

Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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Week 7: Be purposeful

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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

This week, you'll do one of the most powerful exercises in your Circle: "A letter from your future self." By articulating a longer-term vision of what might be possible, you'll increase the chances of that vision becoming a reality.

Suggested Agenda for Week 7	
1. Check-in	10 mins
2. Exercise: A letter from your future self	20
3. Discuss your letters	15
4. Exercise: Share your aspiration	10
5. Voice your intention	5

1. Check-in (10 minutes)

A potentially challenging question to start this week: "When you think about what you would like your work and life to be like in one or two years, how do you feel?" Are you excited? Anxious? Have you thought about it at all?

2. Exercise: A letter from your future self (20 minutes)

This letter is a classic visioning exercise. You pick a date some months or years ahead (12 to 36 months is a good range) and imagine that your efforts towards your goal had gone the way you hoped. Then you write to your younger self and tell the story of what happened. Your letter might address questions like these:

- *What were the keys to making progress?*
- *How would you have normally approached things? How did you do it differently?*
- *How did you overcome setbacks?*
- *When did you realize you were going to be successful? What happened?*

The letter helps you see at least one possible path to a future you want to create. For it to be effective, though, you'll need to include another key element. Anthony Grant and Jane Greene described it in their book, *Coach Yourself*:

"For it to be real, for it to be useful, you need to engage your emotions. It seems that there is something quite special about writing it down that allows you to reach into your deepest self."

So in your letter, you want to be sure to include how your future self *feels* as you are successful and fulfilled - and how you might feel in the future if you didn't make the effort. Choose whatever format or outline feels right for you. Just remember to write for yourself, and not to impress someone else.

The first time I wrote something like this was in a Relationships Masters Academy class taught by Keith Ferrazzi, author of *Never Eat Alone*. (There are more examples at the end of this Guide.) I wrote it at a low point in my career, six years before I published *Working Out Loud*. The outline we used guided me towards articulating what I wanted to happen as well as how it would feel if it did happen. It also helped me imagine how I'd feel if I *didn't try*.

MY LETTER FROM MY FUTURE SELF

My Dreams/Goals

To live in different countries for months at a time—Japan, France, Spain, Italy...(to name the top four). I would like to write (publicly—beyond my weekly work blog, which was at least a start) and to connect with an audience. I'd like to create! Books but also software and other projects. Things that people would use and love.

I'd like to do something genuinely helpful, particularly when it comes to education for kids who may not normally have access to it. (I benefitted from going to Regis High School, a free scholarship high school that changed my life.)

Oh, and financial independence...Actually, I don't mind the idea of having to work to earn a living. But the dream is more to be able to research/write/speak/present about ideas and connect with people. Perhaps ideal "jobs" are those of a Malcolm Gladwell, Clay Shirky or Seth Godin or Keith Ferrazzi.

Articulating my vision

I will become a champion of ideas. Who will write, speak, and connect. Within ten years. (But taking steps NOW!)

How will I know?

I will have authored a book or other notable content that more than twenty thousand people read. I will have been paid to speak. I can earn a living from writing, speaking, and (only some) consulting.

How will it feel if I don't try and if I do?

If I don't pursue my mission now, I will continue to live my status quo and...my sense of being special will fade. My frustration at not doing "more" will increase. My (constant) fear of having to earn enough for the next twenty-plus years will remain. My entire life will be colored by the two statements above.

If I do pursue my vision now, I will be increasingly happy and...my sense of peace and inner calm will be much, much greater. My energy and enthusiasm will be much higher—every day. My family will be happy because I'll be "present" and happy.




Now it's your turn to write yourself a letter from your future self. You can use the format above or write it as a more traditional letter.

Don't feel constrained by the 20 minutes for writing your letter. Most people spend more time on it after the meeting. For this week, even a draft or even an outline will do. The discussion afterwards will almost certainly lead you to make changes later.

4. Exercise: Share your aspiration (10 minutes)

A simple technique for making your goal visible is to add a short sentence about it to your online profile. For example, if your goal is to develop a new skill or project at work, write about that. (“Interested in how the Internet of Things can improve what we do.”) Or perhaps you’re exploring re-location opportunities or a new topic. (“Would love to work in Brazil someday,” “Want to help young women with STEM careers.”)

Try different things till you come up with something you’re comfortable with. Ask your Circle for help if you’re uncertain. Don’t worry so much about getting it exactly right. You can think it as leveraging an online platform to “voice your intention,.” a way to send a small signal to others that increases the chances of connections related to your goal or aspiration. You can easily change it as you learn and grow.

 Update your main on-line profile now, and share what you added with your Circle. Saying it out loud in front of a trusted group can help you improve it and be more confident about it.

5. Voice your intention (5 minutes)

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

This is a good week to reflect. Read your letter. Update it. Maybe place it somewhere you can see it, or share it with your partner or friend. As with other weeks, continue to “work your list.” Look for opportunities to offer attention, appreciation, or a useful resource, or to share a personal fact about you to deepen a relationship. The more you practice, the more comfortable and confident you’ll be.

