# MC Basics

Mentoring Circles (MC) are modeled on the success of the peer group from the book Every Other Thursday.  Chapter 16, "A Group of One's Own: Pigs, Contracts and Strokes" contains details of the ins and outs of how the group operates.  The overall goal of the MC is to extend and foster your peer mentoring and networking experience.  In particular, the MC is a forum to **support others in finding workable solutions to problems.**

**What really happens during a meeting?**  Each meeting will follow the same structure.
- *Signups*.  Signup for individual work time.  Each person will do work with the group on every call.
- *Work*.  When you begin your work time, you will ask for the kind of feedback you want from the group.  Two minutes before your work time is finished, the facilitator will check in to see if you need more time.  You conclude your work time by making a *contract* and you will report back on your contract next time at start of your work time.
- *Strokes*.  At the end of each meeting, each participant will share a stroke (or two) with other members of the group.

**Interaction Guidelines and Expectations:**
- MCs are a problem-solving group and thus *support* others in finding workable solutions to problems themselves rather than *offering* solutions.
- Each participant should be ready to ask for what he/she wants from the group during his/her work time.
- Some people will likely need to stretch themselves and be willing to speak before they may normally feel ready.  MCs are a great space for exploring half-baked feelings, ideas, thoughts, concerns, etc.  Know that this is a safe space.
- MC participants will make no judgmental statements.
- Each participant will determine what the group members can hold him/her accountable for and will let the group know what that is. Group members should relinquish all other expectations of what the other individuals should do.
- Participants will not insert their own stories into another person's story/work time.
- Each participant must make a commitment to the group and to him/herself to participate in the MC.  Like the daily writing practice we discussed at ADVANCE, this is a regular commitment to reflect on one's career and work to improve one's experience.  This time and reflection often fall into the important but not urgent category.  Individuals may occasionally have to miss a meeting, but each participant is strongly encouraged to try to make as many meetings as he/she possibly can.

**Members must commit to the following:**
- Confidentiality.  Everything said and heard in the MC must remain confidential to create group trust.  There must be no element of competition between group members.
- Honesty.  Individuals will be honest in presenting their own issues and give honest feedback with care.
- Commitment.  Individuals are committed to meeting regularly and actively participating in the process of group problem solving.
- Listening.  Participants will listen without judgment and with care in order to reflect back what we are hearing and create mechanisms for individuals to find their own best solutions.

## Terms you should know…

- **Contracts** = Concise objectives at the end of work time.   These should be phrased as "I will …." instead of "I should/ought."  Contracts can be for any length of time and any level of specificity.
- **Strokes** = Positive observation about someone that usually stems from the work in that meeting.  Strokes describe something about someone else – not the stroker.  For example, "I liked the feedback you gave today." Or "I liked how you framed your problem."  Or "I like the energy you brought to the conversation today."  The response to receiving a stroke is "THANK YOU!"
- **Pig =** A pig is an "internalized oppression," personal judgment or criticism.  Pigs can be used to let your feel bad about yourself instead of changing your behavior.  A common characteristic of a pig is "always" or "never" phrasing and "could have" or "should have" regret statements.  Some common pigs include "frog pig" (i.e. fraud pig) and the guilt pig.
- **Rescues** = No rescues in mentoring circle meetings.  What does this mean? Don't solve someone else's problem for them.  Instead offer suggestions and comments to help the individual solve their problems by him or herself.  Also, don't choose to avoid asking for what you need from the group in an attempt to protect another group member (e.g., when someone else has a big issue, opting to skip your work time when you also have something important to discuss with the group).

## Mentoring Circle Roles:

- **Facilitator** - 1) Send out email reminder of meeting a few days prior, 2) Arrive a few minutes early to the meeting so you can welcome people as they join, 3) Host and facilitate the meeting overall, 4) Start things off and invite each person to signup for work time, 5) Invite each person to work. Remind people to report back on their past contract(s) and ask for what kind of feedback they want from the group after describing their work topic, 6) Serve as time keeper when the time keeper is having individual work time.
- **Time keeper** - Keep track of time for individual work time and the meeting overall. The timekeeper should provide a two-minute warning near the end of a person's work time. Becomes facilitator for the next meeting.

## Work time – presenting your issue:

When it is your turn to work, you will make a statement about the issue you would like to explore. To begin you work time, you are invited to first make a statement about how you are doing in general on that day. Then you will go into the issue on which you want feedback.  Your issue statement should consist of the following elements:

- Worlds Check – clearing the air short statement about how you are in the moment.
- Problem/Issue statement
    - feeling/emotion
    - Stems from (due to) ….
    - What you've tried ...
- Work/Support requested
    - Where you'd like to go
    - Feedback you want

Example: Today I'm feeling happy for the sunshine. Here is my issue for today. I'm feeling annoyed that my co-authors are not responding to my requests for feedback. I have emailed them multiple times and given deadlines. I want to receive timely feedback so I can keep moving the paper forward. Feedback I want from the group is strategies to get my coauthors to do what I want.

**Work time – offering feedback:**

Once someone has finished describing the problem for which they want feedback, the rest of the group has a chance to respond. The ultimate goal is to **support others in finding workable solutions to problems.** Hence, rather than jumping to solutions and strategies, groups should first focus on asking clarifying questions. Groups should also ask open questions, e.g., questions that have no agenda, are not solutions disguised as questions, and whose answers are truly unknown to the person asking the question. The goal is to better understand the problem context and help the individual posing the issue to gain new perspectives. This framework promotes personal agency in determining next steps and avoids offering ideas which the individual may have already tried or that do not apply to the person's context. Offering specific solutions should be a last activity unless specifically requested by the individual.

Continuing the co-author example, possible first questions could be

- How many co-authors do you have?
- What has worked well in this collaboration?
- Who else has or could help with this issue?

**Resources:**

- Horner-Devine M.C., Gonsalves, T., Margherio, C., Mizumori, S.J., and Yen, J.W. (Nov. 2, 2018) Beyond hierarchical one-on-one mentoring *Science*. Vol. 362, Issue 6414, pp. 532. http://science.sciencemag.org/content/362/6414/532.1
- Horner-Devine M. C., Margherio C., Mizumori S., Yen, J. *Peer Mentoring Circles: A strategy for thriving in science.* BioMed Central Blog 2017. http://blogs.biomedcentral.com/bmcblog/2017/05/18/peer-mentoring-circles-a-strategy-for-thriving-in-science/.
- Daniell, Ellen. *Every Other Thursday: Stories and Strategies from Successful Women Scientists*. Yale University Press. 2006. http://yalepress.yale.edu/book.asp?isbn=9780300113235
- Milo R & Schuldiner M. (2009). Weizmann young PI forum: the power of peer support. Molecular Cell, 36(6), 913-915. http://www.cell.com/molecular-cell/fulltext/S1097-2765(09)00912-5
- Shkolnik E, Surcel A, Shahar A, & Jang-Condell H. (2012). In person: career GPS. Science Careers. March 16, 2012. http://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2012/03/person-career-gps.
- Louis, Lucille. (2006). The X-Gals Alliance. Chronicle of Higher Education. October 2, 2006. https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-X-Gals-Alliance/46752