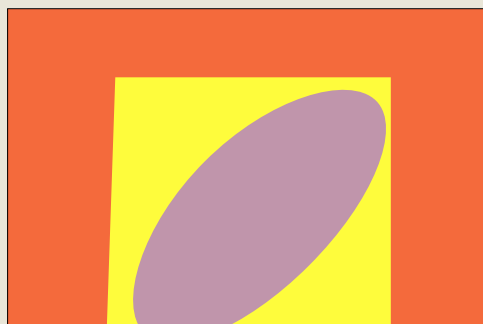
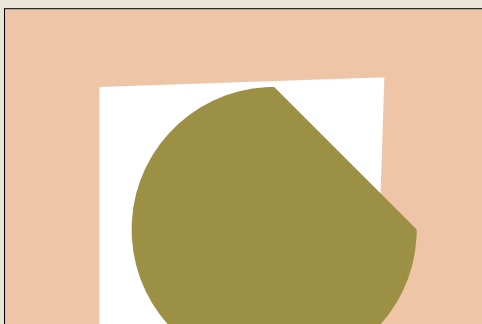
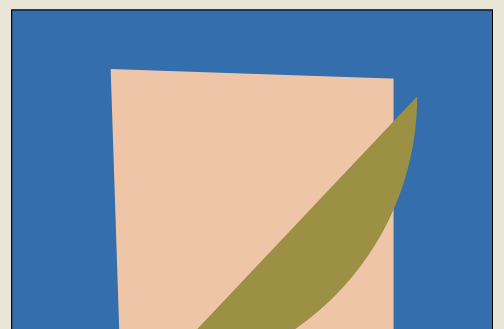
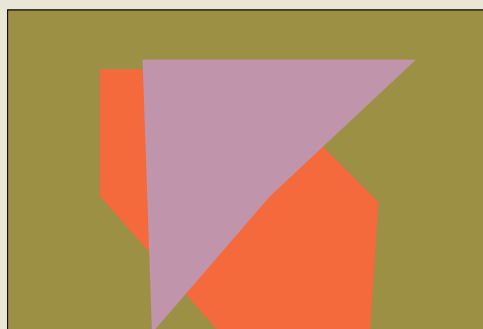
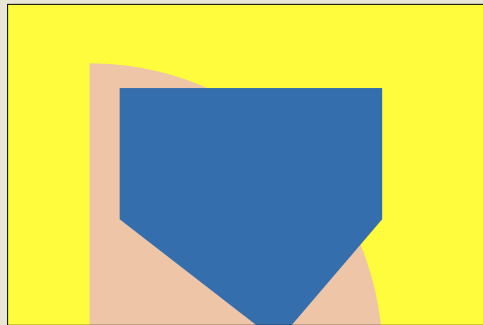
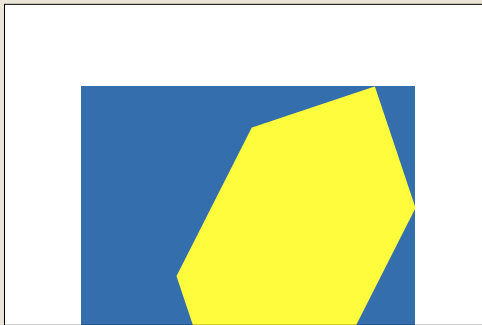

Virtual Gathering Guide

7 STEPS TO MAKE
VIDEO CALLS
EFFECTIVE AND
ENJOYABLE

WORKPLACE
EDITION!

Priya Parker

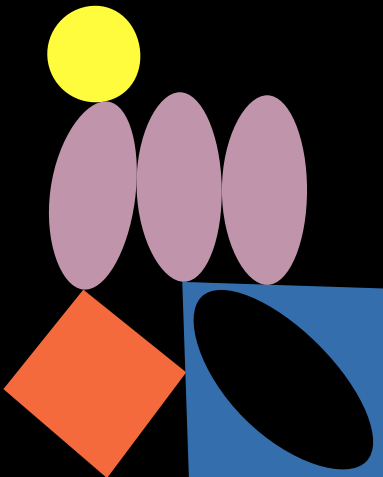


Create moments of connection in the virtual workplace.

When treated with intention, virtual gatherings can be engaging and fruitful.

