



**REBOOT**

# **Belonging Together**

*Building Safe Spaces for Peer Support Groups*

*Functioning with the intensities of our world requires resilience. We are moving from a time when people were expected to know what problem was likely to arise next and have a ready answer for it. Now we are entering an age where we cannot know what is coming. Much of your knowledge is likely to be obsolete within a year. The explosion of global capitalism and digital communication through vehicles like the Internet is changing the face of our economic and social structures at a pace that is dizzying and virtually impossible to absorb. How are we to understand all this, let alone keep up?*

*These are not individual problems. To the extent that we insist on dealing with them alone, I suspect that as individuals we shall feel more and more pressured and isolated. But the issues human beings now face go beyond solutions that any of us can conjure up. We need to make a collective shift as well as an individual one. This means learning to think and feel with others and not merely on our own.*

*In Antarctica, studies of the survival habits of emperor penguins have brought some intriguing findings to light. It had long been a mystery how these animals could survive the intense winds and frigid temperatures of this strange continent. Temperatures of fifty degrees below zero Fahrenheit and winds of one hundred miles an hour or more are not uncommon there. It turns out they survive by forming circles, with their bodies nestled together, to retain heat. And then they slowly rotate the circle, so that no one bird is exposed to the wind too long.*

*They form circles. This is an apt metaphor for the power of peer support. How are we to deal with the cold and challenging winds of change? I will suggest we might do the same, by building safe spaces for peer support groups in our organizations and communities, to generate the resilience we need.*

*The new world we face in the twenty-first century consists of a very different set of forces from any known before. Shifting bases of power, unknown global forces and an enormous emphasis on knowledge make the way human beings talk and think together paramount importance. Human beings create, and share, knowledge through shared experiences and challenges. It behooves us to heighten our abilities on this score.*

**-Adapted by the Reboot Team from Dialogue, by William Isaacs**

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# What

Peer Coaching Groups are intentionally curated learning environments composed of people with an inner desire towards a different way of working, living and being; one more in alignment with themselves and the world around them. They are spaces to answer the calling we feel within to reach and grow into ***who we want to be***. They are spaces to ***bring forth a challenge*** with no easy answer, where the ***vulnerability of not knowing*** is the gateway to knowledge, where listening is valued over telling, and where self-inquiry is the engine moving us forward. They are spaces where ***it's okay to not be okay*** and where the extensive range of the human experience is heard and seen not as failure, but as the very thing that binds us together.

Peer Coaching Groups ***are not*** mastermind, networking, or training groups in which the “answers” are most commonly found outside of ourselves. They are also different from 1:1 conversations you might have with a peer, manager, mentor, advisor, or coach where the interactions are limited by the knowledge, perspective, or intentions of the other. Peer Coaching Groups differ from these other modalities in several important ways.

**Moving Away From Problem Solving:** Most of the modalities noted above (with the exception of coaching) assume that a challenge is a problem to be solved, or that answers to questions can only be known with experience or logical frameworks. When a challenge is brought by a member of a peer coaching group, the other members are not there to solve anything, but instead assume the inherent resourcefulness and agency of all to solve their own problems. Thus members endeavor to *understand the person* as well as the challenge they are in. From that place insights emerge about *how and why* they find themselves stuck and new possibilities are discovered that were not so clear before.

**Listening And Following Our Curiosity:** Similar to coaching, the primary skills in peer coaching groups are listening, inquiry, and mirroring (reflecting back to someone what was heard). Participation in these groups means being fully present and asking thoughtful questions. As each participant practices these skills, they raise the quality of the interactions, increasing the ability of the group to support each other. These skills extend well beyond the boundaries of the group and ripple out into our work and lives.

**Safety in Numbers:** Imagine yourself in a group of people who are listening to your deepest challenges without judgement or agenda, asking open and honest questions, and accepting you as you are. This combination creates a space for transformation. As we allow the parts of ourselves we are afraid of to be seen, we step through the threshold of vulnerability towards connection with others and rapport with self.

# Why

Peer Coaching Groups are a tool to support participants in discovering their own agency in situations where they might normally feel helpless, while maintaining their dignity and humanity. Difficult conversations with professional stakeholders, leading through uncertainty, and even finding harmony in work and life are more approachable with a trusted group of peers. In our organization. At Reboot, we've learned a lot about what makes these groups special, and are sharing what we've learned so more people can benefit.

