

I just wanted to introduce everybody to my friend Deb Brown here, Deb Brown and her partner, Becky, we go back years and years, we actually met first time up in Des Moines. And have been colleagues, I guess ever since probably about 10 years now. And we I haven't had the chance to work with her professionally on this project. But I've been jealous of the work that she's been doing for communities all across America really. And I, she's got some great ideas and some great processes that I think we can all learn from. And it's all about the betterment of Jefferson City and the downtown district to get some things in action here. And I think we've got some good framework that we're going to talk about today.

Well, thank you for having me, Gus. And thank you for remembering me, that's always important. And it's longer than 10 years, just saying. So let's begin, I'm going to attempt to do this in 30 minutes. So I'll speak pretty fast, hold on, take notes, you will have a copy of this presentation, I am recording it. And you will also have the PDF of it.

So let's begin. So what is the idea friendly method? You start with your big goal for your community.

And that's one that excites people and makes them feel like they can play a role in it. You can use that goal to gather your crowd and become a movement that people can get behind. You turn your crowd into a powerful network by building connections. And then you and your newly powerful network accomplish that goal together by lots of you taking small steps.

So what is your big goal? in Akron, Iowa, the mayor held a plant your flag party. They invited everyone in town who I had ideas for what can be done in Akron, Iowa, not Ohio. It's a tiny little town about 1500 people. They had treats and drinks and I talked I came and talked about the idea for a project. Then people took a flag and put their idea on it. Now folks could have their own flag or they could join another group, but they were interested in what they had.

And it worked. Lots of great ideas came out of the event and there was conversation, excitement, and small steps were already put in place at that first gathering.

Now out of that gathering, the youth that attended, planted the first flag and decided they wanted to scoop the loop. These are high schoolers, and it sounded fun to them and they've never done it. So as you can imagine, the old timers came out and had some fun too. In a population of 1500 people they have since upped their restaurant count to seven. The lazy H campground has grown by adding more cabins activities and more places to park Arby's. They're adding a walking trail. The vet clinic expanded an old home in the country was converted to a new lodge the lumber yard was purchased and renovated by a young family. And there are more young families moving into the area all the time.

You plant a flag because there are people out there who want to join you. But they've already been beaten down by the negativity just like I'm sure you have. They need someone to start something idea friendly. Author Clay Shirky says the number of people who are willing to start

something is smaller, much smaller than the number of people who are willing to contribute once someone else starts something. Jason Robert of the Better Block project says that's always what happens when they choose to improve just one street in a neighborhood. They plant the flag and people come out of the woodwork to join them. You know they were there all the time just waiting for someone to get something started. And more importantly, they're waiting for someone to start it in this new idea friendly way. We're not coming out of the woodwork for a typical old way opportunity. Because we've already been burned by those crushing formalities. You plant your flag to collect people excited enough to take action in this new way.

People who are willing to pitch in even in small ways are much more valuable than any number of people who are just serving because it was pinned on them. This is the old way versus the new way.

I'm going to tell you when not so friendly idea friendly story. When I was the chamber director in Webster City, Iowa, I read and seek lots of ideas on how to make my town a better place. One was to put up holiday lights in

the trees downtown. I liked the sound of that, it would encourage people to spend more time downtown would be a visible sign of improvement and maybe generate some pride in our community. So I called the city manager who liked the idea to he had the city crews assigned to put up the light.

Now I thought I was building community. But I was still doing things the old way, the city manager and I had cut out everyone in the community out of the project. Now how could I have created small but meaningful ways for people in the community to be part of lighting up downtown? Well, what if we let everyone pick a tree to decorate themselves, just one tree? Not all the trees would match. But really, who cares? People who chose a tree and decorated it would share pictures online, they would talk about the fun they had doing it together, it would actually be a lasting experience that they've shared together, then the building owners can get inspired to decorate their downtown buildings with lights or whatever, other businesses could decorate their windows.