With millions of hours of virtual meetings and conferences under our collective belts, many companies are embracing work-from-home or hybrid office options. If the virtual office space is your new norm, I encourage you to consider a question too rarely asked of workplaces: what is worthy of our collective time and how should it be structured?

You don't need to be an expert to host a good virtual meeting. It just takes a few simple and creative steps, and you'll be leading effective and enjoyable moments online. This guide provides ideas for ways you might inject connection and meaning into events when you're physically apart but virtually together.



**IF YOU'RE
NEW HERE, HI!
I'M PRIYA PARKER.**

In case this guide landed in your inbox as a recommendation from a friend or colleague, I should probably tell you a little something **about me.**



I am a facilitator, strategic advisor, and author of *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why it Matters*. For the last 20 years, I've been helping people create collective meaning in modern life, one gathering at a time.

I hold degrees in public policy, organizational design, and political theory. But I've also been deeply shaped by dance, community theater, improv, and the fields of dialogue and deliberation. I realized along the way that when coming together, we often spend more time planning logistics than thinking about the elements that make a gathering sing — the human ones.

When the pandemic hit, I turned my attention to how we can make meaning together while we're apart. In partnership with The New York Times, I launched a new podcast, called Together Apart, where I explored how people are gathering virtually, even while apart. You can listen to it [here](#).

I hope the Art of Gathering encourages you to have conversations about community and identity at moments of transition. And I think we all agree that this is one heck of a moment of transition.

You can find additional resources at priyaparker.com and find me on Instagram [@priyaparker](#).

**HELPING PEOPLE
CREATE COLLECTIVE
MEANING IN MODERN
LIFE, ONE GATHERING
AT A TIME.**

STEP 1

Clarify the purpose of your virtual gathering.



It may not be the same as an in-person moment, but it can be just as meaningful.

Whether virtual, in-person, or hybrid, the biggest mistake people make in planning a gathering is to skip identifying a purpose — why are people are coming together in the first place?

Don't assume your digital gathering shares the same purpose as your in-person one. And don't try to do everything. Instead, first ask:

- Why am I bringing this group of people together?
- What is the most important need for this group?
- How might I design the experience online to match that need?

If, for example, you're looking to add warmth that builds goodwill amongst a new or established virtual team, scrap the standard agenda of team highs and lows and host a virtual game afternoon instead.

If you're looking to creatively problem-solve together, send a relevant podcast episode, article, or video with a specific agenda ahead of your time together. It's a simple way to orient your people to the new purpose of the gathering and gets their ideas churning.

**DON'T ASSUME
YOUR DIGITAL
GATHERING
SHARES THE
SAME PURPOSE
AS YOUR IN-
PERSON ONE.**

STEP 2

Use everyone's environment to fill the contextlessness of virtual gatherings.

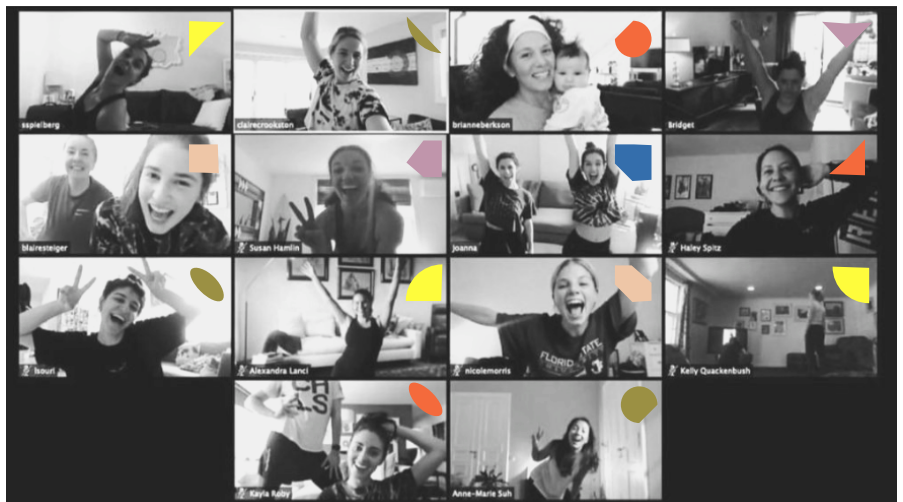
ON ZOOM, YOU CAN BUILD THE ROOM THROUGH A DOZEN WINDOWS.

