



YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

Working Out Loud: For a better career and life

by John Stepper

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41 Highlights

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The key was changing habits. Over time, I realized that in addition to people learning a few skills, they needed help changing their habits so they could apply those skills regularly. After all, even though we know that exercise and a healthy diet are good for us, we still struggle with those things. So I studied how to change people's habits and learned that the research findings are remarkably consistent. They all include the need to take small steps, chart your progress, reward successes, and seek peer support.

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"Working out loud" is the phrase I use to describe both a mindset and a set of techniques you can put into practice. When I explain it to people, I say, "Think Dale Carnegie meets the Internet." It's a human process more than a technical one. More than just making your work visible, you regularly frame what you're doing as a contribution and as a way to deepen relationships. You develop an open, generous, connected approach to work and life. Such a mindset combined with what you regularly put into practice is what helps you enjoy your every day and discover more possibilities.

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Normally it would have been ludicrous for Jordi Muñoz to apply for a job as CEO of a robotics company. He didn't have a university degree to certify what he knew, and his resume wouldn't have attracted any attention from a broker or on LinkedIn. There would simply be no way for his application to reach someone like Chris Anderson or to stand out if it did. But Jordi was able to shape his reputation based on his work, his passion for it, and the value other people saw in it. Jordi's contributions to the online community helped make him and his work visible, enabling him to gradually develop a set of relationships that unlocked opportunities.

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A few months after she wrote that post, a senior manager at her firm noticed Barbara's work and asked if she would join his team. He had never met her, and it wasn't her spreadsheet or genealogy skills that attracted his attention but the way she communicated and collaborated online.

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Behavioral research from the last few decades has given us greater insight into what motivates human beings as a species, and that helps us know what underpins a better career and life. It turns out that the way we relate to our work isn't correlated to the kind of job we have as much as it's correlated to our approach to our job and the environment in which we do it. Being a surgeon, for example, isn't innately more or less fulfilling than being a factory worker. What matters more is an individual's subjective view of surgery and factory work and the conditions in which he does it—the people, physical environment, systems, and processes.

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We have three innate psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When those needs are satisfied, we're motivated, productive, and happy. When they're thwarted, our motivation, productivity, and happiness plummet.³

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Part of the reason so many of us feel disengaged is the way work has been designed for the last century or so. At large companies in particular, work has become increasingly dehumanized, more about processes and systems than about people. In *Humanize*, Jamie Notter and Maddie Grant described how “we run our organizations like machines”⁷ and wrote about the negative consequences of a mechanical model for corporations. Think about how you've felt when you had a micromanaging boss that limited your control or when you were denied access to a new role or a learning opportunity because of your place in an organization chart. The performance review process alone is enough to make people feel bad about work. I've seen people break down in tears after a bad review, all because their manager had to pick on someone to meet her quota. Our environments at work can actively inhibit our drive, limiting our performance as well as the performance of the firm.

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Key Ideas in Part I •Whatever your background, age, or social skills, you can learn to increase your chances of creating a better career and life. •When it comes to how we feel about work, what matters most isn't the specific kind of job we do but how we approach our job and the environment in which we do it. •We feel better about work and life when we tap into our innate psychological needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—and experience more flow moments. •Working in an open, generous, connected way helps you tap into your innate psychological needs. A richer, more diverse network gives you access to more opportunities.

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Working Out Loud = Observable Work + Narrating Your Work¹

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Working out loud is an approach to work and life. It helps you achieve your goals and feel better about work while you discover more possibilities. Think “Dale Carnegie meets the Internet.” As you work out loud, you

leverage principles for building meaningful relationships as well as ways to share your work, get feedback, and interact with others who share your interests. Importantly, you wrap all of this in a mindset of generosity. All that's required is a set of skills and habits that anyone can learn. There are five elements in this description that we'll go through in the next five chapters: purposeful discovery, relationships, generosity, visible work, and a growth mindset.

