



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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Week 2: Offer your first contributions

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For more information, including a customizable version of the Circle Guides for your organization, contact john.stepper@workingoutloud.com.

What to expect this week

In Week 2, you'll make simple contributions to people on your relationship list, deepening relationships in a small way. Just reviewing the list will further attune your attention to your goal, and the small steps you take each week will gradually increase your sense of empowerment.

Suggested Agenda for Week 2	
1. Check-in	10 mins
2. Exercise: Intimacy levels	5
3. Exercise: Make your first contributions	20
4. Discuss your contributions.	20
5. Voice your intention	5

1. Check-in (10 minutes)

A check-in is a quick way for each person to participate right at the start of each meeting, and to let everyone know something relevant for this particular session. It could be sharing progress you made, a challenge you experienced, or how you're feeling coming into the meeting.

Each week, the Circle Guide will offer a suggested prompt or question. This week, your suggested check-in question is simply, "What happened since the last meeting?" For example, did you think about your goal or your list at all?

Check-ins aren't meant to be long discussions. (You may need your Timekeeper to pay extra attention so you limit it to no more than 10 minutes.) There's also no judgment. The check-in is simply an opportunity for each person to be present and engage before doing the first exercise.

2. Exercise: Intimacy levels (5 minutes)

Before you offer a contribution to someone, it helps to be mindful that relationships in your network differ in terms of the depth of the connection. For example, the email you send to a friend asking for help should be different from the request you send to a complete stranger. Yet as obvious as that is, we often get it wrong. Sometimes, our initial outreach to someone we don't know can feel like "too much, too soon," or our approach to a trusted colleague can feel impersonal.

To help be mindful of the different levels of intimacy, here's a simple scale from one to five:

1. The person doesn't know you exist.
2. You're connected in some way. (e.g., you follow them online)
3. You've had one or more interactions.
4. You've collaborated, even in a small way.
5. You regularly interact, exchange ideas, and help each other.



For this quick exercise, go through your relationship list that you created in Week 1, and jot down your intimacy level for each person.

As you do, keep in mind that the objective isn't to get to level five with everyone. You're simply trying to deepen some of your relationships, and to do so with contributions that are appropriate given the level of trust and intimacy with a particular person.

3. Exercise: Making your first contributions (20 minutes)

Your first contribution is to offer something that everyone has and that everyone wants: *attention*.

You'll start by searching the Internet (or the intranet at work) for each individual on your list, looking for some kind of online presence they may have. Look for things like a Twitter account, a blog, an intranet profile, or some other online content they've created.

If you find something, the next step is to offer attention. For example, if you both have a Twitter account or intranet profile, follow them there.¹ If you see a person publishes on LinkedIn, or the intranet, or has their own website, start reading. If you like what you find, let them know by hitting a Like button. If you want to keep receiving updates, look for a Follow button or the ability to subscribe by email.

You don't have to write a comment or message. For now, especially for people you don't know, you're just looking for an unobtrusive way to move the relationship from "the person doesn't know I exist" to "they may have seen my name." But even for people you know well, pressing a Follow or Like button - as simple as that is - signals to the other person that "I see you" and "I care about what you have to say."



For each person on your list, include where you found them and offer attention there. (If you don't find an online presence for someone, simply write "Nothing yet.")

1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____

¹ Note that following someone on Twitter or your intranet doesn't require the other person to do anything, unlike Facebook or LinkedIn which impose the burden of deciding whether or not to accept a request. That's one reason why Twitter and your intranet are often the simplest and most effective places to take a first step in forming a connection.

- 8. _____
- 9. _____
- 10. _____
- 11. _____
- 12. _____

4. Discuss your contributions (20 minutes)

Before you start your discussion, take a moment and read The Generosity Test at the end of this week’s guide. It will only take 2 to 3 minutes.



Please read it now.



Once you’re finished, discuss how each of you did on the test. Talk about the simple contributions you made in the previous exercise. How did they *feel*? Were you able to offer attention without any strings attached, any expectations? How about when you help each other in your Circle? Is that different somehow?

5. Voice your intention (5 minutes)

Each week you’ll end your meeting with two simple steps: confirming logistics for your next meeting and voicing what you intend to do between now and then. The question makes each person mindful of what’s coming up. A brief answer is enough, perhaps a minute or less. This coming week, for example, you might read content from some of the people on your list, make a few more contributions, or do the additional exercises on the next page.

1. Schedule the next meeting.
2. Ask yourself: “What will I do before the next meeting?”

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



Before the next meeting, I will:

FINAL THOUGHT

“The key to real generosity is to be detached from the outcomes. Go ahead and hold the door open without any expectation of a thank you. Make a helpful introduction. Offer some assistance without any mental strings attached.

Your small gifts, freely given over the course of your network, will deepen relationships and unlock access to possibilities.”

- [linkedin.com/pulse/generosity-test-john-stepper/](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/generosity-test-john-stepper/)

If you want to do more...

Easy: Something you can do in less than 10 minutes

Each day we pass people by without recognizing them. Perhaps it's the person cleaning the restroom, doing the landscaping, or providing some other service we tend to take for granted. Today, as you see someone you would normally pass by, offer them attention by greeting them or thanking them for their work. As you do this, pay special attention to how you feel. Notice the expression on the other person's face, and imagine how they might be feeling.

