

Hosts & Guests

Elmore, Tim. *Habitudes, the Art of Connecting with Others*. Poet Gardener Publishing, 2011

Leaders take the initiative in relationships. They are intentional about them. They see themselves as hosts, not guests, and go out of their way to connect with people and provide for them.

While attending a university in London years ago, one young man accepted employment in East Africa. He began his venture there, curious to learn all he could about life, work, and faith. For seven months he lived with a family where he hoped to be mentored in these areas.

Unfortunately, they were apathetic toward him. They never modeled the faith they claimed to have and never helped him get settled in Africa. He observed that the family was casual about their commitments in general. The student later claimed he learned what not to do from this family rather than what to do in life. Within a couple of months, he was disappointed in the whole experience. Eventually he moved back home to India, and ultimately, he led a revolution. This young man's name was Mahatma Gandhi.

That family in Africa had no idea who was in their midst. What an opportunity the family missed to influence Gandhi, one of the most influential men of the 20th century—because they were poor hosts. They never attempted to connect with him on any level.

You know what a good host looks like, don't you? If I was your friend and I came to visit you, I bet you'd know what to do to be a good host. After answering the door, I bet you'd invite me in, offer me a seat, take my coat, etc. A good host is someone who takes initiative, makes others feel comfortable, and connects. Most of us appreciate a good host, and we feel it when one is missing. Have you ever been in a room full of people and felt completely out of place? No one greeted you, showed you around, or even asked if you wanted something to drink. You probably thought about leaving, just like Gandhi. A good host would have made all the difference.

Parties aren't the only place you'll find hosts and guests. I've noticed nearly every relationship and every conversation has both a "host" and a "guest." People seem to find their place in discussions as either the proactive guide (the host), or the one responding (the guest). Now here's the catch. Most people view themselves as "guests" in life. They expect others to make the first move. Leaders know better. They take initiative and think like "hosts." Their focus isn't on themselves, but on others. In fact, when it comes to relationships, the first step a leader takes is to become a host, not a guest, wherever they are. This is rule number one. Good leaders don't depend on their position to get the job done. They leverage personal power, not positional power, with people.

It's been said that "some folks make you feel at home, while others make you wish you were." If you want to be a great "host" in relationships, you'll need to do the following things:

- 1. INITIATE** (others become responsive)
- 2. CONNECT** (others become comfortable)
- 3. PROVIDE** (others become satisfied)
- 4. DIRECT** (others receive guidance)

Initiate

Good hosts take initiative with their guests. They greet them at the door, offer to take their jackets, and start up conversations. As a result, their guests feel welcomed and become responsive. Good hosts make others feel like the most important person in the room. It works the same way in daily relationships. When we make the first move, others tend to let down their guard and engage with us. But it takes initiative on our part to get the ball rolling. Leaders go first.

Sometimes we fail to host by saying, “Well, I’m the leader. They can come to me.” Other times we may fail to host others because our “antennas” simply aren’t up. We become so caught up in the busyness of life that we neglect those around us. JoAnn Jones discovered this one day when her professor asked the class an unexpected question. She writes,

During my second month of nursing school, our professor gave us a pop quiz. I was a conscientious student and had breezed through the questions, until I read the last one: “What is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?” Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times. She was tall, dark-haired, and in her 50s, but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank. Before class ended, one student asked if the last question would count towards our grade. “Absolutely,” said the professor. “In your careers you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say hello.” I’ve never forgotten that lesson. I also learned that her name was Dorothy.¹

Connect

Good hosts connect with their guests. They do their best to help them feel comfortable and at ease. They’re always trying to find common ground with others. Instead of dominating conversations, they focus on others and let them be the main attraction. Leaders have a similar mindset. They know it’s not about them—it’s about creating an environment for others to feel at home with them.

The Walt Disney Company seems to have an intrinsic understanding of how important this is. Everything it does is centered on creating happy experiences for others, especially children. In fact, they refer to all their customers as “guests” and treat them accordingly. I have a friend who works in the Imagineering department. He once told me that Disney employees are always expected to go above and beyond the basics when “hosting” others. For example, if a child drops her lollipop on the ground and begins to cry, any employee is authorized to run to the nearest gift shop and buy her a new one on the spot, with the company picking up the bill! Disney understands the importance of connecting with others. When they say, “Be our guest,” they really mean it!

Connecting with others is important, but let’s be honest, it’s not always easy. As you strive to be a better host, you’re bound to run across some people who are very different from you. You’ll find yourself saying things like, “I’ve tried to be friends with her, but we just don’t have anything in common.” Or, “We always end up arguing. He’s just not worth the effort!”

