



*illustration by Nancy Margulies*

# A Quick Reference Guide for Hosting World Café



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# What are World Café Conversations?

## World Café

is an easy-to-use method for creating a living network of collaborative dialogue around questions that matter in service to real work. Cafés in different contexts have been named in many ways to meet specific goals, for example Creative Cafés, Strategy Cafés, Leadership Cafés, and Community Cafés. World Café conversations are based on the principles and format developed by the World Café, a global movement to support conversations that matter in corporate, government, and community settings around the world.

## World Café is also

a provocative metaphor enabling us to see new ways to make a difference in our lives and work. The power of conversation is so invisible and natural that we usually overlook it. For example, consider all the learning and action choices that occur as people move from one conversation to another inside our organizations and communities. What if we considered all of these conversations as one big dynamic Café, each a table in a larger network of living conversations which is the core process for sharing our collective knowledge and shaping our future? Once we become aware of the power of conversation as a key process in all aspects of our lives, we can use it more effectively for our mutual benefit.

The World Café is built on the assumption that ...

People already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges; that the answers we need are available to us; and that we are *Wiser Together* than we are alone.

## What's essential about the World Café method?

We have outlined a series of guidelines for putting conversation to work through dialogue and engagement. If you use these guidelines in planning your meetings and gatherings, you'll find you are able to create a unique environment where surprising and useful outcomes are likely to occur. A World Café is always intimate, even when it scales to very large numbers.



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# World Café Guidelines: Seven Design Principles

Conducting an exciting World Café Conversation is not hard—it's limited only by your imagination! The World Café format is flexible and adapts to many different circumstances. When these design principles are used together they foster collaborative dialogue, active engagement, and constructive possibilities for action.

## 1) Set the Context



Pay attention to the reason you are bringing people together, and what you want to achieve. Knowing the purpose and parameters of your meeting enables you to consider and choose the most important elements to realize your goals: e.g. who should be part of the conversation, what themes or questions will be most pertinent, what sorts of harvest will be more useful, etc..

## 2) Create Hospitable Space



Café hosts around the world emphasize the power and importance of creating a hospitable space—one that feels safe and inviting. When people feel comfortable to be themselves, they do their most creative thinking, speaking, and listening. In particular, consider how your invitation and your physical set-up contribute to creating a welcoming atmosphere.

## 3) Explore Questions that Matter



Knowledge emerges in response to compelling questions. Find questions that are relevant to the real-life concerns of the group. Powerful questions that “travel well” help attract collective energy, insight, and action as they move throughout a system. Depending on the timeframe available and your objectives, your Café may explore a single question or use a progressively deeper line of inquiry through several conversational rounds.

## 4) Encourage Everyone's Contribution



As leaders we are increasingly aware of the importance of participation, but most people don't only want to participate, they want to actively contribute to making a difference. It is important to encourage everyone in your meeting to contribute their ideas and perspectives, while also allowing anyone who wants to participate by simply listening to do so.

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# World Café Guidelines: Seven Design Principles, cont.

## 5) Connect Diverse Perspectives



The opportunity to move between tables, meet new people, actively contribute your thinking, and link the essence of your discoveries to ever-widening circles of thought is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Café. As participants carry key ideas or themes to new tables, they exchange perspectives, greatly enriching the possibility for surprising new insights.

## 6) Listen Together for Patterns & Insights



Listening is a gift we give to one another. The quality of our listening is perhaps the most important factor determining the success of a Café. Through practicing shared listening and paying attention to themes, patterns and insights, we begin to sense a connection to the larger whole. Encourage people to listen for what is not being spoken along with what is being shared.

## 7) Share Collective Discoveries



*World Cafe Design Principles  
Stamp Illustrations by  
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Conversations held at one table reflect a pattern of wholeness that connects with the conversations at the other tables. The last phase of the Café, often called the “harvest”, involves making this pattern of wholeness visible to everyone in a large group conversation. Invite a few minutes of silent reflection on the patterns, themes and deeper questions experienced in the small group conversations and call them out to share with the larger group. Make sure you have a way to capture the harvest – working with a graphic recorder is very helpful.

For a more in-depth look at the World Café design principles, see the World Café book, “The World Café: Shaping Our Futures through Conversations that Matter”, or attend the **Hosting World Café: The Fundamentals** Signature Learning Program at Fielding Graduate University.

