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Further Reading, 'Make Purpose Your Bouncer', 'The Art of Gathering' (extract) - Priya Parker

*'People who aren't fulfilling the **purpose** of your gathering are detracting from it... because they take time and attention away from what (and who) you're actually there for.'*

- Priya Parker

The **purpose** of your gathering is more than an inspiring concept. It is a tool, a filter that helps you determine all the details, grand and trivial. To gather is to make choice after choice: place, time, food, talks, agenda, topics, speakers. Virtually every choice will be easier to make when you know *Why* you're gathering, and especially when *Why* is particular, interesting, and even provocative.

Make purpose your bouncer. Let it decide what goes into your gathering and what stays out. When in doubt about any element, even the smallest detail, hop back to that purpose and decide in accordance with it...

The guest list is the first test of a robust gathering purpose. It's the first chance to put your ideals into practice... and to assess how committed you really are to those ideals.

Whom to include or exclude?

The desire to keep doors open - not to offend, to maintain a future opportunity - is a threat to gathering with a purpose.

Inviting people is easy. Excluding people can be hard. "The more the merrier", we are told from childhood... at the risk of dissenting from millennia of advice along these lines, let me say this: You will have begun to gather with purpose when you learn to exclude with purpose. When you learn to close doors.

I take no pleasure in exclusion, and I often violate my own rule. But thoughtful, considered exclusion is vital to any gathering, because *over-inclusion is a symptom of deeper problems - above all, a confusion about why you are gathering and a lack of commitment to your purpose and your guests.*

- Sometimes we over-include because we feel a need to repay an old **debt** of hosting
- Sometimes we over-include because we're sustaining a **custom** in which we don't really believe.
- Sometimes we over include because we don't want to deal with the **consequences** of excluding certain people, especially those gifted at making a stink.

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Faced with people who should not, in theory, be there but are hard to keep away, it can feel easier and more generous to go with the flow. But the thoughtful gatherer understands that inclusion can in fact be uncharitable, and exclusion generous.

It's harder to fight for a purpose that hasn't been named – we can intuit that something isn't right, but we can't articulate why. Sometimes naming what something isn't is a helpful way towards clarity of purpose. When an unspoken purpose is voiced and affirmed it becomes easier to champion and defend. Conflict often unearths purpose.

The kindness of exclusion

Even when you get clear on your gathering, there is never an easy way to say “Please don't come”. That's why so many of our gatherings end up being hijacked in the name of **politeness**. But here is what the skilled gatherer must know: in trying not to offend, you failed to protect the gathering itself and the people in it. I have learned that far too often, in the name of inclusion and generosity - two values I care about deeply - we failed to draw *boundaries* about who belongs and why.

“If everyone is invited, no one is invited - in the sense of being truly held by the group. By closing the door, you create the room... the purpose of a gathering can remain somewhat vague and abstract until it is clarified by drawing the boundary between who is in and out.”

- Priya Parker

When you don't root your gathering up front in a clear, agreed on-purpose, you are often forced to do so retrospectively by questions of membership that inevitably arise. To put it another way, thoughtful exclusion, in addition to being generous, can be defining... and can help with the important task of communicating to guests what a gathering is.

Activity

- Who not only fits but also helps fulfil the gathering's purpose?
- Who threatens the purpose?
- Who, despite being irrelevant to the purpose, do you feel obliged to invite?

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But what's wrong with someone who's irrelevant to the purpose? What's wrong with inviting Bob? Every gathering has its Bobs. Bob in marketing. Bob your friend's girlfriend's brother. Bob your visiting aunt. Bob is perfectly pleasant and doesn't actively sabotage your gathering. Most Bobs are grateful to be included. They sometimes bring extra effort or an extra bottle of wine. You've probably been a Bob. I certainly have.

The crux of excluding thoughtfully and intentionally is mustering the **courage** to keep away your Bobs. It is to shift your perception so that you understand that people who aren't fulfilling the purpose of your gathering are detracting from it, even if they do nothing to detract from it. This is because once they're actually in your presence, you (and other considerate guests) will want to welcome and include them, which takes time and attention away from what (and who) you're actually there for. Particularly in smaller gatherings, every single person affects the dynamics of a group. Excluding well and purposefully is reframing who and what you are being generous to - your guests and your purpose.

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