

Have you ever given it some thought as to what constitutes a good gathering? We spend a significant portion of our days interacting with others at board meetings, reading clubs, or Monday morning team catch-ups. However, few of us truly take the time to think about what makes a meeting compelling, significant, or intriguing.

And when we do make an effort to plan, we frequently get caught up in the logistics. We concentrate on the details of a business event's logistics or search Pinterest for design ideas. Rarely do we pause to explore the underlying meaning behind our gathering, understand how individuals interact with one another, or consider arranging gatherings in a way that fosters these connections.

These chapters are the ideal remedy for dull, lifeless meetings. Here you may learn how to energize situations if you've ever noticed that your dinner party lacked a little enthusiasm after a dessert or that your business strategy meetings might be more focused.

These chapters will teach you:

- why the secret to a good gathering sometimes lies in removing folks from the invite list;
- why the secret to a good party may lie in not allowing attendees to pour their drinks; and
- how to magically end a gathering.

## Chapter 1 - Although gatherings are crucial to the human experience, we frequently give them little regard.

We spend the majority of our lives congregating, initially with our families, friends, playgroups, and schools. Then, with adulthood, come dinner parties, weddings, business meetings, and class reunions. Our relatives and loved ones attend our funerals when our lives come to an end.

A significant portion of life and the human experience are gatherings. However, the time we spend it is frequently unimpressive and uninspired.

We complain about conferences and meetings at work. International development expert Duncan Green, who wrote about his opinions on conferences in a 2016 essay for the Guardian, spoke for many of us. With a few rare exceptions, he claimed, his typical state of mind at conferences runs from boredom to despair to wrath. Additionally, a 2015 poll included in the State of Enterprise Work Report revealed that employees regarded inefficient meetings as their biggest challenge to finishing work.

Additionally, unprofessional gatherings are getting worse. Gatherings centered on church communities are dwindling as young people's interest in traditional religion grows. But we also don't appear to be enjoying our time with our buddies all that much. According to 2013

research on friendship in America, 75% of people are unhappy with their platonic connections.

You could anticipate that more individuals would consider ways to improve the situation given the current state of circumstances. Instead, we continue to use the same strategy.

It's uncommon to attend a conference or a cocktail party and discover that the event planners have carefully considered how attendees would interact with one another and benefit from the get-together. That may be the case since we frequently concentrate on the mechanics when we do look for hosting help. How to bring people together in a way that is meaningful, fascinating, or thought-provoking is ultimately a human difficulty that transforms into a logistical challenge. We give more thought to Powerpoints, AV equipment, table settings, and menu options than we do to people and social connections.

The good news is that there are actions you can do to make sure your events succeed. And everyone can adhere to them. You don't have to be extroverted or have a luxurious home or venue to throw an event. Simply continue reading.

## Chapter 2 - The first step to creating a fantastic gathering is committing to a defined aim.

Have you ever given it a thought as to why you hold events like lectures, galas for charity fundraising, and quarterly board meetings the manner you do?

If you did, you could discover that too many of our events adhere to ritualized structures rather than being designed with a specific goal in mind.

We spend a large portion of our working days in meetings because of this. Disregard the possibility that a brief email correspondence would be more efficient than a weekly catch-up meeting. The rite is still performed in this manner because it has always been done that way.

As the author discovered while she was pregnant, the same is true in our social life. Her friends desired to host a baby shower for her. The organizers and the author herself did not pause to consider the goal of the baby shower because it is linked with its own set of customs until the author spoke to her spouse.

Even though custom would have you believe that only women should attend baby showers, it turned out that he also wanted to participate. At that moment, the author understood that she and her husband were transitioning from being a couple to a family together and that they required a gathering that would support them both. Their desire to parent equally and to communicate this intention was unrelated to the ritualized style of the assembly of women.

Therefore, while planning a gathering, try to focus more on the why than the what. Maybe it's your birthday soon, and you want to throw a party to celebrate it like you always do. Examining your motivations for doing something could result in a better, more fulfilling event.

