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Preface

The circle process is a gentle invitation to change one's relationship to oneself, to the community, and to the wider universe. It offers an awakening of connection and purpose beyond the myriad of differences that keep people apart and in conflict with one another.

—Carolyn Boyes-Watson

You cannot possibly achieve all you want in your life on your own. Nor should you want to. But by simply gathering together a small group, you can truly change the world and also solve your most basic day-to-day problems. Cecile Andrews, in her book *The Circle of Simplicity*, explains that circles are particularly important now because they are meeting so many fundamental unmet human needs, such as:

the need to find your unique path, the need to feel part of a community, the need to be connected to the universe. In study circles you fulfill the human needs to feel connected – to feel valued, to feel accepted, to be appreciated for your authentic self, to feel that you are free to say what you want without fear of being judged, to talk with people who

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share your values, to talk about matters of importance and substance, to feel you are learning how to feel fully alive.¹

This reflects the modern literature on societal trends and my own experiences.

My story

Several years ago I began searching for a networking group of my own. I decided to join a few mastermind and networking groups to build my law practice and conflict resolution business. Over time I became increasingly frustrated by their processes. None of these groups allowed enough time to get to know the other members, nor did the conversations go to the level necessary to get to the real issues. I felt that these brief conversations were somewhat superficial.

In my frustration, I decided to create my own networking group. In the process I read hundreds of books, articles and websites on various group and networking processes. These included mastermind groups, dream teams, peer-mentoring groups and circles. I discovered Wisdom Circles, Spirit Circles and Council Circles, to name a few, and I learned about the ancient wisdom of circles. I decided to combine what I learned with what I knew about Corporate Circles (for resolving conflict) to create a new model: One Circle.

At the same time, I was speaking regularly to corporations and associations. I was hearing from audiences that there was a real desire for a deeper sense of connectedness and community. Many people were beginning to lose interest in their loose-knit networking groups and book clubs and were

finding that their community ties were strained. A growing body of people seem to be seeking ways to create trusting relationships and establish mechanisms for coming together to build community.

Over time, I have seen Circles not only solve problems and help people continuously learn, but also cause people to change deeply held perspectives. When people speak in Circles they transform their individual perspectives and create a new understanding – simply by sharing experiences.

Those who have experienced Circles know how it feels to be able to talk about things that are important and difficult. They know how it feels to find that one contact that made all the difference – that might have taken years to locate on their own. They know what it is like to feel supported in a highly competitive world.

What you will get out of this book

In this book you will learn how to create your own Circle and how to keep it on track and resilient. By being a part of a Circle you will

- create solutions and solve problems
- gain wise advice and information
- generate contacts and resources
- develop skills and continuously learn
- achieve goals and balance
- obtain support and connection

Whom this book is for

Although *One Circle* was written for busy professionals who want to live more focused and balanced lives, this book is useful for anyone and specifically for the following:

Entrepreneurs who want to build their businesses, attract clients and run their businesses more effectively and efficiently.

Executives and business owners who want to be more effective and efficient, excel in their leadership capacity and leave a legacy.

Managers who want to bring together people inside a corporation for purposes of mentoring, professional development and succession planning.

Professional women who want support and advice in achieving their personal and professional goals while living more balanced lives.

Parents who want to share parenting experiences (good and bad) and learn how to cope with, care for and relate to teenagers and aging parents.

Career changers who need contacts, advice and guidance in finding a career that best suits their skills and interests.

Most people recognize that they can be more successful with the help of others, yet many find it difficult to connect with others who will consistently challenge and support them. Those who benefit most from the synergy of a Circle are those who feel somewhat alone or those who have only a few people in whom to confide.

Where to from here?

If you are interested in joining or setting up a Circle, simply read on. You can either take the principles set out here and apply them to your current group or set up your own Circle. Pick a location, select a time, pull together a few people, and begin the conversation! It's that easy.

We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.

—Albert Einstein

The circle is a spiritual practice with very practical application in the world . . . Circles work well in health-care organizations, in the nonprofit sector, in government and corporate settings – wherever there is a need to allow the hard-earned wisdom of individual members to surface in order to improve the functioning of the whole.

