



THE
Circle Way

A LEADER IN EVERY CHAIR

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Foreword by MARGARET J. WHEATLEY

An Excerpt From

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A Leader in Every Chair***

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CONTENTS

Foreword	When Did We Forget This? <i>Margaret J. Wheatley</i>	ix
Preface	The Origin of the PeerSpirit Circle Process	xiii
Part I	The Circle Way	1
Chapter 1	Where Circle Comes From and Where It Can Take Us	3
	<i>The circle is an ancient lineage of collaboration that has informed society for thousands of years. The circle way integrates this lineage with a modern understanding of group dynamics and broad applications for organizational settings.</i>	
Chapter 2	The Components of Circle	15
	<i>Every conversation has an infrastructure, an understood pattern of participation. The conversational structure of PeerSpirit Circle Process is outlined here through a map known as the Components of Circle.</i>	
Part II	Circles at Work in the World	35
Chapter 3	The Power of Preparation, Invitation, Intention, and Center	37
	<i>Circle meetings call the right people into the room, inform participants as to why they have gathered, and offer people ways to contribute. Placing a visual representation of shared purpose in the center creates a focus for the group.</i>	
Chapter 4	Rotating Positions of Leadership in the Circle	49
	<i>A PeerSpirit circle is an all-leader group, in which positions of responsibility change and adapt as needed. The three most identifiable positions of host, guardian, and scribe stabilize the progress of a circle session while all participants hold the infrastructure.</i>	
Chapter 5	Accountability Through Agreements, Practices, and Principles	65
	<i>In any group process, there are skills for participating and norms for functioning. In circle, the skills are the practices and the agreements are the norms for operating. The principles provide the energetic movement in an all-leader system.</i>	

Chapter 6: Circle, Step by Step 81

The overall flow of a circle meeting is directed by the components of start-point, check-in, and check-out. These three components set a social container for a clear beginning, a path of conversation, and a clear ending. They are easy to explain and can stand alone or serve as a transition to the full use of circle process.

Part III The Art of Presence in Circle 93**Chapter 7 Story as Core Communication** 95

Story is a map of human experience. Circle provides the strong social container for catching stories and helping each other understand how the narratives of our lives can influence our professional and personal environments.

Chapter 8 Activating and Responding in a Social Container 107

Circle is a social container in which people's greatest clarity and deepest confusion show up. Nonverbal cues of communication are magnified in a circle meeting. Every person brings an energetic presence to circle as well as a verbal contribution. Understanding energetics enables circle leaders to work holistically with the challenges of circle interaction and thereby strengthen group confidence.

Chapter 9 Why Circle Takes Us to the Shadow 127

The Jungian concept of the "shadow"—the unknown parts of the self—provides a way for people to understand the drive for increased wholeness that comes into the circle process and to trust the structure to hold them and language to speak about what's happening in moments of distress.

Chapter 10 Circle as Support for Collective Healing 143

Circle can transform familial, community, and societal issues by receiving stories in a community of listeners. Three stories in this section illustrate the intergenerational healing of a family, the healing provided by addressing issues of race and gender in a southern city, and the ability of traumatized citizens to shift their reactions to organized violence in the midst of social turmoil.

Part IV Circle as Paradigm Shift 161**Chapter 11 Organizational Experiments in Circle Governance** 163

This chapter features three organizations that use circle for their governance: the national board of the Financial Planning Association; the True North Health Care Center in Falmouth, Maine; and the Ridge and Valley Charter School in New Jersey.

Chapter 12 Circle as a Way of Life	183
<i>Circle is a meaningful addition to quality relationships with family and friends. Anecdotal stories illustrate the power of circle to create healthy intimacy. Circle also prepares us to maintain societal calm and self-organization in times of transition, emergency, and social change.</i>	
Afterword Circle in the Heart of Stone <i>Christina Baldwin</i>	197
Glossary	199
Notes	203
Bibliography and Resources	205
Acknowledgments	208
About the Authors	210
Index	213

FOREWORD

When Did We Forget This?

