



# Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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## Week 8: Become more systematic

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### What to expect this week

Having a system can make things easier. This week, you'll work with two simple systems, one for identifying new contributions and one for managing your relationship list. Then you'll practice empathy (again!) in a way that might surprise you - and will certainly distinguish you.

### Suggested agenda

Thing to do	Approx. time
1. Check-in	10 mins
2. Exercise: Your contribution checklist	20
3. Exercise: From ad hoc to systematic	10
4. Exercise: "And now, I'd like to introduce..."	15
5. Checkout for Week 8	5

#### 1. Check-in (10 minutes)

Talk for a few minutes each about whether you feel you're making progress. It may be new relationships, new opportunities, or just new ways of thinking about your goals. Focus on listening to each other.

#### 2. 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. 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 you've seen already to those that may take more effort and may also be more valuable.

1. *Offer recognition or attention:* Recognition and appreciation are “universal gifts.” It could be as simple as pressing a Like button to say “I see you” or “I’ve paid attention to what you said or did.” It could also be establish a connection with a person by following them on a social platform or subscribing to their updates.

2. *Show appreciation:* Gratitude is perhaps the most underutilized resource we have. It feels good to give it and receive it. Saying “thank you” or giving someone credit for their work can be quite powerful. Doing so publicly can be even more powerful.

3. *Share interesting or useful resources:* Sharing interesting content and the work of others you admire is a low-risk, low-cost contribution that can help others. You can send it directly (talking over coffee or sharing a link by email) or spread it on a social platform where you might @-mention specific people or groups.

4. *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.

5. *Answer a question:* This helps the person who asked the questions and anyone else who may benefit 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.

6. *Introduce people:* When done well, paying thoughtful attention to the reasons for connecting people and respect for their time, making introductions can provide access to new ideas, new people, and new opportunities. You might connect individuals, or you can introduce people to entire groups, such as online communities related to their goal.

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 work in progress:* By sharing what you're working on, you may inspire others who or doing similar work, or learn from them, or create the possibility for collaboration. Frame it in a way it feels less like “Look at me!” and more like “I thought you might be interested in this.”

9. *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. Remember to frame it as a contribution, offering up what you've learned in a way that's helpful to others.

10. *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.

Now for each category, see if you can list an example of a specific contribution related to your goal. See if you can help each other by suggesting different contributions you could make. Don't worry about offering anything now. This will serve as a handy checklist for future contributions, including later in today's meeting.

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10. \_\_\_\_\_

### **3. Exercise: From ad hoc to systematic (10 minutes)**

For some of you, your relationship list might be growing and becoming a bit unwieldy. This exercise will help. Instead of going through everyone on your relationship list each week, tracking two additional things for each person or organization will help you focus and ensure you don't lose touch.

- The last contribution I made and the date I made it.
- The date I'd like to make another contribution and what that might be.

For example, if you just made a connection with someone and you're not sure how much you want to invest in the relationship, you might set a reminder to make some kind of contribution within two weeks or so. I maintain this information on simple index cards, as described in the blog post "The best system for managing your network." (The link is at the end of this guide.)

*“I keep the cards sorted by the date for a next action. The stack is small enough that I can carry it with me in my backpack. If I interact with someone on my list, I’ll update the card. If a card gets full or messy, I’ll rewrite it with just the latest, most relevant information.*

*Each week, instead of going through everyone on my relationship list every time and thinking of a possible contribution, I only need to go through a few cards that already have helpful reminders. If I notice that someone hasn’t responded, I’ll think of other things I could do and record a date a bit farther out for a different kind of contribution.*

*Having a simple, convenient system and going through it regularly means I’ll rarely lose touch with someone in my network. And when I’m holding that one card for the one person or organization, it feels different than looking at a row in a crowded spreadsheet. For that moment, I’m focused just on them.”*

Now go through your own relationship list, and add the three new bits of information for each person. As you do it, each of you should share your own system for keeping track of people and contributions.

While some systems are better than others, there is no single ideal way. The best method is one that works for you; one that actually helps you to be mindful of people on it and to make progress deepening relationships; one that’s easy and perhaps even sparks joy. Going through your list of relationships should feel like a personal task, not an administrative one.

#### **4. Exercise: “And now, I’d like to introduce…” (15 minutes)**

Item number six on your contribution checklist includes introducing people. Yet I had been introducing people incorrectly my entire life, and I only realized it when I read a blog post by Anand Sanwal. (The link to his post is at the end of this guide.)

