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**SILENCE AND THE CIRCLE TO BUILD COMMUNITY: A NEW APPROACH TO  
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION ISSUES**

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**Abstract**

Fast-paced corporate environments often push groups into problem-solving in a state of tension, conflict and high pressure demands. The very nature of these conditions inhibit creativity and block a natural flow of thought and expression among group members. The tension may also serve to heighten the sense of separation among group members and exaggerate differences of opinion, producing a win-lose conflict mentality and power struggles.

Instead, a natural flow of creativity, honesty, and mutual understanding is vitally needed for true problem-solving. This workshop reveals silence as a technique to promote and enhance group processes and creative flow.

## **Methods Used**

Today's methods of building teams are stretching to include the practice of intentional silence as persons reconnect inwardly before expressing outwardly. Participants will be given new ways to explore silence in a group setting and to use the ancient tribal circle as a modern format for meeting to solve problems, uncover issues, or bond in creative consensus. This workshop will use silence, music, artistic metaphors, and the circle in ways appropriate for a wide variety of corporate settings.

## **Participant Experiences**

Each participant will experience silence as a powerful new tool for team building and communication. Persons will learn specific methods which involve silence and combine silence with creative thinking in metaphor creation. Practical research and literature in this area will be shared.

Participants will experience a silence exercise which combines free flow writing with visual art representation of a key metaphor related to a current issue or problem. After the exercise, circle work will demonstrate how individual silence work can be extended through sharing into a team or small group decision-making process. The circle is a place where persons can find common threads and reinforce each other. This has application in vision, planning and problem-solving work.

Issues such as problem identification through metaphor, clearing of blocks through dialogue, or creative planning will be addressed in response to questions from the group.

## **Outline of Process**

The Silence/Circle workshop will be composed of six parts:

- (1) Contextual talk on practical uses of silence, blocks and resources
- (2) Group grounding conversation with current relevant issues
- (3) Silence experiential exercise
- (4) Creative extension (through art, writing, drama, etc.)
- (5) Sharing circle to amplify learnings and compare approaches
- (6) Reflection to help each participant apply newly learned techniques to their own situation or facilitation demands

### **Resources Used**

The following books represent a partial bibliography:

Baldwin, Christina, *Calling the Circle: The First and Future Culture*, Swan-Raven & Co., Mill Spring, NC 28756, 1994

Bly, Robert, *The Soul Is Here For Its Own Joy: Sacred Poems from Many Cultures*, The Echo Press, Hopewell, NJ, 1995

Briskin, Alan, *The Stirring of Soul in the Workplace*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, Ca., 1998

Cameron, Julia, *The Artists Way at Work*, William Morrow & Company, N.Y., 1998

Chappell, Tom, *The Soul of a Business*, Bantam Books, New York, 1994

Glassman, Bernard & Rick Fields, *Instructions to the Cook*, Random House, New York, 1996

Jaworski, Joseph, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 1996

Mitroff, Ian I. & Elizabeth A. Denton, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1999

Richards, Dick, *Artful Work*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, 1995  
Spears, Larry, ed., *Insights on Leadership*, John Wiley, New York, 1998

Toms, Michael, ed., *The Soul of Business*, Hay House, Carlsbad, Ca. 1997

Wheatley, Margaret J., *Leadership and the New Science*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, 1992

Whyte, David, *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*, Doubleday Currency, NY, 1996

### **The Presenters**

Patricia Webb is a poet and Artist-in-Residence in Oklahoma since 1990. As a writer and published author, Pat has enabled individuals to discover their own genius with art and words. In writing workshops in a variety of corporations and organizations, Pat has used unusual methods to release insights in varied forms, such as poetry, stories, short essays, and visual art. Pat's current focus is on bringing silence exercises, particularly the labyrinth walk, into the workplace to help persons uncover vital inner resources of wisdom, perspective, and creativity. Writings from over 100 Silence Workshops are being pulled together in her book, *The Wisdom of Silence*, a practical guide to silence as a tool for team building and personal growth.

David McCleskey has directed research and community involvement for the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) for over 30 years. He has traveled and worked in 53 countries coordinating programs for training, community development, and strategic planning. David is currently Director of Research and Archives for ICA's CenterPointeS,

a division devoted to the research, recording, and teaching of ways to foster the human spirit. His particular interest is the spiritual practices that sustain and empower persons as they engage in responsible social action and foster spiritually vital organizations.