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Traditionally, the way we developed our careers was similar to the way companies used to create products or services. Not that long ago, firms needed to put most of their effort into planning so they could ensure their product was right the first time. This was because it was so difficult and expensive to build things that the cost of mistakes was high. A firm typically got just one chance to plan, implement, and ship its product or service and hope they got it right. One of the many problems with this model was that they didn't know what "right" meant until other people gave them feedback, seeing or using whatever they built. Creating things was thus a risky proposition, reserved for institutions that could afford a big investment in planning and the occasional costly mistake.

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We've known for a long time that your networks of relationships are important. It's why people join exclusive clubs and attend conferences. It's why Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* sold so many copies. When he first published it in 1936 as "a practical, working handbook on human relations," he only printed five thousand copies. It went on to sell fifteen million more. "People are frequently astonished at the new results they achieve," he wrote. "It all seems like magic."² Almost eighty years later, the book is still popular. Your network, if developed properly, gives you access to knowledge, expertise, and influence. Mark Granovetter's "The Strength of Weak Ties" showed that people find jobs through their network. Ronald Burt, a sociologist and professor at the Chicago Booth School of Business, showed how people with better networks receive higher performance ratings, get promoted faster, and earn more money.³

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Geography used to be important. A tribe might be everyone in a certain village, or it might be model-car enthusiasts in Sacramento, or it might be the Democrats in Springfield...Now, the Internet eliminates geography. That means that existing tribes are bigger, but more important, it means there are now more tribes, smaller tribes, influential tribes...and tribes that never could have existed before.

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The world is full of people who are grabbing and self-seeking. So the rare individual who unselfishly tries to serve others has an enormous advantage. He has little competition. —Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*

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When Dale Carnegie wrote about the best approach to building relationships, he didn't mention wealth or highly specialized skills. His advice included things anyone could do: Give honest and sincere appreciation. Become genuinely interested in other people. Talk in terms of the other person's interests. Be a good listener. Encourage other people to talk about themselves. Make the other person feel important—and do it sincerely.

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Self-interest and other-interest are completely independent motivations: you can have both of them at the same time.

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Of the twenty fatal shark attacks around the world in 2011 and 2012, six of them were in Australia, prompting researchers there to find better ways of making the presence of sharks more visible to swimmers in the area. So they put the sharks on Twitter. Not that long ago, the only way swimmers would know if a shark was around was if a person nearby spotted one and yelled "Shark!" But waiting until someone within earshot sees a big dorsal fin is both scary and ineffective. You need a better way to know when a shark is around and a better way to spread the word so you can reach a wider audience. That led the researchers to tag hundreds of sharks with transmitters. Now whenever one of the tagged sharks comes within a half a mile of the beach, it triggers an alert to the thirty thousand followers of the Surf Life Saving Western Australia Twitter feed, noting the shark's breed and approximate location. This group, along with other beach safety and shark conservation groups (such as Shark Spotters in South Africa), also rely on humans at specific monitoring lookouts to find sharks and use Twitter to spread the word.

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Since Enterprise 2.0 appeared, I've been implementing social tools at a global company to change how tens of thousands of my colleagues work. Our early efforts failed. An enthusiastic minority might use a given tool, perhaps, but the majority would avoid it, dismiss a given tool as "Facebook for work," or simply not know what to do. Even those who were comfortable using social media struggled to use the social tools to help them meet a goal. They relegated the tools to purely personal use and didn't think to apply them to their everyday work.

