



## RESOURCES

SUPPORTING MEN INTERESTED IN FORMING  
AND MAINTAINING A BROTHERHOOD

## STRUCTURE

(4/4)

### **A Brotherhood Needs A Shared Structure**

Finally, based on my many years of working with groups of men, I'd like to offer some structural suggestions. Needless to say, once again, these are suggestions, not rules!

1. Ideally, meet weekly. If this is not possible, meet fortnightly – but not less often than that. If you meet less often than that, I have found, the vibrancy of the last meeting has often dissipated. Also, should you (for example) agree to meet every three weeks, if I miss just one meeting, then when I next attend it's six weeks since I last saw you all.

2. I believe that the groups that are the most potent are underpinned by strong commitment. You can't just 'drop in' when you're in the mood. This commitment can be to attend meetings 'come hell or high water' – or something like that! It can also be to attend regularly for, say, six months (after which men can go, and others, perhaps, can join).

It may not be appropriate to ask for this kind of commitment until you've all met each other, and all have a sense of the brotherhood's vision and intended modus operandi. But once that's clear, in my opinion, everyone's stated commitment creates an energy field that is strong, inspiring, and 'more than the sum of its parts'.

3. I recommend dividing each group gathering into a beginning, a middle, and an end. The idea of 'the beginning' is that it be a transitional time – a time to transit from whatever state of everyday consciousness we might be in, into a more present way of being – in order to be able to participate in 'the middle' (the main part of the meeting) with more awareness and integrity and compassion.

We often arrive frazzled by our train and car journeys, or jangled and fretting after a day staring at a computer screen, or operating some deafening machine. This beginning, or 'opening' as some men call it, enables us to collect ourselves in to ourselves, to re-attune to ourselves, to come down from our minds into our actual experience, to soften, to open... what a relief that can be!

In the opening phase I like to include (a) something physical (to help the descent from excessive mind-identification), (b) a centring practice (like the Conscious Breathing I talk about in *The Uprising of Man*, in the section on suggested self-educational practices), and (c) something to connect us (like the '50/50' practice I also talk about in *The Uprising of Man*, in the section on suggested self-educational practices) – since we often arrive feeling separate, and a connecting practice can help return us to our oneness.

What happens in the main section is, of course, for the group to decide. I have found that it often includes a go-around, a sharing circle – in which each man can speak uninterruptedly for an allotted time (the exact time might depend on the size of the group). It might also include some work on a specific theme (anger, sexuality, fatherhood, masculinisation, spirituality, etc.). It might also include something related to that brotherhood's chosen activism – or perhaps that would be for a separate meeting.



Regarding the sharing circle: if there are, say, 30 men in the brotherhood (since each man will need at least five minutes to share, and  $30 \times 5 = 150$ , i.e. two and a half hours – which would be far too long to all be sitting listening), this can be done in sub-groups of, say, six – and each week everyone makes an effort to sit with men they haven't shared with before, or for a while.

Finally, I have always found that an ending, or 'closing', helps wrap up a meeting in a very satisfying way. It is another transitional phase – in which to stand united, acknowledge all that has been given and received during the gathering, perhaps express gratitude, and prepare ourselves to take all we have felt 'out into the world' (rather than leaving it behind in the group, so to speak).

4. Regarding leadership: there are no appointed leaders. There might be men whose articulate authenticity endows them with a natural authority – but this is felt, not appointed. However, because each meeting needs a degree of holding, and planning, I would suggest a different man facilitate each meeting – along the lines the group has already set in place. The facilitator of the following week can be decided during the closing. If men don't feel ready to facilitate alone, they can be invited to co-facilitate with another brother.

5. I also recommend contact between meetings. By this I mean two things. Firstly, connecting formally with one or two brothers (face-to-face, by phone, by Skype...). And by 'formally' I mean not just socialising, but rather (for example), if the brotherhood is exploring a certain self-educational practice – each man sharing his own exploration of the practice. Then, afterwards, should you wish, you can socialise....

The other thing is to create a forum, or a WhatsApp group, or something similar – through which everyone can stay in touch. This, I find, is enormously supportive and empowering. You travel through the week with the group alongside you. They are there if you need them. You are there for them, should they need you. And all sorts of wisdom and pain and kindness and creativity gets shared.

6. There are, of course, a thousand subtleties to all of this, but the learning is in the doing – the 'mistakes' are the learning. So be sensitive, but be bold. Make it happen – and ask for outside help if you need it. The OneforOne project is a co-op we have formed to help invigorate (not the book, but the actual) 'uprising of man' – and one of its functions is to offer just this kind of 'outside' support.

End Notes, p. 422

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