

The ADVANTAGES of RUNNING AROUND IN CIRCLES

One of the most powerful techniques in class management I learned from Gordon Stokes in 1976, was to run circles regularly.

This simply means setting aside time in the classes to give the group some opportunities to express their ideas and feelings. Everyone attending a class or a lecture, or indeed any gathering, has a few moments to speak in turn on a specific or general point. Each person has the choice of making a comment, or not

Arrange the chairs for your class into a circular or horseshoe shape as much as it is possible to do in the room. In this way each person can see the other as they speak.

At the start of the class, it is a good idea to explain the few ground rules that ensure running the circle will be a success:

1. Everyone is asked to address exactly the same subject. For instance: "Will you tell us your name, and how you came to hear about Touch for Health?" Or, "What decided you to spend this time and money to take this particular course, and what do you hope to get out of it?"

2. Everyone gets the chance to express freely what they wish to say without interruption or comment from anyone else. This is of vital importance. It is unfortunately true that most of rarely get a chance in our everyday life to have this freedom!

3. Anyone may "pass" if they wish, and if they do, it is nice to go back to them after the conclusion of the circle, and offer them the chance once more, and if they still say "pass" - fine.

4. It is important that the facilitator of the circle makes no response, either to agree or disagree with the contributor. Simply wait until they have finished and then say: "Thankyou", simply and sincerely, without any tonal bias which may be construed either as agreement or criticism.

5. Then the facilitator says, "Next" or "next please", or makes an encouraging gesture to the next person in the group to begin their contribution. This way, the circle proceeds in a smooth and orderly way.

6. Very occasionally, someone will interrupt, agree, or disagree with something being said. At this point, it may be necessary to re-state the framework of the circle: "Thankyou, and may we hear 'x''s comment now, and we would like you to have an opportunity to speak in a moment." If the instructor makes the groundrules clear at the outset when the class is still totally unformed as a group entity, the chances of having to do this are rare. However, one of the great values of running around in circles, is that everyone gets to feel safe to say what they really feel without fear of interruption or contradiction.

7. When everyone has had their say, you may want to say something yourself. Be careful not to invalidate anything anyone has said, or support or reject any one particular view. Difficult, yes, and essential that the leader of the circle merely gives their own opinion just like everyone else, without any particular reference to anything anyone else has said. If some of the comments have been somewhat emotive, maybe the best thing to do is NOT to comment except to say "Well, I would like to move along now with our first/next topic..."

Here are some suggestions collected from classes when brainstorming the value of circles during Instructor Training Workshops. If you can add to the list, please write to me.

BENEFITS OF CIRCLES

Focusses the group's attention.

Enables participation from shy ones.

Helps everyone to be on the same level

Introduces and familiarises individuals with the group

Builds a group identity

Obtains different points of view, and we learn from each other.

Instructor receives feedback

Opportunity to speak without fear of contradiction

Speak without fear of interruption

Discover individual needs in group

Punctuates the class segments

Forces group to address topics

Gives group an exercise in listening

Stimulates creative contributions

Eases tension, , it is "OK" to say what you really feel

Opportunity to air "grievances"

It is nice to let people "pass"

Helps people discover confidence in themselves

Gets everyone involved

You can see everyone else

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