
How to Make a Difference and Thrive Using Circle

Valuable Circle Success Tools, Tips, Guideline and Suggestions

Circle Connections

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Introduction

Why Circles

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

-- Margaret Mead.



(photo credits: Peggy Sebera, photo layout: Carol Hansen Grey)

Circles bring positive change locally and globally, within and without. It is the oldest form of social interaction.

For a long time hierarchal structures have replaced circular structures as the dominant leadership model for groups, as they were seen as the most efficient to a ‘power-over’ style of leadership. However in today’s world, Circles are being revitalized. Their benefits are being re-discovered as a more respectful model that provides and fosters full participation and shared leadership, encourages creativity, demonstrates cooperation instead of competition and dominance, implements power-with instead of power-over, and reveals new solutions to old problems.

When two or more are gathered together you are a circle. When you follow Circle Principles you become a conscious and sacred circle. Conscious and sacred circles are fun and give each participant the courage and power to be most fully who they are authentically, empowering them to make a positive difference in the world.

Starting a Circle is simple, and almost innate to who we are as women. Using this feminine structure for centuries women come together formally or informally using the Circle

Process for conscious connection, deep conversation, mindful creation, conflict resolution, community action, and to realize their dreams.

A Circle can be called for social, personal, professional, entrepreneurial, community or global needs. Contact Circle Connections for assistance in learning and applying the Circle Process to your specific needs.

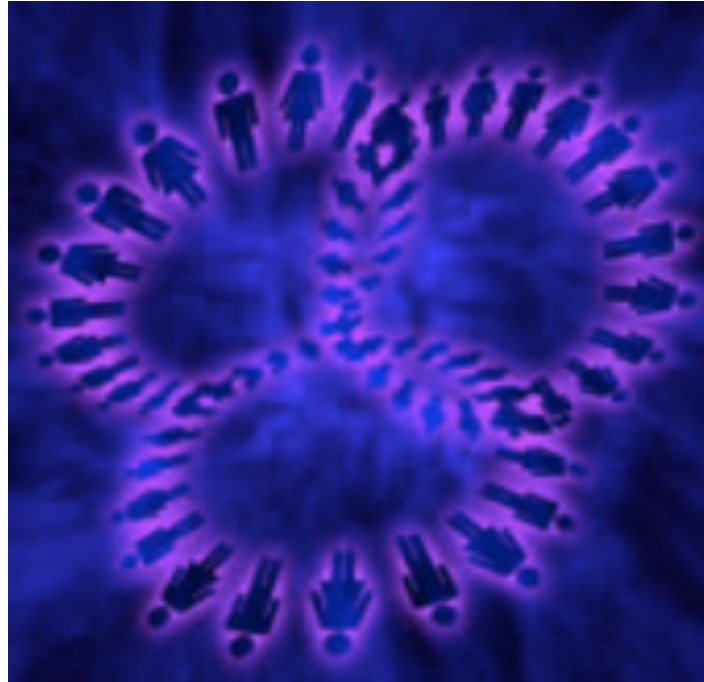


Dance The World!

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The Basics

How to Start a Circle



To start a Circle, find someone with a similar desire to help get it going. Unite your energy and have others join you so that collectively you have the skills, woman-power and courage to go forward. When two or more gather together you are a circle.

1. DREAM THE CIRCLE INTO REALITY.

- Believing that being in a circle will make a difference is the first step to starting a circle.
- Write down your dream to start a circle and post it somewhere you will see it often such as your bathroom mirror or at your computer.
- Share your dream with others and invite them to join you in starting a circle.

- **Name your Circle and its purpose.**
- Some Circles unite only to deepen friendships. Others come together as an Action Circle with a common cause, uniting their creativity and energy promote positive change. Decide by consensus the name and purpose of your circle. Naming your circle brings it into reality not only for each member but to those outside the circle.



