

Finding Afternoon





CHAPTER
3



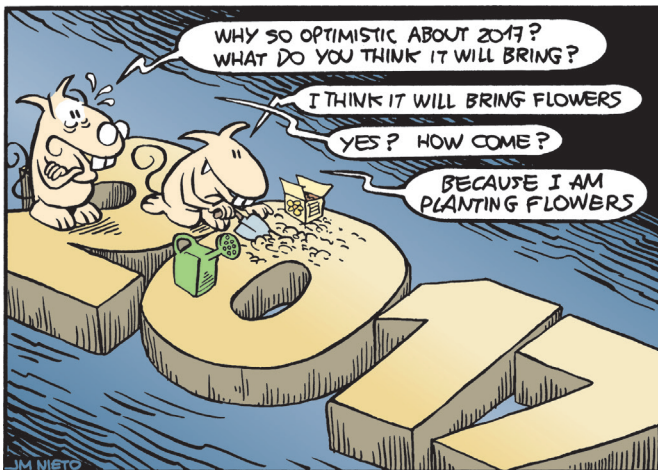
Finding AfterNow

You must give birth to your images.
They are the future waiting to be born...
Fear not the strangeness you feel.
The future must enter you
 long before it happens.
Just wait for the birth,
for the hour of new clarity.

— Rainer Maria Rilke

THE CHAOS AND CONFUSION I encountered when I returned to Japan after the Triple Disasters is more than most of us encounter in our lifetimes. But, we are often slapped by what seems like endless disruptions to our lives. We're frequently overloaded, distracted and stressed. The world around us is often hard to look at without just shaking our heads.

I'm neither a pessimist nor an optimist. I live my life with what Joanna Macy calls "active hope." This cartoon, published towards the end of 2016, gives a sense of what active hope actually is.



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Doing what we can — and what we know is important to do. Sometimes we act alone, doing some good, but perhaps not really changing much. What's often more powerful is when we do it together.

But with all the tensions and suspicion and exhaustion, how do we do it together? How do we talk with each other about what's really important, learning that our differences are assets not liabilities? How do we listen to each other, speak our truth, and figure out what to do AfterNow?

What I have learned from my work in Japan and from many years in other communities around the world is that we need spaces grounded in curiosity, respect and generosity to find our way together. In Japan and in this book, I refer to these kinds of spaces as FutureSessions. How do we create them — these kinds of spaces where we connect, dream and act, now?

This question shifted in some critical ways with the 2015 publication of my Japanese book, *When We Cannot See the Future, Where Do We Begin?* The title has invited me into questions and dialogues that have subtly and substantially altered most of my ideas about change and transformation. In the past, my focus had been on the future, moving towards a horizon. But when the future is invisible — as it seems to be these days — how do we focus? Where do we place our attention? We place it on NOW — right here, the people we are with, and the resources we have on hand. To focus our attention on what is really important. From that space, we can start to co-create and an AfterNow begins to emerge.

In this chapter, I'll explain what I am seeing about the systems, structures and processes that can help us co-create our AfterNow. Today.

I want to be clear, however, that this is not a “how to” manual. Creating these spaces is more art than procedure; more spirit than science. While there are certain things we can do, and watch for, this work is much more than a well-ordered and organized process. Looking into NOW is chaotic, messy, energizing, and frustrating! I want to share some of what has been helpful to me in understanding this work and point out the broad processes, stages and tools that I find helpful.

There are multiple and intertwining steps. First, we must settle our own anxieties, take deep breaths, and be open to what will happen. Next, we begin by inviting together a small group of people to help us



deepen our understanding of what we really want. We come together with a few others as a design team to guide the work. And then finally, we convene people from diverse backgrounds in conversations that matter and which lead to action. These are not linear steps. As we move along, we often swirl back to re-engage with the questions and activities from earlier stages to go deeper. We keep engaging with each other — in face-to-face meetings, on video conferences, on phone calls, in Facebook or LinkedIn, using Google Docs, DropBox, Slack, text messages, e-mails and other forms.

There is an underlying flow that's important regardless of the form of engagement. I've discovered that seven steps help us relationship and co-creation with others.

1. Cultivate our own presence and equanimity

We each carry within us a divine spark of life. When we are able to engage with others from our place of calmness and center, we enter into discovery in the flow of life.

We create the future we want together. We create it from NOW, as ordinary people who listen to each other, tell each other the truth, trust each other enough to try new experiments, and reach out to invite others in. It grows from the very core of our being.

Sounds easy, right? We all know it is not. Our lives are too busy, filled with too much to do and far too many invitations to move towards fear. Sometimes we let our anxieties and fears completely overshadow that spark.

Whenever I am about to engage with a group of people I try to quiet myself. I am not always successful, but I know how important it is to let go of my anxieties, fears and worries. They are there, but I try to not let them “own” the rest of me. I glance at them, thank them for the information they provide and remind them that they are not in charge. When I can show up as a non-anxious presence, I can invite magic in.