Margaret J. Wheatley

I first discovered the power of the circle way in 1998 working with Christina and Ann. But that's not an accurate statement—we don't "discover" circle practice so much as remember it. As humans, our species' memory is filled with circles, not just those we painted on pots and cave walls long, long ago but also the physical formations in which we arranged ourselves as we got to know one another. The extraordinary Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana writes in "The Biology of Love" that humans first developed language when we moved into familial groups.¹ The closer we got to one another, the more curious and expressive we became. As soon as fire was discovered, some early version of us formed a circle around the fire, experimenting with new forms of expression. Circle is the way humans have always sat together and gotten to know one another.

It's important to remember this long, loving lineage as we now daily sit in rows in classrooms, auditoriums, buses, and airplanes, looking at the back of each other's heads. Or as we sit along the straight edges of tables and desks struggling to find a way to communicate and reach one another. After all these centuries of separation and isolation, circle welcomes us back into a shape where we can listen, be heard, and be respected, where we can think and create together. Circle is the means to draw us away from the dramatic and angry public exchanges that now are not just commonplace but seemingly the only option available for discourse. Sitting together as equals, slowed down, held by the shape, drawing on ancient familiarity—just what we need at this time!

In today's world, dozens, if not hundreds, of group processes are available. In the midst of so much choice, it's important to remember the long lineage of circle and its role in human community. Circle process is not a technique; it's a heritage. It is a way to be together that is familiar to people everywhere on the planet. In indigenous communities, it's easy to notice the presence of circle—as people sit in fields resting from their work, in homes and public places, even in airports as they travel. But generally, circle has been suppressed and forgotten. Cultures of hierarchy and control long ago abolished circle, because circle serves democracy. Those seeking to dominate and rule over others know instinctively that circle is dangerous to their desire for power. By its simple shape, circle includes everyone without distinction, welcomes and invites all to participate, and creates equality among those gathered.

So it is that this most ancient of forms becomes revolutionary in today's world. And also most welcome. Welcomed by those who are excluded, by those who never speak to power, by those who don't believe they have anything to say. In this way, it opens up the creativity and contribution of all who sat silent for far too many years. Circle ends our collective and individual silence.

The shape itself offers many benefits. Circle is the form of endlessness, continuation, calming down, pacifying. In a circle, there's no beginning or end—once you're in the circle, you're there, participating in wholeness. Nobody is superior; no one is better than anyone else. We sit together in our differences in one nice, round shape.

We don't pay nearly enough attention to shape, to the form of the meeting. We spend a great deal of time preparing content and agendas and dealing with politics but then barely notice the shape of the room in which we're doing the work. We accept whatever's in the room—the tables, the chairs, the disarray from the last meeting. We just want to get on with the work (and get out of there as quickly as possible). If we do start to rearrange the room, often colleagues ask us what we're doing, why we're bothering. Or they try to embarrass us and accuse us of becoming “touchy-feely.” But if we don't work on the shape of the meeting, it's predictable what will happen. Rectangular tables promote difficult discussions based on opposition; public forums with microphones at the front promote drama and anger; stages and speakers create critical observers; circles create coequal participants and reflective thinking.

As in architecture, form should follow function. Once we define what we want to accomplish in the meeting, it becomes important to determine the

shape in which we'll meet. No one form is good for every circumstance—every form has its uses.

Please let's start paying attention to this! If you want to maintain power and control, keep using the forms that support that. If you need to convey information but not conversation, set the room for a lecture or teaching. If you want to include diverse colleagues and think well together, use the circle. But don't assume for a single minute that you can mix up or ignore the form. It's the most essential element to consider, predictive of the outcome of the meeting.

In this beautiful book, under the wise and loving guidance of Christina and Ann, you'll travel into the ancient lineage of circle and learn how it has been brought forward into our modern organizations. You'll see how deeply embedded this pattern of circle is, how it's a true archetype of the human spirit, one that summons people everywhere to step into the conversation. As you read the stories and understand the practices, I hope that you will feel the stirrings of memory in you, that you will be taken to a place of recall of a time when we were sitting together, drawing on each other's presence and perspectives.