Added Ingredients for Action Circles:

- After introductions talk about your dream and the collective dream you heard from the check-ins. When you organize around a dream the energy stays positive. Life is attracted to the light. When we move toward the enlightenment of solutions to problems in the world we keep the energy positive. When we focus around problems we have problems and the energy will be negative.

- You can use newsprint to brainstorm all that ideas for making a collective dream become a reality. This is a time for all ideas without judgment listed in a random style on a newsprint—shower of ideas. When sprinkled on newsprint it prevents a linear ranking of ideas where one is ranked more important than another. Allow the group to discern a natural cluster of ideas for forming next steps based on their own interests. Individuals chose steps they want to take based on passion plus accountability. See Open Space Technology www.openspace.org for more complete information on self-organizing principles. Circle Connections staff will also help you in understanding the self-organizing principles of Open Space and Circle Principles.



Make sure that all members are heard and are able to contribute fully. Every member becomes a leader and together they are all responsible for making the circle time meaningful for all. In a large group each sub-group is given time to meet to discuss how to carry out their plans such as those who want to work on communications/PR, those who want to make signs for a rally, those who want to involve other organizations, etc.

How to Make a Circle Magical

Eight Essential Ingredients

by Ann Smith

Co-Founder of Circle Connections

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Transforming from Hierarchy to Circles

1. SACRED SPACE

- Circle is life giving; hierarchy is life managing. Circle is both ancient and modern. It is the new model for bringing peace and justice for all.
- **Create and honor sacred space** by arranging the room so that everyone is seated in a circle. If a large gathering, there will be many circles of 8 or less. One large circle is ideal if the room size will allow it.
- The center of the circle or circles is honored with symbols such as a candle, flowers and other sacred objects. Provide rituals such as a time of silence that enables everyone to be fully engaged from beginning to end. The sacred center is where diversity meets as equals.
- **‘Check-ins’ at the beginning of the circle and ‘check-outs’ at the end give equal time to everyone present.**

2. **POWER**

- Power comes from a higher power and is plentiful. We are bringing forth a ‘power-with’ model transforming the ‘power-over’ model of oppression.
- **Information, resources and time are shared.** Sharing information, money, expertise, time and talents empowers individuals and the whole creating a synergy that is much greater than the individual parts.
- **Decisions are made by consensus whenever possible.** All go along with the decisions without undermining. **Start and end on time** unless everyone agrees to a different time.

3. **PEACEFUL (NONVIOLENT) COMMUNICATION**

- One person speaks at a time.
- **Speak and listen from the heart** without judgment.
- The Native American ‘talking stick’ creates a deep level of sharing from the heart. Use any object as a talking piece when needed.
- **Use ‘I’ statements** instead of ‘we’ unless speaking for a group. Use assertive (non-violent) communication "I'm OK you're OK".
- **When confrontation occurs allow for silence to hold differences in the circle's center,** seeking a non-dualist solution instead of polarization.
- **Speak from experience instead of giving advice. Decide together what is to be held in confidence.**

4. **INTENTION**

- Organizing around the vision keeps the energy positive. Co-create a shared vision/intention. Attention is given by all to making the intention a reality.
- The Law of Attraction is a powerful force in making dreams come true. If individuals or the group sends out fear and doubts, they will receive fear and failure. If they send out positive thoughts for success, they will attract success.
- Tasks are chosen by individuals based on their passion and accountability for carrying them out. All stay true to the shared intention receiving support from the whole group. Passion is the positive energy that fuels the task being accomplished.

- Mutual accountability is the insurance that tasks will be completed.
- Cooperation and collaboration among all members allows for everyone's skills and talents to be utilized. When we dream it together and work and play in this cooperative and positive manner, the dream becomes reality.
- The vision is the navigational chart for sailing into the unknown waters of the future. The vision/intention helps organizations and sacred circles stay on course.