Perhaps you want to spend as much time as possible with joyful individuals. If this is your goal, you can opt for a private dinner with your closest friends as opposed to a BBQ with Aunt Mary and Bob from accounts. Perhaps your true motivation for celebrating your birthday is to take a break from your usual routine. In that case, going bungee jumping with a friend would be a better option than attending a party.

You may make the remaining arrangements for your event with the support of a clear objective in mind. Who to invite is among the first things to think about.

## Chapter 3 - A crucial component of creating a meaningful meeting is being ready to exclude people.

The saying "the more the merrier" has a long history in our culture. We've all heard those phrases at some point since we were little.

Therefore, we frequently consider inclusion while discussing guest lists. Even though it might be awkward, the exclusion is sometimes just as vital.

The author struggled with this while working out with her six pals twice a week in a park with a hired personal trainer. They got together to chat and tone up. One of the friends who had planned a trip proposed that a different buddy take his place so that he wouldn't waste the money that he'd paid for the week.

It took the others some time to figure out why they didn't like the notion. One of them eventually realized that the group's true, unstated primary goal was not to attend a paid fitness class but rather to socialize while working out. They didn't know the potential replacement, so his presence would have jeopardized the meetup's genuine goal of creating a comfortable and cozy space for friends to catch up.

Saying "no" under these circumstances is challenging since civility takes precedent. Although it may seem rude to exclude someone, including the wrong individuals is as rude to the other participants.

Some individuals shy away from invites that are exclusive out of concern that doing so would lessen the variety of the group. But frequently, limiting the number of people you invite might be the greatest approach to attract a diverse group of guests. Consider Judson Manor, an upscale retirement community in Ohio, which places restrictions on its inhabitants. The only individuals permitted to reside there? Of course, retirees, as well as five college music students receive free housing in exchange for performances and community involvement.

The advantages to both groups are evident. The rooms are free, and there is a captive audience for the pupils. The presence of young, active individuals and frequent live music, helps senior folks avoid loneliness, dementia, and maybe even high blood pressure.

The group's requirements are exclusive. With, let's say, business majors, the scenario would not have worked. Over-inclusion would have undermined the appeal of the combo.

As we'll see again in the following chapter, one essential component of hosting well is willing to make occasionally difficult choices.

## Chapter 4 - More lavishly authoritative hosts always provide better parties than those who are unduly relaxed.

Being laid back is frequently regarded as a virtue in modern society. As a result, even during events, we are hosting ourselves, we are reluctant to instruct others. Being unobtrusive and laid back with our visitors seems natural.

Being a "calm" host during a party, however, is a clear sign that you are abdicating your duty to the event and your guests, and it is a certain way to watch the event die away.

The author once attended a Brooklyn housewarming celebration. After everyone had eaten, there was a bit of a hush as everybody wondered what was going to happen next. The author advised the hosts to start a game of werewolf, a fun group activity that may bring the guests together and give the evening some much-needed vitality.

The host, however, had her doubts about whether or not all of the visitors would find it enjoyable and she was unwilling to use her position as hostess to persuade them. It was simpler to stay still. After the brief pause, the gathering quickly dispersed.

It's preferable to accept ample authority while hosting as opposed to taking a hands-off attitude. This entails managing events in the best interests of your visitors while acting with authority and selflessness.

A symposium organized by the author to bring together those concerned with raising cattle and marketing grass-fed meat once took place. The author was aware that making as many new connections as possible would be crucial in getting the 120 guests, who primarily didn't know one another, to conceive of themselves as a community.

She, therefore, decided that after each speech, everyone in attendance would stand up and switch tables. Both the guests and the organizers were hesitant. It appeared to be a burden. At first, visitors complained.

But the atmosphere had changed by day's end. Visitors expressed to the author their appreciation for developing unexpected connections with strangers rather than merely chatting with their acquaintances who were seated next to them at 9:00 a.m. The author had used their power kindly, acting in the visitors' actual interests rather than their comfort.

So keep in mind that, despite what it may seem like, expressing control might be the best way to persuade people to enjoy themselves and get something out of a meeting.

Let's now examine rules, which are a different facet of authority.

