



# 13 Ways to Kill Your Community- Synopsis

## FOREWORD


I remember the moment I knew Doug Griffiths was the real deal. He had already mesmerized the delegation attending the Georgetown Conference with his smart, insightful and sassy, *13 Ways to Kill Your Community presentation*. During the question and answer session that followed a Mi'kmaq delegate asked for advice on a particularly difficult situation she faced in her community. Perhaps realizing the question required a more thoughtful discussion than would occur in front of 250 delegates, Doug said he would be happy to talk to her after the session.

Some speakers would leave it at that, knowing that the discussion could easily be avoided. Not Doug Griffiths. He sought the lady out and they found a quiet spot in King's Playhouse to strategize about the best path forward. He listened. They talked it through. He wanted to help her find a solution. He wanted to help them find the way to success. I remember how impressed I was knowing that Doug was going far beyond the typical role of conference speaker. He cared. He still does, and it shows.

Atlantic Canada faces many issues. Our population is dramatically aging (average age in my hometown of Montague, PEI is 47), our youth believe their future lies in larger centres, our traditional industries of fishing and farming and tourism often feel the squeeze of economic ups and downs, and we struggle to tear down silos that stop us from effectively dealing with the big issues we face. We realized we had to do something. The first Georgetown Conference in 2013 was a grassroots effort to empower 'doers and producers' in our Atlantic Canadian communities to find solutions that would work at the local level. It was not going to be a typical conference.

We did not ask government for one cent in funding. We didn't want it to be a government event. In fact, no provincial or federal politicians were allowed. It's not that we felt politicians could not contribute. We simply realized we didn't need anyone looking for photo ops or dolling out promises. We wanted our folks to find their own solutions, and to own their community's future. As Doug would say, it wasn't an event for the people of power, it was an event for the homegrown people of influence. As such, every delegate was required to complete an application to attend and if you happened to be a consultant or bureaucrat with a government funded organization your chances of winning admittance were greatly reduced.

Our no politician rule caused us more than a little consternation when we became aware of *13 Ways to Kill Your Community* and Doug Griffiths. The book is a must read for anyone struggling to overcome entrenched beliefs and political realities that too often stagnate growth and opportunity. But how would we get around the rule of no politicians, especially one from the other side of the country. We took the risk and discovered that in person, Doug is not a politician. He is just a man committed to help us get rid of the chains we place around ourselves, chains that hold us back, and to help us get on with building stronger communities.



The brilliance of 13 Ways is the cutting simplicity with which it is written and the style in which it is presented. The stories he tells are seen in every town. Atlantic Canada is not unique. Communities across North America face growing challenges that need to be addressed. It doesn't matter if you live in Alberta or Prince Edward Island, Iowa or Illinois, Ontario or Colorado, all of our communities face challenges. The solutions he presents to overcome those challenges are simple, basic and effective. They are implementable anywhere, and can get you started down the path to success.

When we decided to host Georgetown 2.0 in June 2016 we employed a format that was very much delegate driven. Rather than the traditional conference of people talking from a stage down to an audience, we relied on delegates driving creation of the agenda. There were only two keynote speakers, Chef Michael Smith of Food Network Canada fame who has built a burgeoning global media empire from the tiny hamlet of Fortune, Prince Edward Island, and once again Doug Griffiths. We needed strong speakers who would push delegates beyond their comfort zone. Both of our speakers delivered in spades.

Change in small towns is difficult. Often change has to come slowly and incrementally. Some days you may not even be sure you are making progress as you take three or four steps back in the hope of making one small step forward. It can be difficult to deal with, and often becomes discouraging if not completely disheartening. Doug demonstrates through this book we are not alone. He shows us the issues we face are similar and universal. He also helps jar people out of their slumber so you can make strides instead of incremental change, so you can step through issues instead of around them.

In my region seven small communities are navigating the thorny path of trying to negotiate shared services and potentially a regional form of government. In many places, it is hard to get a community to work together. It is even more difficult to get neighbouring communities to work together so they can have the capacity to grow, instead of simply holding on for dear life. Doug helped pave the road for these discussions. He helps ensure the discussions that need to be had are had by the community.

I wish everyone could read this book before they get into trouble, but no matter the challenge, no matter the bump in the road that just dislodged you, or the wall that stands in your way there is never a bad time to be inspired. There is never a bad time to read this book. His book is legendary in my tiny province as it still gets passed from person to person and community to community. People still talk about his presentations across the region. He continues to inspire people long after he has returned home and that means he has had a major impact on our Maritime communities.

I am sure this book will have a lasting impact on you and your community too. It is the type of leadership, and strong helping hand, at a time when our communities and those that care about them, desperately need it.

