



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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Week 1: Choose a simple goal & list people related to it

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What to expect this week

In your first week, you'll get to know your other Circle members, and each of you will pick your own individual goal. Then you'll take your first step towards that goal by creating a "relationship list." You may feel uncertain in the beginning - about your goal or about the steps you'll take in this process - but over the 12 weeks a sense of trust develops among people in your Circle, helping you feel more encouraged and empowered.

Suggested agenda

There is a structured agenda each week, but the minutes allocated for topics are just suggestions. Use more or less time as the group needs, but be sure to keep things moving so you can do all the exercises. Since the time can go by quickly, it's good to have someone act as a timekeeper and help the group be mindful of the agenda.

Avoid the trap of spending all the time in discussion and not leaving sufficient time to actually taking a step. If you want more time for discussion, you can choose to do the exercises ahead of your Circle meeting. Whatever you decide, be sure to decide as a group.

Thing to do	Approx. time
1. Start with why	10 mins
2. Exercise: Your goal for the next 12 weeks	15
3. Share your goals	10
4. Exercise: Create your first relationship list	10
5. Discuss your lists	10
6. Checkout for Week 1	5

1. Start with why (10 minutes)

Each of you should speak for a few minutes on why you joined a Working Out Loud Circle. Was it a desire for something more? A reaction to an event at work or in your life? Avoid the typical exchange of where you work and your corporate title. Instead, make it personal, and focus on what motivated you.

Whether it's an aspiration or a reaction to something negative, what's your why?

Here are some real examples of why people and groups start Circles. (Links to their stories are at the end of this guide.)

- Vincent, an engineer in Germany, wanted to “improve as a professional and a person.”
- Julia was interested in meeting people who shared her interests.
- Mari felt her world was a bit small and wanted a way to make it bigger somehow.
- Managers at one manufacturing company wanted to explore new ways to communicate and engage their organization.
- One organization started to spread Circles after yet another re-organizations left people “exhausted by change and uncertain about the future.”
- A manufacturing company wanted to help employees make their work visible and collaborate more.
- Eight companies in Germany worked together on a wide range of issues from on-boarding new employees and increasing diversity to digital transformation and innovation to leadership development.

2. Exercise: Your goal for the next 12 weeks (15 minutes)

For many people, choosing a goal can be a challenge. *Should my goal be big or small? A work goal or a personal goal? Can I have more than one?* The simple questions below can help you choose an appropriate goal for your Circle. If you think you already have a goal in mind, then use the questions to test its suitability for this process and possibly refine it.

- “Do you care about it?”
- “Can you make progress towards it in 12 weeks?”
- “Is it something other people can help you with?”
- “Can you frame it as a learning or exploration goal?”

“Do you care about it?”

Change can be difficult, so you want to tap into your intrinsic motivators as much as you can. Those motivators include autonomy, mastery, and purpose - your need for control, for competence and learning, and for a feeling of connection - to others and to a sense of purpose.

When you think of your goal, pay attention to how you feel. If you don't care about it now, then you won't care enough to do the exercises and attend your Circle meetings, so choose something else. Choosing a goal you genuinely care about will make it easier to develop the habit and mindset of Working Out Loud, which you can apply to any goal.

“Can you make progress towards it in 12 weeks?”

Ambition can be good, though typically not when you’re trying to change your habits. (Consider how many New Year’s Resolutions are broken in January.) If your goal is too ambitious, merely thinking of it can tend to paralyze you, and progress towards it will be too slow to notice during the time you’re in your peer support group. If that’s the case, consider re-framing your goal into more achievable chunks or sub-goals.

“Is it something other people can help you with?”

Deepening relationships is at the heart of Working Out Loud. So you want to select a goal that depends on relationships giving you access to knowledge and opportunities you might not have otherwise. If your goal seems like something you would accomplish on your own - “I will build an app” or “I will get promoted” - try to reframe it in a way such that relationships can help you. For example, “I want to learn from others who have already accomplished what I would like to do.”

“Can you frame it as a learning or exploration goal?”

If you can frame what you’re trying to do in terms of learning and exploration, you’ll be more likely to adopt a growth mindset, to try new things, to be open to new people and possibilities. Especially in your first Circle, consider goals that start with one of these phrases:

“I would like to be better at...”

“I would like to learn more about...”

“I would like to know more people who...”

Framed this way, you’ll more readily tap into your need for mastery and purpose. In addition to making progress towards your goal, you’ll also be doing something else: developing your sense of self-efficacy. That’s the feeling that you have the ability to improve whatever situation you’re in - to get more out of work and life if you want to. The more you practice Working Out Loud, the stronger that feeling becomes. Here are the kinds of goals people typically choose in a Circle:

- I want to learn more about something I care about (be as specific as you can)
- I would like to explore possibilities in a new area
- I want to meet people with similar interests
- I want to get better at what I do for a living
- I would like to find a new role
- I would like to get more recognition at my current role

Now write down your own goal for the next 12 weeks. Keep it to just a sentence or two.

