

## **OD Network 2008 Conference**

October 19 - 22, 2008

Austin, TX

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

### **Day 1: Saturday, October 18, pre-conference**

OK, friends and colleagues, time to strap yourselves in and come on down to Austin for the 2008 OD Network Conference in Austin.

Once again this year, your faithful scribe is at the keyboard, greeting friends, hugging colleagues and collecting impressions for our list members throughout the world.

Although the conference doesn't officially start until Sunday evening, there are three days on which pre-conference sessions are being held...starting this afternoon just after lunch.

There are three pre conference programs that got underway today, with a star studded list of OD folks as presenters:

"The Facilitation Lab: Sharpening Your Skills" is being led by Judy Vogel and your humble scribe here. More on this tomorrow.

"Becoming a Better Intervenor" is being led by Marcella Benson-Quaziena, John Carter, Veronica Hopper Carter, Brenda Jones, Mike Rynex, and Dorothy Siminovich.

"A Power Equity Group Lab" is being led by Carol Pierce and Rick Huntley.

Of the 10 of presenting these labs, I think 7 of us are also NTL members, so you can bet there is a strong thread of experiential learning, in the moment interventions, and commitment to equality and social justice in these programs.

All three of these programs will continue through tomorrow, and there will be another 6 one day programs which will be held. Looking through the program, this is an amazing lineup. Just listed to who's here Saturday and what they're talking about:

"Advanced Facilitation Skills for Multi Stakeholder Collaboration" with the wonderful Sam Kaner.

"Coaching and OD" with Michael Bungay Stanier.

"Creating an Inclusive Workplace" with Barry Cross and Amber Mayes.

"How to Design Large Group Interventions" with an amazing group: Dick Axelrod, Barbara Bunker, Emily Axelrod, and Billie Alban -- these are the folks who, literally, wrote the book on large group interventions!

"High Impact Consulting: The Cape Cod Intervention Model" with Edwin and Sonia Nevis and Nancy Hardaway.

“Embodied Leadership: Centered and Calm in the Midst of Change” with the always incredible Charlie Badenhop.

What a cast! What a show! And I haven't even gotten to the keynotes for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, and they're amazing in their own rights!

So, if you're still on the fence about coming, jump! We're at the Marriott Renaissance on Arboretum Drive in Austin. Conference details are at [www.odnetwork.org](http://www.odnetwork.org).

More tomorrow.

Your humble scribe...  
Matt

## **Day 2: Sunday, October 19, pre-conference**

I'd say the theme of this second day of the OD Network conference was “buzz building.” I say that because, all through the day, there was a buzz building as folks in the 9 preconference workshops from today met, talked, shared experiences, and realized how much good stuff is going on here.

We began Friday with three 2-day preconf, and added 6 more 1-day preconf today. There was a cluster of folks gathered around the coffee and tea stations early today buzzing about what had happened and what they hoped would happen today. Then at lunch, all of the participants and staff from all 9 workshops shared lunch together, which gave us all time to network and compare notes.

The 3 2-day workshops all end at lunch on Sunday. I'm working with Judy Vogel on “The Facilitation Lab: Sharpening Your Skills.” We have about 15 participants, working at two tables, practicing their skills at leading and facilitating brainstorming tasks, criteria development, and decision making. I think we spent 4 or more hours today, with participants working in pairs as facilitators and charters, and then receiving feedback from Judy and me and the other group participants. So far, our participants seem eager and engaged, and are quite obviously learning and improving their facilitation skills with each round of practice . . . It's quite fulfilling for Judy and me. And, it's quite exhausting. I'm not sure I've got it in my to stay up and watch SNL tonight!

Sunday is a huge day at the conference. The Godparents -- our seniors and elders in OD - meet at 9, the People of Color group meets at 9. We have an orientation for people who are attending the conference for the first time at 1. At 2:30, Stephanie Jo Gomez and I are taking over from Denny Gallagher in leading the Dick Beckard Mentoring Session, where we help match up new comers to the field with folks who have experience to share. Every year, we receive rave reviews about this process . . . and hope that's the case this year as well. As usual, we could use a few more mentors . . . so please come by and join with us 2:30 til 4 tomorrow.

