



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

Version 3.5.1 - Oct 2016
Created by John Stepper

Getting started: A simple overview

This material is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. You can download and share it as long as you credit John Stepper and workingoutloud.com. You can't change it or offer it as part of any for-fee product or service. For more information, contact john.stepper@workingoutloud.com.

A Working Out Loud circle is a small peer support group that helps you make progress towards a goal by building relationships related to that goal. Circles meet for an hour a week for 12 weeks. By the end, each of you will have developed a larger, more diverse network as well as habits and a mindset you can apply towards any goal.

How Working Out Loud circles work

The TEDx talk [“Working Out Loud: The Making of a movement”](#) is good to watch before you start. In 9 minutes, it describes circles and how people and companies have benefitted from them. Here are six important things to know about your circle.

You start with an individual goal you care about. Each of you in the circle will pick your own goal. You want to each pick something you care about and can make progress towards in 12 weeks.

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. It's important that members can be open about their goals, their learning, and their struggles without fear of judgment or rejection. Trust is the most important element of a successful circle.

Circles are best with four to five people. More than five people means there's too much communications overhead and not enough time to provide detailed feedback on each individual's progress. Generally, more diverse circles lead to more creativity and ideas.

Circles meet for one hour a week for 12 weeks. Think of the hour you meet each week as investing 2% of your time to develop a 21st-century skill. Making that investment

for 12 weeks is long enough for you to develop new habits, and short enough so your 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 Circle Coordinator. 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. You're not managing the group as much as serving them, things like organizing meetings and keeping track of where you are in the process.

The rest of the guide

In addition to this overview, the Circle Guide for each of the 12 weeks includes a suggested agenda, exercises, and answers to frequently asked questions. While it's not absolutely necessary to read *Working Out Loud* to take part in a circle, doing so will greatly improve your chances of making progress towards your goal and working out loud effectively.

Week	Objective
1	Choose a simple goal & list people related to it
2	Offer your first contributions
3	Work your lists
4	Review your online presence
5	Broaden your range of contributions
6	Expand your influence
7	Make it a habit
8	Practice empathy & engagement
9	Explore more original contributions
10	Become more systematic
11	Imagine the possibilities
12	Reflect and celebrate

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Does the circle have one goal or do we each have different goals?

You each have a different, individual goal. Each of you should pick something you care about and can make progress towards in 12 weeks.

Q: Why is it 12 weeks long?

The only way to develop new habits is through repetition over time. Studies show that your brain physically changes in three to eight weeks depending on the activity. Through repetition, the activity becomes more automatic and, combined with feedback, you become more proficient. The 12 weeks gives you more chances to practice connecting with people in different ways and to get feedback so you learn.

Q: What makes for a good circle?

Some of the most interesting and effective circles are when people have different backgrounds and goals. They tend to bring different perspectives and insights to the exercises and the group as a whole will learn more.

Q: What happens when a circle ends?

You reflect and celebrate. Many people wind up forming a new circle with different people. The structure, shared accountability, and support continues will help you make progress towards something you care about and feel good while you do it.

Q: Where can I find answers to other questions?

There is a Frequently Asked Questions section in each week of the circle guide, and you can find more information in the book and on workingoutloud.com. You can also ask questions of other practitioners in the Working Out Loud communities on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

Tips for a successful circle

As circles form across many countries and organizations, I get a chance to see what's working well and what's challenging. The results described in the reviews of *Working Out Loud* range from feeling more open and optimistic to accomplishing specific goals.

“After just one WOL Circle meeting, I was already feeling more connected with my colleagues and more encouraged about my career.”

“I joined a Working Out Loud circle and it helped me propel my small business idea into a successful, profitable and continuously growing venture...it helped me grow my network in a real and genuine way that felt comfortable and empowering.”

“I am really enjoying the process outlined in this book...It is clear and concise and motivating. John Stepper provides small easy steps to guide us...I honestly feel empowered to own my success and not wait for it to come knocking.”

These tips - in order of importance - will help your circle have a similar experience.

1. *Maintain momentum.* If someone can't attend, or if vacations or other events cause you to miss several meetings, consider skipping the in-person meetings. You can still do the exercises and communicate with each other via email, text, or a group messaging like Slack.
2. *If you get stuck, do this!* As with almost any new habit or skill, there may come a time when your motivation lags and you want to give up. It's natural. When that happens, *shrink the change.* Better to do one small thing - even just the one-minute exercise for a given week - than to skip the week entirely.
3. *Communicate between meetings.* Whether it's via text or email or some other channel the group decides on, share progress you make with your circle. You're not bragging. It's just a small celebration that can motivate others to take a step.
4. *Have a clear, achievable goal you care about.* Focus on a simple learning goal (“I'd like to explore that” or “I'd like to get better at that”), or pick a straightforward work goal (“I'd like more recognition”). Better to practice and make progress than pick a goal that's too abstract or isn't appealing enough.
5. *Schedule time to work out loud.* Building relationships is an investment in yourself. Remember to “pay yourself first.” Even a single 30-minute session each week or two 15-minute sessions will help you make meaningful progress.
6. *Read the circle guides (at least).* The more prepared you are, the better. At a minimum, read the section of the circle guide relevant for each given week. Each section is only 2 double-sided pages long. Reading the book and subscribing to updates from workingoutloud.com will help you make progress.
7. *If you get stuck, ask for help.* Contact me at john.stepper@workingoutloud.com, or join the [Facebook community](#) or [LinkedIn community](#) and ask for advice from practitioners around the world.
8. *Relax and enjoy yourself.* The time you spend thinking about your goals and practicing ways to build meaningful relationships is time well spent. Enjoy it.