

## Deep Hospitality: Creating Space for Change

My friends: as one of the conference organizers, I want to welcome you again to Tools for Change. Today's theme is Creating Space for Change and I want to talk about how all of us create a space for change here at Caux this week. We can all create space for each other, a safe space where we each learn, teach, reflect and grow. So I am talking about the idea of hospitality: the idea that I am a host and you are my guest, and I invite you into a special kind of space. Today I want to deepen this idea and to talk about some of the profound possibilities of what it can mean to show hospitality.

First of all, you may think that because I am a conference organizer, when I talk about creating space my main thought is about how I and the team that I'm part of can create space for the Tools for Change participants. You might think that we are the hosts and you are the guests and it is for us to show hospitality. Well, this is true, but it doesn't end there. Here at Caux, every person makes a difference; everyone works together to make this house operate, and everyone has the power and the responsibility to show hospitality to someone else. At dinner with a new friend I can create space for this person to change; to my roommate I can show generous hospitality. In every conversation I can ask myself, what can I give to this person right now to make them feel welcomed, sheltered, and alive? Hospitality is not just what conference planners show to participants: hospitality can be ordinary, everyday, and part of the fabric of our lives.

A second deepening of what hospitality means is that I, as the host, actually invite my guest not only to change, but to help me change. I surrender myself a little bit and allow my guest to open up to me in total honesty. Let me tell you a story. Recently I spent a night at my friend's house. In the evening I sat with him and his roommate and I could see that something was not right with their friendship. And I wanted to tell my friend what I saw: but this was going to sound critical, and I was a guest in his house, and I didn't feel that it was my place to raise the issue.

But that night, after my friend's roommate had gone to bed, my friend and I were still talking. He turned to me and said, "Zeke, how are you enjoying your stay here? Is everything ok?" This is a common, polite thing to ask, and the correct answer is, "I'm fine," or something like, "could I have a towel?" It is not a request for criticism. So I said, "I'm fine!" But he persisted: "Really, Zeke, is there anything at all on your mind?" Anything you'd like to say?" At this point I thought of his relationship with his roommate—but still I felt that it was not my place to say this. And I don't believe that he knew I had something on my mind, something in particular that he was trying to get me to say: he was asking in the most general way possible. But still I said, for the second time, "Everything is great!" Well, again he asked. "Zeke, anything at all that you want to say to me. Anything at all." And the third time, I felt that it was time to speak.

Do you see? Before the third time, I was saying to myself that he only appears to be inviting me to speak, but still I don't feel comfortable saying something critical or difficult. Only the third time made his invitation open enough, honest enough, that I could really feel comfortable to speak to him. So finally I said, "Yes, there is something..." And I told him

what I had observed about his roommate, and he listened openly and we had an honest discussion about it long into the night. My friend's hospitality was so generous that it invited me, the guest, to safely tell him, the host, something negative about him—to make it all right for me to open up even when opening up meant something difficult.

This is the hospitality of inviting someone to be honest with me: it is self-surrendering hospitality. As the host I surrender by inviting the guest to speak up, to tell me something difficult, and even to ask me to change.

And now a third time, let me push hospitality deeper. Often when I am the host I may think that the person I'm welcoming is more or less like me. But here at Caux we are from so many different places. We have different cultures and religions, different backgrounds and personal stories. And even someone who is from my country and culture—even someone from my own family—can be extremely different from me in their personality and worldview. We are faced with a world full of diversity, and so we have to ask, how can I welcome and create space for change in someone who is very different from me?

I believe that the answer partly lies in recognizing that my own culture and background, and the assumptions that I make about the world, are not the only way of looking at things. As the host I must recognize that my guests may have very different beliefs, values, and worldviews from my own. And I must be careful not to suggest that just because they are different from me, they are actually not welcome in the space I am creating.

This brings us back to the self-surrendering hospitality of my friend. Because I can't just know by reflecting on it all alone whether my assumptions are different from other peoples'. And I cannot expect that someone who does not feel welcomed by me will, on their own, be able to bring this issue up with me directly. I cannot simply hope that my excluded guest has the natural courage and grace to speak to me about it. So I am going to have to create the space for this person to tell me about themselves. I have to be able to speak to someone different from me using my friend's words: is there anything you want to tell me? Is there something that I'm doing that does not fit with your worldview and background? And perhaps I can begin to understand you better, if I give you the space to tell me about yourself by approaching you with self-surrendering hospitality.

As a conference organizer in the middle of this diverse group I take seriously this self-surrendering hospitality. But remember what I said at the beginning about creating space for change: here at Caux we are all the hosts of one another, we are all practicing ordinary hospitality. So this is also a challenge for all of us as hosts – we all can say to each other, "I give you the space to talk to me about my own change, so that with your help I can look again at my assumptions about the world." I think that this is a challenge to all of us, to take these ideas and bring them to our relationships. But let me begin this challenge by saying to all of you: is there anything you'd like to say to me? Anything at all. I invite you into this space of change, in our relationships and in ourselves. I mean it. I invite you to come up and speak to me any time this week. Is there anything you want to tell me?