## Chapter 5 - It may be quite free to have clear guidelines for your events.

Regulations have a poor rep. They bring to mind images of rigidity, dullness, controlling parents, and school. However, that perception is unjustified since, when applied correctly, rules may encourage exploration, fun, and really meaningful interactions.

The Latitude Society, a covert networking group that held exclusive, invitation-only parties in San Francisco until it disbanded in 2015, is an excellent illustration of how regulations may enhance rather than constrain behavior. The laws of the society were intended to promote kinship and a sense of belonging.

For instance, guests were prohibited from pouring their drinks, so they had to ask someone else to do it. This straightforward guideline made people engage but in a lighthearted, relaxed way. This made it easier for them to talk to strangers and get past the small uneasiness that goes along with it.

Rules can therefore serve to change things and help us break out of our daily routines. These days, when technology can be so pervasive in our lives, that is especially crucial.

The reality of being distracted by technology in today's world must be accepted by anybody organizing a meeting of any type. People check their phones an average of 150 times every day, according to a Deloitte survey. How do you make sure that none of those 50 things take place at your event? How can you be sure your guests are there?

The author and her husband organized "I am here" days, a weekend gathering for their friends that revolved on discovering a new New York neighborhood. The group would get together, stroll a good number of blocks, interact with residents, and discuss life in the city. As the crowd increased, they established several ground rules, one of which was that no electronics were permitted.

Those who joined eventually learned to cherish the rules in addition to accepting them. Why? Because they imposed a sense of presence that is uncommon in today's distracted, tech-addled New York. As "I am here" participant and comedian Baratunde Thurston put it, cellphones provide us all the freedom to be anywhere at any time.

It, therefore, seems significant and meaningful to actively choose to do just one activity each day, with a certain group of people, and to concentrate on that and to be there.

Focusing on only one item is a liberating act in a world where we have practically infinite options.

## Chapter 6 - Giving your visitors a good welcome and showing them respect when they arrive can help your gathering run well.

You know who to invite and how to host now that you have a defined goal for your event. How can you get things off to the perfect start?

First of all, be aware that before your event even begins, people will already have preconceived notions about what to expect from it. So set the proper expectations for them.

Making a tiny request of your visitors may be all that is necessary to start priming. After a lengthy, taxing tour, Cirque du Soleil director Michel Laprise wanted to throw a get-together for coworkers before Christmas. The previous day, he sent a brief note to all of his guests requesting them to contribute pictures of two joyous events they had experienced the previous year.

His visitors anticipated a festive evening as he looked through their images. So the scene was set for a joyful evening when they came to see a Christmas tree adorned with their images, including those of infants, scuba diving vacations, and post-show selfies.

Making your guests feel at home and respected to be there is another excellent way to start a gathering, as illustrated by Laprise's Christmas tree.

Sugata Roychowdhury, a former instructor of the author, had a remarkable manner of keeping track of attendance on the first day of class. He roamed the room rather than going through and crossing off the names of the 70 kids. He made eye contact with each student individually, pointed at them, and spoke their whole name.

Roychowdhury has never met his students before. He must have spent hours studying the names and images since he had taken the full class attendance from memory. The pupils were enthralled and felt honored and eager to be in his class right away.

So as your visitors come, consider how you may treat them with respect. This might be as easy as elegantly setting the table before a guest arrives for what they mistakenly believe would be a casual meal. Or perhaps you can come up with a technique to introduce your dinner guests by telling a tale about them rather than listing their jobs or other uninteresting information.

A meaningful introduction like that is a terrific approach to promote authenticity as well. And as we'll see right now, getting to that point isn't always simple.

## Chapter 7 - You may plan your events such that attendees feel free to be themselves when they attend.

Too frequently, we attempt to portray our best selves to the world rather than our true selves. We present a polished, idealized version of our real lives on social media. At professional gatherings, we often focus on our accomplishments and triumphs rather than our weaknesses. However, this frequently results in lifeless, impersonal talks.

So how do you encourage your visitors to be genuine?

The author developed a subject and framework for a World Economic Forum dinner that would steer clear of dry exchanges of professional braggadocio when she was invited to manage it for CEOs and other high flyers.