Paul MacNeill  
Founder — The Georgetown Conference



# Introduction

We all do things that undermine our opportunities for success whether we are consciously aware of it or not. Doug spoke to high school students time and again about how to be successful – study hard, don't do drugs, marry someone nice. The challenge for them, like so many of us, is that we trade what we want most for what we want now, and fail to realize the consequences of our choices. Communities are no different. They want success, they make plans for it and they work hard, but daily they make choices or adopt attitudes that ensure they fail. If we simply stop doing what encourages failure, and ensure our attitude is aligned with our goals, our communities can and will prosper for another generation. Attaining success means realizing we need to be willing to change and adapt, we should truly believe in our community, and we must be prepared to fight for it. If you believe you can, you have a chance. If you believe you can't, you will prove yourself right every time. The following are summaries of each chapter outlining the attitudes that are causing our communities to wither and die.

## Chapter 1 - Forget the Water

We can survive for 3 minutes without air, 3 days without water, and 3 weeks without food. We can survive without just about everything else. Our communities were founded at or near water. It is central to their existence. If you don't have enough water to feed your community, it can't grow or even sustain itself. We have seen the consequences of that situation as it has transpired across California. Quality of water is equally critical to our success. People expect good quality water. We often take for granted that our water will be safe and clean, but it takes only a situation like Flint to remind us of what can happen when we aren't vigilant. Many people think the next major world conflict will be a fight over religion or oil. Perhaps, but the last one will be fought over water because whoever controls water controls everything. The first of the *13 Ways* to ensure the failure of your community is to forget the importance of water.

## Chapter 2 - Don't Attract Business

To kill your community, do not entice new businesses; especially if they may be competing with existing businesses, including yours. We all understand the value of competition. It gives us better price, quality, selection and service. If our community has competition it keeps money at home because people shop at home knowing they are getting better price, quality, selection and service. In communities where competition is limited, people choose to drive to where they get the benefits of competition. When they do travel elsewhere their money leaves with them and it is incredibly difficult to get it back. As money is drained, businesses and the local economy wanes and a slow, painful death is inevitable. We all say we believe in the value of competition, but the only way to prove it is when we support it even when the competition is against us. If you want to fail, don't attract competition and you can have a secure monopoly . . . on failure.



## Chapter 3 - Don't Engage Youth

Every community wonders how to keep youth from leaving. That shouldn't be your goal. The nature of youth is to explore and try new things. You should want them to experience new worlds, new cultures and new ideas. Success is not about keeping them. Successes is about giving them a reason to come home after, and to bring those outside ideas and experiences with them. We rarely do that, however. We don't give them a reason to come home after they have explored. Often we even go a step further by chasing them away so they won't come back. We talk negatively about our community and give them the impression that if they have ambitions and aptitude they must leave to find success. Young folks, not just kids but anyone under 40, are looking for a place to build a life and build a future, and if they don't get the sense from you that your community has a future, they will go elsewhere and the future of your community will leave with them.

## Chapter 4 - Deceive Yourself

Knowing who you are is fundamental to your success. Yet few communities consider their strengths and their values in their plans for the future. They implement generic economic development plans you can pull off the shelf and they try to do what every other community is doing. Soon you become indistinguishable from the others. Every community has a strength they have not yet found, or a weakness that can be turned into a strength. Unfortunately, many communities have essentially given up on trying. They resort to putting up a sign that says 'Lots for Sale' hoping someone driving by decides to move into town, as though that's all people are looking for . . . just a piece of dirt. Deceiving yourself about who you are and what you can offer is a great way to end up as just another nameless, faceless, meaningless community that no one notices because it has nothing to offer.

## Chapter 5 - Shop Elsewhere

A dollar spent in a community will be spent 7 more times on average before it leaves a community. A dollar spent out of town is likely gone for good. We know and preach the value of shopping locally, but as consumers we often don't because we get jealous of local business owners making money. So, without considering the consequences we shop out of town, and the money leaves our community forever. It is just as important that businesses give people a reason to want to shop locally. However, many businesses have grown to expect people to shop locally and don't always provide the price, quality, selection, or service that folks demand. That drives dollars out of town, as well. The attitudes and actions of both parties means money leaves the community. That drives your community's economy into the ground because fewer dollars are available to be circulated. By ensuring people shop elsewhere, instead of supporting each other, your future will leave town as fast as the dollars.



## Chapter 6 - Don't Paint

A community's appearance is the most telling sign of its pride, its faith in itself, and the clearest outward sign of its future. I know that saying a community's appearance is critical to its success is like saying we should judge a book by its cover, but we do exactly that. We are attracted to aesthetically pleasing people, houses, travel destinations and vehicles. Consider the first impression your community makes to newcomers and outsiders. What are you saying about yourself to potential future residents and businesses? Of course, failing may take a concerted effort to turn your town ugly, and of course that will only create the façade of failure. It will only create the illusion that your town is dying. It will only put an ugly cover on your book. With patience, however, no one will pick up that book to read, no one will be attracted to your community, and eventually that illusion of failure will become a reality.

## Chapter 7 - Don't Cooperate

Within a community, failing is as simple as refusing to cooperate with any other organizations, businesses, agencies, boards or other communities. Of course, that is a purely passive way to try to kill your community. If you want to be more proactive your group should actively fight others. Compete with them on similar projects for the same grants, the same volunteers and the same fundraising dollars so no one gets enough to get anything done. As a community, you should compete against your neighboring communities. Don't work together on economies of scale to deliver services to residents, or on attracting new families and businesses. Those lines in the sand drawn over a hundred years ago by someone in a different world cannot be compromised if failure is what you seek. Protect your territory at all costs and keep neighbors divided. Fiercely defend your independence against all reason and eventually your community will die . . . alone.

