

## **OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY OPENING OUTLINE**

In the beginning, my opening sounded a lot like Harrison Owen's – creator of Open Space Technology. With time, it evolved. Now, there are remnants of Harrison's wisdom combined with my own emphasis, gained through working with Open Space since 1993. And it continues to change. So, consider this outline a place to start as you make the experience your own!

### **I. Welcome; Create space**

- A. [Brief introduction by sponsor – what inspired the meeting, its purpose, who's in the room, their aspirations for the time together]
- B. Introduce myself, honored to be here
- C. Start walking the circle.
- D. Look around the circle and know there are many powerful stories about the [theme] in this room. And the skills, ability, knowledge...caring are in this room to truly make a difference

### **II. State the theme**

- A. State it clearly, succinctly and provocatively (e.g., How do we create the organization we really want?)
- B. Name intentions for outcomes (e.g., a stronger culture that brings out the best in each of us)
- C. Name constraints and commitments (e.g., [Sponsor's name] will support you in anything you come up with within her/his span of control; s/he will work with you to make happen anything that involves contractual, budget or crosses department lines in service to customers)

### **III. How does this work?**

- A. Point to the blank wall; here's your agenda, not much at the moment, but in next 30 minutes you'll wonder how we'll do it all
- B. Pick some useful examples to express the potential for magic (e.g., designing airplane doors at Boeing, planning the future of Rotary Clubs in Siberia)
- C. At the core of OS is the belief that organizations work when people take responsibility for what they love as an act of service – our deepest desires reach beyond our ego to a place of our common humanity where individual acts contribute to the larger whole.
  1. Write topic - consider using a question (questions focus and invite), your name, announce it, post it
  2. Describe the time/space matrix
  3. When everyone who cares to has done so, you'll have a chance to look at the agenda and decide where and how you'll spend your time
  4. Not brainstorming – about passion because there are two responsibilities: Convene the group and document the session
  5. We will create a record of all the sessions; explain how proceedings will be handled (e.g., print, computer, Internet)
- D. Housekeeping
  1. Food, breaks logistics
  2. Evening News, Morning Announcements
  3. Bells for gathering everyone together
  4. We're on adult behavior: no one is going to tell you when to change spaces.

### **IV. Principles**

- A. When people take responsibility for what they care about, these four principles naturally emerge.
- B. Whoever comes is the right people
  1. Don't need the CEO, or a cast of thousands to get something done. You need the people who care.
  2. What if you're the only one to show up? When was the last time you had quiet time to think and write about something you really cared about? Go for it!

- C. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have  
We have a choice about how we respond to any situation. And disruption is a doorway to possibility. So if you find yourself getting worked up about what is happening, what might be, could be, or should be, try getting curious, asking given all that, what's possible now?
- D. The last two principles are about our relationship with time.
  - 1. When it starts is the right time. And when it's over, it's over.
  - 2. Rather than letting the clock rule, use it as information and follow your own energy
  - 3. Done in 10 minutes? Great! Move on. And if a session time ends and you're still going, great! Keep going. You may need to find another space if another session is coming to the space you're using.
- E. The Law of Two Feet
  - 1. This is the essence of Open Space – taking responsibility for what you love. At it's heart is a foot of passion and a foot of responsibility.
  - 2. A good indicator is to notice whether you are learning or contributing. If not, use your two feet and go someplace else
  - 3. The law of two feet is also a reminder to stand for what you believe.
  - 4. Two animals show up when the law of two feet is operating
    - a. Bumblebees
      - i. Cross-pollinate ideas – spend time in one place then move to another bringing your ideas with you.
      - ii. And it is how you can spend time in two sessions held at the same time
    - b. Butterflies: they look very delicate and they're deceptive in their impact. Small actions can have large consequences
      - i. Think of the scientists studying weather patterns who said a butterfly flapping its wings in one part of the world can cause storms in another.
      - ii. Butterflies may never attend a session; they hang out in the coffee shop, by the pool, in the bar. You talk with one of them, perhaps about something that you haven't been able to put into words. And suddenly, it comes clear! You take it into another group and suddenly, it's everywhere.
      - iii. So, if you're irritated by people who never go to the sessions, know they do serve a useful purpose; if you're one of them, you don't need to feel guilty about it – in open space you're valued.
  - 5. One last thing about the law: when people know you can move at anytime, it moderates the behavior of people who may tend to hog air time
- F. Be prepared to be surprised
  - 1. Never before, never again will this group be together
  - 2. If you walk out with just what you expected, you've blown it -- be open for the unexpected and it will show up

## V. Do it

- A. It's time. Remember: if your issue or pet peeve is not addressed, look to yourself
- B. My hope for you, that you reach your goals...that magic happens
- C. So, I invite you now to come into the circle, write down your topic, your name, announce it and we're underway
- D. *In large groups*: please move the chairs near the agenda wall out of the way
- E. *Some useful things to mention while people are writing their topics*
  - 1. Handling time conflicts and combinations: negotiation is fine. The final decision is up to the conveners.
  - 2. I encourage you to keep sessions separate even if they sound similar. If there are a lot of people, everyone gets more airtime. And even if they sound similar, often, what the conveners have in mind is quite different.
  - 3. Time and space are infinitely expandable. If there are more sessions than time/space slots or you want a different time or place, write them on your agenda post.