

# Working Out Loud

Working Out Loud (WOL) ist eine derzeit in der HR-Szene und darüber hinaus omnipräsente Methode zur Weiterentwicklung der Unternehmenskultur sowie der Fähigkeiten der Mitarbeiter für das Digitale Zeitalter. Welches Potenzial hat „WOL“ wirklich – ist es nur ein Hype, der wieder vorübergeht oder hat der Ansatz die Kraft, Organisationen und Zusammenarbeit nachhaltig zu verändern? Darüber, was WOL ist, wie es funktioniert und wofür es sich in Unternehmen konkret einsetzen lässt, habe ich – gemeinsam mit dem Transformations-Experten Ingo Stoll – mit dem WOL-Begründer John Stepper gesprochen. Das Interview ist ein Auszug aus dieser Co-Produktion der Podcasts „D1G1TAL LEADERS“ und „#MoTcast“.

**Sebastian Hollmann:** John, can you give a brief summary what Working Out Loud is and how it works?

**John Stepper:** Working Out Loud was born from a desire for something more at work. I spent most of my life working for big companies and found that most people were unhappy. And what I saw was a dramatic waste of potential. These companies have so much to offer, so many resources and opportunities - and yet people are unhappy. So over the last nine years, I've been trying a lot of experiments and what came out is the concept of Working Out Loud. The basic idea is that you can build relationships that matter by making contributions to people over time. That's a very old idea! And today it's actually easier to do that than ever because of the tools we have – in particular social platforms. So Working Out Loud means to build relationships that matter based on conventional wisdom about people and relationships. It helps you to find people related to a goal that you have as well as ways how you can reach them and make contributions to them to deepen your relationships. The idea is: I can give small gifts freely to people in my network. And over the course of my network we're wired for reciprocity – however it's not a mere transaction, I don't have to expect anything. And still, over the course of my network, there can also be a benefit for me and everybody wins.

**Sebastian Hollmann:** Sharing openly to create win-win situations requires a certain mindset – can you tell us more about that?



## John Stepper

unterstützt mit der Methode „Working Out Loud“ Menschen dabei, ein zufriedeneres und selbstbestimmtes (Arbeits-)Leben zu führen. Zudem hilft er Unternehmen bei der Weiterentwicklung ihrer Zusammenarbeitskultur. In Johns Buch „Working Out Loud“ wird diese Methode anhand eines 12-wöchigen Peer-Learning-Ansatzes beschrieben, sodass Interessierte „Working Out Loud“ direkt ausprobieren und die Vorteile selbst erfahren können. Mehr über „Working Out Loud“, inklusive Johns TEDx Talk und Videos von Unternehmen, die die Methode erfolgreich nutzen, gibt es auf [www.workingoutloud.com](http://www.workingoutloud.com).

**John Stepper:** First, that behavior requires generosity - this idea that I'm not limited in what I have to offer. And what you have to offer could be as simple as attention or appreciation. But it could also include work that you make visible.

And the other mindset that I think you are referring to is a growth mindset. If you're willing to view life as a learning process, you're more likely to try new things and successfully deal with setbacks. With a growth mindset, it's also easier

for you to offer things. Even if someone doesn't get back to you - it's ok. Each one of these things is a natural part of the learning process.

**Sebastian Hollmann:** In the era of digital transformation, behavioral change is the most critical factor. You once called WOL a superpower that everyone of us has. What holds us back from unlocking our potential?

**John Stepper:** A lot of this is self-imposed. Back in 2008, social platforms were making their way into organizations - with the potential to change everything because with these tools I can make myself visible and shape my own reputation in my network. I quickly learned that people were so busy that - even if they believed me that Working Out Loud would help them – they still wouldn't do it. And that was fascinating me because people aren't stupid. It's just hard to change your habits. So I started to research what makes us change our behavior and how we develop new habits. It breaks down to a set of techniques which I codified in the Working Out Loud method. The secret to changing any behavior is small steps, practiced over time, with feedback and peer support along the way. That's what happens in WOL circles. You learn by deliberate practice, by taking actions and getting feedback on those actions until you have developed a new set of habits.

