



5 Week Program

Learning Circles for
Women in Agriculture

Building Resilience Together

compiled & edited by Bob Bertsch





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Everyone faces the stress of adversity and change. For people working in agriculture, that adversity and change can be even more challenging. Our livelihoods are at frequent risk from weather disasters, market changes, and other forces beyond our control. We must find a way to adapt to changes in politics, economics, culture, technology and climate.

Building Resilience Together is a way to improve your resilience by intentionally working on your social support system. Social support is a critical part of your resilience. By working on your social support system alongside a small group of other women in agriculture, you'll develop ways of thinking and doing that will contribute to your resilience.

Rethinking Resilience

For a long time, we thought of resilience only as bouncing back after a disaster or traumatic event. While that's still an important part of being resilient, our understanding of resilience has changed to include our response to more frequent stress, like financial or relationship problems. We have also expanded our view to include not just the ability to bounce back, but also the ability to "roll with the punches" by adapting to adversity.

No matter how personally resilient we are, we don't practice that resilience in a vacuum. We live in complex environments and need to adapt to complex changes. Building Resilience Together focuses on improving our adaptability in complex environments by helping you:

- Make connections
- Accept change as part of living
- Move toward your goals
- Practice self-discovery
- Nurture a positive self-view

Learning Circles

Improving your resilience will require some changes, and change can be hard. A learning circle can support as you make those changes. A learning circle is a small group of learners (5-8 members) who make change together by connecting with each other, sharing their experiences, and providing peer support.

Learning circles meet multiple times over several weeks, giving you time to practice new skills and reflect on what you are learning. Using the Building Resilience Together guides, your circle will meet 8

times. Circles usually meet weekly for about an hour, but the guides can be adjusted to what works best for your circle.

Your learning circle will need a facilitator to keep the meetings moving along. You can have the same facilitator for all your meetings or have a different circle member facilitate each of the meetings. The Building Resilience Together Facilitator's Guide has some great tips for facilitating a circle meeting.

Finally, learning circles are a safe, supportive space. Please honor the feelings and privacy of other members, look for ways to support them, and have fun!

Working Out Loud

Building Resilience Together draws on research and writing in the fields of behavior change, positive psychology, and more. John Stepper's "Working Out Loud" model (www.workingoutloud.com) is a particularly important resource.

The Working Out Loud model is grounded in 5 elements that you'll see mentioned throughout our learning circle guides:

- **Purposeful discovery** - which helps you develop the skills and habits to be intentional setting goals and developing relationships.
- **Relationship building** - which helps you see the value connecting with others in improving your resilience, and helps you practice establishing and nurturing relationships.
- **Generosity** - which helps you foster generosity as a motivation for sharing your experiences and supporting others.
- **Visible Work** - which helps you become more comfortable sharing your work and experiences with others. Making your work and experiences visible can lead to new connections that can could improve your resilience.
- **Growth Mindset** - which helps you understand that you can develop the skills, habits and values necessary for to be more resilient by practicing them over time.

Meeting 1

Goals and Self-Discovery

What to Expect

In this meeting, you'll start to get to know the other people in your circle, talk about the guidelines for circle meetings, make some decisions about when your circle will meet and set a goal for your Building Resilience Together experience. Let's get started!

Check-in

Each circle meeting will start with a check-in. During the check-in, you'll have the opportunity to share your progress, struggles, accomplishments, or whatever is on your mind. Check-ins are also a great time to validate and support other circle members. In this first meeting, let's skip the check-in and jump right into the first activity.

Activity 1 – What lights you up? (about 15 minutes)

Before we introduce ourselves to the circle, let's take some time to think about sharing something meaningful to us. Take a few minutes to think about the questions below. Choose one or more questions and try to think of things that are not directly related to your roles at work or at home (mom, wife, grandma, employee, boss, etc.).



What lights me up?



What do I care most about?



What am I an advocate for?

