

A person in a dark jacket stands in the shadow of an ice cave, looking out through a large opening. The cave's interior is dark, with the walls and ceiling made of layered, translucent ice. Outside, a bright, sunlit landscape of snow and mountains is visible under a blue sky with light clouds. The person's silhouette is centered in the frame, looking towards the light.

LEAN IN

ALL-IN-ONE MEETING GUIDE

CENTERED LEADERSHIP PART 1: MEANING

Overview

The Centered Leadership model will help you lead with impact, resilience, and fulfillment at work and in your life. There are five parts to Centered Leadership: Meaning, Framing, Connecting, Engaging, and Energizing.

Meaning, the focus of this meeting, is the anchor. It concentrates on strengths and purpose—drivers of long-lasting fulfillment.

Meeting Goals

- Uncover your strengths
- Develop strategies for actively living into those strengths

Pre-Meeting Prep

- Watch “Meaning” individually or as a group leanin.org/meaning
- Remind everyone to bring a copy of this PDF
- Remind everyone to bring her One Action update (if you’re doing this)



Brought to you in partnership with...

Joanna Barsh, director emeritus McKinsey & Company and author of *Centered Leadership* and *How Remarkable Women Lead*, along with McKinsey & Company.

Meeting Agenda

🕒 Approx. 115-130 minutes for total meeting (based on a group size of ten members)

(Please note: This is one of our longer meetings, and we love the way the activities build on one another. However, you can always skip an activity or spread the agenda over two meetings—whatever works for you!)

1 **Check-In** 🕒 Approx. 20 minutes
Warm up, catch up, and get going **p.4**

2 **Education Activities** 🕒 Approx. 70-80 minutes
Learn from experts and one another **p.5**

- **Activity 1: Key Takeaways** 🕒 Approx. 5 minutes
Take a few minutes to review the core concepts of the “Meaning” video **p.5**
- **Activity 2: Personal Leadership Inventory** 🕒 Approx. 15-25 minutes
Identify the characteristics of a favorite leader to gain insight into your own strengths **p.7**
- **Activity 3: Strengths Awareness** 🕒 Approx. 30 minutes
Reflect on activities that energized you as a child, teenager, and adult to gain more insight into your strengths **p.9**
- **Activity 4: Future Possibilities** 🕒 Approx. 20 minutes
Visualize yourself in ten years energized and fulfilled— and the steps you took to get there **p.14**

3 **One Action** 🕒 Approx. 15 minutes
The little push you need to go for it **p.15**

4 **Wrap-Up** 🕒 Approx. 10-15 minutes
What’s next and a few final words **p.17**

Optional Member Materials

One Action Update, request for feedback worksheet **p.19**

Meeting Guide

Check-In

Warm up, catch up, and get going

🕒 Approx. 20 minutes

Step 1: Icebreaker

👥 Group activity

🕒 1 minute or less per member

An icebreaker is a powerful tool to help us become present with ourselves and one another. One by one, fill in the sentences below and share them with your Circle. Listen carefully as each member takes a turn and say thank you when she's finished. Avoid the urge to slip into conversation.

- Today I am feeling ...
- What I most want to bring forth in my leadership is ...
- That is truly important to me because ...

Step 2: Member Updates

👥 Group activity

🕒 2 minutes 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].”*

Education Activities

Learn from experts and one another

🕒 Approx. 70-80 minutes

Activity 1: Key Takeaways

🕒 5 minutes

Before you jump into today's meeting, review the key takeaways of our "Meaning" video individually or as a group:

Strengths lie at the core of your happiness

It is counterintuitive, but pursuing happiness does not make us happy. So what does? Half of our happiness comes from our parents, or our genetic makeup. Another 10 percent comes from our conditions, or the comforts we have. That leaves 40 percent, which comes from choosing to engage in activities that create positive energy for us. Our choices do not always match our skills. You may be great at something that does not fill you with energy.

You find your strengths through energy

Many of us do not know our passions, and we grow anxious worrying about that. Lots of people advise "Do what you love to do," but what if you don't know what that is? Many of us were raised to get good grades, to excel and make our parents, teachers, and bosses proud. Love didn't have anything to do with it!