Reboot is first and foremost, a coaching company. It was formed in the fall of 2014 by four founders who all believed in a different way of working. **Work doesn't have to destroy us. Work can be the way we achieve our fullest selves.** Since Reboot's founding, a core part of our coaching work has been the Reboot Bootcamp (initially launched for startup CEOs). The Bootcamp is a multi-day , transformative, deep dive for leaders to reflect on their work and lives. It helps them understand the strategies and mental models that got them *here*, and helps them in turn design the strategies that will get them *there*.

It became clear after the first Bootcamp that there was a need to provide ongoing support for those brave participants who came and were immersed in "The Reboot Way." Circles (Reboot's version of peer coaching groups) were born, following the same formula that forms the core of our approach:

**PRACTICAL SKILLS + RADICAL SELF-INQUIRY + SHARED EXPERIENCES =**

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**GREATER RESILIENCY + ENHANCED LEADERSHIP**

There's magic in that formula. One that creates a container of trust and safety that invites us to be honest, to be vulnerable, and to show up fully as ourselves. Not as a role, but as a human.

Each Bootcamp closes with a "Fire Ceremony." The group forms a circle around the flame and there is an invitation to speak. **We are never the same as we were before**, fire reminds us. It's a threshold that changes the state of that which is consumed by it, and it's this metaphor of transformation that informs our groups. Sharing your life with a group of peers, each on their own quest to be a better human is magic. Our hope is that you will take it out into the world and make it better.

We see this work as part of a greater lineage of coaches, changemakers, and guides who are all working to connect us to the power within ourselves and the power of the group. It is in this spirit that we must honor the writer and teacher Parker Palmer and the group he founded, the [Center for Courage & Renewal](#), with whom we consulted when creating Circles. The information herein and the cohorts of leaders out there in the world exist because of the wisdom they passed on to us. **We pass it to you with gratitude and thanks to what came before.**

# How To Begin

As we move into the more practical part of this guide, we will be sharing both the conceptual framework of the different parts of the process, along with examples for how we have approached each step. The goal being that you not only understand the *how*, but the *why*, making it easier for you to discover how the methodology may apply to your specific situation. We will not be listing these steps in chronological order, as we can't presuppose that a particular order will work better than another. Rather, we will arrange each step in a way that seems logical to us, and let you take it from there.

## An Overview

Peer. Coaching. Groups.

Each of these words is important to understand; individually and together.

**Peers** are people who see themselves as equals, and for whom there is a particular **sameness** that's important to them<sup>1</sup>. That sameness is important because it indicates the kinds of experiences that the members share. The challenges that a CEO of a Series B hiring their 100th employee has will likely be different than a restaurant owner. We often assemble in these groups in our lives, sometimes knowingly and sometimes unconsciously. They give us access to different perspectives to similar problems we're encountering, which helps us feel less alone.

**Coaching** is a supporting modality that utilizes inquiry and mirroring (reflecting back to another) to reveal the beliefs and mental models individuals are holding that influence how they think and act. Coaching provides a reflective space to understand these models, and if they are limiting, to change them. In contrast to mentorship or advising in which "the answer" lies outside of oneself, coaching presupposes "the answer" lies within.

**Group Coaching** builds on the 1:1 coaching format and expands the scope to a larger group of people. In this format, it's helpful to teach the foundational skills of coaching, such as listening, asking open and honest questions, and creating a deeper awareness of our emotions and thinking processes. As each member of the group learns these skills, they in turn are better able to support the other members of the group, accelerating the growth of the individuals within it. They are often led by a trained coach or facilitator who is responsible for holding the container of the group, including the norms and behaviors agreed upon by the group, which then is responsible to hold each other accountable to them.

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<sup>1</sup> Sunwolf Dr. (2008). *Peer Groups: Expanding our study of small group communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA. SAGE Publications, Inc.

The **overlap** of these two types of groups, peer groups and coaching groups creates a powerful and sacred combination.

