



Advanced Leadership Course

*A Practical Intensive in Emotional
Maturity, Deeper Connection, and
Bold Decision-Making*

Session Five

Hidden Scripts, Impactful Questions

Schedule

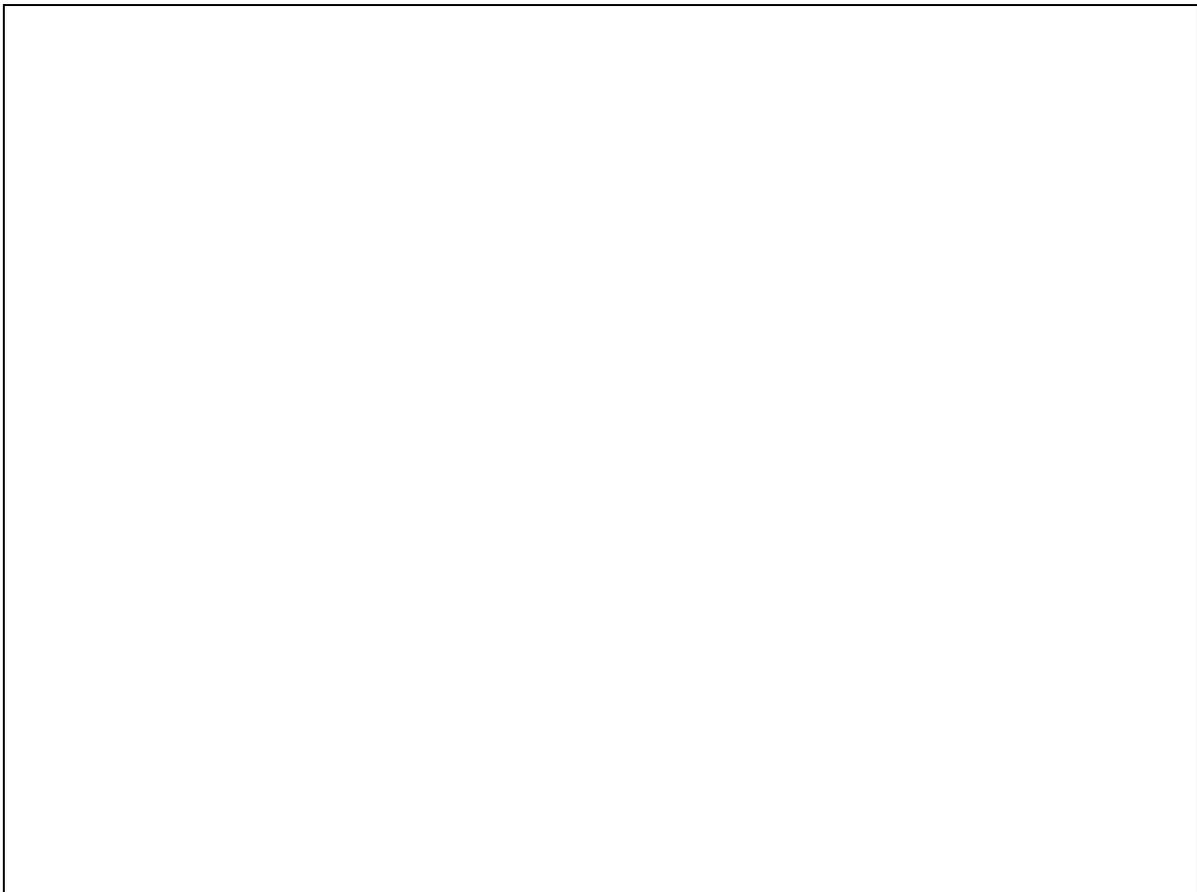
7:30 AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Arrival, light breakfast, informal connection
8:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ “Present and Accountable”: Quiet reflection / meditation○ Triads: Homework from Session Four
9:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Overconfidence and the Single Cause Fallacy
10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Break
10:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Blame and Curiosity
12:15 PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Lunch
1:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ High-Value Questions Practice
2:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Integration, Homework, Evaluations

Small Group Discussion

1. Describe your experience with your connection plan from Session 4 (page 16):

- What shifts did you make from your normal approach?
- What did the experience get you thinking about or noticing in yourself?
- What observable differences did you notice in the other's responses?

2. Describe your experience with your commitment from Session 4:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the participant to write their response to question 2.

