**Open Space**

OVERVIEW

**What is Open Space? (Purpose)**

It is a self-organizing practice of inner discipline and collective activity which releases the inherent creativity and leadership in people. By inviting people to take responsibility for what they care about, Open Space establishes a marketplace of inquiry, reflection and learning, bringing out the best in both individuals and the whole.

**Outcomes**

1. Builds energy, commitment and shared leadership
2. Every issue of concern to anybody will have been raised—participants accept responsibility for what does or does not happen.
3. A full report of issues and discussions will be in the hands of all participants.
4. Action plans and recommendations emerge from discussions as appropriate

**Five Conditions of Use:**

1. There is a real business issue
2. A great deal of complexity
3. High degree of diversity
4. Real passion (people care!), and probably also conflict
5. Urgent need to make decisions (with no preconceived notions of what the outcomes should be.)

**Sponsors:**

* Should have informed consent.
* Need to know what they are getting into, what they can expect, and what will be required of them
* They will never know exactly how things will turn out

**THE STEPS IN BRIEF:**

* Select a focusing statement or question (theme) for your gathering.  It should frame the higher purpose and widest context for your discussion in a positive way.
* Invite the circle of people: all stakeholders or all the people you'd like to have in the room.  Include the theme, date, place and time of gathering in the invitation.
* Create the circle:  Set up chairs in a circle or in concentric circles, leaving space in the center.  Choose a blank wall for the Agenda Wall and label it AGENDA: AM, PM across the top.  Set up a table for computers near a wall you label NEWS.
* To begin the gathering:  Facilitator explains: the theme, the simple process the group will follow to organize and create a record, where to put things up and find out what is happening, the Law of Two Feet, and the Principles of Open Space.  Then, facilitator invites people to silently meditate on what has heart and meaning for each of them.
* Opening the marketplace:  the Facilitator invites anyone who cares about an issue to step into the middle of the circle and write the topic, their name, a time and place for meeting, announce it and post the offering on the Agenda Wall -- one sheet per topic—as many topics as he/she wants.  They will be convenors and they have responsibility for facilitating their session(s) and seeing to it that a report is made and shared on the News Wall.
* When ALL offerings are concluded, the Facilitator invites people to sign up for what they are interested in and take responsibility for their schedules, using the Law of Two Feet.
* People participate in discussions.  The Facilitator takes care of the space.  Reporters enter discussion reports in the computers and printouts are posted on the News Wall.
* Closing Circle:  all reconvene an hour before closing to share highlights, "ahas" and key learnings in a Dialogue format: simply listening to whatever people have to offer without discussion, or you can pass a "talking stick" for each person to hold as he/she is talking, or to pass along if the person doesn't want to contribute anything.
* Mail out whatever record is created and an address list to all who came.
* If it is a several day gathering, do steps 3 through 8 daily.

FACILITATION

**Initiation (Opening):**

1. **Welcome –** May be from sponsor. Short, sweet, and to the point.
2. **Focus the Group** (facilitator)

* “Welcome to Open Space” – slowly enter and walk circle
* The circle is the fundamental geometry of open human communication. It indicates unity
* There is no agenda. We did not publish one ahead of time because you are going to create it. On that blank wall over there.
* You may at this point be wondering “what on earth are we going to do for the rest of our time together?”. I promise that within an hour you will be looking at that same wall and wondering “how are we going to get it all done?”
* Open Space Technology runs on *passion* bounded by *responsibility*
* This technique was invented in 1985, and has been used all over the world in groups of 5 to over 2,000. You will be surprised by how simple it is, and strangely it always seems to work.

1. **State The Theme --** Select a focusing statement or question for your gathering
2. **Describe the Process**

* **Four principles**apply to how you navigate in open space:
  + ***Whoever comes is the right people****.* Whoever is attracted to the same conversation are the people who can contribute most to that conversation—because they care. So they are exactly the ones—for the whole group-- who are capable of initiating action. *Whomever cares should come.* Voluntary Self-selection is the absolute *sine qua non* (condition) for participation.
  + ***Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.***We are all limited by our own pasts and expectations.  This principle acknowledges we'll all do our best to focus on NOW-- the present time and place-- and not get bogged down in what could've or should've happened.
  + ***When it starts is the right time.*** The creative spirit has its own time, and our task is to make our best contribution and enter the flow of creativity when it starts.
  + ***When it's over, it's over****.* Creativity has its own rhythm.  So do groups.  Just a reminder to pay attention to the flow of creativity -- not the clock.  When you think it is over, ask: *Is it over?*  And if it is, go on to the next thing you have passion for.  If it’s not, make plans for continuing the conversation.
* **One Law: *The Law of Two Feet***means you take responsibility for what you care about -- standing up for that and using your own two feet to move to whatever place you can best contribute and/or learn. The Law of Two Feet gives participants freedom to move at any time to a discussion they care about. Caring creates common ground, and helps to remind participants of higher purpose. If at any time today your find yourself neither learning nor contributing, use your two feet and go to some more productive place.
  + **Bumblebees** –pollinate and cross-pollinate, constantly flitting from session to session
  + **Butterflies** –remain aloof and never commit to a session. Yet they are centers of non-action ripe for conversation
* **Be Prepared to Be Surprised**
  + If you walk away from today with just what you walked in with, you will have wasted your time
  + Be Authentically Present: *Show Up, Be Present, Tell the Truth, Let it All Go*
  + *Trust the Process, Trust the People*
  + Have a great time! Remember, *if it isn’t fun, it isn’t working!*

1. **Create the Community Bulletin Board**

* Raising an issue does not require you to be an expert on the subject. Ask a question—questions create open space in which good thinking can happen. Do not worry if you have nothing prepared (notes, slides), you will find that your colleagues here will join you in finding answers.
* Going on record, publicly, is critical to confirm committment

1. **Open the Village Marketplace**

* ***Conflicts –***the conflicted person must find the two conveners and convince them either to combine their sessions or change them. Or they can be bumblebee and attend both.
* ***Combining sessions –***The Conveners rule! Let them decide.

1. **Get out of the Way!**

**Opening the Space for Action**

**Ending (Closing)**

* Talking Stick Ceremony