

ODN in San Juan –Day One

OK, I'll confess that I was skeptical about holding the OD Network's Annual Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. I mean, for 39 years, we'd met in the US and Canada and it seemed to me that members would find Puerto Rico too far, and maybe too far out, to come.

And, boy was I wrong! As of this morning, Friday, October 1, we have more people signed up for this conference than we had signed up for the start of last year's conference, in good ol' Portland, OR.

We're at the Caribe Hilton, a 664 room resort hotel, first built by Conrad Hilton himself in 1949, expanded and refurbished in 1999. And what a site! Like many tropical resorts, the main lobby area is open to the outside air, with tropical birds, an open air restaurant and bar, several air conditioned restaurants, and a cafe that leads directly out to several swimming pools, where the cabana serves food and drinks, just around the corner from the private hotel beach. Somehow, I think the conference content will have some serious competition, so we'd better make sure the content is compelling!

We got the first batch of pre conference workshops started this afternoon at 1:00.

-- John Carter and the Gestalt gang are doing "Becoming a Better Intervenor," which is so popular that it sold out!

-- My friends and NTL Colleagues, David Glaser and Barbara Brewer are leading "Human Interaction for the OD Professional," which is like a mini T group.

-- Old friend and facilitator extraordinaire Geoff Bellman is leading "The Heart of Consulting: Facilitating Change While Being True to Yourself." I saw an ecstatic participant fondling a copy of Geoff's "Getting Things Done When Your Not in Charge," and re-reading his signature and message inside!

-- Evangelina Holvina and Michel Desachelles are leading a short, 2 day Tavistock lab. And, that's just a few of the goodies.

So, if you've been thinking about dropping in, stop. Don't think about it. Just do it. Burn some frequent flyer miles, jump on a e-saver, and come.

We have tons of great content, in a wonderful host hotel, and not a hurricane in sight, except the ones the bartenders make!

It's our 40th birthday, and a hell of a party! Don't miss it.

Matt

ODN in San Juan -- Day Two

One of the neatest things about these conferences is the chance to be in first-hand, face-to-face contact, rubbing elbows with some of the neatest, and best known people in our field.

During our lunch break today, I dropped in on Geoff Bellman's session and we had a chance to re-connect. And had drinks last night with Amy Daly-Donovan, who was flying solo at her pre-conf workshop today because her co-presenter Marilyn Blair had to cancel due to pneumonia, and Jane Hascall couldn't make it. Dave Jamieson from Pepperdine had his participants wandering all over the hotel, interviewing staff and guests as a part of their workshop called Culture and Its Many Consequences. He and I also had a wonderful Italian dinner and academe speak in Old San Juan with Bob Marshak, Beth Lister, and Arthur Friedman of AU/NTL.

Our own pre-conf workshop is a video lab, where we're doing live, fishbowl simulations on videotape, to see if we can discover and learn about group development theories by Will Schutz, Warren Bennis and Herb Shepard, and Wilfried Bion. It is such a thrill to have two of our Johns Hopkins University OD students here, Carrie Hutton and Nina Prescott, to co-present this workshop with me. They are so knowledgeable and competent that it makes an ol' prof proud! And, our participants are so into the session that they've asked that start extra early tomorrow morning. Thanks, too, to Radhika Warrior, a Bowling Green State U student who is our helpful volunteer and participant extraordinaire.

I was thrilled to see Amy Herman, former Exec Director of the OD Network, in the lobby this evening. You'll recall that Amy stepped down for health reasons about a year ago, and it is wonderful that she's back here, looking great, too!

And, Robin Reid and his Canon digital camera were haunting the halls; for the few minutes that I saw "The Official Cameraman of the OD Network Conference," however, there were more pictures being taken of beautiful women and flowers than official ODN events! ;-}

All of this, and the conference doesn't even begin for another two days, so there's still time to postpone your next week's cleaning and come on down to San Juan, Puerto Rico and help celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the ODN with Warner Burke, the founding director, starting Monday.

ODN in San Juan -- Day 3

Before I dig in to the details . . . if you aren't able to make this year's conference, but still want to participate in the conference -- from your desk! -- ULiveandLearn is webcasting the plenaries. Details at <http://www.odnetwork.org/conf2004/webcast.html>

Our hosts, the Caribe Hilton, completely outdid themselves this evening at this evening's opening reception. The hotel is set right on the ocean, with several outdoor pools and cabanas, covered by palm trees, and a wonderful, strong Caribbean breeze. As we left the hotel building and entered the reception, hotel staff were offering free rum punches and free pina coladas, plus several Puerto Rican specialty foods. It's a great way to mingle, network, and catch up with all the friends and colleagues we haven't seen since last year's conference, and before.

