

Closing an Open Space Event

Closing an Open Space happens in many ways. It is largely dependent on the purpose of the gathering. At a minimum, always take time to reflect on the experience.

When converging on ideas or projects is desired, other activities can be involved. Always keep in the style and spirit of the gathering.

ABOUT THE CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Reflections tend to be about two basic areas:

- What **content** related insights emerged?
(What did they notice? What were their aha's?);
- What **process** related insights emerged?
(What did they learn about the principles in action? How does this process apply back in the real world?)

Basic flow

- Make any announcements
- Deal with remaining logistics about the proceedings, both getting notes and where they'll be posted (or how they'll be distributed if on paper)
- Then it's time to reflect

When there's lot's of time

- Pose a question that invites people to tap into a heartfelt place around their experience. I usually work with the sponsor to identify the question on the last day.
- Remind them of the committed time for the close and to pace themselves accordingly. Left on their own, with no request around time, I find people will average 5 minutes each.
- Explain the use of a talking object (as a gift from Native Americans – whoever has the stick talks, everyone else listens. The stick is a reminder to the talker to speak from the heart and to the listeners to listen from the heart. If the group wants to continue after The End Time – so be it – but everybody is free to use the Law of Two Feet.)
- Generally, I'll ask the sponsor to provide something that is meaningful to the group to use as the talking object.
- I put the object in the center, suggest some silence and when someone is ready, they can get the object, bring it to their seat, speak and then pass it to the person next to them.

When you need to be fast

- Pose a question that invites people to tap into a heartfelt place around their experience. I usually work with the sponsor to identify the question on the last day.
- Remind them of the committed time for the close.
- Ask people to think of a word, a phrase, or a sentence that responds to the question. Sometimes I'll ask them to write down something that they think would be useful to remember: a task, a commitment, an idea. They can put it above their desk or someplace where they can reference it later.
- The talking object is passed as above, with people speaking (or reading) their word, phrase or sentence. I've used this in groups of 200-250 and finished in under 25 minutes.

Some questions I've used:

- .. What's different as a result of our time together?
- .. Based upon your view of all of the possibilities discussed and explored, how do you personally want to use your energy, your two feet, to further what's happened?
- .. What is necessary to support this spirit, action, work, project, going forward?
Michael Herman (from listserv, I think)
- .. What is possible now?
OSonOS, Toronto, 1997
- .. Angeles Arien's questions for a closing reflection:
 - What surprised you?
 - What inspired you?
 - What challenged you?
 - What touched you?
- .. As a result of this session...
Chris Corrigan

ABOUT CONVERGENCE

I've noticed three situations with different centers of gravity:

*** The focus is on the individual**

People come from all over and/or the main need is to follow the energy of individual passion.

Re-opening the space with a "what's next?" question always works well.

An alternative: In our Journalism that Matters sessions, Stephen Silha introduced the idea of coaching circles. Clusters of 4-6 people form in some self-organizing way. Each person who wants to do so, shares an idea and gets feedback. Someone takes notes for them. Everyone gets a chance to vet their ideas and learn from others.

*** The focus is on collective action**

People come primarily from one organization or the intent is that people from all over do something of substance together.

Re-opening the space with a "what's our work together?" sort of question surfaces both projects with great support and the outliers that are principally individuals with the energy to pursue what they desire. Everyone gets to work following their passion. And they discover where there is substantial shared energy for next steps.

*** The focus is on collective meaning making and action**

Both working with complex ideas (like the "[story field](#)") and working the system of journalism over the last several years (see www.journalismthatmatters.org) has led me to a desire to find simple ways to surface useful collective understandings, to see what is ripe to name among a diverse group. So I've been experimenting with low-key ways of doing that.

My bias is that to do so begins with individual passion and responsibility and seeks resonance at increasing scale. Here are two approaches I've played with that do that:

One is a bit of a game, but it's quick (about 20 minutes) and does seem to produce useful results. It is something of a face to face version of some of the algorithms used for ranking online. I was introduced to it by a Playback Theatre person. We used it at the end of a one-day conference I keyed last year and I've used it with journalists. The ideas that surface really do seem to have legs. It is called [Thirty-five](#). Each person writes something in response to a question seeking coherence (e.g., *What do you now know about working in the emerging news and information ecosystem?*). People then walk around swapping cards and periodically stopping with another person to read each other the cards they're holding. They split 7 points between the cards. At the end of 5 rounds, the points are totaled (7x5 = 35 max points). Reading the 2-9 top scoring cards seems to surface what has meaning

to many in the room.

See <http://www.thiagi.com/pfp/IE4H/march2008.html#Framegame> for details.

Another approach I've used before opening the space for convergence also begins with individual reflections. For example, with journalists, I've asked them to write a story in which they see themselves working in the "new news ecology". They take about 15 minutes of time by themselves. Then they share stories in groups of 3-5. Each group then generates one statement, allowing for "wild cards" to ensure room for what individuals feel passionate about. Statements are read out loud and laid on the floor around the room. People move to the statement that draws them, literally taking a stand for what has most resonance. It gives quite a visual hit of where the energy is. At a 2009 Journalism that Matters at the [Poynter Institute](#) in St. Petersburg, these statements that emerged:

<http://www.mediagiraffe.org/wiki/index.php/Newsecology-statements>

However insights are surfaced, reflecting on them deepens collective meaning.

Note:

If these activities may seem too directed, I find them a lighter touch than the voting methods used in Open Space's early days.

Re-open the space for action with a "what's possible now?" question. Ideally, this activity happens the next day after people have had a chance to sleep on the insights that emerged.

Whatever form of convergence you use, end with closing reflections.