

Remote Learning Circle (RLC) Guide

The following is a guide for learning with your team while working remotely. 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.

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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” TED Talk

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.
- Watch “The Happy Secret to Better Work” TED Talk by Shawn Achor.
- 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:
 - a. Does being happy improve your performance at work?
 - b. Does success come before happiness or the other way around?
 - c. How do you find meaning in your work?
 - d. How can you increase your current level of happiness in your job right now?
 - e. 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>



Sample RLC: “How to Love Criticism” with Adam Grant (Podcast)

Use the following communication and agenda to lead a remote learning circle on receiving feedback.

Hello colleagues! Before our next learning circle on [DATE AND TIME], please listen to the podcast episode “How to Love Criticism” on WorkLife with Adam Grant. The podcast is 35 minutes, and you can access it here:

https://www.ted.com/talks/worklife_with_adam_grant_how_to_love_criticism/transcript?language=en&referrer=playlist-worklife_with_adam_grant

Before you listen to the podcast, please spend some time reflecting and journaling on these questions:

1. What comes to mind when you think of criticism? What messages have you been taught or received related to criticism?
2. Why is feedback important?
3. Think about a time you received some negative feedback. What happened? What was the outcome?

We will be discussing some of the following questions during our learning circle:

1. Ray Dalio shares his concept of a challenge network. “A challenge network is the group of people that you trust to push you to get better. They tell you the stuff you don't want to hear but need to hear.” Do you have a challenge network? Who is in it?
2. He then goes on to explain that your challenge network can only help if you are ready to listen. Are you ready to listen? Why or why not?
3. How could you model and practice the idea of radical candor – the idea “that you're caring personally about the other person at the same time that you're challenging them directly”?
4. Why is the “feedback sandwich” problematic?
5. How can we “opt in” to giving and receiving feedback as a team? What do we need to help each other learn and improve?
6. What are your thoughts related to the idea of a “second score,” or how well you take feedback?
7. What else are you wondering about after listening to this podcast? Is there something else you would like to learn, or did it lead you to additional questions? Prepare at least one question for the team discussion.

Facilitator Agenda

Use the following agenda to facilitate the discussion.

1. Start with an icebreaker question: Have you ever listened to a podcast before? If so, share your favorite. If not, what did you think of the experience?
2. Open the discussion up by asking the group what stood out to them most from the podcast (the facilitator may want to make notes of the answers for later discussion). Then select questions from those provided above and open it up to the group for discussion.
3. Use the last 5-10 minutes for a closing reflection: Did your idea of criticism change after listening to the podcast? Will you do anything differently as a result of our discussion?



Sample RLC: Rethinking Productivity (Articles)

Use the following communication and agenda to lead a remote learning circle on productivity in the “new world.”

Hello colleagues! Before our next learning circle on [DATE AND TIME], please read the following two articles, think about the discussion questions, and be prepared to discuss with the group the next time we meet.

Article one: [*The Chronicle of Higher Education: Why You Should Ignore All That Coronavirus-Inspired Productivity Pressure*](#)

Article two: [*Business Insider: How to Stay Productive While Managing Coronavirus Fear, According to a Productivity Expert.*](#)

Discussion questions:

1. What did a productive workday look like for you before the pandemic? What does a productive workday look like for you now?
2. How has your approach to work changed due to the recent pandemic?
3. Have you felt pressure to maintain or even increase your normal level of productivity during this time? Why? What do you think the source of that pressure is for you?
4. Should employees be expected to maintain or increase their productivity right now? Why or why not?
5. What are reasonable expectations for employees right now?
6. How can you manage expectations of yourself and others during this time?
7. What unique challenges might limit someone’s productivity during this time?
8. How can employers and supervisors maintain a level of fairness within these differences?

Facilitator Agenda

Use the following agenda to facilitate the discussion.

1. Kick off the session with an icebreaker. Ask the group: What is your favorite *distraction* right now? (Exercise routine, Netflix binge, book, etc.)
2. Pose some of the reflection questions you sent out earlier and include some of your own or invite other questions from the group.
3. Save 5-10 minutes for a final reflection at the end of the discussion. Ask the group: If you could create a NEW synonym for “productivity,” what word would you choose or invent?



Sample RLC: Learning, Working, and Living during Covid-19 Times (Reflection and Discussion)

Use the following communication and agenda to lead a remote learning circle on individuals' experiences of working and living during the Coronavirus response.

Hello colleagues!

Not all learning needs to be centered on external materials. Our own experiences throughout the week or month, plus our day to day work provide some of the greatest learning opportunities. Please answer the following reflection questions and be prepared to discuss with the group next time we meet:

1. What has been most challenging for you about working and living during these times?
2. What have you enjoyed most about this time?
3. How have you been touched or changed by the pandemic? What has informed your experience of living through this time?
4. What changes do you hope continue when work and life return to a "new normal"? How could you ensure these changes are integrated into your work and life?
5. What have you learned about yourself over the course of the last few weeks? About UGA? About humanity?

Please also compose a reflection question you'd like to ask about learning, working, and living during this time. Bring the question with you to the discussion and be prepared to pose it to the group.

Facilitator Agenda

Use the following agenda to facilitate the discussion.

1. Kick off the session with an icebreaker. Ask the group: What 3 words would you use to describe your work or yourself this week? Or share one picture, story, or experience from this time that has brought you joy.
2. Pose the questions provided above and open it up to the group for discussion. Ask others to ask their questions during the course of the discussion. You may also want to ask one or a couple of the following:
 - a. What does hope look like right now? What does reality look like right now? Are they different?
 - b. What piece of advice would you give yourself about working and living in this time?
 - c. In what area, skill, or capacity have you grown the most in the last few weeks?
3. Save time for a final reflection. Who can you connect with (outside of this group) this week and share your experience with? Take some time to message someone or video chat with someone and ask them these questions, or you can express why you're grateful to have them in your life.



Sample RLCs from UGA Student Affairs

The Division of Student Affairs is convening RLCs around the following topics. ~~Steal~~ Borrow their great ideas for your own team!

- Benchmarking: review other departments'/units'/institutions'/industries' websites for a specific thing - new ideas, design concepts, layout, programmatic elements, content, etc.
 - Idea: Ask everyone to review X sites or assign departments/units/institutions/industries for each person to review. Come back together to discuss interesting observations and facilitate a conversation about what best practices to adopt. Work together to figure out how to incorporate them.
- Website review: review and edit website content and structure to better meet audience needs
 - Idea: Conduct SWOT (or some other) analysis of website. Follow-up with conversation and consensus building on general parameters for editing the site based on SWOT analysis. Assign page(s) for team members to review/edit.
- Solution identification: naming and addressing nagging challenges or unexplored opportunities that are generally accepted or put off "until there is time"
 - Idea: Provide space for people to identify nagging or put off challenges or unexplored opportunities. Discuss which one to address first. Work in small groups to identify solutions to present to the group. Come back together to review, modify, merge, etc. the various solutions. Identify next challenge or opportunity to address and repeat.
- Learn about the University: review websites of departments/units across UGA
 - Idea: Ask each person to review a webpage of an area they would like to learn more about. Engage in conversations about what staff members learned. Repeat with a new set of sites.