



Description of Open Space

Adapted from Open Space Technology: A User's Guide, Harrison Owen, Abbott Publishing, Potomac, Maryland, 1992.

What is Open Space Technology?

Open space technology (OST) is designed to deal with real "business" issues, no matter how the nature of the business may be defined. For OST to work, it must focus on real issues that are of passionate concern to those who will be involved. It is effective in situations where a diverse group of people must deal with complex and potentially conflicting material in innovative and productive ways. It is particularly powerful when nobody knows the answer, and the ongoing participation of a number of people is required to deal with the questions.

Open Space will not work, and therefore should not be used, in any situation where the answer is already known, or where somebody at a high level *thinks* he or she knows the answer. OST will work superbly if people are quite willing to admit that they do not know all of the answers, but nevertheless believe that collectively they have a shot at creating viable solutions.

How does OST work?

Simply. Open Space runs on two fundamentals, *passion* and *responsibility*. Without passion, nobody is interested. Without responsibility, nothing will get done. It is therefore important to declare, right up front, what the question, or theme, of the Open Space is. Our question will be: *Put in question here*.

Our Open Space session on *put in date here* will provide just what the words imply, time and space for *put in name of organization or who the participants will be here* to meet in whatever configurations seem appropriate in order to generate new knowledge about our question. Given the talent that will be at this meeting, the design of the day will not be to tell people what to do and when, but instead, to provide a supportive environment in which everyone will be able to do what needs to get done, with a minimum of hassle. At the end of the day, there will be a closing, nothing too formal, but a way to reflect on and share what we have learned together.

We will gather at *put in time here* to set up Open Space. When a participant decides that s/he wants to pursue a particular topic related to our question, s/he will give it a short title and post it on the board. Then, any other participant who wants to join in that particular exploration will sign up. After a little negotiation, times and places will be arranged for all of the sessions throughout the day. After that, it will be up to all of us to make Open Space work.

As you think about preparing for Open Space, don't just consider good ideas that somebody else might do or be interested in. Think of powerful ideas that really grab you to the point that you will take personal responsibility to ensure that something gets done. Proposing an area of discussion and taking responsibility does not require that you be an expert or that a formal presentation be given. Either or both of these may be true. But it may be equally true that you don't know much about the subject you have proposed, and that you are looking for others with whom you can develop some knowledge. Taking responsibility means that you will simply designate a time and place and then convene the session. Hopefully, this is enough explanation to help you begin thinking now about our Open Space session. There are a few other, simple rules, which we will post and explain in more detail when we meet. See you there!