Peer Groups	Group Coaching
<p><i>Functional Definition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A group that considers one another to be equals, and for whom the sameness of the group is an important characteristic for those members (i.e. we are all founders, or we are all leaders in a startup, etc.)</li> </ul> <p><i>Benefits</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Build trusting relationships</li> <li>● Receive support around challenges with people who understand them via shared experiences</li> <li>● Feel less alone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A facilitator / coach-led group of individuals who, by learning foundational coaching skills, support and are supported by each other in service of group and individual goals</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Learn practical leadership / coaching skills</li> <li>● Receive support around challenges via inquiry and deep listening, allowing participants to discover their own answer</li> <li>● Build emotional and practical resilience</li> </ul>

The power of these peer coaching groups lies in the combination of support that each modality offers. The sameness and shared experience of the members, buoyed by the open and curious stance brought by the coaching framework creates a container of trust, safety and rapport. The sameness of the individuals allow for practical support, whereas the *coaching* allows for a deeper level of exploration where members discover their own answers.

They are also sacred. Much care must be taken to ensure the expectations of the members align with the intent of the group. Peer coaching groups lie on a spectrum, and missed expectations become apparent for a few reasons. First, the sameness that is important to one member of the group may not be as important to another. Second, participants may find that what was initially important to them changes after being in the group. One of the benefits of the group can also give rise to tension. This happens when a member of the group, acting from a place of “helping,” gives their answer to another’s challenge unprompted or without inquiring into what type of support would be helpful. This can leave the other person feeling like a problem that needs to be fixed, and reinforces the idea that the answer to their challenges exists outside of themselves. This reduces the opportunities of the members to realize their own agency in addressing their challenge. It is in moments like this that the benefits of having a trained coach facilitating the group become apparent. What might have led to misunderstanding and shut down can be turned into learning opportunities and moments of deep reflection and awareness building.

## Answering The Call

Peer Coaching Groups are not for everyone. They are for people who come with challenges and burdens that aren't readily addressable by reading books or blog posts. They are for people carrying questions about their lives that can't be answered by anybody else, who have an inner yearning that no one else can name or resolve. Holding the stance that it's not about finding participants, but sending out a call, allows the participants *really wanting* this to answer that. This will provide a greater opportunity to create shared purpose among the group while aligning expectations from the start.

Getting more specific, it's important to think about a group of people that aren't so specialized while at the same time not too generalized. Filtering the aperture too small will make it exceptionally difficult to assemble a quorum, and opening it too wide will dilute the reason for people joining, namely that there is a particular sameness that is important to them. Start here, with the sameness that is important to you, your business or your sphere of influence. This will make it easier for you to speak to the participants, especially to the challenges they are going through.

For us, we started with founders and leaders in startups. It was where we had the greatest amount of discipline expertise, and there was clearly a need for this type of work for people in that discipline.

However you market or create a pipeline of potential participants, there are a few steps to take once you've generated interest.

## Screen Participants

Screening participants is for their benefit just as much as it is for those curating or facilitating the group. The process is there to ensure that the type of support being provided is a fit for all involved, as this fit impacts the experience of the entire group for the duration of the engagement. There are a number of factors that contribute or detract from fit. The sameness mentioned at the beginning of this document is a big part of it, and how participants weigh the particular qualities of that sameness that are important to them.

Below is an incomplete list of those qualities. We have found them to be consistently valued by participants when they are present, and can be the source of expectation misalignment:

### **Role/Responsibilities**

What a person does everyday for work informs the various challenges they are bringing to the groups, and having shared experiences around those challenges is important



### **Coach-desire-ability**

In contrast to coachability, which is someone's ability to receive feedback and incorporate it, coach-desire-ability is someone's attitude and desire towards the modality of coaching in general. Coaching is not about telling another person what to do, or that there is a "right" way. It is about leaning into uncertainty, asking and receiving questions that reinforces an individual's internal agency to find their own answers.

### **Vulnerability**

A large part of what makes a peer coaching group successful is how trusting participants are of each other, and trust is built in the groups with the elements of time and vulnerability. Seeing other's lean into their own discomfort helps us to do the same, knowing we can trust them to hold it with respect and that we aren't alone in feeling a certain way. This trust allows for an open flow of information which is imperative in receiving targeted support around our challenges, both externally and internally.

There are a number of ways to set up a screen/filter to give yourself and your participants the best possible chance for a fit. Using the above qualities as a guide, developing an application with minimum commitment requirements is a start. At Reboot we follow up each application with a 30 to 45-minute phone call which helps us better understand each applicant's expectations and ask more in depth questions that help us determine the fit for both sides. The more robust and effective this process, the more set up for success your group will be.

