



## Transitions & Reflections on The Groupaya Way

BROOKING GATEWOOD | JUNE 4, 2015

I'm pleased to share that I have been offered a job as a senior facilitator for sustainable food and water systems work with [Ag Innovations](#) in Sebastopol, CA. This is a really exciting learning and professional development opportunity for me in a topic area very close to my heart, and I have recently transitioned to this full time role with [Joseph McIntyre](#) and a new amazing team of passionate change agents. And of course the sad news is the shift away from my day to day work with Groupaya.

The interview process for this job provided a fascinating opportunity to pause and reflect on my practice. What are the theoretical and methodological foundations of my work? What have been my major influences, trainings, mentors? And, most relevant here: what actually is *The Groupaya Way*, to me?

Preparing for this shift in my work life has had me reflect with great gratitude on the core aspects of The

Groupaya Way that I get to bring with me into my ongoing work and practice. Here are some highlights of The Groupaya Way as I have experienced it:

### **Holy Note-Taking!**

I call it holy because we basically treat note-taking as a sacred act at Groupaya. At first this drove me nuts and seemed excessive. But over time I've come to see the value of having written record for internal meetings, and how it speaks to a level of care for our work, and a strong value on transparency (all our notes are visible to the whole team in a google drive).

With clients, the value is incredibly high — both in terms of giving us a shared display (when using google docs) to organize everyone's attention, and modeling what we're often trying to teach around good 'info hygiene' as we call it, and transparent note-taking and documentation of key take-aways and next steps.

### **Over-Prepare and Under-Attach**

Designing meetings and client engagements is both art and science, and Groupayans take both aspects of the work seriously. The Groupaya Way involves a lot of preparation for events — interviews, research design meetings, scenario thinking, redesign meetings, logistical attention and more redesign of meetings. And by the time the meeting arrives, we also have to be willing to throw it all away on the fly if the moment calls for something else.

I love this part of The Groupaya Way and I believe it's where this work truly is a practice in the larger sense; the ability to be grounded, present, and responsive in the room with clients takes a different kind of skill and practice than the design process. At Groupaya, both are valued and cultivated in a way that I really appreciate — personal practice is part of professional practice in this kind of work.

### **Take Time to Reflect and Share Learnings**

A big part of the Groupaya Way to me centers around taking the time and attention to share our learnings with each other and with a larger practice community. It's so easy to get too busy to pause, reflect, and share your learnings with colleagues, but at Groupaya this is a strong value. We and our broader community benefit as a result.

Internally, we take a lot of time to debrief projects and share learnings in meetings, check-ins, and on a team wiki. We also practice new methods on each other — such as this last year going through Robert Kegan's [Immunity to Change](#) process as a team. These experiments are rich learning for all involved and help us each develop our own practice.

On the public-facing side, we also make time to write blogs and host live brown bag events intended to share learnings and develop our skills with a broader community of practitioners. For such a small company in a field that is so unnecessarily private about it's work, this commitment is really refreshing.

I also want to acknowledge both Kristin and [Eugene](#), Groupaya's co-founder, for their commitment to mentoring younger practitioners. Each of them has given us younger Groupaya practitioners tremendous opportunities to learn and grow in a field that can be hard to break into, with so much of the work being individual and guardedly proprietary. I leave Groupaya feeling a strengthened impulse to give back and

share my own learnings with others in the field as a result.

### **Put the FUN back in DysFUNCTIONal**

This is a funny way we sometimes talk about the work we do internally, and I actually really like it — to me it speaks to the comfort everyone on our team has with discomfort in groups, and with our ability be alchemists that help turn challenges into opportunities. Navigating conflict, power struggles, and other sticky group dynamics is a privileged role we get to play helping groups move toward becoming more trusting and high-performing. I have enjoyed getting more comfortable with discomfort myself in my time with Groupaya and see this as a core competency of The Groupaya Way.

Core also is the *simplicity* of some of the tools we bring to the work. Things like careful meeting design, reflective listening, [check ins](#), highlighting the [conversation habits in a group](#), asking the right questions, and the wise use of post-its can have surprisingly profound impacts. I leave feeling like a humble apprentice to the ninja arts of these subtle but powerful interventions.

### **Everything is an Experiment**

In a way I saved the best for last, in that this is actually probably the most profound shift in my own thinking that I've noticed in my time with Groupaya. Though in the other areas I have most certainly learned a lot and developed my practice, I have to say the orientation of treating change as an experiment is a fundamental shift in my approach to life that stems from The Groupaya Way. I can't even recall how I oriented before — most likely with a lot more fear and less playful willingness to try new things.

Part of The Groupaya Way both internally and with clients is to try on behavior changes in the form of small actionable experiments, and to check in and refine the experiments along the way. When things don't work, we have "joyful funerals" to celebrate the learnings from what's not working, and move on to a new experiment. I find this approach so liberating — both in client work and in my personal life as well.

For example, my recent choice to take this job with Ag Innovations Network brings with it a number of major life changes — taking a full time salaried position rather than being a semi-independent consultant, moving to a small town from a big city, and moving to a solo residence after years of living with housemates. I have had moments of fear creep up about the change of course, but ultimately I can relax knowing that *it's all just an experiment* — this orientation takes so much of the pressure and fear out of the prospect of changing our behaviors and/or our environmental conditions. I may love it, I may not, but I will most certainly learn a lot along the way.

There is of course a bit of sadness in leaving my work with Groupaya. And yet I feel I could never leave Groupaya the way I never really left my alma mater and some of my other most significant learning communities. I will always be an alum and an ally. I carry with me my learnings from and my gratitude for this community of brilliant, caring, dedicated practitioners. And I know we'll stay in touch and keep sharing learnings, because that's The Groupaya Way.