

About the Circle of Trust® Approach

Adapted from Marcy Jackson, Center for Courage & Renewal

“In this culture, we know how to create spaces that invite the intellect to show up, to argue its case, to make its point. We know how to create spaces that invite the emotions to show up, to express anger or joy. We know how to create spaces that invite the will to show up, to consolidate effort and energy around a common task. And we surely know how to create spaces that invite the ego to show up, preening itself and claiming its turf! But we seem to know very little about creating spaces that invite the soul to show up, this core of ourselves, our selfhood.”

—Parker J. Palmer

“When I first began facilitating Circle of Trust® retreats I found it hard to describe just what this approach was really about. Furthermore, I found this lack of easy categorization lead people to compare this approach to what they already knew (which is understandable) and to define it through the lens of one or another “method” of personal or professional development.’

‘While it’s not ultimately helpful to define something by what it’s not, it proved helpful to me to articulate some of the similarities and differences between this approach and others that could be seen as ‘kindred’ but that, in and of themselves, do not adequately or accurately define the Circle of Trust® (COT) approach.”

—Marcy Jackson

Here is a list of some comparisons—along with a sense of how these approaches relate in terms of process, purpose or desired outcome:

The Circle of Trust approach is:

- ...*not* team-building, though with time and trust a strong sense of community naturally emerges;
- ...*not* therapy, though this approach results in greater self-awareness and self-acceptance, sometimes accompanied by a sense of deep inner healing;
- ...*not* a diversity, equity and inclusion program per se, though greater understanding of and connection with “otherness” in its manifestations, as well as leaning into our often painful and hidden aspects of self in an effort to “transform so as not to transmit,” is a part of the COT experience;
- ...*not* a vision quest, though the journey of the inner life often leads to greater clarity of vision and purpose;
- ...*not* a meditation practice, though the practice of being together this manner fosters mindfulness and contemplation;

- ...*not* a spiritual smorgasbord, offering a chance to dabble in a range of spiritual/psychological practices—yet words of wisdom and inspiration from diverse wisdom and spiritual traditions enrich our communal dialogue on some of life’s most challenging questions;
- ...*not* creativity training, though the creative spirit is released when individuals begin to claim their gifts and act on what brings them joy;
- ...*not* leadership training program per se, yet by offering multiple invitations and experiences for people to “author” their own lives individuals begin to take greater responsibility and leadership in their lives and work;
- ...*neither* “sage on the stage” nor “guide on the side,” but rather something altogether different—a kind of “being” and “leading” that emerges from the inside out, that demands clear attention to boundaries and seeking to create safe space within which people can take risks and be vulnerable, while expecting that no harm will be done to them in the process.