Then and now, no matter what's happening in the external world, human beings can get through anything as long as we're together. May we take these practices to heart as our path going forward, out of the darkness of isolation into the clear seeing that circle makes possible.

PART

I

The Circle Way



1

CHAPTER

Where Circle Comes From and Where It Can Take Us

The room sizzles with tension. Emotions are high, opinions are formed, polarities harden, and alliances and divisions are drawn. Twelve women and men dressed in the current armor of business are about to engage one another on the battlefield of a contentious meeting. In the next two hours, they will decide things that shape their organization's future. The agenda is overfull, and there will be insufficient time for discussion or consideration of consequences. Perhaps this doesn't matter, as the decisions have essentially been made through background e-mails, late and early cell phone calls, text messages, and side conversations in the catacomb of cubicles and corner offices. The players wander in: the CEO, the guy from accounting, department managers, and supervisors. The boss's assistant sets up coffee, flip charts, and related papers and gets ready to take notes.

These are good people.

These are the people who keep business running—in the United States, Canada, Europe, India, China, Australia and the Pacific nations, Latin and South America, and Africa. Wherever there is enough stability in society to hold together commerce and community, some variation of these people gather, around the clock, around the world. They have spouses and partners and children they love whom they send off to school in the mornings and cheer at soccer games. They walk the dog, pet the cat, read the paper, watch television, and enjoy a good meal and perhaps a glass of wine or a cup of tea to draw a line through the end of the day. They put the kids to bed and often head back to their laptops

or hand-helds to tend to correspondence they have no time for in the rush of their workday.

“Two to three hundred e-mails a day,” they tell us, “and we’re required to have our BlackBerrys on 24/7.” Another one says, “I get up every night at two A.M. to see if the early meetings have been changed—sometimes we have to be here by six A.M., and I have an hour commute. Then I have to wake my husband and negotiate how we’re doing the kids if I’m gone by five—surprising how many other road warriors are on the freeway that time of day.” A man laughs sardonically: “I sometimes think of myself as a six-figure lemming rushing toward the cliff. I was going to transition out, but my financial parachute burned up back in 2009. Now I’m just grateful to have made it through the layoffs.”

Underneath their resignation is tremendous frustration at what it takes to run the world this way—and to be run by the world. And the place that much of this underlying discontent shows up is in how we run our meetings—how we greet and treat each other and how we wield interpersonal power in the attempt to hold on to some sphere of influence that satisfies our desires to make a difference. This world, however, the world of human interaction and participation, is *our* world to mold and change to fit our needs. What is about to happen here in this room is not predestined; we can redesign it. There is another way: the circle way.

Where Circle Comes From

When humanity’s ancestors began to control the use of fire and to carry the embers of warmth and cooking and light along with them from site to site, fire brought a new experience into being: the need for social organization. We speak of this imagined scene many times in circle, awakening our connections to the dreamtime of human origin.

The man is wet to the skin and shivers. The lifeless body of a rabbit bounces against his shoulder as he hurries through the twilight. The woman trotting at his side pauses in the fading light to gather a few leaves, scratch a surface root free with her toe, and deposit it in the skin pouch at her waist. They move in this fashion along a trail they hope will lead to welcome, warmth, and company for the night. They smell smoke before they can see it, and then hear voices. Finally, they round a bend and there it is—fire glow on a cave wall. Other travelers have already gathered. Not wanting to be mistaken for prey or foe, the man grunts loudly, making the sound for “man-friend.” The people at the fire are alerted now and

shush each other, listening cautiously. There is chatter; then one among them grunts back, “Man-friend, man-friend.” The woman opens her throat and ululates the haunting cry of female welcome. The women at the fire call back to her. They have two things to offer: food and story.¹

With flame, hominid scavengers could provide one another with increased safety, warmth, and food. These elements allowed hominids to cluster in larger groups, and larger groups required an increased capacity for complex social behavior. Evidence of the controlled use of fire dates back to the Lower Paleolithic, some 200,000 to 400,000 years ago, when *Homo erectus*, a now extinct hominid, was first exploring its way out of Africa. The skilled use of fire seems to have been passed along to *Homo sapiens sapiens*—us—who arrived about 165,000 years ago. Solid archaeological evidence of hearth rings has been excavated in South Africa and dated back 125,000 years.