Instead, look for what gives you energy. Notice your heart racing as you think about those activities. Notice if your voice speeds up or gets louder as you talk about them to friends. These are signs of positive energy. We define strengths as what brings you positive energy. Strengths are characteristics that have always been true about you—and that you truly value.

Why we use reflection

Joanna's research shows that our strengths are already within us, but we don't always have access to them. By reflecting deeply, you can make new discoveries about yourself and remember what you already knew but may have forgotten. You may even find yourself feeling more inspired—and being more inspiring!

Activity 1: Key Takeaways (cont.)

Self-awareness is the key

Once we slow down enough to reflect on our underlying mind-sets—to build self-awareness—we gain the freedom to choose. We can choose to use our strengths more. We can choose to shift mindsets. We can allow new behaviors to emerge naturally. In this way, we can change from focusing on fixing weaknesses and striving for perfection to living into our strengths and doing what brings us positive energy.

Purpose comes from using our strengths

The more you use your strengths, the more you deepen them. You'll find yourself waking up with more energy for the day. Purpose is down this path: as you learn what is important to you, you get closer to it; then one day you'll suddenly realize you're doing what you were meant to do.

We start with ourselves

As you begin to deepen your strengths and bring them to your work, you will begin to see strengths in others. Noticing others' strengths helps you withhold judgment; your mind-set will shift from what's wrong to what's right. That's why Centered Leadership starts with leading yourself. We become better leaders when we are able to see ourselves more clearly and shift, out of choice, to be more open to learning. Then we can model the change we want to see.

Activity 2: Personal Leadership Inventory

🕒 Approx. 15-25 minutes

Step 1: Identify the characteristics of your favorite leader

👤 Individual activity

🕒 5 minutes


Imagine a leader who is truly distinctive in your mind—someone who has had a profound impact on you. This could be a leader from any walk of life, real or imagined.

Spend a few minutes considering the characteristics that distinguish this leader. Think about what makes her or him head and shoulders above the rest. Be as specific as you can and jot these characteristics down:

Activity 2: Personal Leadership Inventory (cont.)

Step 2: Identify the characteristics you see in yourself

 Group activity

 2 minutes or less per member

One by one, share the top characteristic you admire about your chosen leader and why. Keep track of everyone's favorite leadership characteristic to create a full list for your Circle.

We often find a group's collective list touches on:

- technical skills like planning and project management
- emotional attributes like passion or making personal connections
- values like integrity or authenticity

We all admire and want to be like leaders who bring out the best in us. So often the traits we admire in others are traits that we have ourselves. Take a moment and reflect on which traits you most admire on your Circle's list—jot them down below if helpful. Then one by one, share the one or two traits that you see in yourself and/or would most like to bring out in your own leadership:

Activity 3: Strength Awareness

🕒 Approx. 30 minutes

Step 1: Reflect on the activities that energize you

👤 Individual activity

🕒 10 minutes

Now we're ready to deepen our awareness of our strengths. Let's go back in time to recall three moments in your life where you felt high positive energy. As you reflect on the questions below, close your eyes and allow the images, words, and feelings to flow. When you're ready, open your eyes and jot down your answers in the present tense.

As a young child, what fantasy games do you love playing? What do you get to do and who do you get to be in these games?


As a young adult, what activities do you feel drawn to? When do you feel so absorbed in an activity that you lose track of time?

Activity 3: Strength Awareness (cont.)

As your recent self (during the past eighteen months), what activities leave you feeling strong, energized, and alive?

Activity 3: Strength Awareness (cont.)

Step 2: Identify your core strengths

 Pair activity

 5 minutes per partner, 10 minutes total

This activity lets you use your responses in step 1 to identify your top three strengths.

Break into pairs. One partner should be the interviewer, using the questions below to probe with curiosity and appreciation. The other partner should be the interviewee, responding to the questions openly and honestly. Each interview should take about five minutes, with one to two minutes for personal reflection at the end.

Interview questions:

- What patterns do you see across the three moments in time? What do you most value about yourself in these moments?
- What do you value about the activities that you describe? Why are they important to you?
- What lies beneath the strengths that you see in yourself? Are there deeper strengths buried below?
- What has always been true about you that you value?

Before wrapping up, the interviewee should take a moment and answer one final question:

- Based on your answers, what do you see as your top three strengths?