The article below offers an example. Since I wrote it, I found that offering attention to people in this way sparks moments of joy throughout my day. Working Out Loud is a practice. By beginning with small steps like offering attention and recognition, you gradually build a capability and a mindset of deepening relationships through generosity. Even mundane interactions are opportunities to practice offering these gifts.

"The Corporate Bathroom Test"

workingoutloud.com/blog/the-corporate-bathroom-test

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

Create an account on LinkedIn. (If you're in Germany, you might also choose Xing, a similar platform that's popular there.) For now, just add a photo and one place you've worked. You can add more later. If you already have an account, take a minute to install the app on your phone and review your profile. If you're part of an organization that uses an enterprise social network (like Jive or Yammer or Connections), then use the same photo to update that profile too.

To read, listen to, or watch

"Guided mastery at work"

workingoutloud.com/blog/guided-mastery-at-work

Working Out Loud: For a Better Career and Life

Chapter 5 - Building Relationships

Chapter 6 - Leading with Generosity

Chapter 11 - Your First Contributions

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is it better to do the exercises during the meeting or in between meetings?

The answer is **do whatever increases the chances of you actually doing the exercises**. Think of your Circle meetings as working meetings. Doing the exercises quietly for a few minutes is totally appropriate. Some Circles feel it's best to use the time together for discussion and to do the exercises outside of the meetings. That's great - unless one or more of you never get to the exercises. Be sure to decide as a group.

Q: I'm not clear how these exercises relate to my goal. What am I missing?

You might think of what you're doing in a Circle as developing a Personal Learning Network (PLN) related to your goal. You're not just "building your network," you're doing so in a purposeful and systematic way. The people are specifically related to your goal, and your contributions are related to your goal.

The basic premise is that you build trust and deepen relationships based on a range of contributions over time. The deeper the relationship, the more likely you are to exchange information and collaborate, and thus the greater access you'll have to information, ideas, and opportunities.

THE GENEROSITY TEST

[linkedin.com/pulse/generosity-test-john-stepper/](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/generosity-test-john-stepper/)

It's such a simple test, and yet it's one that I need to keep taking. The more I practice, the more it applies to things I do throughout the day, and throughout my life. If you're like me, you might be disturbed by the results.

You can take the Generosity Test by imagining it in your head or, even better, actually doing it later today:

The Generosity Test: Hold the door open for someone you don't know.

As you do this, pay close attention before, during, and after. Notice what you're thinking the moment you decide to do it, the way you do it, and how you feel after you've done it.

“After you!”

Here's what happens when I do this exercise:

1. I get a good feeling when I decide to open the door. *I'm about to do something nice.*
2. I make eye contact with the other person or say something to make sure they see me opening the door for them. *After you!*
3. When they thank me, I get another surge of good feeling. If they don't, however, I get irritated, even angry. *How rude!*

It took me a while before I recognized that I wasn't really opening the door for the other person. I was opening it for myself and for those positive emotions I would experience. The person didn't consent to participate in my little feel-good exercise. For all I know, they could be deep in thought or otherwise not in a frame of mind to appreciate or even notice my gesture.

Reciprocity: For better & for worse

In Robert Cialdini's oft-cited book, *Influence*, he writes about how people are wired to reciprocate and how you can use that to influence people to do things. Charities, for example, often include a small token like address labels in their mailed requests for a donation. That triggers a sense of obligation and makes it more likely you'll do something in return.

It works. Even social media-savvy people like Guy Kawasaki reference Cialdini's work and advise you to "invoke reciprocity":

“When you help someone with something, and they say thank you, say “I know you would do the same for me.” Most people would then be obligated to return the favor at this point.”

But how does that *feel*? Does it produce sustainable results or does it only work once? After your first batch of free address labels or the overt mention of returning the favor, you get the idea that you're being manipulated or that the other person is keeping score.

A better approach to giving

Reid Hoffman, the co-founder of LinkedIn, offers different advice. In his book, *The Start-Up of You*, he had “a theory of small gifts” and the role they play in building relationships.

THE GENEROSITY TEST

"It seems counterintuitive, but the more altruistic your attitude, the more benefits you will gain from the relationship. If you insist on a quid pro quo every time you help others, you will have a much narrower network and a more limited set of opportunities. Conversely, if you set out to help others...simply because you think it's the right thing to do, you will rapidly reinforce your own reputation and expand your universe of possibilities."

Small gifts, freely given, are like magic for both parties. For the giver, the contributions feel authentic and genuine because there are no strings attached. It's easier to give because you're not manipulating or promoting, you're being helpful. The receiver, sensing this, isn't burdened by the weight of an obligation, and the gift no longer feels like an unwanted transaction.

Importantly, when you offer things freely, there is still a benefit. But it isn't on an individual basis - "I did this for you and you'll pay me back." ***It's over the course of your network.*** Across the set of relationships in your network, the tendency to reciprocate will yield an aggregate benefit for the person who gives and eliminates the need to keep score.

The Zen of Holding The Door Open

So how did you do on the Generosity Test? What are your true motives in holding the door, and would you be annoyed if you didn't get the response you expected?

If your answers aren't as noble as you would like, that's okay. Offering small gifts freely takes practice. That's why there are so many contribution exercises in Working Out Loud Circles. The repeated practice helps you develop new habits and a new mindset regarding how you make contributions.

The key to real generosity is to be detached from the outcomes. Go ahead and hold the door open without any expectation of a thank you. Make a helpful introduction. Offer some assistance without any mental strings attached.

Your small gifts, freely given over the course of your network, will deepen relationships and unlock access to possibilities.