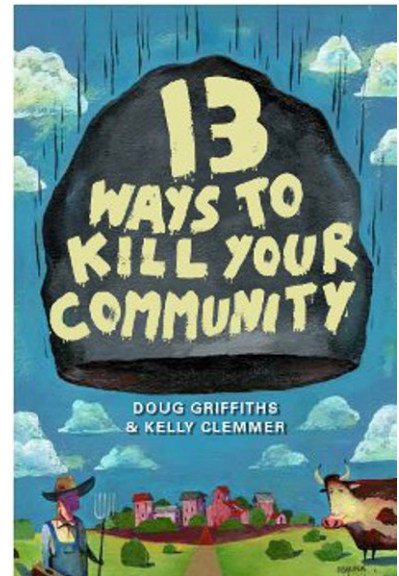


PROLOGUE

I have invested a great deal of time and energy traveling this province discussing what needs to be done by all levels of government and communities to ensure the future of our rural communities. I reiterate that the success of rural development is partially the responsibility of the federal, provincial, and municipal governments. As governments we must ensure that the foundation is there for success to be achieved, and we must be active and aggressive partners in the initiatives that communities undertake to build and grow in the future.

No success will occur, however, unless the plan and the initiative come from each community itself. I, as an MLA, cannot walk into a community, any community, and tell it how to be successful regardless of the plan I have or the money that accompanies it. This is primarily because without community buy-in, without community spirit and desire, without passion from the community to survive, the plan is doomed to failure. The community knows best its own strengths and weakness, its competitive advantages and disadvantages, and how it could capitalize on, or mend, each for success. Or, in short, a community's success will be determined more by its people and their determination to succeed than anything else.



I have, in my travels, made an interesting observation. As a teacher, when I asked young people what they could do to ensure a good life they responded with comments like: I would get a good job, I would marry someone I love, I would buy a nice house, I would finish school, and so on. That is pretty straight forward stuff, and I'm sure any young person would provide similar answers. When asked what they would do if they wanted to deliberately ruin their lives, however, they responded: I would probably become a drug addict, I would probably get someone pregnant or get pregnant before I was married, I would fail out of school, and so on. Then ask them what they would do today to travel down that road to failure and they would immediately realize that some of their current actions were leading them down that path, though they had failed to see it. On drugs; they would say they would start smoking dope and some student would blush because they had. On pregnancy; they would say they would be having sex and some student would blush because they had, or had come close. On failing out of school; they would respond that they would fail some of their classes now and some student would blush because they were.

The point is that some of the best intentions we have, our dreams and hopes, are often shattered by things we do today that we don't realize we are even doing. With that in mind I wrote up a list of 13 things that you can do to kill your community. It is not meant to be a list of things that you should deliberately do, but rather a list of things that you or community members may be doing that are directly having negative consequences on your community and its future. If you are doing these things, you are harming your community's future. I will be writing about one item from the list each week and explaining how harmful it is to your community.

1. QUALITY OF WATER

The first of 13 things that you can do to ensure the failure of your community (remember the purpose of these letters) is to ensure that your community has poor quality of water.

As I said in my introduction, I have traveled all over the province over the last three years talking to hundreds of organization, thousands of people, but I have also been to 54 different communities. I have said often that I could be blindfolded and driven into any community, walked into any home in town, be given a glass of water to sample, and be able to tell you, with almost perfect accuracy, the condition of the town. If the quality

of water is good I can bet you that there are new subdivisions, new businesses downtown, a clean mainstreet, and so on. If the quality of the water is poor than I can almost assure you that businesses are closing on mainstreet, the downtown core looks decrepit, there are many old houses for sale and so on.

The reason for this is that people are used to good quality household water in this province. People are turned off by water with a poor smell, poor taste, sinks and tubs that are brown with stains, and rumours of ill health caused by water. The populace is not often very vocal, but they do view quality water as an essential to a quality community. In all reality, whether that opinion is justified or not, we do see people pay more everyday for water than they do for gasoline. Often complaints rage over the price of less than \$1.00 for 1 litre of gasoline, but we rarely hear people complain about the price of almost \$2.00 for 500ml of water. Quality water is important.

