

# Lorenn Walker, JD, MPH

## Solution-Focused Circles for Organizational Conflicts<sup>1</sup>

Everyone sits in a circle facing each other—no tables or barriers in circle.

You don't need a talking piece<sup>2</sup>, but you can use one if you want.

1. Facilitator thanks everyone for coming and asks if everyone agrees that:

- We can respect whoever is speaking and only one person will speak at time (or only when holding the talking piece if used)?
- Everyone will work on listening to whoever is speaking and not listen to your own thoughts, when others speak?
- If a particularly heated conflict is occurring you can use a practice I learned from Kay Pranis and ask each participant: "Please think of someone who was an important teacher or influence in your life. Who was that person and how would their wisdom help our discussion here today? Let's take a few minutes of silence to think of someone and then we will go around circle and each of us can say who our mentor or teacher was and how their wisdom could help." (If anyone says they had no such mentor in their life, you can say: "Please pretend there was, and let us know what their wisdom would be that can help guide our group's discussion.") Facilitator begins by offering their teacher and her/his wisdom.

2. Facilitator goes around the circle and asks each person to answer this question: "What would need to happen during this circle for you to leave thinking: "That meeting was worth my time.""

3. Facilitator asks each person to say one or two things that they really like about the organization and their work with it, or what they think some of the organization's strengths are.

4. Facilitator breaks people up into pairs and for 10 mins each person will say what they want for the organization in the future (their goals for the organization). Facilitator uses a bell and rings after 10 mins is up and asks people to change roles. The other person listens while the other says what their goals are for the organization.

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<sup>1</sup> A facilitator, recorder to write things down, large poster paper and felt pens & a bell are used to conduct the circle. Schedule about 2 hours for this circle if you have 10 people and longer if you have more people participating.

<sup>2</sup> A talking piece is a Native American tradition and can be anything (feather, shell, stick, etc.) to hold while each individual speaks—no one speaks w/o holding the talking piece.

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After 20 mins, facilitator asks each pair to share their goals. Recorder lists all the things suggested by the pairs on large poster paper, and the facilitator notes all the things that are consistent with each other and organizes in specific areas of similarity, e.g. "increase marketing", "better team communication," etc. The end of this part of the circle should result in some general goals that the group agrees on. Facilitator assigns each goal to a general heading, e.g. "Does it make sense to put this under the "communication within the team" heading?" If anyone says no, facilitator asks where it should go and continues to work on getting group consensus for where to place each subject or invent a new heading for a topic that doesn't fit within any of the ones already identified.

**5.** After all the goals have been addressed and listed under headings; facilitator puts people into groups of 4 and asks them to come up with strategies, with small steps specified, for achieving the goals.

After 20 mins in small groups of 4--facilitator asks each group to share what strategies they came up with--again placing the consistent suggestions together and getting the group to agree that the grouping of the ideas makes sense.

**6.** Facilitator asks for group agreement to implement the strategies and suggest another circle be held in the future. Ask the group what date & time would be good to have follow-up circle to see how things go with the plan.

**7.** Facilitator says the plan<sup>3</sup> for what group's goals & its strategies to implement, will be written up and distributed to each participant.

**8.** Group closing, facilitator asks: "Let's go around the circle, and each person can compliment someone in the group on anything they learned about them at today's circle or anything else they want say."

**9.** Facilitator closes the circle by complimenting the entire group on and what s/he is especially grateful for as a result of the circle.

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### <sup>3</sup> Sample Plan Outline

- I. Organization's Strengths (list all each individual pointed out)
- II. Organization's Goals (list all the goals groups came up with)
- III. Strategies to Achieve Goals (list all the ways the groups found to achieve goals)
- IV. Follow-up meeting/circle date and time

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