—Charles A. Garfield et al., *Wisdom Circles*

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One Circle Basics

About two years ago Nancy, a senior partner at a national law firm, was invited to join a small group of professional women – primarily for purposes of networking. Although Nancy recalls being hesitant, she now believes the group has changed her life. According to Nancy:

The group gave me the opportunity to gain perspective and insight into issues that I would not otherwise gain. Often people in leadership roles become isolated, and my group facilitated the discussion of significant issues – in business, family and personal life – in a totally confidential forum. My ability to be more effective as a mother, a wife and lawyer has been enhanced by this group.

This book is about how to bring together such a group of people – who will challenge and support you. This group is called One Circle. This chapter describes what Circles are, the benefits of these Circles and what a Circle is not. It discusses the origins of circles and why the One Circle model works so

well. At the end of this chapter are some frequently asked questions about Circles.

What is a Circle?

A Circle is a personal advisory board. It is a group of like-minded people helping each other be their best. This group consists of five to twelve people meeting on a regular basis to discuss their business, their work and their lives. Their primary purpose is to help each other achieve their goals. Such a group usually meets once a month, and the meetings generally last about two hours.

These Circles are primarily for purposes of learning and growing. They are designed to enable each member to solve day-to-day problems and also live a meaningful and balanced life. Circles can be used by almost anyone, including any of the following:

- entrepreneurs wanting to grow their businesses
- executives wanting to become better leaders
- managers wanting to mentor others
- professionals wanting to grow personally and professionally
- parents wanting to be better caregivers and spouses
- people wanting to change careers

Circle meetings follow a particular process that allows for every person to participate, contribute and have their challenges discussed. The process is structured and yet flexible enough to accommodate the ever-changing needs of the individuals in each group.

The benefits of Circles

The strength of Circles lies in the trusting relationships that are developed over time. These relationships create a safe place to have candid conversations and provide the necessary support to enable each member to grow. Circles create a connected community and inviting space where members feel open to sharing stories, experiences and advice. This community in turn provides a broad network of advice, resources and support. Here are some of the specific benefits of Circles.

Circles create solutions and solve problems

Every day we are confronted with new problems. We struggle on our own to find solutions. This can take a significant amount of time and cause enormous frustration.

Some people turn to a small network of colleagues or friends to help them solve personal dilemmas. Although these networks are very helpful, they have several weaknesses. They are not always available, they are not always neutral, and they often come with strings attached. These collegial relations are based on a vague system of give-and-take and can generally only be used in certain contexts and situations. For example, an accountant might not want to phone his mother when having trouble with new software.

A Circle consists of people whose *responsibility* is to help you. Each person in the Circle is there to help you succeed. If one cannot help, another likely can. Circle members do this both in the meeting and after the meeting. A Circle is a place for open and candid conversations about all sorts of challenges or problems. It is a place for diagnosing problems; it is a place for unfettered imagination and creative ideas; it is

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a place for canvassing different options and ultimately selecting the one that works best.

A Circle provides a place for the sharing of unique and rich worldly experiences, stories, opinions and feelings. It brings together the cumulative thoughts, opinions and ideas of each of its members. The quality and quantity of advice and suggestions is limited only by the combined life experiences of the group.

Circles provide wise advice, information and suggestions

As we grow personally and professionally in business and careers, we increasingly value wise advice, practical and relevant information, and creative suggestions. To stay alive and vital in business and life, we need a continual flow of this information.

For this advice to be valuable, the provider must, at a minimum, understand who you are and what you want. Indeed, the best advice is usually gained from someone who has known you for a long time and understands your uniqueness, your goals and your personal circumstances.

However, we are all so busy that we often do not have the time to keep others up to speed on what we are doing. Our lives and businesses are constantly changing, and it is very difficult to keep others in the loop. A few lunches here or there with a few close colleagues are not enough. Those who could provide us with great advice are extraordinarily rare.

One Circle is a group of people who, over time, learn about you, about your business, and about your personal goals and aspirations. Because they meet with you on a regu-

lar basis, you do not need to keep reminding them about who you are and what you do. Eventually each person becomes a valuable source of advice, information and suggestions, both inside and outside the Circle.

Circles generate contacts and resources

Whether we work in organizational settings or on our own, we all need others to help build our businesses and our careers. Businesses need to know about their competitors, suppliers and markets. They need a continual flow of new ideas and customers, both to stay in business and to excel. At an individual level we need information about alternative careers and contacts, and at a personal level we need information about everything from the names of plumbers to those of medical specialists.