### **Curate the group**

After getting to a critical mass of applicants, and before sending out invitations, it's helpful to create a list of the participants and the pertinent information about them. Having this list helps to see what the group makeup could be, and gives you a sense of potential issues or challenges that individuals might have with the group. For instance, putting the founder of a 300 person company in a group with other founders of companies less than 50 people could create the potential for disappointment for the individual, which affects the whole group. Here's where the qualities of sameness (mentioned above) that members share becomes a priority, especially around **challenges** they are experiencing and those being similar enough to other participants. At Reboot, we paid especially close attention to the following:

- Role
- Company Size
- Company Stage / Funding Model (Series A, Self-Funded, Established Corporation, etc.)
- Type of Business (Market, SaaS, B2B, etc.)
- Challenges
- Founder / Non-Founder
- Gender
- Stated Ideal Peers (This is a question we ask about in the screening phone call)

*Note: This list is not exhaustive. There are likely a number of other qualities to pay attention to, especially related to the group you are interested in launching.*

When screening members, inquiring into the unique challenges they are coming up against can be a good way to curate what kind of group would be most useful for them.

The size of the group is also an important consideration. There is a balance between giving everyone an equal amount of time to be heard while getting to a depth for the individual and having multiple perspectives. We found the ideal group size to be between five and eight participants.

## **Commitments and Invitations**

Peer coaching groups are made up of individuals with their own needs and desires, joining a group of people they may not know, to come together in support of each other. The journey that each member travels is not always a straight line, and it's important to set expectations. For these reasons the commitment the participants make to themselves and the other members of the group is part of what creates a sense of shared purpose for the group, and so it's imperative for the commitment they are making to be clear. The commitment will be different for each group, however having participants understand at a minimum and best case yearn for the following key points is mandatory for Reboot. They are:

- Group coaching and the skills required (listening and curiosity) to be an active participant
- Personal growth and development
- Attendance: Creating an expectation that every member is to be at every session, with consequences for missed sessions, communicates how critical their presence is to the group's success.

The tension that individual members may feel throughout the process can be exactly the content that is important to bring to the group. We recommend setting very clear expectations and boundaries around what the commitment is, and what happens if it is not adhered to. Including this commitment in the invitation, along with other information like the anonymized bios of the group, day and time the group meets, and any other important details are a good way to give participants all the information they need to make the commitment that will help both them and the group be successful.

## **Start/Kickoff**

The first session with your group is important as it's the first opportunity to not only meet one another, but to begin modeling the practices the group will adhere to and engage in throughout your time together. The facilitator takes on a larger role as the participants will be looking to them for the boundaries of behavior in addition to the logistics of the group and first meeting. Sending out these logistics, and a high level agenda is the first step in setting the tone and the *norms* (see more below) prior to the group coming together. In addition, it's a great opportunity for participants to experience the magic of these groups, by bringing a specific challenge they are dealing with and working through it, supported by the group. We've listed an example of the information we share, along with a typical agenda that should give you an idea of the appropriate level of thought that goes into this vital first gathering.

## Sample Agenda

- Time/Day of first meeting
- For in-person groups, logistics about travel, location, accommodations, and food
- High-Level Agenda for the kickoff meeting:
  - *Welcome & Why We're Here*: Setting expectations for the day
  - *Check-Ins & Brief Introductions*: See more below
  - *Group Commitments & Norms*: See more below
  - *Surfacing a Challenge*: Guided exercise for participants to think, talk and write about what issues they are facing that would be helpful to work through
  - *Listening Skills Exercise*: To begin practicing the foundational skills of the group and share out a challenge, facilitating the beginnings of intimacy in the group
  - *Inquiry Exercise*: Learning how to ask open and honest questions
  - *Inference Exercise*: Thinking about how we think
  - *Working an Issue*: Giving each participant a chance to share their challenge and receive group coaching support through a *typical format* (See more below.)
  - *Full Group Debrief*: To reflect on the exercises and insights throughout the day, shared with the whole group to reinforce both the similar and different experiences of the participants
  - *Check-Outs*

Giving this first meeting some extra thought and intention will go a long way in setting the right container from the start.