5. CREATIVITY

- Everyone is valued and everyone shares in creating new ideas, products, life-giving actions, solutions to problems, insights, healing, vision, etc.
- **WOMANfesting** and brainstorming a 'shower of ideas' is invaluable in allowing all ideas to be counted without judgment or ranking one better than another.
- Right brain, fun activities including the arts (music, dance, art, meditation, visioning, etc.) allows for new thinking and behaviors to make the dream a reality. Creativity transforms established organizations and develops new structures. Creativity empowers all members to be a vital part of a living system that constantly changes in relationship to the environment.

6. SHARED LEADERSHIP

- Leadership is bestowed on those who are congruent with the vision and have the skills and passion to carry out responsibilities. The designated leaders represent the group/organization to the outside. They are entrusted to speak for the whole and are accountable to the members.
- As well, the members are accountable to the leader in providing mutual support. Inside the circle **leadership is shared**.
- Authentic leadership develops when passion, clear vision and skills are in alignment with the whole. Personal growth and healthy creative group dynamics are shared responsibilities by all involved.

7. REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

- Reflection, both individual and group, leads to analyzing what works and doesn't work, and if it is congruent with the greater vision and greater good.

- Evaluating what to do next to bring forth all that is positive supports new thinking and actions that will be productive in the life of the group.
- All that is life-giving is kept; all that is negative is left behind.
- Best practices are shared within the circle and beyond.

8. ACTION

“Action without vision is a nightmare; vision without action is a pipe-dream.” This Japanese saying rings so true. Action with vision using Circle Principles and matched with passions will change the world.

Join Circle Connections by visiting: <http://www.circleconnections.com>

Circle Connections provides ‘hands-on’ help from circle experts to start, nurture and connect circles. Become a meaningful part of a network of mutual support and collaboration that is making a positive difference locally and globally.



The ‘Why’ and ‘How’ of Action Circles

Connecting and Collaborating with Others and Leaning in the Direction of Your Dreams to Make a Difference and Thrive

by Ann Smith
Co-Founder of Circle Connections

THE HER-STORY OF ACTION CIRCLES

Organizing around a dream using circle principles combines the wisdom and methodologies of Indigenous people, sacred circles, appreciation and living system theories, and **Open Space Technology**. It is easy, fun and all ages can fully participate.

We are co-creating a post-modern world that re-connects us to nature and the natural order for organizing our creativity and work. We are leaving behind the machine as the metaphor for life. We are not a cog in the great wheel of modernization, but an invaluable co-creator within a living system where all life matters.

The new paradigm is a living system where all two legged, four legged, winged, scaled, and leafed are valued. All living creatures organize around that which is life giving.

The chaos of new life quickly is organized around that which helps the organism to thrive. Organizing around life-giving principles is natural for us when we let go of the past forms of “power over” and control and become one with the natural and life-sustaining flow.

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Hierarchical structures are life-giving for only a few and at the expense of others. And for the few, these structures are not life giving for very long. What is life giving for all sustains all now and for generations to come.

Living our life with reverence for all creation changes how we spend our money, where we live, how we buy our food, raise our children, view ourselves and the world and make important decisions at work and in our families and community. Putting aside dualistic thinking brings us into a communion of subjects, where we are equally valued and equally share information, resources, power and creativity.

THE 'WHY' OF CIRCLES

Everything is sacred and matter and spirit are no longer separated. We two-leggeds re-learn our place as one with the One that unites us all and become in synch with all creation. Living systems theory and practice becomes the only pathway of choice.

Organizing around the dream keeps the energy positive. Using **Circle Principles** enables each one to fully contribute and the synergy of the group to become greater than anyone's single dream or effort. Collective wisdom, along with full participation, provides creative actions and power for making our dream come true.

Sacred circles provide the healing space to recover from a world of competition, "power over", ranking of diversity, inequities of resources, over consumption, media that tells us we are not good enough, etc. It creates a space where diversity is appreciated and honored; nurturing the power of our collective wisdom in stillness, so that we leave replenished.

Organizing around dreams provides an abundance of positive energy and resources. All are equal and fully participate.

