

DOING AN OPEN SPACE: A TWO PAGE PRIMER by Anne Stadler

WHAT IS OPEN SPACE?

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.

WHEN TO USE IT:

- ❖ Where conflict is holding back the ability to change
- ❖ Where the situation is complex
- ❖ Where there is a high degree of diversity
- ❖ Where there is an urgent need to make speedy decisions
- ❖ Where all stakeholders are needed for good decisions to be made
- ❖ Where you have no preconceived notion of what the outcomes should be

PROBABLE OUTCOMES:

- ❖ Builds energy, commitment and shared leadership
- ❖ Participants accept responsibility for what does or doesn't happen
- ❖ Action plans and recommendations emerge from discussions as appropriate
- ❖ You create a record of the entire proceedings as you go along

HOW IT WORKS:

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.

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.

Whatever happens is the only thing that could've

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.

HOW OPEN SPACE WORKS WHEN THERE IS CONFLICT:

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.

GROUP SIZE:

To date, we know that Open Space accommodates groups from 5 to 1500 people. It can be run for a couple of hours to 3 or more days; consecutively or over time; at one site or at multiple sites connected by computer and/or phone and video. The longer the space is open, the more transformative the outcomes.

THE STEPS IN BRIEF:

1. Select a focusing statement or question for your gathering (Vermont's New Economy). It should frame the higher purpose and widest context for your discussion in a positive way.
2. Invite the circle of people: all stakeholders or all the people you'd like to have in the room (that's you!). Include the theme, date, place and time of gathering in the invitation.
3. 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. Put blank sheets of news print (about quarter size of a flip chart page) and colored felt pens in the center of the circle. Near the Agenda Wall and the News Wall put masking tape for people to post papers on the walls.
4. 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.
5. 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 who have responsibility for facilitating their session(s) and seeing to it that a report is made and shared on the News Wall.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. Mail out whatever record is created and an address list to all who came.
10. If it is a several day gathering, do steps 3 through 8 daily.