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In 2012 we introduced a popular social collaboration platform in our firm.⁹ The software is designed especially for corporations, and it allows you to write and store documents, create groups and websites, start discussions, create events, and more. You can also comment and like almost anything and see all of your updates in a stream of activity similar to Facebook or Twitter. Thousands of companies now use software like this, and it's becoming increasingly common as firms seek to modernize how their employees communicate and collaborate. In just over two years, fifty thousand people at our firm were regularly using the social platform, and the number kept going up. Some employees used it just to search for information. Others used it as a more convenient way to share work with their team. Each month we would interview someone who was actively making his work

visible and ask why he did it and how work changed for him. The benefits fell into four main categories: Becoming more visible Getting useful feedback Becoming more efficient Enjoying work more

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My favorite reaction was from Derek, who posted this after having an epiphany of sorts about the power of making his work visible: The best thing I have seen from the firm in my twenty-six years here. I knew about the platform and maybe visited it a few times but certainly never posted. I didn't think I needed to. Just how wrong can one person be? After a fairly blunt conversation with my manager, I realized I needed to "sell" myself more...In the twenty-six years I have been employed here, I have worked in a number of roles in a few different countries and never thought anyone who needed my skills didn't know who I was. Once again, I was wrong. So, blunt conversation fresh in my mind, let's "sell" myself. I thought about how I could do this and of course came across the social platform. I soon came to realize that it isn't about selling yourself, it's about everything. In the three or four weeks I've been using it regularly... I've helped some people out. I've contributed to conversations from people I don't (or didn't) know. I've made friends (I've got twenty-six followers currently). I've got some new LinkedIn connections. I've publicized some vendor information relevant to my job. I am following thirty-five people, and I feel like I know people now. Did I sell myself? I think I did but in a nice way. I certainly feel like I am contributing to the firm more, and other people know who I am and what I can offer the firm.

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Paul has more impact, recognition, and fun at work Paul is someone who experienced all of these benefits. When he started using the social collaboration platform, he was in his midforties, working in a communications group. Paul's the kind of person who doesn't talk about himself and isn't an active user of social media. He just began by posting material related to his projects, such as ways to make the firm's intranet less expensive. His intended audience was an online community of communications people analogous to Jordi's online drone community. At first a few people provided support, suggestions, and referrals to other people who might be interested. Then each time someone commented or liked his proposals, more people became aware of Paul and his work. Whenever someone helped him, Paul would use the collaboration platform to publicly recognize the person and her contribution, further spreading the word and motivating people to help him even more. Within a few months, he had built a small online movement that saved his firm over \$500,000. "I probably got this done ten times quicker than I might have through traditional channels," he said. More and more people at work, including a managing director from another division, became aware of Paul through his work online. "I know you," people would say when they met him. "Your name keeps coming up." Looking back, it's actually been a great way to get "known." I now have people proactively reaching out to me because they've heard my name attached to the project. On our collaboration platform, you can create a personal brand for yourself.

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In *Show Your Work: The Payoffs and How-To's of Working Out Loud*, Jane Bozarth shows the extraordinary variety of ways that ordinary people make their work visible. Some showed finished products, but many narrated their work in progress. The book includes examples from doctors, dentists, software developers, teachers, and even topiary gardeners. Many of their contributions fell into two simple categories: This is how I did that and This is what I did and why.¹⁰ They made their work visible, often including mistakes and lessons learned, so others in their tribe could benefit from their experience.

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This final element, a mindset of improvement, is the most important one for making working out loud sustainable. There are three reasons for this: 1 A focus on getting better versus being good reduces the fear normally associated with trying to improve your work or relationships, enabling you to do and learn more. 2 Over time your improved capabilities give you a sense of confidence that makes further improvement more likely. That enables you to make more valuable contributions. 3 As you seek to improve yourself, you share your learning with others so they can also benefit. That reinforces the element of generosity.

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A method for getting better at anything Albert Bandura, the most cited psychologist alive today, developed a method he called “guided mastery” that’s incredibly effective for developing new capabilities. It’s also the basis for part III, where you’ll learn to work out loud toward a personal goal. In the 1960s, Bandura used this method to cure people of snake phobias in less than a few hours. Subjects would receive treatment combining “graduated live modeling with guided participation.”² First they would watch for fifteen minutes through a one-way mirror as the experimenter interacted with a snake. After the snake was back in its glass cage, the subject might enter the room and sit on a chair at varying distances from the cage. Gradually the experimenter would model more and more interactions and help the subject follow along. It was the subjects who, based on their apprehensiveness, set the pace at which they proceeded. As they made progress overcoming their phobia, they noticed other changes too: Having successfully eliminated a phobia that had plagued them for most of their lives, a number of subjects reported increased confidence that they could cope effectively with other fear-provoking events. As one subject explained it, “My success in gradually overcoming this fear of snakes has contributed to a greater feeling of confidence generally in my abilities to overcome any other problem that may arise. I have more faith in myself.”

