

## Open Space Technology Planning Overview, 1 Page

**AGENDA:** There must be a clear and compelling theme, an interested and committed group, time and a place, and a leader. Detailed advance agendas, plans, and materials are not only unneeded they are usually counterproductive.

**WHEN TO USE:** OST runs on passion and responsibility. Whenever the answer is basically unknown, and the only possible hope is that the group, consisting of all those who care, can, from their collective wisdom, arrive at solutions that no individual or small group can hope to devise.

**THE THEME:** Creation of a powerful theme statement is critical, for it will be the central mechanism for focusing discussion and inspiring participation. It must have the capacity to inspire participation by being specific enough to indicate the direction, while possessing sufficient openness to allow for the imagination of the group to take over.

**THE GROUP:** The group must be interested and committed. Failing that, Open Space Technology will not work. The key ingredients for deep creative learning are real freedom and real responsibility.

**SPACE:** The space required is critical, but need not be elaborate or elegant. Comfort is more important. You will need a room large enough to hold the entire group, with space to spare in which the participants may easily move about.

Tables or desks are not only unnecessary, but will probably get in the way. Movable chairs, on the other hand, are essential.

The initial setup is a circle with a large, blank wall somewhere in the room. The wall must be free from windows, doors, drapes, and with a surface that permits taping paper with masking tape. The wall should also be long

enough so that the total group may stand before it, and never be more than three to four deep. The center of the circle is empty, for after all we are talking about Open Space.

If the room is very large, additional break-out areas may not be required, but they are always helpful. Best of all is the sort of environment in which common space is abundant.

If you are going to use a conference center or hotel, find one with plenty of conversation nooks, lobbies, and open grounds, where people may meet and work undisturbed, and without disturbing others.

**ROLES:** Sponsor(s), a Facilitator, Participants.  
*For example:*

The sponsor: Designs the invitation, creates the invite list, supports logistics and post event work.

The facilitator: supports the development of a good invitation, works with the logistics team to create the space, open and holds space, helps with proceedings, helps maintain the spirit of the event.

Participants: Take responsibility for what they love, listen and speak authentically, follow through on commitments.

**COMMON Mistakes:** OST is remarkably forgiving. The only way to totally mess up the process is to think you are in charge of it.

*It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power." ~ Alan Cohen*

Sources:

[A Brief User's Guide to Open Space Technology](#)

The Change Handbook: The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems, Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 2nd edition (2007) *Open Space Technology*, by Harrison Owen, pp. 135-148