## Chapter 8 - Live in the Past

The world is always changing, and it always will. Successful communities find ways to adapt to the change, or adapt the change to them. Those that fail often do so because they choose to ignore, deny, resist, or hide from inevitable change. The fear of adapting to change drives people and communities to live in the past, or at least to hold onto it until their last dying breath. That fear breeds anger, and anger is always evident in those who live in the past. They are angry about something that happened 20 years ago, or about something in their world that is about to change. It is always unjustified, however. Mistakes are part of the past, solutions are only found in the future, and inaction is the biggest mistake you can make. Inaction means your community is unprepared for what is coming and that means your community will change, but not the way you want it to. Living in the past will ensure your community becomes part of the past.





## Chapter 9 - Shut Out Seniors

Seniors are often considered a cordial and easy-going group. That is incorrect. They are a dangerous lot who can cause a riot of success in your community. They have worked hard to build a successful community for themselves, their kids and their grandkids. They don't want to see their work disappear. They have the time to volunteer in your community and often still want to. Sure, they vanish for a bit to travel and play golf, but when they return they want to be part of something that offers them social opportunities and a chance to help the community. Many of them also have money and are ready to enjoy the retired life. If you don't provide opportunities for what they are looking for, they will move to somewhere they can get it. If you are looking to kill your community, shut out seniors so they leave and take both their time and their money with them.

## Chapter 10 - Reject Everything New

Have you ever been in a meeting, offered up a new and creative idea, and the argument against trying it out is: "But we have never done that before." If you have, then you know what this is about. Far too many communities refuse to try anything new, so they re-implement the same thing over and over. A popular definition of insanity is: doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results every time. There are communities willing to share their strategies for success. In fact, most openly advertise their success to attract new people and businesses. Somewhere around the world some community has found a solution to a problem or challenge you face. You need only find it, adapt it and implement it. If killing your community is your goal, however, you need to keep doing what you have always done so you can keep getting what you have always got. Don't look to the world and you won't see the world of opportunities waiting for your community.

## Chapter 11 - Ignore Outsiders

Outsider are a special and powerful group. They weren't born in your community so they aren't there by default like you. Every single one of them chose your community on purpose so they know what great things it must offer, and what potential awaits it. They are the new frontiersman who have a strong community spirit and an entrepreneurial attitude. They come from places where they never had what we often take for granted. They see our communities as full of possibilities and opportunities, where they can have a fantastic life with just a little work. We often don't see those opportunities or appreciate what we have anymore. We spend most of our time complaining about how what we have isn't good enough and then demanding more. To ensure failure make those outsiders feel different. Exclude them. If you are lucky they may in fact change their mind about your community and decide to leave. Then your community can finally become a home-grown family of failures right before it dies.



## Chapter 12 - Become Complacent

Success can happen to anybody. Once you have success, the best way to ensure it goes away is to assume continued success will require no effort on your part. Many communities are designing plans they hope will help them achieve 'sustainability'. Listen to the way they use the word, however. They don't often mean 'sustainability' as much as they mean 'status quo'. They hope to just stay the way they are, but we live in a world where there is no such thing as 'status quo'. Success means continued valiant effort. In the words of a great athlete, "it takes a lot to get to the top, it takes even more to stay on top." Seeking to be vibrant, dynamic, responsive, adaptive, and enterprising can give you what your community needs to keep from dying. If your strategy for success is to simply preserve what you are, but to quit working as hard as you have had to in the past, then congratulations . . . you have found a perfect strategy to kill your community.

## Chapter 13 - Don't Take Responsibility

This method of killing your community is powerful, and yet just as simple as it sounds. Our lives and our world are only what we make them. Our community is no different. If we decide we are going to take ownership of our community's future then things are going to get better. If we decide our community's fortune lay in someone else's hands, we can wash our hands of responsibility and watch it die without any feelings of guilt. It doesn't even matter who you blame. You can blame the local government, the state or provincial government, the federal government or the United Nations if you prefer. You can blame a local teacher, preacher, doctor, dentist or the kids down the street playing soccer. It doesn't matter who you blame because none of them are responsible for it. The only thing you can control is you, which means the responsibility for making your community better is your responsibility. No one can do it for you. So, what are you going to do about it?

## Conclusion

Success is all about attitude. For too long we have watched our communities weaken and wither and wondered when somebody is going to fix them. Guess what? You are somebody. Now go out and fight the attitudes that sabotage success. Our communities are worth fighting for . . . and remember – you are not alone. You will face criticism and negativity, but our advice is to simply smile and remind the critics that, "those who say it cannot be done, should not interrupt those who are doing it." And if all else fails . . . give us a call. We know when it comes to finding success . . . There's Always a Way.



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