The OD Network's business meeting is from 4 til 5, at which I expect that new Executive Director Peter Norlin will lead his first business meeting for the Network...at 5:00 is the Welcome to Austin Reception, and then one of the conference all time favorites, One World Music will lead a music making and appreciative conversation from 7:30 til 9:00. I think this will be the 3rd

time I've seen them at our conferences over the years, and I like them even more each time. So, it's been a wonderfully exhausting day so far, and tomorrow promises even more of the same.

Still time to register as a drop in, for a day or the whole conference, if you're around the Austin area. Please come up and say hello if you do or if you're already here!

Matt

### **Day 3: Monday, October 20, Conference kickoff**

So, the energy and activity levels are starting to crank up here at the OD Network Annual Conference here in Austin. Today was the end of the beginning of the conference, with about 15 pre conference programs wrapping up, including The Facilitation Lab that Judy Vogel and I co-lead.

I forgot to mention something from our Lab from Saturday. I was busy explaining the patterns and rhythms of brainstorming in our room full of 15 participants, when there was a sudden flash of light near the door, behind which I saw old friend and conference photographer Robin Reid. Judy and I welcomed him into the room, and were pleased to introduce him to our participants. Robin created the Network's first web page, and was one of the founders of these ODNNet email discussion lists, and led the OD Network board through some very tough times in the late 90s and early 00s. So, it was great that he came into our session, great that we got to see each other, and great that I got to mention Robin's accomplishments to our session participants.

Meanwhile, back at the conference today, there was a steady stream of people checking in, and checking out the large atrium and gathering spot here at the Marriott Renaissance Hotel. But it was Peter Norlin, the new ED of the OD Network, who the man in many places today.

Peter worked closely with Angela Watts in convening the First Time Conference Attendees, welcoming upwards of 100 folks.

Then Peter provided some context and reiterated his and the Network's commitment to mentoring with opening comments at the Dick Beckard Mentoring Session, after which Stephanie Jo Gomez and I got more than 100 people connected in mentor/mentee relationships. The best compliment on our work came from Denny Gallagher, who founded the program, invented the design, and ran it for 8 years, when, on the elevator to our rooms this evening, he patted me on the shoulder and said, "You done good, man!"

Then Peter and the OD Network board hosted the Annual Business Meeting of the Network, which gave Peter the chance to speak programmatically about the work of the network, and its desire to be a network for networks. Billie Alban spoke up and challenged the network to be less US centric and more internationally focused. And, Bill Gellermann urged the Network to be an organization of networks, not just a network of networks, sponsoring work across nations and cultures that would build a better, more sustainable world.

The opening reception was held in a large room, with a wonderful jazz trio on the middle, sponsors booths around the perimeter, lots of good food and drink, and many, many people in the spacious middle. It was a brilliant way to make sure that conference attendees get to see and spend time with the conference sponsors. It was great to catch up with Peter Sorensen (who was just feted on his 75th birthday last week!) and Therese Yaeger of Benedictine

University. They're being given the Share the Wealth award by the Network at Tuesday's awards breakfast, very very well deserved.

The closing of the day was the most delicious part of the day. One World Music returned for the 3rd or 4th time to the network, to lead an evening of rhythmic music making, with color coded tubes for clapping, each of the 4 colors with a different pitch, and their signature green colored shaker eggs. I think I've got my 4th now.

Those of you who are here at the conference, please write back to the lists and add your own experiences and stories about the conference so far . . .

Tomorrow, Peter Norlin opens the conference at 8:30, and we hear the first keynote speaker. I hope to see you here!

#### **Day 4: Tuesday, October 21, general Conference**

What an interesting and stimulating day at the OD Network conference here in Austin, today.

The real early birds joined David Glaser, listservant for our odnet-mindfulness list, for a 6:45 session on meditation. I love David like a brother, but not so much at 6:45 in the middle of an exhausting conference, so I missed the meditation today.

By 8:30, though, I was upright and alert. Board chair June Delano opened the conference, and then Peter Norlin, the new Executive Director, acknowledged the board members, the conference planning committee, and the Network's office staff.

