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< unconference >

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[How to DIY Unconference](#)

The [Business 2.0](#) article in the June [issue about unconferences](#) has three steps listed (it is not on their website yet but [GutsyPinay blogged it](#))... it skips over very important elements needed to make a successful events.

How to host an unconference - oversimplified version:

1. Create a wiki
2. Find sponsors
3. Post author harrison Owen's Law of Two Feet: any person neither learning from nor contributing to a group discussion must walk to another one.

Having put on a few unconferences myself (the Internet Identity Workshop that I co-produce and facilitate and MashupCamp that I facilitate) I thought I would outline the simple steps to host a successful DIY event.

I also must say it is disturbing to see the Law of Two Feet decontextualized out of the context of [Open Space Technology's principles and practices](#). Open Space Technology and the face-to-face process to create the agenda has played a critical role in making the best unconferences so successful.

Here are at least Eleven Crucial Elements to making a Great Unconference:

1) Think of a compelling topic that could used some focused attention by smart people working in the field.

2) Bounce the idea off some influencers and innovators in that topic area to see if they like the idea of bringing people to talk about it more in depth over a few days. [These are like speakers but not - you can tell others they are coming and others will too]

3) Scout for Venues. Many unconferences happen in companies offices over the weekend. It is good to have a space that has a large open space for all the participants to be together and breakout rooms. Good things to have include

- Wifi + ethernet (with lots of bandwidth),
- being allowed to bring food in (the conference industry is full of venues that don't allow you to bring in outside food - then they charge you \$40 for box lunches)
- White boards - you can improvise with paper if there are none
- Projectors (you can invite attendees to bring some if the venue can't supply all you need)
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4) Craft an invitation that will inspire a range of people who could benefit from discussing the topic coming. (run it by the first invitees)

5) Put up a wiki for the event. Post the invitation on the front page. The wiki is used to share who is coming, post suggested topics, Sponsors, Directions to the venue, Nearby hotels etc. As the event happens the participants will use the wiki to document the sessions, links to podcasts, links to blog posts about the event.

6) Set up registration. If you are going to ask people to pay a little something up front set up a registration page with paypal. Fees for an unconference should be at the level that involves 'chipping in to cover costs.'

7) Invite sponsorship to support the event amongst companies who play a role in the topic you are covering. Sponsors get community links, thank you's and build community good will. It is a good value for the money - traditional conferences sponsorships can run between \$10,000 and \$100,000. You can buy 100 folks a breakfast at an unconference for \$800 or dinner at a restaurant for \$3000.

8) Get the word out. Announce it to lists that are related to the topic area. Ping bloggers who write about the subject - invite them ask them to blog about it. Encourage those who are coming to announce that on their own blogs.

9) Figure out the food.

- Have abundant snacks we bought boxes of fruit from the wholesale market and nuts etc from Trader Joes.
- We produced breakfast - bagels, cream cheese, fruit, yogurt.
- We bought the drinks for breaks and lunch from costco.
- Lunch it is good to get catered by family owned restaurants you can budget about \$10 per lunch. Asian food is usually good this way or a sandwich buffet.
- Consider how you will support caffeination - we had a barista come in for about \$800 a day.
- Find a good restaurant near your venue plan a menu and a fixed price per person. We did \$20 per person.

10) Sculpt the event. Choose participatory process that will support the group address the topics of concern in the community.

Use the [Open Space Technology](#) methodology to create the agenda (it is described in detail below)

Besides open space there are some conversation modalities that could help structure a conversation around critical issues. These include [Fishbowl](#), [The World Cafe](#), [Dynamic Facilitation](#) or [Appreciative Inquiry](#).

Support people being able to introduce themselves to one another - they can just stand up and say their name and where they are from or they can play a game like *a strong wind blows*.

Consider having a structured 1/2 day before the unconference part to orient newbies.

Spectrograms can be a great morning activity in open space to mix things up and let you get a sense for how the community feels about certain issues.

Consider having a visual journalist/graphic recorder or a dialogue mapper to create shared display of the

community conversation.

11) Event Day. Create a welcoming inviting space for people.

Have name tags that people write themselves. As a bonus let people identify themselves with stickers from the various communities they belong to.

Create the Agenda using the Open Space Technology methodology. Participants are then invited to come to the front of the room and write the name of there session topic and their name on a 8.5×11 paper. They announce the title of their session to the whole room and then post it on a schedule on the wall. Then once all the sessions have been posted the community standing in front of the schedule wall attendee move sessions around. Sessions are about an hour long with 15 min breaks and an hour for lunch.

The day closes with the all participants gathering in a circle one room and sharing for 20 -30 min the highlights of the day.

Encourage Wikiing of Sessions

Encourage Tagging of Blog posts and photos - Define the tag event initials and then the year is one way.

Encourage Podcasting of sessions and interviews with attendees

Create space for spontaneous interaction

Have a community space that gives people the freedom to meet their needs for connection and interaction

Follow the conversation about the event in the blogosphere by searching for the title of the event and taggs.