As well, we know the importance of water to economics. A farmer can't improve or assure the quality or diversity of crops without assurances of water value. It is impossible to grow value added agriculture, or indeed, any value added industry without access to water. It is difficult to increase tourism development without access to assured water volumes. It is even impossible for a community to grow its capacity without access to enough quality water to service the new households and subdivisions. Comparing the south of the province before irrigation to now, with irrigation, we can observe that there are more farm's that are smaller, more labour intensive, and there is more value added agriculture and commercial business surrounding those farms, and . . . there is an entire tourism industry that was completely unexpected because of the presence of surface water.

So, if you want to ensure that your community will fail. If your desire is to see that your community does not grow and does not succeed, than ensure you don't address the issue of water. It is the most important first step to ensure success. Every community that has been successful has done it, so if you want to fail, ensure water issues are not addressed.

I am determined to see rural Alberta succeed so I will continue to work on water issues, and besides addressing water and waste water issues in our constituency I will also be working on adequacy of supply for primary agriculture (irrigation possibilities), value added agriculture and commercial needs, tourism and community growth.

2. DON'T ATTRACT BUSINESS

The second in the list of thirteen things you can do to ensure your community's failure (remember that this is meant to be sarcastic and only taken literally if killing your community is your ultimate goal) is to ensure that new businesses are not enticed to your community by competitive tax rates and services, especially if they may be competing with existing businesses.

In touring the province we found that communities of about one thousand people in which there was one grocery store, that grocery store owner barely made enough money to support his or her family. However, in communities of roughly the same size where there were two grocery stores, interestingly enough, both did quite well. Likewise was the case in communities of three to five thousand when it came to restaurants. Where there were only a couple of restaurants both suffered, but where there were many restaurants they all seemed to do well. There are many more examples I could provide but space is limited.

What is more important is why that would occur. People in general like choice and variety, and they like to feel they are purchasing in a competitive environment that assures them the best price. In communities where competition is limited we found that people would chose to drive to another community where there was more choice, more variety, and better prices because of competition. Essentially, their dollars would leave town.

Now it seems that councils and or community members did not like the idea of giving new businesses encouragement to locate in the community or local business owners enjoyed their monopoly within a community and feared competition (we all like the idea of competition unless we're the ones being competed against). Either way, successful communities have looked at the long term, the jobs that will be created by the new business, the long term tax return of from a business that locates in a community, and the benefit of having competition to local businesses themselves. Think of it this way: if two thirds of the people in a community shop elsewhere, that only leaves a third of the pie to one business, but if everyone in the community stays there to shop because of choice, variety, and competition that means two businesses each getting fifty percent of the pie.

I have not heard of much of this happening within our communities because we seem to be acutely aware of the need for businesses, any businesses, to come to our communities and try to attract them all. However, if the death of your community is your ultimate goal, be single minded, think of only today, and don't foster a climate that will entice businesses or lead to competition, variety, and choice for community members. That way they will shop elsewhere, the remaining businesses will close their doors, and you will lose your community.

3. DON'T INVOLVE YOUTH

If killing your community is your ultimate goal (remember the point of these articles) than the third item on the list of thirteen ways to kill your community is relegate an important group such as youth (35 years and under) to the sidelines. Youth have energy and ideas, are great volunteers, and are the future of your community, so whatever you do, don't involve them or they will make your community successful despite your best efforts.

Around this province, provincial officials, accountants and tax experts are hosting meetings, the purpose of which is to aid farmers and ranchers in succession planning. The purpose is to ensure that farmers aren't hit with huge tax burdens when they try to pass on the farm, but the ultimate result will be more young people in a position to enter agriculture thereby ensuring the future of agriculture itself.

