

Change your Practice Group into a Powerful Practice Circle

Try this – At your next practice group meeting remove the table and set your chairs up in a circle and see what happens. I guarantee that over time this simple technique will change the way you communicate, the way you treat each other and the way you conduct business.

Let me explain. Six years ago I came upon a powerful technique for resolving deep rooted organizational conflict: Corporate Circles. In a Corporate Circle a team or department meets for several hours to discuss what has been happening in the workplace, how it has impacted each of them and how to move forward. At the end of the conversation the group devises an action plan or blueprint for moving on. The real benefit of these Circles, however, is the enhanced sense of trust that emerges during the discussions. As each person begins to see other perspectives they begin to appreciate how interrelated the situation is. They began to feel empathy for each other, move past hidden resentments and re-establish a foundation for trusting relationships.

As I began conducting more circles I began to realize that this process could be applied to team building – especially since the key to any successful team is trust. Without trust, workplaces become fragmented institutions where individuals are only interested in protecting themselves and their jobs. This lack of trust destroys cooperation, negates the possibility of teamwork, and ultimately interferes with the effective operation of any organization.

I discovered that in order to build trust a group must do three things. It must communicate together,



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it must get past any hard feelings, and it must engage in activities that will rebuild trust. All three things happen in a Corporate Circle.

When people speak in a Circle a number of things happen. First, people recognize others as fallible human beings – with needs and wants. Even individuals who do not like each other tend to relate on a fundamental level when they begin to converse. Second, by sharing information about themselves, they become more attractive and as a result others grow more curious. This curiosity and resulting understanding are the very things that build relationships and ultimately a sense of belonging.

As we learn about others we also begin to see a bigger picture and how we are connected. This

prompts a sense of caring and the entire relationship shifts. The relationship not only becomes more productive and easier but also more enjoyable.

If while sitting in a circle you are able to create a safer place for a conversation, creativity will surface. When comfortable, people let go of their inhibitions – of saying something silly or offending others – and are more willing to canvass solutions that might not be articulated in a less safe place. And this creative problem solving, like improved relations, has a lasting impact – both in and outside the Circle.

No law firm can afford to have ineffective practice group meetings. No law firm can afford the potential loss of creative ideas that might result from a lack of candid conversations. Any law firm that is serious about growing and thriving should consider sitting in a circle. Who knows, it might just be the solution to “herding cats.” **BT**