In the next 12 weeks, I want to:

3. Share your goals (10 minutes)

Take turns sharing your goal. Be sure to include your motivation for choosing this particular one. You can ask each other questions, but be sure everyone gets to speak while leaving enough time for the remaining exercises.

4. Exercise: Create your first relationship list (10 minutes)

For this exercise, try to think of 10 people related to your goal. (You can use your phone or computer in the meeting to play Internet detective or to search your intranet at work.) If you think of a role but can't yet find the name, that's okay. Just write down whatever information you have.

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

If you're struggling to come up with names, here are some people you might include:

- People who have done something similar to what you're trying to do
- People inside your company whose interests or role relate to your goal
- People who have written about something related to your goal
- Members of your Circle

5. Discuss your lists (10 minutes)

Talk about the kinds of people you put on your list, and see if you can offer suggestions to each other. People are often amazed at how many good suggestions come from right within their Circle (There's no need for each of you to share your entire list. The goal of the discussion is to ensure everyone understands how to build one.)

6. Checkout for Week 1 (5 minutes)

At the end of each session, you'll follow a simple process to close the meeting. At the end of Week 1, this includes each person confirming they will commit to participating in the next 11 meetings. That's important to establish trust between members of the Circle. If anyone decides they can't make that commitment, they don't need to specify a reason. They can simply send the group a short note and bow out gracefully.

1. Talk about the commitment for the next 11 weeks.
2. Exchange email addresses and phone numbers.
3. Talk about how you would prefer to communicate online in between meetings (e.g., email, group text, a private online group).
4. Confirm the time and place for the next meeting.

Frequently Asked Questions

Here are some common questions people have after their first Circle meeting. You can ask questions yourself in the private Working Out Loud community on Facebook. (The link is at the end of this guide.)

Q: What if I don't know my goal?

Abraham Maslow, the psychologist famous for defining our hierarchy of needs, said, "It isn't normal to know what we want. It is a rare and difficult psychological achievement." If your goal isn't clear, consider one of the six common goals listed above. Your goal doesn't necessarily have to be a career goal. It could be anything you care about and want to get better at, even your favorite hobby or raising money for a good cause.

The key for the next twelve weeks isn't so much that you pick the One Best Goal. What's important is that you practice working in a more open, connected way that helps you build relationships. Having that experience and developing the habit of Working Out Loud will better equip you to pursue any goal in the future.

Q: What if I pick the wrong goal?

There is no right or wrong when it comes to goals, and people often do change their goal as they go through the twelve weeks. A good goal is clear, something you care about, and is something you can make meaningful progress towards in your Circle. Some people are especially ambitious and try to pick more than one goal. That can work, but focus and practice are more important than ambition. If you find yourself overwhelmed at all, make your goal less ambitious and more fun.

If you want to do more...

Each guide will include some extra exercises you can do before the next Circle meeting.

Easy: Something you can do right now in less than 5 minutes

Scan your list for someone you like but haven't interacted with in some time. (You can also choose a friend or relative.) Send them a short text or email to say "I've been thinking of you and hope you're well." Think of how you would feel if you received such a message.

More challenging: Something you can do in less than 10 minutes

If you don't have a Twitter account already, create a basic one now at twitter.com. Even if you never tweet yourself, having an account is a tremendous asset in purposeful discovery. It allows you to learn about and interact with a wider range of people than was ever possible before. You can pick a photo and add other details later. If you already have an account, take a moment to scan your Twitter stream or search for some people on your list.

To read, listen to, or watch

Real stories of why people and groups form Circles

- "The engineer who Works Out Loud" - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog//the-engineer-who-works-out-loud
- "Julia's story: 'Payback is unpredictable and so is the currency.'" - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog//julias-story-payback-is-unpredictable-and-so-is-the-currency
- "You already made my world bigger" - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog//you-already-made-my-world-bigger
- "The manager who works out loud" - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog//the-manager-who-works-out-loud
- "Completely unofficial: grass-roots WOL in a large organisation" - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog//completely-unofficial-grass-roots-wol-in-a-large-organisation
- "If your innovation program isn't producing much innovation" - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog//if-your-innovation-program-isnt-producing-much-innovation
- "8 companies in Germany" - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog//7-companies-in-germany

On building relationships:

- "The best approach to building relationships" - Link: linkedin.com/pulse/best-approach-building-relationships-john-stepper

Ways to ask a question or find an answer

- Join the private WOL Community on Facebook: facebook.com/groups/workingoutloud/
- Read the FAQ: workingoutloud.com/faq/
- Send me email: john.stepper@workingoutloud.com