Opening Reflections

**“Instead think, “We have a disagreement,”
and engage your curiosity to learn your friend’s perspective.**

**Being curious about your friend’s experience
is more important than being right.”**

Lisa Feldman Barrett

How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain

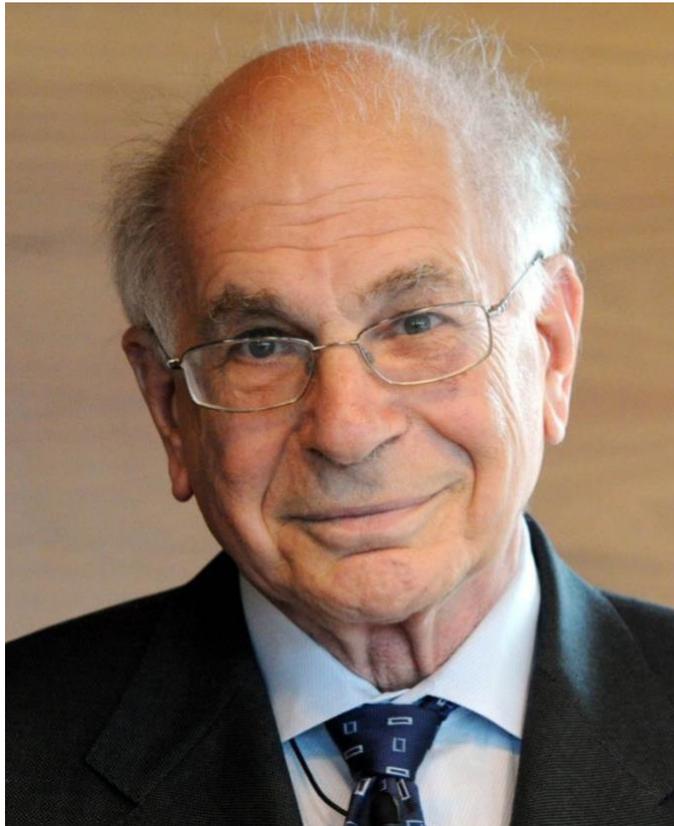
Examples of Self-Deception in Leadership

Over-Confidence

Fallacy of the Single Cause

Blame

Humility and Curiosity



THINKING,
FAST AND SLOW



DANIEL
KAHNEMAN

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS

“We are often over-confident, even when we are wrong.”

“We can be blind to the obvious and also blind to our blindness.”

“It is easier to recognize others’ mistakes than to recognize our own.”

Self-Deception #1: Overconfidence Bias

“People can maintain an unshakable faith in any proposition, however absurd, when they are sustained by a community of like-minded believers.”

“Confidence is a feeling, one determined mostly by the coherence of the story and by the ease with which it comes to mind, even when the evidence for the story is sparse and unreliable. The bias toward coherence favors overconfidence.”

“People almost invariably don’t seek out more information that would spoil their story.”

“We have an apparent inability to acknowledge the full extent of our own ignorance, and the uncertainty in the world we live in.”

Daniel Kahneman
Thinking Fast and Slow

Michael Mauboussin's Luck and Skill Lessons

1. Fend off the natural tendency to view what happened as having been inevitable.
2. "Skill is what's within your control and luck is what is outside your control."
3. Innate talent (luck) plays a role in one's success; basic abilities are important. But hard work that is properly structured (skill) is far more impactful to the odds of success.
4. "There is no substitute for effort and grit; leaders are better off encouraging others on the basis of their effort, rather than on their sense of innate ability."
5. Even strategies that are well thought through will fail some percentage of the time as the result of bad luck.
6. "...Don't make a consequential decision at a point of high arousal – whether that arousal is positive or negative."
7. "Leaders have to recognize that they create a social context for the decisions of their employees. Some social contexts are not conducive to good decisions. For example, if employees feel too much stress, they will shorten the time horizons for their decisions."

Case Study: Curbing Randomness with Humility

In *The Success Equation*, Michael Mauboussin offers a powerful example highlighting the importance of humility:

Peter Pronovost is Chief Quality and Transformation Officer at University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center and former anesthesiologist and critical-care specialist at John Hopkins Hospital.

He had noticed that about forty thousand people in the U.S. died each year from infections caused by central line catheters – intravenous tubes placed in patients as part of their treatment. These were routine procedures not requiring exceptional expertise, and the deaths were completely preventable.

The number of deaths from these infections was equal to the number of women dying from breast cancer each year.

These errors occurred at one of the best hospital units in the world, by highly qualified doctors. Errors were not the result of lack of skill or knowledge but the result of a bad attitude, and poor attentional awareness, which caused these doctors to *overlook the obvious*.

