



Mobilizing Your Community to Become a Strong Town

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Location: Strong Towns Academy

Lesson One: Introduction

Only a stubborn person can change the world.

Conversation starter: Think of a couple things that motivated you to take this course and share them in the comments section of the Academy site or in the space below.

Lesson Two: Start as an Individual

Start with what you have and focus on taking the first step. If you start, know that it is worth it!

Conversation Starter: What is a problem that you feel compelled to address in your community?

Connection Starter: Is there someone else that you could watch this with who could be your discussion partner?

Lesson Three: Understand How Change Happens

Our minds are not the primary source of our reactions to new ideas. Changing someone's mind isn't as straightforward as we think.

Conversation Starter: Are there things which trigger your elephant? What are some of the common triggers to be watching out for in your community as you mobilize your community?

Connection Starter: Take a moment to think about a key location in your community that needs your attention. How can you test an idea for a small change that might help that location? For bonus points, go out and visit that spot with a friend or acquaintance and test your theory. Do you think you've made an improvement?

Lesson Four: Expand the Team

Lone wolves don't change places.

Conversation Starter: Can you identify 2 or 3 other people who share a similar vision to what you want to accomplish? Who would you like to be in your core group?

Connection Starters: Choose one or two of these activities that will help you to expand your team.

- Post an invite on your community's primary social media hub inviting people to join you at a coffee shop at a set time (Stronger Denton)
- Post a comment on your community's primary social media hub saying, "I like some of the changes I'm seeing in my community and would love to talk with others who share that view." (Bothellites for People-Oriented Places)
- Attend a local public meeting and note anyone who speaks from a perspective that you think might mesh well with your own views. (Deltans for People-Oriented Places)
- Visit www.strongtowns.org/local and sign up as a group leader for your community and have us share your contact information with members and email subscribers who are near you (Strong Towns Steinbach)

Lesson Five: Make Connections

Keep your core team small. Build soft connections with a broader network of people you can mobilize who will help you with actions that are good for your community.

Conversation Starter: A good functioning community has people of many different dispositions and viewpoints. What do you think will be the most challenging aspect of being the person who works across differences?

Connection Starter: Think about what the leaders of Strong Towns Denver wrote to their members:

“There are several like-minded groups in our area who have very overlapping goals, like Greater Denver Transit for example. It would be good for us to connect with these groups and find out how we can work together. For those interested in both Strong Towns and a similar group, consider becoming a sort of ‘Strong Towns Ambassador.’ Eventually they can learn about us as well.”

Is this something you can do in your community as well?

Lesson Six: Do Something

Participating in the long game is essential. The long and steady and organized will also beat the short term and passionate. Find a project that you can accomplish. Start small and do something together.

Conversation Starter: What is broken that can be repaired without extensive costs near you? What isn't happening that should be? (ex. a block party, a free music night, cleaning up litter, etc.) What is one small thing that you can start with that would be consistent with your long term vision for your neighborhood?

Connection Starter: Does your community have a neighborhood association that you can join or do you need to start one where you live? The GlenElm Neighbourhood Association (www.glenelm.ca) in Winnipeg had gone dormant. Two Strong Towns members created a core team with a few neighbors to resurrect the neighborhood association which has since had tremendous success with annual events like a front porch music festival, movie in the park, seeds and plants swap, and ice sculpture contest.

Lesson Seven: How to Communicate

Be relentlessly positive. This is what we see in successful local groups. Winning in your community doesn't require a majority - it just requires that it isn't objectionable to the extent that people will turn out to oppose what you are proposing.

Conversation Starter: What is something that your community is doing well and what can you do to celebrate that thing?

Connection Starter: Write a thank you card to a local leader, local businessperson, local volunteer, and a local municipal employee. Be sure to include a comment indicating that you'd be happy to meet with them for coffee or a quick chat.

Lesson Eight: Celebrate Success

Celebrating success foreshadows future success. We are generating momentum for the long term vision that we have for our place. A movement of one person is attractive when it is described as “ours” and not “mine”.

Conversation Starter: Similar to the game “two truths and a lie”, take a moment to write down “one success and two future successes” (ex. We planted three trees to prepare for the removal of two dying trees on our street, we hosted a block party, we spoke up for a pedestrian connection to the library entrance). How can you publicize your successes on social media or through local media outreach?

Connection starter: Can you think of an opportunity you might have to share your ideas in unlikely venues? Ex. Volunteer to give a speech about a project you’re passionate about to your local Rotary or other service club; look up a local Toastmasters club and use the time they give you to speak about these things; email articles to civic leaders; letters to the editor, etc.

Lesson Nine: Influencing Public Officials

Long term change doesn't come about by flexing your power. It comes from having a good network of people who come to realize that you have good answers and a positive vision for the problems of the day.

Conversation Starter: What is one major critique of your local leadership that you know you need to keep under wraps for now until you have standing to raise it with them? What is one significant positive step in the right direction that you can raise with a local leader? (ex. improved bus routes, successful downtown business area cleanup, progress in slowing speeds in a residential area, etc.)

Connection Starter: Email an article to your local elected official and say something like, "I know you're working really hard to address this issue in our community and I wanted to share this article with you because it has several really great recommendations that we can work on together. I'd love to introduce you to a few people like me who want to see these recommendations implemented here in our community." Attend a local council meeting or ward meeting soon after your correspondence is sent so you can meet the person you contacted previously with a helpful suggestion for them to consider.

Lessons Ten to Thirteen: Running for Office

Running for office is not for everyone and that's ok. There is great value in having close relationships with people who are elected to make decisions. Deciding to run for office is a great way to put into practice all of the skills necessary to mobilize your community for change.

Conversation starter: What would it take to get you to run for elected office in your community?

Connection starter: Ask to meet with a local elected official in order to learn how they went about getting elected OR identify someone in your neighborhood who you think should run for elected office and send them a note of encouragement to do so.

Lesson Fourteen: Sustaining Momentum

You may not know it yet, but you have everything you need to start building your strong town or city. Are you ready to activate the Strong Towns movement where you live?

Conversation starter: Can you think of a few people who you could ask to join you in a conversation group?

Connection starter: Reach out to your community's Local Conversation group. If no group has formed (yet), sign up as a volunteer leader to get your group going. Remember, you don't have to commit the next 25 years of your life to the group (although that might be what happens!) but you're just helping to get things started and to see where the conversation takes you. You'll be grateful you did!

Thanks for your interest in taking action where you live! We'd love your feedback and you can email your thoughts to academy@strongtowns.org and we'll learn from your input based on your experience in this course.