Once everyone has their answer ready, let's share at least one of our answers with the others in our circle. As people share, feel free to ask a question, share a related idea or experience, or just offer validation by saying something like, "Thanks for sharing that with us."

Activity 2 - Defining Our Circle (about 15 minutes)

The Building Resilience Together circle guides are exactly that, “guides,” not “instructions.” Your circle can decide when and how closely to follow the guides, as long as you make that decision together.

Number of Meetings

Let’s get some practice making decisions together by deciding how many times we want to meet. There are 3 sets of circle guides; one set for circles that meet 5 times, one set for circles that meet 8 times, and one set for circles that meet 12 times. Meeting fewer times saves time, of course. Meeting more times gives you more time to practice your skills, create strong ties within your circle, and improve your resilience.

It’s critical that everyone in the circle agree to the number of times the circle will meet. Make sure you take the time needed for everyone in the circle to be heard, and to come to a consensus.

Circle Ground Rules

To get the most out of a learning circle, it’s important that we start to build trust with each other and that we feel safe sharing with each other. Review the circle ground rules below. If any of the rules are unclear, discuss them. You may also want to discuss whether the circle want to adopt any additional ground rules.

- What is said in circles, stays in circles.
- We are here to support each other, not compete with or judge each other.
- We will use relationship as resolution. No disagreement is bigger or more important than our connections with each other.
- This is practice. We will leave space for each other to make mistakes.

Set Your Schedule

If you haven’t already, take a few minutes to schedule your next meeting. If it works for your circle, you may want to try and schedule all of your future meetings. Finding a common time can be challenging, so be patient and make sure you at least get your next meeting scheduled.

For guides on circle meetings for 8 or 12 times,
visit go.unl.edu/wia-circles

Activity 3 - Setting Your Goal (about 20 minutes)

Moving toward a goal is one way to improve your resilience. It's also a great way to keep yourself engaged in the Building Resilience Together experience. We are more likely to stick with a process when we can see and feel the progress we are making.

Let's take 5 minutes of quiet time to think about our personal goals for this experience. As you think about a goal, keep the 3 questions from the "What lights you up?" activity in mind:

- What do I care most about?
- What lights me up?
- What am I an advocate for?

Can you set a goal that relates to what lights you up or what you are an advocate for?

Here are some other questions to keep in mind when setting your goal:

- Can you benefit from the experience of others in pursuing the goal?
- Can you frame it as a learning goal?
- Can you make progress towards it in the number of times your circle has decided to meet?



My Goal

Setting a goal is hard. You may not be able to come up with your perfect goal in 5 minutes. Don't worry. You can always change your goal along the way.

Once everyone has a goal in mind, let each circle member share their goal. After each person shares their goal, feel free to ask a question, share a related idea or experience, or just offer validation by saying something like, "That's an awesome goal. Good luck with it!"

Once everyone has shared their goal, take a minute of quiet time to reflect on how it felt to set and share your goal. Does it feel good to have a destination ahead? Are you worried about achieving your goal?

Now let's wrap-up this activity by taking 3-4 minutes to share talk about how each of us felt.

Voicing intentions (about 5 minutes)

Each circle meeting will end with time for each member to share what they intend to work on before the next meeting. Take a minute to review the “Things to Try” section below, in case you want to include one or more of those activities in your intentions. You might want to jot down what you shared and use it in your “Check-in” at the beginning of the next meeting.

Things to Try

Here are some things you could try between now and your next circle meeting to continue to work on your goal and self-discovery.

- Try your “What lights me up?” introduction on a friend, family member, or even someone you just met. What was their reaction? Do you feel like it sparked a connection?
- Reach out to one or more of your circle members to check how things are going for them. It doesn't have to be much, just a quick email or text to let them know you are thinking about them. Did you get a response? If you did or didn't, how did that feel?
- Share your goal in public. If you have a LinkedIn account, add your goal to your bio. If you have a Facebook, Instagram or Twitter account write a short post or tweet about it. If you don't use social media, share your goals with two or three friends. As you shared your goals how did you feel? Did it still inspire you? Did sharing your goal make you think about it differently?



