

OD Network 2007 Conference

October 21 - 24, 2007

Baltimore, Maryland

Matt Minahan, Ed.D., keeps us up to date on Conference happenings.

Day 1: Friday, October 19, pre-conference

Baltimore is the site for this year's OD Network conference . . . it'll be the capital of the OD world for the next 5 days, and we're just getting underway today, with the first day of the pre-conference workshops.

There are three pre-conf workshops that started today. The Gestalt gang -- John Carter, Marcella Benson-Quaziena, Michael Rynex, Barry Cross, and Dorothy Siminovitch -- have about 25 folks in "Becoming a Better Intervenor." Karen Stephenson got her Social Networking program underway today, following up and deepening her keynote thoughts from Conference 2005 in Minneapolis. And I'm leading a two day program called Facilitation 101, with a dozen delightful participants. All three of these programs run all day Saturday and till noon on Sunday.

The OD Network staff drove down from New Jersey Wednesday, the volunteers showed up to assemble participant packages yesterday afternoon, and we've got about a hundred people on hand already.

Coming here to the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in Baltimore is a lot like coming home. We're next to the Little Italy section of Baltimore (great restaurants!), down the road from Fells Point (great bars!), and a short water taxi ride from the Inner Harbor and Oriole Park at Camden Yards, where we've seen a lot of innings of bad baseball the past several years!

So, for me, this conference lacks the drama and anticipation of a long plane ride or a visit to unfamiliar places; it's a 45 minute car ride from home in Silver Spring, MD -- at least, out of rush hour. Could be twice that during rush hour, but being here in the Marriott and out of the traffic grind is a wonderful relief.

So, the drama and anticipation for this year's conference comes in the theme -- The Future Is Closer Than It Appears -- the great keynoters, and the 800 people who will assemble here to practice and celebrate our field of OD.

If you can't come but want to participate, join the live webcasts, or you can participate in them anytime that's convenient for you. The [webcast speakers' lineup](#) is exceptionally good, if I can modestly say so myself!

Day 2: Saturday, October 20, pre-conference

What a humbling beginning to what ended up being a wonderful day here at the conference!

The room where our Facilitation 101 session is happening here at the Marriott Baltimore Waterfront is the last conference room, at the end of a long hall of conference rooms. Yesterday, the other rooms were mostly empty, save for the Gestalt crowd and Karen Stephenson's workshop. So, it wasn't too difficult to feel like a big fish in a little sea.

This morning, all of that changed. The sea got a lot bigger, and this fish felt a lot smaller!

In order to get to our room, I had to walk past the rooms where Samantha and Jeremy Lurey, of Plus Delta Consulting (Gold Sponsors for the conference) were presenting "Launching, Running, and Growing a Successful OD Practice," and Barry Oshry was doing his one-day Power Lab, and Marv Weisbord and Sandra Janoff were doing "How to Lead Meetings that Matter." In the lunch line, I got to see in the flesh -- after years of an online relationship -- Craig McGee, who with Kathy Molloy, was doing the "Creating the Designed Organization" session. And Brigitte Rouson, Vicki Asakura, and Alfredo Vergara-Lobo presented "Cultural Competency: Leading Across Sectors." These sessions had 15, 25, and sometimes 35 people in each one, so the appeal was broad, and it was very obvious. Having to walk past these stars and superstars certainly got me into a very humble frame of mind for our Facilitation 101 session!

There must have been 250 people at lunch today, so the pre-confs continue to be a popular source of learning and skill development for conference attendees.

After dinner, several of us just stood in the lobby for an hour, as folks came in, checked in, and got started at the conference. Chrissa Merron, Peter Norlin, Dave Jamieson, Matt Griffin, Jason Wolfe, Marilyn Blair, Therese Yaeger, Rosa Colon, Stephanie Jo Gomez, Gordon Brooks, Robin Reid. At dinner at Della Note (just fabulous!), we saw the leaders of the regional networks, including Laurie Reuben (ex pres) and Laura Granling (current pres) of Chesapeake Bay OD Network, hanging around with Bill Gellermann and other regional leaders.