Just prior to the reception, the OD Network's Annual Meeting presented a very rosy picture of the balance sheet, and a member base that has grown to over 4,400 as of last December! The board was acknowledged for their hard work and cost consciousness, and Maggie Hoyer's work as Acting Executive Director was also acknowledged. But the real hit of the Annual Meeting was Mary O'Hara Devereaux's presentation of the top ten global trends of the next 10 years. Mary is a futurist and author of "Navigating the Badlands: Thriving in a Decade of Radical Transformation," from which her presentation was extracted, and which launched a great series of small group conversations about the future of OD in a "badlands" world.

The feedback on the pre-conf sessions has been wonderful. Though there weren't large numbers for some of the sessions, by all accounts, the quality was superb. In our own video lab on group development theories, our Johns Hopkins graduate students and I focused on the Team Performance Model, by Alan Drexler and David Sibbett. David's outfit, The Grove, sent along some wonderful materials which dazzled our participants, as only David's work can do!

So, the gang is all here, and we kick this thing off first thing Monday morning. Many, many thanks -- and kudos! -- for this rich smorgasbord of offerings go to the 2004 Conference Program Committee, Gordon Brooks of Pepperdine University, Mary Canty of the NEA, Matt Griffin of Griffin Associates, John McCall of McCall and Colleagues, Edie Seashore of EWS & Associates, Wendy Suter of Novartis, and Jason Wolf of 4Results NOW. They have a gargantuan task of identifying high calibre presenters and keynoters, and by all accounts, they've done us all proud with this year's program!

See you all in the morning plenary with Warner Burke, the OD Network's first Executive Director, as we continue to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the OD Network!

ODN in San Juan -- Day 4

When a human being turns 40, it raises all kinds of questions about a life well lived, improvements in the second half of life, and mortality. Do the same questions prevail when an organization reaches 40? I guess they kinda do . . .

The OD Network's Annual Conference and 40th birthday celebration officially opened this morning, with a warm and wonderful welcome from the San Juan host committee.

They described the island, and its beauty, and its features and attractions, and explained that the art, language, architecture, and cuisine all reflect the blend of island, Spanish, and US cultures which have influenced life here in Puerto Rico.

Then Warner Burke, the very first Director of the OD Network, gave the opening keynote. (Don Klein remembered that when he and Warner were both on the staff of NTL Institute in 1964, the OD Network was basically a drawer in Warner's desk!)

Warner's keynote did not look back, for even a second. Titled "Leadership, Toxicity, and the OD Practitioner's Role," Warner cited several leadership studies and concluded that the selection and screening of leaders is too important a function to leave to the HR folks, who aren't doing all that well with it, and that the OD functions ought to be responsible for leadership selection. A bit radical, eh?

He said that the big 5 factors that are actually at play when a manager or leader gets selected are: outgoingness, mental stability, conscienciousness, curiosity about new ideas, and agreeableness. But, he noted, those 5 factors correlate only to a .20 level with leadership effectiveness. He quoted a friend who owns an executive search and placement firm as saying that 80% of his placements leave after 3 years because organizations don't consider the "fit" of the person when they select.

He gave us his own leadership model, which was really neat:

- self awareness
- having a dream or vision
- high energy and a desire to make a difference
- integrity, including openness and honesty
- ability to deal with complexity
- deciding about goals, and creating options for implementation, rather than controlling implementation
- genuine interest and curiosity about people
- more optimistic than pessimistic
- more agreeable than disagreeable

Warner was then joined on stage by a panel, including Billie Alban, John Adams, Karen Davis, Brenda Jones, Sharon Thorne, Edie Seashore, Fred Miller, and Jason Wolfe, each of whom told stories about their first exposure or key contribution to the OD Network. What a wonderful, and powerful, reflection on our past and on the history of our network! There were table conversations and reports out, which included emails from live webcast participants from around the world, and that was **really** cool!

Our Chesapeake Bay OD Network hosted a lovely poolside lunch, right across from the AU/NTL Association's lunch. Several people wanted to be in both, so they ran back and forth across the way, confusing the hell out of the hotel wait staff!