Technorati Tags: [camps](#), [community](#), [conference](#), [evolutionary](#), [iiw](#), [MashupCamp](#), [Open space](#), [unconference](#)

posted by Kaliya on [05.29.06](#) @ 5:45 am

2 Responses to “How to DIY Unconference”

[Open Space World](#) says:
[May 29th, 2006 at 6:12 am](#)

Swirling Currents of Self-Organizing...

I'm struck today by the swirling currents of self-organizing showing themselves in interesting places. At The World We Want, Phil Cubeta details an almost-two year lineage from the Giving Conference to the first and second omidyar.net members...

Jeff Aitken says:
[June 1st, 2006 at 3:45 am](#)

Thanks for what you say about trying the Law of Two Feet without the circle, board, marketplace, and the four principles of open space. I think that the principles and law become a way of life, and in real open space we learn them viscerally; they carry out into organizational and community life.

I love that these powerful conversation modalities that you noted are meeting up with the emerging interaction technologies. Maybe the best hope for the planet.

It's probably useful for unconferecers to experience all these modalities and what they're good for, so to develop a palette to draw from as you design your next event.

Jeff in Berkeley

Leave a Reply

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the tao of participatory events

by Kaliya Hamlin

unconference: The space between talking heads and a cocktail party with participant interaction around a theme or purpose.

Kaliya is happy to answer questions about unconferences and and is available to facilitate them.
kaliya (at) mac (dot) com

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Upcoming Facilitation

by Kaliya

- * AOL Internal Developer Strategy Event, June 1, Dulles, VA.
- * [Online Community Unconference](#) June 6, Mountainview, CA
- * Supernova Open Space, June 19, San Francisco, CA.
- * [Mashup Camp](#), July 18-19, Mountinview, CA.
- * [DeFrag](#), Nov 5-6, Denver, CO.
- * [New York State Association of Independet Schools. IT Managers Conference](#) Nov 14-16, New Paltz, NY.

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Unconference Resources on this Blog

GOING TO AN UNCONFERENCE?

[The Unconference Session: What to do?](#)

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MEDIA COVERAGE

- * (Gender Biased) [NewsWeek Article on Unconferences](#)
- * Mashup Camp 2 in the [San Jose Mercury News](#)

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POSTS ON OPEN SPACE

- * [Open Space, What happens, Why does it work](#)
- * [How to DIY unconference](#)
- * [Introduction to Open Space at ITU-T](#)
- * [What is Open Space about? EFFECTIVENESS](#)
- * [Open Space as a Tool for Engaging Complex Systems](#)
- * [Invitation and Welcoming Space](#)
- * [Traditional Formats and Unconferencing?](#)
- * [What is Open Space?](#)
- * [Open Space Some Basics](#)
- * [What is the Unconference?](#)
- * [Holding Space for an Event](#)

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LARGE GROUP METHODS

- [A strong wind Blows](#)
- [Spectrograms](#)
- [Fish Bowl Dialogue](#)
- [Speed Geeking](#)
- [Community Mapping](#)
- [Games at Conferences](#)
- [Introductions - how to?](#)

REVIEWS OF MY APPEARANCES

- * [Review my Training F2F Process for Open Source Communities](#)
- * [Coming Full Circle](#) at Community 2.0
- * Human Interaction at Unconferences: [Summary of my BayCHI talk](#) and [Feedback from my BayCHI talk](#)

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REVIEWS OF EVENTS

- * [Un-museum for the Imaginify Metamedia III](#)
- * Voice 2.0 [The Dual Conference Model](#) post: "[lesson learned](#)"
- * VloggerCon [We want the audience to talk more](#)
- * The debate about what is/isn't "camp" [Camp Creep?](#)
- * Online Community Camp [Open Space does not mean Voting](#)
- * [Tools for Collaboration Community Emerging](#)
- * [Panels are sucky](#)

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Past Facilitations

- * [Internet Identity Workshop](#) , May 14-16, Mountainview, CA
- * [Startup Camp 2](#) May 7, San Francisco, CA
- * [Identity Open Space](#) April 26-27, Brussels
- * [Interneational Telecommunicaitons Union Focus Group on Identity Management](#) April 23-25, Geneva
- * [Identity Society Meeting](#) Feb 19, London.
- * [International Telecommunicaitons Union Focus Group on Identity Management, Feb 13-16, Geneva.](#) * [Recent Changes Camp](#) Feb 1-4, Portland.
- * [Mashup Camp 3](#) January 16-17, 2007 Mountainview
- * [Internet Identity Workshop 2006b](#) December 4-6, Mountainview
- * [Ruby on Rails Camp](#) November 9, San Jose
- * [Startup Camp](#) November 2-3, Mountainview
- * [Identity Open Space pre-DIDW](#), September 11, 2006 San Jose
- * [OSCON](#) Workshop Face 2 Face: Process for OS Communities
- * Identity Open Space July 20-21, 2006 Vancouver
- * [Mashup Camp 2](#) July 12-13, 2006 Mountainview
- * [Identity Mashup 3rd Day](#) July 21, 2006 Harvard
- * [Internet Identity Workshop 2006a](#) May 2006, Mountainview
- * [Mashup Camp](#) Feburary 20-21, 2006, Mountainveiw
- * Internet Identity Workshop 2005 October 2005, Berkeley

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