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Popularity + Impact in Volunteer Movements

Alcoholics Anonymous, Poetry
Slams, and the Path to Impact for
the
Civic Innovation Movement

A faded, grayscale background image of a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a light-colored polo shirt, holding a baby in his arms. The man is looking towards the camera, and the baby is looking slightly to the side. The background is dark and out of focus.

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I'm Daniel X. O'Neil.

- <https://www.danxoneil.com>
- <http://www.derivativeworks.com/>
- <http://juggernautco.com/>
- <http://www.smartchicagocollaborative.org/>

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I'm a recovering alcoholic.

- 09/10/00
- One day at a time
- I practice these principles in all of my affairs



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I'm a failed poet.

- 1987 – 1997
- 4 books
- 4 national tours
- Worldwide Entertainment Juggernaut of 21st Century



I'm in civic tech.

- 1999 – ahora
- Civic apps
- EveryBlock
- Open Data Movement
- Smart Chicago Collaborative



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There's a thread here.

- More than one might think
- Three international movements based on volunteer labor
- All of which have a relationship with professional approaches
- Their paths are worth exploring

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Alcoholics Anonymous

- Alcoholics Anonymous is the most successful decentralized movement in history
- There are explicitly no leaders
- The whole thing is run, to this day, by principles + suggestions codified in 1939 + 1947

The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous [\[edit\]](#)

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

LEO BUSCAGLIA, I.R.D.

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Huge Dollars + Huge Impact

- A huge portion of the health industry
- Every self-help book
- Dozens of derivative movements
- The entire 70s

A • \$7.75 in Canada



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Poetry Slams

- One of the most important literary movements of the late 20th century
- Invented in Chicago
- Has a strict set of rules, maintained over time by volunteers

*With respect to its own affairs, each Slam should be free from attachment to any outside organization and responsible to no authority other than its own community of poets and audience.

*NO group, individual, or outside organization should be allowed to exploit the Slam Family. We must all remember that we are each tied in some way to someone else's efforts. Our individual achievements are only extensions of some previous accomplishment. Success for one should translate into success for all.

*The National Slam began as a gift from one city to another. It should remain a gift passed on freely to all newcomers.

Such philosophies might sound a high tone in your head and leave your cynical self muttering "What Bull!" . Sometimes it is. The idealism and cooperative forces of the Slam are in constant conflict with the competitive and self-serving appetites of its ambitious nature. This struggle has taught us much, but threatens to obliterate all that has grown to be. I , as surely you have guessed, am on the side of idealism and hope.

-- Marc Smith (so what!)



Share with friends

Add to Google Calendar



Low Dollars + Medium Impact (7pm-10pm) UPTOWN POETRY SLAM

Sunday March 29

7:00pm - 10:00pm

\$7 Cover

Hosted by Slam originator Marc Smith (so what!)

Open Slam WIN \$10

- Explicitly anti-professional
- Antidote to academia
- Meanwhile: rap + hip hop dominate

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Civic Tech

- An international movement with origins in volunteer coders
- HACKERS!
- Pizza, up all night, geniuses

Open Government Data Principles

Government data shall be considered open if it is made public in a way that complies with the principles below:

1. Complete

All public data is made available. Public data is data that is not subject to valid privacy, security or privilege limitations.

2. Primary

Data is as collected at the source, with the highest possible level of granularity, not in aggregate or modified forms.

3. Timely

Data is made available as quickly as necessary to preserve the value of the data.

4. Accessible

Data is available to the widest range of users for the widest range of purposes.

5. Machine processable

Data is reasonably structured to allow automated processing.

6. Non-discriminatory

Data is available to anyone, with no requirement of registration.

7. Non-proprietary

Data is available in a format over which no entity has exclusive control.

8. License-free

Data is not subject to any copyright, patent, trademark or trade secret regulation. Reasonable privacy, security and privilege restrictions may be allowed.

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Low Dollars + Low Impact

- Niche popularity
- Lots of heat
- Meanwhile: the technology industry dominates culture

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Three movements

- Volunteer-based
- Internally determined rule-sets
- Vastly different impacts on popular culture and society at large



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Two impact patterns

- AA: enormous number of users, huge impact by those who have professionalized in the broader industry (healthcare)
- Poetry slam: very small number of users, huge impact by people in an associated field in the same industry (entertainment)

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A conscious decision to be open

- AA, despite its unchanging, unyielding text, is brilliantly designed with open sockets and has grown in concert with the larger healthcare industry. Attraction not promotion (really open)
- Poetry slams are rigid and closed—there is one way to run a slam, nearly even poem has the same cadence, there is a narrow band of acceptable subject matter (fake open)



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We are divorced from the masses

- As our movement has grown, the Hero Volunteer narrative has dominated
- Separated from the will of the masses (capitalism, product development, human needs)
- Answerable only to itself and its particular fetishes

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Popularity = Impact

- The number of humans who use a piece of software is the #1 most important factor in determining its impact on humanity
- Popularity matters a lot. We don't make popular things. This is simple.
- We have to align our methods, our metrics, our values, and our reward systems to this