



Advanced Leadership Course

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

Session Nine

Avoidance and Risk

Schedule

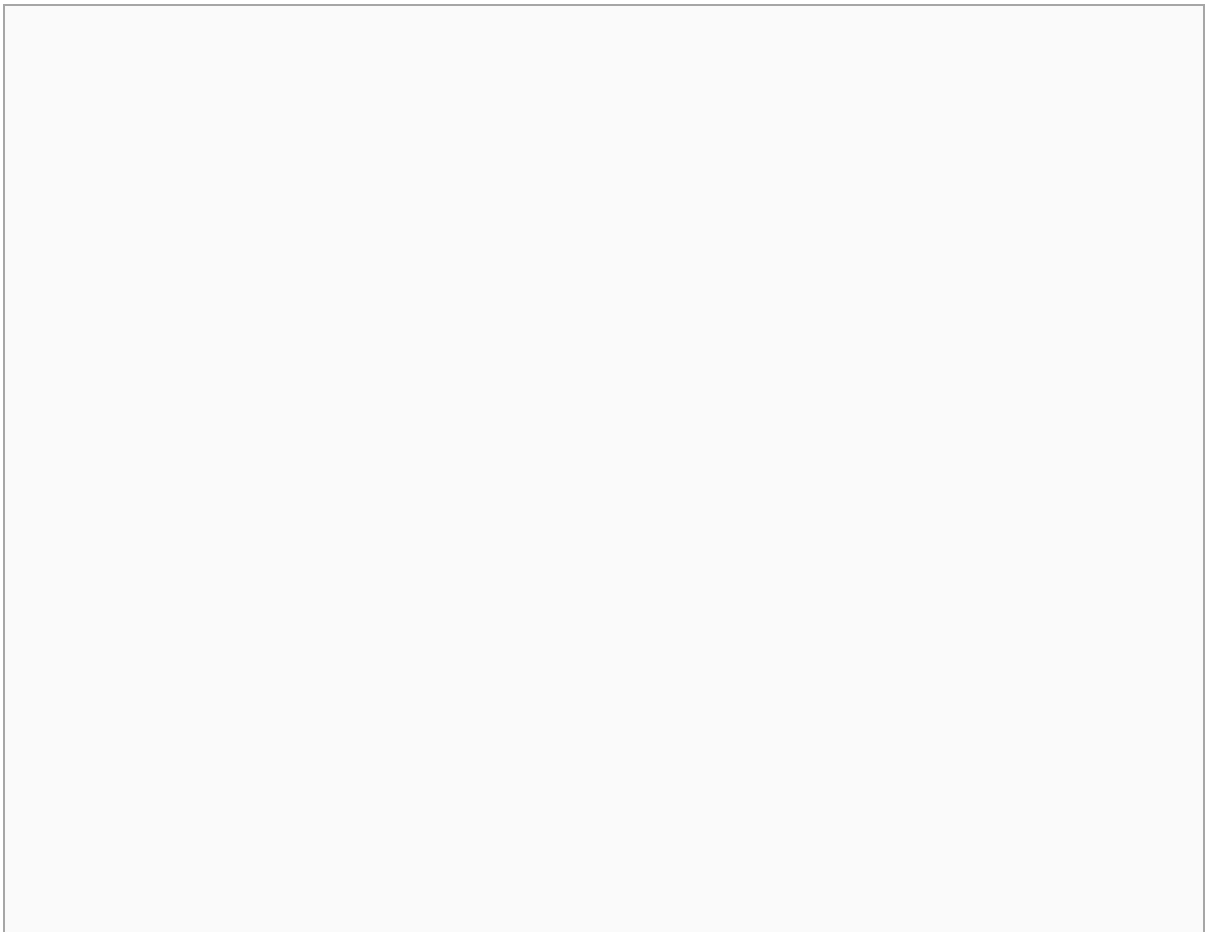
7:30-8:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Arrival
8:00-10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Self-Coaching and Avoidance
10:00-10:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ BREAK
10:15-12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Sticky Messages and Applied Discernment
12:00-12:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ LUNCH
12:45-2:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Crafting and Delivering Sticky Messages
2:15-2:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Wrap-up + Evals

Self-Coaching: Reverse Role Play

1. What happened when you tried the Reverse Role Play?

- Did you clearly introduce it?
- Did you do it?
- Did you clearly end it?
- Did you debrief it?