What makes this interesting in a book about collaborative conversation is the supposition that language as a social tool developed alongside the use of fire and the sophistication of hand tools. Just as archaeologists and anthropologists can verify the progressive development of tools, neurolinguists such as Stephen Pinker, in his book *The Language Instinct*, can verify the brain pattern of a developed language center faintly etched in the frontal lobe on the inside of fossilized *Homo sapiens* crania. Based on this evidence, Pinker states, “All *Homo sapiens* talk, and all *Homo sapiens* use language as the way they interpret and filter the world around them.”² This combination—*fire*, which provided the capacity for extending physical gathering; *tools*, which supported hunting and gathering and eventually agriculture and architecture; and *language*, which provided a way to organize experience, transmit knowledge, and process human thought and feeling—has proved to be an unbeatable combination.

Once upon a time, fire led our ancestors into the circle. It made sense to put the fire in the center and to gather around it. A circle defined physical space by creating a rim with a common source of sustenance lighting up the center. These ancestors needed the circle for survival—food, warmth, defense—and they discovered that the circle could help design social order.

This may seem like quite a leap of imagination, but it seems less so when we notice how strongly the impulse toward circle remains active, almost instinctual, in human beings today. When people are engaged in dialogue and relationships, we generally arrange ourselves in a circular formation. This automatic behavior is based on the need to be able to see and hear each other and to

communicate our intentions through body language and facial expressions as well as through words. The dialogue may be heated, with emotions roused, or it may be comforting, with emotions relaxed; nevertheless, we still stand where we can keep an eye on each other and on what we and they are saying. This social patterning comes from somewhere and has obviously been of service since it has been maintained in the psychosocial lineage of how we behave together. The seminal researcher who articulated the sources of psychosocial lineage was the twentieth-century Swiss psychiatrist and philosopher Carl Gustav Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, who lived from 1875 to 1961.

Jung hypothesized that all human beings share a number of images that seem to spring from a common imagination deep within the human psyche. Jung called this source *the collective unconscious* and noted that it was filled with recurring and universal mythic symbols he named *archetypes*. Archetypes are expressed culturally but are deeper than culture. For example, the archetypal image that arises when you read the words *wise old man* is influenced by race, religion, and cultural origin—you may imagine Merlin, the Dalai Lama, James Earl Jones, or Black Elk; the point is that calling up an image is universal. Speak an archetypal phrase to a group, and everybody will imagine something. Jung studied the power of circle by examining anthropological evidence and making psychological corollaries; we discovered the power of circle by noticing what happens when people sit in a circular shape.

To understand the power of circle as a collaborative conversation model and the kinds of insights that can pour into this group process, it is helpful to understand that when we circle up in a ring of chairs, we are activating an archetype. Archetypal energy tends to make our experiences seem bigger, brighter or darker; our words become imbued with shades of meaning, and our dialogue, decisions, and actions take on a sense of significance. This is part of the attraction to circle process: the archetypal energy can magnify issues among the group and help transform them.

People who have experienced circle often refer to this archetypal energy as the “magic of circle” that occurs when the best (or sometimes the worst) comes out of us and we find ourselves capable of responding with a level of creativity, innovation, problem solving, and visioning that astound us. Others talk about circle as an experience of synergy, as being able to tap into something they didn’t know was in them and could not have predicted as a possible outcome at the start of a circle meeting.

In Germany a few years ago, we were offering a four-day training to sixteen sophisticated consultants from five countries. One of our participants was

a leading scholar and academician who wrote and edited journals on political theory and the legacy of Carl Jung in European pedagogy. He pressed us constantly for cognitive information. It was a very helpful interaction for all of us, especially working cross-culturally and choosing English words we hoped would translate meaningfully into German.