Organizing around the dream is conducted in a circle of equals where every voice is heard and full participation is encouraged. Circle principles provide a safe place to ask questions, to listen to everyone's stories and to gain from each other's experience, perspective, knowledge and creativity.

THE 'HOW' OF ACTION CIRCLES

Simple Guidelines

1. Point person announces to the whole gathering her desired dream story. Examples are: women's shelter, fair wages, fair housing, good education for all, peaceful homes and communities, preservation of the land, etc.
2. Leadership is shared. Any one person becomes the "point person, the one who has a passion for a particular cause and will take responsibility for starting the action circle. The point person, like geese and pelicans, leads the way with others flying in synch and providing support. The point position is shared so no one gets exhausted.
3. She writes her dream on a sign that can be seen by the rest of the gathering.
4. Each person with a dream also announces theirs and puts up a visible sign or drawing.
5. At the end of all the announcements of dreams, the point people determine if there are like dreams that can be combined. If so they move the signs together in clusters.
6. Participants self select—following their passion--a dream they want to work on and go to the sign of their choice. For those who want time to discuss and discern their passion, there will be a discernment circle. This too will have a sign so it is easy to find.
7. **Open Space Technology** is built upon emergent design. Its organizing principles are given.

- Who Ever Comes Are the Right People
- What Ever Happens is the Only Thing That Could Have
- Whenever it Starts is the Right Time
- When it is Over it is Over.

For more information, visit: <http://www.openspaceworld.org>

OST honors 'The Law of Two Feet'. If you find yourself in an Action Circle that is not your cup of tea, walk to another one or form one yourself. If no one comes to your action circle, you can combine like circles or know in another time there will be others who will be attracted to help. Joining an action circle provides invaluable circle experience and ideas for starting your own.

Use a common location village posting of announcements. If you are not meeting in the common space post where you will be meeting.



The Step-by-Step Precess of an Action Circle

THE PROCESS: MAKING TAKING ACTION EASY

- Gather the people in a sacred Circle using **Circle Principles**.
- Assign/invite one person to serve as a scribe. She will make a list of all participants, description of the dream, action steps and assignments.
- Assign one person to serve as Circle Facilitator. She will provide a “talking object” and ensure with the help of everyone else that circle principles are honored.
- The point person (dreamer) introduces herself and her dream.
- Each person introduces herself and tells her hopes for the dream.
- Brainstorming ideas—translated into Spanish as a “shower of ideas” Allows for and encourage thinking out of the box that comes with new perspectives, ideas and visions. The dream is expanded by input of all.
- Name and claim the expanded dream giving it the most exciting description for attracting others to support your dream.
- Action steps are brainstormed, explored and expanded, and each one discerns their role based on passion, gifts, offerings, expertise, and commitment. The use of the “talking object” allows for everyone to contribute. Have times of silence and stillness.
- Action steps become mini-action circles such as a circle to raise money, to gather information, to recruit community support, to write letters and send email, etc.

- Mini action circles meet. Scribe with help from others forms a communication action circle, their task is to write an infomercial filling in details of how the work will get carried out. They will also write up the plan of action.
- Whole **Action Circle** is reconvened to finalize a report that includes next steps in carrying out the actions with roles and accountability outlined.
- Review the dream, action steps and next meeting dates so that the scribe has all the information for a written infomercial. Stating needs is an excellent way of getting others to support, such as we are looking for graphic artists, people to sign petitions, make phone calls, provide a prayer vigil, etc.
- Assign someone or have the group give your infomercial using visuals, songs, dance and other creative ways of presenting a short, exciting, and fun presentation that will be remembered and invite others to get involved. The written report will be given to the **Coordinating Circle** so it can be posted on the Gather The Women Global Matrix website. For more information, visit: <http://www.gatherthewomen.org>
- The large circle convenes for honoring presentations of each **Action Circle**, celebrating the collective work and closing the sacred circle.
- The Coordinating Circle will provide a participants and organizational list, Action Circles information, and the date, time and place of a follow-up gathering.
- A follow-up gathering is held a month later where **Circle Principles** are used. Circle check-ins include the welcoming of newcomers. All **Action Circles** present their latest news telling in a compelling manner how others can help.
- Time is provided for **Action Circles** to gather for a short meeting with old and new members. This is followed by a community celebration.
- Next meeting date and place is set and the circle is closed with ‘check- outs’ — each person saying in a couple of words or a short sentence how this time together has meant to them. Members are filled with blessings and energy to go forth into the world making a difference while being mindful to remain open and embrace the emergent design.