My Intentions

CELEBRATION!

In whatever time you have left, take a minute to celebrate! Celebrate the fact that you have all started a journey together. Celebrate that you were brave enough to share what you shared in this circle meeting. Celebrate the fact that you are here working on your resilience.

GREAT JOB, EVERYONE!

Reflection



How am I feeling about participating in the Building Resilience Together experience?

Not
Great

Super
Excited

mark how you are feeling on the line above



What, if anything, is exciting me about the Building Resilience Together experience?

What, if anything, concerns me?



What obstacles, if any, might interfere with my participation in the Building Resilience Together experience?

What is my plan for avoiding or overcoming those obstacles?



Meeting 2

Building Relationships

What to Expect

In this meeting, you'll start to create a list of people and organizations who can help you achieve your goal. Making connections to improve your social support is important to your resilience. You'll also think about what you might be able to contribute to and gain from the people on your list. Here we go!

Check-in (about 10 minutes)

Let's start by checking in on the progress we have made toward our goals. Each member can take this opportunity to share how they are doing. Take a look back at your "Reflection" section from the last meeting. Did you experience match your expectation? Were you able to overcome any obstacles? Did you try anything from the "Things to Try" section of the last circle guide? This is also a great time to validate and support other circle members.

Activity 1 - Starting Your Relationship List (about 25 minutes)

Making connections with others builds your social support network, which improves your resilience. We are going to create a relationship list and practice building a relationship with each person on that list.

Let's take 10 minutes of quiet time to find 10 people related to our goal. Use your phone or computer to play Internet detective. If you think of a role (e.g. "someone who has experience doing ..." or "a leader in the field of...") but can't yet find a name right away, that's okay. Just write down whatever information you have.

If you're struggling to come up with names, here are some people you might include:

- People who have done something similar to what you're trying to do
- People whose interests relate to your goal
- People who have written about something related to your goal
- People you admire for their resilience

Include any contact information you can find or already have, including email addresses, phone numbers and social media accounts. For now, don't worry about the "Last contact date" or "Next contact date" in the spaces below.

Next, assign each person on your list one of the intimacy levels below. The intimacy level will help you keep track of your progress building that relationship.

1. The person doesn't know you exist.
2. You're connected in some way. (e.g., you follow them online)
3. You've had one or more interactions.
4. You've done work together (at a job, as a volunteer, on a committee, at church, etc.), even in a small way.
5. You regularly interact, exchange ideas, and help each other.

Name:

Intimacy Level:

Email address:

Phone:

Social media accounts:

Last contact date:

Next contact date:

Name:

Intimacy Level:

Email address:

Phone:

Social media accounts:

Last contact date:

Next contact date:

Name:

Intimacy Level:

Email address:

Phone:

Social media accounts:

Last contact date:

Next contact date:

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Email address:

Phone:

Social media accounts:

Last contact date:

Next contact date:

Name:	Intimacy Level:
Email address:	Phone:
Social media accounts:	
Last contact date:	Next contact date:

Name:	Intimacy Level:
Email address:	Phone:
Social media accounts:	
Last contact date:	Next contact date:

Name:	Intimacy Level:
Email address:	Phone:
Social media accounts:	
Last contact date:	Next contact date:

Name:	Intimacy Level:
Email address:	Phone:
Social media accounts:	
Last contact date:	Next contact date:

Name:	Intimacy Level:
Email address:	Phone:
Social media accounts:	
Last contact date:	Next contact date:

Once everyone has at least a good start on their list, each member can share who they found and how each person on the list might help with their goal. After each person shares their list, feel free to ask questions, make suggestions, and offer validation.

Activity 2 – Network Balance Sheet (about 15 minutes)

Building relationships requires give and take. While you hope the people in your relationship list will help you achieve your goal and become a part of your social support network, you also need to think about what you can contribute to them.

