

## Is The Circle Way For Men — A Call For An Emerging Masculine

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In my nearly twenty years of being a Circle practitioner, there have been many times I've found myself in circles in which the participants were primarily women. Thirteen women, two men. Sometimes more women; same number of men. If the ratio of men exceeds 25%, it has been noteworthy and surprising. I've been a bit puzzled by this observation over the years.



It's OK by the way. These have been good circles. I've learned a lot. Participants learned a lot together. We built strong and trusting relationships. We got some good work done. I contributed what I could, with full honesty, which is always the intent.

In those groups, there have been many times when I, or someone from the group, have eventually asked, "where do you think the men are?" That question usually evokes a group chuckle — it's a kind of tension release valve that occurs when something really obvious but unspoken is verbalized into the room.

When I ask that question, to be clear, I'm not asking about men's work. That is important, but a different kind of circle. I've been lucky to be a part of those over the years also. And, to be clear, I

recognize that gender identity includes a larger spectrum than a binary choice.

I've heard others talk about circle as a more feminine form. "It is for listening, which is what women tend to do better." Or, "It is for feeling, which, again, is what women tend to do better."

Um..., OK..., ur.... sure. All of that is true. But it is a bit niggly and not true also. Just sayin'.

In those Circles in which I have sat over the years, wondering, I've asked myself a few related questions that, seem just a bit bizarre. Like, "are men on the whole unable listeners?" I know, the stereotype of never asking for directions does come to mind. Sure, sometimes, but that's an old story, right? "Are men just fixated on command and control?" OK, sure, I get it that embedded in the male DNA was a well-serving need to survive. Fair. But that feels old too. Or that it needs to become old.

I want to re-language the gender-typing just a bit as it pertains to The Circle Way. The Circle Way is a methodology and way of being that is bedrock to the kind of leadership so often needed in these times and in today's organizations. It is the leadership that is listening, which also happens to be a lifelong practice. It is the leadership that is being smart together. Yup, that's gender free. It is the leadership that is diving deeply into purpose. It is the leadership that is shared discernment. The Circle Way creates leadership process that invokes the best of what people, men and women, masculine and feminine, can offer as gift.

I'm glad to have known a few men in my life that have transcended many of these stereotypes. There is a noticeable softness in them; I'd call it a mature masculine, that knows how to be with others. That knows how to be curious. That knows how to ask

questions, together. That doesn't need to be the star of the program. Men that have lived a shift that my friend Margaret Wheatley names, "from leader as hero to leader as host."

In August 2016, Amanda Fenton and I will host [The Circle Way Practicum](#). We are among the people that have been welcomed to pick up the 20+ years of lineage that is the work of Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea. We get to do this in their home teaching space, The Marsh House at Aldermarsh on Whidbey Island, northwest of Seattle, a short drive for both of us.

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Amanda and I are inviting good leaders everywhere. We are committed to working with whomever shows up. We are also committed to a unique bridging, held with some deliberateness to invite us all to The Circle Way, women and men.

Join us. It's true that men may find themselves in a context that they don't find themselves in every day. Sitting in a Circle. Sitting on the floor. Taking long and spacious breaks. Listening to the quiet. Taking turns. But then again, men know this too.

Amanda and I, along with many other colleagues and friends from The Circle Way, hope that the next twenty years grow us, all of us, men and women, in doing good together. In a way that, together, we as a society, can mature a collective psyche through practicing together.

The Circle Way is a call for all of us.



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*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.*