

Apr 27 | Written By Brock Henderson

Game Designer As Host

Not long ago, I found myself in a God-imposed sabbatical of sorts. I call it that because for eighteen months, all of my projects, plans, and hopes were placed on pause. It's not the first time God has had a different plan for my life than what I had, and it probably won't be the last. So, in addition to spending time wrestling with God about what was happening, I caught up on my reading.

One of the books that marked that time is a fantastic book by Priya Parker titled, [The Art of Gathering](#). Priya has dedicated her career to helping people design meaningful gatherings, and her care and thoughtfulness for the subject are evident in her writing. The more time I spent with the book, the more parallels I drew between her work and game design. For example, here are the qualities that distinguish a meaningful gathering:

- They have a clear purpose.
- They place expectations upon participation
- They are temporary
- They have indicated openings and closings
- They have rules

- They create safety
- They equalize their guests
- They connect their guests
- They are run with generous authority

If you were to read through that list without any context, you might think I was listing the qualities of a game. Parker's book sparked so many new thoughts about how I might approach game design that I thought I should share some of the things I've learned.

I like thinking about the role of a game designer as a host because it naturally shifts me into a place of empathy and generosity. When I am planning a gathering, I am focused on my guests. I try to approach the planning with thoughtfulness and consideration because I want to make my guests feel comfortable and enjoy our time together.

I give special attention to making sure the right food and drinks are on hand. I try to remember what people have enjoyed in the past, and if I don't know, I'll try to inquire ahead of time. Food allergies are also a significant consideration; I know of at least one person in my immediate circle with severe food allergies.

The setting is an equally important detail. I have a sister-in-law that requires a wheelchair. For her to be able to attend an event means thinking through spatial logistics ahead of time. We may need to rearrange furniture to make sure she can get through the house freely, or it may mean focusing the gathering in certain areas of the house to avoid excluding her unintentionally—stairs and tight turns can be a big deal.

When I'm in a host headspace, all of these logistic challenges don't feel frustrating or like a chore; I'm happy to plan and prepare because I want to spend time with my guests. Their comfort and enjoyment are at the front of my mind because I love them, and I want my time with them to be a blessing.

However, before you start praising me for my hosting abilities, I must confess that I have not shown my players nearly the same consideration and love that I have shown my guests in the past.

For the last year, I have had the opportunity to work on a game focused on serving the needs of disabled gamers. It's an often-overlooked and underserved segment of gamers. And if I'm brutally honest, before this time, I hadn't given them much thought. I used to rationalize overlooking accessibility issues as an indie because I believed that the problems were hard and the ROI was small. I can no longer make that rationalization.

When I started writing this post, I didn't plan on ending up here, but that's the power of a good analogy. Analogies can help you make new connections and illuminate your thoughts with a different light, which is why I like them so much. Thinking about a game designer as a host has underscored the incongruence of my behavior toward people, which is something I plan to correct. The more empathy and consideration we can offer our audience, the better designers we will be.

There is so much more I want to say, but this is just an introduction. In the coming weeks, I plan to explore several of the points I glossed over. I hope you will come back.

Game Design | Hospitality



Brock Henderson

Brock believes *the world is a better place when we play together*. As co-founder and CTO of **PxIPug**, he is excited to share that message with the world. PxIPug's purpose is to create a healthy community where individuals are valued for who they are and are

encouraged to grow into who they were created to be. The studio does this by crafting games that bring people together.

A designer, developer, and entrepreneur, he has a passion for creating video games and a proven track record with over 25 shipped titles and 3+ million downloads. Before entering the games industry, he co-founded the design firm Paper Tower where he served as creative director for over a decade. During that time, he designed interactive experiences for clients like Coca-Cola, Motorola, and Harvard.

Brock currently resides in a small town in Iowa with his beautiful wife Vanessa and their six children.

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