The room and location do a lot of work to set the context for a group.

A ballroom signals a different set of norms than a mosh pit. The level of light in a restaurant primes guests to the level of intended intimacy. The height of a judge's bench conveys authority.

Virtual gatherings suffer, in part, because there's almost no inherited context to set up "the room."

We do very little to counterbalance that. We place our cameras in front of the blandest backgrounds we can. Instead, invite people to help co-create the room by sitting and placing their cameras in front of spots that have meaning for them, or that adds beauty or color to the many frames everyone else will be looking at. It will add warmth, context, and point to other parts of people's lives.



STEP 3

Have a clear host who knows how to use the mute button.

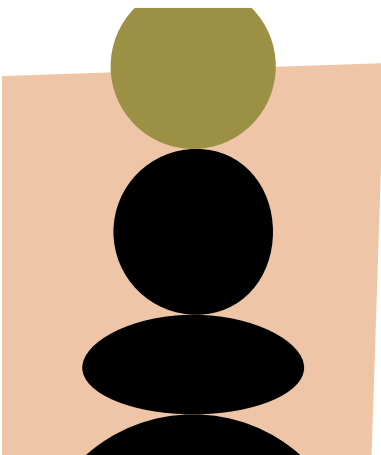
A GOOD HOST IS A DEFT TRAFFIC COP, ESPECIALLY FOR ONLINE GATHERINGS THAT ARE CLUNKIER BY NATURE.

Whether the gathering is four people or 4,000, know who's in charge.

A good host is a deft traffic cop, especially for online gatherings that are clunkier by nature. A good host orients their guests to the gathering's purpose, and connects, protects, and equalizes their guests. Be strong where you need to be but relaxed in unexpected ways.

After the 2016 election, I learned of a progressive political nonprofit that hosted an open conference call to reassess their priorities for the following four years. More than 60,000 people dialed in.

Rather than just talking through the entire call, the host welcomed everyone, and then announced they were going to turn off the master mute button and invited everyone to give one giant scream. Within minutes, the hosts had established their purpose: to remind people that they were not alone.



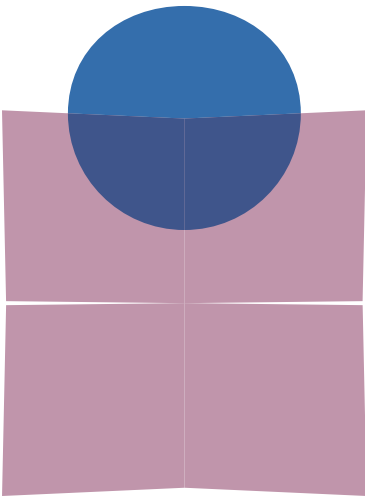
“Power exists in every gathering.



On Zoom,
disproportionate
power lies in the
mute button.”

STEP 4

Create an opening ritual.



A consistent opening ritual connects people and establishes who's in the room and their relevance to the meeting.

Don't just "get straight to business." Invite people to bring a beverage in a favorite mug (or timezone appropriate vessel) and open the meeting by asking them to show the mug (this helps create a common shared moment across distance), and then answer (in one sentence or less) a relevant opening prompt that informs the discussion and shows their own relevance to it.

Have guests share a physical object they keep in their work space, and why it matters to them. (On my desk, you'd find a large smoothed stone with the words "Hal Saunders. Listen deeply enough to be changed by what you hear. 1930 - 2016.").

Also, don't hesitate to use the chat box. For larger groups, drop a question into the chatbox to have people answer, "What's the first concert you ever attended? Where are you dialing in from and what's one sound you can hear right now that's not coming from this meeting?"

You will get insights into your colleagues that can explain what they care about, how they make decisions, and other parts of their histories.

And, of course, the traffic cop should keep this moving along.

"LISTEN DEEPLY
ENOUGH TO BE
CHANGED BY
WHAT YOU HEAR."