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People who work out loud report this same feeling of self-efficacy. In developing the habit of regularly contributing to their network, they become more effective, more connected, and more confident. Joyce, for example, was able to model what others were doing with social media, try things herself, and gradually develop a sense that she too could do it. Jordi got the benefits of guided mastery by seeing what others did, submitting his own drone designs, and getting feedback on how to improve them. Now, more than four decades after Bandura’s work, millions of people are using a modern kind of guided mastery to increase their self-efficacy while they get better at everything from art history to Python programming.

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Focus on getting better instead of being good. Research on fifth-graders showed how emphasizing improvement instead of performance can make a significant difference in effectiveness and confidence.

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The secret of getting ahead is getting started. The secret of getting started is breaking your complex overwhelming tasks into small manageable tasks, and starting on the first one. —Mark Twain

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Can't go for a run four times a week for an hour? Try once a week. Still too much? Go for five minutes. Not working for you? Walk to the treadmill and touch it every day. Touching the treadmill won't improve your cardiovascular function, but it will make it possible to bypass your hardwired aversion to change.

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Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase. —Martin Luther King Jr.

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Today most people have some kind of online presence. Search the Internet for each person on your list, and see what you can find. Look for Twitter accounts, LinkedIn accounts, blogs, or other online content they've produced. If they have Twitter accounts, follow them. In contrast to Facebook and LinkedIn, following someone on Twitter doesn't require the other person to do anything. That's one reason why Twitter is often the simplest and most effective way to take a first step in forming a connection. If you see a website in a person's Twitter or LinkedIn profile, go to that website and look for content. If you like any of it, let the person know by hitting a Favorite or Like button. If you want to keep receiving updates, look for a Follow button or the ability to subscribe by e-mail. There's no need to worry about what to say or write. You're just touching the treadmill. For now, all you're looking for is an unobtrusive way to move the relationship from they have no idea who I am to they've seen my name.

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Besides the like and follow in the exercise, can you think of other simple gifts you might offer both in person and on-line? Here's a list of ten gifts anyone can offer. See if you can come up with at least one more. 1Read what someone wrote. 2Give someone your full attention when she is speaking. 3Congratulate someone on a new job or other milestone. 4Recognize someone by pointing out his work or positive qualities. 5Appreciate someone with a public thank-you. 6Offer your encouragement. 7Offer your support. 8Ask questions, allowing others to share their expertise. 9Share entertainment you've enjoyed. 10Share resources—books, presentations, articles—that you've found useful.

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One of Dale Carnegie's principles is "Give honest and sincere appreciation," and it's one of the first contributions you'll make as you practice leading with generosity.

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The richest man in Babylon also advised to "guard thy treasures from loss" and to avoid wasteful ventures. Average Americans may consider themselves busy, but they also spend more than 34 hours a week watching TV.

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As you reach advanced levels of working out loud, you'll add more original and valuable contributions to this list. For now, though, this is more than enough for getting started. Here's the contribution list from the last chapter: Read what someone wrote. Give someone your full attention when she is speaking. Congratulate someone on a new job or other milestone. Recognize someone by pointing out his work or positive qualities. Appreciate someone with a public thank-you. Offer your encouragement. Offer your support. Ask questions, allowing others to share their expertise. Share entertainment you've enjoyed. Share resources—books, presentations, articles—that you've found useful.