It's easy to get pulled towards learning one more methodology, getting one more tool, studying one more aspect of design or mastering one more model. Don't get me wrong — these are important. If I didn't think so, I would not be introducing them in this book. But the foundation in work of discovering AfterNow is twofold: Be yourself and invite others in.



The frameworks I introduced earlier from *Enspirited Leadership* and the life-affirming principles from the Berkana Exchange are two pathways into discovering how to be ourselves. Whenever I find myself in a free fall of confusion, I start to regain my presence and equanimity by returning to these frames.

2. Pay attention to the air, to the space that surrounds us

Pay attention to the BA I love this word BA and all it represents. I've used it and defined it several times already in this book. It's important enough to keep emphasizing. BA is the air we breathe, together. It is the space we occupy. It is the sense of where we are and who we are with. The Japanese have named this sense BA. Even without the word, most of us know the sensation. We enter a room and feel the grief present. We walk on the street and feel a tension in the air. We step into a park and feel a playful energy.

In Japan, there's a simple expression for someone who is not aware of the BA — they *KUUKI-YOMENAI* (can't read the air). Learning to read the air — being still enough to sink in and notice the subtle energy of people individually and collectively — and then acting in ways that invite people to lean into conversation without anxiety — is essential. Paying attention to the BA helps us find our own harmony and allows us to invite others into theirs.

Part of BA has to do with the physical spaces we work in. Preferably those that are airy and light, close to nature, present to beauty. Many years ago, architect Christopher Alexander, without calling it BA, described some of the physical aspects of these kinds of spaces in his book, *Timeless Way of Building*²². In the beginning of his book, Alexander wrote *we know what the quality without a name — this aliveness — is like in our own lives. This quality can only come to life in us when it exists within the world that we are part of. We can come alive only to the extent the buildings and towns we live in are alive. This quality without a name is circular: it exists in us, when it exists in our*

22 Christopher Alexander's 1979 book set the stage for exploration of what's now called Pattern Language — looking for the patterns of relationships.



buildings; and it only exists in our buildings when we have it in ourselves. Alexander then went on to ask what is it that makes a space come alive?

In the 70s, just as I was really learning about facilitating and hosting, that question captivated my attention. Alexander described the basic patterns in a space that created aliveness — relative position of windows and doors, relationships of height to other dimensions, presence of light. While we usually don't have a chance to re-architect the spaces in which we work, there are always things we can do to bring out the aliveness and beauty—uncluttered, a simple circle of chairs, some flowers in the center, ample light.

And, as Alexander so wisely pointed out, a key part of BA is “what we have in ourselves.” When we enter a room with respect, it helps to create a good BA. The choice is always ours. We can enter with suspicion, fear and judgment. These feelings make the air in the BA heavy. We can enter thinking no one will want our ideas, or we can enter thinking our ideas are the most important. Both of these attitudes weaken the BA. If we choose to enter with an attitude of respect and welcome for all others who arrive, then we begin to invite magic into the room. We begin by knowing that we need each other.

As human beings, we're naturally curious. We understand that we only know a little bit and that we need to find out more. We know we need the ideas, perspectives and experience of others. But we also get afraid. We think that we're supposed to have the answers and that asking questions shows a weakness. It's not true. Our questions — the things we don't know — open the possibility of creating something new. The Nuu-chah-nulth tribe of Vancouver Island reveal this deep spirit in a core aspect of their worldview: “It is unkind not to ask for help.”²³

When we arrive with generosity, we immediately invite in the generosity of others. I mean generosity at all levels — our spirit, our ideas, our knowledge, our questions and the many resources we have available to us. A BA that is filled with generosity is filled with possibilities; together we have enough to find a place to begin.

Whenever I am in a space with others — whether it is a planning meeting or a major community conference — my intent is to show up as a non-anxious presence and to really be interested in the ideas

23 See Tsawalk in Additional Resources: Bibliography



and opinions and hopes of others in the room. If I have that presence, I can invite others to do the same. By coming in with this intention, my presence itself extends this invitation.

As organizers of, and participants in, this work of creating a new now, the single most important work we can do is with our own spirits. The more we can be present to each other without being overwhelmed by our own fear and anxiety and the more we can embrace curiosity, respect and generosity, the more likely we will be able to do the work we need to do, together.

3. Find a few others who care

One thing that stands out for me in all the stories I've heard is that we do this work of creating what's next best when we work **together**. We're smarter together, we're better together, we get more done together. This way of being is a deep cultural competence in Japan. For thousands of years, people in Japan have depended on each other to grow rice, build community and prosper.

The Triple Disasters introduced something more into this cultural competence. Across the Tohoku region, and all across Japan, the disasters were an energetic push for people to stand up for what they want. People who before might have politely waited, stood up and said, "This is important; I need to do it. I'm not waiting anymore." What's unusual in my experience around the world is that people in Japan are both standing up and standing together.

This is so important. I come back to this as a foundation: standing up and standing together.