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# World Café Conversations

## At a Glance

- Seat four (five max) people at small Café-style tables or in conversation clusters.
- Set up progressive (at least three) rounds of conversation, approximately 20 minutes each.
- Engage questions or issues that genuinely matter to your life, work, or community.
- Encourage participants to write, doodle and draw key ideas on their tablecloths (and/or note key ideas on large index cards or placemats in the center of the table).
- Upon completing the initial round of conversation, you may ask one person to remain at the table as a “table host” for the next round, while the others serve as travelers or “ambassadors of meaning.” The travelers carry key ideas, themes and questions into their new conversations, while the table host welcomes the new set of travelers.
- By providing opportunities for people to move in several rounds of conversation, ideas, questions, and themes begin to link and connect. At the end of the second or third round, all of the tables or conversation clusters in the room will be cross-pollinated with insights from prior conversations.
- In the last round of conversation, people can return to their first table to synthesize their discoveries, or they may continue traveling to new tables.
- You may use the same question for one or more rounds of conversation, or you may pose different questions in each round to build on and help deepen the exploration.
- After at least three rounds of conversation, initiate a period of sharing discoveries & insights in a whole group conversation. It is in these town meeting-style conversations that patterns can be identified, collective knowledge grows, and possibilities for action emerge.

Once you know what you want to achieve and the amount of time you have to work with, you can decide the appropriate number and length of conversation rounds, the most effective use of questions and the most interesting ways to connect and cross-pollinate ideas.

