September 30, 2025

Designing meaningful gatherings: Bringing purpose to every meeting and event

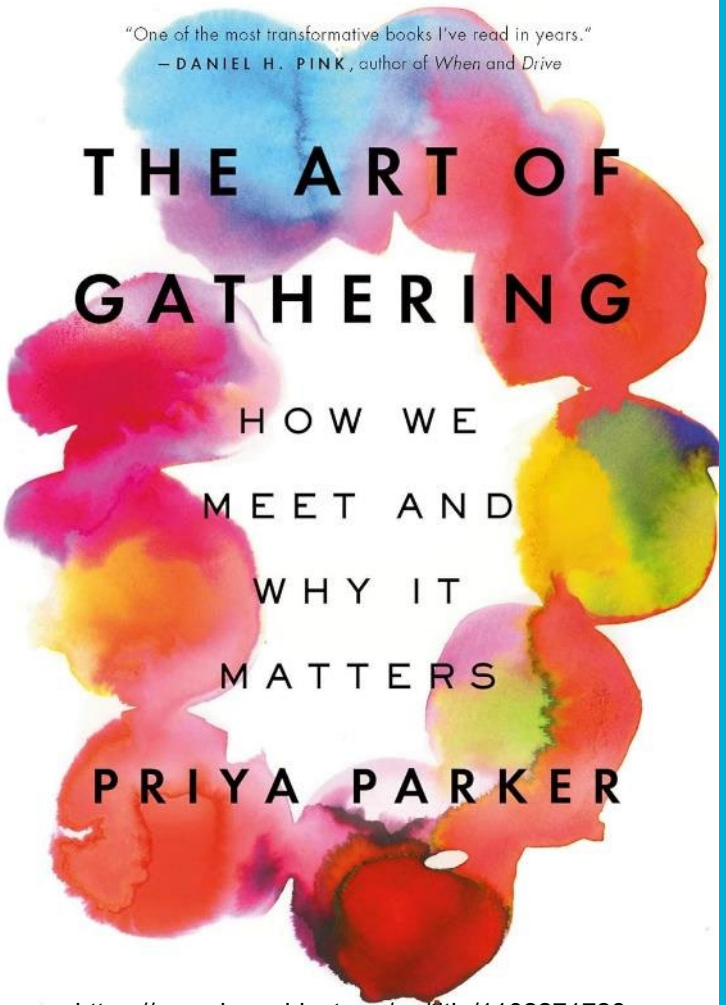
OCLC

Opening

- Take a moment to stop, take a breath, ground yourself
- Acknowledge your physical environment and connect with it.
- With that in mind, please share in chat:
  - Where you are
  - The room or space you're in
  - Sounds offstage
  - Ex: Lawrence, KS, NEKLS office, Whistling

Priya Parker

“The way we gather matters. Gatherings consume our days and help determine the world we live in, in both our intimate and public realms…And yet most of us spend very little time thinking about the actual ways in which we gather.”



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Dan’s story

- Public Library Directors Institute
  - On auto-pilot, attendance declining
  - A makeover with purpose at its core
  - Power of connection

Power of an invitation and a name

“Worn Out Mommas Hootenanny”

Power of an invitation and a name

Directors Institute ⇨ Directors Retreat

Consultants' Meeting ⇨ Consultants' Collaboration Hour

Never start a funeral with logistics

- Don’t squander the opening
  - Surprise speed networking
  - Opening and closing chimes
  - Prioritized social connection and that drove planning

Magical Questions

- According to Priya, a magical question is “one that everyone wants to answer and everyone wants to hear the answer to.”

A few examples:

- What’s a small everyday thing that lights up your world and brings you joy?
- What was a gift or gesture from another person that made you feel truly seen and understood?
- What smell reminds you of childhood, and when did you last experience it?
- You have a lot of skills you are okay at. If you could choose one to learn to the level of mastery, what would it be?

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Purpose comes first

- Decide when we should gather and why
- Don’t conflate the category of the gathering with the purpose

What Difference Does Purpose Make?

- Staff meetings?
- Board retreats?
- Storytimes?
- Summer reading events?
- Older adults?

Answer in chat: Picture a meeting or event you have coming up. What's the "why" driving it?

Adding social connection for caregivers after storytime

- Value of storytime for kids
- Add layer of intentionality to create opportunity for parents to connect

Photo courtesy of Washington County Cooperative Library Services

Stick the landing

- Use closing to look inward and turn outward
  - Begin to make meaning of the time together
- Some ideas:
  - Have a surprise closing that builds anticipation
  - Group photo, shared reflections
  - Postcard to yourself
  - A gallery walk
  - Begin closing traditions

Closing

- Answer in chat: What's one thing you're taking with you to help you make a future gathering more meaningful?

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Closing

- Take a moment to stop, take a breath, ground yourself
- Acknowledge your physical environment and connect with it.
- With that in mind, please share in chat:
  - Where you are
  - The room or space you're in
  - Sounds offstage
  - Anything new?