In the United States, people stand up, but often we don't stand together. Historically, people in Japan have been better at staying together than at standing up. When we can do both — stand up and stand together — extraordinary possibilities become available.

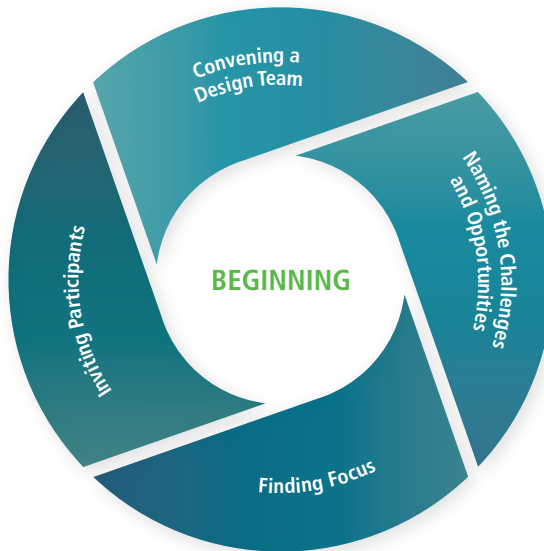
I've been sharing and nurturing this incredible energy of standing up and standing together with people all around the world. We need it everywhere. We find this energy when we enter authentic space — good BA — with other people who are exploring questions that matter.

How do you put this into action? Let's say that you have something you want to do. Something you want to stand up for; or as I

suggested in Chapter 2, a calling has found you. Where do you begin? You begin by finding several other people who care about the same thing. Think of it as tossing a pebble in a pond. We want to generate larger and larger ripples. It begins with a few people who you call together for a dialogue. You begin by being brave enough to share the tender possibilities that are growing inside you and then invite those people to explore and bring life to what is emerging.

In the beginning, there are typically four steps.

- **Convening a Design Team:** We start to get to know each other. Who's here? What do we care about and what is important to us right now? What are the new and old stories we carry within us? How can we invite others to join us?
- **Naming the Challenges and Opportunities.** What is the particular challenge and opportunity that calls us together? It's like peeling an onion: We keep going deeper and deeper. What is the heart of the matter that concerns us right now? What do we care about and why?
- **Finding Focus.** Often what we care about is pretty big. What is our initial focus? What is the starting point? Where can we begin? What lies at the core of the invitation we might offer to others to join us?





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- **Inviting Participants.** Who should we invite? Who do we already know that cares about this challenge? Whose voice is needed? Most importantly: *Who can we invite who will come with respect, curiosity, and generosity?* Depending on the focus, we may issue a broad, open invitation; other times we may only invite specific people. Even with the broad invitation it is important to think carefully about whose voices will be particularly important and to find ways to invite them.

This process of convening, naming, finding and inviting is an iterative one, always reaching out further to invite in a broader range of people who want to co-create new possibilities.

4. Open a path for fresh action with questions

When we come together to learn with each other, to think with each other, to begin building a future together, questions open up new pathways. Our initial impulse for action often starts with on old and incomplete knowledge. If we actually want to create something new, we first need to be in inquiry with each other. Good inquiry always begins with good questions. Asking the right question opens up a conversation and keeps it engaging. A good question reminds us of what has meaning, triggers our curiosity and invites us to explore further.

The most powerful questions emerge when a design team sits with each other for hours on end trying to discover what the real questions are! We sit together, we talk and listen, we ask questions. We take our time, often with a fair amount of silence, discovering deeper and more important questions. As we do so, we strengthen our relations with each other and with the work we are undertaking. Patience is required, as are deep sensing and deep listening. When we approach the process with curiosity ourselves, really eager to discover what may reveal itself, our openness attracts the questions we need

One of the questions that we discover while sitting together will often become the “calling question” for a dialogue. Calling questions give off a particular aroma — one that attracts participation and arouses curiosity. Years ago, my Danish friend, Toke Moeller, worked with a group and discovered the question, “What else could a school





be?” Simple. Crisp. Evocative. It became a calling question for many gatherings on learning and community.

FutureSessions grow out of powerful questions. The questions we choose to begin the process, and those questions that people discover through dialogue, are critical to the success of any session. Here’s what I’ve found useful for choosing questions:²⁴

- A well-crafted question attracts energy and focuses attention on what matters. Open-ended questions — ones that don’t have a simple yes/no answer — are always best. They provoke the imagination.
- Good questions invite inquiry and curiosity. We’re not trying to promote action or solve problems immediately. We’re working to discover more of what is possible.
- Great questions are the ones that stimulate people to go further, uncovering more and more good ideas and possibilities.
- A powerful question
 - ▶ Is simple and clear
 - ▶ Is thought provoking
 - ▶ Generates energy
 - ▶ Focuses inquiry
 - ▶ Challenges assumptions
 - ▶ Opens new possibilities
 - ▶ Evokes more questions!