 *Before the next meeting, I will:*

FINAL THOUGHTS

”Destiny isn’t something that awaits you. It’s something you create.”

- workingoutloud.com/blog/a-letter-from-my-future-self

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- “The bridge between where you are and where you want to be isn’t a bridge at all. Rather, it can be more like a leisurely hike through the woods. You have a general direction in mind and take a few steps, mindful of the signs and clues around you, and a path emerges. This approach gives you access to more possibilities with less risk. It may still be strenuous, but you’re much more likely to enjoy the journey.”

- workingoutloud.com/blog/the-bridge-between-where-you-are-and-where-you-want-to-be

If you need to do less...

If writing the letter was too difficult just now, try just daydreaming about your future self in three years. That's far enough way to avoid sparking anxiety and close enough to feel practical. If you're happy and fulfilled, what is future you doing? Try daydreaming without any judgment or planning. If any ideas pop into your head, you can write them down here. They may be the basis for a letter you write later.

If you want to do more...

Easy: Something you can do in less than 5 minutes

Take a look at your letter and reflect on your goal. Are they related at all? How? If not, why not? For example, Judi Rather was in a WOL Circle and was struggling with her goal. Writing her letter helped her to see what was missing, and she made an adjustment.²

"As individual goals were being crafted, I struggled and had a difficult time really focusing on mine. I was all over the place. Should it be personal? Should it be work related (most in our group were not)?, What did I want the results to be? I did come up with a goal and took the steps suggested each week in working toward that goal, however I honestly could not wrap my heart around it.

Something was missing. Something was tugging at me but I couldn't put my finger on what it was. It lacked the "sticking" power and successes that others were experiencing. I felt disappointment but not sure what to do. Then came WOL Week #7 when we were challenged to write a letter from our future selves.

That became an ah-ha moment! I could instantly visualize that picture and it looked nothing like my original goal. No surprise there either since I really couldn't visualize my initial goal. So, at week 7 ½ I changed by goal. It was exhilarating and freeing which created excitement for where I saw myself personally growing."

You don't need to change anything or judge your progress so far. Just reflect on your goal and letter for a few minutes.

More challenging: Something you can do in less than 20 minutes

The inspiration to do this exercise came from Moyra Mackie, the first person I ever called "coach." At the time, I was working at Deutsche Bank, struggling to write drafts of *Working Out Loud*, and feeling like I was paddling in a leaky canoe - lots of activity but not much progress or direction.

On one of our phone calls, Moyra suggested that I write down what my "perfect month" might look like in a year or two.³ That timeframe was far enough away to give me the latitude to do different things, yet close enough that

² "When WOL intersects with Mussar" - judistorah.wordpress.com/2017/03/15/when-wol-intersects-with-mussar/

³ "Your perfect month" - workingoutloud.com/blog/your-perfect-month

I needed to be practical. My perfect month wasn't just about sitting on a beach in Okinawa, but about a way to earn a living while living a balanced life.

So I took a piece of paper, wrote down the days of the month, and started to imagine what I would do each day. The things I began listing I had considered before. Yet something about mapping those ideas to specific days in the month made them seem more real - and made me ask myself more questions. Yes, I would like to travel, write, do research, etc. But how much? One day a month? Five? Ten? I found myself visualizing my days and weeks. I imagined how it would feel - how I would feel. It enabled me to see an example of what a more balanced, creative, fulfilling portfolio might look like. That was a few years ago. I happened to find that piece of paper recently and was struck by how much of it describes my last month, and the month before that.

When you reflect on your own career and life, where are you heading? What's your perfect month?

To read, listen to, or watch

"A letter from your future self"

workingoutloud.com/blog/a-letter-from-my-future-self

"Make great things happen - Write a letter from your future self" by Maria Brophy

mariabrophy.com/philosophy/make-great-things-happen-write-a-letter-your-your-future-self.html

"A letter from your future self"

tinybuddha.com/blog/letter-from-your-future-self-what-day-is-it-today

Working Out Loud: For a Better Career and Life

Chapter 8 - A Growth Mindset

Chapter 17 - Your Greater Purpose

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I'm having trouble writing the letter. Is there another way?

Some of you may prefer visualizing your future self instead of writing about it. If so, try a vision board. It's a collection of photos from magazines or other media that capture what your future self, your future life, will be like. (Some Circle members have used Pinterest for an online version of this.) Whatever medium you choose, remember: "For it to be real, for it to be useful, you need to engage your emotions."

Q: My future self seems so far out of reach. Where do I start?

The path to the future self you envision usually isn't a neat set of well-planned steps but rather a series of small experiments and discoveries. That's what refines your sense of what's possible, what suits you, and what your next steps might be. Quite often, simply connecting with someone who's done something similar to what you're hoping to do can be extraordinarily helpful. These articles can help you get started.

"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

"The simplest and easiest form of prototyping is a conversation"

workingoutloud.com/blog/the-simplest-easiest-form-of-prototyping-is-a-conversation

"The elephant at the piano"

workingoutloud.com/blog/the-elephant-at-the-piano