Many people belong to clubs, associations and networking groups to meet their need to generate contacts. They talk to others and hope to glean some nugget at each event or meeting. These events, however, rarely meet all their needs. This is because most groups meet infrequently, consist of an ever-changing mix of people, and have vague objectives. The typical lunch or after-work networking meeting rarely provides sufficient time to speak to others, yet alone understand what others do or how you can help each other.

As a result it can take years to develop dependable relationships. By contrast, in a constant Circle, whether a group as small as five or as large as ten, there are usually enough leads or ideas about leads generated to keep everyone satisfied. The principle is a lot like the theory of six degrees of separation first proposed in 1929 and popularized by a 1990 movie.

Circles develop skills and transfer wisdom

As humans we are lifelong learners. We are curious by nature, and without learning we stagnate. We learn about things from books and teachers. We learn skills and how to apply what we know by watching others and practicing. We also learn from hearing about how others do things. We learn tacit or practical knowledge by word of mouth.

A Circle helps members develop knowledge, skills, and new ways of thinking about things and doing things. Skills gained in a Circle range from basic problem-solving skills to communication skills and practical work-related skills. More advanced skills include leadership skills, marketing skills, speaking skills and even coping skills. A Circle also provides a place to experiment or test things out before putting them into action. Through ongoing conversations, best practices (and worst practices) are passed along.

Circles help achieve goals and balance

We all have hopes and dreams. Each person comes to the Circle with some goals and perhaps a vision of their ideal life. We all set tasks and go about trying to accomplish them day to day. However, year after year, many of these goals remain unaccomplished, and we wonder why. Many of us struggle both with setting clear goals and sticking to them. Although we could be more effective and efficient, we end up in a bit of a rut and somehow get off track.

One goal that many people share is the goal of living a balanced life. As baby boomers advance in their careers and businesses, they begin to question the long hours and the emphasis on work. These sentiments are shared by the

emerging Generation X, who are looking not only for balance but also for meaningful work.

In a Circle every person is dedicated to helping each other achieve success and balance – whatever that might mean to each person on an individual basis. The Circle helps its members clarify their goals and set priorities. The Circle then holds each person accountable for those goals and provides necessary support. Even the most self-driven individual welcomes the support of a Circle.

Circles offer support and connection

Our society has become increasingly individualistic. As described in the book *Wisdom Circles*, this emphasis on the individual has become a liability in North America:

During the last four hundred years of human history, tremendous emphasis has been laid on the development of the individual. Wise teachers have encouraged us to know ourselves, trust our inner authority, try the road not taken and fulfill our potential. Western psychology has given us a body of literature on why we need to “individuate,” that is search for the essence of our own uniqueness. Unfortunately, any asset pushed too far becomes a liability.¹

To compound matters, as corporate structures give way to more project-based work, the world of contract workers and entrepreneurs is on the rise. Today more than ever people are becoming consultants and business owners. These individuals miss the camaraderie offered inside corporations and often feel isolated. Many are looking for a sense of connection

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or belonging. They are searching for ways to come together for support and connection.

Research suggests that this sense of connection is critical to well-being, and much of our stress can be attributed to a lack of a sense of community. People need to feel they are part of a community to which they belong and contribute. In his book *American Mania*, Peter Whybrow describes how Americans are starving for connection. He suggests that many Americans have pursued happiness by accumulating material wealth and have forgotten the real source of happiness: intimacy. He says:

It is intimacy, not materialism that buffers the stress of everyday living. Meaning is found in the social bond. Attachment to others serves survival in infancy, and empathetic understanding facilitates adaptation throughout life. Feelings of happiness are tied to intimacy and are dependent on the reinforcing presence of companions and friendship.²

Whybrow explains how Adam Smith's economic philosophy was based on a balance between commercial liberty and the social structures that are rapidly eroding in North America. Apparently Smith felt that human envy and a tendency toward compulsive craving, if left unchecked, would destroy empathetic feeling and the neighborly concerns essential to his economic model and a free market's successful operation.

Robert Lane, a professor of political science at Yale, in his book *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*, described the decline of American community to a state of psychic malnutrition – a kind of famine of warm interpersonal relations,

of easy-to-reach neighbors, of encircling, inclusive memberships amid a life of material abundance. The book *Bowling Alone*, by Robert D. Putnam, also describes the decline of social groups across the United States over the past century.