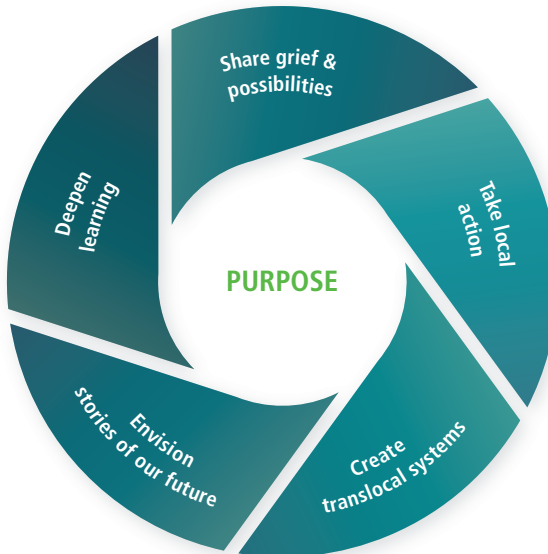
Powerful questions dance with clarity of purpose. Good questions help us understand our purpose. Purpose helps us find good questions. Look for examples of powerful questions that can open up conversations that matter in Additional Resources on AfterNow.Today.

24 The Art of Powerful Questions is a wonderful resource available through the World Café.



5. Gather with purpose

Let's face it. Most of us are tired. We're busy. We have more to do than there are hours in the day. We've all spent far too many hours in pointless meetings where nothing happens. They tend to be boring and frustrating. Too often, we organize gatherings without being really clear about why we want to call people together. When we're not clear, it is unlikely that the right people will show up and it is even less likely that those who do show up will have a productive dialogue.



After the disasters, I was part of many FutureSessions focused on purposes in the five different realms represented in the spiral below. In the beginning, in 2011, most of my work was around grief and possibilities. As the months and years passed, I engaged in more work in the other realms as well.

These realms flow into each other. Systems shift and transformation requires work with all five. It happens naturally and it can happen more powerfully with a bit of organization and insight.



Share Grief and Possibilities. Sometimes we just need to be with each other. We need to share our grief together. Unspoken grief becomes toxic. Held too closely, it causes us to die a little. We become lost and overwhelmed and uncertain. When we speak it out, it becomes fuel for change. It's the same with possibilities. We need to dream together. We need to be in a wild, open exploration of what is possible now that was not possible before. When we hide dreams away, they wither. Spoken out, they grow.

Both grief and possibilities can be fuel for fires of active hope. Good dialogue brings both out in the open.

Often, specific ideas begin to bubble up in this realm. But the main purpose is simply to help people get unstuck; to create a safe space in which people are able to speak from their grief; and to convene an energized space where the sparkle of new possibilities can become visible.

Take Local Action. We live in a time of agonizing needs and unparalleled opportunity. Many of us want to do something to improve our lives and our communities. Maybe it is starting a cooperative housing project. Perhaps it is beginning an aquaponics farm as a viable small business that gives 30% of its product to food banks. Or it might be founding a respite program where parents who are stressed to the point of breaking can leave their kids for several days. In these FutureSessions, people brainstorm ideas, develop plans and prototypes, determine their next steps and decide when they will come together again to share their results. People from diverse perspectives and backgrounds come together because they know what's important and they want to take action.

Sometimes local action takes the form of protest; other times it is the vital work of advising government or others about what they ought to do. My own emphasis and interest when it comes to action is what we can do now, together, with the resources we already have that we can mobilize to begin. In the years immediately following the Triple Disasters, people were coming together in communities and businesses to act together to build the new. Sometimes the work was haphazard.





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Other times it was more organized. I believe that the actions and outcomes will always be more effective when they emerge from the kinds of dialogues hosted in FutureSessions.

Create Translocal Systems. “Translocal” means connecting people in different local areas who are doing similar work. All change is local. Change happens in a particular place; something new is created. It shows up in a local system. But most of us are concerned about more than a single change. We know that the challenges and opportunities in our world require systemic shifts. We’re concerned about transforming the ways in which we live. What moves us from change to transformation?

One way transformation happens is that people who are working on the same themes in different local areas begin to connect with each other, share their learning, and think together about what happens next. This is what we mean by “translocal,” connecting people in different local areas who are doing similar work. For example, in the Berkana Exchange, we identified six different themes ranging from “businesses we believe in” to “upcycling.” Our work contributed to the growth of BALLE — the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies²⁵ just as it contributed to what’s now a loosely connected movement of people around the world who are upcycling what would have been waste into useful products.²⁶

If we want to transform the ways we live, we need to create and nurture translocal connections. We do this by inviting people working with similar issues and possibilities in different places together. This is the kind of work that was happening more and more in Japan’s Tohoku region, three years after the disasters. Things were stabilized — it was time to look for the new.

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- 25 See the bibliography in Additional Resources for details on this thriving movement to support growth of locally based, independent businesses.
- 26 See the bibliography in Additional Resources for one example of the planetary effort that recognizes waste as our most underutilized resource.