Peter then dedicated the conference to Marilyn Blair, to acknowledge her contribution to the Network as the editor of the OD Practitioner for the past 9 years, saying that she had raised the standards and visibility of the ODP and greatly improved the quality of the articles and their contribution to the field. Marilyn walked onto the stage to a standing ovation, and graciously thanked all of authors who've contributed to the OD Practitioner, or to Practicing or Seasonings, the two online journals.

Keynoter Ori Brafman described his organizational theory by using a metaphor of a spider, which can be disabled by removing its head, versus a starfish, which has no head and which regenerates itself when an portion is removed. His lesson began with Hernando Cortez' domination of the Aztecs, and later South America. The Spanish empire then tried to expand north among the Native Americans in what is now Texas, but their organization and leadership was so fluid and decentralized that the Spanish were never able to dominate the far outnumbered Native Americans. He cited Alcoholics Anonymous as an example of a starfish organization where the creation or elimination of a location in one area would have no direct impact on another. He also cited Toyota, with a strong and controlling hierarchy -- very spiderlike -- but with plants that are much more egalitarian and democratic -- very starfishlike. In the end, he advocated for a blended model, with portions of both.

The keynote was followed by a great series of concurrent sessions, and then, after lunch, there was a new conference feature called Supersessions, with a great lineup, including Arvind Singhal, Bob Marshak, Reuben McDaniel, Cathy Royal, and Envision Central Texas.

Another round of mid afternoon concurrent sessions, and then a Fireside Chat with this year's OD Network award winners, Anne Litwin, Therese Yaeger and Peter Sorensen, and Peter Block. All will receive their awards at the Tuesday morning awards breakfast.

The day ended with meetings of the Affinity Groups, including Coaching, Women in OD, the 23rd Global Forum (with dear friend Karen Davis), GLBT Professionals in OD, Healthcare practitioners, and the group that I convened, Men in OD.

Interesting, exhilarating, exhausting...and tomorrow's Awards Breakfast starts early.

I know that there are a bunch of list members here who are reading and thanking me in person. And, while that's lovely and I'm grateful, I hope you'll also add your own comments and ideas here...

G'night! Matt

### **Day 5: Wednesday, October 22, general Conference**

Austin is a great town for a conference like ours because it is so interesting, diverse, and funky. And, it doesn't take itself so seriously.

I have a high school classmate who has been a prof here at University of Texas since 1977. He said that when he came to Austin, it was a town of about 150,000. Now, it's more than 710,000 souls. Chartered in 1839 as the capital of the Republic of Texas, Austin became the state capital when Texas was admitted to the Union in 1846 as the twenty-eighth state. Austin is now the fourth largest city in the state and the sixteenth most populous city in the nation.

Austin is probably best known for its music. 6th Street in the center of Austin has upwards of 50 clubs with all kinds of music every night. We went to Threadgills, which used to be known as Armadillo World Headquarters years ago, for great Tex Mex food and outdoor country/folk music as well. Rather than host a big closing dance and party tonight, the network is providing buses into downtown Austin, so that people can get in to town and sample the local nightlife.

Austin is also known as the home of the late Molly Ivins, a very funny liberal columnist who knew the foibles of George Bush from covering him here in the state house, and as being the "blue pocket" on the electoral map of deep, dark red Texas. It's also the home of the #1 Texas Longhorns, with a legitimate Heisman candidate, Colt McCoy. He and the Longhorns whipped #17 ol' Mizzou this weekend, and you'd have thought they won the Super Bowl...but it was just another Saturday of football in Texas. This is a town and a state that loves its football!

When you're here, the LBJ library is a must see. Last night, PBS nationwide showed two hours of a program on LBJ that was shot before Doris Kearns Goodwin had wrinkles...but it was a fabulous, and used a lot of the same footage that you see here at the library, which is on the UT campus. I hadn't realized that LBJ signed more than 1,000 bills into law establishing the Great Society in his 4.5 years in the White House. He had a deep and profound compassion for the poor, formed in his first job as a teacher in what was called at the time, the "Mexican" school. The Lady Bird Johnson Gardens are another great half day, as is a day trip to San Antonio where the River Walk is lovely and the Alamo is a must see.

