

A circle is the oldest form of social interaction. However, for a long time hierarchal structures offered greater control, and replaced circular structures as the dominant leadership model for groups. It is evident in today's world that the top-down model of leadership is ineffective, even harmful. Circles are being re-discovered as the model that provides 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. **Action Circles** are a catalyst for positive change locally and globally. Everyone is equally valued and equally shares. It is a Spirit-filled time and place where collective creativity and wisdom is unleashed. Working together in circle is fun and gives each one the courage and power to go forward.

Action Circles: Passion & Accountability

It is time for women to shine. What sparks your passion and expands your willingness to participate in bringing about a 5th Women's World Conference (5WWC) where women's and girl's issues, programs, stories, resources, financial empowerment, communications and organizing receive worldwide attention and support?

Passion combined with your willingness dive in is all that is needed to take your first action step. That step is powerful whether or not it is big. Expertise, talents and skills are expanded along the way, especially when linking arms with others who are ready to live their passion out loud and equally dedicated to accomplishing the Action Circle goals.

There are countless stories of simple ways women uniting makes a huge difference. One example is when the women of a small rural village in a developing country started with a grassroots commitment to make a well for clean water. From their united dedication eventually came indoor plumbing for their whole village and beyond. Another inspiring story is the women who were determined to stop wife beating by giving each victim a whistle that would make everyone aware a beating was taking place. Abuse stopped because her husband learned the power of women and was shamed by her circle of women coming to his wife's rescue each time she blew the whistle. Soon whistles were passed out not only to women of this community but also to women in other villages.

Write down your dream to call an Action Circle and post it somewhere you will see it frequently, or under your bed so you can dream on it. Feel it as if it is already complete. By giving attention to your dream, you will attract others to help you bring it about.

- Share your dream with others and invite them to join you.
- Post a friendly announcement in local gathering places such as churches, synagogues, libraries, community centers, etc.

1. Set a date, time and place for the first Action Circle.

Do it sooner rather than later. That very first meeting can be the most challenging to arrange. There may well be "conflicts" in your schedules, but find the time. Whenever you struggle to set a date, return to your intention to create this important gathering. The power of attraction will bring others to you dream.

2. Meet by email, phone or in person. Call the Circle by sitting in circle with an altar in the center or create a virtual circle. (See Circle Principles on Millionth Circle website (www.millionthcircle.org))

3. Sit in circle. Place chairs or other forms of comfortable seating in a circle, where each face is seen and everyone can be heard.

4. Adopt Circle Principles asking for feedback and creating others as you go along.

- Create sacred space
- Speak one at a time
- Promote open and honest communication
- Listen without judgment
- Offer experience instead of advice
- Invite silence when in doubt or need
- Share leadership and resources
- Decisions by consensus

5. Introduce yourself and if you have others who are already involved let them introduce themselves. Welcome them to the Action Circle meeting and present your passion.

6. Devise your own rituals to open and close the circle. A ritual can be as simple as each person introducing herself and offering a short sentence of hopes for making the dream a reality. This is known as a *check-in*. It is always best to start and end with 'check-ins' and 'check-outs.'

There are many kinds of rituals that you can use to honor sacred space. Lighting a candle, having several minutes of silence, reciting a prayer or poem, singing a song are just some of the ways. Using a "talking object" brings the conversation to a deeper level of sharing. Whoever holds the "talking object" speaks from the heart while the others listen from the heart. The Native American 'talking stick' is a sacred object that is always passed clockwise.

7. 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 we keep the energy positive. When we focus around problems the energy will be negative.

You can use newsprint to brainstorm all the ideas for making a collective dream become a reality. This is a time for all ideas, without judgment, to be listed in a random style on newsprint— a 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 choose steps they want to take based on passion plus responsibility.

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, those who want to raise funds, etc.

8. Name your circle and its purpose.

Decide by consensus the name and purpose of your Action Circle. Naming your Action Circle brings it into reality not only for each member but also to those outside the circle. Naming is powerful. Your intention is agreed upon by all the members and sent out into the Universe to become a reality—the law of attraction.

9. Decide who will call the next circle gathering, when and where.

Shared leadership prevents 'burn-out,' promotes active participation and leadership development of every member. Hosting informal circle gatherings keeps the energy going and brings in new members. It builds a powerful bond. Celebrate all successes. Make it nurturing, informative and fun.

10. The closing ritual ('check-outs'):

Each person shares in a couple of words or a sentence on how the circle experience was for them. This can be done before a song, poem, prayers, silence, etc. You are on your way to co-creating a better world.

11. Open Space Principles:

- **Whoever comes -- they are the right ones.** Even if you are the only one for the moment, the power of attraction will bring others.
- **Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.** Stay open to all that others bring and what happens collectively. The magic of a Sacred Circle brings miracles.
- **Whenever it starts is the right time.** It can start when cooking a meal, at the community well or washing clothes in the steam. It can happen at a meeting or in line for an event.
- **When it is over it is over.** When you have accomplished the goal of your Action Circle, it is over. You can create others or join others.
- **Law of Two Feet.** Go to Action Circles that attract you and when you find this is not what you want to do, go to others or start one.

Each Action Circle is self-appointed, self-organized and self-governed using Circle Principles. You don't have to wait for someone to tell you what to do. Each Action Circle is like a part of the body, fully functional and needs the whole to be effective. Communications and interaction with the whole (Council of Circle) is important so the right hand is coordinated with the left hand, the right foot with the left foot, etc.

Circle Connections, Inc. is a membership organization. Each member is given a 20-minute phone consultation, resources, discounts at Circle events, experience in facilitating circles and opportunities to learn from others what works and what doesn't work. We share resources, stories and have fun. Circle Connections hosts regularly scheduled member conference calls where we exchange information that helps us start, nurture and connect our circles. Please join us in changing the world, circle-by-circle, connection-by-connection. www.circleconnections.com.