



Working Out Loud Circle Guide

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Week 9: Explore more original contributions

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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

At this point in your Circle, you're ready to further expand your range of contributions by making more of your work and thinking visible. Even if this is new to some of you or makes you uncomfortable, the exercises this week will help you take a step, allowing you to create something simple that's also generous and useful.

Suggested Agenda for Week 9	
1. Check-in	10 mins
2. Exercise: Your Top Ten	20
3. Discuss ideas for original content	10
4. Group exercise: "The Dinner Table University"	15
5. Voice your intention	5

1. Check-in (10 minutes)

For your check-in this week, take a minute or two each to talk about how you feel about sharing your work online. Don't judge yourself or others. Just be curious about how you feel and why you might feel that way. Are you uncomfortable? Do you think it's the kind of thing other people do, but not you?

Wherever you are now in terms of making your work visible, this week will help you take a step and go further.

2. Exercise: Your Top Ten (20 minutes)

For most people, whether or not you have a blog or other site, it can be difficult to know what to say or how to frame your opinions, ideas, and work in progress as contributions. One of the simplest ways to start is by crediting the work of other people.

"Your Top Ten" is a list of ten resources related to your goal that you found particularly useful or interesting - blogs, presentations, videos, and other self-published sites. It might be books or projects or even people. If your goal is related to management, for example, your list might be titled "Ten leaders who have inspired me" or "Ten great books on management."



Think for a moment about what the theme for Your Top Ten would be, and write the title here. It could be as easy as the top ten learning resources or people related to your goal. Feel free to ask your Circle for help.

My Top Ten theme: _____

You may already have ideas in mind for some entries on your list, and need to search the Internet or your intranet for the rest. You can also ask your Circle for help. To “frame it as a contribution,” you should personalize each entry by adding one or two sentences describing why you found it useful or interesting or how it might benefit others.

EXAMPLES OF ITEMS ON A TOP TEN LIST

Let’s say you were interested in workplace safety, and that Your Top Ten was a list of stories from a range of companies whose approach you found interesting in some way. Items on your list might look something like this:

#1. Safety at Alcoa: Great story of how the CEO’s focus on safety as a “keystone habit” led to significant safety improvements AND great financial results. You can read the story here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charles-duhigg/the-power-of-habit_b_1304550.html There’s a also a great video by the CEO, Paul O’Neill: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC2ucDs_XJY

#2. Safety at Toyota: I was surprised to find out that safety and wellness are part of the morning meeting at the plant every day. Here’s a quote: “We are looking for ways to improve safety, quality and productivity all at once, so we merged both sides of it into one daily discussion.” <http://www.manufacturingglobal.com/people-and-skills/toyota-way-how-automotive-giant-manages-health-and-safety>”



Take time now to create Your Top Ten.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

3. Discuss ideas for original content (10 minutes)

Discuss the results of your Your Top Ten exercise and help each other improve your lists. Even though a top ten list is a simple idea, it's not a simple exercise. It takes time to reflect and curate such a list of resources, and that's time well spent. With this one exercise you create an asset that's helpful to others, you give credit to ten people, and you have a contribution you can refer to and offer again and again.

In your discussion, feel free to go beyond Your Top Ten. Do each of you see the value in making your work visible? Are you comfortable with it? If not, why not? Try to help each other where you can.

4. Group exercise: "The Dinner Table University" (15 minutes)

Over the course of your career and life, you've learned so much that could be useful to other people. Yet how much of it have you shared? You'll get a chance to practice now. Perhaps the best way to provide context for this exercise is via a wonderful story told by Leo Buscaglia, a noted author and speaker. He called it "The Dinner Table University."¹

Leo's family emigrated from Italy, and they had little money. His father was taken from school at an early age to work in a factory, and he was determined that none of his children would be denied an education. To ensure they took learning seriously, his father insisted they learn at least one new thing each day and then share it at dinner time.

Before dinner, the kids would go through the encyclopedia, scrambling to come up with something they could offer. They knew their father would go around the table, child by child, and ask each one, "What did you learn today?"

Leo's father examined and considered each contribution carefully, no matter how small it was. Leo said that by looking at them, listening to them, and respecting what they had to say, his father instilled in him a sense of curiosity and a habit for learning that lasted his entire life.

"Without being aware of it, our family was growing together, sharing experiences and participating in one another's education. And by looking at us, listening to us, respecting our input, affirming our value, giving us a sense of dignity, Papa was unquestionably our most influential teacher."

¹ You can find a longer version of this story, and a video of Le Buscaglia telling it, at workingoutloud.com/blog/the-dinner-table-university



Today, pretend Leo’s father is with you in your Circle, asking each of you, “What have you learned?” Perhaps it’s related to your goal or a recent project, something that worked or didn’t work. Write it down now and share it with your Circle. Feel free to talk openly in the group as you do, just as they did in the Dinner Table University. Sharing what you’ve learned - in person or on-line - is yet another kind of gift. Help each other see how you could each frame your learning as a contribution that might be helpful to others.

5. Voice your intention (5 minutes)

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

Before your next meeting, be sure to work your list so you continue to think in terms of connections and contributions. After the exercises this week, you have even more to offer. And doing the additional exercises will help you gain extra insights into what you have to share and how you might share it.



Before the next meeting, I will:

FINAL THOUGHT

Writing and public speaking are important skills that anyone can develop. Like almost any other skill, it’s not about being naturally good or bad at it, it’s about deliberate practice. Here’s what Peter Drucker, one of the world’s most respected management experts, had to say about it.