# Café Etiquette

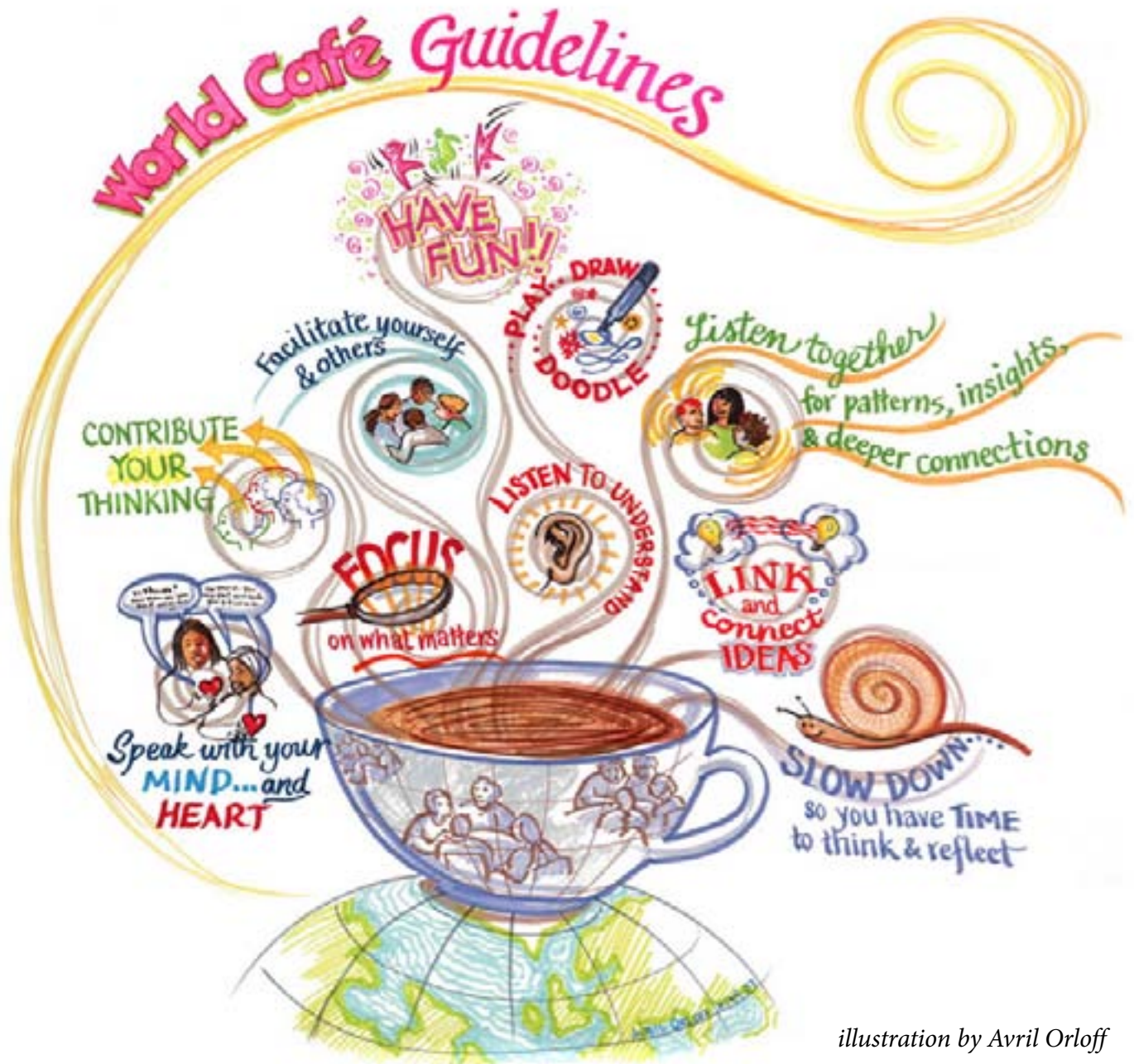


illustration by Avril Orloff

## Play! Experiment! Improvise!

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# The Importance of World Café Question(s)

The questions(s) you use for a World Café conversation are critical to its success. Your Café may explore a single question or several questions may be developed to support a logical progression of discovery throughout several rounds of dialogue.



## A Powerful Question

- *is simple and clear*
  - *is thought-provoking*
  - *generates energy*
  - *focuses inquiry*
  - *surfaces unconscious assumptions*
  - *opens new possibilities*
- Well-crafted questions attract energy and focus our attention to what really counts. Experienced World Café hosts recommend posing open-ended questions—the kind that don't have yes or no answers
  - Good questions need not imply immediate action steps or problem solving. They should invite inquiry and discovery vs. advocacy and advantage.
  - You'll know you have a good question when it continues to surface new ideas and possibilities.
  - Bounce possible questions off of key people who will be participating to see if they sustain interest and energy.

## Keep in mind that...

## Five Ways to Make Collective Knowledge Visible

### Use a Graphic Recorder

*In some Café events the whole group conversation is captured by a graphic recorder who draws the group's ideas on flip charts or a wall mural using text & graphics to illustrate the patterns of the conversation.*

### Take a Gallery Tour

*At times, people will place the paper tablecloths from their tables on the wall so members can take a tour of the group's ideas during a break.*

### Post Your Insights

*Participants can place large Post-Its with a single key insight on each on a blackboard, wall, etc. so that everyone can review the ideas during a break.*

### Create Idea Clusters

*Group Post-Its into "affinity clusters" so that related ideas are visible and available for planning the group's next steps.*

### Make a Story

*Some World Café hosts create a newspaper or storybook to bring the results of their work to larger audiences after the event, using graphic recordings along with text as documentation.*

# How to Create a Café Ambiance

Whether you are convening several dozen or several hundred people, it is essential to create an environment that evokes a feeling of both informality and intimacy. When your guests arrive they should know immediately that this is no ordinary meeting ...

- If possible, select a space with natural light and an outdoor view to create a more welcoming atmosphere.
- Make the space look like an actual Café, with small tables that seat four or five people. Less than four at a table may not provide enough diversity of perspectives, more than five limits the amount of personal interaction.
- Arrange the Café tables in a staggered, random fashion rather than in neat rows. Tables in a sidewalk café after it has been open for a few hours look relaxed and inviting.
- Use colorful tablecloths and a small vase of flowers on each table. If the venue allows it add a candle to each table. Place plants or greenery around the room.
- Place at least two large sheets of paper over each tablecloth along with a mug or wineglass filled with colorful markers. Paper and pens encourage scribbling, drawing, and connecting ideas. In this way people will jot down ideas as they emerge.
- Put one additional Café table in the front of the room for the Host's and any presenter's material
- Consider displaying art or adding posters to the walls (as simple as flip chart sheets with quotes), and play music as people arrive and you welcome them.
- To honor the tradition of community and hospitality provide beverages and snacks. A Café isn't complete without food and refreshments!