Envision Stories of Our Future. Many say that it will take 20-30 years to rebuild the Tohoku region or any other place shattered by major disasters. But what does it mean to “rebuild”? What will they “rebuild” to? Is it just more of the same? What will this future look like? Even before the Triple Disasters, things were difficult in the Tohoku. They were faced with an aging population, a declining economy, and the flight of young people to Tokyo. I often heard people in the rural areas say that they had a sense of not being as good as people in Tokyo. Returning to that past did not seem so inviting. But what would a different future look like? Could they imagine and create a future where people thrive in Tohoku and throughout all of Japan?

The Triple Disasters cracked open the assumptions and barriers of the past and made it more possible to move in new directions. All across the world, social, political and environmental upheavals are creating such openings. The challenge is how to take advantage of these openings for bold and imaginative thinking, engage with each other to imagine the kind of future we want, and then act together to create it.

Part of the challenge of envisioning a new future is finding new stories that capture our hopes and dreams. We are in a time when we need new stories everywhere in our world. But it can be difficult to imagine the new until we have a way to open ourselves to what’s possible, to think beyond what we know. Processes such as Transformative Scenario Planning can help with this. In Chapter 6, I describe TSP and a few of these processes and how you can use them in your communities. Underlying each of these processes is the simple fact that we need new stories for the future that we can believe in and act upon.

This work of creating new stories is happening in many ways in Japan. The US based Pachamama Alliance’s Awakening the Dreamer Symposium is prospering in Japan as one way to invite people to consider their dreams. The Goi Peace Foundation and Byakko Shinko Kai with their global Symphony of Peace Prayers are helping people find their “divine spark.” The possibility that happiness could be the basis of new stories for our lives was being explored at the first annual Happiness 2.0 conference in Tokyo in early 2017. Joanna Macy’s framework of Active Hope is helping people find their next story for how they will live their lives.



Deepen Learning. Everyone, everywhere is busy these days with hardly a moment to spare. This is particularly true in areas recovering from disasters. In 2013, I watched as colleague after colleague in Tohoku entered hospitals as they dropped from exhaustion. Everyone worked as hard and fast they could. While it would have been nice to pause and reflect — chew your experience — most simply did not have or make the time. When time might have been available for this, instead some expert would stand up in the front of the room and offer training. The immediate need for action was constantly overriding the need for rest and reflection. That's not how deep, generative learning happens.

Often when we're doing work that we think is important, we just keep trying to do more — and faster. We're usually learning a lot as we fly through our days, but until we stop and reflect on what we're doing, the chances are high that the learning will get lost. Often the best way to learn is to pause and talk with others who are engaged in similar work. Reflective learning environments help us share what we are seeing and what meaning we are making from our experiences. Doing so, we each get clearer about our own learning. When we combine our knowledge with others, we see even more. When we have a firm foundation in our own learning, we are then ready to ask real questions to experts from outside our immediate system. Suddenly, what they offer is no longer theoretical and abstract, but something that can be immediately grasped through the lens of our own experiences.

When we form different intentional structures — learning networks, social labs, communities of practice — where we can join together with others for the purpose of learning on a regular basis, we begin to create the conditions for true transformation.

The structure and methodologies of FutureCenters is one way to host and foster this learning. One example of this comes from Entrepreneurial Training for Innovative Communities (ETIC),²⁷ a Tokyo based-nonprofit created in the 1990s. After the Triple Disasters, it immediately organized to make it possible for people to make 3 to

27 EETIC has been doing extraordinary work in Tohoku since immediately after the disasters. Learn more about their work all over Japan on their website.

9 month volunteer commitments. ETIC supported these volunteers with modest stipends as well as with learning opportunities. I worked with ETIC to offer FutureSessions which emphasized three levels of learning:

- Learning from self
- Learning together with peers
- Learning from teachers and wisdom keepers

Each of these levels is important. We begin with a STOP. Then draw a deep breath and ask: “What am I seeing? What am I doing? What am I becoming aware of?” Together, we reflect on our own experiences, engage in dialogues with colleagues doing similar work, and bring in perspectives and knowledge from beyond our systems.

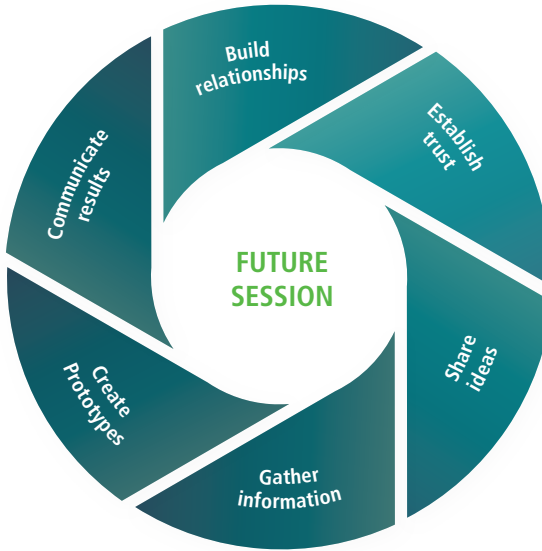
This deepening of learning helps us become conscious of what we already know and acts as a compass as we find our next steps. The specific learning in each session with ETIC was unique — based on the questions and energy present — and ranged from a sense of solidarity in working with the unknown, to committing to keeping our own health and happiness as essential elements of anything we did in the wider world.