So, the momentum is building . . . the multitude is assembling . . . the energy is rising . . . and we've got another half day of our Facilitation 101 session tomorrow.

More then. And, if you're in the area, the Marriott Waterfront is already booked, but the Courtyard across the street has rooms, and you can always register on site, or attend virtually via web cast.

Be here, or there, but don't miss the great stuff that this year's conference offers!

Day 3: Sunday, October 21, Conference kickoff

Today's highlight here at the conference was the announcement and celebration of three leadership changes.

At the OD Network's Business Meeting, board chair Christi Olson announced that Maggie Hoyer is stepping down from the Executive Director position, after serving 12+ years with the Network. By anyone's calculation, that makes Maggie the longest serving employee of the Network, ever. There will be several opportunities to celebrate Maggie's tenure at the Network, including a special reception for her on Monday evening. So, if you're at the conference, find the fun and be there to tell her in person how much we've benefited from her years with the OD Network.

Christi also announced that the new ED for the Network will be Peter Norlin. She said that it was a unanimous decision of the board, and that she and the Network were thrilled that Peter had accepted the job.

Peter said that he is looking forward to serving the Network members, to contribute to the field of OD, and to follow the lead that Maggie has charted for the Network.

There was warm appreciation and lots of good wishes for the future for Maggie. And, I think folks were surprised, and then pleased, and then very excited about Peter's appointment.

Also announced today was a leadership change that affects the OD Network and our NTL members. Bob Marshak announced that Christi Olson is stepping down as chair of the OD Network Board of Trustees, because she's accepted the full time position as the President and CEO of NTL Institute.

June Delano will take over as chair of the OD Network's Board of Trustees, effective Nov, 2007.

Bob also announced that he and Christi will be completing their 6 year terms on the Board in 2008, and that the board will conduct an election for 2 vacant positions in the spring of 2008.

The other big event here today was the Dick Beckhard Mentoring Session, which Denny Gallagher ran for the 7th year in a row. Along with Marti Kaplan and Stephanie Jo Gomez, I had the privilege of working with Denny on today's program, and it is in part for his service on the program that the Network is awarding the Service to the OD Network award to Denny Gallagher this year! Congratulations, and thanks for all of your hard work and accomplishments, Denny!

We had a great cast of 35 mentors, all with vast amounts of experience - 25, 30, 35, and 40 years apiece! -- people like Michael Broom, and Frank Friedlander, and Bev Scott, and Judy Vogel, and David Glaser, and Dick and Emily Axelrod, and James Calvin, and Jeremy and Samantha Lurey, and Bill Gellermann, and Peter Norlin, and Charlie Seashore, and Sioux Thompson, etc etc. Using Denny's marvelous matching methodology, we got the mentors matched up with 110 mentees, in groups of 2s, 3s, and 4s -- and we did it all in 90 minutes! Can you say, "talk fast!?"

All of the planning and communication and marketing and recruiting needed for the event was well worth it to see the explosion of energy and good will that infected the rest of the event as the doors from our room opened at 4:00 today.

The opening reception this evening at 5:00 featured several Baltimore angles, plus a video of Baltimore highlights, including Oriole Park at Camden Yards, the Inner Harbor, the water taxis, the Maryland Science Museum, and Baltimore Aquarium, and Fort McHenry, where the Star Spangled Banner was written during the War of 1812.

It was a lovely day, and a long one. I didn't get outside for a breath of the real world until 9:30 this evening, but it was worth the wait.

Opening keynote is tomorrow morning. I'm doing the Monday mid- morning webcast, so if you're not here, maybe you'll be there! And then it's Men in OD, which I'll be convening late afternoon, and then we start the rounds at all of the receptions tomorrow evening . . .

