



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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Week 4: Earn someone else's attention

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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

How you present your contribution can make all the difference. This week, you'll practice refining the way you write your messages and how you approach people in general. These exercises will make your contributions feel more personal and valuable, and more likely to be effective.

Suggested Agenda for Week 4	
1. Check-in	10 mins
2. Group exercise: The Inbox Empathy game	15
3. Exercise: Earn someone else's attention	20
4. Discuss your contributions & how you made them	10
5. Voice your intention	5

1. Check-in (10 minutes)

How is it going for each of you? How are each of you feeling about the process and your progress so far? If someone is struggling, it's okay to spend more time helping them work through it. You'll all learn from it and you can help each other manage the remaining time, even if that means deferring certain topics.

As you listen to the others, try your best to put yourselves in their shoes. You don't need to "fix" anything at this point. Simply paying attention and actively listening can be helpful.

2. Group exercise: The Inbox Empathy game (15 minutes)

You can find examples of empathy - and the lack of it - in your email inbox. The inspiration for this exercise appeared more than 80 years ago in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*:

"If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from that person's angle as well as from your own.

That is so simple, so obvious, that anyone ought to see the truth of it at a glance; yet 90 percent of the people on this earth ignore it 90 percent of the time. An example? Look at the letters that come across your desk tomorrow morning, and you will find that most of them violate this important canon of common sense."

For example, here's an actual message I received from a professional salesperson. How would you feel if you got a message like this? Eager to respond or a bit irritated?

"Did you get my last e-mail? I wanted to follow up on a couple of attempts to connect with you. "

Messages like these are common. People commonly offer to pick your brain or invoke reciprocity by buying you coffee in exchange for information. They're not bad people and those aren't *terrible* things to do. It's just that they could elicit a better response if they took a bit more time to think of how the other person would feel when they read their message. That's empathy.



Take a look at these other real examples below. Spend 5 minutes as a group discussing how you would feel if you received these messages, and what the lack of empathy might be.

Actual Email Text	Lack of Empathy
"I'd love to take you to lunch and pick your brain. Any chance you're free one day over the next two weeks?"	
"Do you have time to talk or meet up? I would value the opportunity for a twenty-minute meeting."	
"Let me know, as I have some time over the next few days."	

In general, being mindful of the following three questions can fundamentally change how you approach someone.

- *What would my reaction be if I were the other person?*
- *Why should she care?*
- *Why am I doing this?*

The first question makes you more mindful of the words you use. The second one helps you focus on the value to the the recipient instead of the value to you. The third question helps you examine your motives and give you the chance to rethink them if necessary.

The three questions can change the tone of your communications. When you take the other person's perspective, and frame your contribution as a genuine gift, it liberates you from the fear of being pushy or being rejected. Examining your motives also helps you avoid being manipulative, insincere, or otherwise doing something you're uncomfortable with. If the salespeople who sent me the above messages had asked themselves the three questions, they would have written their emails differently and increased the chances of a positive response.



As a group, spend the next few minutes going through your own email inboxes looking for examples of emails that show a distinct lack of empathy. When you find one, share it, and explain why it irritates you instead of earning your attention. What do your other Circle members think?

Try to come up with five examples.

Example	Lack of Empathy

3. Exercise: Earn someone else’s attention (20 minutes)

In this exercise, you’ll practice offering another kind of simple contribution: sharing a resource that you’ve found interesting or useful. Yet for sharing to feel like contribution - for your messages to be read and appreciated - you need to practice. The only tool or technique you’ll really need is (as you may have guessed) empathy.

Empathy is the key to earning someone’s attention: *What will the other person be thinking as she reads this?* As you keep that in mind, you’ll want your messages to have three elements:

- Appreciation: Demonstrate that you’ve paid attention to the recipient.
- Context: Mention why you thought of them specifically in relation to what you’re sharing.
- Value: Describe the potential benefit to them.

Your message needn’t be long, but it should be personal and authentic. For example, let’s say I saw a video that I really found useful, and I thought of someone who might also find it useful. First, I put myself in the other person’s shoes as I’m writing it, and I anticipate the questions they might have: “Who is this person? Why are they sending this to me? What am I supposed to do with it?” Here’s an example.

EXAMPLE OF SHARING A USEFUL RESOURCE

Subject: A 2-minute video you might find useful

Hi, Lisa.

I saw your tweet about starting a WOL Circle in your organization. That’s excellent!

So I thought you might find this 2-minute video helpful. It’s from a recent WOL event at a company in Germany. It gives you an idea of what a talk & workshop might look like, and how you might accelerate the spread of Circles.

https://www.zf.com/corporate/en_de/magazine/magazin_artikel_viewpage_22268776.html

Have a great week!
John



Now it's your turn. Choose an article, book, video, TED talk, or other resource you would like to share and list it here.



