

## Open Space Technology

**Context:** In Open Space meetings and events, participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of importance. We will use a dialogue and learning focus of:

- **What really matters now in being a trusted change advisor? ...and in the near future?**

Open Space has been called passion bounded by responsibility, the energy of a good coffee break, intentional self-organization, spirit at work, chaos and creativity, evolution in organization, and a simple, powerful way to get people and organizations moving.

*Open Space began in part to the oft-quoted observation that in traditional conferences and large meetings, the coffee breaks are the best part.*

While Open Space is known for its apparent lack of structure and welcoming of surprises, it turns out that the Open Space meeting or organization is actually very structured – one that fits to the people and the work at hand, so that it often goes unnoticed in its proper role of supporting (not blocking) best work.

### Open Space guidelines

Start the topic **you wish to work on**. The person who posted the topic will be there and will begin the dialogue. In deciding how to behave, your choices include:

- **The rule of two feet:** When the discussion is no longer of interest, use your two feet to move on.
- **Butterflies:** Feel free to flit from topic to topic.
- **Bumblebees:** Take ideas from one topic to another and cross-pollinate.

### Open Space principles

1. Whoever comes are the right people.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.
3. Whenever it starts is the right time.
4. When it's over, it is over.

### What will happen?

We never know exactly what will happen when we open the space for people to do their most important work, but we can guarantee these results when any group gets into Open Space:

1. All of the issues that are MOST important to the participants will be raised.
2. All of the issues raised will be addressed by those participants most qualified and capable of addressing the learning needs on each of them.

After an event, the results can be made available to an entire community within days of the event, so that the conversation can invite every stakeholder into implementation of the learning.

Things only get done by individuals, and nothing gets done unless people want to do it. Passion is great, but goes nowhere until the feet take it somewhere.

**Open Space can only fail for two reasons:** if people show up with no passion and/or if somebody tries to control the process in order to achieve some sort of pre-determined outcome(s).

### Open Space is about

1. Growing more of what works: focusing attention on things makes them *grow, in importance, detail and depth*. So why not grow more of what works rather than stuff that doesn't?
2. *Invitation*. Invitation gathers people into an event, where they are further invited to post more invitations. The results of the groups that form around the smaller invitations are also invitations to carry the work into the larger world.
3. *Marketplace, Circle, Display Board, Breathing*: the four basic mechanisms at work in an open space meeting or event.
4. *Honoring both* the good of the *individual* and the good of the *collective*, knowing both can be served without a tradeoff. It is a measure of success, indicating a higher-order system has emerged.

Source, adapted from:

<http://www.openspaceworld.org/cgi/wiki.cgi?WorkingInOpenSpace>

By Deb Nystrom, [www.REVELN.com](http://www.REVELN.com),  
From the Assn. for Change Management Practitioners

## Excerpts from the Experts

“The sponsor-agent relationship is so important that just about everything we can hope to accomplish hinges on it.

As practitioners, we can relate to and partner with a sponsor at many different levels. There are five that I feel represent the least to the most influential.

At the top of the partnership scale are trusted advisors. These practitioners reach the pinnacle of credibility and reliability in their sponsor relationships. They incorporate all the respect and confidence granted to an influential resource, and they are also considered an integral part of the sponsor’s ongoing decision-making process. As such, the sponsor typically maintains an ongoing dialogue with the practitioner rather than waiting until a change-related problem arises to call in the expert. In addition, this kind of access is often associated with a personal chemistry and comfort that adds a coaching/mentoring aspect to the relationship.”

*Excerpts from the “Trusted Adviser” post, [www.changethinking.net](http://www.changethinking.net), Daryl Conner, Conner Partners.*

“There is very big difference between being the expert and being someone’s advisor... As smart people themselves, clients don’t want advisors to tell them what to do. They want you to tell them their choices so they can make their own decisions: ‘Help me understand my options. Help me understand the pros and cons. Give me a recommendation. Help me reason through to a decision.’ That is very much like being a teacher, and it is very much different than knowing the answer yourself. It’s making the client find the answers. And it changes the focus of attention, which means that those of us who have ego needs, which includes me, sometimes find it hard to remember to do this. It’s so much more fun for your ego to show off and prove that you have the answer so you can say to people, ‘Aren’t I smart?’ However, the client doesn’t want to focus on your smarts, but rather on his problems. The issue on the table here is not your ego.”

*Excerpts from “The Trusted Advisor Interview” with author David Maister from **Financial Advisor Magazine**, 2001. <http://about.davidmaister.com/print.php?n=articles&d1=18&d2=73>*

“Communication is at the heart of all counseling relationships. CEO advisers know that, yet many repeatedly fail to make their points. They ignore the requirements of individual clients and contexts. They talk but don’t illuminate. The following rules for effective communication target CEO counselors, but most apply to anyone trying to build a close advisory relationship:

- Use discussions, not decks.
- Synthesize, don’t dump.
- Understand how the CEO processes information.
- Use the CEO’s vocabulary.
- Talk to the CEO as you would to a colleague, not to your boss.
- Fit communications to the CEO’s calendar.
- Just listen.”

“The best inside advisers manage to navigate those murky waters while delivering extraordinary value to the CEO. Having observed many of these people in action, I have identified some qualities that the best ones share:

- Limited Career Expectations.
- Professional Excellence.
- Personal Connection.
- Courage and Candor.
- Good Judgment and Common Sense.
- Appropriate Distance.
- Limited Tenure.”

*Excerpts from “Confessions of a Trusted Counselor,” **Harvard Business Review**, Sept 2005, David A. Nadler, author and founder of Delta Consulting Group.*

<http://hbr.org/2005/09/confessions-of-a-trusted-counselor/ar/1>