Remote Learning Circle (RLC) Guide

The following is a guide for learning with your team while working remotely. We will continue to add to this guide, so please check back for more ideas and resources.

We are available to help you and your team! For additional guidance, or if you have a recommendation to add to this guide, please contact Joshua Warren at jdwarren@uga.edu.

Contents

What is a Remote Learning Circle (RLC)? ...................................................................................................... 1
Steps for Planning a Remote Learning Circle ................................................................................................ 2
Ideas for Remote Learning Circle Sessions and Topics ................................................................................. 2
Sample RLC: “The Happy Secret to Better Work” ......................................................................................... 4
Sample RLC: Everyone Chooses a TED Talk ............................................................................................... 5
Sample RLC: The Moment of Lift Book Discussion ..................................................................................... 6

What is a Remote Learning Circle (RLC)?

A learning circle is a group of people who are committed to learning and growing together. The goal of a learning circle is to create open dialogue and reflection around concepts, issues, etc., with a focus on a shared outcomes. A remote learning circle engages a group in this type of learning remotely.

It is important that while individuals on a team learn, the team is also learning and growing together. RLCs are a focused way to promote structured and continual learning as a team while working away from the office. They also provide meaningful connection for team members and leaders.

RLCs do not require substantial time to facilitate, nor do they require expert-level knowledge. They can be structured to meet the learning and engagement needs of your team. Feel free to be creative and make it your own. As you navigate this new structure, please reach out to Training & Development with any questions.
Steps for Planning a Remote Learning Circle

Follow these steps to plan an RLC for your team or group.

1. Decide on a topic, theme, or resource for the learning circle to focus on.
2. Select a time and place for the discussion to occur and communicate to the group with ample time to prepare.
3. Distribute (or have someone on your team distribute) any necessary materials and a meeting agenda.
4. Plan (or have someone on your team plan) a brief check-in or icebreaker activity to start the meeting.
5. Have a discussion based on several discussion questions or prompts that were given ahead of time.
6. Plan (or have a team member plan) a final reflection activity.
7. Assign (or have your team decide) on the next learning assignment.

Supervisors are encouraged to delegate responsibility for some of these steps to interested members of their team. Enabling colleagues to take ownership of certain tasks provides meaningful leadership opportunities and will allow you more time to support a sustainable team learning practice.

Ideas for Remote Learning Circle Sessions and Topics

Use some of these ideas as suggestions to focus your remote learning circle.

TED Talks

Take some time to watch someone’s favorite TED talk and discuss it as a team. Some of our favorite TED talks are found here. See sample agendas for leading a discussion around TED talks here and here later in this guide.

Languages of Appreciation

Read The Five Languages of Appreciation by Gary Chapman and Paul White, then take the assessment and debrief together. You can even develop a “favorite things” worksheet together and share some of your favorite gift ideas, things you like, and things you dislike or are allergic to. Having these details helps plan appreciation and rewards around birthdays, holidays, and special occasions.

Book Study

Reading a book together fosters learning on your team. Chose a book that is relevant to your work, relevant to professional development, or speaks to your team. We recommend The Culture Code by Daniel Coyle. For more of our book recommendations, check out this remote learning resource. See a sample agenda for leading a discussion on The Moment of Lift by Melinda Gates here later in this guide.
**Individualized Learning Plans**

Each team member decides on a learning plan that includes T&D courses, online learning, professional development reading, etc. and shares updates with the team on their progress and learning. This is a great option for teams that want to customize the learning option while still creating a team environment and accountability.

**Lunch and Learns**

Just because you’re working remotely doesn’t mean you can’t share a meal together. Connect online over your favorite foods and focus on a particular topic, theme, or learning that you’ve been doing. This break can help bring structure and a contact point into a team that feels isolated.

**Articles**

Articles are a great way to learn about a particular topic. Share interesting articles with your team and discuss them together. Find some of T&D’s favorite articles [here](#).

**Movies and Documentaries**

Movies and documentaries can be powerful team building experiences. Watch a movie or documentary, reflect, and share what you’ve learned. We recommend “The Call to Courage” by Brene Brown available on Netflix.

*Please see sample communications and agendas for RLCs on the following pages.*
Sample RLC: “The Happy Secret to Better Work”

*Use the following communication and agenda to lead a remote learning circle on happiness at work.*

Hello team! As a part of our work and professional development while we are working remotely, I would like for all of us to participate in a learning circle. Each week we will use TED Talks to focus on a theme, learn something about that theme and reflect and discuss our learning together the following week.

At some point over the next week, I would like all of us to:

- Think about the role happiness plays in your work.
- Reflect on the TED Talk and answer some discussion questions.
- Be prepared to discuss your experience as a group next week.

Detailed Agenda:

1. Before you watch the TED Talk, think about the role happiness plays in your work. Write down your thoughts in a few sentences. It may be helpful to think about whether or not happiness matters to your work, or how your level of happiness might affect your ability to work well.
2. Once you’ve written down your first thoughts, please watch the following TED Talk: [The Happy Secret to Better Work](#) by Shawn Achor.
3. After you watch it, reflect on these questions and write down your responses:
   - Does being happy improve your performance at work?
   - Does success come before happiness or the other way around?
   - How do you find meaning in your work?
   - How can you increase your current level of happiness in your job right now?
   - How can our team support each other’s happiness and work satisfaction?
4. We will discuss our experience together next Tuesday at 10 am. During that meeting, I would like to hear what was your first OR favorite job and why. Then we will discuss our initial reflection, the TED Talk, and our answers to the three discussion questions. I will close the meeting by assigning our next TED Talk.