She decided on the concept of the good life as her topic.

She also requested everyone in attendance to get up and make a toast to the good life at some time throughout the evening, and to begin their toast by sharing a personal tale from their own lives. This was done to encourage visitors to speak up. The visitors would be forced to become genuine and cease bragging about their accomplishments as a result, she reasoned.

The outcome? A meal centered on genuine human feelings. One of the guests spoke about her experience working in disaster assistance while getting emotional. Another person gave her mother's final advice, which stated that she spent 90% of her time worrying about unimportant things and instructed her daughter not to do the same.

Another visitor was encouraged by this to confess something she had never before disclosed with anyone: every morning, she does what she calls a death meditation, in which she muses over all she would leave behind if she passed away while appreciating her life. As the evening progressed, many previously untold experiences were spoken, and tears were also shed. As a result, these groups of individuals used to engage based on their job titles and resumes and genuinely interacted with one another.

How can you then incorporate this honesty into your gatherings?

First, request tales. People understand immediately that a compelling tale involves risk, passion, and vulnerability. You cannot relate a compelling tale about your achievements.

Second, be transparent. The author's toast, in which she described how she received her first period and how her mother celebrated it with delight, was one of the reasons her dinner was so successful. She said to the group that because of her mother's response, it was a time when she felt recognized and important.

You must be willing to reveal yourself first if you want your visitors to divulge anything private. If you take the initiative, others will follow.

## Chapter 8 - There are easy methods to finish meetings properly, yet far too often events peter out rather than come to a rousing conclusion.

The author once learned how to distinguish between excellent performers and just competent ones from a theatre teacher named Dave Sawyer: pay attention to both their entrances and exits from the stage. Because they are aware that how you end things affects people's experiences and memories, truly great actors pay just as much attention to their dramatic departures as their dramatic entrances.

Furthermore, a great host ought to adopt the same strategy. Avoiding things from just fizzling out is the first step to a wonderful conclusion.

Bartenders announce "last call" just before bars close all across the world. Why? To enable the customers to conclude their unfinished business, whether it be placing an order for delivery or ending their contentious discussions about French philosophy. It guides them toward a conclusive conclusion.

In your own house, you may put in place a sort of final call. It's a regular issue at dinner parties for some attendees to want to go exhausted after dessert while others would rather stay and drink brandy into the early hours. In this case, you might express your gratitude to everyone for a lovely evening and let them know they are free to depart.

You may underline that everyone who wishes to stay should do so by going back to the living room at the same time. The last call at a dinner party allows attendees to decide whether to order more food or to end the gathering.

Making sure that your gathering is remembered for the proper reasons is the other crucial component of a conclusion.

A management consulting course is taught by the father-in-law of the author at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He steers clear of giving a tedious rehash in the final class of the semester. Instead, he takes a minute to caution his pupils about the challenges of a career in management consulting and the need of maintaining equilibrium and a sense of direction in life.

Then he performs a card trick for them. He explains to them that although it appears to be magic, it is a method. And he adds that he hopes they can perfect the tactics he has taught them to the point where it seems and feels like magic.

It's a conclusion that guarantees his gathering will be remembered for meaningful reasons long after it has faded into obscurity.

Wouldn't life be more enjoyable if we left every party in this manner?

# The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters by Priya Parker Book Review

Too frequently, the meetings in our life are uninteresting and pointless. However, things don't have to be this way! It's easy to arrange events that are meaningful and memorable when we abandon the customs and habits that surround them, accept the gracious authority of being the host, establish certain ground rules, and invite guests to be themselves.

Think about where you are in detail.

The ideal meeting places are those that embody and inspire your event's actual purpose. Consider your options carefully and venture outside of your comfort zones. For instance, you can think of holding a college reunion at a graveyard to motivate your former friends to continue pursuing their youthful aspirations. Or, if you're planning sales training, you might arrange for your coworkers to spend a day with a busker, exposing them to the essence of their line of business. It will be easier to come up with novel and memorable venue ideas if you think about it imaginatively and with an eye on the goal of your gathering.

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