In future meetings, we'll consider specific ways you can contribute to the specific people on your list. Right now, let's look at the big picture. Use the network balance sheet below to list the things you want to get from and the things you can contribute to your social support network as a whole.

Once everyone has completed their balance sheet, share what you want and what you can contribute with the others in the circle.

NETWORK BALANCE SHEET

What do I want from my
social support network?

What can I contribute to my
social support network?

Voicing intentions (about 5 minutes)

Each circle meeting will end with time for each member to share what they intend to work on before the next meeting. Take a minute to review the “Things to Try” section below, in case you want to include one or more of those activities in your intentions. You might want to jot down what you shared and use it in your “Check-in” at the beginning of the next meeting.

Things to Try

Here are some things you could try between now and your next circle meeting to continue to work on your goal and self-discovery.

- Make your own Network Balance Sheet for a specific group you are involved in. Doing a balance sheet for a community group, a group of friends or even your family can provide some important perspective. Are you getting what you want to get out of the group? If not, why? What do your contributions to the group reveal about your strengths?
- Choose a method for keeping track of your relationship list. Think about what method would be easy to maintain and would keep your list in front of you. Some people have used a notes app on their phone. Some keep a journal or contacts book. Some have a detailed, color-coded spreadsheet. What method would work best for you?



My Intentions

CELEBRATION!

In whatever time you have left, take a minute to celebrate! Celebrate the fact that you showed up today. Celebrate the time you took to reflect on what you need from your social support network. Celebrate the fact that you are here working on your resilience.

GREAT JOB, EVERYONE!

Reflection



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Great

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mark how you are feeling on the line above



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What, if anything, concerns me?



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What is my plan for avoiding or overcoming those obstacles?



Meeting 3

Giving the Universal Gifts

What to Expect

In this meeting, you'll start working on your relationships with the people on your relationship lists. You are going to use the approach John Stepper outlines in "Working Out Loud," which starts with small gifts given in the spirit of generosity.

Check-in (about 10 minutes)

Let's start by checking in. Each member can take this opportunity to share how they are doing. Take a look back at your "Reflection" section from the last meeting. Did you experience match your expectation? Were you able to overcome any obstacles? Did you try anything from the "Things to Try" section of the last circle guide? This is also a great time to validate and support other circle members.

Activity 1 – Giving the Gift of Attention (about 15 minutes)

The approach we are going to use to build our relationships is based on "reciprocal altruism," the idea that we are willing to make sacrifices for others because we believe, if we do, others will make sacrifices for us. This idea is important because it helps us look at our relationships less as a series of transactions (for example, "I'll help you move your couch, if you watch my kids next week"), and more as a commitment to mutual support. That mutual support starts with small gifts given in the spirit of generosity.

The first small gift we are going to offer is the gift of attention. John Stepper calls attention and gratitude the universal gifts, because everyone likes to receive them. Go through your relationship list and give attention to at least 3 people. Attention can be very easy to give, especially if the recipient is present online. If any of the people on your list have a public social media account (Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook), you can offer attention just by liking or sharing one of their posts. If they have an Instagram or Twitter account, you could simply follow them. If you can't access their LinkedIn or Facebook account, send them a connection or friend request. If they don't have an online presence, think about how you could say "I see you" or "I care about what you have to say" in a low-stakes way.

Write down the person you gave attention to and the way you gave attention to them below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Activity 2 – Giving the Gift of Gratitude (about 15 minutes)

Now let's give the gift of gratitude. Pick 2 people from your relationship list that you'd like to thank for something they have said or done. Pick 1 person to thank privately and 1 to thank publicly. Take 5-10 minutes to think about who you would like to thank and what you would like to say.

	Gifts of Gratitude	
	Recipient	Thank you Message
Private	_____	_____
Public	_____	_____

When you have your messages ready, go ahead and send them. You can send your private thank you by email or text. You can offer public appreciation via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, or any other channel you like. Once you have sent your gifts of gratitude, update your relationship list with the date of your contribution.