Day 4: Monday, October 22, general Conference

The lovely city of Baltimore has graced us with wonderful, 75 degree weather the past few days. Our hotel here is situated right on the Inner Harbor, so the sun rises ever so slowly, and ever so colorfully, and ever so brilliantly each morning right over the water to the east.

It's a bit the way that this conference has dawned.

A small band of hearty souls Friday gradually grew to a couple of hundred on Saturday, doubled in Sunday, and today -- ta dah! -- the sun slipped over the horizon and dawned on our gathering here on the Harbor with over -- ta dah! -- 900 friends, colleagues, and fellow travelers.

Even before the day's business got underway, the buzz in the hallways this morning was about several of the Sunday workshops. Lots of chat about "Theory that Informs OD: What Practitioners Are Learning" in which Brenda Jones and Paul Cadario convened a breath-taking panel of extremely diverse and divergent perspectives. There was an appreciative buzz around Edie Seashore's and Michael Broom's session "Back to Basics: Principles for Powerful Practice." And last evening, there was a community dialogue called "The Wire, OD, and Systems in Distress."

Christi Olson, Chair of the Board of Trustees, opened the conference with a lovely tribute and testimonial to Maggie Hoyer, who is stepping down as Executive Director of the Network, citing her 12+ years of service in a variety of roles, and surviving three prior EDs. The 700+ people in the room honored Maggie with a long and loud standing ovation.

Christi then introduced Peter Norlin, long time OD Network member and Associate Editor of the *OD Practitioner*, as the new ED, to start toward the end of the year.

The conference opening keynoter was Art Kleiner, author of "The Age of Heretics, " and "Who Really Matters: The Core Group Theory of Power, Privilege, and Success." He cited Elliott Jacques "Requisite Organization" theory, and Karen Stephenson's Social Network Analysis in discussing the formal and informal ways in which organizations operate, particular about the attributes of people in the "core group" of an organization. He used the body's circulatory systems as a metaphor for these formal and informal systems in organizations.

There were twelve concurrent sessions in the morning, with great presenters, including two of our own list contributors, Bill Gellermann and Charlie Badenhop, plus Billie Alban, Barbara Bunker, Katherine Farquhar and Ka Flewellyn, Pam Van Dyke, Charlie Seashore, Michael Broom, Jane Rozenzweig, Michael Brazzel, and Dave Jamieson. Several of these folks have been keynoters elsewhere, and here, they're doing concurrent sessions. Just an amazing collection of talent.

The afternoon plenary was hosted by conference planning committee chair Paul Cadario, as a combination Jim Lehrer and Wolf Blitzer, with two HR executives, Marta Brito-Perez, Chief Human Capital Officer at the Department of Homeland Security, and Larry Milan, SVP, of ING Financial Services. One of the major HR challenges at the Department of Homeland Security is that their workforce is aging, and the incoming workforce isn't staying till retirement but leaving after 4-5 years, which is very expensive given the need for security clearance and competency testing that is part of the screening process. At ING, one challenge was to take a good look at their corporate culture and employee value proposition, as employees were often very attracted to the firm and disappointed once they got inside. Even though their organizations are very

different, it is clear that both recruit from the same talent pool, have many of the same talent management problems, and rely heavily on their respective OD functions.

The afternoon concurrent sessions featured Steve Jones, David Osborne, Heather Berthoud, Bob Greene -- four of the 32 NTL members presenting at this year's conference! -- plus Trish Silber and Nedra Weinstein, Mai Moua, a fun session on Improv, Harrison Owen on Open Space, Beth Applegate, Maggie Potapchuk, Saul Eisen, Dave Jamieson, and several more as well.

Late afternoon was a fireside chat hosted by Jean Haskell and Chrissa Merron, with this year's OD Network Award recipients: Fred Miller, receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award, Denny Gallagher, receiving the Service to the OD Network Award, David Sibbet, receiving the Member's Choice Award, United Religions Initiative, receiving the Global Work Award, Frances Beard, receiving the Sharing the Wealth Award, and Harrison Own, also receiving the Sharing the Wealth Award.

