

HOSTING THE CONVERSATION OF THE WHOLE



Pause for a moment of quiet reflection.



To help people connect into the larger field of collective thought, have them imagine a ball of yarn passing overhead from one person in the room to another, connecting people and ideas.



Focus on the issue of the dialogue by asking anyone in the room to share a key idea, theme or core question that holds real meaning for them. Ask participants to listen closely to each person's contribution, rising to share their reflection if they sense it is connected to the person's before them in some way. This helps to weave a web of connected thought throughout the room. When one thread is complete invite others to offer a new thread into the web of ideas.



HARVESTING AND SHARING DISCOVERIES¹

We've done many things of course. You can display the tablecloths and have people gather around those. It works particularly well if people from different tables give each other tours of their tablecloths. Then, later, the group can explore what's in the centre of the conservation as a whole.

If there are a lot of tables, we may have each table turn in a large card or sticky notes with one key idea that expresses the essence of what was important from their conversations. If the group size is smaller, each member can contribute a card with the idea he or she feels is most essential. Then we can post these on a wall or cluster related cards and make a gallery tour from that. Other times we do a quick computer turnaround and publish a newspaper right on the spot, so participants can read the headlines and build on them for further conversation or action planning. We've even used video to create news stories about what people have learned.

At times, we have people find a partner and just walk around the room talking about what they learned that day, or what idea has the most life for them. Then they link up with two others and then the four link with four more. With each linking up you have to get briefer and more focused on the deeper themes. Very quickly you can get a sense of what everybody is hearing, especially if everyone is listening for the collective wisdom in the larger group.

¹ Source: The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter

HARVESTING AND SHARING DISCOVERIES (CONTINUED)

Another option is to have each Café table create an exhibition. You tell people, “In one hour you will have the opening show for the exhibition. We’ll serve drinks and everyone can come to the gallery and see what each Café table or group of tables created in terms of essence of what’s been explored, what people learned, and possible action steps” (or whatever you want as output). After they have each created their own exhibition, people can take a tour of the other contributions in the gallery – but they can also add their insights and put actual comments on each other’s contributions. It’s like growing a living picture of the whole.

You can never actually capture the whole of what has occurred in a Café dialogue because each individual makes his or her own sense of it. However, by inviting multiple perspectives on the essence of what’s been discovered, the group, together, can point toward the deeper knowledge of what’s most important.