



CHANGE • HEART • FUTURE
HELPING COMMUNITIES CREATE
FUTURES WHICH COMPLEMENT THEIR
VALUES, CHARACTER & RESOURCES

The Charture Institute

P.O. Box 4672
485 Arapahoe Lane
Jackson WY 83001
(307) 733-8687 – phone/fax
charture.org; js@charture.org
An IRS 501(c)3 charity
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MEMORANDUM

To: Interested parties
From: Jonathan Schechter *Jonathan*
Date: January 28, 2013
Re: “Chance Meetings Primer”



At January 17's “22 in 21” event, many break-out group participants talked about creating a “Chance Meetings” type of forum for their particular area of interest. These areas included technology, the arts/creative community, and the environment. In addition, other community members have expressed interest in starting a “Chance Meetings” for the region’s outdoor athletes.

Given this interest, I thought it would be useful to develop a “Chance Meetings Primer,” sharing a few thoughts about the process of creating a Chance Meetings forum, as well as specifying the role Charture can play in establishing additional Chance Meetings.

Concept

At 2012's 22 in 21 event, the group sitting at breakout Table 14 became interested in steps it could take to further entrepreneurship in the Tetons region. Doing a little research, they found that one quality which hallmarked communities with a strong entrepreneurial culture is a monthly “Chance Meetings,” a regular-but-informal event where people interested in entrepreneurship can gather, randomly network with one another and, in the process, develop connections, ideas, and opportunities that otherwise would not come about.

The “classic” Chance Meetings format is simply an informal networking event, with no structure to speak of save people showing up at a particular place and time. Table 14 modified this format to include in each month’s Chance Meetings a series of 4-6 two minute talks called “Two Minute Drills.” In these, each speaker shares a quick overview of his or her business, framed around a goal of leaving the audience with one key take-away point. For some speakers, this take-away may be a lesson learned; for others, it may be a problem they are facing. Regardless, each Two Minute Drill speech is tightly timed, and one speaker follows another without any Q&A (the Two Minute Drills occur about 45 minutes into the two hour Chance Meetings, allowing plenty of time for post-Two Minute Drill discussions).

By all accounts, the Two Minute Drills have been quite successful, adding richness to the Chance Meetings conversations, and giving attendees a better sense of the diversity of Tetons-area business ventures.

Eight Chance Meetings were held in 2012, and Chance Meetings is now an established event on the first Monday of every month, from 5-7 pm at The Rose bar. The event is no-host, and monthly attendance ranges from 50-70 people (the first annual Christmas party attracted over 100).

Of Chance Meetings’s many strengths, perhaps its greatest is how it builds “weak ties;” i.e. helps connect individual entrepreneurs with others who, like themselves, often work alone or in small firms and otherwise have no means of connecting. Through these ties, attendees are able to learn more about their “fellow travelers” in the local entrepreneurial world, and through those connections find needed resources, hatch new ideas, and launch efforts that otherwise would fall by the wayside.

Bigger picture, the Chance Meetings concept will likely lend itself to any endeavor in the Tetons region which meets a few basic criteria:

- Is something people are passionate about;
- Is something in which many people participate, but for which there is currently no structure tying them together; and

- Is something which is integral to the region's character

Changing technologies, the arts, the environment, and outdoor athletics all meet these criteria, so all seem likely candidates for the development of their own Chance Meetings.

Initial Steps

Among the lessons learned by Table 14 was that it does not take a lot of time or effort to organize a successful Chance Meetings process. What is required, however, is that everyone involved in the organizing process share a passion for the subject, a willingness to work, and a desire to make the process fun for all involved.

Initiating a Chance Meetings process involves three basic steps:

1. Develop a steering committee of individuals who are knowledgeable about their field, well-connected in it, and able to look beyond their own particular interest/organization to think creatively about both their field and its connections to the broader community.
2. Have the steering committee meet to address a few basic questions:
 - a. When and where should the Chance Meetings occur?
 - b. What will be the theme of each month's "Two Minute Drills"?
 - c. Which speakers should address that theme, and who will recruit them?
 - d. How best to notify likely attendees about the Chance Meetings, and recruit them to come?
3. Make sure that someone is in charge of, and will follow through on, basic logistics such as arranging for the site, arranging for sign-in sheets and nametags, pursuing videographers (if the group wants the Two Minute Drills" taped), and the like.

Because the topics and speakers for several months' Chance Meetings can be decided at one planning meeting, the steering committee shouldn't have to meet more than once or twice to plan several months' worth of events. In addition, because the Chance Meetings structure is so bare-bones (e.g. a no-host bar; no food served; minimal m.c.-ing), staging a successful Chance Meetings requires steering committee members to put in only a limited amount of additional time outside their formal meetings.

Any or all of this format and approach can be modified as the steering committee sees fit, of course. But the big picture take-away message about the Chance Meetings concept is that rewarding events can be developed for a relatively small – albeit highly thoughtful – investment of time.

Charture's role

The Charture Institute organized 22 in 21 to help the Tetons region begin taking steps to shape its own future, a future which complements the community's values, character, and resources. With this in mind, Charture had two reasons for helping the Table 14 group with its 2012 efforts:

- Table 14's efforts complemented what 22 in 21 was trying to achieve; and
- for 22 in 21 to succeed over the long haul, Charture needs to be able to point to tangible successes stemming from 22 in 21.

Table 14's efforts held the potential to address both of these reasons, and its success in 2012 gave Charture something to showcase at 2013's 22 in 21. Because our hope is to have other such successes to showcase at 2014's 22 in 21, Charture is willing to help any group interested in starting a Chance Meeting (or similar forward-looking effort) get off the ground.

In particular, this means that, just as it did with Table 14, Charture will provide start-up help (which Table 14 found to be of great help). This includes assisting efforts such as organizing, logistics, recruiting, publicizing, and other first steps needed to get Chance Meetings off the ground. Potentially, we can also provide limited financial support for efforts such as videotaping, but such details will have to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

The caveat here is that, in all this, Charture sees itself as an incubator: We'll help groups get launched, but we also expect them to take responsibility for keeping the effort going.