## Other formats

These steps will give you a better sense of the important vectors to track, and they may or may not apply to your situation. For instance, if you're launching an internal peer coaching group in your company, a phone interview is probably not necessary; however, what is still very important is confirming there is an expectation alignment for all the participants entering a group. The expectations for internal groups may be quite varied for each employee, and a company sponsored group can feel either *required* or *optional* depending on how the reasons for the group are communicated, each having unique consequences on the success of the group. Communicating what the peer coaching group is for (a safe space to reflect and share challenges and coach one another to find each participant's unique solution) and confirming that the participants are desiring that type of support can help create alignment prior to beginning. Not doing so can create misalignment and misunderstandings that will affect the balance of the group.

## Facilitation

It's important to say a bit about the importance of facilitation in peer *coaching* groups. In a purely peer group, the primary benefit is that the participants have enough shared experience in common. There is no need for facilitation because there is no expectation for coaching, deep listening, etc. In fact the presence of a facilitator will create an imbalance in the sameness of the group. However, when the purpose of the group is to be centered around coaching, then the need for facilitation becomes a primary concern, with the facilitator becoming an anchor within the group. Facilitation, when done well, includes the following:

- Holding sacred the norms of the group and ensuring the stability of the container. When needed, gently hold participants to the commitments they've made and guide them back when they stray outside the boundaries agreed to.
- Guide, model, and, at times, teach the coaching skills that are integral in creating the conditions for the group to support each other in increasing their agency and resiliency together.
- Call forth or challenge the group towards the best version of themselves. It may seem uncomfortable or even audacious to think along these lines, but one of the great things about a peer coaching group is the agreement made to personal growth. There is often a reserve of relational capital and a supportive enough container to allow a loving challenge to take place.

The facilitator that guides the group should be vetted in a way that they meet the criteria desired. If necessary, additional training can be provided. Reboot provided a period of training for all facilitators, as a way to practice the formats and skills that are required to understand what's important about facilitation in a group.

It's equally as important to support good facilitation as it is in finding facilitators. Support may take the form of one-on-one check-ins, where facilitators have the opportunity to share challenges and workshop ways forward or share stories that may help provide a new perspective. Creating a peer coaching group for facilitators is also a great way to support them in the same way that participants are supported. This creates a space for facilitators to coach and be coached as well as feel less alone and more resourced. A virtuous cycle is created where facilitation challenges become opportunities for growth and learning, in turn helping the facilitators show up fully and support the peer coaching groups they are a part of.

# How To Facilitate & Manage

Okay, so you've made it this far. You've got a group and a date to launch. Now what? We found it immensely helpful to give participants a roadmap to reference as a way to communicate the standard practices, tools, guidelines, and overall tone of the group. We've shared some of the lessons we've learned below.

The roadmap (which might take the form of a handbook, manual, or other medium) should communicate both the context or tone of the group, as well as specific content that will be helpful for participants to set their own internal expectations. Some useful elements we've found to have in the roadmap that also describe and set expectations are:

## **An Overview**

Explain what peer coaching groups are and why they're valuable. Share any information that feels helpful regarding the group format, i.e. general cadence and length of sessions, size of the group and how they meet (virtual vs. in-person) as well as what the costs are. If these groups are part of a larger organization, how do they fit into the ethos and mission of that organization? And finally, what can participants expect from an "internal" perspective regarding transition, transformations, etc. that they might encounter in these groups?

How detailed you get in each of these areas is completely up to you.

Other elements that we have found helpful in the understanding of these groups are:

### **How the groups are formed (curated)**

This helps to shine transparency on the process, as well as lend credibility to it. Participants are often curious about this process, oftentimes in order to understand that there is a baseline criteria that is involved, which helps to ensure there is a greater chance that people in the group will be more alike.

### **The potential challenges of being in a group**

In our work with peer coaching groups, we came across challenges that came up repeatedly for members, and encouraged them to talk about them. This not only allowed us to address them, but naming them for members, in some cases before they experienced them, allowed those challenges to be normalized and thus easier to talk about with the larger group.

### **The trade-offs of virtual vs. in-person and how to make the most of each format**

Similar to the potential challenges of being in a group, naming the trade-offs that are involved for virtual vs. in-person formats are important in helping participants understand what's required of them in order to get the most out of each format. In addition, some participants will be more inclined to believe that one is better than another, and understanding the trade-offs will help dispel the "better than" belief and instead see them as having pros and cons. For instance, being able to meet virtually opens up the geographic location of each participant, allows for more flexibility in scheduling, and is the only option in

times of social isolation. It's incredibly important when in a virtual format to find a quiet place, free of distractions, where you won't be interrupted and you won't need to move. Naming these helps to set expectations and can also be a part of the commitments participants make to each other.

