

From Weird to Wyrd: Shifting Meeting and Societal Culture Through The Circle Way

Tenneson Woolf
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I want it to feel more normal to gather in circle.

By normal, I mean expected. Anticipated. I mean, the norm, what we know instinctively to do. And by where this would happen, I mean almost everywhere. In project team meetings. I mean, in government committees. I mean, in every form of staff meeting. I want circle to be met less with a groan and a derogatory Kum ba yah reference — did you know that “Kum ba ya” was originally a spiritual song invoking God to help those in need, literally, “come by here.” I’m glad to see that, in an



increasing number and range of places, circle is a key practice methodology of leadership. It’s not the only way to meet. It’s just often one of the most important ways to meet to be smarter together, and more honest, and to help those in need, including ourselves.

I want it to feel really weird to not gather in circle.

By weird, I mean being in a meeting that doesn’t begin with some gesture of hello. Some genuine acknowledgement of meeting for a specific purpose, and that requires full attention with one another. Not just plowing into the agenda, or the solutions being sold rather than the problems and opportunities being explored. Not just racing to get done as fast as possible, so as to move on to another plateful of additional meetings. That’s weird, right. Isn’t there some part of all of us that has us girdering resolve, rolling our eyes figuratively and literally, to get through these formats.

Contemporary culture is searching, increasingly so, for more meaning and wisdom together. Desperately. I believe this and see it with so many that I work with. Yet, so often, it is our own habituated behavior and thought, doing more of the same, that blocks us, impedes us, and renders simple alternatives unimaginable.

The Circle Way, from my now 20+ years of experience, helps to remove the weird and replace it with “wyrd.” In old English, “wyrd,” from which the word “weird” has evolved, had a very different meaning and usage. It had connotation of being able to see “an invisible connection in all things,” or to see “the thin lines between the lands of the living and the ancestors.” Wyrd, was a word that connoted wisdom. “Weird” in contemporary use, is far from that. Not listening well together in today’s

meeting culture is weird. Use of The Circle Way, well, that is really wyrd.

It is my experience that learning some of the basics of circle really matters. And repeating them. And repeating them often, again. And then from the basics you learn even more about simplifying or innovating that enables you to practice anywhere. One of my sons did a lot of karate from ages 6-13. It always impressed me that even the most skilled, multiple black-belted students at his studio, still gave real attention to the the first form, kata, that they learned. When you get circle, you may not always use a bell, nor a talking piece, but you will recognize the most basic form, and become quite skilled at invoking the discipline of circle to almost any human encounter.



My point isn't to evangelize the benefits of circle — I suppose it is just a bit. My point is more to remember out loud what most of us already know, and to acknowledge more openly what we crave. Most of us have instincts to turn to one another. Particularly when the chips are down. We listen to or with a friend. We hold a family council. We instinctively reach for one another in crisis and tragedy, in joy and exhilaration.

And further, my point is that the times we live in are increasingly raising tensions with far-reaching

impact. The US presidential elections. Standing Rock. Eliminated health care and exponentially rising costs. Civil rights violations. Police and authority tensions with community. Millions of displaced refugees from Syria spread throughout Europe. Environmental degradation. It's not hard to come up with ten fingers full of serious global and local tensions that have grown from processes of not turning to one another. Weird.

Times like these call for us, all of us, to mature the way that we are together. Yes, mature. We don't always have to listen deeply to each other, but there are times when it is the only thing that matters. The individual and collective zeitgeist is really on a precarious ledge. To be clear, I'm not super hopeful that we can turn all of this around. I'd like to be able to say that, but I'm not being very honest if I do. What is honest to me is being able to offer something now, at scale, simple, that can make a difference.

Now is the time. To reclaim our historic memory of listening and learning together. To bring to contemporary culture, whatever is in front of you, us, to remember a matured way of being together. To relieve ourselves from barking or whispered comments of weird, and to hold ourselves accountable for the thin lines and connections of the wyrd.

I want it to feel normal. Wyrd is up to all of us. The Circle Way is very valuable and a simple practice for making the shift.



Tenneson Woolf

(tennesonwoolf.com) is a facilitator, workshop leader, speaker, and writer. He designs and leads meetings in participative formats. To help people be smart

together. To get people interacting with each other — learning together, building relationships, and focused on projects. To get deeper to the heart of what matters. From strategic visioning with boards to large conference design. He has been a practitioner of Circle and other participative forms for 20+ years. His lineages include The Berkana Institute, The Circle Way, and The Art of Hosting. Information on The Circle Way Practicum, which he hosts with Amanda Fenton, can be found at www.learnthecircleway.com.