One of my all time favorite radio stations, KUT, is also here. KUT is run by UT students, and like WXPN which is run by students at the University of Pennsylvania, it is a solid, professionally executed, well run, well programmed, very appealing station that does much, much more than pass along NPR programming. I've been listening to KUT on the web for years, and always make it a point to tune in when I'm here. (It was pledge week this week, so I've done some other sampling as well...)

One more bit of Austin info at the end here...

The day got off to a very early start, with the OD Network Breakfast Awards Ceremony. Fred Miller and Bob Marshak, who are both Lifetime Achievement Award recipients themselves, presented the award to this year's recipient, Peter Block, in absentia. The Sharing the Wealth award to commemorate Kathie Dannemiller, was presented by Marilyn Blair to Peter Sorensen and Therese Yaeger, of Benedictine University. The Larry Porter award for the best article in the OD Practitioner was presented by Judy Vogel to Anne Litwin for her 2007 article, "OD: Dancing in the Global Context." And Jason Wolf introduced and presented the winners of the Student Paper contest, Michelann Quimby, Karl Logue, and Jeff Schoeneberg of St. Edwards University right here in Austin, and John Milburn, of Sonoma State University. (As one of the readers in the SP competition, I must say that these two papers, which were presented later in the day, were exceptionally well researched and written this year.)

Today's morning keynoter was author Patricia Shafer, president of Compel, Ltd., and co-founder of The Change Leaders, an international coaching and consulting network. She is also author of Whole Work: Developing Tomorrow's Truly Global Leaders. She has done some global research on what makes for effective organizations now and for ideal organizations in the future. She found that there is an "emerging convergence," or what she called an "e-vergence" around several key organizational principles that is occurring across organizations and continents. She said that they will emphasize the whole, not the parts, that they will keep a kind of "Super Scorecard," which has fewer hard core production and performance and bottom line measures, and leans more toward communications and energizing people. She said that leadership will be about motivating and leading people, and that the skills of transactional management won't even need to be measured, because they will be a given. She said that successful change includes, energizes, and integrates within activities, and that effective leadership communicates, collaborates, cooperates, and partners with others. She cited Ray Anderson, former CEO of carpet manufacturer Interface, as an exemplar of this new kind of leadership, especially around environmental sustainability. Below is a link to two 5 minute videos, called Climbing Mount Sustainability, in which Anderson talks about how he learned and came to embrace sustainability personally and as a company priority for the past 15 years. He describes the 7 faces of Mount Sustainability, including eliminating waste which he says has funded all of the rest of the initiative at Inteface, plus emissions, energy, material flows, transportation, and the culture shift internally and externally to create the ecosystem of sustainability.

Climbing Mt. Sustainability, Part 1:

<http://www.bigpicture.tv/videos/watch/e00da03b6>

Climbing Mt Sustainability, Part 2:

<http://www.bigpicture.tv/videos/watch/1385974ed>

As her final point, Patricia said that the research interviewers did not ask about diversity, but that, even unprompted, 59% of respondents said that if you really want a better organization,

you'd value diversity better. She closed her presentation with a wonderful quote from Marcel Proust: "The only real voyage consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes; in seeing the universe through the eyes of another, one hundred others--in seeing the hundred universes that each of them sees."

The afternoon keynoter was good friend and NTL colleague Frances Baldwin, president of Designed Wisdom, and author of *The Art of Engagement: Taking Transformative Simplicity to Scale*. Frances shared her ideas and experiences in creating powerful and game-changing conversations in organizations. She had some tables in the front of the room set up in World Cafe format, and said that she likes to ask "what are the courageous questions that are at the heart of your organization?" She cited three organizations that have taken this challenge seriously: The Kalamazoo, MI Drug Courts, which are shifting the penal system into a problem solving system; Columbia Medical Association, which is working internally to create a dialogic culture and develop a high engagement management system and working externally within the community to train 200 leaders from other business sectors; and the Optimal Health Care Project, which is engaging people in conversations about sustainable business practices. Her final point was that there are six Cohering Elements of the Practice of Engagement: reaching out to the boundary zone people, using generative thought to drive your world view, considering the whole system as your domain, using transformation as your going-in intention, making the locus of the change the people of the organization, and the embodiment of principle as a requirement for the work.

