



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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Week 9: Explore more original contributions

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What to expect this week

This week you'll further expand your range of contributions by making more of your work and thinking visible. This may be new to some of you or make you uncomfortable. The exercises this week will help you take a step, allowing you to create something simple that's also generous and useful.

Suggested agenda

Thing to do	Approx. time
1. Check-in	10 mins
2. Exercise: Your Top Ten	20
3. Discuss ideas for original content	10
4. Group exercise: "The Dinner Table University"	15
5. Checkout for Week 9	5

1. Check-in (10 minutes)

"Were you able to make progress this week?" "What was your biggest challenge or biggest success?" Keep it positive and constructive, remembering to celebrate successes while offering help or support with difficulties.

2. Exercise: Your Top Ten (20 minutes)

If you're uncertain or uncomfortable about publishing your own content, this exercise will help you. For most people, whether or not you have a blog or other site, it can be difficult to know what to say or how to frame your opinions, ideas, and work in progress as contributions. One of the simplest ways to start is by crediting the work of other people.

“Your Top Ten” is a list of ten resources related to your goal that you found particularly useful or interesting - blogs, presentations, videos, and other self-published sites. It might be books or projects or even people. For example, your list might be titled “My Top 10 resources for 3D printing” or “Ten inventors who have inspired me ” or “Ten great books on innovation.”

Think for a moment about what the theme for Your Top Ten would be, and write the title here.

Title: _____

Now start your list. (Feel free to search the Internet or your intranet, or ask your Circle for help.) For each item on your list, “frame it as a contribution” by adding one or two sentences describing *why* you found it useful or interesting or how it might benefit others. Here’s an example:

“#1. *The Art of Possibility* by Ben Zander and Rosamund Stone Zander is one of the most inspiring books I’ve ever read. It changed my thinking and my approach, and made me a more optimistic, open person.”

Don’t worry yet about publishing your list. For now, there’s value in the searching, reading, and writing. That’s good practice in framing insights and interests as original contributions.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

3. Discuss ideas for original content (10 minutes)

Discuss the results of your Your Top Ten exercise and help each other improve your lists. Do each of you see the value in making your work visible? Are you comfortable with it?

4. Group exercise: “The Dinner Table University” (15 minutes)

Today, you’re in your ninth session together as a Circle. What have you learned? Maybe it’s something related to your goal, something that worked or didn’t work. Or maybe it’s about the approach you took, or ways you discovered other people and ideas to work with. It could be something you learned about relationships or about yourself.

Now’s a good time to think about it - and to share it.

Perhaps the best way to provide context for this exercise is via a a wonderful story told by Leo Buscaglia, a noted author and speaker, whose father instilled in him a sense of curiosity and a habit for learning that lasted his entire life. (A link to a version of his story is at the end of this guide.)

Leo’s father was taken from school at an early age to work in a factory, and he was determined that none of his children would be denied an education.

“Papa believed that the greatest sin was to go to bed at night as ignorant as when we awakened. To ensure that none of his children ever fell into the trap of

complacency, Papa insisted that we learn at least one new thing each day. And dinner time seemed the perfect forum for sharing what we had learned that day. Naturally, as children, we thought this was crazy.”

Not having an answer wasn't an option. So before dinner, the children would scramble to come up with *something* they could offer. When it was their turn, each child's contribution was carefully examined and considered no matter how trivial it was.

“Without being aware of it, our family was growing together, sharing experiences and participating in one another's education. And by looking at us, listening to us, respecting our input, affirming our value, giving us a sense of dignity, Papa was unquestionably our most influential teacher.

‘How long we live is limited,’ he said, “but how much we learn is not. What we learn is what we are.” Papa's technique has served me well all my life.”

As you reflect on your experience so far, pretend Leo's father is with you in your Circle, asking each of you, “What have you learned?” Perhaps it's related to your goal, something that worked or didn't work. Or maybe it's about the approach you took, or ways you discovered other people and ideas to work with. It could be you learned something about relationships or something about yourself.

Write it down now and share it with your Circle. Feel free to talk openly among the group as you do. You might consider sharing it online, too.

5. Checkout for Week 9 (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.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I'm not comfortable with the idea of making my work visible.

That's a common and completely natural feeling. Yet as with many skills you may try and develop, you will become more comfortable with practice over time.

The benefits are worth the effort. When you make your work visible, you amplify who you are and what you do, you extend your reach, you expand your set of possible contributions and how to offer them, and the feedback on your work helps you get better faster.

Q: What should I actually do? Start a blog? A Facebook page? Make videos?

The answer depends on you, your content, the people you want in your network, and even the tools themselves. A good way to start is to look at people who are relevant to your goal and see what they're doing. Go ahead and read blogs, Like Facebook pages, and watch videos related to your purpose. That will help you discover what you think is good as well as what you don't like. Then emulate the work of people you admire. Over time, you'll gradually develop your own style.