The second day into our conversation, something happened that sparked the group and took our learning into insight—we don't remember the particulars of the moment but do remember how urgently this man leaned forward and said, "Stop. Stop—right now, what is happening? What is this energy?" He gestured into the space between us, eighteen people sitting in a room at the back of a little retreat center outside Frankfurt on a sunny spring day. He looked at Ann on one side of the room and across the circle at Christina on the other side. "You, what are the two of you doing? How does this happen?"

"It's not the two of us," we told him. "It's all of us and the circle itself." Synergy is the experience of interaction between elements or people that when combined produces a total effect greater than the sum of the individual parts. The man's question led us into a rousing discussion on synergy, with clarifications being offered in several languages. After a while, satisfied with their explorations, the participants moved on. Later that evening, with a mischievous smile on his face, our colleague brought a pitcher of beer and a bowl of pretzels to our dinner table and popped the next question: "OK, now I want to discuss from where comes synergy?"

Circle as an Archetype of Group Process

Even though the wheel as a *tool* wasn't invented until about 5,500 years ago, the circle as a *symbol* appears in cave paintings and carvings dating back 35,000 years to the Late Paleolithic era. In his research, Jung discovered that the circle, often in the form of the sun wheel (a pie cut into eight equal pieces), is represented in cultures that developed in complete isolation from each other. The circle shows up around the world as the medicine wheel, the wheel of law, the wheel of the year, the Catherine wheel, the dharma wheel, the Kabbalah wheel or tree of life, the mandala, the zodiac, the Uroboros, the triad cross, the Celtic cross, and many other variations. When we pull the chairs away from the table and out of the rows and into a ring where we face each other, we are turning ourselves into a sun wheel. We assume the shape of the symbol itself—and synergy comes with us.

Since the 1990s, when PeerSpirit began offering circle process in an increasing variety of mainstream settings, experimenting with the circle's ability to hold conversation in social settings that range from North America to Europe to South Africa, we

have remained consistently aware that the ancient, ever-present circle archetype is evident in the modern methodology. We have repeatedly seen people surprised by their own capacities to access insights and come to decisions no one had imagined when their meeting started. They have asked, “How did we just do that? We didn’t get into power struggles. We came up with a course of action no one had seen as possible before.” Or they comment, “The director came into this room with ‘my mind is made up’ written all over his face. Twenty minutes later, he’s at the flip chart diagramming options.” And people begin to wonder, just as we do, “Is there something about the circle itself that encourages us to newness? Could this process work where folks are really stuck? Could slowing down and talking together really make us more productive? Could circle make our work lives more sustainable?”

Not everyone in the room needs to be interested in or thinking about synergy, archetypes, or social evolution for circle to work. However, group process is strengthened when a few thoughtful participants understand that we are playing with the fires that made us who we are. These fire tenders can then help a group remain steady through the kinds of experiences circle elicits, many of which are shared in stories throughout this book.

Circle may start as one small shift that turns out to be a tipping point. Often we suggest that people introduce a bit of circle process by offering a round of *check-in*, using the first ten or fifteen minutes of a meeting to invite each participant to share a short relevant story that relates to the group’s purpose—essentially, to let the group members know how they appear to each other. Sometimes people worry that the exercise is taking time away from the agenda, and yet this simple routine gathers people’s attention and focuses everyone on the purpose of the meeting. And sometimes the power and wisdom of the archetype shows up.

In the late 1990s, when PeerSpirit worked with the Center for Nursing Leadership (CNL), we had an experience of archetype streaming through and changing check-in. Founded in 1996 by members of the American Organization of Nurse Executives and funded by a grant from the Hill-Rom Company, CNL developed a one-year educational and midcareer renewal program called Journey Toward Mastery. Founding members had read Christina’s book *Calling the Circle* and were incorporating PeerSpirit methodology into their meetings. We were invited to join them to strengthen their understanding of circle practice. In the first few minutes, we offered the following check-in suggestion: “Tell us the story of how you came to enter the profession of nursing.”

