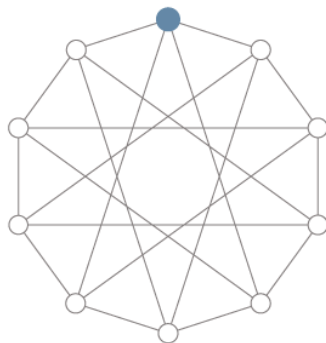
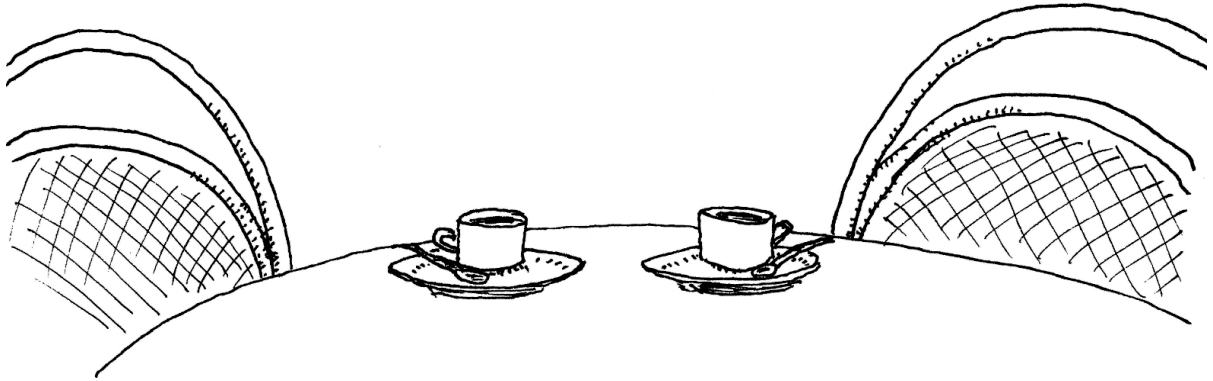


Hosting Coffee

A Wisdom Jig from



Humane
Leadership
Conference



Is There Someone You'd Like to Meet?

Is there a person you would you like to connect with and learn from?

You can invite them out for coffee with the goals of opening up a connection, finding shared interests and values, and learning a bit of what they know. If you get lucky, you may create opportunities for yourself.

This jig will help you clarify your intentions, assuage any anxieties you might have, and honor the person you're hoping to connect with. You will learn practical tools for how to prepare to meet someone, how to be curious without grilling, how to be appreciative without being adoring, and how to be attentive without feeling the need to be impressive.

*Black coffee at sidewalk cafes with chairs and tables like gaudy insects.
It is a precious sip we intercept filled with the same strength as Yes and a No.
It is fetched out of gloomy kitchens and looks into the sun without blinking.
In daylight a dot of wholesome black quickly drained by the wan patron...
Like those black drops of profundity sometimes absorbed by the soul that give us a
healthy push: Go!
The courage to open our eyes.*

—Tomas Tranströmer, *Espresso*, translated by May Swenson

Coffee with whom?

To get started, find people at the edges of your network who are doing what you desire to be doing, who may be able to help you along your path, or who you just find fascinating.

There are lots of ways to be introduced:

- Live introduction at a party or event

- Introduction by a mutual acquaintance
- Social networks like LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook or even email

Why have coffee?

Holding a cup of warm liquid can open a person's heart and mind. Check out the research [here](#). Asking someone out for coffee is a socially normal and non-threatening way to invite someone into a non-committal conversation.

More importantly, we have found that two people meeting authentically opens opportunities for further engagement. These opportunities can include new friendships, new fields of inquiry, and even new jobs. These possibilities arise naturally from the positive emotions of making new connections and out of the powerful [norm of reciprocity](#). The norm of reciprocity states that if we are open and vulnerable the person we're with is more likely to open up as well. It also states that if we honor, respect, and create good experiences for others they will seek to do the same for us.

What are your intentions?

First, get clear about your intentions by asking yourself some questions:

- What do I want to walk away from this conversation with?
- What can I learn from this particular person?
- What's in it for them?
- How can I honor this person by asking uniquely relevant questions of them?

How to invite

Reach out to your person in the most personal yet least intrusive way, offering them the opportunity of having coffee with you for an hour with an easy option to say no. Some benefits to them you could mention include:

- Sharing their expertise and experience
- Meeting someone who shares their interests and values
- Professional networking
- Interesting questions and perspectives
- Discovering shared goals and new approaches

You want to make it easy for them to say yes, but also allow plenty of space for them to easily decline to meet you for whatever reason. You do not want to sit for an hour having coffee with someone who would rather not be meeting with you.

Choose a place near them that they like. Manage the downside risks and avoid social awkwardness and riskiness by meeting in a public, neutral environment without huge time or

financial commitments. Ideally, the place would be alive but quiet enough to talk and be heard without raising your voice.

Confirm a few days ahead and then again a couple of hours before, unless this is a first thing in the morning coffee, in which case you can confirm the night before.