And I'm going to tell you don't stop downtown. Let's involve the whole community. People could decorate their houses or put lights in the windows of their apartment. If you couldn't do anything else, could you drag a light into the front window for just one night? Each single light in the window shows someone who lives there that cares about their town.

It's your pen and paper out, you're gonna work a little bit, what is your big goal? What do you most want for your community? Now, not what you think you should want as part of your job necessarily, but what really gets to your heart. So in order to think about it, consider these two sentences, how you'd finish them, if our town had, or if our town was, and write that down. I'll take about 10 seconds, one word or one sentence, so you can come back to it in a few minutes. If I had Jeopardy music, I'd play it for you.

All right, the next part of the idea friendly method is to gather your crowd. And you do that with your big idea. One that excites people and makes them feel like they are going to get to play a role in your big idea by taking small steps.

Now, what would be the old way to gather a crowd to work on any idea? Of course, you assign people to committees, a real committee group actually sent out this email to their members. We are planning for our annual programs, please see attached and let us know which committees you are willing to serve on. Thank you for your support. I know you've gotten emails just like that too, haven't you?

Well, old committees used to be only men don't get me going down that path. Right?

So the state and sublimity Chamber of Commerce in Oregon, you know what they did, they killed off all their committees. Their new way is to gather people only when needed using their big goal. So Elena Turpin told us they are making a difference in the community, she said, then your organization becomes a movement that people can get behind, not just another volunteer opportunity. And there's a difference between Please serve on our committees, and becoming a movement that people can get behind.

It's the difference between community committees and activities. In Columbia, Ohio, there was this boarded up

window, it was ugly. No one could figure out why the owner didn't put in a new window. Well, the first thing I did when I got there was to go visit him and ask him hey, why haven't you fixed the window? Instead of having a committee meeting to talk about what we were going to do about it, right? Turns out, he was more than willing to fix it, but to spec to the new renter when he got one. In the meanwhile, the city manager pulled together a few bucks and hired a local artists that paint this scene on that boarded up window. And the secret was the artist did the work during a big event downtown. Right where the window was people stopped to watch him work to chat with him. And they toured the building.

Also, do you want to move from asking people to join organizations and committees, to inviting them to participate in activities they might enjoy?

So as you're thinking about how this applies to your idea, an important key here, when I say hold the gathering, I don't mean to start holding formal meetings with a president in minutes and accountability and treasurer's reports. Oh, good lord. I don't mean that the chamber or economic development committee, or the



downtown group is in charge of them. I mean, to get together with friends and do things, and then you grow from there. That's the idea friendly way. It's informal. Yes, it's chaotic. But it's with a crowd of people connecting and getting things done.

All right, back to your pieces of paper again, what would it look like if you had your crown together and your big idea? So think about it. Now? Who are you? Who's your crowd? Who would be interested in doing what you just wrote on your thing?

I always think of friends and family. But you know, sometimes it's other similar business owners that might be interested. It might be student. too important to involve our students as soon as we possibly can. All right, you have gathered your crowd with your big idea.

Now we're going to turn that crowd into a powerful network by building connections. Take a look at the old way. In Idaho economic developer, Jessica told us that she's dying to get a microbrewery in her town. So what would be the old way to build connections and get that

brewery? Well, Jessica could present the idea to the meeting of her economic development board, then they of course, would take a vote referred to subcommittee order a feasibility study, the expert would look at it, write it up, submit the feasibility study back to the subcommittee, the subcommittee would review it and of course, take another vote and then refer it back to the board. The board would then look at it, take a vote on it, and maybe add it to their five-year business development plan. Maybe then they'll be able to offer incentives or start trying to recruit and establish microbrewery. Does your head hurt like mine does? Do you recognize this? I know you've seen it.

