

AWESOME CIRCLE FACILITATOR GUIDE

AWESOME CIRCLES are one of those special go-to magical activities that generates high impact engagement in a short amount of time. They can be done with anyone, anywhere, anytime and as often as you want. Awesome Circles appear simple in action because facilitators plan for success by mastering this facilitator guide and practicing how to give affirmations. It is heavily scripted to help you be fully prepared and to ensure participants have a positive experience. Of course we know you are going to go off script, but please keep to the core values of recognizing and validating participant's assets.

Key Objective:

The MHA Labs Awesome Circle is a powerful yet simple activity to encourage youth and adults to identify and name their key strengths, to use evidence to validate their strengths and to practice communicating their strengths confidently to others. The facilitator should be in the mindset of inspiring participants to recognize their power and build confidence. This activity has been successful with school classes, after school program cohorts, employee groups, parent groups and even at a family reunion.

Key Goals:

- ★ Youth/Adults engage in fun, safe and challenging activities in a creative atmosphere.
- ★ Youth/Adults identify their top power skill strength—a skill that they strongly believe they excel at and are confident doing.
- ★ Youth/Adults learn how to use stories and examples from their life as evidence of skills.
- ★ Youth/Adults practice communicating and expressing their strengths with confidence.
- ★ Youth/Adults build their skills identity.
- ★ Youth/Adults practice giving affirmations, feedback and support to their peers.
- ★ Youth/Adults interact with their peers to build a positive community.

Key Building Block Skills:

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS:

- ★ Demonstrates a belief that one's own actions are associated with goal attainment.

COMMUNICATION:

- ★ Organizes information that serves the purpose of the message, context, and audience.
- ★ Uses and adjusts communication strategies as needed based on the purpose of the message, context, and audience.
- ★ Signals listening according to the rules/norms of the context and audience.
- ★ Seeks input to gauge others' understanding of the message.
- ★ Asks questions to deepen and/or clarify one's understanding when listening to others.

COLLABORATION:

- ★ Encourages the ideas, opinions, and contributions of others, leveraging individual strengths.
- ★ Provides feedback in a manner that is sensitive to others' situation/feelings.

Set-up:

Create a space in the room where participants can stand or sit in a circle. This activity can be done anywhere so if the weather is nice consider doing this outside.

Workshop Size:

An Awesome Circle can be as small as a two participants but should not exceed 15-20 people. For large groups, break into smaller circles where participants are trained on how to give the needed response affirmations.

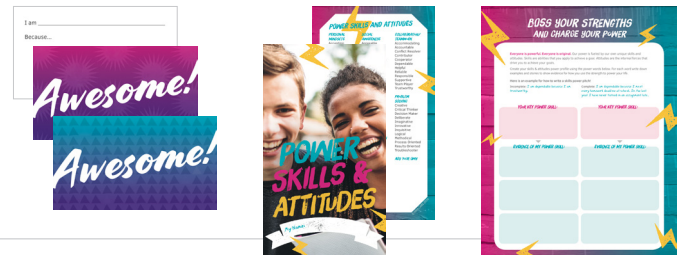


Workshop Duration:

At a minimum, give at least 10 minutes to explain the core activity and have participants fill out their Awesome Card. Allow at least 1-3 minutes for each participant to share and receive their affirmation. Can be lengthened to allow for more peers to share affirmations.

Materials Needed:

- ★ MHA Labs Awesome Cards. If Post-It notes are used instead, simply speak or post the prompt “I am _____ because _____.”
- ★ MHA Labs Power Skills and Attitude Cards or Handouts
- ★ Writing Instruments
- ★ Supplemental Worksheets: Boss Your Strengths



POWER CIRCLE AFFIRMATIONS

The facilitator and/or peers **must give a supportive affirmation response** after each participant shares their Awesome Card story. This has shown to be critical to the process. Participants can benefit from learning and practicing affirmation strategies in order to lead and participate in the circle. The facilitator should ideally not be the sole voice. If this is the first time doing an Awesome Circle, do not use the affirmation prompt to give feedback on what they wrote. Likely the first time will not be an ideal piece of evidence. Sharing strengths is a vulnerable activity especially the first time. Reserve your feedback on their writing for a separate activity the following day or the second time you do the activity. This is about generating confidence and power over time.

When doing this as a train the trainer workshop or if you are encouraging peers in the circle to do the affirmations, this can be taught after people have completed filling out their Awesome Card and before gathering in the circle.

Here are suggested options for affirmations but feel free to expand this list:

- ☐ Recognize/Celebrate how big an achievement their skill story is.
- ☐ Describe an insight you learned about the skill itself based on their evidence—skills have multiple meanings and there are always new insights to gain.
- ☐ Illustrate how their skill will benefit their performance in their class, program, job or life.

- ☐ Acknowledge how their strengths likely benefit others including their peers, family, teachers, instructors and employers. Use an example.
- ☐ If two or more people say the same skill, highlight how their stories actually show how the same skill is illustrated in unique ways. When this happens, it is a great way to demonstrate how a word may mean different things to different people and evidence helps us clarify what we mean.
- ☐ If the story is deeply personal using more sensitive subject matter, recognize their courage in sharing. Use either sympathy or empathy to recognize their emotions and experience. Rather than going deeper into their traumatic experience which can be triggering.
- ☐ If they decided to pick a skill that was not on the list, highlight their creativity and contribution to the larger understanding of skills.