There were 17 concurrent sessions this afternoon -- too many good choices, including Robin Reid on Learning from 30 Years of Mistakes; Nedra Weinstein, Trish Silber and

Lisa Kimball on Complexity; Tom Devane on Partnerships in Large Scale Change; and Judith Katz and Fred Miller on Whites Confronting Racism. So, I went to the Student Paper and Presentation Program, in its third year since Jason Wolfe kicked it off at the 2002 conference in Montreal. Two great papers were presented, and the authors conducted interactive sessions to demonstrate the main messages from their papers. The winning authors were Jeffrey Young from Sonoma State, Kimberly Lewis and Andrew Porter from AU/NTL, and our own Sherryl Stalinsky from Saybrook! (Sherrie's paper was based on Karl Abrecht's Organizational Intelligence theory, which he's discussed right here on our lists!)

Notably, we had papers from 15 different schools in this year's competition! Thanks to Marilyn Blair for recruiting readers and managing the evaluation process, and to Therese Yeager of Benedictine for leading today's session.

Late afternoon, Fielding honored Charlie Seashore in a session that must have been a blast, because it was loaded with people and their was laughter bursting out the seams. I was next door, trying to convene the Men in OD session, which I do every year, where we had a wonderful conversation around Stan Herman's messages on our odnet email discussion about the field of OD being too yin oriented. I'll post more about that in another message, and want to thank all of our odnet members who have been participating in that thread for getting us a good kick start for the conversation.

We were free this evening, so several groups headed for Old San Juan for dinner, which was delightful.

Tomorrow, the Network presents several awards, including a special posthumous award to Warren Hoffman, the OD Network's webmaster for the past 10 years, and my close, close friend and collaborator. His lovely wife, Pam Hoffman is here to accept the award, which I'm going to try to present without bawling my brains out.

ODN in San Juan -- Day 5

I'm still sweating from a full night of dancing at this evening's gala, but I'll get to that in a bit.

This, the middle day of this conference, ended with great fun, and it began with a wonderful ritual -- the OD Network's awards ceremony.

One of the Network's Lifetime Achievement Awards was presented to Charlie Seashore, who told a funny story about being a participant in a three week T group, facilitated by none other than Edie Whitfield, who became Edie Seashore. The other was presented by Emily Axelrod to Marv Weisbord, who was not able to attend.

Jason Wolfe presented the Service to the Network award to Matt Griffin, for his work with the New Professionals Learning Group, serving on the 03 Planning Committee for

the Portland Conference, and for chairing the 04 Planning Committee for San Juan. When Matt accepted the award, he jokingly said the award should be renamed the "I couldn't say no when they asked to me work!" award.

The best regional network award was accepted by Ted Nguyen on behalf of the New Jersey OD Learning Community, which is piloting a new operating model by having no dues, no budgets, and no paper, with almost 1500 members!

There was a special award to the Association of Community Colleges, a European non profit which is establishing a network across the continent and connecting people and projects in a true "networking" fashion.

Another special award was presented to Elsie Cross for her sustained and significant contribution to the Network and to the field. Her son, Barry, accepted the award on her behalf, sending Elsie's love and appreciation, as Elsie has not been well enough to travel for a while.

Your humble scribe was honored, and deeply touched, to present a Special Contribution to the Network award for Warren Hoffman's almost 10 years of service as the OD Network's webmaster, who died in June at 64. His wife, Pam Hoffman, accepted the award with grace and honor and appreciation.

The morning panel did a wonderful job on the topic of Theory and Practice and the Cutting Edge of OD. Chris Worley of Pepperdine facilitated a panel, which consisted of Lennox Joseph from The World Bank, John Boyle from Microsoft, John Vogen and Ilean Galloway from Intel, and Steve Brigham and Janet Fiero of America Speaks.

Our experiment with web casting is growing by the day! ULiveandLearn has been webcasting our plenary sessions, and there were emails from people participating in 7 different countries which were read during the plenary. That's a very big deal, and many, many thanks to ULiveandLearn for their support!

There were about 13 concurrent sessions this afternoon, and I chose the Memorial session for Frank Burns and Kathie Dannemiller, which was deeply touching, and wonderful. Thanks so much to Lisa Kimball and Sylvia James for organizing this for all of us.

This evening's gala included great Puerto Rican dishes, drinks, and a special 40th birthday cake and a round of "Happy Birthday" to the network, following by great music and dancing, to the point of sweet exhaustion for us ol' folks!

