

How Living in Cohousing Has Made Me a Better Person

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INTRO

Eleven years ago, when I first heard the maxim “Cohousing is the longest, most expensive personal growth course you’ll ever take,” I laughed. I would have rather had spikes driven through my eyeballs than take a “personal growth” workshop. “Personal growth” was never my goal in seeking cohousing...I was just tired of living alone and wanted more community, more friendly people around me.

I’m here today to tell you sincerely that living in cohousing has made me a better person: a better mother, a better wife, a better friend, a better neighbor, a better citizen – just a better human being overall.

SHOWING UP

Woody Allen said that 80% of success is just showing up. In cohousing, we have general business meetings, committee meetings, meals, parties, work days - my neighbors show up...and they show up...and they show up! In fact, they rarely go away! Over the six years since we moved in, I’ve spent more time with many of neighbors than I have with most of my friends & family members.

They show up when someone’s celebrating...they show up when someone is grieving...they show up when a new baby’s born...they show up when someone’s dying.

And they call upon ME to show up. To show up physically. And to show up emotionally -- to be kinder and more thoughtful.

And if I DON’T show up, they call me on it...and then they forgive me.

LISTENING

In order to find consensus, I have to find commonality with others...and in order to do THAT, I have to listen...and listen deeply. Showing up in community means I have to shut up, slow down, and really listen. And my neighbors give me the same gift – I am heard and seen and witnessed and acknowledged in community in a way that I have never been before in my entire life.

LESS JUDGMENTAL

It may surprise some of you, but I can be a very judgmental person. Living in cohousing has meant getting over my tendency to make snap judgments....being around people for the long

haul means learning to accept them as they are, in the same way I hope that they accept me. There are people in my community who I just plain out did not like when I first met them...some of them are now among my best friends. I can find something to appreciate about every single person, something of which I was NOT capable before cohousing.

NEW CAREER = BEING A GOOD EXAMPLE

Cohousing has directly led to a change in career, which has also given me opportunities to become a better person. Everyone knows that I am a facilitator and trainer...so, damn it, I have to continually “walk my talk” and be a good example at home. I never get to go off duty.

To tell you the truth, I really wasn't any good at all this “process” stuff before cohousing. Perhaps the best illustration is this: If you told my ex-wife that part of what I do for a living is teach people how to communicate, she'd laugh for a week...because the reason she divorced me was my inability to communicate.

Normally I would end this story here, but because we're talking a lot this weekend about growing the cohousing movement and its influence within the bigger world...how many of you have a similar experience – that cohousing has made a profound change in how they relate and interact with the people around them? Now imagine... there are four to five thousand people living in cohousing in the US. The business networking gurus claim that the average person knows 250 people. That means cohousers directly interact with and influence about 1.2 million people. Each of them influence another 250 people, for a total of about 300 million. That's just two or three degrees of separation from the entire population of the US.

Together, as we each grow and change and become better people, our example is changing the world.