



LEAN IN

How to be an ally to women at work

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide

The
Women
at Work
Collection

How to be an ally to women at work

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide

The
Women
at Work
Collection

Meeting agenda

approx 75 mins

Member updates

15 mins

Watch video

7 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Activities

- Activity 1: Highlight others' skills and accomplishments
- Activity 2: Help make sure women's voices are heard
- Activity 3: Form an "advocacy alliance" with your colleagues

15 mins

10 mins

10 mins

One Action

3 mins

For Circles with only 60 mins, here are suggestions to shorten this agenda:

- Encourage members to watch the video in advance
- Spend 5 mins on member updates

Getting started

Member updates

2 mins or less per member

15–20 mins depending on group size

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 okay not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

Watch video

7 mins

Icebreaker

10 mins

Take a few minutes to think about the following questions. Then, go around the room and share one of your answers (less than 2 minutes each).

- Think of a time when a colleague spoke up or advocated for you at work. What happened? How did their advocacy benefit you? Share your experience with the group.

Activity 1: Highlight others' skills and accomplishments

15 mins

Read as a group: As we just learned in the video, there's tremendous power in women advocating for each other at work. It's especially crucial for anyone who holds more power to advocate for others who hold less. Anyone in a management role—or who is involved in hiring and performance reviews—holds power. But you also have power in situations where it's less obvious—for example, if you schedule or lead meetings, or if you work closely with more senior colleagues.

In this activity, you'll make a plan to speak up for the women you work with:

- **Write it down (5 minutes):**
 - Think about all the women you work with who are either at your level or more junior than you.
 - Whose work has impressed you? Who do you think should get more recognition? Write their names down.
 - For each woman on your list, consider the most effective actions you can take to advocate for them.
 - Can you advocate directly for their promotion?
 - Can you speak about their work in a public or large group setting?
 - Can you influence whether they're assigned high-profile work or stretch assignments?
- **Discuss as a group (10 minutes):** Share one of your advocacy plans with your Circle so you can all learn from each other's ideas.

Activity 3: Form an “advocacy alliance” with your colleagues

10 mins

Because of stereotypes that women should be giving and communal, women are often taken more seriously and have more bargaining power when they advocate for others, rather than for themselves. That means there can be huge payoffs to forming a group of colleagues who pledge to advocate for each other and amplify one each other’s ideas at work.

- Think for a moment—and make notes—about which of your coworkers you could join up with and become mutual advocates for. Your list can include colleagues of any gender.
- Make some notes about how your group would work. Would you commit to advocating for each other at a certain frequency (e.g., weekly) or just acting on an ad hoc basis? Will you exchange notes via group text, on a call, or in person?
- Then, go around the room and have everyone share their plans with the Circle.



“Most of my career has been spent being the only in so many spaces, whether that was being the only woman or the only person of color, or maybe the only out LGBTQ person. I've been very lucky in my career to find allies. Many of my bosses have been white men or white women, and they've been incredibly formative and fierce advocates for me. They've been honest about things that they don't know about, or they'll acknowledge that they don't have the right words, but they are explicit in the fact that they want to do better and be an ally to me.”

Sarah Lands Ramrup, senior lead, consumer goods industry, Missouri, USA (she/her)

Activity 2: Help make sure women's voices are heard

10 mins

Research shows that women face more barriers than men when it comes to being heard and included in meetings. This issue can be more acute for women who face additional kinds of bias, for example, women with disabilities and women of color in many contexts.

In this activity, you'll brainstorm ways to help ensure your women colleagues are heard and included in group conversations. Note that it's especially important to take these steps to include women with less power than yourself.

Discuss as a group:

- Which of the following steps do you consistently take?
 - Invite other women to speak
 - Distribute speaking time equally
 - Ask to hear from women who are being interrupted and spoken over
 - Amplify other women's ideas by repeating them and giving credit
 - Praise and showcase other women's work
 - Create systems to distribute "office housework," such as note-taking, in meetings
 - Share public speaking opportunities with women who have less power than you
 - Share pronouns
- Are there any steps you'd like to make part of your regular workday?
- Do you have any strategies that are not listed here for supporting other women in meetings and group conversations?

One Action

3 mins

Choose one of the following:

- Choose one of the advocacy actions you planned in activity 1 and commit to doing it this month or
- Commit to starting an “advocacy alliance” among women you work with, as you planned in activity 3

Plan to share what happened with your Circle the next time you meet.

“When I joined my Lean In community, it was inspiring because I had the opportunity to look at other women who were fighting the same battles I was. Being part of a network of women cheering for you is so inspiring. It matters even more when you are an immigrant and people question your education or where you’re coming from. In the Lean In community, I found not only inspiring women, but also mentors and sponsors who were willing to take a chance on me and give me an opportunity.”

Laura Espriu, director of HR, digital media company, Lean In Network Leader, Washington, USA (she/her/ella)



Congratulations on a great meeting!