I need to correct a mistake I made in yesterday's message. Charlie Seashore's honorary session was sponsored by The Fielding Program. This morning's plenary was sponsored by Pepperdine.

Tomorrow, I'll do a few lines about San Juan and beyond . . .

So, what are the most treasured resources on a tropical island in October? The beach? Shade trees? Air conditioning? Wrong!

Here, it's Felix "Tito" Trinidad, who brought this city to a screeching halt Sunday returning from Madison Square Garden, where he defeated Ricardo Mayorga in the eighth round of a middle weight boxing match the night before. For several hours on Sunday, the roads around the airport were lined with people, cars, picnics, and parties, all waiting for a glimpse of the returning champ. And, what an arrival Tito made, on the top of a large fire truck, that was full of fans and supporters. The police did their best to keep at least one lane of the interstate open in both directions, but at times, even that was difficult due to the press of people.

Several of our ODN members who arrived on Sunday afternoon got caught up in the festivities, and thought the large crowds were to welcome *them* to San Juan! <just kidding.> But it was the San Juan taxi drivers who really made out, earning huge tips from grateful passengers by using side streets and secret passageways to skirt the throngs!

This island is about 100 miles across, and 30 miles from north to south. San Juan is on the north east side of the island. El Yunque, the Caribbean National (Rain) Forest is about 30 miles southeast of San Juan. We're headed out there tomorrow to see what's different in the 10 years since we were last there.

This island has done a GREAT job of encouraging commercial development along its most beautiful coast lines, and at the same time allowing public access to a scarce resource. Our hotel here, the Caribe Hilton, is on half of an ocean lagoon. The other half of the lagoon faces on the city's soccer stadium and the Third Millennium Park. The walking path circles around to a monument at the water's side, on which is written in English and Spanish, May Peace Prevail on Earth.

Our hotel is on the farthest west side of the commercial hotel and beach area. Just to the west is Old San Juan, a century-old area of great restaurants, tourist-y shops, small hotels, great old homes, and very small cobblestone streets.

One of our favorite places in Puerto Rico is at the far south of the island, Ponce. Many 18th century buildings, multi-colored, built into the hillside, overlooking the Aguirre Forest and Jobos Bay National Estuary and Research Reserve. In it, there are many smaller islands that are popular with locals and tourists for weekend sunbathing and swimming.

Last night at the gala, there were several suggestions that we come back to San Juan, and to the Caribe Hilton, every four years, and I must say, I have some sympathy for that idea! Most years, most people fly in for a few days of the conference, coming late and/or leaving early. This year, there are a bunch of folks whose spouses have come (mine

included) and who are staying through til Fri, Saturday, or even into next week. So, it's clear that San Juan has some appeal that goes beyond Portland or Montreal, which were also very hospitable for our past conferences. Something about the topics, and the beach, and the breeze . . .

ODN in San Juan -- Day 6

So, what do you do after you've heard from the field's founders and the OD Network's first ED, and recounted the history of the field and the Network, and looked at some best practices in applying current Theory and Practice today? You look out beyond our boundaries and into the future.

That's what was up today, the official closing of the OD Network's Annual Conference and 40th Birthday Celebration. Billie Alban chaired a panel on Global OD. The panelists were Vivian Rabassa from Puerto Rico, Imre Lovey from the International OD Association (IODA) based in Hungary, and Kenzi Kwong with Kenn & K Consulting in Hong Kong. They discussed the ways in which mainstream OD practices in the US don't work and worse, are offensive, in some other cultures. They noted the power-distance differences, to say nothing of the pay differences, between local and international consultants. They asked visiting consultants from the US to speak the language of the countries they visit, to assume their local counterparts are competent and worthy partners, and to give up the assumption that the OD staff is better than the HR staff! Billie was right that this session could well have lasted several hours! Great stuff, including several important inputs from our webcast participants around the world! That was really neat!

Among the 10 concurrent sessions were Linda Ackerman Anderson on Tailoring Your Strategy and Process to Get Results; Bill Pasmore from Mercer Delta on how OD leaders move beyond classic OD models; Maurice Monet from JFK University on clashing values; Khris Quade and Glenda Eoyang, on Large Group Events; plus sessions with Charlie Seashore, Michael Broome, Edi Seashore, and more. What a great lineup of all-star presenters on this last day of our conference.

