

TOOL BOX

OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

Open Space Technology is a process tool that convenes large groups of people and engages them in constructive conversation on a focused topic in a highly participative manner. OST is based on the concept of a community of collaboration and a village marketplace of ideas.

Participants continually move between community and the marketplace of issues and topics. This introduces a constant mixing and cross-pollinating of group input, producing systemic and sustainable results. Open Space capitalizes on the richness and adaptability found in the harmonious integration (not homogenization) of diversity. Each person is heard and takes responsibility for contributing. The collective knowledge of the entire organization is integrated and brought to bear on immediate solutions as well as long-term capabilities.

There are Four Principles and One Law that guide behavior in Open Space Technology:

The principles are:

1. Whoever comes are the right people, which reminds people in the small groups that getting something done is not a matter of having 100,000 people. The fundamental requirement is people who care to do something. And by showing up, that essential care is demonstrated.
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have, keeps people focused on the here and now, and eliminates all of the could-have-beens, should-have-beens or might-have-beens. What *is* the only thing there is at the moment.
3. Whenever it starts is the right time alerts people to the fact that inspired performance and genuine creativity rarely, if ever, pay attention to the clock. They happen (or not) when they happen.
4. When it's over, it's over. In a word, don't waste time. Do what you have to do, and when it's done, move on to something more useful where you can contribute.

The Law is: the *Law of Two Feet* which states simply: if at any time you find yourself in any situation where you are neither learning nor contributing, use your two feet and move. One of the most profound impacts of the law is to make it clear precisely who is responsible for the quality of a participant's learning and contribution: responsibility resides with the individual.