It can be tempting to throw in the towel. Don’t. Instead, try using the 101% Principle: find the 1% that you have in common with someone, and devote 100% of your attention to it. Maybe you both enjoy tennis, like the same music, or love the same sports team. Whatever it is, find it and zero in on it. It may take some effort to discover that 1%, but you’ll be glad you did in the end.

Provide

Good hosts provide for their guests. They prepare delicious meals, plan engaging activities, and anticipate needs that may arise. As a result, their guests become satisfied and look forward to a return visit. Leaders play a similar role. They meet the needs of those around them and look for ways to benefit them.

When we start looking, it's amazing how many needs there are around us. When we start leading, it's amazing how many of those needs we can meet. One of the great needs today is relational leadership. People today are crying out for relational leaders—leaders who connect with their hearts, not just their heads. It's no longer enough just to be competent or have strong character. To lead effectively, you'll need to have strong people skills as well. That's what this little book is all about.

One of the most basic ways we can provide relational leadership is by adding value to others. By "adding value," I mean improving someone else's life by sharing your own. I've made a goal to do this with every single person I come in contact with for more than ten minutes. It can happen in a variety of ways. Sometimes I'll tell a story from my own experience and the light bulb will come on for someone else. Other times I'll share a book, an encouraging word, or help someone through a personal crisis. However it happens, my goal is for others to be better off after having spent time with me. It's my way of providing for them.

A friend once told me, "I don't remember what someone does or how well they did it; I remember how they made me feel." What a great line for us to remember. We don't need to be perfect, but we do need to show others that we care.

Direct

Good hosts give direction to their guests. They help them know when the party starts, the location, how to get there, and what to expect once they arrive. They don't make others figure it out on their own. As a result, their guests receive guidance. Leaders direct others as well. They know that others are looking to them for clarity on which way to go.

Beyond simply telling others what to do, leaders provide direction in the following ways:

- Suggesting a variety of options for those facing a dilemma.
- Giving resources and instruction based on past experience.
- Helping others do a "self-discovery" to guide them along the way.
- Placing others in contact with key people to help them on their journey.

Years ago, I decided I was going to be a host, not a guest, in the relationships of my life. This is a challenge for me because I am a natural introvert. I am tempted to be passive in relationships and let others take the first step. Even with my family, instead of vegging in front of the TV watching ESPN, I try to host my wife and kids. A few years ago, I surprised my wife with a Valentine's weekend in Paris, France. (I got a great deal on tickets!) We toured museums, ate crepes, soared to the top of the Eiffel Tower, and laughed a ton. It was an unforgettable weekend. On the flight home, I asked my wife what her favorite part of the trip was. After reflecting for a moment, she smiled and said, "I think it was simply that you took the initiative on everything from the travel, to the hotel, to the babysitting responsibilities. You were the host. You were the leader." Hmmm. That's when it hit me that maybe hosting and leading go together.

Reflect and Respond

Good hosts are always looking for ways to connect with their guests. They initiate the conversation, create a comfortable environment, and ask questions to find a common interest.

1. At parties, most people view themselves as "guests." In our relationships, why is it that the majority of us expect others to make the first move?
2. What motivates leaders to take the initiative and be a host? How are leaders different from others in this respect?
3. What effect does a bad attitude have on being a good host? What kind of attitude do hosts need?

Self-Assessment

Think about your daily interactions with others—at work, in school, while doing errands, etc. Are you a host or a guest? Go through the following chart and indicate where you fall on the scale.

GUESTS	HOSTS
Wait for the phone call	Make the phone call
Are introduced by others	Introduce themselves
Focus on differences	Focus on similarities
Put others on edge	Put others at ease
Look to be served	Look to serve
Add nothing to others	Add value to others
Need clear advice	Offer clear advice
Reactive; passive	Proactive; take initiative

Over the years, I’ve noticed that there are four main obstacles that keep people from becoming good hosts. Evaluate yourself. Do you relate to any of the obstacles? Discuss your thoughts.

- 1. **FEAR** “What will they think of me? What if I say something stupid?”
- 2. **PRIDE** “Don’t they know who I am? They should come to me.”
- 3. **LAZINESS** “It’s too much work... I’d rather not make the effort.”
- 4. **PERSONALITY** “I’m not naturally outgoing, so why even try?”

Take a moment to do an honest evaluation on being a good host or hostess in your relationships. Assess yourself in the following four areas:

- 1. **INITIATE**
How do others respond to you? < **POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT** >
- 2. **CONNECT**
How comfortable are people around you? < **POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT** >
- 3. **PROVIDE**
Do your guests feel satisfied? < **POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT** >
- 4. **DIRECT**
How well do others receive guidance from you? < **POOR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 EXCELLENT** >