

LEAN IN



ALL-IN-ONE MEETING GUIDE

Leah Weiss, PhD:  
Compassionate Leadership

# Overview

## INSTRUCTIONS

Individually or as a group, watch Leah Weiss's video, "Compassionate Leadership" (available at [leanin.org/leahweiss](https://leanin.org/leahweiss)). Use the activities below for a group discussion on the themes and ideas shared in her talk.

## ABOUT THIS VIDEO AND GUIDE

In this video, Leah Weiss gives a short master class based on her popular course on compassionate leadership, which she teaches at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. Her advice draws on years of research and her well-reviewed book, *How We Work: Live Your Purpose, Reclaim Your Sanity, and Embrace the Daily Grind*. In this discussion guide, you'll find activities to help you discover your purpose and act with compassion and self-compassion. You can find additional tools and resources at [www.leahweissphd.com](http://www.leahweissphd.com).



# Meeting Guide

## 1 Check-In

Warm up, catch up, and get going

🕒 Approx. 15 minutes

### STEP 1: ICEBREAKER

👥 Group activity

🕒 5 minutes or less

An icebreaker is a powerful tool to help us become present with one another and ourselves.

Use this icebreaker to set your intention for the Circle meeting.

When have you felt a strong sense of purpose in your work? In 30 seconds or less, share your experience with the group.

### STEP 2: MEMBER UPDATES

👥 Group activity

🕒 1 minute or less per member

Once you're warmed up, go around your Circle and share personal updates. As a general rule, personal updates should be brief and focus on big changes and important decisions in your life. (It's OK not to have one every month!)

If you have a One Action Update, share that with your Circle at the same time. (A One Action is one concrete action you committed to take at your last meeting; the goal of a One Action is to step outside your comfort zone or practice a new skill.)

**For example, a member update might go like this:** *"Since our last meeting, I asked my boss for a big assignment and got it. I'm thrilled but a little nervous [personal update]. For my One Action, I asked that coworker I've been struggling with out for lunch. She immediately said yes, and I was surprised by how easily we got along. I can see it helping in the office, and we're going out for lunch again next week—her invite! [One Action Update]."*

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## 2 Education Activities

Learn from experts and one another

🕒 Approx. 110 minutes for both activities

### Activity 1: Discuss your reactions to the talk

👥 Group activity

🕒 Approx. 10 minutes

Reflect on these questions with your Circle:

- What most surprised you about Leah's talk?
- Did any of the experiences she describes really resonate with you? What were those experiences, and how do they relate to your life?
- What's one key takeaway from her talk that you'd like to share with someone else? With whom would you share it?

### Activity 2: Define your purpose

🕒 Approx. 15 minutes

#### STEP 1: PERFORM A TOP-DOWN ASSESSMENT OF YOUR PURPOSE


👥 Group activity


🕒 5 minutes or less

- Write down the five to ten values that matter most to you.
- Go around your Circle and share the top three.

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## STEP 2: CONDUCT A BOTTOM-UP ASSESSMENT OF YOUR PURPOSE

 Pair activity

 Approx. 10 minutes


Think for a moment about how you'd tell your life story in 3 minutes or less

- Then find a partner in your Circle.
- Tell your life story to your partner.
- Have your partner tell you the three values that they think embody your story.
- Switch roles and repeat.

Does the new information from your partner inform your sense of your own values? Edit them accordingly.

### Activity 3: Write your personal mission statement

 Individual activity

 Approx. 20 minutes

For this exercise, you'll need a pen and paper or other writing device. (A computer works if you shut off all other notifications—you'll need to concentrate!)

1. List your most important values and beliefs, drawing on what you learned in Step 1 and Step 2.
2. List the emotions and life challenges that work against you living your values.
3. List the ways you behave that undermine your ability to live your values (at work or at home or elsewhere). These are the behaviors you want to avoid. Example: Procrastination when anxious.
4. Turn these three lists into a statement—a sentence that summarizes your goals.

Here is Leah's personal mission statement as an example:

**Mission Statement:** I will work to find compassion for myself and others through finding purpose for all that I do and avoiding the things (stress, fatigue, bottling up emotions) that work against that purpose.

**List 1:** compassion, purpose, honesty, equality

**List 2:** stress, anxiety, fatigue

**List 3:** rehashing old problems, not moving forward, avoiding real emotions and issues



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**How to use your statement:** Write out or print your statement and place it somewhere you can see it.

You can also treat the statement as a draft and revisit it in a few days or weeks, and expand on it if you see new ways to do so.

You might notice that your goals change from one month or year to the next, and that's okay. Personal mission statements aren't set in stone. What's important are the steps you go through to craft your statement (reflecting, writing) and that you have one. In all things, at all times, you can always look at your statement and remember that you have purpose.

## Activity 4: Conduct a time-to-purpose audit

 Individual/group activity

 Approx. 15 minutes


This exercise involves looking at your calendar to see if you're living your values.