Activity 3 – The Spirit of Generosity (about 10 minutes)

Remember, we are trying to build relationships by giving small gifts in the spirit of generosity. We are trying to build trust, and trust is hard to build when we expect something in return for our contributions.

Take a few minutes to read “The Generosity Test”

(<https://workingoutloud.com/blog/the-generosity-test>), a short blog post by John Stepper.

What did you think of the post? How would you do on the Generosity Test? Take a few minutes to share your thoughts with your circle.

Voicing intentions (about 5 minutes)

Each circle meeting will end with time for each member to share what they intend to work on before the next meeting. Take a minute to review the “Things to Try” section below, in case you want to include one or more of those activities in your intentions. You might want to jot down what you shared and use it in your “Check-in” at the beginning of the next meeting.

Things to Try

Here are some things you could try between now and your next circle meeting to continue to work on your goal and self-discovery.

- Try give 5 small gifts to five individuals—all five in one day. It doesn't matter if the acts are big or small, but it is more effective if you perform a variety of acts, including giving attention and gratitude. The acts do not need to be for the same person. The person doesn't even have to be aware of them.
- Find three opportunities to perform a random act of kindness. Examples include feeding a stranger's parking meter, donating blood, helping a friend with a chore, or providing a meal to a person in need. Bringing a coworker a cup of coffee. Focus on the feeling of generosity.
- Choose one more person from your list to give attention to and one more person to give gratitude to. These are the universal gifts. When given in generosity they can help build relationships. After each act, write down what you did in at least one or two sentences; for more of a happiness boost, also write down how it made you feel.

My Intentions

CELEBRATION!

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GREAT JOB, EVERYONE!

Reflection



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Meeting 4

So Much to Offer

What to Expect

Building Resilience Together is a strengths-based approach to building relationships and resilience. In this meeting, we are going to think about all of our experiences and think about how they can be strengths in our lives by becoming the basis for building relationships with others.

Check-in (about 10 minutes)

Let's start by checking in. Each member can take this opportunity to share how they are doing. Take a look back at your "Reflection" section from the last meeting. Did you experience match your expectation? Were you able to overcome any obstacles? Do you feel like your relationships are getting stronger? This is also a great time to validate and support other circle members.

Activity 1 – 50 Things About You (about 25 minutes)

Let's revisit an activity we did at the 2019 Nebraska Women in Agriculture Conference. Learning circle participants have said they get more out of this activity each time they do it. In this activity, we are going to use self-discovery to find the things about ourselves that can help us connect to others. Self-discovery is an important part of building resilience. Spending time thinking about yourself can help you reflect on how you remained resilient through difficult experiences, and it can help you identify the personal strengths that contribute to your resilience.

Let's take 5 - 10 minutes to write down as many facts about ourselves as we can. You might start with more obvious facts like your age, relationship status, or hometown, but you'll find you'll have to dig deeper for facts as you go. Write down your facts on the next page.

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- 50.

Now let's take some time to share our facts in our circle. Did you write down any facts that surprised you? Were there facts that you think provide a basis for connecting with someone or deepening an existing relationship? Many people find it difficult to talk about themselves, but do your best to share your authentic self. Remember, this circle is a safe space to practice being authentic and vulnerable.

Activity 2 – More Contributions (about 15 minutes)

We have already given the gifts of attention and gratitude, but there is so much more we could give. Below is a list of types of contributions you could make to the people on your relationship list. Gifts are always more meaningful when you choose them with the recipient in mind, so try to be intentional in choosing your gift and who to give it to.

Go through the list of 10 types of contributions below and write down:

- a specific contribution that you could make
- who you would want to share that contribution to
- why you think they would be interested in that small gift

Share Your Experience

It doesn't have to be a profound experience. Just letting someone know you've been through something they are experiencing can be a gift.



What specific experience could you share?



Who would you share it with?



Why might they be interested?

Share Your Ideas

Sharing your ideas can help others and even spark new ideas.



What specific idea could you share?



Who would you share it with?