Interestingly, I have only found one community in this province this is doing any sort of succession planning for town or county councils. Before the last round of municipal elections most small town and county councils had an average age that was almost twice mine (I'm 32). Please note that I am NOT telling all of the aged and experienced people to get off council. It is important to blend the experience and patience of the aged with the energy and ideas of the youth. Too much youth or experience does not ensure a balance of those who are dealing with today's issues, and those who want to plan for the community they want to see twenty years from now.

I also have yet to find a community that has a succession plan for main street businesses. Many small town business owners I met around the province simply planned on locking the doors when they retired. Few had ever considered talking to high school graduates to see what they would need to return home after education, or engaging them in a youth entrepreneurship program in local businesses so they stay. How do you plan for the future of your community if you don't engage them (since the youth are the future) in the planning process and help them identify opportunities?

Successful communities told me that complacency and saying that the youth aren't interested are just excuses. They tell me that the youth are interested, they simply want to be asked their opinions and concerns, they want to know action will be taken, and most importantly, they want to take part in the solution, not be relegated to the sidelines.

If ending your community is your plan, don't engage youth, don't find reasons for them to stay, and don't encourage them (over and over) to get involved. Let them leave. Encourage them to leave. Let them go where they are wanted. The future of your community will vanish as fast as the youth.

4. DON'T ASSESS NEEDS

The fourth in the list of thirteen things that you can do, if your ultimate intent is to ensure that your community fails, is to ensure that you don't assess your community's needs or opportunities. Every community lacks something. Whether it is a small town that lacks daycare services or a hardware store, or it is a large city that lacks community spirit or has traffic issues, every community lacks something. The process of improving a community is never done because problems and challenges will always arise and addressing those problems will lead to new opportunities for improvement.

I have not been in a community that does not have some competitive advantage over other communities that would make people want to move to/live there. Every community has something unique to offer. Sometimes it is the people in the community that make it so wonderful, sometimes it is the service clubs, sometimes it is the businesses, and in others it is the school or hospital quality. Every one of those communities, however, also has disadvantages that deter people from locating there.

Assessing what a community has, both its strengths and weaknesses allows the community to fully realize what great things it has going for it, things it can brag about in attracting new people, but also increases the awareness of what might be missing so that those problems can be fixed or addressed in some way, thereby removing the reason for people to leave, or chose not to locate there.

Communities that have assessed their strengths and weakness often act quickly to address them. What they find is that the community itself seems to thrive for two reasons. First, community members themselves seem to have more energy and desire to 'help out' because the community acts when it needs to and is seems to be a place with a future. Second, other's choose to locate there because they recognize it as a community where people's needs are met, it is a progressive place that addresses the future and refuses to be stagnant.

Communities that do this find creative ways to improve or add service clubs, more cultural activities, new businesses, better programs for young families, or even just plants and flowers to beautify the town, and it works because those communities are growing. So, if the failure and death of your town is the ultimate goal, don't look around and assess your communities needs and opportunities or you just may feel compelled to do something about it. You may realize that it is not that daunting a task and actually move on to improve other things, and your community may just become one that meets it challenges head on, and that is a sure sign of success, something you don't ever want if failure is your ultimate goal.

5. SHOP ELSEWHERE

The fifth method of ensuring that your community fails actually has two components that are directly related to each other. Of course, we always hear Chambers of Commerce say that you should shop locally to keep dollars in your community, but seldom do we hear the Chambers preach about how important it is for businesses to give reasons to consumers to shop locally.

Essentially it comes down to this: every dollar spent within a community reaches seven other hands before it leaves the community (if people try to shop locally), which keeps the local economy hoping, but each dollar spent outside the community is gone for good. When those dollars leave it affects the local economy drastically. So, if your ultimate goal is to drive your community to extinction your goal should be two fold. First, ensure that you encourage people to shop out of town, which will lead to business closures within your community, job losses, and ultimately people will move out.

