



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

Version 4.01 - April 2017
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Week 8: Become more systematic

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What to expect this week

Having a system can make things easier. This week, you'll work with two simple systems, one for identifying new contributions and one for managing your relationship list. Then you'll practice empathy (again!) in a way that might surprise you - and will certainly distinguish you.

Suggested agenda

Thing to do	Approx. time
1. Check-in	10 mins
2. Exercise: Your contribution checklist	20
3. Exercise: From ad hoc to systematic	10
4. Exercise: "And now, I'd like to introduce..."	15
5. Checkout for Week 8	5

1. Check-in (10 minutes)

During this week's check-in, consider questions like "What has been the best thing so far for you?" It may be new relationships, new opportunities, or just new ways of thinking about your goals. Focus on listening to each other, and be sure to celebrate any progress.

2. Exercise: Your contribution checklist (20 minutes)

So far, you've offered universal contributions like recognition and appreciation. You've shared resources you've found useful. You've made a list of facts that can serve as the basis for shared interests. And still the range of possible contributions can be broader.

Here's a guide of ten kinds of contributions you can use as a reference guide, from the simplest you've seen already to those that may take more effort and may also be more valuable.

1. *Offer recognition or attention:* Recognition and appreciation are “universal gifts.” It could be as simple as pressing a Like button to say “I see you” or “I’ve paid attention to what you said or did.” It could also be establish a connection with a person by following them on a social platform or subscribing to their updates.

2. *Show appreciation:* Gratitude is perhaps the most underutilized resource we have. It feels good to give it and receive it. Saying “thank you” to someone or giving them credit for their work can deepen the relationship. Offering public appreciation is a different but related gift, one that's less personal but reaches more people. Try both.

3. *Share interesting or useful resources:* Sharing interesting content and the work of others you admire is a low-risk, low-cost contribution that can help others. You can send it directly (talking over coffee or sharing a link by email) or spread it on a social platform where you might @-mention specific people or groups. Be sure to include your rationale for sharing. That makes it more personal and purposeful.

4. *Ask a question:* Vulnerability can be a gift. Asking a question allows others to demonstrate their expertise, especially when you share how you tried to get the answer before asking. When someone helps you, be sure to appreciate their contribution, and make their answer available in such a way that it can help others.

5. *Answer a question:* When you answer a question, you help the person who asked it as well as anyone else who may benefit from your answer in the future. Doing so in an informal, humble way shapes your reputation as someone who is both knowledgeable and generous.

6. *Introduce people:* Thoughtful introductions can provide access to new ideas, new people, and new opportunities. You might connect individuals, or you can introduce people to entire groups, such as online communities related to their goal. The key is to make them selectively and to show respects for each party's time.

7. *Offer feedback:* Here you're trying to build on something someone has done in a way that credits the person's original work while also helping others. Your contribution should be positive and constructive, something that advances the work in some way. It could be a question, a suggestion, or a comment about how and why it was useful or interesting to you.

8. *Share your work in progress:* By sharing aspects of your work - what you're doing, why, and how - you may inspire others who are doing similar work, or learn from them, or create possibilities for innovation and collaboration. Frame it in a way it feels less like “Look at me!” and more like “I thought you might be interested in this.”

9. *Share your experience:* Reflect on your work. What have you learned - from both failures and successes - that might be useful to someone else? It might be resources you found

useful or techniques you've found effective or mistakes that others should avoid. Remember to frame it as a contribution, offering up what you've learned in a way that's helpful to other people.

10. *Offer original ideas:* You needn't limit yourself to work already completed. What opportunities do you see for improvement in the future and what are your constructive ideas? Your opinion or idea can be framed as a contribution, especially when you invite others to contribute their own comments and suggestions. Credit other people who may have inspired you and build on their work wherever possible.

Now, for each category, see if you can list an example of a specific contribution related to your goal. Share when you're having difficulty and help each other by suggesting different contributions. This will serve as a handy checklist for future contributions.

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

3. Exercise: From ad hoc to systematic (10 minutes)

For some of you, your relationship list might be growing and becoming a bit unwieldy. This exercise will help. Instead of going through everyone on your relationship list each week, tracking two additional things for each person or organization will help you focus and ensure you don't lose touch.

- The last contribution you made and the date you made it.
- The date you'd like to make another contribution and what that might be.

For example, if you had a good interaction with someone, you might pick a date within a few weeks when you'll make another contribution. Or if it's someone you just met and you're not sure how much you want to invest in the relationship, you might pick a date a few months out. This helps you avoid the "out of sight, out of mind" problem. Instead of trying to remember all of these follow-ups in your head, this simple system enables you to keep in touch with people in a way that involves less stress and fewer mistakes.

Where should you capture this information? I've used different tools at different times - from pen and paper to spreadsheets to index cards, as described in a blog post "The best system for managing your network." (The link is at the end of this guide.)

"I keep the cards sorted by the date for a next action. The stack is small enough that I can carry it with me in my backpack. If I interact with someone on my list, I'll update the card. If a card gets full or messy, I'll rewrite it with just the latest, most relevant information.

