

VIRTUAL LEARNING CIRCLES (VLC)



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WHAT IS A VIRTUAL LEARNING CIRCLE (VLC)?

A LEARNING CIRCLE IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE COMMITTED TO LEARNING AND GROWING TOGETHER.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF A VLC?

The goal of a learning circle is to create open dialogue and reflection around concepts, issues, etc., with a focus on shared outcomes. A virtual learning circle engages a group in this type of learning through remote resources.

STEPS FOR PLANNING A VLC

FOLLOW THESE STEPS TO PLAN A VIRTUAL LEARNING CIRCLE FOR YOUR OFFICE OR TEAM.



1. Decide on a topic, theme, or resource to be the focus for the VLC.
2. Select a date and time for the online meeting to occur, and communicate to the group with enough time for everyone to prepare.
3. Email any necessary materials and meeting agenda.
4. Plan a brief check-in or icebreaker to begin the first meeting.
5. Have a discussion based on several questions or prompts that were given ahead of time.
6. Plan a final reflection activity.
7. Assign (or have your team decide on) the next learning assignment.
8. Use [this guide](#) as a resource.

SUPERVISORS ARE ENCOURAGED TO DELEGATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOME OF THESE STEPS TO INTERESTED TEAM MEMBERS.

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 VIRTUAL LEARNING CIRCLE SESSIONS AND TOPICS

USE SOME OF THESE SUGGESTIONS TO FOCUS YOUR VLC.

TED Talks Take some time to watch someone's favorite TED talk and discuss it as a team. [Here](#) is a list 5 talks for career development, to get started.

Languages of Appreciation Read LoA 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.

Book Study Reading a book together fosters learning on your team. Choose a book that is relevant to your work, professional development, or speaks to your team. 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 later in this guide.



IDEAS FOR VLCS, CONT.

Individualized Learning Plans Each team member decides on a learning plan that includes workshops, 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 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.

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.



SAMPLE VLC: "THE HAPPY SECRET TO BETTER WORK"

USE THE FOLLOWING COMMUNICATION AND AGENDA TO LEAD A VIRTUAL 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.



SAMPLE VLC, CONT.:

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 10am. 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 VLC: 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 choose?
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 two discussion questions would you ask your colleagues if they were to go watch the same TED Talk?

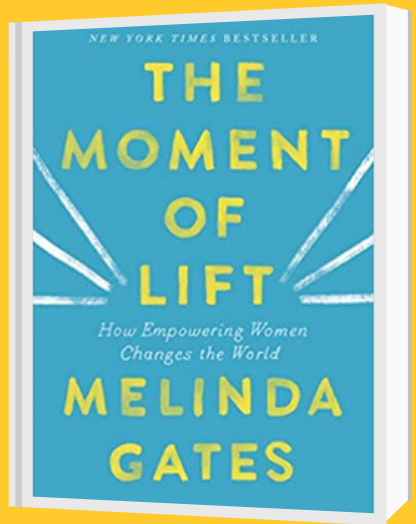
WE WILL GO OVER THESE NEXT WEEK IN A ONE-HOUR ZOOM MEETING. PLEASE HAVE ALL OF YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED AND BE PREPARED TO DESCRIBE THE VIDEO YOU WATCHED AND DISCUSS YOUR THOUGHTS WITH OUR TEAM.

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 #4 ABOVE).

SAMPLE VLC: BOOK DISCUSSION

USE THE FOLLOWING AGENDA TO LEAD A REMOTE LEARNING CIRCLE ON THE MOMENT OF LIFT BY MELINDA GATES.

1. Begin with a check-in question. Give a time limit for the responses if your group is large. Choose one of the following:
 - o Who is the most inspirational woman you've ever met?
 - o What is an issue facing women today, and why is it important?
 - o 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 okay!



SAMPLE VLC: BOOK DISCUSSION, CONT.

4. Discussion questions:

- o 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.” (p. 7)

- o 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.” (p. 79)

“Women need male allies.” (p. 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.” (p. 150)

SAMPLE VLC: BOOK DISCUSSION, CONT.

- o 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.” (p. 164)

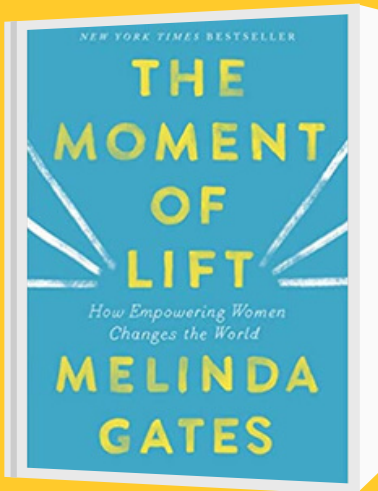
- o Can you think of a time learning caused you to shift your perspective or your actions?

“...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.” (p. 182)

- o 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.” (p. 237; Chapter 7)

SAMPLE VLC: BOOK DISCUSSION, CONT.



- 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."* (p. 249)
- How can we work together to create a new culture

(here at ASU)? 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." (p. 261)

5. Summarize and close. Share your screen and watch Melinda Gates speak about The Moment of Lift.