Three's a crowd: Avoid allowing a third party to attend because the connective energy will be split and you may lose control of a watered-down conversation instead of having a really connective and informative one.

Develop your questions to ask

The best way to be interesting is to be interested.

Your list of questions is not intended to create a structured, artificial flow to your hour together. It is a set of tracks that you can use to guide your conversation to be sure you get what you came for but also to put the conversation back on track if it wanders away from your purpose or slows down at some point. I am always amazed that if I have a list of questions the conversation almost always naturally answers 90% of them.

At a lull, towards the end of the conversation, I check my list and find anything that is missing and just ask that as a way to complete the conversation. This is often a wonderful moment because the other person realizes that you have been thoughtful in advance about what they might teach you.

Some question prompts and ideas:

- What are you hoping to learn from this person?
- What opportunities would you like to open for yourself?
- What was their path to their current state?
- What are their current interests and opportunities? Challenges?
- What experiences are they hoping for next?
- What would they do if they were you and had your goals and current situation?
- Their experience that you may benefit from?
- Their path ahead (so that you might align with them)?
- Their opinion of your approach to things/your conceptual framework/your chosen affiliations, friends, mentors, path forward
- Tell me about when you faced a situation like mine?
- What did you do when... ?
- What happened when you...?
- What has been great about...?
- What would you consider doing differently?
- If you could go back, at which forks in the road would you consider taking the other path?

- What seems to be the key to your success?

A process for building relationships

Here's a useful model for thinking about how we build relationships. A simple mnemonic for it is CLEAR.

Connect/Learn - These two are linked because the best way to connect with someone is to be curious about them. Start by connecting with them at the human level by noticing their current state and acknowledging that, by focusing on their needs and interests and then by giving them a gentle opening (a simple question) to step into. The goal is to gently allow you to discover shared interests, experiences and values.

Earn - In the process of conversation we can earn the trust and respect of the other person by being trustworthy. This means paying attention, asking for clarification and expansion of the unique things they are saying, and finally by consciously looking for promises that we can make and keep (i.e., "Could I send you a link to that book we discussed?").

Astonish - We can astonish others with very small actions. First, just being prepared, gracious and curious can be quite astonishing. If you make a promise, then add something extra as a kindness to the person. That can make all the difference. For instance, when you send the link to the book you discussed, you can also send a poem or quote that you think they might enjoy or send a handwritten thank you note. Or follow up a week later with a "thinking of you" card.

Roots - Once you have clearly astonished your new connection, it is time to send out some roots that will help things grow. That is the moment to ask them if they know anyone else you should meet, if there is any way that you could help them, if they know of any groups you should check out, etc.

How to have the actual coffee meeting

Get to the location a few minutes early and find a good table. Ideally the location is private, quiet enough, but easily seen from the main entrance. Watch how people order to see how the place works and what the specialties or most popular items are. It's a good idea to have a book or something else not too valuable that you can use to reserve the table while you are ordering.

Have paper and pen ready with your key 3-5 questions as small bullet points in the top right corner in case you need to refer to them later.

As the person approaches, make eye contact and, if you have not met them before, ask “Hi, So-and-so?” Greet warmly and authentically with, “Hi. I’m _____. Smile, extend your hand in greeting. You can simply say, “Thanks for coming, I’m glad to meet you.”

I like to follow with, “How are you today?” Look them in the eyes and wait. Then, really listen and respond as a human being.

Ask, “May I get you a coffee or tea?” and point them toward the line/ordering counter. I then start right in energetically by saying, “Thank you for joining me this morning. I’m really looking forward to talking to you about your experiences in _____.”

By starting right in like this you avoid uncomfortable silences, you don’t have to be creative with small talk, and you let the person know that you respect their time and their expertise and that you are eager to dive right into what makes them special and what is potentially connecting between the two of you.

Anything else that is off point will let a sharp person think that you may not value their time or your own time very much. In some cultures this will seem quite direct. But I am assuming we are in North America and that we are fairly business-like people even if we are not in business.

You can always circle back to more personal and global conversation after you have covered the material you really want to. Most meetings are very short and to the point in our current culture.

Things to avoid:

- Being obsequious, flattering
- Apologizing or rolling over, like, “I feel so underdressed,” etc.
- Making a joke to relieve your nervousness
- Talking about the weather or other mindless chatter. If the weather is really remarkable, mention and move on immediately

Once you’re sitting down, point to your paper and pen and ask if they mind if you take a few notes. “A short pencil is better than a long memory.”

Relax and move your attention off of yourself and onto your guest. Keep it there, really allow yourself to see and hear them. The quality of your calm attention is your greatest gift.