Then began the competitive cocktail parties, receptions, and affinity group meetings. Starting at 6:30, I was convening the Men in OD, at the same time that the 21st Global Forum, Coaching and OD, GLBT Professionals, Latinos/as in OD, OD Practitioners for the Environment, the Fielding party, the Pepperdine party, the Johns Hopkins party, the AU/NTL party, and a bunch more. What a terrible choice, eh? A group of men sharing about their experiences in the field, competing with another round of mini hotdogs wrapped in bread dough and dunked in dark mustard!

The sweet and bittersweet part of the day was the 8 pm reception to honor Maggie Hoyer's tenure as Executive Director of the OD Network. There were lovely tributes from about 15 people, the board, and the staff, and it was clear that Maggie is deeply connected to many of the members. I called her "the center of the center of our Network." Stephanie Jo Gomez called her "our heart and soul," and I don't think that either was an exaggeration. Some conference miscreant put together some counterfeit lyrics to Dean Martin's, "That's Amore," handed out copies, and had the whole room of 100 people join in song to salute Maggie's dedication and contribution to the network. They laughed, and they cried. It was fun, and it seemed just right for the occasion.

I am greatly impressed by how gracefully and thoughtfully the OD Network is handling this transition. Every piece of the announcement process here at the conference was executed with good taste, good grace, professionalism, and compassion. I'm extremely proud of our Network in this endeavor.

And, I'll deeply miss Margaret Franks Hoyer in these halls and in our Network after next month.

Day 5: Tuesday, October 23, general Conference

When you think about Baltimore, you probably think about crabs and oysters, the Inner Harbor, bad baseball with the Orioles, good football with the Ravens, and good medical research at Johns Hopkins. At the end here, I'll pass along one of the best kept secrets about Baltimore, and I'm betting you'll find it a surprise.

We're right, smack dab in the middle of the conference cocoon here . . . not sure what day it is, not sure what the weather is, not sure what's going on in the outside world, and not sure we really care!

It was an early, early start for about 100 of us. The Awards Breakfast was full of wonderful people, with big and powerful personalities, all of whom gathered as friends, family (including Fred Miller's 95-year-old mother), and supporters of the award recipients, and who had deeply touching stories and insights about themselves and our work. Suffice it to say that there was lots of laughter, and many many tears. Those honored were Fred Miller, receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award; Denny Gallagher, receiving the Service to the Network Award; David Sibbet and The Grove Consultants International, receiving the Member's Choice Award; United Religions Initiative, receiving the Global Work Award; Frances Beard, receiving the Sharing the Wealth Award; and Harrison Owen, also receiving the Sharing the Wealth Award. Now in its fourth year, the Awards breakfast is becoming an important tradition at the annual conference gathering.

This morning's plenary was by two people not really well known in OD. No name recognition like Meg Wheatley or Delorese Ambrose or Fred Miller or Peter Block. And yet their message so completely captivated the place that, based upon the long line of people trying to get in to their concurrent session, I'd say they've developed an instantly large fan club here at the conference. Jerry and Monique Sternin pioneered the Positive Deviance approach, shaped in developing countries, and which has led to sustainable improvements in seemingly intractable organizational and social issues, such as nutrition among rice farmers in Asia, female genital circumcision in Egypt, and MRSA infections here in US hospitals. They emphasized the huge power of self discovery, that externally provided knowledge doesn't solve problems and that all systems need measurement. They said that it's easier to act your way into a new way of thinking, than to think your way into a new way of acting. Focus on practice, not knowledge. Positive Deviance should be used when problems require behavioral or social change, for seemingly intractable problems, in places where there are Positive Deviants, where there is leadership to address the issue, and skilled facilitation.