2. What traps did you fall in? What did that experience reveal to you about you?



Self-Coaching Notes

1. Coaching preparation centers on:

- Asking a question that gets beneath the story
- Holding a stance under pressure
- Refusing to rescue someone from the discomfort of seeing themselves clearly
- Staying present when the easier move is to advise, fix, or reassure

2. Preparation begins with oneself:

- Asking yourself the question you would ask a coachee
- Sitting with a question instead of solving through it
- Refusing to rescue, soothe, or distract yourself from something unflattering you see in yourself
- Holding a stance or expectation for yourself that you would hold for someone else

3. Which of these four are you most adept at with others, and less for yourself?

Avoidance In Coaching

The most expert avoidance is difficult to catch. It shows up in language that sounds like wisdom: measured, patient, attuned to the relationship. Coaches get especially fluent in this language, because the coaching discipline requires effective restraint and inquiry. Those same disciplines give avoidance its richest vocabulary. What follows is a closer look at the places the avoidance hides best in the coaching role, and the questions that can help surface it.

1. Asking another question when it's time to make an observation

When does the next question stop serving the coachee, and start protecting the coach?

Examples might include:

- The coach already knows what the coachee needs to hear, and is asking a question to delay saying it
- The coachee is circling the same idea, and another question keeps the circle going
- The questioning role is a comfort place for the coach, rather than taking stances

2. Softening the observation past the point of usefulness

When does reframing detract from the sharpness of a message? Examples might include:

- The coach translates the hard observation into a gentler question to avoid the recipient's reaction
- Qualifiers like *maybe, I might be wrong, or just a thought* reflect the coach's own insecurity more than it reflects real discernment
- The coach pre-softens because the relationship feels fragile, when the fragility may be the issue

3. Letting them “get there themselves” when evidence suggests they won’t

When is patience – useful in many instances – disguising a deeper truth? Examples might include:

- The coach is unwilling to share something difficult
- Evidence suggests the coachee isn't that interested in changing
- The coach identifies his/her patience as part of the problem

4. Hiding inside the coaching role

When does the role become a shelter for the coach, instead of a service to the coachee?

Examples might include:

- The coachee is asking for a peer or a friend, and the coach keeps offering questions
- The coach refuses to share an opinion because "that's not my role," when an opinion is what the moment requires
- The role becomes a way to avoid being seen as a human with stakes in the outcome

5. Protecting the relationship instead of serving the person

When does the long-built trust become the reason for not using it? Examples might include:

- The coach has held the same observation for months and never offered it
- The coach softens or skips the harder message because the relationship feels too valuable to risk
- The coach mistakes the absence of conflict for the presence of progress

6. Filling the silence when the coach doesn't know what to say

When does the next move become a technique to cover for the coach not having one?

Examples might include:

- The coach reaches for another framework when sitting with not-knowing would serve the coachee better
- A new question gets asked to fill the air rather than to advance the work
- The coach's discomfort with silence becomes obvious

Which of these most resonates and why?

Discernment: Holding Opposites

A practiced ability to read reality accurately, interpret it wisely, and choose the next right action for the long run.

Discernment could be described more accurately as a mindset, rather than a specific set of behaviors. An unmistakable mindset of discernment is the capacity to hold two true things at once.