Each week, instead of going through everyone on my relationship list every time and thinking of a possible contribution, I only need to go through a few cards that already have helpful reminders. If I notice that someone hasn't responded, I'll think of other things I could do and record a date a bit farther out for a different kind of contribution.

Having a simple, convenient system and going through it regularly means I'll rarely lose touch with someone in my network. And when I'm holding that one card for the one person or organization, it feels different than looking at a row in a crowded spreadsheet. For that moment, I'm focused just on them."

While some systems are better than others, there is no single ideal way. The best method is one that works for you; one that actually helps you to be mindful of people on it and to make progress deepening relationships; one that's easy and perhaps even sparks joy. Going through your list of relationships should feel like a personal task, not an administrative one.

Whatever system you choose, go through your own relationship list now and add the new bits of information for each person.

4. Exercise: "And now, I'd like to introduce..." (15 minutes)

Item number six on the contribution checklist includes introducing people. Yet it was only when I read a blog post by Anand Sanwal that I realized I had been introducing people incorrectly my entire life. (The link to his post is at the end of this guide.)

"Single opt-in intros are lazy and disrespectful and make you a terrible person. Good people do double opt-in intros."

What's a "double opt-in intro"? Here's an example of what he means. Suppose you think Sally and Bob would benefit from knowing each other. You might think that a nice thing to do would be to send an email to the two of them to make the connection.

"Hi, Sally and Bob.

You're both doing such great work that I thought you should definitely know each other! I'll leave it to you two to connect.

*Thanks!
John"*

That's a "single opt-in intro." When you send an email like this introducing people, even if it's well-intentioned and only takes you a minute or two, you burden the recipients with an obligation they never asked for. Instead, the "double opt-in intro" has you first ask each person individually if you can make the introduction. That allows them to opt out ("Thanks, John, but I'm too busy now"), possibly saving everyone some time and potential embarrassment.

Like the exercise in Week 4, this is an opportunity to practice empathy. As you write your email, put yourself in the shoes of the recipient and think how you would feel if you were them. Be sure to provide three things:

Context: what motivated you to want to introduce the other person?

Value: how will they each benefit from the introduction?

Opt-in: ask for explicit permission before making the introduction.

You might object that neglecting the opt-out is such a common practice that it's okay to do it. Or perhaps the recipients shouldn't be so precious about their time. But if you truly intend the introduction to be a contribution, then the right thing to do is to ask each recipient first and make it easy for them to decline your offer. Even if they reject your introduction, they'll appreciate your sensitivity and respect for their time. Practicing empathy is always a good thing to do.

Now scan your relationship list for an introduction you think would benefit both parties. Or, if you're struggling, help each other with "someone you should know" so you can practice. Whomever your "Sally and Bob" are, write them an individual note now that includes context, value, and the choice to opt-in.

If you find this difficult, do the exercise with other members of your Circle, perhaps by introducing them to someone you think is related to their goal or would otherwise be helpful or interesting to know.

5. Checkout for Week 8 (5 minutes)

- 1. Schedule 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 will increase the chances even further if you write down when and where you will do it.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: This seems like a lot of contributions! Do I really need to do all of this?

No, you don’t need to do all of this. The contribution checklist is just a guide to help you think broadly about what you might offer. Remember, the goal is to deepen relationships. You can usually accomplish that with recognition, appreciation, gratitude, and other small gifts.

Gifts like original content, etc. are wonderful but only in addition to *small gifts, freely given*.

If all you do is generously offer small gifts in a way that shows empathy, that is a lovely and incredibly powerful habit.

If you need to do less...

That was a lot this week. If you didn't make it through all the exercises, that's okay. Consider "touching the treadmill." Shrink the change so you can still make some kind of progress. For example, here's an easy way you can do less this week and still move forward:

1. Read the contribution checklist.
2. Circle the contributions you are most comfortable with.
3. Go through your relationship list and offer something you circled.

Every time you make a contribution you are reinforcing your new habits and mindset.

If you want to do more...

Easy: Something you can do in less than 10 minutes

Read and reflect on the following article. How might this apply to your own contributions? To how you handle responses (or the lack thereof) from others?

“You can be a delicious, ripe peach and there will still be people in the world that hate peaches.”

Link: workingoutloud.com/blog/can-delicious-ripe-peach-will-still-people-world-hate-peaches



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

Read the blog post, "The HR director I wish I knew" for an example of how a simple contribution can quickly lead to an interesting, meaningful connection. (The link is at the end of this guide.) Be sure to read the updates at the end. See how many different kinds of contributions you can find from the contribution checklist.

To read, listen to, or watch

Managing your relationship list

- “The best system for managing your network” - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog/the-best-system-for-managing-your-network

Making introductions

- “PSA: Email Introduction Etiquette” by Anand Sanwal - Link: cbinsights.com/blog/double-optin-intro/
- “How to introduce people online” by John Stepper - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog/how-to-introduce-people-online

When you don't get a response

- “You can be a delicious, ripe peach and there will still be people in the world that hate peaches.” - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog/can-delicious-ripe-peach-will-still-people-world-hate-peaches

The HR director I wish I knew

- “The HR director I wish I knew” - Link: workingoutloud.com/blog/the-hr-director-i-wish-i-knew