

Welcome to the OH Cards Workshop

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(In this text, should reference be made to the OH-Cards, the cards of the entire genre are to be understood, not just those of the title OH)

Basic understanding

The use of the cards of the OH-genre addresses two very particular spheres of experience:

Firstly, the activities made possible with the cards create a positive (i.e. safe) ambience in which the skills of communication, exchange of perspectives and value-free understanding can be deliberately practised. *Whatever you see in the cards that you pick, is directly, intuitively about yourself. That's how The OH Cards work, why they were created: to put you in touch with yourself ... and those around you.*

Secondly, the cards function as a tool which can facilitate entry into a wide spectrum of interpersonal activities of a social, professional or therapeutic nature *to put you in touch with those around you.*

This experiential practice may then be taken back into one's private or professional daily life in an enhanced form.

OH ETIQUETTE

In OH, we honour each other's privacy. I may choose to pass, choose to not play the cards I have drawn. I can do this with or without explanation, revealing my cards or not.

In OH, we honour each other. I will not interrupt you.

In OH, we honour each other's intelligence and imagination. I do not re-interpret (or interpret) your cards - even in the secrecy of my mind.

In OH, we honour each other's integrity. I do not contradict you or argue about your interpretations. I try to remember that there are no "correct" or "incorrect" interpretations of the pictures, no misreading of words.

In OH, we honour each other's individuality. When I interpret my OH Cards I do not assume that you see what I see, feel what I feel, read what I read.

Areas of Use

1. Communication
2. Conflict Resolution
3. Help in Dealing with Personal/Social/Therapeutic Questions
4. Personal Creativity
5. "Hands-On" Approach to Art

1. Communication

As we begin to put OH-cards into use, we take a moment first to elucidate the "rules", which are, more precisely stated, an agreement among participants as to the etiquette governing an OH-exchange. Following these basic recommendations creates an atmosphere of trust and acceptance:

- each person will speak without interruption, judgment or interpretation from others
- no one will dominate the exchange by monologuing
- feedback, given in response to what was actually said or seen (e.g. body language) will take the form of questions of clarification or supportive, non-judgmental expressions of empathy from fellow participants
- any participant has the right to pass or to select different cards

Based in the spirit of democratic equality, this etiquette allows room for both individuality and the experience of integration in a group - we can experience the benefits of departing from our own single track without sacrificing individual perspective. Of equal importance to the OH-participant is the practising of an active kind of listening made possible by abstaining from judging and interpreting what is being heard.

These conditions create an oasis for the equality of life-perspectives, as for the expressing of them in all their rich variety. Experiencing such a quality of exchange, a cut above the tenor of usual communications, may incite in OH-participants a learning impulse that they can reach across into daily life.

Used in accordance with the recommended etiquette the cards can lead to a noticeable enhancement of communication skills. Even early in life children may be encouraged to hold strong, individual points of view and to exert these over the points of view of others in order to be considered successful. Others may learn to hold back with their perspectives, either so as not to be judged or not to appear too self-important. Using the OH-genre to stimulate a specialized quality of exchange that occurs a step beyond such unconscious communication habits gives all types of personalities

- the opportunity to express their perspectives in an atmosphere of trust and validation in which authenticity, rather than self aggrandisement or negation, is required and
- to learn active listening, which fosters understanding.

All people are conditioned through upbringing to a set of norms. We receive in early life what Ely Raman, the creator of OH, calls our "givens". On the one hand useful as signposts displaying rules, morals and ethics of the social group in which the individual evolves, such norms, when neither questioned nor complemented by new impulses, can lead to rigidity. How then should the thinking of others, who have most certainly been differently conditioned, be understood and their perspectives accepted? Adhering unbendingly to one's own givens is one of the most basic causes of interpersonal misunderstanding. Such misunderstanding, in its turn, can lead to conflict.

2. Conflict Resolution

Whether in daily life or the workplace, wherever people with various needs, ideas and goals come together, discussion (i.e. sharing of knowledge and perspectives) is vital to the resolving of differences and to arriving at solutions that serve the best interests of the most people as often as possible.

The ability to change one's perspective is a basic requirement for maintaining peace and preventing conflict. In the listener, this ability fosters understanding for the one who is being heard. For the communicator, it enables an expression to be found that can be received by the listener.

The state of readiness-to-anger or -violence, on the other hand, often emerges out of a helplessness in making oneself otherwise understood, or from the refusal to understand. Both conditions could be seen as outcomes of inability/inflexibility to see other perspectives. Exactly this ability/flexibility is one of the skills that can be taught and practised with OH-cards, breaking ground for constructive discussion and peaceful resolution of conflict.

Children and young people, as well, can learn through playful applications of the OH-genre that life may be perceived not just in terms of polarity (good-bad, right-wrong, friend-foe, etc) but in terms of variety and complementarity. Differences can be accepted: what is perceived as "other" must not of necessity, or by social obligation, be taken to be a hostile force.

Each OH-participant always has the sovereign right to interpret his or her own cards and, consequently, an equal status within the larger process. Each person has the same chance to contribute to the whole or to influence an outcome (e.g. in storytelling as a group), to transform negative to positive. There is always fresh opportunity for new direction, for discovering a way beyond what at first glance might seem to be the end of a road.

In indirect ways, then, this manner of playful interaction using the medium of the associative cards can contribute to the increase of understanding, equality and peace.

3. Help in dealing with Therapeutic/Social/Personal Questions

The OH-genre was developed to be an effective tool in healing. This can be practiced in professional life, as well as in private or in a social situations with friends.

