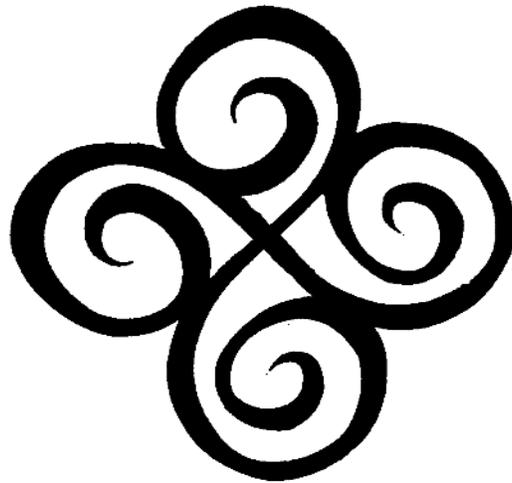


ADVANCED COUNCIL PRACTICE



With
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COUNCIL is about relationship. It is about creating an experience of bonding, empathy, teamwork, trust, rapport, fellowship, community, and ultimately *love*.

Several core maxims express the heart of council:

The truth is in the center of the circle.

No one of us is as smart as all of us.

The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

The health (of the individual, circle, or organization) is a function of participation.

Everything is connected to everything else.

Everything must go somewhere.

Trust is a function of self-revelation.

What we are unaware of holds us prisoner.

Advocacy must be balanced with inquiry.

The bottom line is:

The quality of our work in the world flows from the quality of our relationships.

The quality of our relationships flows from the quality of our communication.

The quality of our communication flows from the integration of *Mind, Heart, Body, and Spirit*.

COUNCIL INTENTIONS

1. Listen from your heart.
2. Speak from your heart.
3. Be spontaneous.
4. Be lean & to the point.
5. Speak to whatever will serve
yourself, the circle, & the Highest Good.
6. Whatever is said in the circle
stays in the circle.

LISTENING FROM THE HEART

- Seek understanding (vs. agreement)
- Accept others as they are (vs. fixing them)
- Empathize (vs. criticize or judge)
- Read the field (the group's energy & mood)
- Stay centered (calm your "monkey mind")
- Stay present (vs. withdrawing emotionally)
- Witness your internal responses & put them on "hold"
- Honor feelings (both yours & the others')
- Find the gift in the wound
- Listen for the soul of the circle

SPEAKING FROM THE HEART

- Tell your personal story (vs. philosophizing)
- Use "I" statements (vs. "you" - avoid characterizing others' thoughts & feelings)
- Favor feelings over mere facts & opinions
- Reveal your process (how you got where you are) as well as your conclusions
- Tell the fullest possible truth (vs. edited truths)
- Cut to the chase (avoid "fill" or "thinking out loud")
- Be spontaneous (vs. rehearsing or editing)
- Move toward vulnerability (vs. away from it)
- Trust your listeners & the circle
- Honor the *Still Small Voice Within*

READING THE FIELD

The practice of council calls for the deepest listening. This includes listening for what is said "between the lines," for the collective soul of the circle. We speak of this kind of attention as *reading the field*.

The human heart follows where we put our attention and the invitation of council is to attend to the emerging *mind, heart, body* and *spirit* of the given circle in which we find ourselves. This field, or group soul, is not simply the sum of the moods and energies of each individual, but rather the *synergy* of our conjoined hearts and minds. It is something entirely new and unique in the moment.

In practical terms, reading the field means being aware of the tone, energy, the needs, and intentions, as well as the ever-changing overall progress of the circle as a whole, even as we are speaking ourselves or listening to others.

This is NOT a call to analyze (or worse, to psychoanalyze) the group individually or collectively, but an invitation to be aware of the ebbs and flows of the group's field, along with our own inner experience.

This practice, of reading the field, is the essence of *witnessing*. It is a challenge specific to council to be both participant and witness simultaneously, sharing *who I am* in the context of a growing awareness of *who we are becoming*.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, this field exerts a powerful influence on what we think, feel, and sense, as well as on the choices we make, large and small. The more aware we can be of our emerging community, the more compassionate and effective we become as individuals.

This is true of life in general.

Following is a handy memory tool for staying mindfully aware of the group's FIELD:

F = feelings

I = intentions

E = energy

L = language (both verbal & body)

D = destiny (where we are evolving to together)

"The group is the art form of the future." - Jacob Needleman

COUNCIL FORMATS

- **BASIC COUNCIL** — Talking Piece goes around circle; ideal for assuring that everyone who wants to may speak; good for opening & closing group processes & for assessing the group "mind." May be "open" or focused on a theme or question.
- **WEB** — Talking Piece in the middle; speaker picks up Piece when moved, returning it to the center after talking, & so on; good for discovering themes, weaving images, developing the group story or going deeply into specific issues. Requires a slightly higher level of initiative.
- **FISH BOWL** — 2 or more (but usually no more than 10) seats in center with Taking Piece; chosen people in seats; outer circle are witnesses; Talking Piece moves among inner group only, until Witness comments at end; good for "hot" issues & encouraging team/group feedback.
- **SPIRAL** — Usually 4-6 seats in center; volunteers flow from outer circle into center seats & back again; one "turn" involves both speaking & listening, that is, listening to the next person after you speak before returning to the outer circle; ideal of developing "spirit of inquiry" within a group & for conflict resolution. Works well for a sense of inclusion in large groups.
- **LEARNING CIRCLE** — A variation on the Basic Council, with at least one round each for the four questions: What happened? How do I feel about what happened? What did I learn? What will I do differently in the future? If only a small number of the group were involved in the original event, it could be done as a Fish Bowl with the rest of the group as Witnesses.
- **RESPONSE COUNCIL** —
 - a. The person holding the Talking Piece may empower brief dialogue with other people, short answers to questions, improvisational moments, etc., all without shuttling the Talking Piece back & forth.

b. If there is time & space, a person might choose to do more extensive work or exploration by holding the Piece & asking for input or responses from as many people as desired (i.e., from one to the entire circle).
Excellent for peer reviews.

- **DYADIC / COUPLES' COUNCIL** — Two people sit in council & pass the Piece between them, working on an issue, exploring a vision, etc. One or two Witnesses may be present & offer their comments & perspectives, either during or at the end of the process as pre-arranged. If working in a group, as during relationship intensives, Witness Seat(s) may be left open for people to enter intermittently. This form is good for connecting with the essence of the relationship, the "Third Presence," the bigger picture. (See *Flesh and Spirit*, by Jack Zimmerman and Jaquelyn McCandless.)

- **DREAM COUNCIL** — Best shared early in the morning, after sleep, silence, or guided meditation. Often conducted with participants lying on floor with heads toward center. Dreams are spoken one at a time out of the silence; told in the "first person" & present tense. Time is left at end for spontaneously weaving comments, common themes, insights, etc., by any and all participants. Good for community building, discovering interpersonal connections, shared songlines, or the shadow or vision of a group. When complete, encourage people to sit up slowly and "return" gently. It is often very rewarding to invite witness comments after, especially in a training or when working with an on-going group. This form is one of the strongest examples of what's possible when individuals are open and willing to offer their personal story up to the weaving of the group.

- **POPCORN** — The facilitator, or anyone holding the Talking Piece, can invite a Popcorn Council, where any and everyone may speak up with a word or phrase, a brief offering, a sentence or two, on a given theme or subject. The Talking Piece does not need to be shuttled around, but is held by the "inviter." This is often a good technique for gathering group witness comments, taking a quick poll of where people are, inviting additional themes or issues, or as a closing round at the end of a program or activity. A good way to express gratitudes and appreciations.