The final plenary was another all-star summit: Where Do We Go From Here, from an Appreciative Inquiry perspective, with David Cooperider and Diana Whitney. What a great conversation about the future of the field, and of our world, the Millenium Development Goals, the UN Compact, and our hopes for the year 2014.

The final bit of fun was from our sponsor, Microsoft. They donated to three participants a full version of Office 2003, a new product called One Note, and a full X-Box and several games! What a haul!

And, what a day!

Tomorrow, there are 9 post conference sessions . . . And I'm going to none of them! One of our email list readers wrote about the Caribe Hilton: "Best

are those hammocks, and staring out into blue and green, eh?!?!? Enjoy the breezes through the trees, and come home safely."

So, I've got my instructions, that's my plan for tomorrow, and I'm sticking to it.

A final few thoughts and reflections tomorrow.

ODN in San Juan -- Day 7

So, how do you wrap up an annual conference and a 40th birthday party for 600 people? With a hearty THANK YOU! to everyone who helped pull it off.

There were still about 100 people in the 6 post conference workshops today, as the majority of participants headed for the beach, the pool, the jacuzzi, the hammocks, the golf course, the El Yungue rain forest, scuba diving, snorkling, spelunking in the caves, the massage table, or Old San Juan. Not a bad way to wrap up a conference and birthday party, eh?

This was our first OD Network conference to be so heavily sponsored, and the sponsors made a huge difference in the quality of the conference. Many, many thanks to:

- America Speaks, and good friend and colleague Carolyn Lukensmeyer;
- The AU/NTL program, including Arthur Freedman and Beth Lister and the 50 or so students and alumni who were present
- Benedictine University, and Peter Sorensen and Therese Yaeger
- The OD programs at Bowling Green State University, which sent several faculty and staff members, and 20 orange-shirted students as well!
- The Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve, who loaned us David Cooperider for the closing plenary
- CoVision, and my long time friend Lenny Lind
- Dannemiller-Tyson Associates, and especially the wonderful Sylvia James and Mary Eggars
- Elsie Y. Cross Associates, with thanks to Barry and good health wishes to Elsie
- Fielding Graduate Institute's School of Human and Organization Development, including Gordon Brooks
- The Gestalt Institute of Cleveland and Doroty Siminovich, and wishing good health to John Carter
- Griffin Organization Consulting and "Service to the Network" award winner Matt Griffin
- Microsoft Corporation, which donated software, rubik's cubes, and a huge X-Box and games combo to conference participants
- Novartis Pharmaceuticals and Wendy Suter who was our masterful Mistress of Ceremonies
- NTL Institute, and Executive Director Margaret Tyndall and the 30 or so NTL members who are on the board, presented, or participated in this conference
- Pepperdine University and Anne Feyerherm and Chris Worley

- Pfizer, Inc which sent a whole handful of people for this first time this year
- Plus Delta Consulting and its honcho Jeremy Lurey
- Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center, and long time friend John Adams
- Teachers College at Columbia University, who loaned us Warner Burke and Billie Alban for three huge valuable days
- ULiveandLearn, which provided our webcast service, not only live around the world this week, but also on CD to those who couldn't attend!
- St. Thomas University's Department of Organization Learning and Development.

Further acknowledgement to our OD Network "Friends," Corptalk, Garrison Printing, Otto Krueger, Bob Marshak, and John McCall.

Conference photogs Robin Reid and Peter Hoyer provided us a wealth of head shots, mug shots, and group shots which will be on the web soon. Thanks to both of you! In many cases, your pictures look better than the actual people do!

The conference planning thought they were done when they arrived at The Caribe Hilton, but they met every day, sometimes more than once. Please join me in thanking Gordon Brooks, Mary Merrill, Matt Griffin, John McCall, Edie Seashore, Wendy Suter, and Jason Wolfe.

And finally, there were exactly 2,657, 241 decisions that were made and implemented in preparing for this conference, and each was done with acuity, aplomb, grace, and a smile by the OD Network staff. Many, many thanks to Kathryn Jones, Mirlande Parker, Linda Taylor, Director of Professional Development and Mistress of All Things Pat Yankus, and Acting ED and The Last Living Responsible Adult Maggie Hoyer.

So, it'll be 13 months until we can have this much fun again. Our next conference is in Minneapolis, Minnesota in November, 2005. Resolve now to be there.

See you next year!

Peace. Matt

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