

# Art of Hosting – A Glimpse of the Whole

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Recently I was with my daughter at her piano lesson. Zoe, 13, has been taking piano for about six years. She brings tears of joy to me as I watch her in love with her music. Her teacher, Chad, is gifted. His love of piano is clear. His artistry is enriching. Each time I have taken Zoe to her piano lesson, I have learned something important about artistry in my work as I have listened.

One day it was about wholeness. Chad was encouraging Zoe to think of the music as one whole, as one movement, rather than the practice chunks she was separating it into. Not doubt there were helpful practice chunks, but what I saw was Chad trying to help Zoe evolve beyond the mechanics she knew into an artistry of deeper feeling for the whole of the music and its varied energies.

From this, I could feel a language do describe different sections and characteristics of an Art of Hosting training and other group process artistry that I love. I began to see more of how each part of trainings that I and my colleagues offer are best experienced as a whole. To show up for the first part is to experience something good, but it misses the exponential magic of the first part integrated into the whole.

The following are sections of a four-day training that I and my colleagues have often offered, viewed as a whole. I've seen them named different things. The intent is what matters more to me and how each, when integrated, creates magic, both in expanded and share vision, and in simple, clear practical applications.

## 1. Arrival. Coming Present.

The intention of this first time, often in an evening, is to help people arrive. Show up. Begin to see each other. Begin to see more of themselves. To open participants to being in the event context, in the learning space, and in the community for the next period of time. Some of this is letting go of what participants bring to the room. For many, we carry pretty big todo lists wherever we go. We are committed to speed and efficiency. The intent in this first period is to find another way into the accomplishment that we want. It has the feel of slowing down so that we can speed up. It is about moving deeper so that from that depth, we might work faster and in more sustainable ways. It usually involves a welcome by the sponsor. It usually involves overall sharing of context – the process we will be in over the next days. It usually involves a question, "Why did you choose to come here?" I've seen it work very well with a circle. I've seen it work very well with a world café. I've seen people at the end of this first evening delighted and surprised by how close they feel to other participants in such a short period of time and by how clear the purpose is. Arrived. Present.

## 2. Deepening In. Dreaming. Identifying Questions.

The intention of this second time, often a full day, is to deepen in. To begin to note the many layers of assumptions, questions, and beliefs that are part of the work we do. It is increasingly rare for any of us, individuals or teams, to take time to imagine what our work could also be. And yet it is increasingly common for us to need better ways to do our work. Many of us are accountable in our doing within very demanding deadlines. Many are without time to pause and look more broadly at the purpose and the practicalities of our work and how we must work together. Or what new insights we have learned through our experience. Or what conditions have changed in the world that

require us to adapt some of our previous plans. I have seen this work very well, again in circle and café, and also in appreciative inquiry. I have seen it work well in open space, particularly when the invitation is to stay conceptual rather than tactical. It is a time to ask questions like, “What is going on in the world that makes this work important?” Or, what are the core questions that if given attention would further strengthen our ability to do the work that we know matters and that we care about? Or what are the images of the future that we can see that we want to begin building in the present? I’ve seen people in a mix of places by the end of this day. Some are full – without any plenary speakers, there is a lot of information that has been shared and created. Some are tired – listening in conversation is hard work. Some are elated – they feel the quality of learning, work, and relationships that is beginning to spark new images of possibility. And some are frustrated – to let go of a personal viewpoint as many are being heard can be a real challenge to individual or shared identity.

### 3. Listening. Doing the Work.

The intention of this third time, often another full day, is to roll up our sleeves and get to work. It is the kind of work that many crave, and that some arrive ready to do on the first evening. However, doing the work on this third day is very different than if done on the first night. Work on this day comes from a greater sense of community, and thus sustainability. It comes from a greater sense of colleagues who have come to see each other at more rich and more whole levels. Work on this day comes from the process of seeing our own opinions and beliefs change as we have been actively learning with others. It comes from a sense of shared story, of enriched sense of purpose. It comes from a place of shared commitment rather than obligation. I have seen this work very well in open space formats. People name the topics that they most care about. Others self-select into joining them, and they get to work. I have seen teams uniquely united on this day. The response I often hear from participants is surprise at how quickly things moved and how detailed and practical they were. Whereas the previous day felt more conceptual, this day is more tactical and leaves people feeling a great sense of tangible outcome.

### 4. Taking it Out of the Room

The intention of this last time, often a half or two thirds of a day, is to further solidify what participants take with them to apply in their local settings. For some it is asking a few more questions. For some it is setting a clear intention. For some it is connecting with a few more people. For some it is listening to one more teaching or model. I have seen this work well with knowledge cafes, circles, and action open spaces. It is a time to help people clarify their next first steps, whether in content, process, relationships, or strengthening fields. It is also about taking the surprise, the reawakened memory or strengthened sense of community and applying it. Practicing it. Doing the work in our local places of work and community. It is about a commitment to action, wise action that is simple, clear, and sustainable. And it is a time to close well, often with simple ritual, to seal the learning space that we have had together.

### A Final Thought

Hosting conversations that matter is an art. It is a group process artistry. I find the sections above apply as well to four day trainings as they do to four hour meetings, or even 60 minute meetings, whether in person or by phone conference. Arrival flows into deepening, deepening into working, working into practicing. And it begins again. My experience with them is one of music. Of an art that I love. Of a wholeness that brings delight and capacity to the people we work with and the work that we all care about and that is so needed in these times.