There are typically three phases to a new business locating in town, especially if the new business is owned by someone who has lived in the town most of their life. Phase 1: the business opens and most people think it won't be successful and use that as an excuse not to shop there. Phase 2: the business is still around but people won't shop there because the business owner is, "making too much money," so they go somewhere else to shop, making someone else money. Phase 3: the business goes broke and closes and then I get phone calls saying, "what is the province going to do about this . . . we just can't keep businesses in this town.

Jealousy is often a very strong human trait, and the root of this problem. In fact, there is a very nifty trick that you can do that will encourage great success in ensuring your communities failure. Talk to everyone in the coffee shop and on the street about how those greedy business owners are making so much money, about how they are doing too well, driving too nice of cars, have too big a houses and so on and so on. That will ensure no one shops there, driving them out of business, creating job losses, and encouraging the demise of your community.

Business owners can take part in this too, however. They can encourage people to shop elsewhere by charging high prices and expecting people to shop there because they provide a local service. Don't clean up you business so it attracts people to enter your store, and don't treat your customers like customers, treat them like they have to shop in your store and that service and price are options that depend on your mood. Build your entire business founded on the principle that local should and must shop locally and you own them nothing.

The combination of these two things are one of the most sure fire ways to ensure that your community will lose businesses, lose jobs, lose money, lose services and eventually die. If the failure of your community is your ultimate goal . . . this is the answer for you.

Secondly, encourage businesses to not be local consumer oriented, thereby encouraging consumers to shop out of town.

6. DON'T PAINT

The sixth method of thirteen that you can act on to ensure that your community fails can be summed up in one phrase, "don't paint," but also includes not sweeping, dusting, planting flowers, or anything else that would generally make the community more attractive.

I know that suggesting success comes with appearance is akin to the adage that you can judge a book by its cover, but you have to admit that often you can tell something about a book by its cover. To say the least, the cover's appearance is one of the factors that will determine whether or not you attempt to read the book. Within a community its appearance is the most telling sign of its own pride, it's the clearest indication in its faith in itself, and it is the clearest outward sign of its future.

Think of it in these terms: it is human nature to be drawn to attractiveness; human beings are genetically coded to be attracted to beautiful, aesthetically pleasing people and places. We don't often ask out people we don't find attractive. We don't often buy cars or houses we find ugly. We don't buy clothes that we think are ugly. We don't often shop in stores that aren't aesthetically pleasing either. We are attracted to things that please our senses.

When businesses on main street are run down, have paint peeling off the walls, lino turning up on the floor, crooked sidewalks, dirty empty windows, and dim lighting, people are less inclined to shop there. People will actually pay twice as much for a product in the Bay than they will for an almost identical product in Zellers simply because of the atmosphere. When the town is dusty and dirty, when the lawns aren't mowed on the boulevards or in people's yards, and when the playgrounds and parks are run down, people are not

'attracted' to you community.

Now, many communities are fixing these problems by fixing things up. Some are redoing their parks and playgrounds, working on a Mainstreet Project, adopting themes to tidy up businesses (like a wild west or roaring twenties themes), or working on Communities in Blooms projects. Some are creating (tax) incentives for everyone to mow their lawn and improve their property, or are having community pride development days (where neighbours work together on a beautification project in their area). Still others have decided to simply paint everything; paint every old building, fire hydrant, and abandoned houses and businesses within eyesight.

Painting isn't a bad idea. Suppose you own a house you are trying to sell. Every real estate agent has confirmed that instead of doing major home renovations inside or outside of that house, the most effective way to increase the value of, and curb appeal of, the house, is to paint it. The same must hold true for a group of buildings. If you want to build community spirit, attract people to the community, and encourage people to shop locally . . . paint.

So, that is why I say, if your ultimate goal is the failure of your community, don't paint. Of course failure will take more than that. It will take a concerted effort to turn you town ugly. And of course, that will still only create the façade of failure, it will only create the illusion that your town is dying, and in essence, 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.