For additional resources, visit this [TED Ed lesson](#) focused on this same TED Talk.

Thank you everyone! I am looking forward to our conversation.
Sample RLC: Everyone Chooses a TED Talk

*Use the following communication and agenda to lead multiple remote learning circles focused on different themes via TED talks.*

Hello team! As a part of our work and professional development while we are working remotely, I would like for all of us to participate in a learning circle. Each week we will use TED Talks to focus on a theme, learn something about that theme and reflect and discuss our learning together the following week. You can find TED Talks here, and you can search by topic, most popular, newest, and more.

At some point over the next week, I would like all of us to find a TED Talk that we find interesting and answer the following questions:

1. What TED Talk did you chose?
2. Why did you find that topic or TED Talk particularly interesting?
3. How can you apply what you learned to your work or life?
4. What else are you wondering about after watching this talk? Is there something else you would like to learn, or did it lead you to additional questions?
5. What 2 discussion questions would you ask your colleagues if they were to go watch the same TED Talk?

We will go over these next week in a one-hour meeting. Please have all of your questions answered and be prepared to describe the video you watched and discuss your thoughts with our team.

Next week we will all be choosing from one of our colleague’s TED Talks that we found interesting and answer the discussion questions they have prepared for us (see number 4 above).

Thanks! I am looking forward to our conversation.
Sample RLC: The Moment of Lift Book Discussion

Use the following agenda to lead a remote learning circle on The Moment of Lift by Melinda Gates.

1. Begin with check-in question. Time the responses if your group is large. Choose one of the following:
   a. Who is the most inspirational woman you’ve ever met?
   b. What is an issue facing women today, and why is it important?
   c. What is one word you would use to describe your experience with this book? Why did you choose that word?

2. Have each person type in the chat feature their favorite quote and its page number. In the order it’s received, have the person who typed it read the quote aloud. Discuss with the group.

3. Make room for silence. Some of the stories in this book are very hard hitting and may take a moment to think through. This is ok.

4. Discussion questions:
   a. The word “feminist” often has charged reactions. How do you define feminist? Did your definition change after reading this book?
      “The first time I was asked if I was a feminist, I didn’t know what to say because I didn’t think of myself as a feminist. I’m not sure I knew then what a feminist was. Twenty-two years later, I am an ardent feminist. To me, it’s very simple. Being a feminist means believing that every woman should be able to use her voice and pursue her potential, and that women and men should all work together to take down the barriers and end the biases that still hold women back.” (Page 7)
   b. How do you see men today acting as allies for women? How can we encourage more men to be involved? Do you think it’s necessary?
      “Male allies are essential.” (Page 79)
      “Women need male allies.” (Page 199)
      “A man who is dominant is probably not going to say, ‘Hey let’s be equal, take some of my power.’ But a man might respond to the changing views of other men, or to a woman who asserts her power. Change comes when men see the benefits of women’s power—not just what women can do that men cannot, but a quality of relationship that comes in equal partnership that cannot come in a hierarchical relationship: a sense of belonging, of community, solidarity, and wholeness born of a promise that I will help you when your burdens are high, and you will help me when your burdens are low. That is why we women have to lift each other up—not to replace men at the top of the hierarchy, but to become partners with men in ending the hierarchy.” (Page 150)
   c. Melinda sheds light on many complex problems both in America and abroad. Did reading about some of these issues change your perceptions on how best to “help” in these situations?
“Outside groups had tried to change these practices, but no one succeeded...she quickly saw that there was more than a language barrier dividing these two groups. There was an empathy barrier. The outsiders showed little skill projecting themselves into the lives of the people they wanted to help, and they had little interest in trying to understand why something was being done a certain way.” (Page 164)

d. Can you think of a time learning caused you to shift your perspective or your actions? Discuss as large group, or use the breakout room feature on Zoom.

“...Bill learns. He loves to learn. Yes, he challenges people very hard, sometimes too hard, but he listens and learns, and when he learns, he is willing to shift.... [learning] is the central pillar of the culture we’ve tried to create at the foundation.” (Page 182)

e. Do you agree that this is startling evidence that the United States is far behind the rest of the world in honoring the needs of families? Why or why not?

“Paid family and medical leave allows people to care for their families and themselves in times of need....The United States is one of only seven countries in the world that do not provide paid maternity leave.” (Page 237 and Chapter 7)

f. Has community or belonging played a role in your empowerment? Discuss the role of gathering in your life.

“Empowerment starts with getting together – and it doesn’t matter how humble the gathering place is.” (Page 249)

g. How can we work together to create a new culture (here at UGA)? What would it look like?

“When women gather with one another, include one another, tell our stories to one another, share our grief with one another, we find our voice with one another. We create a new culture – not one that was imposed on us, but one we build with our own voices and values.” (Page 261)

5. Closing. Share screen and watch Melinda Gates speak about her book: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CXVhbwtla8