

Real Impact • Real Issues • Real Clarity



For over 20 years Inner Circle has been helping CEOs and business owners achieve clarity about real issues that impact their business and personal lives.

Each *Inner Circle*® meeting serves as an interactive think tank, a place where entrepreneurs come to challenge one another and to be challenged. By tapping into the wisdom and objectivity of the group, members find they are able to overcome obstacles faster and with greater confidence.

We would say the impact is remarkable. But don't take our word for it, take theirs.



If you're thinking about joining Inner Circle, one question you'll ask is, "Will this be worth my investment of time and money?" What you get out of Inner Circle is largely dependant on what you put into it, so only you can supply that answer. But here are some members whose response would be an enthusiastic "Yes!"

My First *Inner Circle*® Meeting Saved me \$500,000



When I left my family's business I was so eager to get out that I agreed to pay a heavily inflated amount at an outrageous interest rate to hold onto a division of the company. The business couldn't support those terms.

At my first *Inner Circle* meeting I asked, "What advice can you give me about refinancing?" In my mind I thought that the solution to my problem would be found in longer terms or a lower interest rate.

The group responded in disbelief, "You paid what, for what?" They saw that I paid more for the business than it was worth and pushed me to go back and renegotiate. A member of my *Inner Circle* group, a business broker, offered to represent me. I ended up with a new price that was \$500,000 lower.

It was a solution that I didn't even think was a possibility. When it's your family, your business, your livelihood...you're often too close to see it clearly. You just don't know what you don't know.

Dodd Clasen, President, Creatis Inc.

"When it's your family, your business, your livelihood...you're often too close to see it clearly. You just don't know what you don't know."

I attribute at least half of the money I was able to make in selling my company, or about \$6 million, directly to my involvement in Inner Circle. In addition to helping me in numerous aspects of my personal growth as a CEO, *Inner Circle* members provided me with critical help quelling an attempted board takeover, and in pursuing the right buyer for the company.

Eric Korevaar, Founder, Optical Access, Inc.

When a large client fell behind on payments and rumors started to spread about them closing down manufacturing plants, I brought my concerns to my *Inner Circle* group. The group told me not to hesitate. They warned me to take the red flags seriously and get aggressive on collection issues right away to protect my company.

It took effort, but we got their balance down to zero and put them on a cash before delivery status. That move paid huge dividends. Months later the client filed for bankruptcy. My competitors didn't take action and lost large sums of money, from the low to high six figures. A company of our size never could have survived a hit like that. The push to action helped me avoid a huge financial loss.

Joel H. Scott, Co-Owner, Scott Foam and Fabrics

If there is one thing we know about entrepreneurs, it's that they seldom have a "typical" day. So the issues that come up at meetings are diverse. During the roundtable discussion each member presents an issue that is top of mind, the one it would feel best to resolve, and gets feedback from the group.

My Inner Circle® Group Helps me Thrive in a Family Business



I left my job and joined my new husband in his business, which was great in the beginning. But it wasn't a perpetual honeymoon. Several years into it I noticed friction between us at work. Jon was losing passion for the business he had been running for 17 years. It was having a negative impact on us and the business.

Inner Circle helped me see it was time to get him out of the business. Jon agreed and asked me to take over the role of CEO from him. He was actually relieved and is off doing other great things for our family.

Running a family business is tough. There's a lot of emotion and a lot to lose — fail to confront issues appropriately and you put both your business and your most important relationships at risk.

My Inner Circle group is a neutral sounding board that helps me see things with greater clarity and bolsters my resolve to do the right thing, even if it's not the easy thing.

