

Coaching Circles – Leveraging Your Coaching Skills in a Truly Inspiring Environment™

By Charles Brassard



Charles has trained coaches and other human development professionals for over 20 years in the design & facilitation of Coaching Circles. He is also senior faculty with New Ventures West and co-founder of Convivium, an integral development coaching school offering ICF-accredited programs in Canada and France.

To learn more about coaching circles and opportunities to train as a facilitator-coach, visit our website at <https://coachingcircles.ca>

The invitation

In coaching, we have the wonderful opportunity and privilege to know another human being intimately and to support their unique quest for authentic self-expression in the world. We can easily understand how this is possible in a one-on-one coaching relationship but it's harder to imagine in a group setting, especially when the coaching comes mainly from colleagues and not the professional coach! Yet, this is exactly what happens in coaching circles.

A powerful way of working with a group

In contrast with team or group coaching where the focus is on coaching a group toward a common goal, in coaching circles a facilitator-coach guides a small group of people (typically 5 or 6) in synchronizing their coaching to support a colleague. During a session, each member of the group has a dedicated “airtime” to be the client (between 45 and 60 minutes) and to explore a difficult issue or ways of moving an important project forward. Those who support the client gradually learn to go beyond their well-honed tendencies to offer advice or solutions and step into a coaching posture. This means supporting the client in observing in a new light their habitual ways of doing and being, and in exploring new possibilities for action uniquely relevant to their situation.

When everyone in the group has the opportunity to give and receive such exquisite care and support from their peers every time they meet, relationships deepen and creativity abounds. This brings about exciting possibilities for learning, collaboration and achievements within the group and across the organization, as individuals step into their true power and bring their growing leadership presence and coaching skills to the rest of the organization.

COACHING CIRCLES

True support for breakthroughs

Enabling purposeful change

Given these outcomes, it is not surprising that many organizations have integrated coaching circles into their learning and development agenda or directly into their management and leadership development programs. Examples of how coaching circles have been used include:

- Facilitating the onboarding of new managers
- Supporting newly promoted business leaders in managing their professional transition
- Accelerating the implementation of new business priorities
- Supporting the development of high potential women leaders in a typically male-dominated business environment
- Breaking down silos and fostering collaboration between functional leaders of the same organization.

For organizations, these strategies directly contribute to improving the bottom line while helping people to grow, thrive...and stick around!

For coaches, coaching circles provide a vehicle to diversify their practice and to leverage their skills in new and exciting ways.

Key distinctions

Here are some of the challenges and opportunities that are generated when moving from one-on-one coaching to many-on-one coaching as is experienced in coaching circles:

One-on-One Coaching

- The focus is on a single client
- We are managing a single flow of conversation
- In session, we are the only witness to the client's process
- The client learns from their own direct experience and from our feedback
- The client speaks about the culture they are living in
- One learns to be a client

Coaching Circles

- The focus is on both the client and individuals in the group
- We are synchronizing multiple contributions to the client's reflection and inquiry process
- Multiple observers from diverse backgrounds and functions enrich the client's process
- Everyone in the group also learns from the client's challenges and breakthroughs
- The group is a direct expression of the prevailing organizational culture
- One learns to be a client and learns to be a coach



True support for breakthroughs

A mix of skills

Leading coaching circles draws from a unique combination of design, coaching, and facilitation skills. In design, we aim to create a process and structure that matches the specific business and development needs of a team or an organization. In coaching, we balance our direct support to the client with helping everyone develop their own coaching skills. In facilitation, we protect the process while enabling the group to respond creatively to what arises in the moment.

When these successfully come together, coaching circle participants are able to work on the challenges that really matter to them and gradually move from a problem-solving and expert mindset to a coaching and development mindset. In turn, this deeply impacts how they show up as leaders and contributors in their own spheres of influence.

For the sake of what

Coaching circles turn out to be a fascinating human development laboratory because individuals show up, collaborate and learn in a very dynamic environment, i.e. with peers who have different personalities, different challenges and different capacities. As facilitator-coach, we bear witness to and seek to nourish this diversity. People learn to think out of their box and connect with their heart. And when this happens, the world is better for it!

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