The Positive Deviance conversation continued on into a concurrent session, and there were about 10 others, with one called Face the Music: Experiential Learning and Creativity in OD, one called Strategic OD: Critical Issues in Designing and Implementing an Internal OD Function, Fostering Action among White People Confronting Racism, and, the session that I attended, which was the Student Paper Presentations. We're in the 7th year of the SPP, and had 27 papers submitted this year, from 19 different graduate programs, across three continents. And, boy, did we have some GREAT submissions! In the end, the two best papers were "An Exploration of Social Constructionism Theory," by Katharine Wismer of Seattle University's OD and Renewal Program, and "Don't Ask What Complexity Can Do for You, Ask What You Can Do for Complexity," by Barbara Christian of the Milano New School. And, as one of the readers, I want to tell you that these two papers were the best among a whole batch that were fabulous. It was great to see these two scholar/practitioners present their ideas and themselves, and engage with some of the best thinkers in the field, including Therese Yeager, and Jason Wolfe, and Marilyn Blair, and Bill Gellermann, and Mark Berns, and others. It's hard not to be wildly optimistic about the future of our field, given the talent of these scholar/practitioners!

After lunch, we heard Trabian Shorters, Director of US Operations for Ashoka Institute (www.ashoka.org/), which is a non-profit global association of social entrepreneurs. So, your question is probably similar to mine: What IS a social entrepreneur? Trabian explained that they

are men and women with system-changing solutions for the world's most urgent social problems, tackling poverty, and prison recidivism, and and education, etc. They've built a global community of people who are developing models and exchanging knowledge about collaboration and infrastructure needed to engage citizens in the business of governing their lives.

The afternoon concurrents dealt with topics such as team coaching, the America Speaks project in New Orleans, an organizational dynamics project in China, cultural competency among Asian Americans, and Cyber-OD: A Call to Action.

Folks are getting tired.

OK, I'll make that an "I statement." I'm getting tired.

And, tonight, we've got the big Hairspray gala, with food, music, dancing, and a Hairspray theme, relating to the John Waters' Broadway musical and recent movie about the integration of Baltimore by high school students in the 1960s. <http://imdb.com/title/tt0427327/> A great dj with music from the 50s and 60s, some of the women in large wigs, several in 50's costume, including three of the Network's office staff.

Flashing lighted rings. Meat loaf and mac and cheese for dinner. Root beer floats. Ice cream sundaes. It was a great slice of life in Baltimore in the 50s and 60s.

As friend and NTL colleague Heather Berthoud said this afternoon, the air is beginning to escape. The vendors have packed up their wares -- about a day earlier than anyone's memory . . . but that, and the fatigue of 5 days -- or is it 5 weeks? -- of continuous conference wears a person down. As a borderline extrovert/introvert, I have no idea how the real introverts manage themselves in long conferences like this. Naps, maybe?

Anyway, back to Baltimore's secret.

The one area in which Baltimore really stands out is in its public and alternative radio stations . . . all of which are, or were, sponsored by schools in Baltimore. WBJC -- www.wbjc.com/ -- is one of the last remaining full time classical music stations in the country, operated by Baltimore City Community College -- www.bccc.edu/. There is great full time jazz -- one of the few places left in the country -- on WEAA -- www.weaa.org/ -- at Morgan State University -- www.morgan.edu/ -- one of the historically black universities and colleges. One of the truly GREAT alternative rock stations in the country is WTMD -- www.wtmd.org/ -- is at Towson State University -- www.towson.edu/ . And the big NPR affiliate, with state-wide reach via a repeater network, is WYPR -- www.wypr.org/ -- which until 2001 was owned and operated by Johns Hopkins University, but now is full-service, publicly owned and operated station, with lots of local programming.

So, we're down the last day tomorrow . . . But as you can tell, this one was full of energy and life for the field and for ourselves. It doesn't get better than that.