At the same time as this work with ETIC, I also became involved with the Co-Cre Project — the co-creation project — sponsored by Recruit Holdings, a major corporation in Japan. We started bringing in people working at the local level across Japan, not so much to form translocal networks for action, but to just pause and learn from each other. More recently, NewStories, working with other key sponsors in Japan, has created a Japan/US Learning Cohort of the leading facilitators of social innovation. In all of these examples, the purpose is to deepen learning and in each case the approaches used for FutureSessions are at the core of these dialogues.

6. Engage with others

FutureSessions are a way to engage in a group of people in conversations that matter which lead to action.

There are six overlapping stages in FutureSessions. They don't necessarily take place sequentially. Each is essential for success.



Build Relationships. Real change, deep change, requires people who are not normally in relationship with each other to come into relationship. It requires opening to the other.

We are often disconnected from one another. Just being aware of our relationship is itself a shift. Teams of doctors in the US have noticed that surgical procedures go better when the members of the team begin by introducing themselves to each other!

Building relationships happens in many ways. Sometimes it is in a dialogue — but that's not always the right starting place. I remember one of my colleagues talking about people in temporary housing after the disasters. "They don't want to be in relationship with each other. Their lives have been taken away. They don't want to be here. They hope they will leave soon, even though they know they won't." He said that rather than starting with dialogue, he was organizing different



opportunities for people to play with each other. “If I do that first,” he said, “then maybe they will start to get interested in each other.”

Others have talked about how sometimes it is better to have some common project — building something, cleaning something up, organizing a festival — so that people work side-by-side and begin to be curious about each other. What’s important is that people start to recognize each other as real human beings with their own personal stories.

Establish Trust. Our dreams are precious. Our grief is personal. Our fears can be overwhelming. It takes time for us to share our dreams, grief and fears. As we do so, we begin to create trust. One of those tricky paradoxes is at play here. Sharing who we really are invites trust — but it is hard to share who we are without trust already existing. We often have to take a leap of faith and be vulnerable with others to create trust.

To a large extent, trust has to be built over time and in place. In the beginning, perhaps, we “test” trusting one another. We know from FutureSessions work all over Japan that trust increases when people share their stories with each other — our personal history, grief and fears, hopes and dreams, or vision for what we want to do. When these stories is shared in a good BA, people begin to see more of who each other truly are. When this happens, trust naturally follows.

When we trust each other, dialogue flows more deeply. We are able to access more ideas, examine possibilities, create new models and organize ourselves for new collaborations. As we experience each other’s integrity, generosity and good-heartedness, the trust deepens and we are able to create even more together.

Share Ideas. Every community is filled with people with good ideas about how to make things better. When we create a BA where people feel comfortable sharing those ideas, collectively we begin to make visible the range of possibilities needed to move ahead. In many ways, this is the easiest of all the stages, IF we have done the work to build relationships and establish trust.



People are usually eager — and sometimes a little shy — about sharing their ideas. Often working at first in twos or threes or fours is a good way to get ideas flowing. Appreciative Inquiry²⁸ can lead to sharing and talking in small groups that then leads to unrestrained brainstorming that begins to create an abundant list of possibilities. People then see that their idea is one part of a bigger picture that we create collectively. Simple techniques of “dotting” — giving each person in the room five big dots with adhesive backs to place next to their preferences in the room, or using some of the other methodologies offered in the Additional Resources section of AfterNow.Today, helps to bring forward those ideas most interesting for future consideration.

Gather Information. Once a community has started to surface the ideas it wants to seriously consider, it’s time for more work. One of the things a community needs to know is what it doesn’t know! When a community starts to get motivated because its own ideas are beginning to take on form, it is time for the research to begin.

This research can take many forms: learning journeys to other communities to see what they have done, engaging student teams from local universities to do research, identifying and interviewing people, businesses and other organizations who have some expertise in the area being discussed. FutureSessions are a good place to begin to organize information and its various methodologies are useful in talking about the information gathered and continuing to develop new ideas.

Create Prototypes. Eventually we’re ready to try something. *Prototype* means we don’t have to get it right. We’re trying something to see what we can learn. It begins by coming up with a model or a plan. Prototypes range from preliminary to testable models. A prototype might be a detailed model using play-doh or drawings or words or other forms, or it might be a demonstration event. An idea for town planning might be

28 Appreciative Inquiry, developed by David Cooperrider from Case Western Reserve University in the 90s, is a powerful process used around the world to focus and amplify what we appreciate as a starting point for deep change. Additional Resources: Methodologies on the AfterNow.Today website.

prototyped with a three-dimensional model of an area being considered. A new program to match elderly in the community with young people as reading buddies might be prototyped as an intergenerational reading evening. A possibility of a new local business drying and preserving flowers might be prototyped by preparing an initial batch of flowers for a local farmer's market.

