



# Working Out Loud Circle Guide

## A simple overview

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A Working Out Loud circle is a small peer support group in which you pick a goal and build a network of relationships that can help you with that goal.

Groups meet for an hour a week for 12 weeks. By the end of your 12 weeks in a circle, you'll have developed a larger, more diverse network and a set of habits you can apply toward any goal.

### How Circles Work

There are five important things to know about circles:

*Circles are confidential.* Members of a circle will learn better when they're in a supportive environment and don't need to fear being judged or gossiped about. What happens in the circle stays in the circle unless members explicitly agree otherwise.

*Circles include 2 - 5 people.* More than five people means there's too much free-form discussion and not enough time to provide detailed feedback on each individual's goals and progress. The more diverse the circle is, the better.

*Circles meet for one hour a week for 12 weeks.* After an initial meeting to get to know the other people and their goals, group members are asked to commit to 11 additional meetings. 12 weeks is long enough for people to develop new habits, and short enough so the effort is focused and sustainable.

*There's a simple, structured curriculum.* The 12 weeks are meant to be a guided mastery program. That means you take small steps, get feedback, and make progress at your own pace. There are specific exercises, but there is no test

and no judgment. Any progress you make will help you build your network and increase your chances of reaching your goal.

*One member is the facilitator.* Groups work best when one individual takes it upon themselves to care more and is willing and able to keep things organized, positive, and productive. Like the producer of a movie, the facilitator makes sure things get done: invites members, organize meetings, facilitates discussions in the meetings, and nudges people who need to be nudged. Importantly, they also make sure no one gets left behind.

## **Resources to Help You**

The Circle Guide is a synthesis of exercises from the book, *Working Out Loud*. While you don't have to read the book to take part in a circle, the techniques, stories and examples in the book will greatly improve your chances of realizing your goal and working out loud effectively.

In addition to this overview, the Circle Guide includes a section for each of the 12 weeks that includes a suggested agenda, one or more exercises, and answers to frequently asked questions. There is more information on [workingoutloud.com](http://workingoutloud.com), including additional exercises, techniques, and stories of people who work out loud.

## **Who's in Your Circle?**

Since circles are peer support groups, it's important that members can be open about their goals, their learning, and their struggles without fear of judgment or rejection. For some, that means close friends are a good choice for their circle. Others might prefer strangers. Generally, more diverse circles lead to more creativity and ideas. Whomever you choose, make sure you'll be comfortable being open and vulnerable in front of them.

## **Before Your Circle's First Meeting**

Once you've selected people you would like to include in your circle, it's time to invite them to the first meeting. Pick a place that's comfortable and conducive to a small group having a conversation for an hour.

The best preparation for your meeting is to read the book. If you don't have time to finish it, read the beginning of *Part III Your Own Guided Mastery Program*, including *Chapter 10 - A practical goal & your first relationship list*.

Everyone in the circle should read this overview and also *Working Out Loud Circle Guide - Week 1*.

## **Guidelines for Every Meeting**

Here are basic rules that apply to every meeting. The facilitator should feel free to gently remind people of the rules occasionally.

### ***The facilitator should:***

- *Read the material relevant for that week.* Not everyone will read the book, so it helps if the facilitator has read it.
- *Have the material handy at the meeting.* This allows the circle members to refer to it during the meeting and allows those who haven't read it to quickly skim it.
- *Choose a suitable location for a group discussion.* Pick a place that's comfortable and not too loud.
- *Keep the discussion moving.* Check the agenda before and throughout the meeting and keep discussions moving along by gently remind people of the agenda for the meeting.
- *Help everyone participate.* That sometimes means drawing out people who are quiet or gently helping someone bring their input to a close.

### ***Every member should:***

- *Read the material relevant for that week.*
- *Be on time.* The hour will go by quickly. When people are late, they'll miss out themselves and will break up the flow of the meeting for everyone else.
- *Be prepared to take notes.* You could use pen and paper or a tablet but try and avoid laptops. You should be actively listening and participating
- *Focus.* Don't use your phone as it distracts you as well as the other circle members. It also signals that you're not listening and don't care, making it difficult for the group to share openly and trust each other. If you do get interrupted, excuse yourself and step away from the table.

Most importantly, *relax and enjoy yourself*. Any time you spend investing in yourself - thinking about goals and ways of deepening relationships to accomplish them - is time well spent. Enjoy it.