7. DON'T COOPERATE

One of the essential requirements for success, *IN ANYTHING*, is cooperation. Whether you are looking for success in your marriage, your business, your friendships, your sports teams, or your barn raising, success can only be achieved if there is a strong element of cooperation between partners. So, in the spirit of this series of columns I suggest to you that the seventh of thirteen things that you can do to ensure that your community *fails and dies* is to refuse to meaningfully cooperate with other organizations, businesses, agencies, boards or communities.

Have you ever been part of a project (big or small), whether it be family, friend or community-based, and noticed that the energy, or rather synergy, of the group fired up to a point where it seemed to take half as much effort to get twice as much work done? Have you been on the type of project where groups join forces, combine their energies, and bring their individual strengths together and accomplish things that exceeded any one group's abilities? If you have you know that the experience always ensures one thing – success.

In order to ensure that doesn't happen in your community it is important to resist any instinct to partner or cooperate. The least you can do is ignore the activities of other groups, ignore the benefits of potential economies of scale through partnering with others, and ignore the talents and abilities of other groups that could complement yours, because any and all of these things may lead to successful partnerships. This, however, is simply a passive way to work towards failure.

If you want to be more proactive in your pursuit of failure your group, organization, or service club should actively fight other organizations and service clubs. You can do this by competing with them on similar/identical projects, by applying for and fighting for the same grants, by drawing from (fighting for) the same volunteer base, and by competing for the same community fundraising dollars to ensure that neither your group, nor another, is successful in completing any one project or activity. Of course, other groups may catch on to this and avoid you and yours like the plague, which would only ruin your efforts to cause failure, so there is an even more devious method you may want to consider.

The final and most effective way to destroy cooperation is not to avoid partnerships and not to fight partnerships, but to actually enter into them and destroy them from the inside out. Yes, I mean join forces, through a board or agency or club, under the guise of cooperation, and then undermine all work that goes on. Convince the other partners that what you are working on can't be done, that it isn't feasible, that other options aren't workable, and that what you are working on is completely impossible. Bring a sense of hopelessness and futility to the project itself, be negative and pessimistic, never offer workable or realistic alternatives, and stall and drag out progress. You will ensure failure . . . and you might even be praised for it if you can make your negativity and pessimism sound like it is based on good sound reason and logic.

Now, take this approach to the work you do everywhere. Apply it to all of the groups you work with. Use the final method approach to reach out to other towns (under a guise of cooperation) and kill their spirit and energy too because your community can die even faster if you take other neighbouring communities down with you. You can be assured of leading your community to failure if you are determined and cunning enough.

8. LIVE IN THE PAST

To have the ultimate goal of destroying your community requires the right attitude. Most of the ways we have discussed so far have been essentially about attitude. There is one attitude, however, that is absolutely essential in ensuring the death of your community. That attitude involves living in the past and constantly dwelling on past problems, mistakes, or failures. Of course, this also involves transmitting that attitude to other community organizations and members.

In my work on the Rural Development Initiative I have traveled the length and breadth of this province three times. I have been in meetings with people of various backgrounds and experiences from over 70 communities around this province. At every meeting I was at, working on this project and at virtually every subsequent meeting where I discuss rural development and the thirteen ways to kill your community, I meet someone who purveys this attitude. They usually speak up first and are the angriest, and they always try to suck the energy out of the room.

These people would rather dwell on the past than direct the future, and they do it in one of two ways, both equally as destructive. They either long for the glory days of old, seeing everything new as bad, or they dwell on about the things that went wrong yesterday, as though it were tomorrow they are talking about. They want everything to return to what it was yesterday, or they complain passionately and convincingly about past wrongs or injustices as if nothing can move forward until the past is rectified. These people, it seems, are more comfortable dwelling on the past because the idea of living in the future scares them.

In committee meetings, organizational meetings, or just in the coffee shops and beer halls these types of people are excellent at drawing down the energy of creative, forward thinkers. They are excellent at getting people with ideas to be frustrated, mad and defeatist before they begin a project, thereby ensuring its failure. They convince all that things will never be as good as they were and that there is no point in doing something, rather everything needs to be undone. They are most adept at changing the conversation from that of solutions for the future to the problems, or glory, of yesterday.

