

The Art of Convening™

transformative meetings & conversations
TeleTraining Series

The Essential Path: Convening Meetings That Work

Transformation means going from one state to another. It assumes the need for a fundamental shift to a different level of action. While change means simply varying the present situation, transformation means changing its essence. This change of essence can come only from a change of consciousness. And consciousness is changed by insight. Transforming thoughts are lasting and fundamental insights which represent an actual rebirth.

Meetings are a telling indicator of consciousness, because how we conduct them reflects our values. By shifting the focus and intent of how we meet – from information delivery or action-oriented sessions to deeper, more essential articulations of our visions – we can create essential meetings that are transformative. We do this by providing an environment of caring, truth, and courage as we endeavor to tackle difficult issues in this time of great transformation.

A sustainable economic system is one that reverses current exploitive, extractive practices. In the long run, only sustainable organizations that nourish individuals can thrive. We wish to embrace the overarching principles of sustainable culture in everything we do, including in the way we run our meetings. We cannot change old practices by working in old modes. It is imperative that we function not out of competitiveness, but out of wisdom, compassion, and basic respect.

In our work with individuals and organizations across the country, we have created a new form called Essential Meetings, which is a format that helps question and revitalize underlying vision and mission. Essential Meetings are designed to surface and utilize the wisdom inherent in the group. This new form synthesizes traditional methods for meetings with ancient council practices and modern organizational development practices influenced by Peter Senge's work with Learning Organizations, David Bohm's work with Dialogue, and Open Space technology articulated by Harrison Owen.

We created Essential Meetings because we perceive that people are starving for real dialogue about how to create fundamental change. Essential Meetings are a method for mirroring healthy behavior to one another, for

creating a safe container that provides the opportunity to surface the creativity, knowledge, and intelligence that is ready to emerge. Individuals working in a setting of mutual trust and respect are more apt to integrate the richness of their personal values with the larger system change underway. Some participants come to the meetings having already undergone a deep process of personal transformation, yet are reluctant to express it for fear of being seen as soft or unprofessional. These gatherings allow individuals to express their technical expertise while linking inner values and gathering strength from others. In the presence of support, what may have seemed only personal becomes a known, common experience.

A successful Essential Meetings is characterized by:

- Leadership that by example grants permission to be honest.
- A container of safety where participants have permission to tell their truth.
- Awakening to the possibility of transformation.
- Attendees who can come from where they are in their history and are able to be exactly who they are in that moment, free to express what is really alive inside them.