Andrea Machalek, President and CEO, Machalek Communications

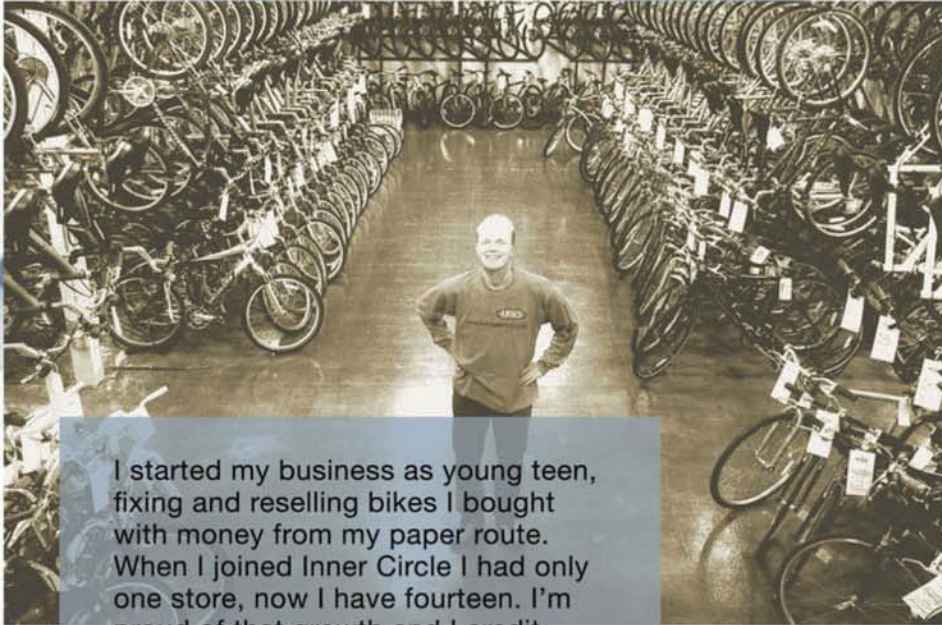
"Running a family business is tough. There's a lot of emotion and a lot to lose — fail to confront issues appropriately and you put both your business and your most important relationships at risk."

Issues are sometimes pragmatic, sometimes strategic, sometimes complex and sometimes simplistic. Examples of issues from past meetings include:

- One member was considering offering company cars as a benefit to her long-term employees. "Who's done it and what do I need to think about before I take this step?" she asked.
- A member sought feedback on how she could re-brand and re-position her professional services so that potential clients would better understand the full scope of what she was capable of doing. The group helped her come up with a fresh company name, one that didn't pigeon-hole her, and helped her identify which of her services were most marketable.
- A member shared the hurt of finding out that his long-time partner had stolen \$70,000 from him and the group helped him put together a recovery plan.
- Many members have asked for input on personnel decisions, seeking guidance on issues such as how to best compensate their sales force, what to do when they've outgrown their start-up staff, and how to screen job applicants to determine if they're a good fit for the position and the company.

Inner Circle® meetings force business owners to step out of day-to-day operations on a regular basis to take a broad, elevated view of the business. On an annual basis, members present a Vision Quest. One part business plan and one part soul searching, the process calls on each member to clarify what they want their business and personal life to look like in years to come.

My *Inner Circle* Group Holds my Feet to the Fire



I started my business as young teen, fixing and reselling bikes I bought with money from my paper route. When I joined Inner Circle I had only one store, now I have fourteen. I'm proud of that growth and I credit Inner Circle with helping me achieve it while maintaining a life I love to live.

I was a workaholic early on. I've always been pretty intense and driven. But I take my commitment to family just as seriously and I wanted to have more time with Jane, my wife and partner in business.

Everyone talks about what they want out of life, but actually making it happen, that's another story. I started by announcing during my Vision Quest my goal to take two weeks of vacation each year.

My *Inner Circle* group held my feet to the fire. And I learned that the company really could survive, even thrive, without me. Now I structure my schedule to spend up to twelve weeks each year with my wife at our vacation home in Hawaii. Everybody needs to coast occasionally!

**Erik "The Bike Man" Saltvold,
President and Founder of
Erik's Bike Shop**

"When I joined Inner Circle I had only one store, now I have fourteen. I'm proud of that growth and I credit Inner Circle with helping me achieve it while maintaining a life I love to live."

When you articulate a clear vision and define a solid plan for making that vision tangible, big things happen. Legacies are born. Passions are re-ignited. Bold steps are taken. Missteps are avoided. And companies experience smart and often dramatic growth. Examples of clarity achieved through the Vision Quest process include:

- A presenter realized that he no longer wanted to run one part of the business his father started. He was worried that other family members would be upset about his "abandoning" the business. His fellow *Inner Circle* members encouraged him to talk to the other members of his family still involved in the family enterprises. He did so that afternoon and they asked what took him so long to realize it. He sold that part of the business in two months and went on to start another very successful business.
- A manufacturer described his plans for growth including the purchase of new equipment and the lease of additional space. His *Inner Circle* group confronted him with the fact that he was over-extending himself financially and taking on too much overhead for clients he didn't even have yet. Realizing he was about to make a big mistake, he went back to the drawing board to form a new plan for growing the business.