Key Circle Tips

A Few Ingredients for Healthy Circle

by Ann Smith

Co-Founder of Circle Connections

Professional Speaker, Visionary Catalyst and Circle Leader

<http://www.circleconnections.com>

*“If we can stay with the tension of opposites long enough
- sustain it, be true to it -
we can sometimes become vessels
within which the divine opposites come together
and give birth to a new reality.”
-- Marie-Louise von Franz, Jungian Scholar (1917-1998)*

TIP #1 SILENCE

What I love about being in a sacred circle is not only the deep conversations but also those moments of silence. My world, like so many of us, has information overload. I love silence to open the circle. This is especially good when in a business setting. After you have introduced yourself and the purpose of the gathering, call for silence so that each person is given these precious moments to relax and become fully present. When the conversation becomes argumentative or two or more are talking at the same time, call for silence. I ring a soft bell before and after the silence so everyone knows when it starts and ends. It is also a great way to close the circle.

TIP #2: LEAVE YOUR EGO OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE

My group process mentor taught me two important rules:

1. The most important people are the ones you are with right now.
2. Leave your ego outside the door.
3. I have added a third rule: Spirit is in charge.

When we give our full attention to facilitating a Circle process and put others first, the ego stays outside of the circle. This is done by: listening without judgment and standing in the shoes of another allowing for silences giving everyone the opportunity to speak and holding my own thoughts to myself until it is my turn focusing on the common ground and honoring differences allowing for consensus trusting that what is meant to happen will happen.

Control of people, places and things is an illusion; it is ego interfering with reality. Spirit is in charge so let go and let Spirit. It is time for women to learn and model healthy communication and mutual respect.

TIP #3: SHARED LEADERSHIP

Instead of assigning tasks, list them and have the planning circle choose those that they want to accomplish. When we organize around what we like to do the energy stays positive and the tasks get done. The Canadian women's leadership circle did this in planning their Gather The Women event in Canada as well as the planning circle of Gather The Women of South Florida. It works!

TIP #4: OPPOSING COMMENTS

What is the optimum way to handle when there are two or more opposing comments from members of the circle? When you have two or more opposing comments from members of the circle let them reside together in the center without taking sides. The Circle is the place where opposites can meet. It is the place where we can come together and transform opposite positions and thoughts by allowing all thoughts offered by circle members to dwell without judgment. When an opposing thought is brought into the circle call for silence. The center of the circle is a vast container of space and time that can hold opposites. When they are not debated and allowed to reside in silence the Oneness of our thoughts will unfold. You can move on to other topics while letting this stay in the center. When we shift our perspective from dualistic thinking to knowing that all perspectives lead to a greater truth we live into the magic of Circle.



Circle Connections

Who We Are...

Circle Connections is a unique online community whose purpose is to foster the empowerment and connection of women and girls to start, sustain and unite circles dedicated to taking action for the greater good.

We believe that learning to THRIVE is a vital part of MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

Circle Connections is connected with women leaders and organizations focused on women's and girl's issues and empowerment around the world.

We welcome and are also supported by men who support initiatives that empower and advance the essence of women's growth and development in all sectors of life.

