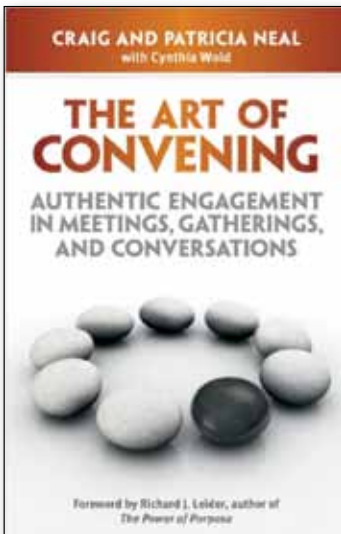


# Gathering to Create Insightful Change

Don't just facilitate meetings. Create profound connections.



By Terrence Fernsler

*The Art of Convening: Authentic Engagement in Meetings, Gatherings, and Conversations.* By Craig and Patricia Neal with Cynthia Wold. Softcover. 212 pages. Berrett-Koehler Publishers ([bkconnections.com](http://bkconnections.com)).


**A**uthentic engagement in meetings and gatherings connects people and energizes them. Energy and connection lead to commitment from participants, something we could certainly use more of. This book demonstrates principles and practices that bring about authentic engagement and leadership in meetings, other gatherings, and conversations.

At the heart of engagement is understanding who we are and how we will be in relationship with others. To engage authentically, we must be willing to express what is true for us and listen carefully to what is true for other people. Clarifying our own intentions opens us to communicating with others.

The authors explore the core elements of authentic engagement and examine the central challenge, key principle, and essential questions of each element. They also provide useful exercises to help readers put these principles into practice.

Practiced together, these keys can result in empowering, fulfilling gatherings. Meaningful connections become possible. These strong connections sow commitment to action.

When we understand ourselves and others, we uncover commonalities, including shared aspirations. We cut through fears and become more generous toward each other. We open possibilities and become strong teams and organizations, working together toward common goals and in common purpose. Wisdom and knowledge become collective.

Knowing how to engage meeting participants reveals these shared assets. The authors describe an effective way to use the basics of convening to become a more productive, cohesive, and sharing team. 

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*Terrence Fernsler has been a nonprofit professional for over 30 years and is currently a candidate for a Master's in Nonprofit Leadership degree at Seattle University.*

## Core Elements of Authentic Engagement

**Know** who you truly are, at your core, and be willing to share your true self.

**Clarify** why you want to meet with others and what the purpose of the gathering will be.

**Use** warmth and a sincere tone to invite people to the meeting, not just asking for a body to turn up but conveying how important their full participation is.

**Select** a meeting space with care. Your surroundings will play a vital role in encouraging engagement. If possible, find a welcoming space with natural lighting, and arrange chairs in a circle.

**Open** the meeting by explaining its purpose along with the desired goals and outcomes.

**Explain** protocols for the meeting, and ask for agreement. For example, will people take turns talking? Is it OK to interrupt another speaker? Will everything said be confidential? When will the meeting end?

**Invite** everyone in the group to say something — perhaps by having them each respond to a question. Suspend judgment, making sure all people feel heard, needed, and respected.

**Keep** all participants engaged in conversation, allowing space for differences of opinion. Nurture the emergence of something new.

**Commit** to action. Ask people to speak briefly about the specific commitments they're ready to make as you all move forward to a common future.

## Evoke Group Wisdom

Wisdom circles are a great way to get to the heart of the matter. Here's how they work:

- Pull chairs into a circle with no table in the middle.
- Have each person speak in turn, moving clockwise around the circle. Anyone may "pass" at any time; no one should be forced to speak.
- Allow a pause between each person speaking.
- Listen and ask questions rather than giving advice or "the answer."
- Listen deeply for the wisdom that is emerging.