Now practice asking yourself *For whom might this be a contribution?* Try to list three people.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



The last step is to send a link to your resource via any platform you prefer - e-mail, text, Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn. The less intimate the relationship, the less invasive the channel you should use. For example, @-mentions on Twitter or your corporate intranet are neither an intrusion nor a burden, whereas a text message can be seen as both. (Email is in between the two.) Share whatever resource you selected with at least one of the people you just listed.

4. Discuss your contributions & how you made them (10 minutes)

Talk about your contributions. What did you choose to offer and to whom? How did you earn someone's attention?

The other people in your Circle will be very good at detecting a lack of empathy. By helping each other think of what to share and how to share it, everyone can expand their understanding of contributions, and become a bit more comfortable incorporating empathy into their communications.

5. Voice your intention (5 minutes)

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

Try to "work the list" (reviewing your relationship list) at least once this week, and make one or more contributions. Don't think of it as extra work but as a chance to practice generosity and empathy.

Write down what you will do this week, and share it with your Circle.

FINAL THOUGHT

“The real reason you Work Out Loud is that deeper relationships help you be more effective and give you access to more ideas and opportunities. Each step you take in building those relationships helps you feel more empowered and connected, tapping into your intrinsic motivation.”

- workingoutloud.com/blog/working-out-loud-over-email-or-coffee

If you need to do less..

If you or other members of your Circle are finding it difficult to do all the exercises, then try this one thing now: send me an email at john.stepper@workingoutloud.com.

You can share your goal, or what you think of your Circle experience so far, or simply say hello. Whatever you write, just imagine what I might be thinking as I read your message. Put yourself in my shoes, and you'll be practicing empathy.

If you want to do more..

Easy: Something you can do in less than 5 minutes

Look at the sample letter I included above in the exercise, “Earn someone else’s attention.” the one for sharing a useful resource. What do you like or not like about it? How would you have written it?

Keep in mind that empathy in communications is not meant to be a technique or trick to get someone to respond to you. It’s a way for you to genuinely offer something in a way that’s easy for someone to receive.

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

Take the Empathy Test. Read the post below and follow the instructions there.

“The Empathy Test”

workingoutloud.com/blog/the-empathy-test

Once you’ve finished taking the test, think of how it applies to your reactions to emails you get, or when someone doesn’t respond, or to other behavior that you find challenging or irritating.

To read, listen to, or watch

“Six ways to write emails that don’t make people silently resent you” by Jocelyn K. Gleib

fastcompany.com/3068741/six-ways-to-write-emails-that-dont-make-people-silently-resent-you

“Working Out Loud over email or coffee”

workingoutloud.com/blog/working-out-loud-over-email-or-coffee

“When someone doesn’t respond to you”

workingoutloud.com/blog/when-someone-doesnt-respond-to-you

Working Out Loud: For a Better Career and Life

Chapter 15 - How to Approach People

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: "Earning someone's attention" feels fake.

If it feels fake or inauthentic, stop. Only share something you think is a genuine contribution that might be helpful or interesting to the other person. If you feel like it's a trick, manipulation, or stealthy request for a favor, don't send it.

Q: I assumed Working Out Loud meant using social media, but these exercises referred to email a lot. Why?

Working Out Loud doesn't *require* you to use social media. It helps, but you could use traditional channels - even talking over coffee - to share your work in a way that helps others. Also, remember that email is still the predominant means of communicating in most organizations.

There are many benefits to using social platforms, whether it's your social intranet at work or Twitter, LinkedIn, and the many other public platforms. Sharing your work there amplifies who you are and what you do, extends your reach, and expands your set of contributions and how you can offer them. But if those things scare you off, shrink the change and start by using what you're comfortable with. That way you're more likely to make progress. Over time, framing your goals in terms of other people and contributions you can make will become a habit.

Q: But what if my contributions aren't good enough?

Although your early original contributions may not meet your aspirations, whether they are "good enough" depends more on how they're offered and the expectations around them. If I pay two thousand dollars for a vase from a store, I expect a certain level of craftsmanship. If my friend is learning to make pottery and offers me one of his first creations as a gift, I'll cherish it no matter how misshapen it may be.

Q: I sent something and the person didn't even respond. How rude!

When someone doesn't respond, it can be natural to invent a negative story about why they didn't. Instead, practice assuming the best of the person - they're simply busy or may not have even seen it. Don't badger them - "Did you get my email?!" Simply offer a different contribution in the future.

Again, think of the Generosity Test. If the only reason you're being generous is to receive a positive response, that's not a contribution - it's an obligation.