We watched in amazement how the power of the right question can open a group’s synergy. The two of us, coming in as sensitively as we could yet outside

the profession we were serving, expected people to check in fairly succinctly. We expected participants to offer a brief anecdote that would better inform us of the motivation behind their career choice and lead into our teaching design for the morning session.

Instead, we witnessed stories of great heart. One person explained that she was the first girl in her large family to go to college; others grew up in small towns and rural areas where their grandmothers had delivered most of the babies. One knew as a child that she had healing abilities that she couldn't talk about; another had a sense of being called at an early age to serve humanity; another's father had died when she was fourteen, and her experience of caring nurses during that time made her determined to become such a caregiver. People listened with rapt attention and without interrupting as one by one they reached into their personal histories and brought forward the memory of the moment they had chosen their path. They laughed with one another and cried with one another, and by the time we had finished check-in, the morning was over.

The experience of circle that morning was a far more powerful lesson than we could have provided talking about circle methodology. And after lunch, when we began a more cognitive conversation about how circle process could influence learning within the cohort group and among the nurse leaders in their organizations, everyone had a profound reference point. This is another aspect of circle that constantly informs us: that the process can hold great depth, that it can survive and resolve long-standing conflicts, provide a space for healing, and then shape-shift into an efficient, peer-led, agenda-based meeting. All this happened at CNL in the course of a few hours.

Three archetypes were activated in this experience: the *healer* that shaped the participants' life journeys, the *circle* that provided a learning ground different from any they had previously experienced, and the *leader* that guided them into the fullness of their careers.

Years later, we still meet these women and men in the places where their work has called them. They are CEOs, chief nursing officers, vice presidents in large and small health care systems, directors of education, professors at nursing schools, and consultants to their profession. Cathy Michaels, currently on the faculty of the University of Arizona College of Nursing, remembers, "It was a profound shift to be invited into story. The question sent us into reflecting on how we had come to live this life. . . . And when that chord was struck, we became a community that wanted to listen. The serendipitous nature of the question met a waiting readiness in people to let go of everything else and speak from the heart."

Today, Cathy and other nurse leaders tell us stories of the times since that day when they have pulled chairs into a ring and used such a question to check in with staff and team members. They understand how to help teams become grounded in their foundational stories and to stand together on that shared foundation while using circle to manage their work relationships and tasks.

Triangle as an Archetype of Group Process

“Change the chairs and change the world” is a snappy slogan that contains a deeper truth. Whether or not we realize it, social design is always influencing us. Over time, the arrangement of things in our environment becomes such an ingrained norm that we assume that our way of being together is the only way of being together. We do not see that the arrangement itself sets the ways we interact and that if we shift the arrangement, we can shift the interaction. As we bring the circle back into places where the form of arrangement has become codified by organizational charts and chairs bolted into rows facing lecterns, we are greeting the archetype that has become the modern norm: the triangle activated as hierarchy.

The triangle is a universal symbol as old as the circle, one that similarly appeared in the Late Paleolithic. The triangle is chiseled and painted on cave walls as a representation of the Great Mother and continues down through time, showing up as the Great Pyramid, the Star of David, and the Trinity. We mentally relate to the number three and the three-pointed configuration represented by the triangle. The triangle is the basic unit of family (father/mother/child); the triangle divides how we see ourselves (body/mind/spirit); the triangle shapes how we view society (church/state/individual). Looking at the triangle through a psychological lens, we understand Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, with survival at the base and self-actualization at the top. Looking at the triangle as a system of socialization, we get powerful leaders located at the top and followers, employees, and ordinary citizens located at the bottom, with gradations of authority assigned and maintained in a status-based worldview.

As powerful archetypes manifesting in human affairs, the triangle and the circle have probably always coexisted in the organization of human society. One way to look at the world today is to think about the triangle, representing hierarchical power, as having overtaken its partnership with the circle and, as is the nature of power, decidedly come out on top. Hierarchy as a model offers an efficient means for charting systems and for carrying out specific and repetitive tasks when coordinated effort is required. Hierarchy is useful for passing on information, giving

directions, establishing chains of command, developing armies, developing workforces, organizing data, programming computer software, and mass-producing goods. Yet it lacks a holistic understanding of networked systems and biological interdependence and connectivity.