“As soon as you move one step up from the bottom, your effectiveness depends on your ability to reach others through the written or spoken word. And the further away your job is from manual work, the larger the organization of which you are an employee, the more important it will be that you know how to convey your thoughts in writing or speaking. In the very large organization, whether it is the government, the large business corporation, or the army, this ability to express oneself is perhaps the most important of all the skills a man or woman can possess.”

- workingoutloud.com/blog/why-you-should-write-more-and-the-single-best-tip-for-doing-so

If you need to do less...

To help you become more comfortable with the idea of sharing original content, and show you how simple it can be to begin, read this article by Jane Bozarth.

“Narrating our work”

learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/984

It’s about Gloria Mercer, a woman who was retired and had a simple goal related to her health and a new hobby. By making her work visible, she accelerated her learning, built a small community, and inspired the formation of two small businesses. Here’s an excerpt from the article:

“There are so many lessons to glean from this case. They include the social aspect of publishing your learning, getting feedback and encouragement from friends and helping other friends as they learn; the fact that enthusiasm can be contagious; the willingness to share and not keep everything to yourself; the real way that knowledge is shared; the organic ways that networks grow.

And more to be learned here: that learning often spawns the desire for additional learning...the ways in which social technologies can accelerate learning and give it geographic reach; and the value of a community truly committed to improving practice.”

Read the article, then reflect on how you could you make your learning visible in a way that might help others.

If you want to do more...

Easy: Something you can do in less than 10 minutes

Ira Glass is the producer of “This American Life” on radio. It’s one of my favorite shows, and is loved by millions of people. He seems like such a natural storyteller. So I was surprised when I watched an interview in which he said, “I took longer to figure out how to do this than anybody I ever met.”

Watch the 5-minute video. Pay special attention to his humble start and how he gradually got better over time. Listen to his self-criticisms, and then listen to his advice at the end. How might it apply to you? How might you begin?

Ira Glass on Storytelling

youtube.com/watch?v=X2wLP0izeJE

More challenging: Something you can do in less than 30 minutes

Publish “Your Top Ten.” Post it on your blog if you have one, or on your intranet at work. Or if that’s not possible or too challenging, send it by email to someone who might be interested in the topic and ask what they might add to the list.

As a bonus, note that you could turn your list of ten items into ten individual profiles, each one offering more information. For example, you could turn the few sentences you wrote about a particular item into a few paragraphs by including what you liked and why, how you discovered it, what happened as a result.²

To read, listen to, or watch

Show Your Work: The Payoffs and How-To’s of Working Out Loud, by Jane Bozarth

amazon.com/Show-Your-Work-Jane-Bozarth/dp/1118863623/

² “The HR director I wish I knew” is an example of such a profile - workingoutloud.com/blog/the-hr-director-i-wish-i-knew

Show Your Work!: 10 Ways to Share Your Creativity and Get Discovered, by Austin Kleon
[amazon.com/Show-Your-Work-Austin-Kleon/dp/076117897X/](https://www.amazon.com/Show-Your-Work-Austin-Kleon/dp/076117897X/)

Working Out Loud: For a Better Career and Life
Chapter 7 - Making You and Your Work Visible
Chapter 18 - The Start of Something Big and Wonderful
Chapter 19 - Shipping and Getting Better

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I'm not comfortable with the idea of making my work visible.

That's a common and completely natural feeling, and as with many skills, you'll improve and become more comfortable with practice over time.

The benefits are worth the effort. When you make your work visible, you amplify who you are and what you do, extend your reach, expand your set of possible contributions and how to offer them. The feedback on your work helps you get better faster. Your organization benefits too. By making your work visible - what you're doing, why you're doing it, what resources were useful, what you learned - you enable the organization to reduce duplication and accelerate the pace of innovation.

Q: I don't like writing and don't think I'm good at it. What should I do?

Writing, like presenting or making videos or doing pretty much anything, is a learnable skill. It just takes practice and feedback. Look again at the quote from management expert Peter Drucker in the Final Thought above. Another management expert, Tom Peters, described writing as "a timeless and powerful skill."

Even if you don't think you're good at it now, getting better at communicating in any medium is one of the best things you can do for your career. Fred Wilson, a venture capitalist who developed a habit of blogging every day, noted, "The investment I've made in my communication skills over the past eight years is paying huge dividends for me now." He said he didn't start till he was 42, and his story inspired me to begin writing regularly too.³ Here are two articles that might help you practice and further develop your communications skills.

"Why you should write more"

workingoutloud.com/blog/why-you-should-write-more-and-the-single-best-tip-for-doing-so

"Getting better at public speaking"

workingoutloud.com/blog/getting-better-public-speaking

Q: There are so many people who know more about the topic than me. Who cares what I have to say?

Of the billions of people using the Internet, there are surely some who will benefit from your experiences, especially if you frame them as a contribution.

For example, imagine you've just joined a new organization or you're starting to learn about a new topic. You don't know anything. Who would benefit from your experiences? *Everyone else like you!* If you chronicle your learning - what you're finding useful, who helped you, mistakes you made that others might avoid, etc. - then other people who join the company or are learning about that topic can benefit from your visible work. By sharing your experiences, you'll give them comfort that they're not alone, and will give them information that might make things easier for them. Those are wonderful contributions.

³ "Writing" by Fred Wilson - [avc.com/2011/11/writing/](https://www.avc.com/2011/11/writing/)