

The Art of Hosting: An Invitation to Layers of Purpose

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Over the last ten years I've been asked many times to define the purpose of The Art of Hosting. Each time I've responded, I've been aware there are many layers to the question and any response I might offer.

Below are four of those layers, each that I intend and invoke with calling and hosting teams. Even with varied talents and interests, I find these layers help ground the unique expression of that team in that gathering with those participants.

1) Better Skills, Better Meetings — This is what many people want. It is as basic to organizational health as regular exercise is to personal health. The Art of Hosting, and the general framing of participative leadership, offers a set of tools, methodologies, perspectives, and practices to help improve meetings. Committee meetings. Staff meetings. Or repeated meetings that are engagement strategies for long term community involvement. Our intent at The Art of Hosting is to help all participants leave as improved practitioners able to host better and more meaningful meetings.

2) Leaning in to Longings — Most of us have hopes and dreams about what our organizations can be. About what we want to be in them. Most of us are not satisfied in simply “getting by” or “enduring.” Most of us want to actively lean in to our longings, individual and collectively, on behalf of a deliberate and desirable future together. I believe because we are daring, and caring, enough to do so. And because we know that real longings,

spoken genuinely, and heard with curiosity, reset and recenter the clarity of our endeavors.

3) Create a Narrative Arc to Hold Us Into the Future — For change to happen, or be sustained, most of us need a story. An overarching narrative that reminds us of a purpose. Sometimes it is the story of us as individuals. Sometimes it is the story of our teams. Sometimes it is the national or global story of a world that requires us to evolve with it. It was Christina Baldwin in her book *Storycatcher* that spoke, “Life hangs on a narrative thread. This thread is a braid of stories that inform us about who we are, and where we come from, and where we might go. The thread is slender but strong: we trust it to hold us and allow us to swing over the edge of the known into the future....”

4) Practice Presence as Core Competency — “Core competency” is language most commonly used in a business setting. Yet its meaning is widely known. An ability that is essential, a skill that is at the crux, a muscular memory central to accomplishing purpose. Like flour is to bread. Like kneading is to preparing it. Core competencies are very utilitarian. They help us get things done. They are things, or steps, that we wouldn't, or couldn't, live without. A premise I hold for the Art of Hosting is that presence is “the” core competency that is called for in these times. In professional life. In communal life. In the often fast paced, hyper-connected, ever-changing world, presence, perhaps more now than ever, is most needed.

The Art of Hosting is a format I ground my work in. It has grown and changed in the last 15 years, yet remains grounded in something very familiar after all these years. There once were a handful of us offering and experimenting. Now, there are numerous people I don't know, all offering good through the format. It's exciting to see, and to lean in together to these layers of purpose.

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