

Four positions for a Host Leader

Mark McKergow and Helen Bailey's original book *Host* presented for the first time their models of six roles and four positions for a host leader. While their book is not the first to look at hosting as a key aspect of being with people, it was the first to explore in depth and in detail, through history and in different cultures, what great hosts actually do, and how this can transfer directly into leading. The metaphor of a host is instantly apparent to almost everyone. These roles and positions add a wealth of detail and possibility

Step forward or step back?

The key question for leaders: are you going to step forward or step back next? Both of these moves, and combining them into a dance, are at the heart of Host Leadership. Are you going to step forward to make something happen, or step back and allow others space and time to respond and make their own contributions?

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It's good to think about how we spend our valuable time at work. When was the last time, however, you thought about *where* you spend your time? The answer to this is not just 'in the office', 'in the car' or whatever – it's about the kind of positions we take up in relation to others. It turns out that host leaders are very good at moving from one position to another, alternating close contact with their 'guests' and more detached and reflective standpoints. We can all use these lessons to spread our attention and build relationships quickly and effectively.

In the spotlight

Being in the spotlight is very much the public-facing part of the leader's role. It is where the action is, in full view of everyone—and everything about you gives off messages. Being comfortable taking the spotlight from time to time is a key part of everyone's job these days.



'Spotlight' moments are the times when everyone's eyes are on you - the team briefing, the pitch meeting, the presentation to potential customers. These are of course key times. However, there is much more to building successful engagement than simply being a confident presenter.

With the guests

Taking the metaphor of hosting, a good host knows the value of spending time with their guests. This is also time spent in public, although the focus will be different. Rather than being in the spotlight, with all eyes on you, you can take time to go around and "work the room."





This is a much less formal process, and often involves spending time with people individually or in very small groups. It's time for catching up, asking how the person is getting on, and connecting with others. This is time for discovering and remembering people's strengths, interests, particular concerns and so on. Lots of key information can be discovered and stored away for future use. Think of how good it is when someone takes enough interest to remember your football team, children's names or dream holiday plans.

In the gallery

The gallery is a place high above the action. From there, the room can be surveyed from a position above the hubbub and interaction down where the party is happening. From a spot such as this, it's possible to take an overview, to see what's happening without (for a moment) the distraction of being in the hubbub.

Time in the gallery is time observing from above. In our normal work life, this might include:

- Stepping back from everyday business and distraction
- Taking a pause to look at the big picture
- Taking a "helicopter view"—looking from above at wider issues, progress and challenges ahead



In the kitchen

As a host, we will invariably sometimes retreat to the kitchen. This is a more private place—where preparation is done, where family members may come and go, but which the guests are normally steered away from. The kitchen will be the place in which we work in private, out of view of most of the guests.



This can be the most challenging place to find time – after all, life is so busy getting out there! Effective leaders and managers know the value of private time in the kitchen – to reflect and review, to discuss things with trusted colleagues and confidants, to take time to learn with a coach. Even a focused and scheduled hour per week in the kitchen can make a huge difference.

The six roles for a host leader are available on another resource sheet from [Host Leadership](#).