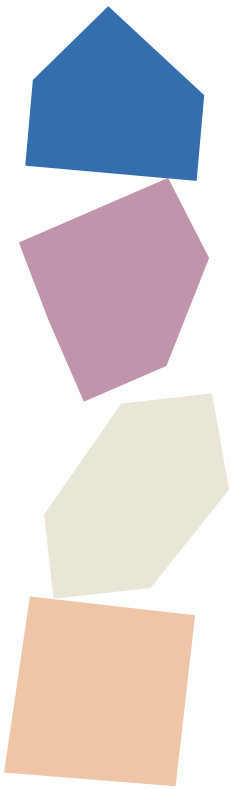
HAL SAUNDERS

“The gathering begins from the moment of discovery, not the moment the guest walks in the door.”



STEP 5

Make space for informal connections.



Transform an anonymous audience into a community.

When the pandemic hit, one of my favorite organizations, Creative Mornings — a morning speaker's series for creatives, organized in more than 100 cities around the world — had to figure out how to re-create their high energy, face-to-face breakfast speakers series virtually.

The organizers realized that one of the secret ingredients of their in-person gatherings was *the coffee line*. People would meet each other, chat, and form connections before ever entering the room to see the anticipated speakers.

And so, in their virtual gatherings, they start with digital coffee lines. Everyone was put into a 5-minute breakout room to just...chat. It warms people up and creates the informal interaction that is incredibly important but missed in digital space.

IT WARMS PEOPLE UP
AND CREATES THE
INFORMAL INTERACTION
THAT IS INCREDIBLY
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IN DIGITAL SPACE.

STEP 6

Break it up: Host different conversations in different rooms.

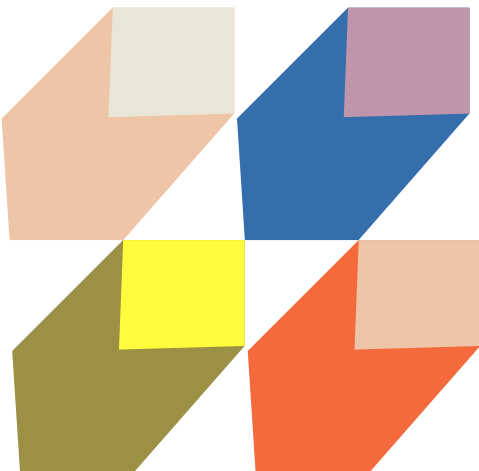
PEOPLE ARE MORE
LIKELY TO REMEMBER
DIFFERENT MOMENTS
OF AN EVENING
WHEN THEY OCCUR IN
DIFFERENT ROOMS.

Shake it up.

In a conference, if there's a new session, we move to another room.

Ed Cooke, a memory expert, tells us that people are more likely to remember different moments of an evening when they occur in different rooms.

To break up different sessions of your call, have people change rooms or even just camera angles. (Take stretch breaks in those transitions.) They will be more likely to recall different parts of the meeting later on.



“Connection happens
when you remind people
we all have many sides.



And, those sides may
even be in tension with
one another.”

STEP 7

Don't ditch the cocktail hour.

**MAKE TIME FOR
TOASTS AND
CHITCHAT.**

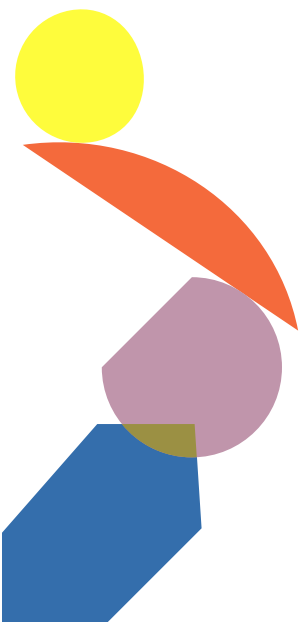
Keep the time for celebration, banter, recognition, and release.

Invite people to bring a drink of choice. Invite people to move into a part of their space that would be the closest thing to a cocktail hour. Consider sending them a \$12 drink credit, so you're still "hosting" them.

Make time for toasts and chitchat. It will help close your offsite/meeting/virtual summit. It gives a sense of camaraderie. And it is a moment to make meaning.

Take it a step farther and send a digital gift that arrives at the end of the gathering: an app that's related to your gathering's purpose, a digital subscription, a Venmo payment with your favorite relevant emoji, a screenshot of the gathering that just occurred.

Inventing creative, meaningful ways of being together apart can, and should, be fun.



Virtual Gathering Guide: Workplace Edition

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