

THE KEY TO GREAT DIALOGUE AMONG WOMEN LEADERS IS NOT ABOUT WHO OR WHERE OR WHEN... BUT HOW.

More Meaning in the Meeting

There are meetings. And then there are meetings that can change the world.

Such meetings happen when the right women come together in the right way at the right time to think broadly, talk freely, and share deeply. The connections and concepts born in these dialogues have the power to open doors, shift paradigms, and blaze new trails.

The Women's Leadership Center at Williams Bay is dedicated to exactly this concept. But we're not confined to our new campus to leverage it. And the way we're leveraging it underscores the potential of accomplished women to lead positive change.

"How we gather matters," writes consultant and author Priya Parker in *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*. Yet the nature of gatherings has been changing. On the one hand, we are busier and more interconnected than ever, thanks to constant texts, email, IMs and news alerts. On the other hand, we are spending less time with each other physically, according to the American Time Use Survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

While the pandemic contributed to that solitude, the trend began before COVID-19. Reversing it is something we are taking on—and it's the premise of special gatherings hosted by the team behind Lincoln Road Enterprises and the Women's Leadership Center. Over the last year, we've put together several personalized, strategy-oriented dinners for groups of around 20 accomplished women. Their backgrounds have been diverse; they haven't known each other before meeting. Our agenda each time has been to spark fresh thinking on complex issues that women leaders face while also building networks among them in the areas where we're focused.

And it worked: In the spaces we generated for them, these women found their differences receding and their connections growing, which encouraged more honest dialogue, more innovative ideas, and a flood of creativity.

Such a capacity to engender trust, honesty, and openness is key, we're discovering, to bringing women leaders together to do good work. And it seems to be a capacity women manifest easily when the room feels "right."

"Our world needs more jointly sourced solutions—and women do that naturally," says MarySue Barrett, Senior Strategy Advisor for the Women's Leadership Center and Lincoln Road Enterprises. Barrett acknowledges that the Women's Leadership Center team is growing skill in putting together these types of gatherings—how to create the right kind of intimate, warm setting, how to get women feeling at ease and relaxed, and how to create an atmosphere where they share truthfully.

The result is a level of collaboration that can open doors to new ideas, opportunities, and missions. And such creativity is needed. "Until you get women's experience and perspective applied to complex problems, you won't get the best solution," added Dorri McWhorter, former President and CEO of the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago and recent participant in one of these special sessions.

"We spend our lives gathering," author Priya Parker reminds us. And these days, "coming together is more important than ever. Gatherings crackle and flourish when real thought goes into them."

"We're just trying to find the best ways for women to innovate and produce to make the world a better place," says Ann Drake, President and Chair of Lincoln Road and founder of the Women's Leadership Center. "We tried to think, 'What makes women successful? What works for them?' And that's what we're doing here."