

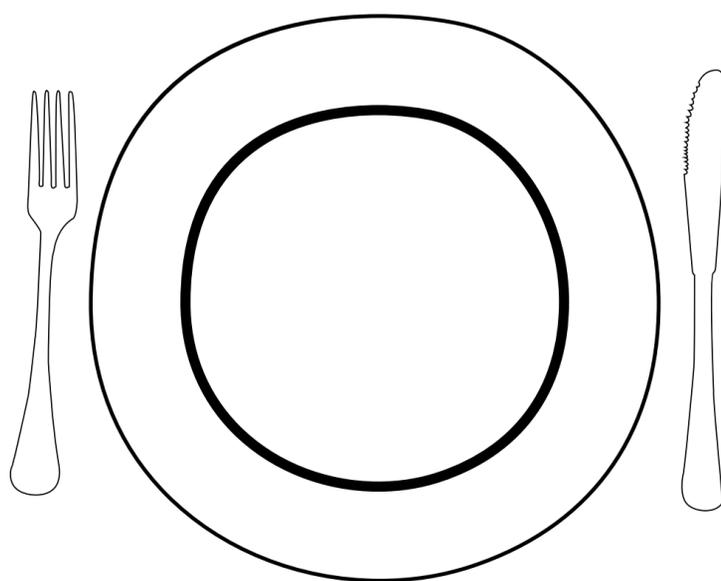
*Host a
dinner party
that gets
everyone
talking.*

Michelle Welsch

Book design by [Matt Radcliffe](#).

There isn't a better way
to unite the people
in your world than
by bringing them together
to share food. New ideas,
magical stories, and a sense
of belonging are by-products
of an evening well planned.

**I'm going to tell you how
to make this happen.**



Setting aside time to gather around a table sets the stage for communication, sharing, and meaningful relationships. In our hectic world, the value of community cannot be understated, and it's easy to foster connections among individuals with a little attention and planning.

Once you've experienced it, you can't deny the electricity that encompasses a group breaking bread. My friend Michael Hebb delivers a great [Tedx talk](#) on the importance of creating dining situations that serve as backdrops for quality discussion. In my own work, I look to amplify conversations that evolve when strangers discover more similarities than differences.

But let's be honest: hosting can be filled with anxiety and stress. The last thing you feel like doing after a long day at work is organizing a party at your home. However, it doesn't have to be an anxiety-producing event. In fact, it doesn't even have to be at your home (more on the difference between home-hosting and venue-finding later).

What you want: a range of individuals sharing unique, inspiring stories. As host, you are the key to this outcome. Your position is to concoct an evening filled with

curiosity and wonder. It's up to you to create a canvas for meaningful conversation. An [impresario](#), as Seth Godin rightfully declares.

To help you orchestrate an evening that is equally enjoyable for you and your guests, I've shared some tips to help you on your way. With strategic planning and deliberate focus, you'll be the mastermind of an evening that will have guests sharing stories long after the evening has ended.

The value of community cannot be understated.

Use this e-book to plan a dinner event that facilitates worthwhile discussion, incites valuable relationships, and encourages storytelling that turns strangers into friends. There's even a handy checklist at the end to remind you of what's important.

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NAME YOUR INTENT.

Introducing strangers at a wine bar is a very different experience than reuniting old friends at a backyard potluck. Before you send out any invitations, consider the purpose of your get-together. This will underline every step you take to ensure your dinner is just as you imagine.

Do you want to introduce individuals from different parts of your world (Yoga Instructor, meet Financial Advisor!) or are you looking to foster a specific business exchange (“Fred, you and Sally both serve small business owners...”)?

It is possible to:

- Make introductions.
- Encourage unexpected connections.
- Foster meaningful conversation.
- Solve creative problems.

It can be helpful to pinpoint a guiding star as you begin your plan. Think about what you’d like your evening to center around.

Most importantly —*and before you read any further*— you must consider your own role for the evening. This requires honest self-assessment. Let me reiterate: be honest.

Remember, as an impresario, you set the tone for the evening. If you're putting on airs or pretending to be comfortable when you're really not, your guests will notice. The more authentic you can be, the more comfortable your guests will feel to reveal their own quirky selves.

*The more authentic you can be,
the more comfortable your guests
will feel.*

Alongside authenticity, you'll need to be up front regarding your capabilities as a dinner host. Are you comfortable inviting people into your home? While your humble abode may present organic intimacy absent from the neighborhood grill, inviting people over can cause many individuals undue stress. This is not a bad thing, but it is important that you are honest about what you can and cannot provide.

Do you want the freedom to focus on your company without some of the responsibilities of playing host? How can you participate fully in the way you're envisioning?

A WORD ON THEME.

It's easy to confuse intent with theme, but your theme for the evening will emerge from your intent. Once you have identified exactly what you want out of the evening, you can begin to go wild and crazy and creative (or not) with your theme.

Note: While a theme is not necessary, it can help tie separate elements of your evening together. For instance, if you choose a travel theme, everything from the menu to the details on the place settings can include an aspect of this motif.