If you're just beginning to consider original content, focus on reading and writing drafts for yourself instead of publishing mechanics. When you feel you're ready, there are links to helpful articles about setting up a blog or Facebook page at the end of this guide.

Q: I don't like writing and don't think I'm good at it. What should I do?

Writing, like presenting or making videos or doing pretty much anything, is a learnable skill. It just takes practice and feedback. Writing in particular is still the dominant medium on the Internet. Here's a quote from management expert Peter Drucker that summarizes how important it is:

“As soon as you move one step up from the bottom, your effectiveness depends on your ability to reach others through the written or spoken word. And the further away your job is from manual work, the larger the organization of which you are an employee, the more important it will be that you know how to convey

your thoughts in writing or speaking. In the very large organization, whether it is the government, the large business corporation, or the army, this ability to express oneself is perhaps the most important of all the skills a man or woman can possess.”

Another management expert, Tom Peters, described writing as “a timeless and powerful skill.” Even if you don’t think you’re good at it now, getting better at communicating in any medium is one of the best things you can do for your career. As Fred Wilson, the venture capitalist who developed a habit of blogging every day, noted, “The investment I’ve made in my communication skills over the past eight years is paying huge dividends for me now.”

If you need to do less...

To help you become more comfortable with the idea of original content, read the story of Gloria Mercer in the article, “Narrating our work,” by Jane Bozarth. (The link is at the end of this guide, along with other resources related to making your work visible.)

Gloria was retired and had a simple goal related to her health and a new hobby. By making her work visible, she accelerated her learning, built a small community, and inspired the formation of two small businesses. Here’s an excerpt from the article:

“There are so many lessons to glean from this case. They include the social aspect of publishing your learning, getting feedback and encouragement from friends and helping other friends as they learn; the fact that enthusiasm can be contagious; the willingness to share and not keep everything to yourself; the real way that knowledge is shared; the organic ways that networks grow.

And more to be learned here: that learning often spawns the desire for additional learning...the ways in which social technologies can accelerate learning and give it geographic reach; and the value of a community truly committed to improving practice.”

After you read the article, reflect on your own goal. How might you make your learning visible in a way that could help others? Write down a few ideas here.

If you want to do more...

Easy: Something you can do in less than 10 minutes

Ira Glass is the producer of “This American Life” on radio. It’s one of my favorite shows, and is loved by millions of people. So I was surprised when I saw him in an interview describing how he came to be so good at what he does: “I took longer to figure out how to do this than anybody I ever met.”

Watch “Ira Glass on Storytelling” (there’s a link at the end of this guide). Pay special attention to his humble start and how he gradually got better over time. Listen to his self-criticisms. Then listen to his advice at the end. How might it apply to you? How might you begin?

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

In Your Top Ten exercise, you wrote a sentence or two about each person or piece of work on your list. But you don’t need to stop there. You could turn that list of ten items into ten individual profiles, each one offering more information. You could include what you liked and why, how you discovered it, what happened as a result.

For example, last week, there was an exercise in this section to read the blog post, “[The HR director I wish I knew.](#)” That post was a profile. (The link is at the end of this guide.) Read it now to see how I tried to “frame it as a contribution” and what that contribution led to - even with a few hours of writing it!

Now look at Your Top Ten exercise and choose your favorite item from it. How might you expand on it and turn it into a profile? Write a few notes here.

To read, listen to, or watch

“The Dinner Table University”

- “Our Dinner Table University” - Link: unprovenpervert.blogspot.com/2008/05/our-dinner-table-university-by-leo.html
- “The Dinner Table University” - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog//the-dinner-table-university

Making your work visible: a wide range of examples

- “Writing” by Fred Wilson - Link: avc.com/2011/11/writing/
- “Narrating our work” by Jane Bozarth - Link: learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/984
- *Show Your Work: The Payoffs and How-To’s of Working Out Loud*, by Jane Bozarth

- *Show Your Work!: 10 Ways to Share Your Creativity and Get Discovered*, by Austin Kleon
- *Working Out Loud: For a Better Career and Life*, by John Stepper

Places to put original work

- en.support.wordpress.com/five-step-blog-setup/
- en.support.wordpress.com/five-step-website-setup/
- facebook.com/business/learn/set-up-facebook-page
- linkedin.com/pulse/20140326191638-235001-how-to-write-your-first-blog-post-on-the-linkedin-publishing-platform

If you want to do more...

- Video: Ira Glass on Storytelling - Link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2wLP0izeJE
- “The HR director I wish I knew” - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog/the-hr-director-i-wish-i-knew