I usually deal with them with frankness, though some would assert that I'm rather mean. I don't care what happened in the past. I mean, we are supposed to learn from the past, and I do, but we are not supposed to live in it. Things have been done wrong, and will be in the future by all people at sometime (my grandpa always used to say that the only time you don't make a mistake is when you do nothing), but we need to talk about solutions, not talk incessantly on what wrong was done. Mistakes happen, but solutions don't make themselves happen. You have to work on solutions for the future, and that only happens when you let go of mistakes, and the glory of the past.

I don't want to be mean or rude, but there isn't enough time to dance around with niceties. The future of rural Alberta is at stake not its past, and I/we need to deal with those who want to work for the future not live in the past. So, let me assure you, if killing your community is your goal, that negative attitude is essential. Hold to it, live it, talk about it and pass it on.

9. IGNORE YOUR SENIORS

When it comes to killing your community there is one group in particular that you must ensure that you relegate to the backrooms and side streets because they are a dangerous group that could cause a riot of success within your community. That group is seniors. Yes, I know they are often viewed as cordial and easy going, and are rarely viewed as a factor when it comes to the future, but don't be fooled.

Seniors typically have more time and money on their hands than the average person who is still busy raising a family and working one or two full time jobs. The time factor that they have makes them available for all sorts of community associations and activities as volunteers. Most seniors are responsible for building the communities in which we live and want to still be active members within their communities. They often want to volunteer and help out. They want to be needed. We all do.

Successful communities have often captured that resource and have an excellent senior volunteer base for many functions and organizations. Successful communities that do this also realize the need for relationships and have discovered the power of dynamic relationships and interdependency between youth, seniors, and middle aged people who work together for the betterment of the community. Successful communities don't just wait for the seniors to show up either, they recruit them personally. They are successful.

As far as money goes, many seniors have quite a bit. Not all do, but many have a lot. That doesn't mean you try to get them to invest in hair brained schemes, or donate to every project in town. It runs deeper than that. Seniors are a unique group of people with unique needs, and unique demands. Seniors aren't about to die, they are about to live. They want to live in comfort; they want to live an easy life; they want to live well. They want to be entertained and they want to have fun. That is the point to retirement.

Some successful communities have realized that and capitalized on it. Sometimes it involves developing senior appropriate housing (not just assisted living, but condos and houses appropriate for seniors), services around laundry and transportation, or entertainment such as camping, golfing and dancing. Whatever the case, some communities have realized that seniors are consumers and will pay money for what they want, so they give it to them. Those communities don't just keep their seniors, they attract others. As a result they grow, and indeed some communities have doubled in size because of that.

If you are trying to kill your community you are best to ignore the senior population. Warehouse them in 'old folks' homes, don't include them in projects, activities or decisions, and don't cater to their needs. If you are really lucky they will move to where they can get what they need. If you are moderately lucky you will just relegate them to the sidelines and they will fade away. Either way, don't think of them in terms of the future, simply think of them as the past, and you will find another effective way to kill your community.

10. NOTHING NEW

The tenth way that you can ensure that you community is not successful and ultimately dies can be summed up with, 'be short-sighted'. What I mean by this is that you must confine your thoughts to local issues, local ideas, and local problems. As one wise man once said to me, "be one of those people that are are scared to get out of sight of the water tower." Don't look outside your community for new ideas or

emerging trends.

I have a friend in business who makes his money by using other people's ideas. He travels to small towns in this province and identifies businesses that are growing and booming within small towns there, but are not located in small towns here. He then opens up a similar business and . . . he has yet to have one fail on him. He tells me all of the time that people can learn from failure, but it is more pleasant to learn from success.

