

Transforming Hard-line Positions to Shared Possibilities: An Opportunity for True Leaders

By David Savage, Lisa Nye and Sandy Masterton

Our shared world is a challenging and complex space. So much of what we believe is right and common sense does not seem right or common sense to others. The stakes and risks for ourselves, our families, our communities, our Nation and our world are high and seem to escalate. There are so many opportunities before us now and in the years to come but how do we pursue and engage in these opportunities in “a good way” so that interests, outcomes and benefits are balanced and have the ability to build positive legacies without detrimental impacts. So much challenge, conflict and change is happening now. Looking at opportunities with a lens of fear and without a dialogue based on human interaction will impede meaningful progress and positive change – progress and change that adds to the value of communities, people and systems.

“Leaders promise to get us out of this mess; we willingly surrender individual autonomy in exchange for security. But the causes of today’s problems are complex and interconnected. There are no simple answers, and no single individual can possibly know what to do. Not even the strongest of leaders can deliver on the promise of stability and security. But we seldom acknowledge these complex realities. Instead, when things go wrong, we fire the flawed leader and begin searching for the next (more perfect) one.” Margaret Wheatly

Leadership is fundamental to making progress, driving change and sustaining results. Engaging as self-aware leaders is critical to engaging in transparent and respectful relationships. There needs to be an ability to create a human, meaningful and visionary conversation among leaders on business and economic development.

We are told; “now is the time.” We face huge challenges. We can learn from where we have been, understanding where we are now and looking forward to see what future we desire. Where may we turn for wisdom to move forward in a “good way”? A place where we can show our true leadership and to actively take part in solving our many challenges; a Leader Wisdom Circle. A Circle in its many forms throughout history (a campfire, forum, round table...) has been a place to come together, listen, speak, connect, solve, learn and be a community. Our earth is a circle. Our life is a circle. Consider the collective wisdom that is possible from a circle of listening, speaking, understanding and co-creating solutions.

In the Circle, we embrace tradition, cultural understandings and approaches, seeing one another, respect, leadership and fresh possibilities that honour all.

The purpose of a Circle is to;

- Create and support respectful conversations between deeply affected parties to understand the critical issues and answer the real questions that matter from a diverse circle of leaders.
- Build strong, healthy and respectful relationships where people work together building our future.
- Shift adversarial positions to mutual understanding and new possibilities.

A Leaders Wisdom Circle is a space, virtual or real, where leaders with intersecting interests talk about what leading means and how leadership strengths, if combined, can drive greater success and results. Circles create a dialogue among leaders on their approach to the world, to life and to business with positive economic and social results. Sharing stories of what creates value for one or the other. The critical component is figuring out where the leadership interests intersect and finding ways to maximize those areas for the benefit of all. The participants in a Circle are those who have very different positions and perspectives but are willing to explore with others who may be seen as adversaries.

This is an invitation to engage with people who care about subjects and questions that matter to you and your Nation, community and organization. Your circle will be most successful in solving significant challenges when you bring in others whose opinion and experiences are very different from yours. We can no longer afford “group think” or “yes men”. The stakes are high. We invite Chiefs, Elders, business and economic champions, health and social advocates, environmentalists, youth and others. We must embrace differences of outlook and perspective to find common ground and to confront and address risk so opportunities emerge.

These are the principles of great Circles;

- ✓ Our intention must be authentic,
- ✓ We build relationships and trust first,
- ✓ We invite and respect diversity of opinions,
- ✓ We establish key questions that matter,
- ✓ We listen,
- ✓ We seek new ideas from the collective wisdom,
- ✓ We are open to unexpected outcomes,
- ✓ We take as long as it takes,
- ✓ We commit to action and hold accountability.

Circles do not always result in great outcomes; sometimes they fail if the intention is not honest or conflict is feared. The effectiveness of a Circle is determined by the quality of the intentions and actions of all participants. Compromise is not our goal. Circles may result in transformative relationships and unexpected positive shared outcomes. That is worth it. Leaders may now lead with respect, patience, vision, purpose and engagement. What is a significant “question that matters” to you and your people? Let’s move together from conflicting positions to mutual respect and shared possibilities.

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