

Leveraging Peer Exchange Through Open Circles | The Argonauts



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Introduction

Approximately five weeks ago, as the coronavirus started to spread throughout most of the world's population, our team gathered in our 'Gaia' creation room to discuss what we could do to support our community.

We decided to send [a survey to our members](#), asking: *What do you need most in this time of crisis?* The answer came back immediately, loud and clear.

An overwhelming majority responded by expressing a deep desire to connect with peers in a trusted environment to share their current situation, thoughts and feelings.

We have answered this call — shifting our focus and resources over the past few weeks to open up the Trust Circle experience to all of our members.

The result: The Open Circle, unique one-time sessions providing support to the entire Argonauts community.

The Open Circle is now available to both Argonauts and Friends of the Argonauts. Our aim with the Open Circle is not only to provide a safe place to share both the challenges and new priorities that have evolved over the course of the coronavirus' rise, but also to share our positive experiences and those “silver-linings” that provide hope and focus for the future.

With 6–8 leaders and one professional facilitator coming together for one session to support each other with their full presence, the Argonauts' Open Circles is a tested and proven environment of trust and expertise that fosters personal development and strengthens resilience in times of uncertainty.

Bringing our leaders together allows them to learn from one another in a structured process, with the two main goals being:

1. To share your current challenges and lighten the load on your shoulders, and
2. To learn from other leaders' stories about how to overcome your own challenges.

Instead of experts telling members how to solve their problems, members share their personal experiences and approaches to a problem. Thus, every participant learns from their peers about what worked and what didn't. The learning process emphasizes confidential exchanges of authentic first-hand accounts based on

mutual trust and vulnerability. This proven method accelerates our members' learning and problem-solving.

These are core concepts that Trust Circle members value most. Exchanging insights and experiences with peers improve their leadership skills. In this crisis, we are opening these circles to give more leaders access to this tool.

The Origin

The Open Circle concept came about from our collective experience over years of facilitating Trust Circles for our members to connect, share and grow. The Circles support our members in their development as individuals and leaders of their organizations. It is designed as a safe and confidential space for honest dialogue, authentic vulnerability, and non-judgmental support. By regularly discussing key issues and challenges while listening to others' experiences, you can break unhelpful patterns and be inspired to take new ways forward. By expanding our self-knowledge we can create greater impact, positively influencing our families, our teams, and all those around us.

Within the Circle, members develop trust relationships with seven peers from different industries, countries, and backgrounds. A professional facilitator ensures a constructive process for sharing experiences and challenges. The non-judgmental conversations and authentic experiences help you gain new perspectives, growing within and in your business and personal relationships.

During the coronavirus crisis, we are opening our Circles to every member, Argonaut or Friend of the Argonauts, who wishes to share their experiences, thoughts and

feelings with peers. To allow for engagement and adequate speaking time, the groups will be kept small and guided by a professional facilitator.

How does it work? Each participant shares their currently most present challenge or priority, and the facilitator then selects one challenge to be explored by a participant of the Circle. After elaborating on one's own challenge, everyone listens to the response of other participants, learning from their experiences and ideas. There is no preaching, just personal stories from other courageous leaders like you.

Each 90-minute Open Circle session is designed to give all participants equal time to present their challenges and personal approaches to solving them.

While most conversations these days revolve around the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions are diverse, spirited, and unpredictable. There is no script or right outcome: just fellow leaders thinking through and feeling their way through this difficult time. Any topic can be discussed and every participant will have their space to respond with their story.

In previous Open Circle sessions, we have discussed a wide range of topics: how to organize a team to work from home, how to keep trust with staff despite layoffs and salary reductions, how to retain customers and make new connections remotely, how to deal with separation from loved ones and how to adjust to time always together. A recurring theme is how to make the tough decisions and manage courageously in these times and thinking about how we can shape what will come after. There have been moments of shared joy and laughter, sadness and tears. Each circle is unique, and each individual experiences it in their own way. This safe

space lets us be who we are, vulnerable and open, telling our stories and listening to those of others.

The Feedback

In my role as Head of Product Development I have had the opportunity to facilitate the first four Open Circle sessions to test and adapt our approach. These four sessions gave me the privilege of connecting profoundly with our members during and after the session. I gratefully received their responses.

Several participants told me how that those 90 minutes proved to be the best investment — in terms of time — that they could remember.

One Friend of the Argonauts shared how, despite an overloaded schedule of online-meetings and sessions, this was the first time it was possible to grasp the power of a well-organized and professionally facilitated conversation. Many participants noted how moving and beautiful it was to see trust building connections forming among fellow leaders, previously strangers, now bound together by that peak experience of a mere hour and a half.

Along with the incredible gratitude members have expressed, the feedback from the Open Circles has been amazing, exceeding our greatest expectations. We observe people that have never met before forming meaningful and valuable bonds. This is not an accident: we carefully select the members who participate in each conversation from our talent pool of remarkable leaders.

One result of our Open Circles has been that two members –who never met before – have already set up a joint project to support

their countries in the COVID-19 crisis — this after just 90 minutes sharing experiences, thoughts and feelings with fellow Argonauts.

These are just a few of the reasons why we are moving forward with our experimental innovation. We are happy to announce that new Open Circles are being scheduled and will be available to members and Friends of the Argonauts for as long as needed during this unprecedented crisis.

I am grateful for all the hard work our team has put into this project. It is our chance to contribute and give something back in these times of crisis. Personally, I am grateful for all the supportive feedback members have offered to improve the Open Circles for the next groups to join.

If you are not a Friend of the Argonauts or Argonauts Member yet but would like to experience the power of an Open Circle, please → [contact us here](#).



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