Within a hierarchical worldview, people look for their place. They can either accept their place as an unchangeable fact or strive ever upward toward greater perceived stability and privilege. That is our heroic story: the rise to power and the escape to greater freedom. The closer people are to the top, the more they tend to accept and defend hierarchy, and the closer people are to the bottom, the more they tend to acquiesce to or resist hierarchy. Every time people enter a meeting that plays out the scene that opened this chapter, we activate the triangle archetype and struggle to find our place within the implied power grid.

For the past five thousand years, the increasing valuation of triangle over circle, of hierarchy over collaboration, has gone through many evolutionary changes until what is a mutable imbalance of power is accepted as innate human nature: that's the arrangement. What started off as a concept of partnership in the deepest recesses of the human mind has become a distorted and destructive worldview in which collaborative ways of social organization are denigrated as child's play, relegated to the past, and discounted as utopian, naïve, or "new-age." And yet this world, the world of human interaction and participation, is our world to mold and change to fit our needs. We can rearrange who leads, how we lead, and what happens to all participants in a system. When we understand the archetypal shift, we can rearrange the chairs in ways that rearrange our world.

Where Circle Can Take Us

The circle way is a practice of reestablishing social partnerships and creating a world in which the best of collaboration informs and inspires the best of hierarchical leadership. The chief needs a council that brings the voices of the village to his or her ear. The president needs a cabinet. The coach needs a team. The teacher needs students. The elders need children. And the meetings need to change.

The ancient ways of circle are waiting for us to remember and activate a true experience of collaboration. So if the opening scene of this chapter is how most of the world currently gathers, we have the opportunity to change that scene by changing the meeting into circle process. The room buzzes with creative tension, emotions are optimistic, diverse opinions have been welcomed into the conversation, and the past several days of background e-mails, phone

calls, text messages, and side conversations in the cubicles and corner offices have all supported the development of an agenda that is focused, with time allotted to each item and premeeting information shared among all participants. Twelve women and men are about to engage each other in the dynamic interactions of a meeting held in circle process. In the next two hours, they will decide things that shape their organization's future. They have scheduled time for sufficient dialogue and consideration of consequences. They are ready to vote on some issues and to gather information and survey the wisdom in the room on other issues.

The leaders come in and take their places at a round table. The CEO has one agenda item prepared for presentation; the guy from accounting has another. One of the department managers will serve as *host* today, assuring that the process moves smoothly along; one of the supervisors will serve as *guardian*, watching over timeliness and helping the host maintain orderly momentum. The boss's assistant sets up coffee, flip charts, and related papers and prepares to serve as *scribe*, to note the essential insights, decisions, and action items.

Here the triangle of leadership is embedded within the collaborative circle. The host is not the boss; the guardian is not the enforcer; the scribe is not the historian: these roles are loose, rotating, voluntary, assumed and released as the sessions of a circle-based group advance toward fulfilling their intention. The triangle of leadership stabilizes group process so that the ideas, stories, wisdom, and synergy that emerge can stream through the conversation and be preserved in helpful ways. With this understanding in place, and the reestablishment of the ancient partnership, these good people can change the chairs *and* change their world.

The group can learn new ways of distributing leadership and responsibility. Participants can set agreements for respectful interaction before speaking and define what material is confidential and what can be shared. They can mark the moment between casual socializing or multitasking and paying full attention to one another. They can blend the dynamism of collaborative conversation with voting, achieve consensus, and acknowledge the authority of informed hierarchy within their roles in the circle.

