
The 'Why' and 'How' of Action Circles

Connecting and Collaborating with Others Leaning in the Direction of Your
Dreams to Make a Difference

by Ann Smith

<http://www.circleconnections.com>



The 'Her-story' of Action Circles

Introduction

Organizing around a dream using circle principles combines the wisdom and methodologies of Indigenous people, sacred circles, appreciation and living system theories, and **Open Space Technology**. It is easy, fun and all ages can fully participate.

We are co-creating a post-modern world that re-connects us to nature and the natural order for organizing our creativity and work. We are leaving behind the machine as the metaphor for life. We are not a cog in the great wheel of modernization, but an invaluable co-creator within a living system where all life matters.

The new paradigm is a living system where all two legged, four legged, winged, scaled, and leafed are valued. All living creatures organize around that which is life giving.

The chaos of new life quickly is organized around that which helps the organism to thrive. Organizing around life-giving principles is natural for us when we let go of the past forms of "power over" and control and become one with the natural and life-sustaining flow.

Hierarchical structures are life-giving for only a few and at the expense of others. And for the few, these structures are not life giving for very long. What is life giving for all sustains all now and for generations to come.

Living our life with reverence for all creation changes how we spend our money, where we live, how we buy our food, raise our children, view ourselves and the world and make important decisions at work and in our families and community. Putting aside dualistic thinking brings us into a communion of subjects, where we are equally valued and equally share information, resources, power and creativity.

The 'Why' of Action Circles

Everything is sacred and matter and spirit are no longer separated. We two leggeds re-learn our place as one with the One that unites us all and become in synch with all creation. Living systems theory and practice becomes the only pathway of choice.

Organizing around the dream keeps the energy positive. Using **Circle Principles** enables each one to fully contribute and the synergy of the group to become greater than anyone's single dream or effort. Collective wisdom, along with full participation, provides creative actions and power for making our dream come true.

Sacred circles provide the healing space to recover from a world of competition, "power over", ranking of diversity, inequities of resources, over consumption, media that tells us we are not good enough, etc.

It creates a space where diversity is appreciated and honored; nurturing the power of our collective wisdom in stillness, so that we leave replenished.

Organizing around dreams provides an abundance of positive energy and resources. All are equal and fully participate.

Organizing around the dream is conducted in a circle of equals where every voice is heard and full participation is encouraged. Circle principles provide a safe place to ask questions, to listen to everyone's stories and to gain from each other's experience, perspective, knowledge and creativity.

Basic Circle Principles

Circle Principles

- Honoring sacred space
- One person speaks at a time
- Speak and listen from the heart
- Encourage and welcome diverse points of view
- Listen with discernment instead of judgment
- Share leadership and resources
- Decide together how decisions will be made—consensus
- Offer experience instead of advice. When in doubt ask for silence.
- Confidentiality
- Speak from your own experience and beliefs rather than speaking for others.
- Open and close the circle by hearing each voice. (Check-ins and check-outs)

(For more information about Circle Principles, visit the Millionth Circle website: <http://www.millionthcircle.org>)

The ‘How’ of Action Circles

Simple Guidelines for an Action

1. Point person announces to the whole gathering her desired dream story. Examples are: women’s shelter, fair wages, fair housing, good education for all, peaceful homes and communities, preservation of the land, etc.
2. Leadership is shared. Any one person becomes the “point person, the one who has a passion for a particular cause and will take responsibility for starting the action circle. The point person, like geese and pelicans, leads the way with others flying in synch and providing support. The point position is shared so no one gets exhausted.
3. She writes her dream on a sign that can be seen by the rest of the gathering.

4. Each person with a dream also announces theirs and puts up a visible sign or drawing.
5. At the end of all the announcements of dreams, the point people determine if there are like dreams that can be combined. If so they move the signs together in clusters.
6. Participants self select—following their passion—a dream they want to work on and go to the sign of their choice. For those who want time to discuss and discern their passion, there will be a discernment circle. This too will have a sign so it is easy to find.
7. **Open Space Technology** is built upon emergent design. Its organizing principles are given.
 - Who Ever Comes Are the Right People
 - What Ever Happens is the Only Thing That Could Have
 - Whenever it Starts is the Right Time
 - When it is Over it is Over.

For more information, visit: <http://www.openspaceworld.org>

OST honors 'The Law of Two Feet'. If you find yourself in an Action Circle that is not your cup of tea, walk to another one or form one yourself. If no one comes to your action circle, you can combine like circles or know in another time there will be others who will be attracted to help. Joining an action circle provides invaluable circle experience and ideas for starting your own.

Use a common location village posting of announcements. If you are not meeting in the common space post where you will be meeting.

The Step-by-Step Process of an Action Circle

The Process – Making Taking Action Easy

- Gather the people in a sacred Circle using **Circle Principles**.
- Assign/invite one person to serve as a scribe. She will make a list of all participants, description of the dream, action steps and assignments.
- Assign one person to serve as Circle Facilitator. She will provide a “talking object” and ensure with the help of everyone else that circle principles are honored.
- The point person (dreamer) introduces herself and her dream.

- Each person introduces herself and tells her hopes for the dream.
- Brainstorming ideas—translated into Spanish as a “shower of ideas” Allows for and encourage thinking out of the box that comes with new perspectives, ideas and visions. The dream is expanded by input of all.
- Name and claim the expanded dream giving it the most exciting description for attracting others to support your dream.
- Action steps are brainstormed, explored and expanded, and each one discerns their role based on passion, gifts, offerings, expertise, and commitment. The use of the “talking object” allows for everyone to contribute. Have times of silence and stillness.
- Action steps become mini-action circles such as a circle to raise money, to gather information, to recruit community support, to write letters and send email, etc.
- Mini action circles meet. Scribe with help from others forms a communication action circle, their task is to write an infomercial filling in details of how the work will get carried out. They will also write up the plan of action.
- Whole **Action Circle** is reconvened to finalize a report that includes next steps in carrying out the actions with roles and accountability outlined.
- Review the dream, action steps and next meeting dates so that the scribe has all the information for a written infomercial. Stating needs is

an excellent way of getting others to support, such as we are looking for graphic artists, people to sign petitions, make phone calls, provide a prayer vigil, etc.

- Assign someone or have the group give your infomercial using visuals, songs, dance and other creative ways of presenting a short, exciting, and fun presentation that will be remembered and invite others to get involved. The written report will be given to the **Coordinating Circle** so it can be posted on the Gather The Women Global Matrix website. For more information, visit: <http://www.gatherthewomen.org>
- The large circle convenes for honoring presentations of each **Action Circle**, celebrating the collective work and closing the sacred circle.
- The Coordinating Circle will provide a participants and organizational list, Action Circles information, and the date, time and place of a follow-up gathering.
- A follow-up gathering is held a month later where **Circle Principles** are used. Circle check-ins include the welcoming of newcomers. All **Action Circles** present their latest news telling in a compelling manner how others can help.
- Time is provided for **Action Circles** to gather for a short meeting with old and new members. This is followed by a community celebration.
- Next meeting date and place is set and the circle is closed with 'check-outs' — each person saying in a couple of words or a short sentence how this time together has meant to them. Members are filled with

blessings and energy to go forth into the world making a difference
 while being mindful to remain open and embrace the emergent design.

For further information regarding Action Circles, visit Circle Connections

<http://www.circleconnections.com> - or - contact Ann Smith:

ann@circleconnections.com