



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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Week 10: Become more systematic

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What to expect this week

By Week 10, it's becoming more natural to think of your goal in terms of people and contributions. Yet you're still working on making it a habit and mindset. It's natural, for example, to struggle with finding the time or with remembering to follow up with people. The exercises this week will help make offering contributions more systematic and habitual, so it takes less effort and thinking to do it and it feels increasingly natural.

Related reading from *Working Out Loud*

Chapter 20 - *Engaging Your Network*

Blog post: johnstepper.com/2016/03/19/the-hr-director-i-wish-i-knew/

Suggested agenda

Thing to do	Approx. time
Check-in	10 mins
Exercise: Your contribution checklist	20
Discuss your contributions	10
Exercise: No time like the present	15
Checkout for Week 10	5

Check-in (10 minutes)

Each person should speak for a few minutes about what they did since the last meeting. Discuss interesting blogs, YouTube Channels, Facebook pages, or other

self-published sites you found and why you liked them. Share any contributions you made (or ideas for possible contributions).

Exercise: Your contribution checklist (20 minutes)

So far, you've offered universal contributions like recognition and appreciation. You've shared resources you've found useful. You've made a list of facts that can serve as the basis for shared interests. And still the range of possible contributions can be broader. Here's a guide of ten kinds of contributions you can use as a reference guide, from the simplest to those that can take more effort and may be more valuable.

1. *Connect*: Establish a connection with a person online, typically by following them on a social platform or subscribing to their updates.
2. *Show appreciation*: Recognition and appreciation are “universal gifts” that Dale Carnegie wrote about in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. It could be a Like button or a public “thank you” or giving someone credit for their work.
3. *Share learning*: Sharing interesting content and the work of others you admire are low-risk, low-cost contributions that can help others.
4. *Connect the dots*: Take something you found valuable and help spread it to other individuals or groups that might find it useful by @-mentioning it or sending it to them directly.
5. *Ask a question*: Vulnerability can be a gift. Asking a question allows others to demonstrate their expertise, especially when you demonstrate how you tried to get the answer before asking. Be sure to offer appreciation for help, and make the answer available in such a way that it can help others.
6. *Answer a question*: This helps the person asking and anyone else who benefits from your answer in the future. When you answer questions in an informal, humble way, it also burnishes your reputation as someone who is knowledgeable and helpful.
7. *Offer feedback*: Here you're trying to build on the work someone else has done in a way that credits the person's original work while also helping others. The gift is constructive feedback that advances the work, and your feedback may also include appreciation or a question.
8. *Share your experience*: Reflect on your work. What have you learned - from both failures and successes - that might help others? It might be resources you find useful

or techniques you've found effective. Frame it in a way it feels less like "Look at me!" and more like "I thought you might be interested in this."

9. *Offer original ideas:* Beyond reflecting on work done in the past, you can imagine what might be done and frame that as a contribution. What opportunities do you see for improvement and what are your constructive ideas? Credit other people and build on their work wherever possible.

10. *Connect a purposeful group:* One of the most powerful contributions is connecting people who care about a particular topic and enabling them to work together on some positive change. It could be a working group that's focused on a particular problem or a community of practice where members are interested in getting better individually and advancing the practice overall.

Now for each category, see if you can list an example of a specific contribution related to your goal. Don't worry about offering it just yet. Just having this list handy will help serve as a checklist in the future.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Discuss your contributions (10 minutes)

Talk about the categories and some of your contributions. When you were trying to come up with examples, which ones were easy? Which were difficult? See if you can help each other by suggesting different contributions.

Exercise: No time like the present (15 minutes)

Scan your list of contributions above and make at least one right now during the meeting. If it's a small gift, try to make several. Each of you should do it quietly, but shout out "Made one!" each time you offer something to inspire others to act too.

Checkout for Week 10 (5 minutes)

1. Schedule the next meeting.
2. Remind people to read the Week 11 circle guide and suggested reading.
3. Ask: "What will you do this week?"

Keep reviewing your relationship list and thinking of the contributions you could make for each person on it.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: This seems like a lot! Do I really need to do all of this?

Remember the goal is simply to deepen relationships, and that you can usually accomplish that with recognition, appreciation, gratitude, and other small gifts.. Those should comprise the majority of your contributions. If that's all you do - generously offer small gifts in a way that shows empathy - that is a lovely and incredibly powerful habit. Gifts like original content, etc. are wonderful but only in addition to *small gifts, freely given*.

Bonus exercises

Easy: Something you can do in less than a minute

Send a text to a family member, perhaps someone you haven't spoken to in some time. Just a sentence or two to let them know you're thinking of them. How did it feel when you sent it? If they replied, what was the exchange like?

More challenging: Something you can do in less than 5 minutes

Read the related blog post, "[The HR director I wish I knew](#)" for an example of how a simple contribution can quickly lead to an interesting, meaningful connection.