Although there are many ways in which people come together, such as networking meetings, book clubs and dinner groups, these meet only some of the needs of busy professional people. Causal networking does not allow for deeper discussions, book clubs rarely discuss work life, and dinner groups are mostly just for fun and meeting new people. At the same time, the corporate world can often feel uninviting and frightening. It is rare today to find a healthy and supportive work environment, and the statistics show this is taking a toll.

People need to feel safe to be creative and to reach their full potential. Circles create places where this can happen. In a Circle members are challenged yet supported. Members challenge each other's thinking, beliefs and actions in a supportive manner. They reconcile what you say with what you do, and they hold you accountable in way that encourages your development.

What Circles are not

Circles are different from social groups, sports groups and educational groups, and it helps to know how they are distinct.

A Circle is not a social group

Many people belong to social clubs or more loosely defined groups such as extended families or community groups. Many belong to book clubs and dinner clubs. Although these groups might discuss issues and problems, they are different from

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Circles in two main ways. First, they are constructed mostly for pleasure. Their main outcome is a sense of fun or happiness. Therefore, as we all know, when the conversation gets a bit controversial, a social convener will quickly de-escalate the conversation to ensure no one gets insulted or hurt. Many potentially authentic conversations thus get pushed aside to maintain a level of comfort or social decorum. In Circles, this does not happen.

The other reason social groups differ from Circles relates to accountability. In most social groups you may enter and leave the group freely. Although your absence may be noted, you are not generally compelled to attend or to account for your actions. In a Circle, your absence is always noticed, and you are committed to that Circle.

A Circle is not a therapy group

There will be times when an individual in a Circle will confront a serious life crisis such as divorce or death. The Circle is an appropriate place to share these circumstances, learn from them and gain some support. The Circle is not, however, designed to provide therapy. In these situations there must be a balance between providing emotional support and meeting the needs of the other members.

The Circle process ensures that conversations stay focused in two specific ways. Since each person is responsible for maintaining the conversation, if an individual feels that a conversation is getting off track, that person must speak up. Each Circle creates their own unique Circle Purpose Statement that describes the particular focus of the group. If a conversation seems to be going on a tangent, the members can remind the group of their purpose and talk about how to keep focused.

A Circle is not group coaching

Many executive and life coaches use group coaching to help their clients. These groups are different from Circles in several ways. First, a coach selects the group on the basis of who needs coaching as opposed to how the members can help one another. Second, a coach usually steps into a leadership role and often provides coaching throughout the meeting. Third, coached groups tend to be fairly short-term and are not designed to be self-sustaining. They are often set up by a coach and tend to last only as long as the members feel they need the help of a coach.

These differences indicate the ways in which Circles can be so meaningful and long-lasting. Indeed, Circles have historic foundations.

The origins of Circles

Circles date back to monolithic times. According to many experts, circles are not a current fad but rather a combination of both ancient and modern wisdom – about how to keep human relationships alive, free, open and constructive, as described here by Beverly Engel:

In time the circle became the primary social, political, spiritual structure as evidenced in paintings, carvings, petroglyphs, runes, crafts and, later, architecture. We see the remnants of circle-based cultures among indigenous peoples all around the world. For example, the Inuit of the Arctic still meet in circle as do most Native American tribes.³

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Most of the Circles in existence today would be considered spiritual-type circles or aboriginal-type Circles. In her book *Women Circling the Earth*, Beverly Engel describes many of the emerging types of Circles, including council circles, crones' circles, creative circles, dream circles, empowerment circles, peacemaking circles, PeerSpirit circles, sacred circles, simplicity circles and wisdom circles. Each of these is directed at a particular audience for a particular purpose.

Other groups closely related to Circles are mastermind groups, dream teams and peer-mentoring groups. In 1932 Napoleon Hill coined the term "mastermind groups." Hill conducted research on some of the wealthiest men in history and came to discover that almost all of them were members of various "mastermind" groups. He described these groups as being powerful think tanks specifically formed to provide the expertise that businesspeople needed to excel. Since that time, mastermind groups and peer-based think tanks have emerged in many different fields. One version is the so-called barn-raising, where a group of entrepreneurs, business owners and executives will get together to provide feedback to an individual on a new business idea or concept.

Another type of group related to Circles are dream teams, a term coined by Barbara Sher, an author and career expert. In her best-selling book *Wishcraft*, Sher suggests that people in transition or between jobs can seriously benefit from a group. The aim of dream teams is to help people in transition think creatively about who they are and their ideal job. A more recent version of dream teams is offered by author Cheryl Richardson's *Take Time for Your Life* groups.