Day 6: Wednesday, October 24, Conference closing

It was a week of sunny, 75, sweet breezes . . . and it came to end Wednesday in Baltimore with clouds and rain -- desperately needed rain -- sweeping in through the harbor and off into the far

horizon. Just the perfect day to bring a wonderful conference to its end. The release -- and the relief -- that comes from the arrival of a long awaited rain storm . . . and the relaxation that comes from arriving at a long-sought destination.

That's what Wednesday was like at the OD Network Conference 2007 in Baltimore.

It had been a week of brilliant sun and fun, with waterside jogging and harbor taxi rides, Italian restaurants galore, glorious shopping and sightseeing at the Inner Harbor, a delightful Aquarium two blocks away, the Maryland Science Museum two blocks after that, great public radio . . . and . . . thousands of hugs and handshakes, deep conversation with old friends and new acquaintances, long sessions with the leaders and founders of our field, profound peer learning in sessions, challenging key note presentations, vendor sessions, 144 mentors and mentees, awards for commitment and achievement, celebrations of the past, optimism for the future, honoring Maggie Hoyer's tenure and accomplishments as executive director, and multiple appreciations.

The day began the way all sane days should begin, with a lovely session called "Using Insight Meditation to Sharpen Our Consulting Skills," led by Zen master (and close colleague and friend) David Glaser. Some teaching, some sitting, some discussion, some lessons, some sitting, some sharing. Just the right start to the day.

One of the big hits of the day was the "Learning from the Lived Experience of Luminaries in OD" session, in which John Bennett extended his dissertation research in a conversation with Billie Alban, Barbara Bunker, Saul Eisen, Bob Marshak, Charlie Seashore, Edie Seashore, and Marv Weisbord.

There was another popular concurrent session also based on dissertation research, convened by Case grad and fellow NTL member Bauback Yeganeh, dealing with Mindfulness and OD: Momentary Awareness for Effective Change.

I also heard from several folks who had "unexpected" experiences -- good ones! -- with Diane Hetherington and Betsy Hostetler in their Tuesday session "Systemic Solutions: Seeing Hidden Dynamics."

There was no keynote on Wednesday, but the closing plenary included a video about OD and the conference, shot on the scene at the conference by conference sponsor, Snippies. The plenary also allowed conference planning team chair Paul Cadario to acknowledge and thank the conference planning team: Kristy Dominquez, Donna Ginn, Stephanie Jo Gomez, Laura Gramling, Sylvia James, Lisa Kimball, Stephen Pile, Laurie Reuben, John Vegas, and Angela Watts. Thanks to all for lining up all the great talent that we had this year's conference.

The conference planning process also involved an Advisory Panel: Mila Baker, Gordon Brooks, Kristin Cobble, Al Cooke, Katherine Farquhar, Jeff Frankes, Bill Passmore, Ken Schaefer, and Jeff Sube.

June Delano, who is the incoming chair of the Board of Trustees, spoke appreciatively about the conference, and invited all to get involved and attend next year's conference, in Austin, Texas.

And the conference was officially closed.

But that was just the beginning of the fun for those presenting or attending in the post conferences . . . and what a line up! I spent the afternoon with David Sibbett in a 3 hour workshop on graphic facilitation that was chock full of simple and powerful ways to work at the flip chart and on the wall.

"Leadership for a World of Difference" was offered by Dan Distelhorst and Gordon Watanabe.

"Systems, Social Justice, and Quadrant Identities" was offered by Kathy Obear, and NTL colleagues Marcella Benson-Quaziana, Michael Brazzel, and Cathy Royal.

"The Transformative Power of Action Learning" was offered by Chuck Appleby and Bea Carson.

So, it's done for another year. Another good year. Another good conference. Another good time to collect and connect . . . I like the fact that we have the conference in the fall . . . the time of gathering and storing . . . binging on friendship and collegueship . . . storing up before the arrival of the long, cold winter . . . that 11 month winter without these people and the relationships that define our field and our work.

And [in October 2008, we get to do it all again, in Austin, Texas.](#) I hope to see you all there!

Your humble scribe,
Matt