



# Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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## Week 1: Attune your attention

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For more information, including a customizable version of the Circle Guides for your organization, contact [john.stepper@workingoutloud.com](mailto:john.stepper@workingoutloud.com).

### What to expect this week

In your first week, after getting to know your other Circle members a bit better, each of you will pick your own individual goal. Then you'll take a step towards that goal by creating a "relationship list," an initial list of people related to your goal.

You may feel uncertain in the beginning - about your goal or about this process - but over the 12 weeks your sense of confidence will increase with the steps you take. So will the sense of trust among people in your Circle, helping you all 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. If you haven't already picked a Facilitator and Timekeeper, do so now before you begin, or rotate the responsibility if you prefer. (Those two simple roles are described in the Getting Started section.)

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.

Suggested Agenda for Week 1	
1. Group exercise: "What brought you here?"	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. Group exercise: "What brought you here?" (10 minutes)

Think for a moment about why you joined a Working Out Loud Circle. Was it a desire for something more? A response to an event at work or in your life? Whether it's an aspiration or a reaction to something, take a moment now to write down your own personal reasons and then share it with the rest of your Circle.

When you're sharing your answer, be sure to make it personal and focus on what motivated you. When you're listening, practice giving the person your full attention and try to relate with their motivation.



*I joined a WOL Circle because:*

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

Next you'll each choose an individual goal. This will help orient your activities throughout your Circle, including which relationships you'll want to build and what contributions you'll make. If the idea of picking a goal makes you nervous or uncertain, there's no need to worry about this particular exercise. The goal for your Circle isn't Your One Special Purpose In Life, but something much simpler.

### CHOOSING YOUR GOAL

- Do you care about it?
- Can you benefit from the experience of others?
- Can you frame it as a learning goal?
- Can you make progress towards it in 12 weeks?

Ideally, you should pick a goal that sparks your interest and curiosity and yet is small enough that it doesn't trigger your anxiety. Here are a few questions can guide you. If you already have a goal in mind, use the questions to test it and perhaps refine it.

#### **“Do you care about it?”**

When you think of your goal, pay attention to how you feel. Is it something you're genuinely interested in? Or is it something you feel you're *supposed* to want? Choosing a goal you truly care about taps into your innate need for control. (After all, *you* chose it, not someone else.) That makes it easier and more enjoyable to do the exercises and make progress. If you find your goal doesn't genuinely spark your interest, pick something else.

#### **“Can you benefit from the experience of others?”**

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 get a graduate degree,” “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 goal?”**

If you can frame what you're trying to do in terms of learning or 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 needs for mastery (a sense of getting better at something) and purpose (your connection to other people and/or meaning).

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

Choose something achievable, or that you can at least make progress towards. If your goal is too ambitious, merely thinking of it can trigger resistance and prevent you from taking a step. If that's the case for you, consider re-framing your goal into more achievable chunks or sub-goals. Once Working Out Loud is a habit, you can choose more ambitious goals if you like.

### COMMON GOALS

1. I want to learn more about something I care about
2. I would like to explore possibilities in a new area
3. I want to meet people with similar interests
4. I want to get better at what I do for a living
5. I would like to find a new role
6. I would like to get more recognition in my current job

Now take some time to think about your goal for the next 12 weeks and write it down. Keep it to just a sentence or two.

 *In the next 12 weeks, I want to:*

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**3. Share your goals (10 minutes)**

If that wasn't easy for you, or if you're uncertain about what you wrote down, that's okay. There is no right or wrong when it comes to the goal you pick now. More important than which particular goal you choose is that you take steps each week in your Circle.

Why? Because the progress principle is extremely powerful. Each step you take unlocks more steps, bringing you into contact with more people and possibilities each week. It's a kind of "purposeful discovery" which can help you refine your sense of what you want to do. Over time, those steps will help you develop habits you can apply to any goal in the future.

If at some point you find your goal isn't right for you, you can change it. Make it more fun or more interesting or less daunting. Do whatever allows you to keep taking steps.

 Take turns sharing your goal now. 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 next exercise, you'll create a relationship list, which is simply a list of people related to your goal. At first, you may think of a few names right away. Then use your phone or other computer to look for more people, searching both the Internet and your intranet at work.

### PEOPLE YOU PUT ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP LIST

- People who have done something similar to what you're trying to do
- People you've learned from
- People inside your company whose interests or role relates to your goal
- People who've written or given talks about something related to your goal
- Members of your WOL Circle



Try to get to at least ten names now. Even if you only know a role or company of someone but not their name, that's okay. Just write down whatever information you have. If you get to ten before the others are finished, keep going until the group feels ready to move on. If you're stuck, ask your Circle for help.<sup>1</sup>

You can write names down here, or anyplace else that's convenient for you and that you can reference in future meetings. You're going to use this list for the rest of your Circle - adding, deleting, and changing entries as you explore and learn.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_
13. \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>1</sup> Why include members of your Circle? Two good reasons are that they already know your goal and are motivated to help you since you're practicing Working Out Loud together. If ever you're struggling with an exercise related to your relationship list, doing the exercise with someone in your Circle makes it feel easier and less risky.