Pronovost was able to get the doctors to use a simple checklist when installing central line catheters and thereby saved hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of lives, more than “any laboratory scientist in the past decade.”

To adopt a checklist is to embrace humility and admit our own fallibility. None of us can flawlessly cope with a complex world. A grocery list is a checklist that we use in a very low-risk environment. Why not use one when the stakes are high as well.

Reflection

1. What did reading pages 5 – 9 get you thinking about?

2. Record a personal example where your over-confidence got you into trouble:

Self-Deception #2: Fallacy of the Single Cause

Technical Questions – Easy, provable answers

- Why did the IRS reject my tax return?
- What caused the showerhead to stop working?
- What causes most central line IV infections?
- Where did we spend the most money this year?
- What is company policy on vacation and sick days?
- What were the available facts that led to that person's prison sentence?

Complex Questions – No single cause, no easy answer

- Why is my daughter depressed?
- Why does my boss repeatedly cancel our one-on-ones?
- What caused the divorce?
- How do I retain better talent in the workforce?
- What is best for America right now?
- Why isn't the team more aligned?

“Convictions without Evidence”

1. Good leaders are good motivators.
2. Good parents do not produce low-functioning offspring.
3. Bad parents do not produce high-functioning offspring.
4. People are inherently good.
5. Your boss will recognize your hard work.
6. Everything will work out in the end.
7. Busy, comfortable, and wealthy should be encouraged.
8. Strong convictions are good.
9. If I want to accomplish something bad enough, I can.
10. If something bad happens, someone is to blame.
11. What you don't know can't hurt you.
12. Cancer is random.
13. Humans only use 10% of their brain.
14. Ulcers are caused by stress.
15. Laziness is the main reason why people don't succeed.

Beliefs Communicated as Truths

1. “I understand.”
2. “I know what I’m doing.”
3. “I know what my spouse thinks.”
4. “I’m doing the best I can.”
5. “I believe my mother said it was true.”
6. “Failure is not an option.”
7. “We all need to be on the same page.”
8. “My kids deserve the very best.”
9. “You have to be comfortable with your choices.”
10. “The decision was right because we all agreed it was.”
11. “We won because our team made the proper adjustments.”

Questioning Unfounded Beliefs

Polite conversation is full of confident assertions, based on unfounded beliefs.

Consider the following examples:

1. “The harder you work, the luckier you get.”
2. “I already know what my team needs.”
3. “I’m approachable – people will come to me if there’s a problem.”
4. “If I don’t step in, it won’t get done right.”
5. “I give people space, so they know I trust them.”
6. “Once I’ve made up my mind, it’s best not to revisit the decision.”
7. “If no one is complaining, everything must be fine.”
8. “I know how my boss (or spouse, or peer) sees me.”
9. “We’re too busy to stop and reflect right now.”
10. “If we’re making money, we must be doing something right.”

Commonly Hidden Assumptions in Relationships

- What the other most wishes I would stop doing; why they have not told me
- What I am doing, without realizing it, that costs me connection or trust
- What they say about me when I am not in the room
- How they interpret my silence
- Where they believe I am falling short, and why they are living with it
- What they assume my true priorities are, based on my actions
- What they think I am afraid of
- The moment the first began to doubt me
- What they are protecting me from knowing
- How they explain my leadership to someone else
- What they think I am blind to in myself
- How they decide whether to bring me bad news
- What they think I value more than them
- What they believe I will never change about myself
- The last time I disappointed them, and how it changed their view of me
- What they believe I owe them, but will never give
- What they believe is “off limits” with me
- What they think I am pretending not to hear

Reflection

1. What did reading pages 11 – 15 get you thinking about?

2. Describe one strongly held personal conviction (belief), and how you arrived to it:

Self-Deception #3: Blame

Blame is rarely a careful analysis. It is usually a fast story that protects us from the truth we do not want to face.

The deception is not always “I’m innocent.” It is more subtle:

- If I can locate the villain, I do not have to feel afraid.
- If I can name the culprit, I do not have to admit my own contribution.
- If I can be right, I do not have to be accountable.
- If I can be angry, I do not have to grieve.
- If I can win the narrative, I do not have to change.

