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FE SUNDAY

FINANCIAL EXPRESS ON SUNDAY **READ TO LEAD**



The human connection

The art of gathering will be significantly redefined in 2021

VAISHALI DAR

WE SPEND OUR lives gathering—first in classrooms and then in meetings, weddings, conferences and away days. Yet so many of us spend this time in underwhelming moments that fail to engage, inspire or connect us. So, what's the difference between the gatherings that inspire you and the ones that don't? In the book, *The Art of Gathering*, author Priya Parker gets to the heart of these questions and reveals how to design a transformative gathering. An expert on organising successful gatherings whether in conference centres or her living room, Parker released this book in 2019 and highlighted how to create moving, magical, mind-changing experiences—even in spaces where we've come to expect little.

The pandemic in 2020 changed the way we meet and greet, a year that taught us about the importance of human connection, and social gatherings. Which is why the art of gathering in 2021 requires intention of a connection. Why do we need to gather more effectively?

The year 2021 would be a year when things begin to open up, says Sonal Holland MW, educator, entrepreneur, founder of Soho Wine Club and Sonal Holland Wine Academy. "With large-format get-togethers becoming less prevalent, and on a need-to-do basis only, people will spend more time in intimate settings, where good food and great spirits will

take centre stage. What's more, after a year where people haven't really had a chance to indulge themselves, the year will be a great time to relearn the lost art of social interactions and great conversation. The year will make us actively choose to live slower and enjoy the littlest, quotidian pleasures that surround us, as we reconnect with those that matter the most to us."

There seems to be a stronger sense of community-building and personal connection than there has ever been. "Studies show that people's focus and productivity increase exponentially when they're in group settings, and feelings of stress or anxiety decline. That's why there has been such a peak worldwide in mental health issues and depression during WFH. I see office-going fostering a sense of togetherness a lot more than it ever has, however, in smaller group settings than before, and in a more agile way. Globally, businesses are being called upon to develop hybrid workplace strategies and more flexible working arrangements. This is why coworking will be even more important going forward, as it allows for a variety of ways to work. Coworking is complete with social distancing and increased hygienic measures, while still encouraging curated interaction with other co-workers. Last year defi-

nitely has thrown people's professional lives off-kilter. To understand the current pain-points and help individuals and businesses regain a sense of work-life balance, while allowing them to work worry-free in safe, but human-centered surroundings is a must," says Marlies Bloemendaal, founder and creative director, Ministry of New, a collaborative workspace in Mumbai.

As the need for safeguarding health and maintaining proper hygiene continues to remain a central priority, there will be a major transition in how events such as exhibitions and conferences are conducted in 2021.

Raj Manek, executive director and board member, Messe Frankfurt Asia Holdings, feels events of mass gathering will transform into organised gatherings, where the implementation of safety parameters and physical distancing will become a mandatory requirement. "Spaced out halls with organised crowd patterns and use of gloves and sanitisers in making any physical contact. Most importantly, the duty of organisers will not just be limited to conducting their respective gathering in a secured manner, but more so in a way that sustains the warmth and the essence of friendly human interaction. Technology will play a key role in facilitating secured communication via virtual meetings, webinars and other online channels. Mobile access to floor plans and schedules will allow visitors to get all required information about the exhibition, thereby making the show floor more organised," he says.

As a responsible organiser in the global trade fair industry, Messe Frankfurt India strives to provide events facilities through its new 'MFI SafeConnect' directives to create a safe and conducive environment for business exchange.

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