Yet another modern form of groups is peer mentoring, which grew out of the counseling field. For many years psychologists and counselors have used peer groups to help

people solve psychological problems. The bulk of the peer-mentoring programs were established in high schools in North America, and today many high school counselors use peer mentoring regularly.

There are many types of peer-mentoring groups today, ranging from Alcoholics Anonymous to exclusive executive programs, such as the forum used by the Young Presidents' Organization. Although similar to mastermind groups, peer-mentoring groups are not generally constructed with a particular mix of experts. Their focus tends to be on mentoring individual members through difficult times, and they are usually facilitated by a leader or guide. They often have a set start and ending period.

Circles are different from these groups in three main ways. First, Circles are not limited to any particular purpose and can be used for almost any purpose by any group. The group itself decides on its unique purpose. It has no set time frame, and it can last as long as the group wishes.

Second, Circles are self-sustaining. Although Circles can be facilitated by an outsider, in a typical Circle the leadership role is rotated. This reinforces the Circle Principles of shared leadership and shared ownership. This self-sustaining quality has many benefits. It makes Circles easy to set up, inexpensive to operate, and flexible enough to adjust to the shifting needs of the group.

Third, and most importantly, Circles provide the sense of safety necessary to build trust, create significant conversations and develop deeper relationships. This safe place also provides a type of incubator that allows individuals to become more empowered.

The following chart compares some of the better-known types of groups to the One Circle model.

Circles compared to other groups

	One Circle	Mastermind and peer-mentoring groups	Networking and social groups	Corporate teams
Membership	Any person who wants help solving problems and achieving their goals	A select mix of business professionals, often based on corporate position or income	Friends and business acquaintances	Those assigned to the group by management
Size	Consistent group of 5 to 12 people	Consistent group of 10 to 15 people	More than 20 and often over 100	Depends on the group or the project
Purpose	A shared purpose as decided by the group	To share business advice and expertise	To meet other people	To deliver a service or product or accomplish a task
Duration	As long as the group wishes. Groups meet once a month and are usually self-facilitated	Usually monthly meetings over one year, subject to renewal	Usually monthly meetings with annual membership	Ongoing or until a project is complete
Glue	The Circle Principles, Practices and Process	Formal commitment and membership fee	New people in varied businesses	Required by job
Cost	No fee.	Variety of fees, depending on service offered	Variety of membership fees	No fee

Why Circles work

There are three main reasons why Circles work. As humans we enjoy being with others, we are more creative in groups, and we are more courageous when with others.

People enjoy the human connection of groups

The main reason Circles work so well is because people generally like being with other people. We are by nature social. We also need to interact with each other and tend to be happier and work better when with others. Indeed, research shows that human interaction is necessary for normal human development and that loneliness, a sense of isolation and even serious illnesses can be caused by lack of human interaction.

On the more positive side, people generally want to help others. Most people, when asked for help, feel drawn to assist. When someone asks for our help, it is often difficult for us to refuse, but more importantly, our helping almost always provides us with a sense of satisfaction.

People tend to be more creative in groups

Research has repeatedly shown the power of group thinking. Groups tend to create not just more, but better ideas than any one group member.

As human beings, our minds work in predictable ways. We form patterns of thinking and, when confronted with new situations, tend to apply our tried-and-true methods of solving these problems. A disadvantage of this, of course, is that when we get stuck, we cannot seem to get unstuck. By working in a group, individuals are able to break free of patterns, adopt new ways of looking at things and become more open.

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Synergies emerge as people open up and combine their thoughts and energy.

An example of group synergy can be demonstrated through a brainstorming exercise. Each of the group members is asked to simply state ideas that come to mind. Each idea stimulates another, and so on. By the end of the exercise most of the members are surprised not only by the ideas that have emerged, but by the realization that their personal assumptions would have prevented many of the ideas from surfacing at all.

Group synergy is enhanced in situations where people feel safe. In these situations, individuals tend to be more willing to say what is on their mind. In a safe place creativity tends to emerge more easily.

People tend to be more courageous in groups

The world is not always an inviting place. Each of us welcomes a harbor from an often stormy world of work and sometimes difficult relations. When we are alone we are limited to our own resources and thus have a tendency not to take many risks. We are not as courageous as we might like. People in groups tend to be more courageous and take on more risks. This is due to two factors.

