



StrengthenND[®]

Embrace the Naysayers! **Strengthen ND's *Rural Shorts* Series**



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We all know they will be there, and for the most part, we dread the naysayers when we are planning a new community event, project, or community change of any kind. There is truth in the statement that change is hard; however, change is really hard for some people. I have heard from many communities that “nothing ever happens here because of the negative attitude in the community.”

I have found that there is no stereotypical naysayer. Some are older and yet some of the youngest people in the community can be naysayers. I believe it is a personality trait; rather than a negative attitude, it is a fear of the unknown. (This is my secret and personal analysis - never repeat this to anyone.) Seriously, I do believe that these are the people who need to be asked for their input in the beginning. Many have great ideas, but they need to be asked to join in and offer them. Bring them into your community enthusiasm and help them see what the community can do.

We need the naysayers. We should embrace the naysayers and never ignore them. They make us accountable by questioning us, they make us better, and they help ensure better projects, events, or other community change.

Over many years of rural community work, I have found that some of the most successful efforts have addressed the potential naysayers early, by asking for full community input. You know who they are; ask for their opinion and have a good positive discussion. People like to be asked for their opinions, and need them to be addressed in some fashion. It is respectful, and most often beneficial.

Broad community input is crucial to the success of any project or event in a community; in rural communities, everyone is needed to help, participate, attend...and ultimately benefit. So, we ask the naysayers for their input and we use their input to make the project or event stronger. We don't let them dictate change or stop change; we bring them into the fold of change.

Simplistic? Yes, it is; however, I have seen many community projects that have moved forward by bringing the few naysayers into the fold. By getting them involved, they also participate in success. Always celebrate success and include everyone in the acknowledgement of that success, no matter how small a project.

Speaking of celebrating success; never be humble about your community and its successes. Too often we do not realize that what we are doing is creative and innovative, that our example might be important for others to use, and that it is a building block for more success.

Strengthen ND is placing stories of community success on its website. One of my areas of responsibilities is to find them, interview community members (particularly those who embraced naysayers), and compile these stories on our website as examples for other communities. Please contact me with your success story.