**Sebastian Hollmann:** What are the most important use cases for Working Out Loud in organizations?

**John Stepper:** A typical use case that companies apply Working Out Loud for is onboarding. New employees are typically hungry and want to learn how to navigate in their new company. They want to reach out to new people in this new place and with the help of the circles they can do this more quickly and are thus more productive. Other companies also apply it for digital transformation projects or innovation programs as the behavior change component. Some are also using it for diversity or leadership development - for that use case the circles have been adapted and changed to a reverse mentoring approach so that young people work with executives and they teach them in their own safe and confidential space how managers can lead and engage a global organization using these tools that they may not have been used to before. So we give leaders a way to experience the benefits for themselves in a way that is safe and also comfortable for them.



Sketchnote by Tanmay Vora / QAspire.com

**Sebastian Hollmann:** Can you give us a short tour through the curriculum? What is happening in the circles?

**John Stepper:** As I mentioned, the circles are a safe and confidential space that allows you to experiment and try something new. A WOL circle is a group of 4 or 5 people who spend 1 hour a week for 12 weeks – and ask themselves 3 questions:

1. **What am I trying to do?**  
This helps you to focus on an individual goal that you care about.
2. **Who's related to that goal?**  
Here you try to find people that could help you in some way.
3. **How could you contribute to them to deepen the relationship?**  
This helps you to identify opportunities for win-win situations.

And that's what happens over the 12 weeks. Regarding the habit change: If I tell people „Here are some new tools and methods“ – it's too much too soon. What tends to happen with a lot of these digital transformation projects is that it is threatening to people. So instead of engaging them, instead of enabling them to take a step, they get detached because it provokes fear or re-

sistance, or both. What WOL circles do is to break down the change into very small, fear-free steps during these 12 weeks - so simple that anyone can do it. The peer support of those 3 to 4 other people gives you the structure to keep going. And that's how we can achieve a behavior change.

**Sebastian Hollmann:** It's often not easy to find a goal – can you give some tips for that?

**John Stepper:** Goals are good – but when they're too big, what happens is that they tend to trigger your natural defense mechanisms, the resistance in your head. It's trying to protect you from failure. And so what happens is that because of your big goal your brain says: „Oh, that's scary!“ So, you're not gonna take a step. And then a week goes by, a month, six months, your life... And what we hope people do in WOL circles is that they pick a goal that they care about, something accessible, something you can make progress towards in 12 weeks. Something that you could frame as a learning or exploration goal. It could be: "I'd like to get better in my job" or "I'd like to meet more people inside or outside the company

that are related to what I do". Goals like these stretch you a little bit but they are not scary. They step into your innate needs for control, competence, and connection. These are intrinsic motivations we all share. As human beings, we all want to have more autonomy, to get better at something, and a feeling of connection to other people and a purpose. And that's what gets you to show up at the circle meetings. Even if you're not sure what your goal is, and you pick something that simply sparks your interest and curiosity, like learning more about a new hobby. You go to your circle meetings and there you experience how you can reach people, how you can deepen relationships, how you can use the tools. And by the end you have habits you can apply to any goal. So the key isn't picking an especially "good" goal in your first circle. It's the practice that counts - doing the exercises week after week and gradually developing new habits and a mindset. Then, no matter what you're trying to do, you can find people related to it, develop relationships, and increase the chances for exchange and colla-

boration that make you more effective and earn you access to more possibilities. THAT's a superpower, and it's one that anybody can develop. ■

Das vollständige Interview mit John Stepper: <https://bit.ly/2Oglk2M>



**DR. SEBASTIAN HOLLMANN**

HR Strategy  
Continental AG  
E-Mail: Sebastian.Hollmann@conti.de

Als Blogger schreibt Dr. Sebastian Hollmann über HR, Leadership und die Arbeitswelt in Zeiten der digitalen Transformation ([www.hr-strategie.blog](http://www.hr-strategie.blog)). Zudem ist Sebastian Hollmann Leadership-Podcaster ([www.DIGITALLEADERS.blog](http://www.DIGITALLEADERS.blog), [www.nachhaltigfuehren.blog](http://www.nachhaltigfuehren.blog)) und Dozent für Leadership und Führung an der Steinbeis-Hochschule Berlin. Als Speaker spricht er insbesondere über die Themen Social Collaboration, Working Out Loud und Digital Leadership.