

GUIDEBOOK HUMAN RECHARGING STATIONS

INTRODUCTION

How nice it is to get together with some friends once in a while; talk a little, hang out or listen to music. You feel completely at home with them and afterwards you think, "We should do that more often!". It can be a spontaneous impulse to visit each other, and sometimes it's a planned moment. You are then with people you know well and often have known for a long time. Sometimes, however, togetherness arises with people you just know and with whom you experience a click. Or with whom you are suddenly in the same boat, because public transportation is cancelled. You chat, share your experiences, annoyances and perhaps your food.

For me, these moments are very valuable. I then experience a recharged energetic feeling. It is as if I have refueled. My battery of trust in people has been recharged because I have experienced togetherness and kindness or helpfulness. These moments also make me relate to the world in a pleasant way at a time, which many people experience as spicy and worrisome.

As a group person, I have all kinds of opportunities to refuel with regularity, and I wish other people the same. All the groups I am part of have also become an interesting research for me, because I wanted to fathom what makes a gathering a "refueling station." I would like to share these experiences and what I discovered in them about creating places to recharge. In this book, I describe how far I have come to understand this phenomenon.

A charging spot is for me:

A gathering of people with a quality that energizes people. It is a place where people can be completely themselves and experience togetherness in order to go out into the world recharged.

The importance of charging places is so great because they counterbalance loneliness and deepening gaps. There is a need for places where people can meet in all their humanity and experience togetherness. Beyond differences because we are all human and respecting differences because we are all unique. And this is not just about meetings, because this desire also applies to families, residential communities, schools, businesses, organizations, healthcare facilities, networks. How can you create a home for all the people who come there, where they can be themselves and experience true relationships with others? In those places, people can feel, follow and use their natural power again. And you can't do that alone.

A recharge site can also become a fertile breeding ground from which you do things together and get things done. That you can move from thinking and dreaming into action because you have built trust in each other, have shared values, can take a beating together and begin to experience flexibility in working together and making decisions. The focus in this book is on creating the place itself, and I sincerely hope that this is an encouragement to create places of recharge quality anywhere.

How then?

How a recharge place comes about and how it works consists of two components. First, your inner attitude and intention, and second, the practical side of such a recharge place. Both aspects deserve attention; both the process for which it is perhaps still searching for words and the concrete

doings. Along the way I have experienced different phases in the creation and maintenance of a recharging space and these are all discussed here.

1. PREPARE

*Every idea
must be
vulnerable*

David Bohm

INNER

In the beginning there is an idea to organize something. That it is going to be a recharge site, you are often not aware at that time. You just want to organize a meeting, project, training or event. Or you are in the process of building an organization. Before you realize it yourself, you have become an initiator.

Everyone chooses their own perspective when organizing. Some people like to throw themselves into the content, others into finding a good venue, and still others get excited about thinking about who you might involve or invite. The beauty of an idea or a plan is its spontaneity that makes you take action. Suddenly you see an opportunity to bring people together and you get to work.

What you will do together doesn't really matter. Whether that's charging or coming up with something together or making sure things run smoothly in a team.

DISCOVERING VALUES

The first question you can ask yourself is: What makes this idea make me so immensely happy? With that, you're doing an initial exploration of what you

care about. Another question that can help is: What is essential for me if I am going to do this? Especially through this second question you get to the inner preparation. Namely, the question of what values you want to organize from. That is an open and broad question and that is why I will give an example.

On King's Day for a few years I had the habit of offering "Free Hugs" at the free market. I had made a poster for that purpose and people who saw it could then get a hug from me if they felt the need. When I offered that, I set out to hug every human being. Even the unkempt, even the heavily inebriated, even the not-so-my-type people. I made the offer from the values: love, respect, acceptance and unconditionality. I took that to myself and put this intention into all my "hugs" that day. And I am convinced that people can sense that.

So it's about identifying what values matter when you get started. Another example is the pioneer weekend that I and others have organized a few times.

An important value to the success of our pioneer weekend is that we work with what emerges as a theme in the group during the weekend. Another value is that we take care of each other. That means that if you are exhausted that weekend, you are taken care of: that you have a good meal and a good night's sleep. A third value for the weekends is comfort. We don't sleep in bunk beds and we always choose a location where you can walk right into nature. And on one of the weekends, we also focused on the value of "being completely yourself." That led to interesting abrasion, because if everyone is doing that, how are you together. That was instructive.