Blame gives you:

- Quick reduction in anxiety
- A sense of moral high ground
- An identity boost (I’m the responsible one)
- A target for your frustration
- Permission to stop thinking

Blame costs you:

- Accuracy
- Learning
- Repair
- Influence
- Trust

Curiosity: The Antidote to Blame

Staying Fascinated, Intrigued, and Curious

Curiosity is more than asking questions. It is the decision to set aside your version of the truth long enough to discover another.

It is choosing to stay in the unknown instead of rushing to the comfort of your own conclusions.

It is a refusal to be satisfied with the story in your head when the truth may be more complicated, less flattering, or more uncomfortable.

In key relationships, ask yourself:

- What is the most important question I have never asked this person?
- What about this person do I quietly judge?
- What do they wish I would notice without being told?
- What does this person believe about me that I have never challenged or clarified?
- What tension between us have I decided to “live with” instead of bringing into the open?
- If they could speak completely without consequence, what would they say to me?
- What is one thing I hope they would never bring up to me?

High-Gain Questions

High-gain or high-value questions do more than gather information. They surface truth, expose assumptions, and create space for deeper honesty. They often induce discomfort, because they require vulnerability to ask, and to answer.

Principles of High-Gain Questions:

- Invite reflection that cannot be answered in a sentence.
- Aim at what is avoided, glossed over, or left unsaid.
- Replace judgment with genuine investigation.
- Signal that you are willing to hear the real answer, even if it is not flattering.
- Reward openness with connection, not punishment.

Selected High-Gain Questions for Leadership Conversations:

1. What is the conversation you have been waiting for me to initiate?
2. Where have I misunderstood you, and stopped trying to get it right?
3. What am I doing that makes it harder for you to be successful?
4. When you hold back with me, what are you protecting yourself from?
5. What do you wish I would see about you without you having to explain it?
6. How do you decide whether to trust my leadership?
7. Where have you adjusted your expectations of me downward?
8. What have you noticed about me that I seem unwilling to talk about?
9. If you were in my position, what would you do differently?
10. What is the most important thing I could change in how I lead you or this team?

Discussion

Typically, leaders *overestimate* how much to tell
and *underestimate* how much to ask.

What do you see in yourself, on that front?

In a typical one-on-one work conversation
what percentage of interacting time
are you talking vs. listening?

What percentage of your air time
in a typical conversation,
gets expressed in the form of a question?

What are your target percentages for asking and telling?

Translation Reflection Exercise

1. Consider the closed question, “Do you want to watch the movie *Wicked* tonight?” Translate it into an open question:

2. Consider the vague question, “How are things?” Translate it into a specific question:

3. Consider the directive, “You need to talk to her before the end of the day.” Translate the “telling” into “asking”:

Building a Bridge to a Question

A good bridge reduces defensiveness and shows you are entering the conversation with respect, not ambush.

Bridges that Invite Openness:

- There is something I've never asked you because I wasn't ready to hear the answer. I'm ready now, and I'm wondering if you'd be open to it?
- I would rather have an honest conversation than a polite one. Are you willing to go there with me?
- There's a question I've been holding back because it might be awkward. Are you open to hearing it?
- I am working on not avoiding hard conversations, and I'd like to practice that with you. What are your thoughts on that?
- I have been making assumptions about you instead of asking. Can I check one out with you?
- There is something I might be wrong about, and I would like to find out. Can I share it and hear your take?
- If I were in your position, I might not want to answer this, but I think it matters. Will you hear me out?

Practice

Guidelines:

- Groups of three. One observer, one receiver, one deliverer.
- Each person writes down a real question they need to ask someone in their work life.
- Before asking it, craft a bridge statement to set up the conversation.
- Practice delivering the bridge and the question without softening it to make yourself more comfortable.
- Observers note what worked, and what didn't work, based on the below:

AVOID:

- Hedging or apologizing (“This is probably stupid but...”)
- Over-explaining your intentions before asking
- Turning the bridge into a full speech that dilutes the impact
- Using the bridge to *justify* yourself instead of invite openness
- Asking a “safe” question instead of the real one you wrote down

DO:

- Keep the bridge short — one or two sentences max
- Deliver it calmly and without rushing
- Make eye contact and use an even, open tone
- Follow the bridge immediately with the question
- Listen fully to the answer without defending or redirecting

Between Now and Session 6

1. Surface One Common Unknown

Choose one “Commonly Hidden Assumptions” from the list on **page 15**. Intentionally bring it into the open at least once before March, approaching the conversation with genuine curiosity and without defensiveness.

2. Capture and Reflect

After completing the action above, record what you learned, what surprised you, and how it altered your view of yourself and/or the other person.

Notes
