

Finding Comfort in the Hot Zone

Standing in the Fire: Leading High-Heat Meetings with Clarity, Calm, and Courage

By Larry Dressler. Softcover. 236 pages. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, www.berrettkoehler.com.

By Terrence Fernsler



“Becoming an observer of your emotions will minimize defensive reactions.”

Becoming an observer of your emotions will minimize defensive reactions and help you make deliberate choices during heated meetings. You need to focus on the present, keep an open mind, maintain compassion, and ground yourself in core principles. All these things require knowledge and practice.

It's important to prepare for high-heat situations beforehand and take time for reflection afterward. Contemplation is fundamental. It fosters rejuvenation so that you can catalyze positive change, not only in meetings but throughout your organization and your life. **S**

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Facilitating meetings often leads to heated situations in which participants become polarized, angry, fearful, or confused. It's difficult to know what to say or do in these situations, especially for the person leading the meeting. In this book, Larry Dressler suggests how to prepare for such situations so that you can keep from becoming anxious or defensive, and describes how to be a change agent in a heated meeting. Such meetings can be challenging, but they also hold great potential for creativity.

It's easy to become swept up in discordant groups unless you learn to recognize their creative potential and use your presence to hold the group together. You need to allow space for strong emotions, conflict, and complexity.

“Heated meetings can be devastating, but they also hold great potential for creativity.”

NOURISH THE LEADER IN YOU

The wisdom in *Standing in the Fire* stretches far beyond meetings. Its advice will help you become a stronger person, facilitator, and leader:

Become familiar with your self-limiting patterns. Hold your beliefs to the light, and ask yourself if they're serving you.

Step into your “discomfort zone.” Attend talks by people with views different from yours. Listen to radio shows with commentators who make you want to scream. Pay attention to opinions you might label “stupid.” Note how you can acknowledge different perspectives without agreeing with them.

Be compassionate toward yourself. You can't open your heart to others till you give up self-hate and self-blame.

Bring relaxed attention to each moment. In times of chaos, take stock of your physical state, and acknowledge your feelings.

Be sure you have an ongoing set of practices that prepare you to be your best as a leader. These contemplative practices might include yoga, conscious breathing, deep relaxation, prayer, meditation, tai chi, self-guided inquiry, or journaling.

Notice Your Body

During your next meeting, try these small physical adjustments, and see how they affect your mind and emotions.

- **Feel** the soles of your feet in contact with the ground.
- **Pull** your shoulders back and open your pelvis.
- **Relax** your jaw and lift your head.
- **Straighten** your back, extending the top of your head toward the sky.
- **Smile.**
- **Let your in-breath** go all the way down to your belly.
- **Change** the volume and tone of your voice.
- **Stop** talking. Concentrate on listening and being aware of your surroundings.