

WORKING OUT LOUD CIRCLES

BY MICHELLE OCKERS

Working Out Loud helps you to build a better career and life. By participating in a Working Out Loud circle you build skills and habits of working and connecting with others in a purposeful, open, generous way. This enables you to build a strong network, make progress towards a goal of your choice, and gain access to more opportunities. Anyone can form or join a circle - not just the privileged or those who are 'picked'. It is for everyone and it is free.

In mid 2015 a professional association asked me to speak at an event about how to use social media to enhance your career. As I prepared for this event I realised that I would be significantly short-changing the attendees if I simply showed them how to use tools like LinkedIn and Twitter. Instead I shared a much more powerful, transformative idea - Working Out Loud. I also invited attendees to join a Working Out Loud circle - which 25 of them did.

What is Working Out Loud?

Bryce Williams coined the term in 2010,¹ defining it as:

Working Out Loud = Observable Work + Narrating Your Work

John Stepper expanded the definition to:¹¹

"Working out loud starts with making your work visible in such a way that it might help others. When you do that - when you work in a more open, connected way - you can build a purposeful network that makes you more effective and provides access to more opportunities."

The power in this definition is the emphasis on mindset. When I first read John Stepper's book *Working Out Loud*¹¹ what most struck me was the spirit of contribution and generosity with which he suggests people approach the development of relationships and sharing their experience and work. It is not about self-promotion; it's about making contributions. In turn these contributions strengthen your relationships and build your network. This helps you to learn, to be more

effective in your work or hobbies, and to build a more meaningful career and life.

John Stepper describes five elements of Working Out Loud.¹¹

Visible work - This is the fundamental starting point for working out loud. Making your work visible amplifies who you are and what you do. It greatly extends your reach. It expands the contributions you can make and how you can offer them.

Relationships - As you work out loud over time, you will interact with a broader range of people. This enables you to develop relationships and build your network. Other people will help you access knowledge and opportunities.

Generosity - The way to build and deepen meaningful relationships is through generosity. By framing your efforts to make your work visible as contributions (as opposed to self-promotion or personal branding), you are more likely to engage other people. You don't need to tell people this is what you are doing - just having this intent will alter the way you make your work visible.

Purposeful discovery - This is about having a goal in mind. Perhaps it is about getting more recognition at work, getting better at a skill, or simply exploring a new area. A goal provides a focus and helps you orient your activities. It still leaves plenty of room for serendipity.

A growth mindset - This is a mindset that you are not innately good or bad at something. Rather, you are just not good at it yet. One of the main reasons for openly narrating your work is to find ways to improve it.

You already know that relationships matter, and the logic of how you could benefit from making your work more visible is straightforward. You may have considered working out loud, but not known where to start. Perhaps you have started, but found it difficult to develop new habits. Working Out Loud circles address the challenge of getting started and making it a habit.

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How a circle works

Circles combine peer support with gradual, self-paced practice to build mastery - a process known as Guided Mastery. A Working Out Loud circle is a peer support group of four to five people in which you each pick a personal goal - these are individual goals that could be quite different for each group member. You then build a network of relationships outside of the circle that can help you with that goal. Groups meet for one hour per week for twelve weeks. In the circle you each ask yourself three questions:

- What am I trying to do?
- Who can help me?
- How can I contribute to them to deepen our relationships?

Your goal may be work-related or it could be something outside of work, for example related to a hobby, sport or a community activity. Anyone can participate in a circle, regardless of factors such as employment status, organisational role, age or industry. It doesn't matter whether circle members already know each other or not. Circles can meet face-to-face or virtually/online. Everyone has something to share that others will find interesting and valuable. Anyone can build relationships and expand their network.

Discussion within a circle is confidential. This helps create a supportive environment where members learn more about working out loud effectively.

The tough part isn't knowing what to do, its getting started and making it a habit. This is where participating in a circle is so valuable.

Resources

Weekly Circle Guides^{iv} are available online for each of the 12 weeks. They contain a suggested agenda, exercises and answers to frequently asked

questions. Reading John Stepper's book is not essential, although it is extremely helpful to getting the most out of a circle.

One circle member is the facilitator. They serve the group by keeping meeting logistics organised, facilitating discussion using the Guides, and nudging anyone who is at risk of being left behind. The role doesn't require a lot of extra effort, but is very important.

Circles help the more experienced too

Perhaps you have already connected to a lot of people and actively engage with them online and face-to-face. What results are you getting from your current efforts to make your work visible and from your interactions with others? Adopting a growth mindset, is there potential for you to get even better?

Participating in a circle will help you to focus on a specific goal and refine your working out loud mindset and practices. The interaction with the people in your circle will bring new energy and perspectives to your goal. The structure and shared accountability will help you to make progress towards your goal. I am in my second circle, and have helped form six others. I see so much value in circles that I shall continue to participate in them on an ongoing basis.

Feedback

The following is feedback from people who have participated in Working Out Loud circles.

"After just one WOL Circle meeting, I was already feeling more connected with my colleagues and more encouraged about my career."

"I joined a Working Out Loud circle ... and it helped me propel my small business idea into a successful, profitable and continuously growing venture...it helped me grow my network in a real and genuine way that felt

comfortable and empowering."

"Work has so much more meaning now and I feel like I'm in control of my own career destiny."^v

How to form or join a circle

You can readily form your own circle by asking others to join you. Use the resources listed below or share this article to introduce the idea to others. Read the overview and tips for a successful circle from the Circle Guides online page and get started. Alternately contact me and I will connect you with others who want to join a circle.

You have the power to build an amazing network, create value and drive change like never before.

References

- ⁱ <http://thebryceswrite.com/2010/11/29/when-will-we-work-out-loud-soon/>
- ⁱⁱ <http://workingoutloud.com/the-5-elements-of-working-out-loud/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ John Stepper, 2015, Working Out Loud. For a better career and life. Ikagai Press, New York.
- ^{iv} <http://workingoutloud.com/circle-guides/>
- ^v <http://workingoutloud.com/5-tips-for-a-successful-working-out-loud-circle/>

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