In any case, what is an important value for creating charging spots is diligence. Careful preparation and implementation have proven to be essential. Because with care you create safety and trust, and that is important to feel at home, relax and recharge.

Further, you will discover that the values from which you act will also naturally become apparent as you proceed with practical preparations. For example, the value of being inclusive or exclusive and how your initiative relates to that. Inclusiveness and exclusiveness is how you deal with who you invite. There is something to be said for both and it depends on what you want. At a birthday party it is normal to choose your guests, at a village fair everyone is welcome.

SELF-OBSERVATION

In the second instance - when you get past the initial enthusiasm - you may find that organizing something like this doesn't seem so easy after all. You become aware of doubts or less energy to get started. These are interesting signals, which can lead you to not go further.

You can examine these signals. Is the first idea still not correct? Are you dreading something? Are you going it alone? Especially the latter is common for enthusiastic organizers, because working together is simply more complicated than doing something alone. Another reason can be - and I know this from personal experience - that it doesn't even occur to you to organize together. In my case it was because of my position as the eldest daughter in the family and a related (too) great sense of responsibility. The signals may also indicate different needs or values from which you work or live. Or your body signals to you that relevant information is missing or that unhealthy interpersonal processes are going on. All relevant information you can discover if you listen to the subtle signals within yourself.

So the inner work in this phase calls for taking the signals - thoughts, intuition and bodily sensations - seriously and exploring them. What is your doubt? Why do you doubt?

It helps me to write this down and question myself about it as I write. The answers then come naturally from my pen or from a wisdom center somewhere inside me. I write until I understand.

PRACTICAL

How do you practically get started with an idea? A team, a place, a program and a target audience, that's where it starts.

TEAM

For me, the practical side of preparation begins with the question, "Who would I most like to co-host this recharge spot with?" That's a question I didn't ask myself before, but which now makes me very happy. Working together is not necessarily easier because it takes time to understand each other, to see who each person is at their core and what talents people have. But once you get in tune with each other, it can be effortless, joyful and energizing.

So partnership requires attention in the preparation phase to become well attuned to each other. For this you need time and one or more good conversations, depending on how well you already know each other. In any case, these conversations are about everyone's intentions in organizing the recharge site (including making money, helping people, recharging yourself), about the values that are important to each individual, and about everyone's talents and where you can strengthen each other.

SITE

If the team is standing, location is a key consideration. To become a charging spot, you ideally need a space with the following characteristics:

- Lots of daylight
- Near nature and preferably with a view or even a view of nature
- Beauty around you; that things are beautiful in the sense of pleasant colors and (natural) materials
- Comfort of well-seated chairs and the right temperature. With a multi-day meeting, good beds are important and that everyone can retire to their own sleeping place if desired.
- Spacious spaces so you can move around, walk around, walk around chairs.
- Good acoustics and ventilation. With poor acoustics, it is difficult for sensitive people to hold conversations or stay in a room for long periods of time.
- Lovingly prepared food and drink. It's not in the luxury, but in the attention and variety. For many people in a longer meeting, fruit or sweets are also important to stay with it.
- Dedicated managers with love for the place and for the guests.

Once you have found a potential place, it pays to go look. Actually, this is a requirement because you can't just rely on pictures from the website. In addition, it is nice to make contact with the managers of a place. They can often tell you more about the background or use of the place, and this information is important for the invitation you will send later and the extent to which you yourself feel at home at a location.

Before every dialogue dinner (great conversation and good food) that my colleagues at Spirit of the Age and I hosted quarterly, one of us always went to check out the location. Can we sit spaciously at round tables? Is it a nice environment? Are the company people friendly and dedicated? I think that's important because the venue is an extension of our hostessing. It's nice when that runs smoothly and you understand each other well.

You can also meet online. With that, it's just as important to research the capabilities of the application you choose for what's important. Consider: the quality of the sound and picture, how many you can be in the picture at the same time, whether you can break up into small groups, the ease of use and whether it looks nice.

PROGRAM OR RHYTHM

For a meeting, it is nice to have a program. For a recharge site, it is different, because it is a place where people generate energy again and should be able to feel completely at ease. This means finding the right balance in a program between structure and flexibility to meet the needs of the people who are there.

