

Convening the Ultimate Dinner Party

by Richard Leider

If you're working from home for the foreseeable future due to the ongoing pandemic, you're most likely going to need to get a lot more comfortable with zooming. Just because we can't go out doesn't mean we need to feel isolated. Isolation is fatal.

During this ongoing time of pandemic anxiety, I find that we're hungering for "courageous conversations." We feel a need to be transparent, to feel less anxious, and to help others feel the same. It takes curiosity to connect in meaningful ways.

Curiosity?

I personally learned from the architect and iconoclast Founder of TED, Richard Saul Wurman, that he created TED based on his vision of an ultimate dinner party" In 1984, he invited guests from Silicon Valley (T), Hollywood (E), and academia (D) representing his "curiosity" about the emerging convergence between these fields. The rest is history as TED morphed from his dinner party into a viral video phenomenon and a worldwide network of people united by their curiosity.

As the story goes, if Richard felt bored at his "TED dinner party," he had no problem ending a guests' rant and posing a new question. TED talks eventually took on the 18-minute limit – the alleged limit of the human attention span. Asking a good question requires us to move beyond what we think we know about an issue or a person. It moves us out of our comfort zones into the unknown, the awkward, and sometimes even the uncomfortable.

The "Curiosity Gene"

I've always been curious, bordering on obsessed, with questions. When I was growing up, I asked a lot of questions. The problem, now, is that I never outgrew the habit. In short, I can be annoying.

How so? Well, I often find myself posing questions in conversations. I guess I was born with the "curiosity gene." I've noticed that too many times, conversations tend to slip into "How are you doing?" It's a question we rarely (if ever) answer honestly – instead defaulting to the standard "I'm fine, thanks!"



Do you have the “curiosity gene?” Who would you be curious to invite to your “ultimate dinner party?” It’s possible that what you’re curious about, others are too, and the questions you’re obsessing about, others might also be asking themselves too. Richard Wurman claims that “curiosity is finding the extraordinary in the ordinary.” Great questions can spark that curiosity and invite new connections between people. So, the key ingredient for a purpose-full dinner conversation is to intentionally select a table question – a theme for the conversation. The truth is that questions are just as important as answers, often more so.

Convening an “Ultimate Dinner Party”

Try using Zoom for an “ultimate dinner party.” Invite several other people to share wine, healthy snacks, and great conversation virtually. Here’s how to make the most of it.

Follow this “recipe” for convening your dinner party – GQ + GP + GF = PF

Good Question (GQ) plus Good People (GP) plus Good Food (GF) = Purpose-Full (PF)... a gathering that helps you feel filled and fulfilled!

Good friends ask great questions, as do good leaders, teachers, and parents. Posing good questions, I believe, is an art worth cultivating, especially today when everyone is an aggregator and curator of information. Good questions create focus and add the savory flavor to the recipe.

For example, for my ultimate party, I’d follow this recipe:

GQ = “Can I make my life count?” How? Why?

GP = Parker Palmer, Richard Rohr, Joan Halifax (and others)

GF = Frog’s Leap merlot wine and healthy snacks

PF = Feeling connected... feeling heard

What about you? Who would you invite to your “ultimate virtual dinner party?” “What would be your recipe?”

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Richard Leider, founder of Inventure – The Purpose Company, is the author of ten books, including three best sellers, which have sold over one million copies. *Repacking Your Bags* and *The Power of Purpose* are considered classics in the personal growth field. Richard’s PBS Special – *The Power of Purpose* – was viewed by millions of people across the U.S. His newest book, *Who Do You Want to Be When You Grow Old?: The Art of Aging on Purpose* is now available.