Examples:

- Chutzpah and humility
- Warmth and strength
- Conviction and openness
- Anger and commitment
- Accountability and flexibility
- Safety and challenge
- Honesty and humility
- Directness and care
- Conviction and curiosity
- Holding the line and holding the person
- Standing firm and staying open

Discernment situations:

- *“Is this a repairable conflict, or a destructive pattern?”*
- *“In this moment, do I need to be generous, direct, patient, or done?”*
- *“In this situation, what’s mine to own, and what’s theirs?”*
- *“Where is the urgency I feel coming from in this moment?”*

Sticky Messages Discernment

What to do when:

1. A long-tenured peer on the leadership team is quietly underperforming. The CEO is loyal to him personally and won't address it. You and the others are absorbing the cost, and resentment is fracturing the team.
2. Your most talented direct report is becoming someone you don't want to lead. The work is excellent. The arrogance, the gossip, and the way she handles juniors is corrosive. People are afraid of her.
3. Mid-conversation, you realize the candidate you're about to recommend hiring reminds you of yourself, and you suspect that's why you've been advocating for him over a stronger applicant.
4. Your board chair, a longtime mentor and friend, is beginning to show signs of cognitive decline in meetings. No one is naming it.
5. A colleague you respect just delivered a presentation to senior leadership that you found self-serving and intellectually dishonest. He asks you afterward, sincerely, what you thought.
6. Your spouse has been telling you for months that your work hours are damaging the marriage. You have been managing the conversation rather than answering it.
7. You owe an apology to someone whose career you affected with a decision two years ago. You were partly right and partly wrong. You have not reached out.

Crafting Sticky Messages

Return to your pre-work message and audit it honestly against the six dimensions below.

Six dimensions when delivering a sticky message:

1. Precise	Does it say exactly what I mean?
2. Owned	Is it about my experience and impact, not the others' behavior?
3. Honest	Have I kept the weight the message requires?
4. Direct	Have I said it without escape hatches (no hedging)?
5. Specific	Am I using a real moment, not an abstraction?
6. Observational	Am I naming what I saw rather than telling the other what to do?

How would you adapt your previous message after reviewing the above?

Delivering Sticky Messages

Each person delivers to one person in the room

The structure:

- Begin with who the message is for.
- Deliver the prepared message.
- The recipient receives it only. No verbal response, during or after.
- The room observes both of you.
- After the delivery, the room gives the deliverer feedback on the message and delivery.

What the “Invested Observers” in the room are doing;

Inviting the deliverer in on what they witnessed. Not what the deliverer should have said or what the observer would have said.

Observer guide:

What to track	Reflection question
Body	Did the deliverer stay grounded, or leave? Where did they go?
Eyes	Where did the deliverer’s eyes land? When did they drop, drift, or fix?
Voice	Where did the voice shift to soften, harden, speed up, trail off, get louder than needed?
Pacing	Over-explain? Over-apologize? Over-soften the landing? Rush past it?
Stance	Did the deliverer collapse under the weight of the message, or harden against it?

What to track	Reflection question
Contact	Did the deliverer stay in contact with the recipient, or leave the relationship the moment the message left their mouth?
Witness response	What happened in your own body as you watched? Where did you feel pulled to look away?
Landing	Did the message arrive as clear, owned, honest, direct, specific, observational?

Reflection

As each person delivers, notice the moment you most want to look away. That moment is information about you, not the speaker.

Practice

Between now and Session 10:

1. Complete your Capstone Presentation and prepare to present to your peers next month.
2. Deliver one message.
 - Before Session 10, deliver one difficult message you have been postponing.
 - Not the largest. Not the one that would change your career. The one you keep telling yourself you'll get to.

Fear versus reality:

What I feared	What actually happened	What this tells me about my pattern

Also track:

Dimension	Before / during	After
What I noticed in my body before, during, after		
What it cost me to keep delaying — and what another year of delay would have cost		

Dimension	Before / during	After
What landed for the other person		
What delivering this revealed about my pattern that I didn't see before		

Track three you choose not to deliver – For each, sort honestly. The third column is where most honest answers will sit.

Message I'm choosing not to deliver	Discernment	Avoidance	Not yet sure

Bring to Session 10:

- One observation about your own pattern that you couldn't see before this experience
- The one message you delivered, and what it produced
- The three you didn't, and your honest read on why

Notes

