

The Chateau Principle - Importance of Place

When you host a gathering or a meeting, it is important to consider the impact the location could have on people in attendance and their behaviour. In her book "*The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why it Matters*", Priya Parker introduces an idea she calls the "Chateau Principle". In its simplest form the Chateau Principle says that the location of a meeting has an impact on how people in attendance feel, act and speak. Location matters.

Think for a minute, about how social events in our personal life feel different when you sit around a kitchen table or island vs. the family room vs. the formal living room vs. the backyard. We can all think of many examples of how the location impacts people's words, feelings and behaviours.

In our professional lives, many of us have been told about the benefit of 'off-site' meetings and retreats. This idea has gained traction for the same reasons: people think, talk, and act differently away from the regular workplace environment. However, Priya's description of the Chateau Principle causes us to dig a bit deeper into the idea that location matters and specifically how the location of a meeting might impact partnerships, collaborations, and networking relationships.

When it comes to partnerships, collaborations, and networking relationships here are some questions to consider when determining where to meet:

- At the start of a partnership relationship, how might the location of initial meetings impact people's sense of power, vulnerability, and overall comfort? When the initial conversations happen in a coffee shop or other neutral location, does that set a different tone going forward than if the conversation happens over the phone or in the office of one of the partner organizations?
- When one member of the partnership suggests a meeting location that is not the office of any of the organizations, is that perceived by all to be a truly neutral location?
- When a large and more economically lucrative organization offers to host the meeting at their office, is that seen by others as them graciously sharing their resources, or does it provide the hosting organization's employees with an increased level of comfort to voice their thoughts and influence the discussion?
- When employees from two organizations are meeting together, do you meet in places so that people from both organizations travel or take turns hosting? How might the meeting location and travel time impact people's sense of collaboration and partnership?
- When two or more boards of directors get together in a neutral community space to discuss potentially merging, is it necessary or even possible to have a location that is baggage free for all attending?
- Within a specific meeting location, are there specific rooms or ways to set up the room that might foster more collaborative conversations than others?

If, as the Chateau Principle suggests, the choice of meeting venue is one of the most important levers you have to shape what behaviours you desire from the meeting attendees, then it is critically important take time to thoughtfully consider where meetings happen and select a location with intentionality.