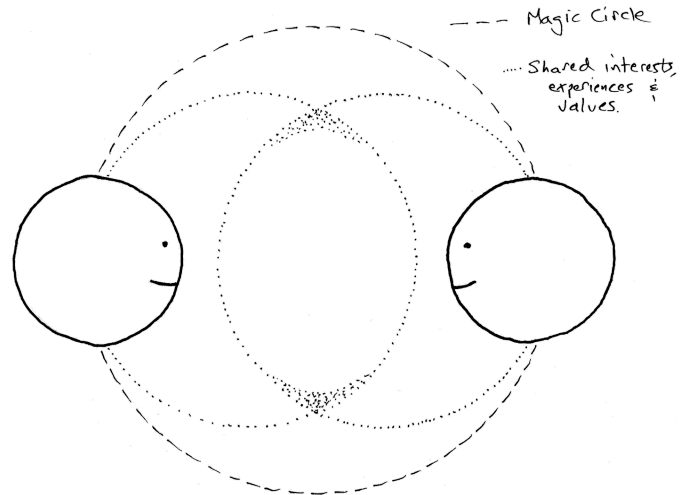
Listen carefully to what they are saying and ask questions about words that they use that you may not understand, assumptions that they have made about how things are connected or how things work, or logical next steps or edge cases to what they are talking about. Ask about their experiences and learnings from what they share.

One of the deepest longings of the human soul is to be seen.

- John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*

The rules are that you hold the circle, it's a magical circle of intimate conversation. Hold the energy of the connection in the space so that you can hold the Connect and Learn steps of the Clear process and create reciprocity opportunities.

Reveal a bit more about yourself to discover a lot more about the other person, the interests, values and experiences you each share. All the while, look for potential next steps to deepen and extend the relationship.



The keys here are to listen well, be curious and to ask the obvious questions that their statements open up.

- "It was the best decision I ever made" leads to, "In what way?"
- "So, I had to...", leads to, "Then what happened?" or "How did you work your way out of that one?"
- "I decided to..." leads to, "How did you make that decision? Were you confident it was the right choice at the time?"

Keep an eye on the time. Aim to end 3 minutes early or on the dot. Say, "I have really enjoyed our time and all that you've shared. I also respect your time, so I want to note that we're almost through our allotted time."

If you felt that there was a valuable connection, set up the opening for your next meeting by saying, "Would it be okay to reach out to you with any follow-up questions that arise?"

Or, if you really do feel like your conversation has been cut short (and the other person seems to be engaged and enjoying themselves as well) you can suggest getting together again in the coming days or weeks to continue talking.

State that you really appreciate the time that they have allotted to talk to you. There is always a next time, it just may be quite a while before it happens. Maybe something needs to change before the next time. Nonetheless set up the opening for your next invitation to coffee to ask follow up questions or report on progress.

As suggested in the CLEAR model, look for something that you can promise to do for the person (like send them a link or a quote you discussed) in the next couple of days. Keep this promise, it is the key to moving from the Connect and Learn steps of the Clear process onto the Earn step which builds your trusting, solid relationship.

Practice before you go

Practice will reduce your anxiety so that you can focus on hosting your guest.

The key is to practice the first 30 seconds of greeting, where you address needs and open with your first question. The goal is to smoothly connect with the person and get them talking about who they are and what they know. This will put everyone at ease.

Set a time to practice these opening moments and your first questions in a quiet place with a safe friend or colleague. Run through the opening moments in a role play a few times until you are at ease doing so. Role playing can be uncomfortable, but it allows us to move through discomfort before we are in the real situation.

Practice listening for and stepping into elevator statements, they can lead you to a deeper level of connection and conversation. As you have your practice discussions, listen for loaded words and phrases. Elevator statements and your follow up might include:

- When they use a word that carries a lot of emotion (good or bad), follow with “I noticed you used the word, _____. What prompted that?”
- If they use phrases that include words like always, never, should and could, follow with “It’s interesting that you used the word (never, always, etc). Can you tell me more about your experiences with that?”
- When they use words that are new to you, you can say, “Can you help me understand that a bit better?”
- If they say, “... but that’s another story...” you can say, “Tell me more, I have time if you do.”

In the beginning of practice, these phrases might feel unnatural or mechanical. Keep going, very soon they will become your own, very useful tools.

There is no need to overdo it. Practice to 50% confidence. We're not seeking perfection, just some additional ease. You will successfully fill the last 50% in the excitement of the moment.

Some Context

*When you meet that person. A person. One of your soulmates.
Let the connection, relationship be what it is.*

*It may be five mins. Five hours. Five days. Five months. Five years. A lifetime.
Let it manifest itself, the way it is meant to. It has an organic destiny.
This way if it stays or if it leaves, you will be softer from having been loved this
authentically.
Souls come into, return, open, and sweep through your life for a myriad of
reasons, let them be who and what they are meant.*

— Nayyirah Waheed, [Let the Connection Be What It Is](#)

Further reading

- *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie
- *How To Talk To Almost Anyone About Almost Anything*, Barbara Walters. A bit outdated now as social mores have shifted, but still some valuable insights into how humans can connect in conversation. Some useful notes [here](#).
- Humane Leadership Conference [website](#)

May your connecting and learning bloom beautifully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.