

## Courage to Be Communal

Tenneson Woolf

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When I was younger, I often thought about courage as being brave. Brave to take on scary things or very demanding things. Against bad odds. I thought of courage as what it took to go into a dark room, or what it took to turn out the lights and then jump to my bed for fear that something under the bed would get my toes (humor me — it still took some courage).

There was courage in telling the truth that was less than flattering. "I'm sorry mom; I failed the test." There was courage in playing ice hockey. It was a game that I loved and that was really important in my growing up. I remember it took courage to commit to the physicality of playing hockey — you had to be in good shape, and, there was that one kid in Pee Wee C (10 year olds) that said he was going to kill me. It scared me for a long time.

Courage was a kind of armor. For protection and for battle.

Now, all grown up (humor me again — more grown up), courage has come to take on other forms. It takes a bit of living to realize some of the nuances of courage.

Recently, a friend shared a sermon with me, in which the minister named that it takes courage to be communal (and that community is the central act that we need humans need to reclaim). Ah, now that's interesting, isn't it.

My earlier versions of courage all felt very personal and individual. Stuff that I had to do. But this being

communal, well that's a new spin isn't it. The courage to lean in to going together rather than alone. The bravery to be in the messiness of figuring things out together when it's so much easier to isolate and proclaim narrowed certainties. The demanding, yet attractive requirement to see the invisible and the subtle together, not just alone. It takes courage to be together, despite, I believe, we humans being hard-wired to be communal. How odd, right. Yet, so many of the norms of contemporary society now have us needing to reclaim the communal.

I'm challenging myself these days to have courage to be communal. To be vulnerable enough to share what is easier to keep private, including stuff that I just don't know. To listen to another's truth and position, though different from mine, to hear the person's passion and conviction and be ok about disagreeing. To act together, even when I feel all acted out. To encourage a narrative of seeing together — it takes a village. To show up for conflict — ouch — when I would rather dismiss it or run away.

It takes courage and heart to take off the armor. It takes courage and heart to undo centuries old stories of collectives as just the sum of the parts. It takes courage and heart to live as a composite being that is community.

I'd like to say all of this courage and community is all very clear and simple. I want that to be so. I'd also like to say that it is easy. Maybe it is. It still seems to take some bravery though, just as it did as a kid to go in the dark, and to make leaps into even the most natural of things — the communal.

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TENNESON WOOLF  
CONSULTING



## Tenneson Woolf

[www.tennesonwoolf.com](http://www.tennesonwoolf.com)

*I am a facilitator, workshop leader, teacher, blogger, and coach committed to improving the quality of collaboration and imagination needed in groups, teams, and*

*organizations — to help us be in times such as these with consciousness, kindness, and learning. My work over 20+ years has been to design and lead meetings in participative formats. From strategic visioning with boards, to large conference design, to communities just learning to listen to one another again. Lately I have been working with faith communities, educators, and foundation leaders. I post a daily blog, "Human to Human," in which I offer reflection on varied aspects of participative leadership practices, insights, and human to human depth. The orientations of living systems, self-organization, and emergence inspire all of my work. So does emptiness, breath, or a fresh-picked garden tomato. My work lineages include The Berkana Institute, The Circle Way, and The Art of Hosting. I'm originally from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. I now live in a small town where urban meets rural in Lindon, Utah, at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains.*

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