Your theme can also be a helpful tool that puts guests in a particular mind frame. You can use this to your advantage if you are looking to accomplish something specific during your time together, i.e., a brainstorm, a matchmaking session, or a reunion.

Once you have a general idea of your motives and the reason behind your dinner gathering, you can start to think about who should attend.

INVITE THE RIGHT PEOPLE.

You may have an idea of the people you'd like to bring together before you figure out exactly why. This is absolutely OK.

As you begin to ask individuals to join you for an evening, think about the group as a whole. [Gestalt 101](#).

It is essential that you consider the energy, talents, and career trajectory of each attendee. Do they bring something unique to the table? Are they an extravert, a foodie, a prankster? It's important to have a nice mix of personalities and energies that either complement or fall into the same category, especially in an intimate environment.

The people you invite to your dinner can very well make or break your evening, no matter how much planning you've done.

Alongside inviting the appropriate personalities, you'll need to decide how big of a party you're looking to organize. A dinner in which all are seated around one table accomplishes something different than a banquet hall. While both scenarios (and the range between) are equally doable, you will have different needs to consider as you work to create something special for all who attend.

Most importantly, give each guest the attention they deserve — their work, their personality, their tastes, their skills, their networks — as you design a seating arrangement that fills the air with magic.

DESIGN AN EFFECTIVE SEATING ARRANGEMENT.

A seating arrangement is one of the easiest ways to show your guests the attention and care you've put into your evening. It is a tool that enables you to ensure specific connections are made. As the dinner organizer, take advantage of this opportunity. Place cards are warm details that can help you achieve your vision for the evening.

Do you want to encourage people to meet others they aren't familiar with? Split up couples. Are you hoping to introduce individuals from complementary fields of work?

Remember your intent. This will help you determine who sits where. People don't need to stay in the same spot all night, either. Perhaps you switch seats after each course?

More often than not, the size of your dinner party will be dictated by your space. Thus, the environment you select for your dinner is just as important as your guest list.

PICK THE PERFECT SETTING.

Imagine: at last! The evening has come. You've spent hours planning, the menu is perfect, and your seating chart is sparkling with possibility. You sport your best outfit, ready to greet your guests with calm, confident poise. Your smile is bright --- until you arrive. An unknown stranger has settled at the head of the table, and you aren't sure why or how he is there.

You didn't invite this person, but he is everywhere. He's staring at your coworkers and is in your friends' faces. His mere presence changes the taste of the food and the topics people feel comfortable discussing.

Your environment is the guest who has already been invited.

Whether you're hosting a dinner in your home or organizing your evening at a nearby eatery, carefully regard the space and the options available to you. Recall your intent.

Did you envision a private, intimate gathering? Are you comfortable inviting a group to your home? Your dining room will have a different *joie de vivre* than reservations at the neighborhood grill.

The key is to find a space that complements what you are hoping to create among your guests. Things like lighting and noise levels can act as additions (or subtractions) from the overall experience.

*Find a space that complements
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If you are hosting in your home, you will have to plan for clean up and set up, or ask your guests for help. If you have other things on the agenda, you may not want to worry about serving, fussing over dishes, making sure the trash is taken out, or listening for latecomers to ring the door bell.

If you've decided to venture down the restaurant route, ask if the establishment has a private dining area. A reserved table sends a different signal to guests than a public table

in the main dining room. Keep in mind restaurants may require a deposit to hold the room or insist on serving a *prix fixe* menu.

This is when you need to consider the costs involved with your evening.

WHAT IS YOUR BUDGET?

There are upsides and downsides to hosting a party in your home. Cost is a major factor. By instructing others to contribute to the meal, you can drastically reduce your overall spending for the evening.

If you're choosing to use a venue, the overall spending budget can appear a bit more cut and dry. Obviously, treating your guests is one thing, but if you're instructing them to pay their own way, you must be up front about the menu and cost expectations beforehand.

Many restaurants have minimum spends for private rooms and tack on service fees for large parties.

Don't overlook the hassle of splitting up a bill at the end of the evening. Awkward wallet fumbling is not the way you want to end an evening. Plan beforehand to save everyone embarrassment.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT FOOD.

Another potentially embarrassing situation: dietary restrictions. There's no buzz kill quite like discovering a guest's diet prevents them from eating anything being served.

The food you serve plays an important part in your evening. It is also a great way to bring your theme to the table. Ask everyone to bring a dish from a certain country or find a local restaurant that can tell you the story behind your meal.

Remember your intent: Are you looking to create a more formal or relaxed setting? A five-star restaurant and a cooking lesson in your apartment are both great, but very different.

MAKE SURE EVERY ONE FEELS WELCOME.

It's up to you to set ground rules for the evening and ensure each of your guests feels respected and valued. This can be achieved through your introductions and the activities you plan for the evening.

Yes, activities.

Activities are your friends.

Sometimes, conversation is enough. You've done the work. You've nailed the seating chart, and people launch into fulfilling discussion without prompt. Other times, some encouragement is necessary.

Don't fret! You just need to give a little push to get people to relax and enjoy. You can do this in a number of ways.