## In Session

Ok, everyone is primed and ready... now what do you do? There are a number of practices that we've found immensely valuable, and they are shown below. It may also be valuable to include these in some way in a roadmap you send to your participants beforehand.

### Group Commitments & Norms

Another way of thinking about the group commitments and norms is *setting the container*. A container in these terms are the behaviors and actions that we together determine are important to the group, which let all the members in the group know where the boundaries of acceptability lie. Knowing where these boundaries lie helps members understand what can be *held* by the container. For instance, one of Reboot's norms is *Ask Questions Before Giving Advice*. This helps to create an environment of safety where challenges are met with curiosity as opposed to problems that need fixing.

### Check-Ins

Increasingly, research confirms the benefits of check-ins. Having a format for members of the group to check-in helps to accomplish a number of things. First, it gives them an opportunity to context switch from what they were doing to what they are doing now. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to share whatever is important or on their mind with the group so they can fully arrive and be present. It also goes a long way in giving other people in the group context as to what is going on for each individual. This is important in peer coaching groups and other relational contexts such as work, and even at home. We tend to jump to conclusions and quickly make meaning of someone else's behavior without having proper context or an understanding of what's really going on for them. Making space for check-ins helps the story-making part of our brain calm down in regards to the actions of others.

### Typical Formats

Having a typical format that members of the group can feel comfortable with can be an invaluable tool and/or shorthand for creating a loose structure around issues and challenges. We've shared some of the formats that have inspired us below:

- [Clearness Committee](#): Invented by the Quakers and adapted by the [Center for Courage & Renewal](#).
- [Honest and Open Questions](#)
- [Troika Consulting](#): From [Liberating Structures](#)

### Confidentiality

It's imperative to name, especially at the beginning, and then throughout, the level of confidentiality that is assumed in the groups. Also, if you are planning to run your own group, doing research and naming what the group norms around confidence are in

contrast to what is *legally* confidential (i.e. what may be discoverable in an investigation) can also be useful and important to know.

## Skills Building

These groups are different from other groups or communities we are a part of, and as such it can be helpful to introduce and practice the skills and tools that make them more impactful for the participants that join. We've mentioned the skills that we have emphasized and have been valuable in setting the tone of the groups, which by no means is a complete list of what's possible, and may not be applicable to your groups. But, it is a starting point.

- Listening
- Inquiry
- Inference
- Sharing
- Journaling
- Dealing with conflict, both internally (within yourself) and externally (with others)

## Feedback

Feedback is essential information to have from participants. Having both formal and informal channels are part of what allows participants to be heard and for issues to arise so the group or facilitator can do something about it. The outcome is not as important as raising the issue. We collect feedback in two formal ways. The first is a check-in during the normal course of sessions for the purpose of understanding how each individual is doing. This gives the facilitator an opportunity to understand not only the individual participant, but the overall quality of the group. This gives participants another outlet, beyond informal conversations, to voice their needs and concerns with the hopes of addressing it during the session. The second is when a participant leaves the group, or the end of the group itself. The purpose here is to understand what worked for the participant and what they would have liked more of. It helps us understand what's happening on the ground and see larger trends to pay attention to across all participants and peer coaching groups.

We recommend checking in at a cadence of either three or six months. We found this time frame to be the sweet spot where there is enough time for participants to generate opinions about the process while allowing the opportunity to share the experience close to real time.

# How To End

*What we call the beginning is often the end*

*And to make an end is to make a beginning.*

*The end is where we start from.*

-T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," from Four Quartets

We at Reboot have been incredibly influenced by the transitions framework outlined in the book *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes* by William Bridges.

As Bridges argues, every transition begins with an ending, whether externally out in the world or within ourselves. This ending is followed by a "wilderness" period where we are in between, neither here nor there. This in-between period can be especially uncomfortable as we leave the comfort of the old for the uncertainty of the new. Then there is the new beginning, where we start to inhabit and move towards a new state of being.

Oftentimes when someone reaches out to be in a peer coaching group, they are doing so because something in their life is ending. It can be challenging to see it as such, it might just feel like a challenge. Overwhelm in a fast growing company, being promoted to a management position, and many other situations create scenarios that feel more like beginnings than endings. However it's important to also honor what's ending in these transitions, because they often give more clues to understanding our internal experience. The end of finding success by solving technical challenges. The end of an ideal we had for our company. Honoring these endings help us not be tied to any particular outcome, making it easier to move toward what's next for us.