- Write out your one to three most important big-picture goals or values. Examples:
  - Advance to the next level at work
  - Change career
  - Be a more engaged parent
  - Give back to my community
- Then, take out your phone or computer and review your calendar for the last week. How many hours did you spend working toward one of your top goals?
  - For instance, say it's important to you to advance to the next level at work. How many hours of the last week did you spend learning skills or networking to help you get there?
  - Or if it's important to you to spend time with your family, how many hours in the last week did you do this?
  - Write down this number for each of your goals.
- Is there a mismatch between your goals and the time you're spending on them? As a group, brainstorm what gets in the way and think of how you can devote more time to your goals.

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## Activity 5: Turn a work task into a calling

 Individual activity


 Approx. 10 minutes

You can make any work task feel more satisfying if you reframe it as part of your personal calling.

- Pick a task from your calendar, such as going to a meeting, giving a talk.
- Then think about it as just a routine part of your job.
- Then ask yourself, “How does it advance my career?”
- Then ask yourself, “How does this task advance my values and goals?”
  - For each step, make notes about your mental state. How does your feeling about the task change when you think about it in each of these three ways? Are you more or less excited about it? Does it change your sense of joy and purpose?
- Optional: Try doing this with a whole day of tasks.

## Activity 6: Use compassion at work

 Individual/group activity


 Approx. 10 minutes


When we have compassion for others, it creates a more inclusive workplace and makes us less biased toward co-workers. This exercise will help you be compassionate toward someone who is making your working life difficult:

- Bring your difficult colleague to mind.
  - Imagine her outside of work—for instance, interacting with her husband or children or walking in nature.
  - Imagine possible insecurities or life disappointments that led to behaviors you find bothersome.
  - Assume that she acts with the best intentions. Think about ways that behaviors that bother you might stem from good motives.
  - Think of people who care about her, such as family members who rely on her.
  - What behaviors does she have that you appreciate? (For instance, her sense of humor, her ability to get things done.)
  - Can you imagine meeting her outside of work for the first time and enjoying her company?
  - How do you view her now that you’ve finished the exercise? Have your feelings about her changed? Does her behavior seem less bothersome?
- Share how you felt before and after the exercise with your Circle.

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## Activity 7: Treat yourself with self-compassion

 Individual/group activity

 Approx. 15 minutes

In her video, Leah talks about the two arrows: the first arrow is the challenge you're facing, and the second arrow is the ways you criticize yourself or talk negatively to yourself about the challenge.

This activity helps you learn how to resist the second arrow when you meet challenges in your life. Research shows that when people minimize the second arrow, their resilience goes up significantly.

- Identify your first arrow.
  - Take a specific example of a struggle you are currently experiencing. It could be physical pain, financial stress, or perhaps a relationship challenge. Fill in the box with a very brief description of what this first arrow is.
- Identify your second arrow.
  - Fill in the second box identifying the follow-on arrow: How are you criticizing yourself or putting yourself down in relation to this challenge?
- Share what you've learned with the group.
  - Go around the Circle and describe your first and second arrows. Telling others can reinforce what you've learned and help you internalize your new self-awareness.
- Use that self-awareness.
  - Going forward, in your daily life, remind yourself to notice when you start shooting yourself with the second arrow. This awareness can reduce the impact of your self-criticism.



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## 3 One Action

The little push you need to go for it

🕒 Approx. 5 minutes

We recommend you close every meeting by committing to a “One Action”—one concrete thing you’re going to do before your next Circle meeting to step outside your comfort zone or practice a new skill.

### SHARE YOUR ONE ACTION WITH YOUR CIRCLE

One by one, go around your Circle and complete the following statement:

- Over the next month, I commit to \_\_\_\_\_.

Move quickly from member to member, and consider cheering one another on as you go.

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## 4 Wrap-Up

What's next and a few final words

🕒 Approx. 15 minutes

### STEP 1: FINALIZE LOGISTICS OF YOUR NEXT MEETING

👥 Group activity

🕒 Approx. 10 minutes

Before you break, make sure you have the basics covered for your next meeting, including day and time, location, and food and drink responsibilities. Decide what you're going to do when you get together or who is going to send out ideas. You may also want to talk through what worked—and what didn't—in today's meeting so you can brainstorm improvements going forward.

### STEP 2: CLOSE ON AN ENERGETIC AND INSPIRATIONAL NOTE

👥 Group activity

🕒 5 minutes or less

Think of one small moment of joy you can plan for this week. Go around your Circle one by one and share what you'll do.

**CONGRATULATIONS ON A GREAT MEETING.**

### About Lean In Circles

Lean In Circles are small groups that meet regularly to learn and grow together. They're a place for sharing ideas, gaining skills, seeking advice, and showing solidarity. Most of all, they're a place where we help one another become our very best selves. Starting a Lean In Circle is one of the best ways to build your skills while helping others. To find out more visit [leanin.org/circles](https://leanin.org/circles).