Well, what's the new way? Why not start a homebrew group bring together people who like to brew their own beer at home, get them together in somebody's backyard. Let them share ideas and just talk. Now you know what's going to happen. Yes, they're going to drink some beer. But after three beers, someone in that group is going to say, you know, I could open a microbrewery. You might even know of one that started that way, a home brewer decided to make the leap. But this is a little different. Imagine how much more likely they'll be to

succeed if they have a group of supported who home brewers to encourage them to help with connections to suppliers and other brewers who have made the leap or the agencies and all the rules they'll have to deal with, or to work out problems or even come and volunteer and help staff the microbrewery at the launch, because they built connections, they will be more successful.

So again, you've looked at the big idea you've considered for your crowd as well, how could you get people together and actually do it? Or do something related to it? So what is the equivalent of the Homebrew group that would support your big idea? Or what kind of connections do you need?

And by the way, if you have questions for me, we're going to answer them at the end. Just make sure to make a note for yourself. Often, this is where I hear about it.

In the idea friendly method, the next piece is to take small steps. And this is the best fun for me because you get to take action right away. Now, what would be the old way to take small steps in your tradition of

community leadership? Well, the first steps are hold a meeting and write a plan. You would meet me and plan and plan talk everything over a few times. And those guys in the back looking over your shoulder would say I think you should also do this. Or they might say I don't think we should do that the Chamber said they might do something kinda like that. And we don't want to step on their toes. So you have to keep meeting until everything is planned out. watered down, and everyone agrees.

Let me tell you about the buy local campaign in Franklin County, Iowa. The chamber started a buy one product local campaign. We chose toilet papers the one product because we all use it hopefully. Did you know the average person uses 105 rolls a year

In chamber we did a yearlong campaign using all the tools you can think of to get word out both offline and online. We did posters or radio and TV and even created a special website. Then the local businesses got on board and they just didn't do signed. Lots of them did creative displays. The hardware store went all out with a display from their plumbing department. They actually

built a stickman out of PVC pipe and sat him you guessed it on a toilet.

Chamber director Brook and I made toilet paper displays that we took to every local event and fair and festival. 4000 people in the town, businesses who didn't tell toilet paper found creative ways to use toilet paper in their advertising. The US car dealer gave away a year's supply of toilet paper when you bought a car. The local radio station told toilet paper jokes. If I never hear another one, it would be too soon. Facebook was filled with stories and people shopping for toilet paper with pictures included too while the campaign was going on.

Everyone in town was talking about toilet paper. They were redefining themselves as people who supported their town, all because they bought their toilet paper locally.

Another story comes from Akron that we talked about before. One of their big ideas was they wanted to replace their old swimming pool. And of course, they started the typical capital campaign and people gave, but that's not something everyone can participate in. And

not everyone has that kind of money to give the students wanted to be able to give to. After all, they'd be the ones using the pool the most. to high school students from the National Honor Society came up with a way to get younger students involved. They went to the elementary grades and started a penny war between the classes to a penny war means students bring in as many pennies as they can find. And the class with the most pennies at the end of the contest wins. The mayor said kid came up with all kinds of ways to find pennies, and they were having such a fun time doing it. Parents, grandparents, neighbors, businesses and students all worked together to scrounge up pennies from all over town. Then they got together and counted their pennies. And you can bet every penny did matter. Each kid knew they played a small but meaningful part in replacing the pool.

Now small steps also means you don't have to do all the work. Let's look at two concerts. The first concert happened at an agritourism business in Oklahoma, they brought in a couple of professional musicians for performances out of the farm. The musicians were reasonably well known they'd been on TV shows you've heard of but turn out to the concerts really wasn't that

great. And a friend of the owner took to Facebook and pointed out the classic small-town contradiction. People keep saying there's nothing to do in this town. But then when we do put on something special, they don't turn out. And I know you've run into this too. You work really hard on events and things to do. Then only a tiny crowd shows up. The community complained that it was boring, or not at a convenient time or didn't sound like something they wanted to do. It's frustrating.

