

The Price of Belonging Is Inconvenience: New Article Explores the Hidden Cost of Community

New article in The Conversation links loneliness, toxic workplaces and an “emotional recession” to the true cost of real belonging.

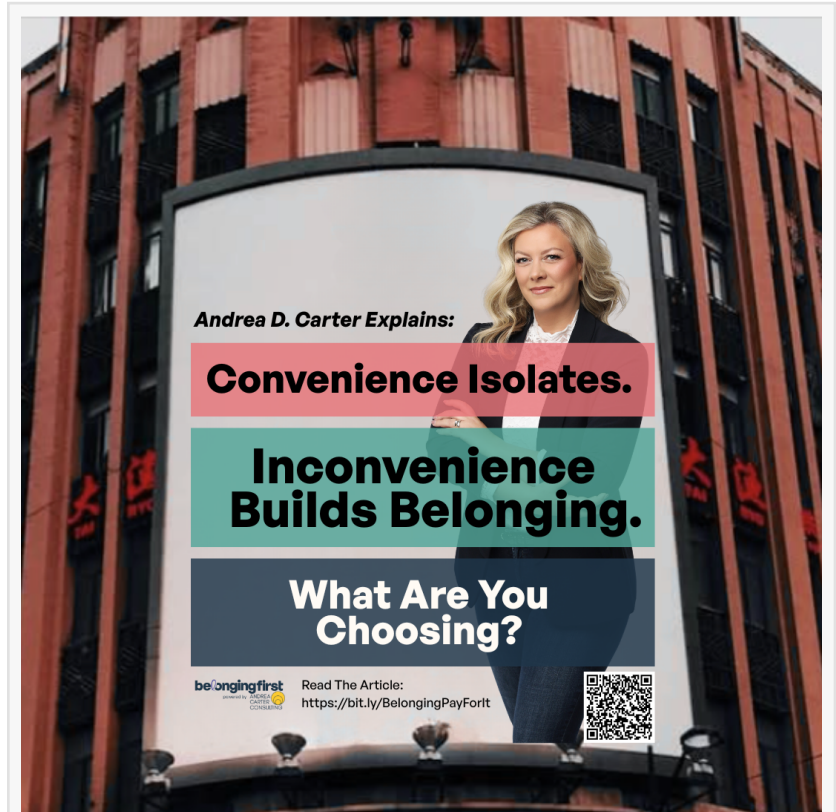
TORONTO, CANADA, December 9, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Neuroscience-based workplace belonging expert [Andrea D. Carter](#), Adjunct Faculty in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Adler University and founder of [Belonging First Methodology™](#), has published a new article in The Conversation titled “The price of belonging is inconvenience. Are we still willing to pay it?”

In the article, Carter argues that we have optimized away the very “productive inconveniences” that make real community and belonging possible, fuelling three overlapping crises: rising loneliness, toxic workplaces, and a collapse in trust in employers and civic institutions.

Every time we choose people over convenience, we invest in community. The real question is whether we are still willing to pay that price.

Three converging epidemics

Drawing on recent global and North American data, Carter connects three trends that are often treated as separate problems:



Are we still willing to pay for community and belonging?

Loneliness: A World Health

Organization report estimates that one in six people are affected by loneliness worldwide, with loneliness linked to roughly 871,000 deaths each year, a mortality risk comparable to smoking.

Workplace toxicity: In new U.S. data, 80% of workers now describe their workplaces as toxic, up from 67% in 2024, and identify this as a primary driver of poor mental health. Gallup's global engagement findings show stalled employee engagement costing the global economy hundreds of billions in lost productivity.



ADLER

Forbes Advisor named the Adler University online Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.) in Industrial and Organizational (I/O) Psychology as one of the country's top programs.

Collapsing trust: Trust in employers and civic institutions is eroding, intensifying polarization and withdrawal from shared life.

“

Every time we choose people over convenience, we invest in community. The real question is whether we are still willing to pay that price.”

Andrea D. Carter

“These are not three separate problems,” Carter writes. “They are symptoms of the same underlying issue: the dismantling of social infrastructure that builds cohesion and belonging.”

An “emotional recession”

The article highlights a large-scale study of 28,000 adults across 166 countries that found global emotional

intelligence scores dropped nearly six per cent between 2019 and 2024. Researchers describe this pattern as an “emotional recession” – a shrinking pool of shared emotional resources.

The steepest declines occurred in intrinsic motivation, optimism and sense of purpose, three capabilities that help people stay hopeful, keep moving forward and remain willing to invest in relationships.

“When our emotional capacity erodes, community frays,” Carter explains. “We become less able to tolerate difference, less willing to repair conflict and less motivated to show up for one another.”

The hidden cost of convenience

Carter critiques “convenience culture” for prioritizing ease and efficiency over collective responsibility and mutual obligation. Digital platforms promise connection without commitment, and algorithm-driven feeds allow people to retreat from the discomfort of difference.

Belonging, she argues, is not the same as fitting in. Fitting in is conditional and transactional: you can stay as long as you comply. Belonging is active and reciprocal. It asks something of both the individual and the community that receives them.

“That mutual obligation is exactly what convenience culture does not tolerate,” Carter notes. “And it is precisely what builds trust, respect, commitment and the emotional resilience we are losing.”

Five “productive inconveniences” that build belonging

Grounded in her workplace belonging research, Carter introduces five “productive inconveniences” that act as the infrastructure of real community in families, workplaces and civic life:

Costly commitment

Real community is a two-way street.

Sometimes the group’s needs come

before personal ease, and that responsibility cannot fall on the same people every time. When only some people have to invest, belonging doesn’t mean much.

Co-ordinated time

Strong relationships need time and presence. When calendars are full, making the effort to see people in person matters. Texts and emails are useful, but they cannot replace real presence.



Andrea D. Carter, wearing red glasses



THE CONVERSATION

The conversation is the world's leading publisher of research-based news and analysis.

Navigating difference

Belonging requires staying in relationship with people who see the world differently and learning to disagree without disengaging. Listening, respectfully disagreeing and staying curious in moments of conflict are what stretch us and make communities stronger.

Conflict repair

Healthy relationships require accountability and repair, not just exit. Instead of unfollowing, ghosting or quietly walking away, the hard conversations that allow relationships to survive and grow are an essential inconvenience.

Mutual need

Belonging demands interdependence: asking for help and being willing to be needed. Radical self-sufficiency is often just isolation by another name. Mutual reliance is what turns a group of people into a real community.

“These frictions are not bugs in the system. They are the system,” Carter says. “They are how we build comfort, connection, contribution, psychological safety and wellbeing in real life.”

A call to leaders

Carter calls on leaders of all kinds – parents, people managers, executives, ERG leaders and community organizers – to distinguish harmful barriers (such as discrimination, exclusion and bureaucratic waste) from essential inconveniences that build the “muscle” of belonging.

“The good news is that this emotional recession is not inevitable,” she emphasizes. “We can rebuild community by practising these five productive inconveniences on purpose, inside the work and relationships we already have.”

Read the full article

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