*“Single opt-in intros are lazy and disrespectful and make you a terrible person. Good people do double opt-in intros.”*

Here’s an example of what he means. Like the exercise in Week 4, this is an opportunity to practice empathy. Suppose you think Sally and Bob would benefit from knowing each other. You might think that a nice thing to do would be to send an email to the two of them to make the connection.

*“Hi, Sally and Bob.*

*You’re both doing such great work that I thought you should definitely know each other! I’ll leave it to you two to connect.*

*Thanks!  
John”*

That’s a “single opt-in intro.” When you send an email like this introducing people, even if it’s well-intentioned and only takes you a minute or two, you burden the recipients with an obligation they never asked for. Instead, the “double opt-in intro” has you first ask each person individually if you can make the introduction. That allows them to opt out (“Thanks, John, but I’m too busy now”), possibly saving everyone some time and potential embarrassment.

As you write your email, put yourself in the shoes of the recipient and think how you would feel if you were them. Be sure to provide three things:

- Context:* what motivated you to want to introduce the other person?
- Value:* how will they each benefit from the introduction?
- Opt-in:* ask for explicit permission before making the introduction.

You might object that neglecting the opt-out is such a common practice that it’s okay to do it. Or perhaps the recipients shouldn’t be so precious about their time. But if you truly intend the introduction to be a contribution, then the right thing to do is to ask each recipient first and make it easy for them to decline your offer. Even if they reject your introduction, they’ll appreciate your sensitivity and respect for their time. Practicing empathy is always a good thing to do.

Now scan your relationship list for an introduction you think would benefit both parties. Or, if you’re struggling, help each other with “someone you should know” so you can practice. Whomever your “Sally and Bob” are, write them an individual note now that includes context, value, and the choice to opt-in.

If you find this difficult, do the exercise with other members of your Circle, perhaps by introducing them to someone you think is related to their goal or would otherwise be helpful or interesting to know.

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**5. Checkout for Week 8 (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 will increase the chances even further if you write down when and where you will do it.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

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

No, you don't need to do all of this. The contribution checklist is simply a guide to help you think broadly about what you might offer. 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*.

## If you need to do less...

That was a lot this week. If you didn't make it through all the exercises, that's okay. Consider "touching the treadmill." Shrink the change so you can still make some kind of progress.

Here is an easy way you can do less this week and still move forward:

1. Read the contribution checklist.
2. Circle the contributions you are most comfortable with.
3. Go through your relationship list and offer something you circled.

Every time you make a contribution you are reinforcing your new habits and mindset. Whenever you're struggling to make a contribution, remember to touch the treadmill and offer one of the small and simple universal gifts.

## If you want to do more...

### Easy: Something you can do in less than 10 minutes

Read and reflect on the following article. How might this apply to your own contributions? To how you handle responses (or the lack thereof) from others?

“You can be a delicious, ripe peach and there will still be people in the world that hate peaches.”

Link: [workingoutloud.com/blog/can-delicious-ripe-peach-will-still-people-world-hate-peaches](http://workingoutloud.com/blog/can-delicious-ripe-peach-will-still-people-world-hate-peaches)



### More challenging: Something you can do in less than 15 minutes

Read the 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. (The link is at the end

of this guide.) Be sure to read the updates at the end, and see how many different kinds of contributions you can find from the contribution checklist.

## **To read, listen to, or watch**

### *Managing your relationship list*

- “The best system for managing your network” - Link: [workingoutloud.com/blog/the-best-system-for-managing-your-network](http://workingoutloud.com/blog/the-best-system-for-managing-your-network)

### *Making introductions*

- “PSA: Email Introduction Etiquette” by Anand Sanwal - Link: [cbinsights.com/blog/double-optin-intro/](http://cbinsights.com/blog/double-optin-intro/)
- “How to introduce people online” by John Stepper - Link: [workingoutloud.com/blog/how-to-introduce-people-online](http://workingoutloud.com/blog/how-to-introduce-people-online)

### *When you don't get a response*

- “You can be a delicious, ripe peach and there will still be people in the world that hate peaches.” - Link: [workingoutloud.com/blog/can-delicious-ripe-peach-will-still-people-world-hate-peaches](http://workingoutloud.com/blog/can-delicious-ripe-peach-will-still-people-world-hate-peaches)

### *The HR director I wish I knew*

- “The HR director I wish I knew” - Link: [workingoutloud.com/blog/the-hr-director-i-wish-i-knew](http://workingoutloud.com/blog/the-hr-director-i-wish-i-knew)