In other words, creating a prototype means going ahead and learning more about a possible idea by doing what you can with the resources at hand. We don't wait for anyone. Just start. When we build a model, or develop a demonstration, we see how our ideas work. We also see how the images held by different people may have sounded the same, but as we move ahead we discover differences that can make our work stronger. In the world of innovation, some people say, "Fail early and fail often." This is really just a reminder that we usually learn more from our mistakes than from our successes. Remember:

- We know how to do this.
- We know how to turn to each other.
- We know how to reach inside ourselves for inner strength.
- We know how to go alone when we must and how to stay together when we can.

Prototyping opens up a space of creating in the real world.

Communicate Results. Prototyping gives us something real and tangible to talk about with others. We've gone from ideas to seeing what we can make work. We try something, keep track of what happens, and then come back to another FutureSession to discuss next steps. Our work grows and deepens as we make what we've done visible to those we need to partner with as we go to the next stage. That next stage might involve:

- **Connecting with other possible participants:** Sometimes we try to grow the field of people involved in co-creating new possibilities and developing new collaborative partnerships. In other words, we want to make our work visible so we can connect with other people and invite them to join us.
- **Presenting to those who might support the work:** Sometimes we have taken a piece of work as far as we can with the resources



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we have immediately available. Now it is time to take it to the next level. In a business, this may mean that we need to present our work to those in positions of authority in order to get decisions and budgets for proceeding further. In a community, this might mean it is time to reach out to government with ideas and proposals that have been tested. For a nonprofit organization, it might mean it is time to sit down and develop a next stage plan and seek funding. In each of these cases, we are communicating with those whose support is necessary to go to the next level.

- **Sharing with the community:** Other times we want to tell the community what we've been up to. We want to share our original concerns, the ideas we've developed, our research, and the prototypes we've produced as a report back to the community. By doing so, we open up our work in ways that can lead to unexpected synergies and may also surface those who are opposed to our ideas so we can dialogue with them as well.

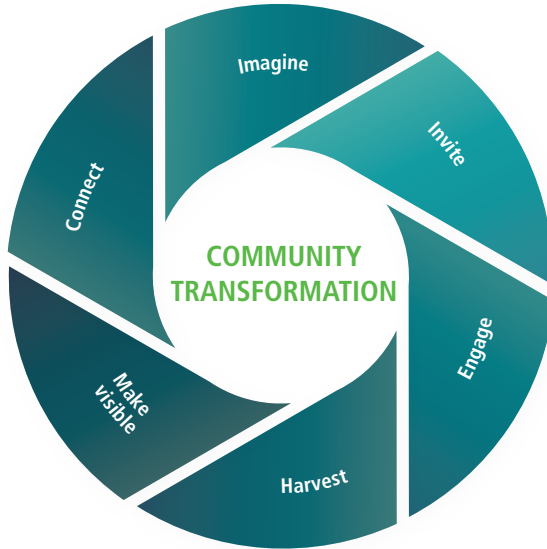
These six steps — building relationships, establishing trust, sharing ideas, gathering information, creating prototypes, and communicating results — are what we do in FutureSessions. Sometimes several of these steps happen in a single session; often a series of sessions over an arc of time is required. As we work over that arc of time, we keep coming back together in FutureSessions, encountering each other in the ways described in this chapter. We use these steps to mobilize our communities to create the futures we all want. It is long-term work; it takes decades of being in the now to create a new future. It takes time. We have to keep connecting with each other, listening deeply, sharing our insights and hopes and dreams.

7. Move from Dialogue to Action to Community Transformation

This is another pattern I want to be explicit about. The “communicating results” step above begins to show this pattern. It is important that we keep a focused eye on the work immediately in front of us — the action we are taking. These days, we are often encouraged



to “focus like a laser beam” on a specific aspect of our work or life. Yet, I find that we also need a soft gaze that takes in the larger system we want to influence and transform. I experience this soft gaze as a spiral with six stages:



These six basic stages can grow movements for community transformation. What’s important is that we see this as a continuous cycle, a spiral, of deepening engagement as we search together for AfterNow. We move, with exquisite attention to each single stage of the journey, knowing that doing each well opens further possibilities.

Imagine. It all begins with imagination. For many years in my work I thought we needed to begin with clarity of purpose. I’ve realized that clarity of purpose is too narrow and constricting. When we focus too soon, we exclude many things that may be useful. We actually need to start with imagination. With curiosity.

We need to continually challenge ourselves to see more possibilities. Sometimes we do this through dialogue — asking questions such as, *What is possible now that was not possible before?* Sometimes it happens through brainstorming — quickly listing our different ideas and different approaches. Learning journeys, where a group goes out to

closely observe what is going on in different systems, can also act as a stimulus for imagination. Slowing down, getting out of the old traps in our heads, and inviting in people with different ideas and perspectives are all ways to stimulate our imaginations.