First, people generally feel safer when surrounded by others. When in a group, individuals tend to share or spread the responsibility among the individuals. For example, feelings of both disappointment and success are spread out over the group, decreasing their impact on any one person.

Second, a group provides direct support. Each person, as a group member, contributes in some way to each other's decisions and actions. Thus each person tends to feel commit-

ted to that decision or action. If one member fails, there is a shared sense of loss. If one member succeeds, there is a shared sense of accomplishment. As a result of these feelings in a group, individuals tend to be more daring and creative.

Another interesting phenomenon is that people tend to have more courage for others than for themselves. Others do not feel your hesitation and fears in the same way you do. They can often see things more objectively and make challenges more manageable.

Circles at a glance

By way of both summing up this chapter and filling in a few details, here are some frequently asked questions and answers about Circles.

What is a Circle?

A Circle is a group of five to twelve people who get together for the purpose of helping each other solve problems and achieve their goals. It is a personal advisory board for work and life. The group meets on a regular basis to discuss their business, work and life. These meetings generally last one to three hours.

What is the purpose of a Circle?

Circles are intended primarily to tap the synergy of a group to help each person in the Circle creatively solve problems. The Circle is designed to enable all members to be their best and live successful and balanced lives. Circles can be used by almost anyone and specifically benefit the following individuals:

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- entrepreneurs wanting to grow their businesses
- executives wanting to become better leaders
- managers wanting to mentor others
- professionals wanting to grow personally and professionally
- parents wanting to be better caregivers and spouses
- people wanting to change careers

What are the benefits of a Circle?

The strength of Circles lies in the trusting relationships that are developed over time. These relationships create a safe place to have candid conversations and provide the necessary support to enable each member to grow. The specific benefits a Circle provides are as follows:

- create solutions and solve problems
- share wise advice and information
- generate contacts and resources
- develop skills and continuously learn
- help achieve goals and balance
- provide support and connection

How does a Circle work?

The group agrees to the fundamental Circle Principles (see chapter 2) and follows the Circle Process (see chapter 5), which allows every person to participate and contribute. The process is both structured and flexible enough to accommodate the ever-changing needs of the individuals in that group.

How long will a Circle last?

Circles are designed to last for months and even years.

Who will be in my Circle?

Each group decides who will be in their Circle after considering certain criteria, such as motivation to join and the purpose of the Circle. Ideally members should have similar goals and noncompeting interests. Once a Circle is formed, new members may join only if every person in the group agrees.

How often do Circles meet?

Circles meet on a regular basis, usually once or twice a month over several years.

What will I have to do in a Circle?

You will need to show up for all meetings set by the group, and you will need to commit to the five fundamental Circle Principles: equality, confidentiality, commitment, shared ownership and shared leadership. These principles are discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

Who runs a Circle?

A Circle is always facilitated by a Circle Guide. This guide can either be a member of the Circle or an external facilitator. If the guide is a member, this role should be rotated so that each member participates in leading the Circle at some point. If the guide is external, they should have some experience with Circles.

What should I expect at the first meeting?

The focus of every Circle is on building strong relationships. Therefore the process is deliberately paced to allow for bonds to grow naturally. The first few meetings are dedicated to getting to know each other, clarifying expectations and learning about the Circle Process. Agendas for the first six meetings can be found in chapters 6 and 7.

How are Circles different from other groups?

Unlike many other groups, Circles are resilient, encourage significant conversations and build trusting relationships. The unique Circle Principles, Practices and Process provide the sense of safety necessary to enable members to learn and grow.

Circles are different from many groups in three main ways. First, Circles are not limited to any particular purpose and can be used for almost any purpose by any group. The group itself decides its unique purpose. It has no set time frame and it can last as long as the group wishes.

Second, Circles are self-sustaining. Although Circles can be facilitated by an outsider, in a typical Circle the leadership role is rotated. This reinforces the Circle Principles of shared leadership and shared ownership. This self-sustaining quality has many benefits. It makes Circles easy to set up, inexpensive to operate, and flexible enough to adjust to the shifting needs of the group.

Third, and most importantly, Circles provide the sense of safety necessary to build trust, create significant conversations and develop deeper relationships. This safe place also provides a type of incubator that allows individuals to become more empowered.