Why might they be interested?

Share Your Process

What's obvious to you might be amazing to others. Sharing how you do something can be an eye-opening gift from someone.



What specific idea could you share?



Who would you share it with?



Why might they be interested?

Share What You've Learned

when you learn something new, spread the word. The best time to share is when you learn something, so you don't forget to share.



What specific thing you've learned could you share?



Who would you share it with?



Why might they be interested?

Share Your Challenges

Sharing a challenge you are going through can help both you and the person you are sharing with. You will both know you are not going through your challenge alone.



What specific challenge could you share?



Who would you share it with?



Why might they be interested?

Meeting 5

Reflection and Celebration



What to Expect

In this meeting we are going to look back on what we have accomplished and look forward to what we can do together. Most importantly, we are going to celebrate each other, the connections we've made and the relationships we have built.

Check-in (about 10 minutes)

Let's start by checking in. Each member can take this opportunity to share how they are doing. Take a look back at your "Reflection" section from the last meeting. Did you experience match your expectation? Were you able to overcome any obstacles? This is also a great time to validate and support other circle members.

Activity 1 – Destination Postcard (about 15 minutes)

Where do you want to go from here? One way to help you get there is to envision that future. Create a destination postcard that describes what that future looks like if you have accomplished your goal. You can create a drawing, a bulleted list, poem, short story, whatever helps you describe the future. Here are some things to think about:

- What were the keys to making progress on your goal?
- How would you have normally approached things? How did you do it differently?
- How did you overcome obstacles?
- When did you realize you were going to be successful? What happened?

Be sure to include how your future self feels as you are successful and fulfilled - and how you might feel in the future if you didn't make the effort to pursue your goal. Choose whatever format or outline feels right for you. Just remember to create the postcard for yourself, and not to impress someone else.

If you are comfortable, share your destination postcard with your circle.

Things to Try (about 25 minutes)

Don't let your journey end here. Building your resilience is an on-going process. To be resilient, you need to keep learning, reflecting, and building relationships. You need to keep touching the treadmill. Do you remember the "Touching the Treadmill" activity from the Nebraska Women in Agriculture Conference? Go back to the beginning of this workbook and review it. With that in mind, let's talk about things we can try to keep our momentum.

- Make a plan for keeping this circle connected. You could continue to meet, share your contact information, or start a Facebook group or group text.
- Set aside time to invest in yourself. Take a look at your calendar and schedule appointments over the next four weeks for deepening relationships with people related to your goal.
- Send your destination postcard to your future self via futureme.org. Simply go to futureme.org, outline or copy your postcard there, and pick a date at least 30 days in the future. (It's a free service, supported by ads and crowdsourced donations.) You'll be surprised and even amazed when you receive it.
- After a break of a few weeks or months, consider forming another Building Resilience Together Circle with the same people or with new members. New people tend to give you extra energy and even more diversity of perspectives and experiences.
- What are your ideas for keeping the momentum going?



My Intentions

CELEBRATION!

In whatever time you have left, take a minute to celebrate! Celebrate the fact that you showed up today. Celebrate the time you took to reflect on what you need from your social support network. Celebrate the fact that you are here working on your resilience.

GREAT JOB, EVERYONE!

Reflection



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Super
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mark how you are feeling on the line above



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What, if anything, concerns me?



What obstacles, if any, might interfere with my participation in the Building Resilience Together experience?

What is my plan for avoiding or overcoming those obstacles?

Credits

We have adapted the working out loud process, asset-based development, positive psychology and other approaches for this experience. The following people and organizations informed these ideas and activities.

Jessica Beckendorf

Karen Jeannette

John Stepper: <http://workingoutloud.com/>

Harold Jarcho: <http://jarcho.com/>

Improv Edge: <http://www.improvedge.com/>

Charles Duhigg: <http://charlesduhigg.com/how-habits-work/>

The Community Roundtable: <https://www.communityroundtable.com/grow/truth-innovation-and-communities/>