The other concert happened in my town. 25-year-old Michael walked into my office and said we needed to have more live music in town. And I responded with you betcha We sure do. What are you going to do about it? Well, that's the room. He just assumed the chamber would make it happen. We sat down that day. And we talked about things like who were his friends who would participate with him and make it happen. What kind of event would they want to put together? What kind of equipment did they need? Where could they do this? Who could help with marketing? How would they start? Is there a smaller way to do this the first time? Well, he went back and gathered his crowd. Michael and his

friends liked the idea of an open mic, and then they could be the band behind the performers.

So Michael came back and asked me if that was okay. And you know what I said? I don't know. Is that okay? It was starting to understand this was going to be his and his crowds event. They were building it together. So they created music in the park. And they involve a lot of people in small but meaningful roles. The guys designed their own posters and ads. Lots of people came with lawn chairs and listened to three hours of music. Several people came on stage and sang played and performed. One guy showed up from another town with lights and set them up so they could continue the music in the dark. Nobody asked him to come he just heard about Got it and figured he could be helpful.

And everyone had fun. It was decided that they were going to do music in the park. Three more times over the summer. The music brought together people from across different parts of the community. They shared the experience of making and enjoying live music together. And they all had a small but meaningful role in creating it.



So you want to go you want to move from picking just one idea that you think is most likely to succeed, to letting people try them? Ah, let me repeat that. You don't want to just choose one idea. You want to try them all, from deciding which ones you think will work to learning which ones are working by doing them in very small test.

Bolivar Missouri tried to rock on. And in seven days, they had 3000 People join their Facebook group. It's kind of like the equivalent of the entire population of Bolivar. The city administrator said in an interview, if you set up 10 different things and said which of these things do you think will spark the community and take off? I don't know if this is one I would have picked. And that's the point. We don't know which one idea will work. So there is no reason to set up 10 different ideas and vote or try to pick just let 10 People test out 10 ideas.

You want to move from voting ideas to testing them. Mainstreet expert Jackie Waldman told us when you vote, the same people tend to lose over and over. So quit voting and just let people test, you'll be learning

which ideas work by actually doing them in very small tests.

Now I have a secret to having a successful event. We are so used to being in charge of planning the entire event down to the who removes the garbage part. Here's the idea. Don't do that. Plan about two thirds of it or less, then put out the word you want people to share their ideas and add to the event. Of course, you'll plan out the locations for everything, but not what goes into all of those locations. During one large event. We never would have known about human foosball. But a local county church had a group of teams that had built the game. They wanted to set it up and I said yes, not knowing what it was turned out to be the most popular thing at the event. Human Foosball who knew

I wouldn't have thought of Barstow races either. But look at that crowd. And look at the Tony tires banner, someone thought of selling space to sponsors. My point is to let folks come up with ways to participate. And they will all you have to do is say yes, and here's your spot. Not only will they come, but they bring their family and their friends to everyone wants to have some fun.

All right back to your paper how can you make smaller more meaningful ways for people to be part of your idea? Go ahead and write that down now.

How encouraging to see people writing thank you

All right, let me share some idea friendly stories with you. Several communities in Iowa decided they wanted more entrepreneurs. So they held an informal gathering called entre bash was actually three counties that got together roundtables were set up with one expert at each table, like an accountant, like a social media person like a lawyer, and you can visit with the experts personally in only the expert you need it. The young Hispanic couple you see in the photo met with the Small Business Development Center Lady, and they have since started their own greenhouse business in town

and Bennettsville South Carolina. They hold the newcomers meeting pretty regularly. And what a brilliant idea to have the realtors personally invite their new

customers to this gathering. They're given the opportunity to ask questions of representatives from the city and the county. Things like where do I take my garbage? Can I burn my garbage for example? Many of these people at the event I was at had ideas on how to better their community and they were already in action. Several one had opportunities to be involved. That means they wanted to volunteer. Start your own newcomers meaning

