



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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Week 7: Be purposeful

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What to expect this week

This week, you'll do one of the most powerful exercises in your Circle: the "Letter from your future self." By articulating a longer-term vision of what might be possible for you, you'll increase the chances of that vision becoming a reality.

Suggested agenda

Thing to do	Approx. time
1. Check-in	10 mins
2. Exercise: A letter from your future self	20
3. Discuss your letters	15
4. Exercise: Share your aspiration	10
5. Checkout for Week 7	5

Check-in (10 minutes)

Share how you're feeling about the process and about your progress. Celebrate successes and help each other with challenges. Remember to shrink the change and "touch the treadmill" if you're stuck or feeling overwhelmed.

Exercise: A letter from your future self (20 minutes)

This is a classic visioning exercise. You pick a date some months or years ahead (12 to 36 months is a good range) and imagine that your efforts towards your goal had gone the way you hoped. Then you write to your younger self and tell the story of what happened. Your letter might address questions like these:

- *What were the keys to making progress?*
- *How would you have normally approached things? How did you do it differently?*
- *How did you overcome setbacks?*
- *When did you realize you were going to be successful? What happened?*

The letter helps you see at least one possible path to a future you want to create. For it to be effective, though, you'll need to include another key element. Anthony Grant and Jane Greene described it in their book, *Coach Yourself*.

For it to be real, for it to be useful, you need to engage your emotions. It seems that there is something quite special about writing it down that allows you to reach into your deepest self.

So in your letter, be sure to include how your future self feels as you are successful and fulfilled - and how you might feel in the future if you didn't make the effort. Choose whatever format or outline feels right for you. Just remember to write for yourself, and not to impress someone else.

As an example, here's my own letter that I wrote in a Relationships Masters Academy class taught by Keith Ferrazzi, author of *Never Eat Alone*. (There are more examples at the end of this Guide.) I wrote it at a low point in my career, six years before I published *Working Out Loud*. The outline we used guided me towards articulating both what I wanted to happen as well as how it would feel if it did happen - or if I didn't try to make it happen.

My Dreams/Goals

To live in different countries for months at a time—Japan, France, Spain, Italy... (to name the top four). I would like to write (publicly—beyond my weekly work blog, which was at least a start) and to connect with an audience. I'd like to create! Books but also software and other projects. Things that people would use and love.

I'd like to do something genuinely helpful, particularly when it comes to education for kids who may not normally have access to it. (I benefitted from going to Regis High School, a free scholarship high school that changed my life.)

Oh, and financial independence...Actually, I don't mind the idea of having to work to earn a living. But the dream is more to be able to research/write/speak/present about ideas and connect with people. Perhaps ideal "jobs" are those of a Malcolm Gladwell, Clay Shirky or Seth Godin or Keith Ferrazzi.

Articulating my vision

I will become a champion of ideas. Who will write, speak, and connect. Within ten years. (But taking steps NOW!)

How will I know?

I will have authored a book or other notable content that more than twenty thousand people read. I will have been paid to speak. I can earn a living from writing, speaking, and (only some) consulting.

How will it feel if I don't try and if I do?

If I don't pursue my mission now, I will continue to live my status quo and...my sense of being special will fade. My frustration at not doing "more" will increase. My (constant) fear of having to earn enough for the next twenty-plus years will remain. My entire life will be colored by the two statements above.

If I do pursue my vision now, I will be increasingly happy and...my sense of peace and inner calm will be much, much greater. My energy and enthusiasm will be much higher—every day. My family will be happy because I'll be "present" and happy.

Now it's your turn. Remember to write from your future self *for* yourself, not to impress someone else. And don't feel constrained by the 20 minutes for writing your letter. Most people spend more time on it after the meeting. For this week, even a draft or even an outline will do. The discussion afterwards will almost certainly lead you to make changes later.

Discuss your letters (15 minutes)

Ask if anyone in the group is willing to read their letter. The purpose isn't to solicit approval or even feedback (although it might lead to an interesting conversation). It's just another way to voice your intention, to literally "put it out there" in a way that's still feels safe.

If you're not comfortable sharing your letter, that's okay. Instead, you can discuss whether the exercise was hard or easy for you, and why. But if even one of you is willing to read your letter, that gift of vulnerability can give others the confidence to keep working on articulating their own vision.

Another way to do this is to pick someone in your Circle, or another trusted friend or family member, and share your letter privately with them. (If you do, send them a copy ahead of time so they can read it without you watching them.)

Exercise: Share your aspiration (10 minutes)

Edit your online profile and add a short sentence related to your goal or your letter. If your goal is to move to a new city, consider adding something as simple as "Moving from New York to Tokyo." If you're exploring the idea of writing books for kids, you might add "Aspiring author of children's books."

Keep it short. Feel free to try different things till you come up with something you're comfortable with. Don't worry so much about getting it exactly right. You can easily change it as you learn and grow.

You can think it as leveraging an online platform to “voice your intention.” It’s a simple signal to others and yourself, one that increases the chances of connections related to your goal or aspiration.

Share what you each added to your profile. Saying it out loud in front of a trusted group helps you improve it or be more confident about it.

Checkout for Week 7 (5 minutes)

1. Schedule the next meeting.
2. Ask: “What will you do this week?”

Write down what you will do this week, and you will be even more likely to do it. You’ll increase the chances even further if you write down when and where you will do it.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I’m having trouble writing the letter. Is there another way?

Some of you may prefer visualizing your future self instead of writing about it. If so, try a vision board. It’s a collection of photos from magazines or other media that capture what your future self, your future life, will be like. Whatever medium you choose, remember: “For it to be real, for it to be useful, you need to engage your emotions.”

If you need to do less...

If writing the letter was too difficult just now, try just daydreaming about your future self in three years. That's far enough way to avoid sparking anxiety and close enough to feel practical. If you're happy and fulfilled, what is future you doing?

Try daydreaming without any judgment or planning. If any ideas pop into your head, you can write them down here. They may be the basis for a letter you write later.

If you want to do more...

Easy: Something you can do in less than 5 minutes

Take a look at your letter (or your daydreaming notes above) and reflect on your goal. Are they related at all? How? If not, why not?

You don't need to judge yourself or change your goal. Just think about different experiments of other small steps that are in line with what your future self was saying.

More challenging: Something you can do in less than 30 minutes

Share your letter with a trusted friend or family member. Send it by email so they can read it privately without you watching them. The purpose isn't to solicit approval or even feedback (although it might lead to an interesting conversation). It's just another way to voice your intention, to literally "put it out there" in a way that's still feels safe.

If you're stuck for what to say, you might write "As an exercise in personal development, I wrote a short letter from my future self. The instructions suggested sharing it with a trusted friend, and I thought of you. Thank you for being my trusted friend."

Another alternative is to send it to me at john.stepper@workingoutloud.com. I won't share it or write about it (unless you explicitly say that's okay). I would consider it a gift of vulnerability and will read ash one.

To read, listen to, or watch

Examples of Letters from Your Future Self

- “Make great things happen - Write a letter from your future self” by Maria Brophy - Link: mariabrophy.com/philosophy/make-great-things-happen-write-a-letter-your-your-future-self.html
- “A letter from your future self” by Share Ross - Link: tinybuddha.com/blog/letter-from-your-future-self-what-day-is-it-today
- “A letter from your future self” - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog/a-letter-from-my-future-self