If doing peer based affirmations, the facilitator should have a built in “assignment” for who will give it. Typically, people share clockwise in the group so the affirmation can be assigned to the person who is going next. It creates a positive flow. Do not leave it open ended to the group until you build a culture where everyone will always jump in with an affirmation. Of course there is no limit to how many affirmations a participant can receive. Time permitting, encourage as many affirmations from the group as possible.

WORKSHOP FRAMING

Provide each participant with a MHA Labs Awesome Card, MHA Labs Power Skills and Attitude Card or Handout and a writing instrument. You can make adjustments to the directions if you are using the supplemental Boss Your Strengths Worksheet.

This activity uses a list of universally applicable power skills. With minor facilitator adjustments, you can use any resource including badges, tests and scorecards that have skills language.

Open the activity with a brief discussion on how each person has a unique set of skills and mindsets that give

them power to achieve their goals/aspirations, achieve in school, succeed at work, overcome adversity and navigate their life experiences.

Discuss how important it is for each of us to know and understand our key strengths and how we can apply our strengths to achieve our goals. Discuss how different people can use different skills to get to the same outcomes. Discuss how we can learn from and rely on each other's strengths to help each other reach our individual or collective goals.

Prompt 1

Ask participants to review the Power Skills and Attitudes Card and identify ONE word that represents their most powerful strength and write it in the "I AM ____" line of the Awesome Card.

- ★ Highlight that of course they may have multiple strengths but for today you want them to identify one strength they are most proud of and feel confident about. Share that no skill on the sheet is more or less important than another. That unlike a college or job interview that may be looking for a particular skill, this is truly about what they value in themselves.
- ★ **Note:** The Power Skills and Attitudes card is not written at a 5/6th grade reading level like most MHA Labs tools. This serves to broaden participant's vocabulary of skills. This not only supports a deeper understanding of their own skills but will be critical when interviewing for college admissions, scholarships and jobs. Encourage participants to look up words they do not know by providing dictionary or internet access. Feel free to be creative in how you build vocabulary. Possibly have a skill of the day/week activity where a participant presents on a skill.

Prompt 2

Next discuss what gives a strength power and legitimacy. When we use evidence such as a success story or example, we prove our strengths not only to others but to ourselves. When we collect multiple examples, we build a strong foundation for confidence. Evidence also helps us address people that may have doubts about our strengths. It is much harder for people to doubt or disbelieve us when we can give multiple examples.

Ask participants to now think of a story or example that demonstrates their key strength and write it in the "BECAUSE____" section. *Below are two examples that can be used to demonstrate the difference between just describing your skill with another descriptive word compared to an example that serves as evidence.*

★ **Incomplete:** I am dependable because I am trustworthy.

Complete: I am dependable because I met every homework deadline at school. In the last year, I have never turned in an assignment late.

★ **Incomplete:** I am friendly because I am social.

Complete: I am friendly and this has opened opportunities for me to serve as a teen community ambassador at my church where I am in charge of welcoming all of the new teens who move to my neighborhood.

Prompt 3

Now invite participants to join you in creating a Power Circle in open area of the space. Have them bring their completed Awesome Card. Power Circles are when people come together to discuss their personal and collective power.

Describe how participants are going to practice as a group sharing their Awesome Card aloud in a Power Circle. (As the facilitator, you should participate as well) Discuss the importance of being able to confidently share strengths out loud. That sharing helps others better understand our power. Discuss how sharing strengths with evidence is not considered bragging but is a powerful way to communicate what we are good at and how we can benefit and support others.

Share that after each participant communicates their Awesome Card Story they will be receiving a positive affirmation from the facilitator and/or their peers. See section on Power Circle Affirmations.

Prompt
4

To help add further framing depending on the type of program or setting where you are conducting the activity, ask participants to come up with examples of where sharing our strengths with others is important. For example, if you are in a career prep program, every job interviewer will want to know your strengths and will ask for examples. We must be ready to give thoughtful answers with evidence and confidence.

Prompt
5

Give the directions that each person will share their Awesome Card aloud saying "I AM__BECAUSE__." Because you want them to practice being and sounding confident as well as being good listeners, this is a good time to teach verbal communication skills and prepare participants to supportively share. Feel free to have fun. Offer the option for people to use different communication styles such as spoken word, singing, and even dance. Yes, one time a participant did a Salsa dance when sharing.

★ **Speaking:** Ask participants to describe what confidence sounds like. Have 4-5 participants share until you feel everyone has a sufficient understanding of what is expected.

★ **Listening:** Next ask participants to describe what type of listening skills one should exhibit when people are sharing something as personal as their key strengths, compared to a homework assignment. Have 4-5 participants share until you feel everyone understands what is expected.

Prompt
6

To minimize the stress and chaos of randomly calling on people, ask for one volunteer, then simply go clockwise around the group. Share this process with participants so that they can relax into the activity. Otherwise participants wait in panic to be called upon.

PROMPT
7

Ask for a volunteer and begin the circle. Don't forget affirmations! After the last person goes, have the group do one last fast round where everyone just says their strength word creating a mantra cheer.

Add extra effects by having everyone clap, high five, or other gesture to celebrate after each word share or all together at the end.

Prompt
8

In closing, ask participants to reflect on what they learned about each other? Ask participants how knowing each other's strengths might benefit each other? As the facilitator, highlight how the group was comprised of very unique strengths and stories and how powerful the collective can be together. Share how you truly value their unique contributions and will value their strengths over the course of your class, program or work experience.

Afterward:

To keep the information as a living resource, have participants create a collage of their cards so that you and participants can leverage key strengths throughout the class, program or work experience.