When a design team meets for the first time, the first thing we need to do is look at what has happened so far and open ourselves to reflect on what else is possible. Through these actions, we imagine our way into the future and set the stage for a deeper inquiry.

Invite. From that place of imagination, the design team asks itself: Who do we need to invite in order to explore these questions? Who has a stake in this area? Who has different ideas and experience than we do? Who will it be important to involve if we are going to be successful in creating something new?

We want to stretch — but not so far that we break. We want to involve people with many backgrounds: women and men, old and young, people engaged in many different kinds of daily work. We want people with diverse knowledge and perspectives and we want them from different sectors of the community — business, government, nonprofit organizations, citizens, academia, and professionals.

We don't want to try to convince anyone about anything. This is not about selling or promoting. It is about attracting and inviting. Our work is to find the people with diverse experience and perspectives who want to be with each other — the people who can come together with curiosity, respect and generosity. We don't want to leave anyone out — but we don't need to try to bring everyone in.

Each time we convene a FutureSession, we need to remember that it is just the next step in a process and that there will be other sessions as well. The essential question to ask is,

Who needs to come now, to our next session?

Engage. Then, of course, we engage with each other. We come together in powerful ways that help us see our common concerns from a deeper perspective and as an invitation into new collaborative action. I've written about FutureSession engagement in the preceding section. I just want to situate it in this spiral. As we engage, we harvest.



Harvest. In any dialogue session, there are always many things going on. Many different levels of interaction. Sometimes we work in a circle of the whole; other times we work in a variety of small groups addressing the same questions or exploring different areas. At regular intervals, it is important to pause and invite participants to look back on what's been said by harvesting the fruits of their conversation.

Many things contribute to a good harvest. Sometimes it is as simple as bringing the essence of what has been happening at smaller levels of the system — pairs, trios, groups — into the middle of the room. Sometimes just a sample is needed, sometimes a more complete report. Using “post-its” to make maps on the wall of ideas and possibilities; having a graphic illustrator who is listening deeply to everything being said and bringing it forward in colorful illustrations; having sections of walls dedicated for sharing poems or quotes or resources — all of these can be part of this harvesting.

Sometimes we get more energetic and use a process like “Social Presencing Theatre” from Theory U, where a group of people listen and inquire deeply into the field and create a simple and powerful performance to make the invisible within the room more visible. Working with other non-verbal media — group body sculpture, play-doh clay models, drawing pictures — can give important new insights about what's happening. Graphic Harvesting — a skilled listener and artist making wall murals of what's being said — adds a powerful dimension to any gathering²⁹.

Make Visible. Often our intent is to grow our inquiry and broaden the community of people involved. That's the next step beyond harvesting. Often harvesting is of most use to the people who were part of a dialogue. It helps them remember the collective energy, the “air” in the room and what it felt like to be there. It captures and shares some of the ideas and context as well. That's great — but there is a next step in this dance. If we want to grow this inquiry and to nurture an overall cycle of change, we need to make what is harvested visible to the broader

29 Drawn Together through Visual Practice illustrates this wide field of harvesting.





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community. This means we look for opportunities to go from the specific information of harvest to creating knowledge that can be shared more broadly.

It's exciting when a group sits with what's been gathered in the harvest and asks, *What does this really mean? What does it point us towards? Who needs to know about this?* These questions open the door to create different artifacts — blogs, articles, edited videos, photo collections, and specific tweets — that begin to share the deeper meaning present.

Connect. The next step in this spiral is when we use what we have made visible to connect our work and dreams and questions to more people. Earlier I spoke of this work as dropping stones in a pond. When we make our work visible, we send the ripples further in ways that enable us to connect with more people. We continue to use the spirit of invitation to welcome more people in, to share our explorations, our questions and what we are beginning to see as possible. We use both our hearts and minds to continually ask, “Who else can we invite in?” We use our knowledge as a basis for inclusion rather than as a means to exclude.

Imagine. The spiral keeps turning as we step again into a time of imagining and going through the six steps again, going deeper and deeper.



For three and a half years — from April of 2011 through the end of 2014 — I kept introducing these ways of thinking about dialogue. Sometimes I was invited to design and host different kinds of FutureSessions. Sometimes I was invited to talk about the structure and form of this work. My modest ability to speak Japanese was something I danced with continually. Another part of that dance was discovering both the power and the limitations of doing this work as a





foreigner, an outsider. I could make almost no contribution to the rescue and emergency work required in the disaster region in 2011, so most of my convening was in other parts of Japan — often bringing people from Tohoku together with others in Japan. In 2012 and 2013, I showed up wherever I was called in the region. By 2014, my focus was shifting to helping people deepen their learning in the disaster area and across all of Japan.

By 2014 it was also time to pause, raise our heads and look around at how Japan was changing.