I have seen a lot of successful communities that have built themselves up with creative, unique ideas, but I have also seen a lot of communities that have 'borrowed' others' successful strategies. The most interesting thing I have seen, however, is when communities actually exchange ideas and find ways to work together so that both (or many) communities grow. Communities that seek out ideas, that explore options, and find partners that extend beyond the sight of the water tower often find an entire new world of opportunities on which they can capitalize. They find the future.

Communities that fail often stay short-sighted, never looking for new opportunities and ideas. Members of the community who help this along often label others' ideas as foreign, eccentric, or too crazy to work in the town they are. They don't like new ideas because they are new and have never been tried before. Voltaire once said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results every time." That is often what small, unsuccessful towns do. They use the same people with the same ideas over and over (chasing away anything new) and each time expecting that the result to the community will be different.

The world is becoming more global, and is full of solutions, ideas and opportunities if you want to find them. But, if failure of your community is what you are after, don't think about that idea anymore. You are best to stay within eyesight of the water tower. Keep your ideas within reach of the water tower as well. For that matter label all others' ideas that are from outside as foreign and unworkable. That will ensure nothing new ever comes up, and your community will die doing what it has always done.

11. IGNORE IMMIGRANTS AND NEWCOMERS

As we approach the end of this series of columns on how to ensure that your community fails and ultimately dies (this is number 11 of the list of 13 things) you will notice that some of the items from the list resemble each other. For instance, number eleven in the list urges you, if your goal is failure, to ensure that you don't attract or retain outsiders or immigrants to your community and don't capitalize on their abilities.

I have spoken before about not involving youth (who have ideas and energy) and not involving seniors (who have time and money) in your community, and now I am speaking about outsiders and immigrants. I have spoken about each of them separately because each group brings unique skills and strengths to the table, and each has the ability to single handedly grow your community. When it comes to outsiders and immigrants, it is their entrepreneurial attitude and their community spirit that makes them a threat to the successful failure of your community.

A book called *The Millionaire Mind* is a short expose on what 'type' of mindset breeds success and new millionaires. One of the most interesting items in the book was the statistics that show that most of the new millionaires made in North America are actually immigrants from other countries. They become wealthy because they have often come from nothing and have nothing to lose, risking everything they have, which is often very little, in order to get more. They understand this is the land of opportunities. So, while we are often complacent (we complain about what is wrong or what is lacking but are content enough to just sit by hoping someone else will take care of it) immigrants often are not. They appreciate the opportunity they have here and capitalize on it.

To be completely frank, they often come from places where there is no democratic government or no government resources available to assist them in building their community, and so they simply do it themselves. They come from places where self reliance isn't a virtue or just talk in political circles, but where it is the only option that exists. They therefore don't wait for someone else to do it, and don't spend a lot of time talking about what can't be done or how it is someone else's responsibility . . . they just get it done for themselves, for their children, and for the future of their community.

As well, outsiders, even from other communities, don't often fit into the mindset of the community. They don't know what was done in the past in the community and don't care. They don't care about past grudges, they don't care about past failures, and they don't wait for someone else. They see the potential within their new community and want to build on it . . . after all it is the community on which they chose to build their future. They have often come from somewhere where things were done differently, which can cause the entire community to think differently, which leads to success.

Both groups can cause success, through businesses that develop and in community projects that need a push. They are a dangerous lot that are sure to cause success. The best way to deal with those people is to shut them out of all community organizations, shut them out of town and county councils, shut them out of successful business ventures, and shut them out of economic and community development organizations. They will only cause trouble and success. You may even want to consider spending time in the local coffee shop talking about them and their 'strange' ways. Make them feel excluded and different, make people stare at them, and if you are lucky they will not only feel excluded but may in fact change their mind about your community and leave. That will not only ensure the long term failure of your community but will grant immediate success by chasing newcomers away.

12. TAKE NO RISKS

If you are deliberately trying to kill you community you must ensure many factors work in tandem. If all of the factors come together you can ensure that new people don't locate to your community, that existing members leave, that new businesses don't start and existing ones fail and so on, and that your community will die. Be careful, however, that you don't accidentally do something that could lead to success when failure is your ultimate goal. That leads me into the twelfth item on the list of thirteen ways to kill your community: Don't take risks or plan big, you may accidentally succeed.