Revisit your intent. Is there a particular topic you'd like to discuss? Stop hoping, and have a list of questions at the ready. Pose challenges. Ask your guests to ask each other fun questions. Place writing utensils in plain sight. Icebreakers don't have to be sad.

FAVORS!

Not a necessity, but a very nice touch. Small gifts or tokens can tie in your overall theme at the end of the evening. Favors are a great way to express your appreciation and gratitude for everyone's time. And people always love gifts.

NEVER BE TOO BUSY FOR "THANK YOU."

Graciousness cannot be understated.

In fact, thank you notes are just as important as the initial invitations. Thank each and everyone person for their contribution and their time.

Your follow up note also provides the prime moment to make sure the connections you had imagined took place. Ask your guest if there was someone they met that felt connected to, if they're planning on getting together again, and if there's anything you can do to help.

Graciousness cannot be understated.

You'll want to make sure everyone received each other's contact information, but this can be a tricky area. No one wants to feel obligated to connect. Sometimes a good evening can be just that, a good evening. You don't need to add more "to dos" to anyone's list.

If you have another dinner party in the works, your follow up is a great time to insert a save the date message into everyone's calendar. Energy is often high right after a party. Ride it.

REWARD YOURSELF FOR A JOB WELL DONE.

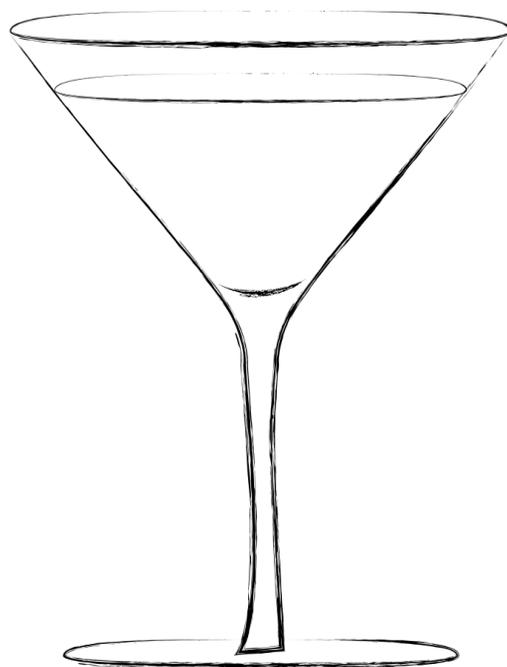
Your phone will surely be buzzing with thanks, and your inbox dinging with emails from grateful friends.

An important lesson I learned as a mental health professional: you can't be present for others if you can't be present for yourself.

Now that the planning and evening is over, take time to re-energize. Entertaining can be draining, so you'll want to refresh and renew yourself. Treat yourself to something special — a massage, a workout, a visit to the local bookstore, a movie. You deserve it!

Then... start planning your next dinner.

Your guests will be waiting with eager anticipation for your next invitation.



Your perfect dinner party checklist:

INTENT

- What is my reason for bringing people together?
- What would I like to happen during the evening?
- Am I hoping for a specific outcome?

THEME

- Will a theme help further my intent?
- Is there an umbrella idea that can tie elements together?

INVITATIONS

- Are there certain people I want to introduce?
- Will guests' energies complement and inspire?

SEATING CHART

- Are there certain individuals who need to meet?
- How do people's personalities mix and match?

SETTING

- Am I comfortable inviting guests to my home?
- How many people can I accommodate?
- Is a private dining area an option?

BUDGET

- What is my budget for the evening?
- What do I expect my guests to contribute?

FOOD

- Does anyone have dietary restrictions?
- How will the menu affect the experience?

ACTIVITIES

- Are there certain topics I want to discuss?
- How can I make all guests feel welcome?
- Do I have tokens or gifts to share?

FOLLOW UP

- Have I thanked everyone appropriately?
- Did everyone exchange contact information?
- Will I plan another dinner?

SELF CARE

- Can I make the next one even better?
- Do I feel satisfied?
- How am I going to treat myself?

ABOUT PROJECT EXPONENTIAL

Our lives are increasingly intertwined, yet the time and space for us to cultivate meaningful connections have become scarce.

Project Exponential examines the ways in which we connect and form relationships, both online and off. It recognizes those who triumph, who add something special to their world, who leave a trace of good in their wake.

We introduce industries with complementary goals and start conversations that matter. We curate events based on unique talents and skills, working carefully to create memorable experiences.

Find people who can inspire and challenge you to grow. Meet someone who can enhance your work and encourage you to question, try, fail, succeed, and develop the connections around you.

Learn more about Project Exponential by visiting our [website](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle introduces successful and driven personalities, creating unexpected relationships in places others have failed to see.

Whether private dinners or large conferences, she uses the magic of surprise and serendipity to develop unique platforms for individuals to learn more about themselves and do better work. Relying on clinical credentials and psychology training, Michelle expertly connects strangers, brands, and businesses, turning first impressions into lasting relationships.

Michelle holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Colorado, a Masters degree from Columbia University, and is a New York State Licensed Master Social Worker.

Learn more by visiting Michelle's [website](#).