

Notes on Relational Meetings

Relational meetings lie at the heart of the Industrial Areas Foundation's approach to community building. Face to face, one to one engagement is the most radical act IAF teaches, preaches and practices. This central focus has emerged from seven decades of organization building in the United States and abroad. It is both settled practice and the primary source of institutional renewal.

Relational meetings are best understood as a craft, sometimes rising to an art form, which requires conceptual clarity, mentoring, sustained practice and collective reflection.

The outcome of a good relational meeting is developmental not instrumental in nature. That is, rather than selling, using, fitting or manipulating, the one to one encounter aims to establish or advance a relationship grounded in mutual respect.

In our era, institutions of all kinds rarely if ever are places where relational skills are taught and learned. The absence of intentional formation in this regard has produced a skills deficit that regularly manifests in relational dysfunction in institutions of all kinds.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously stated that the "first service of a Christian is to listen". IAF organizer Ed Chambers in Roots for Radicals describes a relational meeting as "one organized spirit going after another person's spirit for connection, confrontation and exchange of talent and energy."

Characteristics of relational meetings

- Face to face. (Technology - phone, email, text, social media, tweet - is useful to set meetings.)
- Credentialed. Clear referral and purpose.
- 30 minutes.
- Active, reciprocal listening.
- Story centered. Person centered.
- An exercise in mutual discovery of shared values, histories, interests, hopes, fears.

Relational meetings are not: chitchat; task oriented; abstract exchanges; counseling; interviewing; marketing; job talk.

Relational meetings are: personal and public; probing; fluid; mutually engaging and satisfying; imaginative; calculatedly vulnerable; action oriented.

Relational meetings often but not always conclude with asking and answering one or more questions: Meet again? Otherwise engage? Referrals? On occasion you make a decision in a relational meeting not to have a follow up.