painting murals Using the paint by numbers method is a great way to bring more people into the process. And Webster City Iowa for groups government, business education and a nonprofit created a creative placemaking art project that everyone could be involved with. They picked a building with some boarded up windows on the second story that they can use as a canvas for some art. Now a Latina owned the building, and many of the businesses on the ground floor serve the Hispanic people and young people also in the community. And artists do a simple paint by numbers design of colorful geometric shapes and colors, and each painting represent in one part of the history of the town. They then took all the panels out to the fairgrounds

and laid them out. Everyone in town was invited to come paint, even just a tiny bit, you could go for a few minutes, or you could go for hours and be part of painting the designs. Of course, the local newspaper took pictures, and you could see the camaraderie created when people came together to make art. Now that the panels are installed over the boarded-up windows, that building has become both a local and tourist attraction. And it's stunning.

This is the Alva, Oklahoma Artwalk. Now imagine if you were to partner with Artwalk folks and offer to display some of the art in your store. Maybe leave it there just a little bit longer. Special events like art walks or evening stroll give people a very specific reason and time to be out shopping. But they don't happen by magic. It takes community members and businesses working together to create them. Making the effort to be open during the events is better than staying closed. But if you really want to benefit your stores can be a partner in these events, have local artists display their work or have musicians perform in your store, put out a few refreshments be a part of the celebration.

To increase the appeal and draw more people downtown for Small Business Saturday, which will be here sooner than you know in Morgan Hill, California created street scenes, individual parking spaces in the heart of downtown were transformed by local businesses into activity areas, they have designated five adjacent parking spots for this one-day parklet. And this effort is all about creating a relaxing yet active vibe for downtown visitors. And you don't need an event to do this. You could set up a parking spot or two during the weekend or after school one day, or anytime really promoted on social media and have fun.

Yeah, you know two seasons winter in construction, right? That's the Midwest. And at some point, there will be construction going on; you can create some great-looking boards in front of it. Use quotes from your local people. Let the students be involved in the work and make it fun. By using quotes from your residents, you're involving more people in your community.

Here's just a few tips to help you make your transition to idea friendly, just a little bit easier.

Iowa State University studied 99 Small towns for 20 years. In that time, those times experienced every kind of change. What the researchers concluded is that no matter what happened or didn't happen, the towns that prospered the best were the ones that were open to new ideas, and welcome new people into making decisions about the future of their community. involve everybody.

Here's a favorite of mine. Stop doing things you don't need to do anymore. Kill the all the VIP events that are no longer working. And you don't have to do all the event. Now is a great time to say to your community. We simply can't put together all these events this year. And then ask them what events they would like to take over. You don't have to do them you're gonna kill them. But if somebody really wants it, tell them just do it themselves.

Please get out of the meeting room, city hall or county chambers in the boardroom. Kind of feel oppressive as I talked to people in a boardroom. Have you noticed that the whole formality and weight of the past can just make you frown as soon as you step inside? If you're having a meeting about anything to do with downtown, when it makes sense to do that, you can look around and see

the downtown. You know where you stand on the issues depends on where you sit. The location affects the conversation, sitting in the council chambers or an old meeting room. You're too far removed from the life and activity that you're trying to create. Standing outside downtown, you get to be part of the scene, you get a chance to do that and to think about the potential for improvement.

While you're outside, you want to be conspicuous doing your thing. It's one thing to like your idea. When you're sitting behind your computer in your house. It's another thing to be doing it out in the real world where people can see you. It shows a level of commitment. And it's even better if you're not the only one doing it. You know, nothing draws a crowd like a crowd. Make people slow down to get a look, make them curious, get them to stop and ask what you're doing, then you've got a chance to share a bit about your if our town big idea, and the small but meaningful way, they could be a part of it right now.

