

At its essence, the Art of Hosting is a practice (a repeated exercise in or performance of an activity or skill so as to acquire or maintain proficiency in it), a way of thinking and acting that leads to greater understanding and more skillful action. There are four domains of practice enfolded within the Art of Hosting practice. These are commonly referred to as the “Four-fold Practice” and within each of the four domains, there are myriad practices.

An important implication of recognizing the Art of Hosting as a practice is that mastery of the art is dependent upon ongoing practice; if we are not practicing, we are not participating in this art and we will not develop mastery. People working within the Art of Hosting are referred to as “practitioners” because this commitment to practicing is at the essence of the art. As with any practice, capacity increases over time and practitioners discover new levels and meaning to the practices. Some aspects of deeper practice can sound strange to new practitioners and can only be understood through experience. Practice begins wherever you are and has endless depth of possibility.

Given the myriad of practices contained within the Art of Hosting, it can be helpful to focus on the domains described in the Four-Fold Practice.

Host Self

The art of hosting is the art of being, of being the embodiment of a host. No set of skills, techniques or methodologies can substitute for the consciousness of the host. Hosting requires presence, that quality of authenticity, vulnerability, confidence and courage which comes from deep personal work which cannot be done in isolation. Presence is a holistic emergent quality incorporating physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Presence is what allows a host to stand in the midst of intense emotion, to tolerate chaos without rushing to fix anything, to be comfortable with silence, to work in service of purpose bigger than personal ego.

Hosting self is the practice domain of developing presence. On a physical level, it involves getting adequate rest and exercise and managing stress. On a mental level, it supports the development of an open mind that is free of habitual patterns of thinking and unconscious beliefs and assumptions. On an emotional level, it learns to recognize what triggers habitual emotional reactions and new ways of dealing with those emotions. It also helps us to own our own expectations and projections and to cope with uncertainty. It nurtures self-compassion and a willingness to take risks, make mistakes and learn from them. On a spiritual level, hosting oneself connects us with the unseen world of energy and spirit and reduces attachment to ego and frees us to work with compassion and without the need to be in control. It supports us in embracing solitude and silence and a connection to the natural world.

The Art of Hosting does not have specific approved or recommended practices for hosting oneself. Rather, it recognizes that every practitioner must find his/her own practices for developing presence. These practices could include yoga, dance, martial arts, meditation, contemplative writing, prayer, psychotherapy, time in nature, solitude, tantric sex, art, music or... The importance is finding a set of practices that increase your personal capacity for presence and then to commit to regular practice.

Participate

With the presence which arises from hosting self, we are ready to participate. On one level, this means engaging in conversations and allowing yourself to be hosted. As the practice of

participating deeps, it can evolve into a participation with all of life. Participation is involvement with what is and with what wants to happen without expectations and without a desire to attain any particular outcome. It is about showing up with your full self and your own interests whilst sensing what wants to happen and discerning how to align yourself and your interests in service of larger purpose.

Participation demands trust and letting go of control. It invites a depth of conversation in which silence is a welcome participant and in which connection transcends spoken words and includes nonverbal and energetic components. Participation is an invitation into the unknown, an opening to being changed and the field from which emergence is possible.

Participation manifests through conversation and conversation is an art. It is not just talk. It demands that we listen carefully to one another, to nature and to the unseen. It demands silence as well as words. It demands that we offer what we can in the service of the whole, to speak with deep intention while listening with deep attention. Participation flows from the mood of curiosity. Curiosity and judgment cannot live together in the same space. If we are judging what we are hearing we cannot be curious about the outcome, and it will be difficult for the conversation to move beyond defending preconceived positions. Skillful conversation requires an open mind, open heart and open will. Skillful participation in conversation calls for mindfulness and the ability to slow a conversation down to allow deeper listening and clarity to arise.

Practices within the domain of Participation include active listening; dialog; asking wicked questions; owning one's own projections, expectations and assumptions; clarifying intentions; check-ins and other elements of "circle practice; cultivating a mood of curiosity and openness and listening to nature.

Host Conversations

The domain of hosting conversations is often perceived as the tip of the iceberg. This is the domain of methodologies, yet it is so much more. Hosting conversations is the art of creating and holding a container in which people can do their best work together. It is about sensing all of the conditions that will allow a group to settle into collective presence, holding that space through chaos so that new order and clarity can emerge. Such conversations do not just happen, they are the product of clear intentions, a powerful calling question, a compelling invitation, good design, skillful framing of the context and the holding of space in which the work can be done. All of these are practices and skills of hosting conversations.

Initially, hosting is likely to consist of mastering the core methodologies. In time, the practice calls for increasing depth of presence to be able to "hold space" for deeper conversation. Eventually, the practice also includes more subtle aspects including preparation of the physical space, invitation and welcoming and working with the energy of the group. While much of the attention of practicing hosting is focused on the external work, the actions, an equally important aspect of the hosting practice is to attend to one's inner state and learning. Hosting inevitably challenges us at our growing edge, whether that is the ability to let go of control or to feel competent and adequate as a hosting team member or in finding the right language to invite deeper participation or to find the courage to overcome fear. A practitioner of hosting is engaged in both the internal and external practices.

None of the practices are best done alone but it is particularly important to work as part of a team when hosting.

Practice community

The fourth of the four-fold practices is the practice of co-creating learning communities, communities of practice.

It is one thing to go to a training and to learn the basics of hosting practice. But what then? How do you implement your learning and stay connected to other practitioners? How do you sustain your learning and keep your practice alive and growing? The old paradigm to address such challenges is to create a organization or an association and to listen to the wisdom of the experts. But, this model doesn't work in emergence. The shared knowledge is the result of collaboration and conversation, not in the possession of an expert. There are no rules or formulas or requirements for doing this work. Practitioners are all encouraged to innovate and collaborate and to discover new models and processes. Yet, there is also a need to recognize and protect the essential DNA and to learn from those practitioners with more experience. How does a community of practitioners participate together where there are no clear guidelines or agreements?

This has been the challenge and the beauty of the Art of Hosting community for over a decade. From a few friends sharing ideas together, the community has grown to several thousand with a website and open-source workbook and other materials. All of this without any licensing or copyrighting, without any organizational structure or staff or headquarters, without any financial expectations or agreements. As a community, we did not start out knowing how to do this. We began with a focus on shared purpose, shared principles and friendship. As friends, this community of practitioners looked for opportunities to work together, to learn together and to share their learnings. In time, what has emerged are a group of more experienced practitioners who are recognized as stewards and periodic gatherings to sense into the needs of the community and to make any necessary collective decisions. What has also emerged has been an online platform for communicating and for collecting and disseminating learnings, models, materials and other artifacts of our learning.

This community of practice pattern has emerged regionally throughout the world in response to local trainings and local needs. While it does not look the same everywhere, there are many shared elements. This experience of building a community of learners is not unique to the Art of Hosting and the learnings of this particular community are not held as the right way. The beauty of this fourth domain of practice is that we are all learning together what it means to be in learning together and how we can collectively hold the emergence of the work. Like so much within the Art of Hosting, this is fractal; what we are learning in the global community has relevance in local and regional communities of practice. The practices that we have learned together are being applied and tested and refined as we create communities of practice. Together we are learning how to learn together and as we learn this we are able to apply it to the work we do.

Finally, as we learn together we are also confronted with our blindspots and those parts of our practice that are less skillful or conscious and this provides an opportunity for us to individually and collectively increase our capacity through hosting ourselves. Thus, the Four-Fold Practice is a cycle leading to deeper practice and continual capacity.