What I have learned over the years with fellow organizers is that a rhythm rather than a program can work well for a place of recharge. You look for some set moments with lots of time in between, like, for example, the rhythm of monastic life with set times for meals and prayer. What helps to find the appropriate rhythm is to create programs for meetings, but then reduce them to the core and let them go. An example:

For a Togetherness Weekend in 2006 with eighty friends and family members, I created a comprehensive program for two full days. I had all kinds of ideas

about what we could do together and how to make it a celebration. What remained after all kinds of considerations was a block of "children's program" in the afternoon, "dinner" and "dance opportunity" and the next day "breakfast" and "forest walk." Searching for the right program, we discovered that if we wanted everyone to feel at home on that weekend, it was important to provide space. What introvert wants to go to a packed program of check-in, biking, swimming, quiz, performances, bowling, BBQing, dancing, table tennis, watching World Cup soccer, miniature golf, singing together, sunbathing and billiards? We decided to include in the invitation mainly the sentence, "All the space to do your own thing." In the end, almost all of the above activities took place and it was a big party, but nothing had to and everything arose in the moment.

TARGET

Finally, when organizing meetings, the question of who you are doing it with comes into play. What is your target group? You would like to be inclusive and show that everyone is welcome, but that is often not the case. At gifted evenings it is not conducive to welcoming non-highly gifted people, at a Togetherness Weekend it is not nice if friends bring their friends and during a dialogue meeting it is not nice if participants get heavily into a debate. At the same time, you also want diversity in a group and not just like-minded people from the same bubble.

For a recharge site it can be nice to be together with like-minded people from the same bubble. After all, it's a recharge spot and you all have the goal of then going out into the wide world again. And even when you get together with like-minded people or friends or lovers of dialogue, the invisible

diversity between people is quite great. So for a recharge spot, dare to choose a target group. That will enhance the quality of being together.

The value of inclusivity or exclusivity also translates to how you deal with potential new participants. This is the time to explore with each other whether new participants can join the recharge site as you go along and how that works. And how do you deal with people who leave.

Because exclusion and rejection are sensitive topics for many people, it is important to discuss them carefully with each other. Not infrequently, groups have fallen apart because of the group dynamic process around participants entering and exiting. Sometimes you only discover along the way that someone may not have fully understood the purpose of the recharge site and you may want someone to leave. More on that at "Carrying Tension."

EXERCISES IN PREPARING

QUESTIONING YOURSELF IN WRITING ABOUT INNER SIGNALS

Question yourself with warm curiosity. Welcome what presents itself. Follow the tip of your pen and what flows from it. It doesn't have to be pretty or logical, but prefer full sentences to a list of points. Herewith some questions that may stimulate you:

- What makes me really happy?
- Why am I doing this?
- What in me wants to be heard or seen?
- Where does my restless feeling come from?
- What makes me falter?
- What am I afraid to face yet?

EXPLORING INTENTIONS AND VALUES IN A GROUP

Allow at least two hours for this conversation. Create a dialogic setting (chairs in circle, quiet). Take a few minutes to be with each other in silence, sit well with both feet on the ground and focus on deep breathing (breathe to your belly). Ask the question you want to explore together. Ask everyone to write down for themselves what comes to mind when you hear this question. Take turns sharing what came to mind without the other person responding. Reflect together on what has been expressed after everyone has spoken. What stands out? Is there a common thread to discover? At the end, it may be nice to put into words together an answer to the dialogue question or perhaps a follow-up question.

For this conversation, the following questions may be helpful:

- What would I like to accomplish together? What dream do I have about the outcome? And if you already know each other well: What can we accomplish together? What is possible? What binds us?
- Why do I want to contribute to this? For me, how does participating differ from contributing or is it the same thing?
- What values¹ is/are natural to me?
- What is essential for me if we are going to do this? What is an essential condition for me if I am going to do this? What do I not want to contribute to?
- Who are we as a group? How inclusive or exclusive?
- What do we not yet face?

GETTING IN TUNE WITH EACH OTHER

Allow at least two hours for a conversation about each person's talents and needs. Create a dialogic setting (chairs in circle, quiet). For this conversation, the following questions may be helpful:

- What does it take to function optimally as a team?
- What talents do I naturally have (come easily to me)?
- What is my use case in collaboration?
- What stimulates me in interaction with others?
- What do I find difficult to deal with?

¹ Think of values like equality, justice, dignity, freedom, trust, compassion, diligence, service, hospitality, diversity, openness, truth, unconditionality, loyalty or universal principles (more culturally neutral) like respect, love and wholeness. You can also easily find lists of dozens of values on the Internet if you lack inspiration.