Cards of this genre are used worldwide in helping professions, they are applicable in a wide spectrum of therapeutic processes, assisting both the process of the client and the work of the therapist. When people find it difficult to speak about themselves, or when emotional blocks are experienced, OH cards can serve as a key to accessing the inner condition. In this way the OH-genre makes an effective contribution to the work of healing even deep trauma caused by war, catastrophe and personal loss.

Similarly, the associative cards can enhance the work of pedagogues, social workers and other such professionals in their work of helping people find expression for their inner images and voices.

People working privately or alone at self-discovery find assistance in their process by making use of the OH-genre. The cards function as a door to the unconscious where previously unrecognized feelings and new perspectives await discovery. Creativity expands under their influence.

4. Creativity

Creativity by its very nature can't be induced or forced, but there *are* ways in which it can be trained. OH-cards can be applied to this objective.

Most people hear within themselves, with varying frequency or intensity, the voice of an inner critic. One function of this voice is to caution us about the leaving of familiar ways and conventions. But although such ways and conventions offer a safe place for the development of the personality they can also restrict spontaneity and the courage to live life in new ways.

The sheltered environment created by applying the OH-etiquette permits us to give free rein to our natural and innate creativity, to dream even an impossible dream. The images and words on the OH-cards provide the impulse that calls the idea forth, like a waking dream.

The OH-method of selecting cards randomly, rather than intentionally, prevents us from adhering only to the familiar. When the selected card is turned face up we are confronted with the unknown. And as associations begin to flow in response to the image (or word, or combination of both), our innate faculty of imagination, wellspring of all new ideas, is activated. Experience has shown that even people who consider themselves uncreative can participate in this process and thereby learn to value their own inner wealth plus their ability to access it.

In addition to the random-access-effect, spontaneity plays a strong role in the OH-method. Trying to come up with an appropriate response through a rational process is not the avenue to self-accessing with OH. First respond, think about it or discuss it later!

OH-cards can also be used in an individual's search for creative solutions to specific problems. Through the process of associative play, in which one stands at a little distance to the actual problem, a whim or a flash of spontaneous inspiration might lead to an idea that wouldn't have occurred in the process of logical thinking usually applied to problem-solving. Such ideas can then be further examined for applicability.

5. "Hands-On" Approach to Art

One of the engendering ideas behind the OH-cards is the concept of "variable structures" (Marcel Duchamp, John Cage): that is, artworks whose creation process may deliberately include changes induced by other objects or by the viewer. This concept supports a version of art that is malleable instead of sacrosanct.

Paintings in the form of playing cards - not hanging on a museum wall but held in one's own hand! - make available the opportunity for an intimate encounter with art. The distance from the card-in-the-hand to the eye approximates the distance from the suckling infant to the face of its mother, the first focal length we experience in life.

Each card deck of the OH-genre can be seen as an art exhibition in small-format whose paintings are there to be combined and selected at the will of the viewer. This personal and interactive approach activates something completely natural yet perhaps new in the person who experiences it: instead of relying on experts who organise exhibitions or interpret art for the public, each person/player, without inhibition, just goes ahead and enjoys his or her responses, including attractions and antipathies, aesthetic preferences and fully original and spontaneous interpretations. Such an approach to art, too, is transposable into other life situations, integrates the concepts underlying art into one's own creative projects and perhaps even into one's approach to life. In this manner art becomes interactive, becomes itself enlivened in being used as a source for inner development.

Conclusion

OH Cards enable you to focus on the most free and independent part of you ... your imagination. They playfully suggest that you trust and value your intuition. Although often dismissed as just a feeling, we know intuition is a constant, very powerful influence in our daily thoughts and actions.

A round of OH leads you to discover who you are at that moment, and even where you fit within your community. By providing a framework and a focus, the cards make it easy for you to share with others what you currently think, imagine, and feel.

The sense of well being that emerges after a game of OH is difficult to

explain ... yet recognizable. There is a feeling of renewed creativity, and a more relaxed view of your life. OH Cards lead you to enjoy communication at its best.

Emotional self-awareness and the ability to express clearly can be a life-long endeavor, and is a key to staying well. If we believe that health is a state of well-being on all levels - emotional, intellectual, physical, social and spiritual - then we will want to look for ways to integrate these states.

OH Cards enhance our awareness of the integrating process, by combining the literal and the imaginary, and at the same time adding fun to the exercise. They are an important form of access to our intuition.

Sometimes awareness is a natural occurrence; we experience it as a flash of intuitive recognition about a situation we are in, or someone we know, or about something we are doing. We value these flashes, as they are truths about ourselves and life around us.

The feature that makes OH Cards unique is that the system is as free as the user. That is to say, there is no underlying moral or conceptual system to guide or structure a user's perceptions. Instead, when we use OH-cards we are entirely responsible for what we are seeing in a combination of cards. This is an unusual and powerful responsibility.

And the ability of OH Cards to relate to our conscious and unconscious daily lives is uncanny. Their capacity for relevance is largely due to the contemporary character of the paintings and the choice of words. A great deal of thought and care was taken in selecting the ideas represented in the cards so that they would reflect the round of life.

Recommended reading, published by OH Verlag:

The Little Book About The OH Cards, Joan Lawrence & Ely Raman, 2005

Strawberries Beyond My Window, Waltraud Kirschke, 1989

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(we invite you to contact us with any questions you might have around OH Cards:
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