Do just a tiny part of your idea, then take the small steps from there. And here's some tiny step ideas. One idea we've all heard about is the community dinner that



closes down Main Street, you know, that kind of dinner, I mean, shut down the whole main street with everyone in town sitting down to eat together at a long table, where you can take a small step and try it out. Start with two card tables on the sidewalk. And just a few friends. In Harlow town Montana, the city-wide garage sales got started by the Junk Shop during their slow time. It's now advertised regionally and managed by the chamber; it's had a huge economic impact for them.

So another problem is that officials may not give you approval for your idea. Asking officials for approval is a terrible way to try to start an idea. They don't know if it'll work. And they have no incentive to say yes, yet. So start smaller in a way that doesn't require permission. Yet, if you need city approval for food trucks in the street, start smaller invite to food trucks to park in the parking lot around back. Well, you don't need any approval. And then this is the important part track the results where the restaurants still busy did the nearby stores see more activity that people come and eat from the food trucks. So now you have some results from your test. And you can take those results to the city

council to ask for permission to try a bigger version. You want to entice rather than convince.

And the last problem I want to talk about today is opposition. The one committee that every town has no matter the size is the committee of negativity. For all the effort put into creating a shared vision and reaching consensus. There is no town where every single person agrees on everything. It's not possible, because talents are made up of human beings. You know, actually negative people, some of them think they're helping, they're helping you not fail. They're warning you about past failures, bad things that might happen. They want to help your community but they just don't have the right tools to do it. Well, you can try small tasks to show them how your big ideas are already working. But I tell you don't spend too much time trying to convince them. And just remember this, you can't lose people who were never yours. Every bit of energy you put into fighting the opposition is really hurting your entire community. Put that energy into positive action instead.

All right, you've already started your idea friendly Journal, the note you made today, our idea friendly note, you've got that big idea that's going to improve the quality of life in your community. You know how to gather your crowd and I know you've got to be terrific at building connections. Now you just have to take the small steps and starting with just one alright,

let's talk a little bit about the idea of friendly toolkit and then I'm done. You'll see a watch party we always encourage people to invite others to watch the first video with you and that video first videos the idea of friendly met the 30 minutes that Becky and I have done together to talk a little bit more about it and then you want to use the idea of friendly principles in your current work how can use some of those principles you've learned today and what your current work is the next video is it differently next steps so you've heard about it differently you think it's a great thing. Now what how do we get started what I need a friendly now what we encourage you to use the newsletters as a guy you can use those you can share them as a jumping off part sorry jumping off point to have discussion. The video third videos I differently officials in boards in Yes, they can be idea

friendly too. Now you're currently thinking your community, but why not think regional and take it differently to the next level in your region and your state, you also have access, you have a megaphone membership, you have access to all the videos that we've done. And we encourage you to choose some that appeal to the particular challenge you're dealing with, you'll receive, you should already have it a creed, you want to print it out, put your city name on the bottom of it, and use it to guide your actions. If you do that, hang it somewhere, send me a picture, so I can share it too. And there's an action guide, including a little help along the way. And you do all of that and complete the toolkit and you get your own certificate. So I'd I do, we're all done. Thank you. Are we ready for questions?

This toolkit is well carry Yeah, emailed out earlier this week, so you don't have access to it. If you haven't very least, I'd really love everybody to look over video three. For me, I'm not I'm sometimes a bad auditory learner. And it's really helpful that they have the transcripts on there too, because you can read through it. And then they have the video and just separate audio.

So anyway that you prefer to take in information but the video three about specifically how boards can take this method and apply it was really helpful for me because I heard the first video so it was like this also as well and good but horrible, or how do we have an interesting video to help me? Think about how we could? Yeah, implement some of these ideas.

Excellent. And you're right that I like to listen to the audio because I like podcast, I drive a lot. So I've listened to our own stuff quite a bit, because it's good for me to know it right? There is video as well and the transcript if you'd rather read it.

Do we have any questions?