The Benefits of Connecting Circles

- **Community organizers join together**

We are creating one of the largest people movements in history. Women, girls, men and boys who understand and support the creative empowerment of women, are coming together to create a new way to being with each other, in communities, at home, in the work place, in all that they do. We teach, support and promote the power of Circle Leadership Principles to enliven, inspire and ignite the passion and mission to unfold while honoring the wisdom of the collective whole. We are changing the world, one circle at a time, multiplying the rate and speed at which this wisdom is shared to manifest a world that is loving, sharing, peaceful, yet joy-filled, action-oriented and focused on its mission – helping and loving one another in many forms.

- **All circles gain effective win/win communications**

Through our sharing our personal and collective growth, we bring all circles together to support one another. We envision a broad community that is patient, tolerant, understanding, and transparent in its communication, which we believe leads to ultimate peace.

- **No woman or girl is left behind**

It's been said that any organization is only as good as its last member. There are no lost or forgotten members in society. We merely need to open our arms and embrace people from all backgrounds, socio-economic, religious or spiritual, or any other classification. Grassroots people, women, girls, men and boys, learn by doing and claim their right to access education, training, funding, work and other needs. Let's come together connecting your circle and ours in one large space, to learn, form and share.

- **Through connections, we bring about positive, systemic change**

Most circle have core missions to address the most important issues on the planet. These include stopping violence, eradicating of poverty and creating a sustainable environmental that serves its communities as well as the earth. These missions and circles will be connected at this place. Soon, you will be able to find other circles connected or share with your circle mission and vision. Stayed tuned as we grow our connections to bring about these new changes, to support you and the collective wisdom of the world!



Circle Connections Co-Creators

Ann Smith



(Our Co-Founder, Feisty Activist and Visionary, Global Cross-Pollinator and Roving-Reporter at the U. N.)

Ann, from Naples, Florida, is a Circle mentor, educator, consultant, professional speaker, creator of circle leadership programs & trainer of trainers, author of [Stories from the Circle](#), [WomenPrints](#) & Dear Ann Column for [Peace X Peace](#), co-editor of [Women's Uncommon Prayers](#), and Circle Calendars.

She was founder and director of [Women's Works](#), and served as the director of [Women in Mission and Ministry, Episcopal Church USA](#), director of [Global Education Associates](#) and has worked around the world with the United Nations, women's organizations and local groups using Circle Principles as the foundation for all international, national and local events and programs.



Rhonda Hull, Ph.D.

(Our Co-Founder, Compassionate and Curious Advocate for the Greater Good, Professional ‘Nudger’, Life ‘Doula’ of Meaningful Connections and Transformational Moments, and Wobbly Web-keeper.)

Rhonda is a connector at heart and lives between the Northwest and her grandchildren in California. She has an assortment of credentials and professional experience in Education and Psychology, but claims that life as her greatest teacher. She was introduced to Circle over 30 years ago in her children’s classroom. She has worked with Richard Carlson, author of *Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff*, who nudged her to author her own book, [“Drive Yourself Happy: A Motor-vational Maintenance Manual for Maneuvering Through Life”](#).

Rhonda loves creating and celebrating life’s ever-changing meaningful moments. She is a writer, spiritual counselor, happiness mentor, professional ‘nudger’, advocate for women and children, committed to fostering grace amidst crisis. With two grand children on the autistic spectrum, **Rhonda** is passionate about shifting the perspective about autism and is determined to create connection and foster possibility in the most unlikely places.

To learn more about Rhonda, visit:

www.driveyourselfhappy.com

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Caroline Ravelo



(Our Business Goddess, Organizational Mentor and Divining Rod, Activist, and our Associate Director dedicated to making Circle mainstream.)

Caroline is our **Associate Director**, lives in Florida, and has been involved in circle work for many years. **Caroline** is an **Intuitive Reader, Holistic Coach, Life, Business, Spiritual Teacher** and welcomed **grounded business guiding force for Circle Connections** as we evolve to be financially sustainable in a whole-hearted way as well as spiritually sound.

To learn more and to become a member, visit:
<http://www.cicleconnections.com>