



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

Version 4.01 - April 2017
Created by John Stepper

Week 4: Earn someone's attention

This material is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. You can download and share it as long as you credit John Stepper and workingoutloud.com. You can't change it or offer it as part of any for-fee product or service. For more information, contact john.stepper@workingoutloud.com.

What to expect this week

How you offer something can make all the difference. This week, you'll practice empathy, refining the way you write your messages and approach people in general. Just as beautiful wrapping can make the same gift can feel different, a little thoughtfulness can make your contributions feel more personal and valuable.

Suggested agenda

Thing to do	Approx. time
1. Check-in	10 mins
2. Group exercise: The Inbox Empathy game	15
3. Exercise: Earn someone's attention	20
4. Discuss your contributions and how you made them	10
5. Checkout for Week 4	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? Be sure to celebrate when someone gets a response or makes a connection. Or 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.

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.”

In general, being mindful of the following three questions can fundamentally change how you approach someone. The questions invoke empathy and generosity, and make you more mindful of the actions you take and the words you use.

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

When you frame your contribution as a genuine gift, it liberates you from the fear of being pushy or being rejected. Examining your motives helps you avoid being manipulative, insincere, or otherwise doing something you’re uncomfortable with. Invoking the three questions changes the tone of your communications. Seth Godin described it as the “sound of confidence”:

“It’s a blend of two things. ‘I’d really like to help you,’ and, ‘If this isn’t for you, that’s okay, there are others it might be a better match for.’”

As a group, spend the next few minutes listing examples of emails that show a distinct *lack* of empathy, and why they might irritate you instead of earn your attention. Try to come up with five examples.

Example	Lack of Empathy

If you need help, here are a few actual messages I received from professional salespeople that display a lack of empathy. If they had asked themselves the three questions, they would have written their emails differently and increased the chances of a positive response.

Actual Email Text	Lack of Empathy
"Did you get my last e-mail? I wanted to follow up on a couple of attempts to connect with you. "	Pesters you in an attempt to change the outcome.
"Let me know, as I have some time over the next few days."	Makes it seem as if their time and effort is more important than yours by fitting you into their schedule.
"Do you have time to talk or meet up? I would value the opportunity for a twenty-minute meeting."	Frames their requests in terms of what's in it for them instead of what's in it for you.
"I'd love to take you to lunch and pick your brain. Any chance you're free one day over the next two weeks?"	While the offer of lunch is nice, it feels like a transaction - the cost of a lunch in exchange for your information and time. The cliché "pick your brain" is unappealing at best.

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

Creating messages so they will be read and appreciated is a skill you can develop with practice. Ramit Sethi, author and entrepreneur, described what you need to do in his article: "You have to sell free." (A link is at the end of this guide.) The word "sell" may have negative connotations for you, but what it really means here is showing people why they should pay attention. Here's an excerpt from his article related to offering a simple contribution: sharing something you found useful:

For example, do not just send people a book recommendation or random URL. In a world full of thousands of links a day, you might as well send that e-mail straight to the trash.

Sending people a random link—even if it would change their lives—isn't a favor. It's a burden. You have to "sell" free. You have to explain why this link matters and what they'll get out of it.

Let's practice by offering another kind of simple contribution: a particular resource that you've found interesting or useful. Choose an article, TED talk, book, 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.)

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

- Appreciation: Demonstrate that you've paid attention to the recipient.
- Personalization: Mention why you thought of them specifically.
- Value: Describe the potential benefit to them.

Your message needn't be long, but it should be personal and authentic. Here's an example:

Subject: A book I thought you would find particularly useful

Hi.

I've always admired how you're looking for ways to develop yourself. So when I read Working Out Loud: For a Better Career & Life, I thought of you.

It's about building relationships that matter, that can help you be more effective and access more opportunities. I'm in a "Working Out Loud Circle" at work that's practicing the ideas in the book, and I'm enjoying it.

Here's a link to the TEDx talk that explains more about it:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpjNI3Z10uc>

Have a great week!
John

Now, share whatever resource you selected with at least two people on your list.

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? By helping each other think of things to share and how you might share them, everyone can expand their understanding of contributions, and become a bit more comfortable incorporating empathy into their communications.

5. Checkout for Week 4 (5 minutes)

1. Confirm the time and place for 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'll increase the chances even further if you write down when and where you will do it.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Selling free seems 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.) If you're already using social media or you're active on your organization's intranet, that's great. 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.

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. I would consider any of those a contribution, and will truly enjoy receiving your email, I also guarantee I will respond to you personally.

If you want to do more..

Easy: Something you can do in less than 5 minutes

Think of a message you received recently that made you feel more connected to the person who sent it. What was it about the message that made you feel that way? Try to identify how you could use some of those same elements to make others feel more connected to you and make your messages more personal and engaging.

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

Look again at the sample letter I wrote above, or at the example in Ramit Sethi's article. What do you like or not like about those examples? Keep in mind that empathy in communications is not meant to be a technique or trick to get someone to respond to you. Rather, it's a way for you to genuinely offer something in a way that's easy for someone to receive.

To read, listen to, or watch

On more effective communications

- "How This Guy Can Get People to Read His E-mails" by Ramit Sethi - Link: iwillteachyoutoberich.com/blog/how-this-guy-can-get-people-to-read-his-emails/
- "Six ways to write emails that don't make people silently resent you" by Jocelyn K. Gleib - Link: fastcompany.com/3068741/six-ways-to-write-emails-that-dont-make-people-silently-resent-you
- "The sound of confidence" by Seth Godin - Link: sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2013/11/the-sound-of-confidence.html

On empathy:

- "The Empathy Test" - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog/the-empathy-test

On offering contributions using traditional channels

- "Working Out Loud over email or coffee" - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog//working-out-loud-over-email-or-coffee