I know this one may be a hard one to believe, but trust me, it is true. You see, taking big risks and working on big ideas can lead to failure, and wonderfully large failure at that, but it doesn't usually happen. Some communities have taken big risks and worked on big ideas and have had marvellous failures that have devastated their communities. They are usually communities that chase down, and sometimes catch, big factories or plants that help their community . . . until they leave or shut down, and then failure ensues because the community put all of its eggs in one basket, but believe it or not those cases are not that common.

Every great and wonderful invention, every discovering, every idea, every change in the course of human history, whether globally or locally, originated in and by somebody who was ready to take a risk. If no one took a risk, took a chance when they could fail or be ridiculed, then nothing would ever change. It would be status quo all the way to the end of time. Dreamers and believers, visionaries and revolutionaries are the ones who change the world in which we live, and though often they are ridiculed and resented (because everyone hates change until they get used to it), they persevere and make things, more often than not, better.

So, by taking risks and by thinking big (not necessarily about a big factory, but new big picture ideas) you are likely to face resistance but you are also likely to cause a chain reaction that will lead to success, that will

change your community and its direction (from downward) forever. The risk may be in building a new subdivision, it may be in building a spec home, it may be in securing good water, it may be in spending money on beautification, or it may be simply taking a risk on something that the community and its citizens desperately need. Whatever the case, if you take on such a risk with the expectation that it will fail, and that your community will fail as a result, it likely won't work. Odds are that the risk will be a success and your community will also be a success.

If you intend to make your community fail you should stick with the status quo, stick with activities that have no risk (and therefore no payout), because thinking big and taking risks usually just leads, in a big way, to success.

13. DON'T TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

We have reached the last item on the list of thirteen ways to kill your community. Many other papers have requested this series of columns and I have begun to send them off to them. I am glad that the series has been such a success, and indeed, I have received many compliments on the series. I only had one criticism from a gentleman who criticized me for being so negative and critical. I tried to remind him that this series is meant to be taken tongue in cheek and designed to point out some of the things we do that damage our community without understanding their impact, but he was not interested and merely screamed until he hung up on me. To anyone else that may have felt the columns were too negative or felt offended, I'm sorry, but I hope you understand that often, before we can fix a problem, we have to understand what is causing the problem and remedy it.

The interesting point about the gentleman who called was that every problem that he mentioned was someone else's fault. Low commodity prices, closed borders, lack of processing, lack of volunteers for community fundraising, lack of new businesses in town, lack of truck drivers, lack of, well . . . everything, essentially. Many enterprising and entrepreneurial people find that the lack of something means, not a road block, but an opportunity. Positive thinking people see problems as opportunities to make money, to develop new skills, to meet new people, or sometimes, just a new challenge or experience. Negative people don't just see challenges as tough they see them as impossible to overcome and can't help but focus on what is wrong, unable to see how it could be made right, and often by them.

I am reminded of a quote that says, "Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men (and women) who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact, it is an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration of truth, it is a dare. Impossible is nothing, and nothing is impossible." I try to live by that. I have never given up on anything . . . and indeed, when I am turned away the first ten times, I just get more ornery. I often smile at people who tell me something is impossible and say, "Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it."

So, if your ultimate goal is to bring about the failure of your community the thirteenth way to ensure that is to ensure you and no one else you know ever takes responsibility for anything that is wrong or a problem in your community. Spend time taking to others too, and convince them that everything that is wrong is someone else's fault and someone else's responsibility, that way, you and no one you know will feel compelled to become involved to fix it and the problem will remain. Blame the province, blame the federal government, blame your MLA, blame the Mayor and Reeve and their councils, blame the employees, blame the volunteers, blame the price of gas, or blame the kids down the street. Whatever you do, find someone to blame and challenge them to fix it, but don't ever take responsibility or you may just lead your community to successful initiatives.