The same is true when groups end. An ending is not a failure of the group, it's an acknowledgement that the individuals in it are changing, which is good! In addition, normalizing these changes creates as much opportunity for learning as being in the group does.

Part of this process is to invite your group to reflect on what is the calling in their lives they feel now. What are they moving towards? What obstacles might they come across on their way? What support will they need?

Lastly, to both respect the journey that the group has been on and to express our appreciation, ending with an invitation to share gratitude for others, the process, and even for oneself can be a powerful and uplifting way for the group to complete their transition.



# Who

Peer Coaching Groups are for anyone looking to support others and, in turn, receive support around the challenges and obstacles they come up against in their work and lives.

## **Across Companies & Organizations**

Reboot Circles began as a way for startup leaders, whose companies often rely on venture capital, to accelerate their growth and resilience as the clock ticks to become profitable, raise additional funding, be acquired, or shut down. In this pressure cooker, having a place to share vulnerably and honestly in a way that feels safe allows those leaders to receive a deeper and targeted level of support and empathy. The pressure cooker experience is by no means unique to startups, and even though it seems incredibly broad to say peer coaching groups are for anyone who goes through struggles in their life, it is also likely true.

The context of work is a useful place to start. As we offered Circles to CEOs and founders, it wasn't too long before we expanded the offering to C-level executives, VPs, managers, and directors.

## **Within Companies & Organizations**

Within companies there are benefits and things to look out for when running your own peer coaching group. Some of the benefits are increased transparency and communication for the leaders in a group. It's also important to look out for the proximity of direct reporting of the people in the group, and to maintain a certain amount of separation. Grouping people who are connected by solid or dashed reporting lines can make it difficult to share authentically. It is especially helpful to have internal peer coaching groups (within companies) professionally facilitated for these reasons, and to make clear what is in bounds and out of bounds for the group. The most useful manifestation of these groups are ones in which members can share challenges and receive individual support, and feel safe to bring organizational blind spots up the ladder in a way that ultimately is helpful for the company.

There is a growing awareness and interest in peer coaching groups even beyond the corporate environment, yet not that much information on best practices on running them. The early adopters have mainly been those that can afford the cost of a professional facilitator or coach, which has kept it in the arena of companies with a budget for such things. We see this work being valuable for a much larger audience, for whom a "how-to" guide may be the catalyst needed. That is our hope.

# Outro

We are inspired by trees.

Trees are wonderful organisms that perform one of, if not the *most* important function on the planet. They create *atmosphere*. They create oxygen for us to breathe, and we in turn breathe out carbon dioxide for them to breathe. In effect, by creating oxygen for us to breathe, they are creating the conditions for us to survive, be successful, and thrive. Where trees may do this without a second thought, it can be more difficult for humans, requiring intentional thought and understanding. This is what this document is all about, creating an atmosphere wherein others can be successful and thrive.

We hope that you have enjoyed this window into how we think about peer coaching groups. The goal of this document is to pass it forward to interested individuals or organizations that are inclined to make use of it, and perhaps launch their own peer coaching groups. We know that this work is constantly evolving and so our wish, and request, is for you to share your learnings with us along the way.

We will be modifying, updating, and evolving this document from time to time, and hope that we can include your learnings as we do.

With humility and gratitude,

The Reboot Team

# References

Sharing how you created this experience and referencing the work of others is imperative in giving credit where credit is due. This will allow participants to dive deeper into the content and material if they feel called to do so. Throughout this document you'll find references to a variety of sources that have influenced us and have made our program what it is. I've included a number of those references below.

*Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*, by Edgar Schein

*Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well*, by Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen

*Time to Think*, by Nancy Kline

*Fierce Conversations*, by Susan Scott

*Let Your Life Speak*, by Parker Palmer

*A Hidden Wholeness*, by Parker Palmer

*Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, by Marshall B. Rosenberg

*Forum: The Secret Advantage of Successful Leaders*, by Mo Fathelbab

*The 5th Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, by Peter Senge

*Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together*, by William Isaacs

*Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, by William Bridges

*Peer Groups: Expanding Our Study of Small Groups Communication*, by Dr. Sunwolf