



VISUAL TOOLS FOR EVERYONE

BY JENNIFER LANDAU



Visual Meetings
by David Sibbet

If you have ever reached for a pencil to explain or hang onto an idea, then the book *Visual Meetings: How Graphics, Sticky Notes & Idea Mapping Can Transform Group Productivity* (Wiley, 2010) by David Sibbet will change how you work, meet, and even think. Don't draw? Not to worry—this book isn't about drawing per se but how to use “visuals”—text, simple drawn images, photographs, graphic metaphors—as a natural part of engaging people, analyzing, innovating, and better yet, getting people to put their ideas together and take action. *Visual Meetings* is about how to surface the knowledge in the room (or in yourself) and organize it so that you can use it. And this means via traditional paper with pens as well as digitally/virtually, from table-top size to huge templates and charts.

Sibbet outlines a comprehensive system of visual strategies and techniques. He backs up the clear instruction and many inspiring examples and case studies with serious concepts and models about people's thought processes, group dynamics, and team engagement around tough questions, real work, and deep learning. Sibbet mixes a storytelling style with conversational narrative, bullet-pointed lists, and line art, making concepts easy to understand and apply. And the story he tells is not just about his professional journey, but about an emerging field of talented practitioners at a time of great innovation and change in the workplace and community.

The author doesn't stop at offering the wisdom of his own experience.

Sibbet weaves in and acknowledges the contributions of others he has learned from and worked with around the globe, so you will find a wide variety of tried and true strategies, models, and techniques—all in visual form, all reality-tested across languages and cultures.

Diving into Visual Meetings

Part One, “Just Imagine,” invites you into what is possible when visuals are explicitly joined with thinking, particularly in groups. After an opening story of his work with Apple Computer, Sibbet moves into reflections on the cycle of learning—imagine, engage, think, enact—he finds core to all individual and group work. He outlines skills for drawing and recording, including exercises for the emboldened reader. He introduces classic visual templates, including time lines, Venn diagrams, and a “business as garden” metaphor.

In Part Two, Sibbet delves into engaging groups and building rapport, an element he sees as key to meeting productivity. The five chapters in this section cover how visuals reinforce listening and hence engagement, concepts and tips for PowerPoint-free presentations, visual strategies for selling/engaging potential customers, and techniques that utilize familiar resources such as sticky notes, dot voting, printed images, and objects.

“Graphics for Visual Thinking” is the section of the book most recognizable as “graphic facilitation.” The cornerstone of Sibbet's consulting, the Group Graphic Keyboard, is defined in detail. This model is a deceptively simple, yet powerfully elegant system for classifying and using what gets written on a wall, that is, recorded charts. You will find all of the familiar, classic visual tools addressed, from lists and fishbone diagrams to mind mapping and templates

for storytelling. Sibbet outlines the best use and limitations of each category, as well as how each fits with group process, problem solving, and systems thinking. Sibbet also addresses working digitally and in virtual meetings.

Part Four takes the use of visuals beyond the meeting room, into project/plan implementation. Fostering team performance and project management has been central to Sibbet's consulting, and these five chapters provide specific visual strategies for taking thought to action. “Seeing It All Come Together: Tools for the Seriously Hooked” is the last section, offering thoughts for those wanting to go beyond the meeting room into visually integrated practice that is augmented by emerging technology.

Bumping Up Effectiveness

Visual Meetings touches on many established fields of practice—information design, systems thinking, graphic design, meeting facilitation, project management, adult learning, strategic planning, leadership development, cross-cultural facilitation, data analysis, community development. Sibbet offers a treasure trove of process “gold nuggets,” pulling together some of the best across these varied fields of practice, and then launching the reader into synergistic realms far beyond.

The thinking and techniques in *Visual Meetings* will bump up your creativity and effectiveness as it has mine, enriching all that you do at work and in your community—and around your dinner table with the kids, as well! ■

Jennifer Landau, principal with Hammond & Landau, has provided visual process consulting to business, government, and community organizations for more than 24 years. As one of the pioneers of graphic facilitation, her visual approaches to strategic planning and building “community at work” are directly linked to her education in community studies (UC Santa Cruz) and organization development (Pepperdine University).