**Use Your Imagination!**

**Be Creative!**

## Café Supplies

- Small *round* tables of 36 to 42 inches are ideal, but small card tables will also work.
- Enough chairs for all participants and presenters.
- Colorful tablecloths.
- Flipchart paper or paper placemats for covering the café tables.
- Colored *water-based* markers (so they don't bleed, Crayola® and Mr. Sketch® work well). For legibility use dark colors such as green, black, blue and purple. Add one or two bright colors to the cup (red, light green, light blue, or orange) for adding emphasis.
- A vase with cut flowers, a mug or wineglass per table for markers.
- A side table for refreshments and snacks.
- Mural (6' long x 48" tall) or flip chart paper for making collective knowledge visible and tape for hanging.
- Flat wall space (minimum of 12') or two rolling white boards (4'x6' each).
- Additional wall (or window) space for posting collective work and/or the work of the tables.

### *Optional (depending on size and purpose)*

- Overhead projector & screen.
- Sound system for tapes and/or CDs.
- A selection of background music.
- Wireless lavalieres for Café Hosts, and handheld wireless microphones for town meeting-style sessions.
- Easels & flipcharts.
- Basic supplies including stapler, paper clips, rubber bands, markers, masking tape, pens, push pins and pencils.
- Colored 4x6 inch or 5x8 inch cards (for personal note taking).
- 4x6 inch large Post-Its® in bright colors for posting of ideas.



# I'm the Café Host; what do I do?



*illustration by Nancy Margulies*

The job of the Café Host is to see that the seven design principles – the guidelines for dialogue and engagement – are put into action.

It is not the specific form, but living the spirit of the guidelines that counts.

Hosting a Café requires thoughtfulness, artistry and care. The Café Host can make the difference between an interesting conversation & one that truly matters.

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- Work with the planning team to determine the purpose of the Café and decide who should be invited to the gathering.
  - Name your Café in a way appropriate to its purpose, for example: Leadership Café; Knowledge Café; Strategy Café; Discovery Café, etc.
  - Help frame the invitation.
  - Work with others to create a comfortable Café environment.
  - Welcome the participants as they enter.
  - Explain the purpose of the gathering.
  - Pose the question or themes for rounds of conversation and make sure that the question is visible to everyone on an overhead, flip chart or on cards at each table.
  - Explain the Café guidelines and Café Etiquette and post them on an overhead, an easel sheet or on cards at each table.
  - Explain how the logistics of the Café will work, including the role of the Table Host (the person who volunteers to remain at the end of a round of conversation and welcome new people for the next round).
  - During the conversation, move among the tables.
  - Encourage everyone to participate.
  - Remind people to note key ideas, doodle and draw.
  - Let people know in a gentle way when it's time to move and begin a new round of conversation.
  - Make sure key insights are recorded visually or are gathered and posted if possible.
  - Be creative in adapting the seven Café Design Principles, or guidelines, to meet the unique needs of your situation.

# I'm a Table Host; what do I do?



illustration by Nancy Margulies

- Remain at the table when others leave and welcome travelers from other tables for the next round of conversation.
- Briefly share key insights from the prior conversation so others can link and build using ideas from their respective tables.
- Gently & as appropriate, encourage people at your table to jot down key connections, ideas, discoveries, and deeper questions as they emerge.

## Note -

- Because people are used to behaving a certain way when they are a facilitator or “being facilitated”, there can be a danger with inexperienced Table Hosts taking on more of a role than is meant here.
- There are no facilitators in a World Café, only hosts. Everyone at the tables is responsible for hosting themselves and each other. For this and a variety of other reasons you may choose not to use Table Hosts in your World Café.
- Always choose a new Table Host at the end of each round – not at the beginning (the same person should not be a Table Host for more than one round).

## Stay in Touch!

Like the Café process itself, this Guide is evolving. As you experiment with hosting your own Café conversations, we'd love to hear from you, both about your Café experiences and the ways we can make this Guide more useful.

Contact [info@theworldcafe.com](mailto:info@theworldcafe.com) with ideas and feedback.

And for further detailed background information, including Café stories, additional hosting tips, supporting articles, and links to related Café and dialogue initiatives, please visit our website: <http://www.theworldcafe.com>