And, I haven't even mentioned any of the great concurrent sessions which is where more than 100 members and guests were presenters for this conference.

One last day tomorrow. What a sprint this has been!

Matt

### **Day 6: Thursday, October 23, Conference closing**

This last day of the conference is always the most bittersweet for me. Ideas are swimming around, concepts abound, faces and places rebound, names, alas, not found...The large crush of people here Monday and Tuesday -- upwards of 800 or more! -- is now closer to 500 or so...

Makes me wanna wander through the halls singing, "The Party's Over," but not the version from Bells Are Ringing, the version by Willie Nelson down here in Texas music country! (Full lyrics below.)

The day began very early for folks who attended Charlie Badenhop's session on somatic intelligence. (Charlie is a frequent contributor here on odnet and on odnet-mindfulness.) Then the participants in the Dick Beckhard Mentoring Session met over breakfast to debrief the experience...so that by the time morning concurrent sessions began, some of us were ready for bed again!

The closing plenary was quite inspiring. Ms. Pamela Hartigan is the Managing Director of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship and the co-author of *The Power of Unreasonable People: How Entrepreneurs Create Markets that Change the World*—"required reading" at this year's World Economic Forum. Her talk was titled, "Combining Markets and Meaning—Why Social Entrepreneurship is More than a Passing Trend." Pamela explained that

that in her experience social entrepreneurship captures the imagination as a way of combining innovative solutions to social and environmental challenges with sustainable sources of revenue. She said that the best organizations in the future will figure out how to combine working in a market with doing work that has meaning.

She mentioned three places where this is already happening: 1) The Aravind Eye Care Hospital [www.aravind.org/](http://www.aravind.org/) whose mission is to eliminate blindness in India, and which has done so well in implementing its retail health model that is now moving toward a managed care model; ...and why it is a strong draw for individuals looking to be part of organizations that are fundamentally innovative, morally compelling and philosophically positive. She explores social entrepreneurship as it is evolving around the world and the key challenges it currently faces. 2) Endeavor [www.endeavor.org](http://www.endeavor.org) which is a grant funded program to support entrepreneurs, especially in developing markets. It's a powerful source of change because it taps into the desire to work, prosper, and succeed. One of its board members is the amazing Jim Wolfensohn, for whom I worked at the World Bank when he was president there, and who can be seen in a video on the Endeavor home page 3) Duck Rice <http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/006568.html> is an integrated bio-system, primarily in Japan and East Asia, which eliminates the need for fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides by incorporating duck-raising into organic rice cultivation. The approach is now being replicated with substantial success all over South East Asia as an effective way to boost farmer incomes, reduce environmental impact and improve food security.

Pamela closed by saying that people want three things in their work: they want it to be fundamentally innovative, philosophically positive, and morally compelling. (We later found out that her husband, Martin, had been a colleague of mine years ago at The World Bank.)

After a short lunch break, the afternoon post conference sessions got under way, as the number of people around grew smaller and smaller throughout the day.

So, at this point, the lobby is hosting a jewelry show, and the East Texas Roofing Contractors, and there is no sign of all of the magic that happened at the OD Network, in Austin, in 2008. But the magic was here, and it was great to be a part of it.

Matt

PS 1: My favorite bumper sticker and tee shirt here says "Keep Austin Weird," which I think is a reference to the growth that they've seen here that I referenced in yesterday's message;

PS 2: Next year, we're in Seattle, so we hope you come see us there; and

PS 3: Here are the lyrics to The Party's Over:

*The Party's Over, it's time to call it a day.  
They've burst your pretty balloon and  
taken the moon away.*

*It's time to wind up the masquerade.  
Just make your mind up the piper must be paid.*

*The Party's Over. The candles flicker and dim.  
You danced and dreamed through the night,  
it seemed to be right just being with him.*

*Now you must wake up, all dreams must end.  
Take off your make up, The Party's Over.  
It's all over, my friend.*