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If it feels fake or inauthentic, stop. Only offer genuine gifts. If you didn't love Lean In, for example, don't say you did. Even more importantly, if you loved something and shared it, don't worry about a response. It's the expectation of getting something in return that can spoil a gift. Offering contributions should make you feel good. If you don't have positive feelings as you work your lists, reconsider the gifts you're offering and whether you're truly delivering them without any strings attached.

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A common goal-related problem I see in our Working Out Loud circles is when people choose something they think they should care about but don't. For example, it makes intellectual sense to want more recognition at work. But if you don't like your job or the people you work with, it's hard to summon the energy you'll need to pay attention and work out loud toward that goal. When I worked with Barbara, we spoke about possible goals related to her current job or possibly pursuing other careers in finance. But those ideas didn't feel right or inspiring. So she chose a simpler goal of simply "seeing what else is out there" related to her genealogy hobby. For Barbara, exploring people and possibilities related to something she was passionate about was a much better way to orient her working out loud activities. It made it much more attractive for her brain to devote attention to it.

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A checklist for changing anything in your life: Take small steps toward your goals. Set some realistic, achievable goals. Structure your life to help you attain your goals. Chart your progress. Look at the areas where you're successful. Reward yourself for your successes. Focus on your achievements. Allow yourself to fail without turning it into a catastrophe. Enlist the support of friends. Picture the way you'd like life to be.

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Here are ten examples of more significant contributions you can consider making: Answer questions others have asked. Offer a comment that builds on someone's work. Share your ideas. Share something you've learned. Share your work experiences, especially mistakes. Share your life experiences. Share your challenges. Offer introductions to people you know. Offer your skills. Offer your time.

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One of the reasons many of us don't have larger networks is we're uncomfortable approaching people we don't know. Here, for example, is a comment on one of my blog posts about relationships: It may sound stupid, but the biggest impediment to my reaching out to experts I admire comes from a set of tapes in my head that they are too important, busy, and clever to have time for a stranger. I think it's an age and female thing—as my Millennial colleagues have no problem reaching out to anyone.¹ Well, I've had that same fear too. Why would they want to talk with me? Based on the coaching I do, I find it's a feeling almost all of us share. I also find it's a feeling we can handle more easily with a little practice. Being mindful of the following three questions changes how you feel when you approach someone: What would my reaction be if I were that person? Why should she care? Why am I doing this? The first question invokes empathy. It makes you more mindful of the actions you take and the words you use. The second question leads to generosity. Framing your approach as a genuine gift is liberating, freeing you from the fear of being pushy or being rejected. The third question leads to confidence. Examining your motives helps you avoid being manipulative, insincere, or otherwise doing something you're uncomfortable with. Seth Godin described it as the “sound of confidence”: “Generosity, not arrogance. Problem-solving, not desperation. Helpfulness, not selfishness.”² If you're generous and helpful as you approach someone, you'll feel much more comfortable than if you're arrogant, desperate, and selfish. That concept might seem obvious to you, but in practice, people routinely come across as arrogant, desperate, and selfish, usually without even knowing it.

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When Barbara and I were going through her relationship list, there was someone whose work she found interesting but she was reluctant to approach him. The mere idea of contacting a stranger made her anxious. I would like to know... Do you have time for coffee? It felt pushy and inauthentic. But with the three questions in mind, she wrote a note based on empathy and generosity instead of self-interest. The e-mail was just a few sentences, beginning with Barbara's appreciation for the person's work and including an offer to help organize an event for his organization if he was interested. She was happy and surprised when she got a response right away. It even included a warm thank-you. “It really works :))” she wrote me, complete with a smiley symbol. “And I was so nervous to just approach him unasked.”

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Tim Grahl offered some excellent advice for people seeking help from others: When you're in outreach mode, revoke your right to be offended. You're not always going to get the answer you want. People are going to turn you down or just ignore you from time to time. That's a part of the game; that's a part of life. When you don't get a favorable response, take a breath and move forward. Keep looking for ways to help people. Always assume the best of people.

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