

The Tree of Engagement

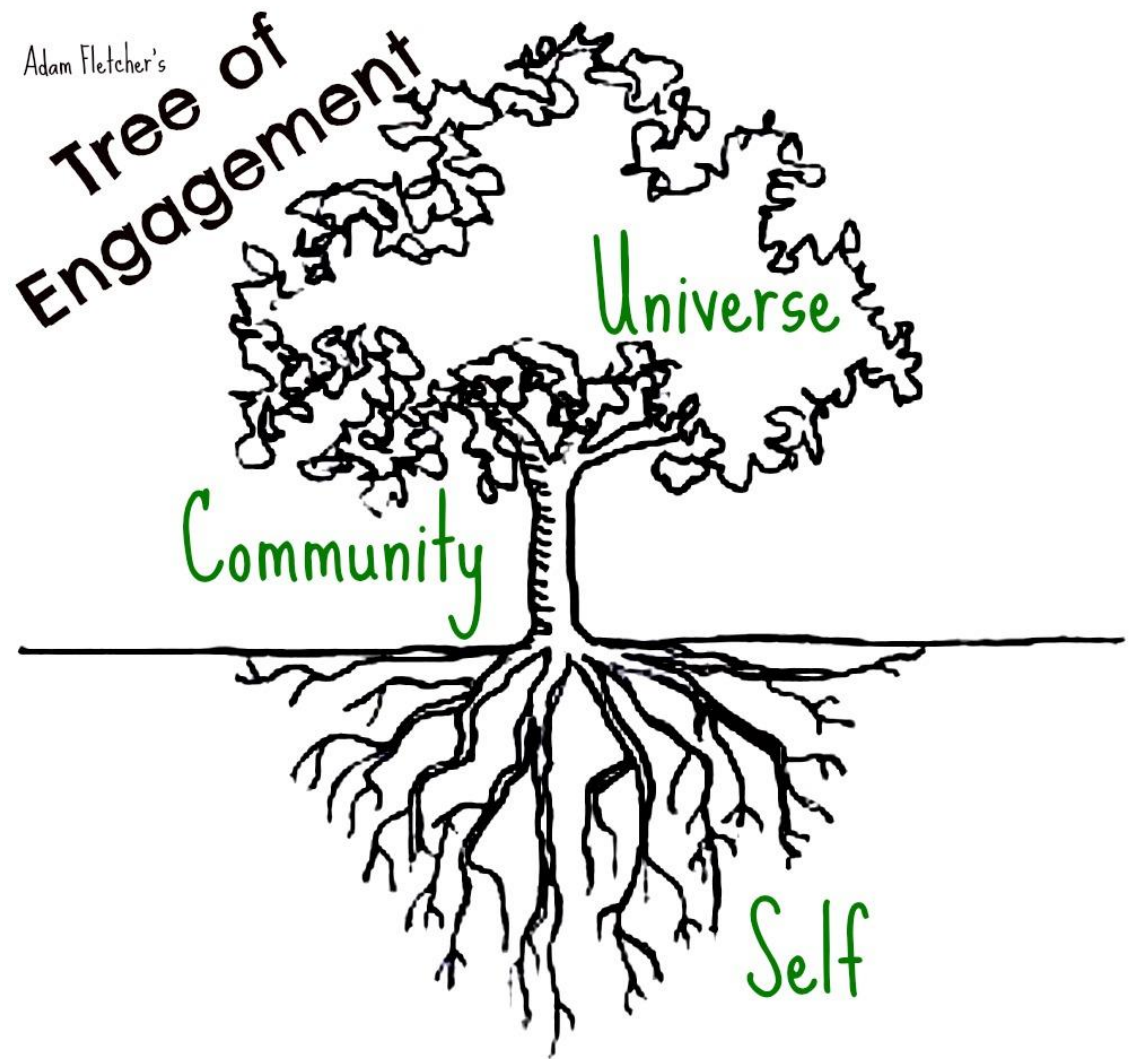
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As a young man, I was taught the art of storytelling by one of Omaha's greatest, [Idu Maduli](#). His graceful, courageous work brought me into neighborhoods throughout my area of the city where most people would never go, fearful of poverty or people of different races. Idu went though, over and over, to teach kindergarten through twelfth graders about acting by combining his storytelling abilities with techniques he'd learned from [Augusto Boal](#).

He brought me along for three summers to help him teach, and along the way sparked the imagination of his journeyman. Since then I have strove to become half the teacher and storyteller I remember Idu being.

In his distinct way, I remember the gritty naturalness of the stories Idu shared. Many of them were focused on [Anansi](#), the trickster spider of many West African cultures. Others were drawn from European folklore, and others from other places. Wherever they were from, all these stories conveyed a sense of connection, dependence, and interaction with the Earth and all our relatives.

It is from this place that I originally conceived the "Tree of Engagement". This model is a metaphor meant to illustrate the sustained connections that drive all of our lives. Engagement is a very natural reality of our daily existence, since it simply happens whether or not we see it. This model is meant to help us see how we're engaged, and is shared in three sections, each of which represents an area of engagement in our lives.



Engaging in the Universe. The sustained connections between all things, everywhere, all the time is best summarized by the term **Universal Engagement**. It is what the seemingly unrelated things around us depend on in order for the world to go around. Universal engagement allows people to see how the most minute thing affects the grandest, and vice versa. The relevance of the **butterfly effect** echoes this idea. Each of us demonstrate Universal Engagement through the things we create and share outside ourselves, including our work, our children, our cooking, and our conversations. We acknowledge Universal Engagement in all we consume, including food and clothing, others' feelings and ideas.

Engaging in the Community. As humans, we are constantly surrounded by other people, places, and identities. The community around us includes our families, friends, work, neighborhoods, cultures, and other things we identify with. **Community Engagement** is any sustained connection we have with those people, places, and identities. We express these connections every time we see the people, places, emotions, ideas, wisdom, and things around us. We foster these connections through all that we sustain outside ourselves, including families and friendships, forests and gardens. Shared values, built structures, and other creation we share with our immediate circles are all forms of Community Engagement.

Engaging in the Self. Within each of us is a unique configuration of blood, guts, and soul reflecting a singular engagement of everything in the Universe within one creation. Within our selves are infinite connections that are lastingly established in order to personify Universal engagement. Each one of us, individually, creates, builds, demolishes, nurtures, sustains, expands, and explores the universe in our own ways, thereby justifying our existence. The sustained connections of each self are what I call **Personal Engagement**: the sustained connection we have to the worlds within ourselves. Anything we do to connect with ourselves shows this, including knowing, nurturing, examining, and deconstructing ourselves. Personal Engagement is our root, the tap root of which digs deep into the Earth for inspiration, dedication, and health; the smallest of which roots contribute to the health and well-being of our whole selves.

The Tree of Engagement is a metaphor for all these experiences. How does it grow in your life? Do you think it has ever fallen over? Since its impossible to be truly disengaged from everything, all the time, what would you say is your weak spot of engagement?

Reflect on the tree and let me know what you think, please!

Now, *get to climbing-* if you want to...

—Adam Fletcher
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