

AT WORK

No Boys Allowed: How to Tap the Power of Other Women

by Maureen F. Fitzgerald

If a 'female nature' indeed exists, this nature is likely to include a large cooperative component. However, our fast-paced, competitive society often crushes our tendency to cooperate with and support one another. The result? Personal and professional isolation and wasted potential. PhD and lawyer, Maureen Fitzgerald suggests how using our innate ability to cooperate can turn up our level of personal power.

For years male CEO's, executives and entrepreneurs across North America have been using peer mentoring groups (often requiring high joining fees) to help them reach their goals. Now, professional women are doing it on their own, when and where they choose, minus the membership fee. It is no secret that women often gather to have meaningful personal conversations, but now our "Circles" are including a business dimension, and being used as powerful tools for networking and professional development.

Three years ago I refused to join expensive groups and decided to set up my own, more intimate group. I was tired of luke-warm networking meetings and wanted to create a firey group that would support me unconditionally. I wanted a book club with teeth. I read hundreds of books and stumbled upon Circle processes. I decided to apply what I learned to my group and found that by following a fairly simple process our conversations went deeper.

Circles are gatherings of 8 to 10 people. These groups meet to help each other achieve their personal and professional goals. Circles help professional women obtain wise advice, generate contacts, solve day-to-day problems and gain support and connection. Since busy professional women don't have much spare time, Circles provide quick, easy access to comrades who know you and your business. VP and coach, Shelley Leonhardt has been in a Circle for a year. She says: "Being in a Circle is like no other group. Not only do I feel completely supported, but the group continually challenges me in all aspects of my life and business.

Now that I am in a Circle I wonder what I did before." In a society where individualism and fear are rampant, people need, more than ever, to connect with others for their sanity and success.

Three Steps to Creating your Circle

Step 1 : Decide that you want to form a dynamic group of like-minded women. Your group would meet once a month for about 6 months (or longer as interest dictates) to exchange information, set goals, generate contacts and gain support.

Step 2 : Invite 6 to 8 women to join you. Pick a convenient location and time. Tell each person that the purpose of the Circle is to help each other be their absolute best.

Step 3 : Follow a Circle process. A Circle process creates a safe place to allow for candid and courageous conversations. This entails following a set process for each meeting, sharing the responsibility of the circle with all of the members, and allowing each person to guide the circle over time. Some foundation principles you will want to adopt are equality, confidentiality and commitment.



Maureen F. Fitzgerald

Maureen F. Fitzgerald has her PhD and is a lawyer and the author of: *One Circle-Tapping the Power of Those Who Know you Best. The Essential Guide to Creating a Personal Advisory Board.* It is the first do-it-yourself book on how to create

and maintain a peer advisory board for work and life. Maureen is also the president of CenterPoint – Conflict & Collaboration Inc. and can be reached at info@CenterPointInc.com