Creating a Renewed Culture of Conversation

Recognition that we can talk and listen ourselves into the changes we need is simultaneously occurring to people in a number of environments. PeerSpirit Circle Process, the infrastructure of circle we have designed to serve in modern settings, travels in the company of other circle carriers and ways of calling for-

ward this heritage—the Way of Council, the Ehama teachings, Peacemaking Circles, the Millionth Circle, and other interpretations of lineages continue to elucidate circle process and capacity. In addition to the various circle processes, we find ourselves connected to a growing number of conversational modalities that have circle at their base: Open Space technology, World Café, Conversation Cafés, Art of Hosting, Appreciative Inquiry, restorative justice circles, Bohmian dialogue. Variations of collaborative group process are constantly being designed and offered as contributions to our social exploration.

We are in big trouble, so we need big help. We have inherited and created many problems, so we need many solutions. These collaborative conversational modalities are replicating, adaptive, global, democratic forces through which ordinary people are rediscovering their abilities to connect with each other's hearts and minds and make things happen as a result. These emergent conversations are not, at their essence, policy discussions or strategic planning; they are spontaneous eruptions of empowerment based on the release of energy that occurs while speaking to and listening to each other within the container of the archetypes.

What is generated by this emerging culture of conversation is a social paradigm shift that can occur anywhere, at any time, within any group of people. It operates through an intelligence that integrates the heart and mind. It seeks to restore principles of belonging and to find meaningful ways for everyone to contribute. Perhaps this culture of conversation is occurring now because science has given us a much more complete story of our origins and history: we have come to truly understand that we are one people, literacy among the populace is greater than ever before, and we live in a technologically as well as biologically interconnected world.

In symbolism, the circle and triangle are often found together. A triangle within a circle appears on the back of the U.S. dollar bill and on the front of the Alcoholics Anonymous medallion and is recognized as an international peace symbol. The partnership of archetypes is the willingness to combine the best attributes of both social structures and to know when to call on each of their strengths and to experience their balance. It is the nature of circle to invite in, to provide both access and boundaries, to provide a participatory process, to set social expectations, and to absorb diverse, even opposing, views through the alchemy of a symbolic central "fire."

Circle functions best in an environment where people feel socially safe and have the time to make authentic, thoughtful contributions to the process. How

to foster that social safety is a major purpose of this book. Circle invites contribution—particularly for problem solving or insights from unexpected sources (the janitor who solves a managerial issue, the child whose comment shifts a situation for teachers and staff). Circle provides a social container in which all voices may speak and be heard.

By contrast, *hierarchy* functions best in an environment where tasks need to be clearly delineated and carried out quickly with little or no debate, where authority requires clear boundaries, and where leaders have the time, space, and education to make good judgment calls and set directions for people who have different responsibilities (the paramedic handling triage, the skipper directing a crew through wind-whipped seas, the platoon leader on military reconnaissance). Triangle provides a social container in which safety depends on each person doing his or her part.

In the mid-1990s, Christina was editing pages for *Calling the Circle* while seated next to an airplane pilot who was flying home in economy class. He read over her shoulder for a while and then announced in a tone of friendly challenge, “From what I see on your pages, you and I are diametrically opposed human beings in how we see the world.” A spirited conversation ensued, and our civility as temporary companions led us to listen to one another.

After expounding on the need for “one pilot, one decision,” and the sense of responsibility he felt flying these magnificent machines, he mentioned that the research on plane crashes and other in-flight disasters had caused the Federal Aviation Administration to mandate communications training between the cockpit and the cabin crews so that they would better understand each other’s skills and roles in moments of crisis. “Oh,” Christina smiled, “like being able to call a circle in the air?” The two of them came to agree that he led with hierarchy and accepted circle, while she led with circle and accepted hierarchy. It was a five-mile-high dialogue of balance and partnership.

So here we are. We are facing new terrain and a plethora of challenges and disasters we can hardly imagine. No one has come this way before, yet we stand at the front edge of the long and winding path of our human heritage. The greater the number of people who understand where the application and experience of circle can take us, who have the confidence to put a candle or photo or mission statement in the middle of a shouting match and suggest a return to listening, the more empowered we will be to create the kind of world for which we long and on which our ultimate survival depends.

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A Leader in Every Chair***

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