1

Activity 3: Strength Awareness (cont.)

2.


3.

Then switch roles and repeat the exercise.

Activity 3: Strength Awareness (cont.)

Step 3: Share your core strengths

 Group activity

 1 minute or less per member

One by one, share your strengths with the Circle. Simply state your strength without elaborating on it, and consider cheering on one another as you go.

Activity 4: Future Possibilities

🕒 Approx. 20 minutes

👤👤 Pair activity

🕒 10 minutes per partner, 20 minutes total

Now that we have started to identify our strengths, how will we use them to live into our purpose? In this next exercise, we visualize ourselves in the future.

Break into the same pairs. One partner should be the interviewer, using the questions below. The other partner should be the interviewee, imagining herself ten years from now giving the best of herself to work and life—and feeling energized and fulfilled. As you answer, close your eyes and allow yourself to think and dream boldly.

Interview questions:

- Complete the sentence: I am most proud of the contribution I have made to the lives of others and who I have become because I have ... and because I am ...
- If you assume for a moment that everything is possible—without constraints and knowing that you cannot fail—what do you want to experience?
- Standing in this ideal future and looking back, what do you need to start doing differently today to make your unique contributions and achieve a deep sense of fulfillment in the future?

Spend ten minutes on each interview, then switch roles and repeat the exercise.

One Action

The little push you need to go for it

🕒 Approx. 15 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.

Step 1: Identify the action you’re going to take

👤 Individual activity

🕒 10 minutes

Using the grid below as a framework, identify the actions you will take (or intensify) to live into your strengths at work, home, or school. Then decide how you will free up time to make these actions a reality.

For example, you might say: *“To live into my strengths of curiosity and love of learning, I am going to reserve thirty minutes twice a week to grab lunch with a colleague to learn what she or he is doing. I can accomplish this by scheduling the lunches, since I have to eat anyway.”*

	Personally	Professionally
I commit to start doing or intensify...		
I commit to do differently or reduce time on...		


One Action (cont.)

Reflect for a moment and select the One Action that you're committed to take before your next meeting.

Housekeeping Note: We recommend you give an update on your One Action during your next meeting. On page 19 of this PDF, you'll find an optional worksheet to help you prepare your update. Individually, or as a group, you can decide to bring the worksheet to your next Circle meeting.

Step 2: Share your One Action with your Circle

 Group activity

 1 minute or less per member

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

- One action I commit to take this month to live more into meaning is...
- One thing the group can do to support me in this commitment is...

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

Wrap-Up

What's next and a few final words

🕒 Approx. 10 minutes

Step 1: Finalize logistics of your next meeting

👥 Group activity

🕒 10 minutes

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

Step 2: Close on an energetic and inspirational note

👥 Group activity

🕒 2 minutes or less

To punctuate the end of this meeting, go around your Circle one by one and complete the sentence: I am feeling ...

Congratulations on a great meeting.

See the following pages for optional member activities.

One Action Update

Use the following prompts to give your One Action update during your next meeting. You can even prepare your answers ahead to maximize your time with your Circle.

- The strength I am using more regularly is (feel free to list more than one):

- The one change I am noticing about myself is:

Request For Feedback

This worksheet is a great tool for more broadly discovering your strengths and the ways you're holding yourself back from living into them. Consider sending it to several contacts in your professional and personal life. You may also want to partner with another member of your Circle and gather and synthesize the findings for each other.

The following page includes the feedback worksheet for you to send out. If you would like to print or e-mail this worksheet without the rest of this document, [click here](#).

Request For Feedback

I am participating in an education series called Centered Leadership in my Lean In Circle. In this context, I am collecting feedback to help me understand my strengths, how I can make better use of them, and how I might be limiting my personal leadership impact. Please complete this brief questionnaire and return it. Thank you so much.

1. When I am at my best in your eyes, what do you observe me doing? Please use a couple of specific examples to help me understand, either events or situations. What behaviors do you observe? What is the impact of my behaviors on you and/or others?

2. What may be getting in the way of me being at my best more often? Please use examples again of specific events or situations. What behaviors do you observe? What is the impact of my behaviors on you and/or others?

3. What other friendly advice can you offer to help me bring my best self forward? Please suggest the smallest steps I should take that could make the biggest difference.