## 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 your to share your entire list. The goal of the discussion is just to ensure everyone understands how to build one, and to gain early experience in contributing to each other.

## 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. Schedule the next meeting.<sup>2</sup>

### FINAL THOUGHT

How can such small steps make a difference? The simple act of writing down a list of people related to your goal attunes your attention. You become increasingly aware of their work, their thinking, and feedback from others about them. Once you're paying attention, you notice people and ideas you hadn't seen before. You make connections you hadn't thought of and you start to think differently about your goal.

"Deciding what we pay attention to can shape our entire world view.  
It can decide which doors are open to us and which doors we never see."

- [workingoutloud.com/blog/how-this-one-simple-act-gives-you-access-to-new-possibilities](http://workingoutloud.com/blog/how-this-one-simple-act-gives-you-access-to-new-possibilities)

### If you want to do more...

Each week, the Circle Guide will include some additional exercises you can do before your next meeting. They're not meant as "homework" and there's no pressure to do them. Think of the additional exercises as good ways to reinforce and build on what's in the guide for that week. And if all you do before your next meeting is to reflect on your goal occasionally, that would be good too.

#### Easy: Something you can do in less than 5 minutes

Scan your list for someone you like but haven't interacted with in some time. (For this exercise, you can even 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 15 minutes

If you don't have a Twitter account already, create a basic one now at [twitter.com](http://twitter.com). Even if you never tweet, having an account is a tremendous asset in purposeful discovery. It allows you to learn about and interact with a

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<sup>2</sup> To minimize scheduling issues, try to stick to the same day, time, and location. Also, anticipate holidays or other known calendar challenges to avoid rescheduling as much as possible..

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.<sup>3</sup>

## To read, listen to, or watch

At the end of each Circle Guide there will be articles, videos, and other resources that can help you go into more detail on a particular topic. Like the additional exercises, these aren't meant as homework but as simple ways to learn more.

"The best approach to building relationships"

[linkedin.com/pulse/best-approach-building-relationships-john-stepper](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/best-approach-building-relationships-john-stepper)

"The bridge from where you are to where you want to be"

[workingoutloud.com/blog/the-bridge-between-where-you-are-and-where-you-want-to-be](https://workingoutloud.com/blog/the-bridge-between-where-you-are-and-where-you-want-to-be)

"How this one simple act gives you access to new possibilities"

[workingoutloud.com/blog/how-this-one-simple-act-gives-you-access-to-new-possibilities](https://workingoutloud.com/blog/how-this-one-simple-act-gives-you-access-to-new-possibilities)

"Why is Italo Calvino stalking me?"

[workingoutloud.com/blog/why-is-italo-calvino-stalking-me](https://workingoutloud.com/blog/why-is-italo-calvino-stalking-me)

*Working Out Loud: For a Better Career and Life*

Chapter 1 - Four Stories

Chapter 2 - Improving Your Odds

Chapter 4 - Purposeful Discovery

Chapter 9 - New Habits and a New Mindset in 12 Weeks

Chapter 10 - A Practical Goal and Your First Relationship List

## Frequently Asked Questions

*Q: What if I'm not sure about my goal, or if I pick the wrong one?*

The most common questions people ask are related to their goals. However, more important than choosing the best goal (as if there was such a thing), is choosing a goal that will spark your interest and curiosity. That's what will make your Circle experience easier and more enjoyable.

If your goal isn't clear, consider one of the six common goals listed above. Or if you find yourself overwhelmed at all, change your goal, perhaps making it less ambitious or more fun. More important than which goal you pick is that you actually practice - doing the exercises, getting feedback, and learning - so that you develop skills and habits you can apply to any goal.

*Q: What if I'm having trouble finding people?*

Don't limit yourself to people you know. Practice your sleuthing skills as you play Internet Detective. For example, once you find one person, try to see who that person is connected to, and keep following the trail of connections. Also, remember to ask for help from your Circle members. Circles are peer support groups, after all, and part of the process is learning to ask for and offer help.

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<sup>3</sup> Here's a nice article on "Twitter for Beginners" by Harald Schirmer in both English & German: [harald-schirmer.de/2017/12/27/twitter-for-beginners-an-introduction/](https://harald-schirmer.de/2017/12/27/twitter-for-beginners-an-introduction/) & [harald-schirmer.de/2015/10/29/twitter-fuer-einsteiger/](https://harald-schirmer.de/2015/10/29/twitter-fuer-einsteiger/)