

### **Book notes**

\*Countries descending into totalitarianism almost always take away the right to assembly because the way people create new ideas when they come together is one of the most powerful forces.

\*Most of us gather without thinking seriously about how we do it. Perhaps this is why so many hate gatherings, particularly in settings such as a work meeting. We rely on templates rather than deeply considering an important question - why are we gathering?

\*We generally organize gatherings based on templates determined by the type of gathering, but make this decision slightly early before we've determined the purpose of the gathering. The answers to questions about purpose should dictate the organization.

\*Routines are the enemy of great gatherings.

\*Changing the focus of routine meetings is one way to signal a culture change. A similar method is to make slight adjustments to timing or length.

\*A good purpose for a gathering acts like a decision filter. You know it's on the right track if others dispute the purpose (or these ensuing decisions).

\*If a meeting is not organized around a clear desired outcome, it defaults to being organized around process; knowing what you want helps you make decisions to get there.

\*Great conversations are often invigorated by new blood.

\*A gathering must have one thing, and focus on it. No multitasking is allowed unless it absolutely has no detriment to the main purpose.

\*A lot of aimless gatherings make decisions as they go, occasionally pausing to wave at some higher purpose.

\*Inclusion doesn't always serve a gathering; work on the guest list until it is absolutely certain that everyone who is there is already there. If the gathering isn't initially clear, membership questions will belatedly (and with conflict) clarify the purpose.

\*A diluted diversity serves nothing; it must be heightened and sharpened, brought into focus and relevance by the composition of the group.

\*A group that is too large creates shallow bonds, as members have many ways to explore potential connections.

\*Eight to twelve is the sweet spot for lively and inclusion discussion. If a decision is necessary, slightly smaller, and possibly an odd number (to break ties in a vote). Broad sweet spots for groups in general are 6, 12 to 15, 30, and 150.

\*Tables should be arranged so they do not leak; four people should sit in a square, not in rows.

\*Switching rooms for different parts of a meeting helps people remember the event.

\*Moving partitions - even little painting easels - can help a room change size to fit the needs of the gathering.

\*A 'chill' host rarely makes for an effective host.

\*Obama alternated taking questions - boy, girl, boy, girl - to encourage everyone to participate equally in a Q&A type of situation.

\*A gathering that brings strangers together might require the host to protect certain guests. For example, late arrivals might disrupt the dynamic of a group, or pockets of people who know each other might make it hard for a stranger to find those open to new connection.

\*At dinners, one way to help new people connect is to prohibit people from serving themselves. A tactic might include having certain people in charge of wine, or water.

\*Groups where the members try to fulfill others' needs will have a much easier time meeting everyone's needs than does a group where each person thinks selfishly.

\*Etiquette can become passive-aggressive or exclusionary if the guest list does not have a full understanding. In these instances, explicit rules or directions for behavior can create a more democratic gathering.

\*A group spending twelve consecutive hours together is much different than four hours on three separate occasions. One reason is that over time walls come down and people become more open to having real conversations.

\*In a world where there are endless choices, where it becomes easier by the day to multitask, the decision to wholly focus on one thing is a revolutionary act.

\*Social media trains us to regard unfilled time as an opportunity to browse social media.

\*Commitment to one task reduces the low-grade anxiety of using the current moment to anticipate the next.

\*90 percent of a gathering's success is predetermined. A massive part of this is communicating to guests what they should expect prior to arrival.

\*A decoration idea - ask guests to send pictures ahead of time, then print them out.

\*Don't start - or end - a gathering with logistics. Use cold opens and connect people to the purpose of the gathering; close with remarks for the guests to take with them.

\*In a group, the weakest link is not an individual, but the connection between two members.

\*People selected for a group due to accomplishments or strengths will often show-off among each other, reducing the likelihood for emotion risk or real connection.

\*Encourage realness by asking for experiences rather than ideas.

\*Audiences generally connect to performers who speak with perfectly natural phrases.

\*Stories are about decisions you made, not about what happens to you.

\*A cult of positivity ruins certain gatherings, steering participants away from the thought- or heart-provoking.

\*Strangers help us see who we are trying to become in ways that our family and friends often prohibit. Both are in certain ways unbalanced, one knowing too much of our past while the other knows nothing.

\*Changes can happen, but it often takes time, with privileged people offering protection.

\*Universities, founded as places for dispute and argument, routinely exclude people whom some students or faculty consider out of order.

\*A well-intended desire to avoid hurting others means we rarely say anything that matters. This means kicking the can down the road, and avoiding dialogue about vital questions.

\*A subtle relocation can serve as a soft last call, giving guests a chance to exit while also extending the invitation for those who wish to stay.

\*A last call is a good way to signal that it's time to wind down.

\*A balanced life should be measured over eighteen months, as it's often difficult to be fully balanced in all aspects of life.