



Advanced Leadership Course

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

Session Two

*Don't Take the Bait:
Staying Grounded Under Pressure*

Schedule

7:30 AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arrive / Settle In ○ Light Breakfast, Informal connection
8:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Present and Accountable”: Quiet reflection / meditation ○ Triads: Homework from Session 1
8:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discussion: <i>Don’t Take the Bait</i> ○ Live Issue Demo: Diffusing the bait in real time
10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Break
10:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discussion: <i>Four Strategies to Avoid Getting Snookered</i>
12:15 PM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lunch
1:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feedback Update: Tracking progress ○ Live Issue Demo: Skillful <i>delivery</i> of squirmy feedback
2:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Session 3 Actions, Evaluations

Opening Reflections

We act as if simple cause and effect is at work.

We push to find the one simple reason things have gone wrong...

As soon as we find someone to blame,

we act as if we've solved the problem.

Margaret Wheatley
Author, Leadership and the New Science

Don't Take the Bait

“Taking the Bait” is the Reactive Urge to Blame, Correct, or Avoid

First, something happens:

- A look of contempt or disapproval from a loved one
- A calculated dig in a meeting.
- A loaded question in front of the room.
- A decision that wipes out months of your work.

Then, pressure and tension accelerate.

Pulse quickens, breath shortens, muscles get tight, impulses surge:

- Strike back.
- Put them in their place.
- Reclaim control.

That's the bait.

Not taking the bait requires self-awareness and poise.

Leaders who can stick to their principles and maintain emotional balance tend to protect their credibility and feed higher maturity back into the systems they lead.

A potentially disastrous moment is turned into powerful modeling.

The alternative: an increasingly reactive and distractable culture, where disruptions become focal points rather than passing hiccups.

What’s a Bigger Problem: The Bait or the Bite?

To reduce your bait-taking, reflect on these questions:

1. Who or what predictably sets you off?
2. What kind of move from someone else causes your focus to narrow, your judgment to cloud?
3. How do you stop yourself from over-reacting?

Write down two bait-taking examples from the last six months. For each, name the bait, how you took it, and the fallout.

Bait:		
How I took it –	The fallout –	

Bait:		
How I took it –	The fallout –	

Four Strategies to Avoid Getting Snookered

The following strategies are disciplines, not tips.

Each demands rare self-honesty;

A willingness to examine your least flattering patterns;

The grit to apply what you learn in daily leadership and relationships.

Awareness

Examples: Noticing Signals

- **Physical:** Your breath shortens, jaws lock, chest tightens.
- **Emotional:** Poise disappears, irritation spikes, defensiveness sets in
- **Mental:** You lose perspective, get fixated on proving your point. Rehearse your comeback.

A leader’s internal “noticing” barometer interrupts autopilot responses.

Reflection: List two physical or mental signals that your reactivity is building. Which one do you miss most often? Please give detail.

Signal #1	
Signal #2	

Awareness Examples

Less Mature	More Mature
<p>Moves through high-pressure moments on autopilot, unaware of inner state until after reacting.</p>	<p>Notices physical, emotional, and mental cues early enough to choose a response.</p>
<p>Confuses strong emotion with clear thinking.</p>	<p>Distinguishes between emotional reactivity and principled conviction.</p>
<p>Blames external circumstances for being “caught off guard.”</p>	<p>Takes ownership of tracking personal triggers and patterns.</p>

Less Mature:

- “I didn’t even realize I was getting worked up until I was already yelling.”
- “I was blindsided — there was no way to see it coming.”
- “I always get mad in those situations; it’s just who I am.”
- “I can’t help it; when people are wrong, I have to tell them right away.”

More Mature:

- “My skin gets red when I’m under pressure — it’s my cue to slow down.”
- “I tend to stop thinking when challenged, so I reflect before speaking.”
- “Becoming aware that I’m about to react helps me take a step back.”
- “I lowered my voice and slowed down to help others think clearly.”

Responsibility Examples

Less Mature	More Mature
Reactivity-driven, go-it-alone mentality.	Takes responsibility for self while aware of and grateful for “those who have my back.”
Blames others for one’s own reactivity and unmet needs	Acts to meet own needs for comfort, happiness, well-being, and learning.
Avoids ownership of feelings, thoughts, and behavior.	Owns feelings, thoughts, and behavior while considering their impact on others.

Less Mature

- “Everything I’ve achieved has been a result of my own hard work.”
- “If others have a problem with me, that’s theirs to carry.”
- “I wish I could eat a healthier diet, but my wife keeps buying desserts.”
- “My direct reports can’t handle stress, so I avoid hard conversations.”

More Mature

- “I worked hard to get here, with help from many others – and a lot of luck.”
- “I’m weighing how my behavior impacts you, and want to listen to your perspective without defensiveness.”
- “I’m improving my ability to turn down desserts, and I’m not finished yet.”
- “I’m discovering less intimidating ways to have hard conversations.”

Relationship Connection

Relationship connection is the irrefutable cornerstone of influence.

Relationship cutoff and reactive distance are common in business and in families.

More mature leaders seek to stay connected under pressure, not to win approval or agree, but to remain present and curious.

Connecting expands your field of vision. Avoidance shrinks it.

Reflection: Name one person you've been avoiding. Write two curious, non-defensive questions you could ask them this month.

Name:	
Question #1 –	
Question #2 –	

Relationship Connection Examples

Less Mature	More Mature
Avoids challenging relationships, especially under pressure.	Stays connected to important relationships even when tensions run high.
Withdraws to self-protect.	Engages with curiosity to keep communication and influence alive.
Over-emphasizes safety and comfort.	Principles and goals, not discomfort, determine contact.

Less Mature:

- “I just don’t deal with that person unless I absolutely have to.”
- “They’ve never respected me, so why should I engage with them?”
- “It’s easier to send an email than to meet face-to-face.”

More Mature:

- “I set up a meeting with the colleague I’ve been avoiding to better understand their perspective.”
- “I stayed in the conversation even when it got uncomfortable.”
- “I reach out intentionally to people I tend to avoid.”

Discernment and Flexibility

Discernment is clarifying for self the move that fits the moment.

Flexibility is being able to execute it without betraying your principles.

Pressure tempts leaders into one-mode responses: force, persuasion, withdrawal, humor. Overuse any of them and you lose range, credibility, and rapport.

Reflection: Retrieve a story of a live leadership challenge. Write one firm response, one soft response, and one light/playful response. Which is most likely to serve both the outcome and the relationship?

Leadership Challenge:
Firm Response –
Soft Response –
Playful Response –

Discernment and Flexibility Examples

Less Mature	More Mature
Uses one default mode of influence regardless of context.	Reads the context and adapts approach without betraying principles.
Equates consistency with rigidity.	Balances consistency of principle with flexibility of execution.
Reacts based on habit, expediency, or comfort zone.	Chooses responses that fit both the moment and the goal.

Less Mature:

- “This is how I’ve always handled it, and it’s worked before.”
- “I’m either all-in or all-out – no middle ground.”
- “I’m not going to sugarcoat things, ever.”

More Mature:

- “I adjusted my approach because the usual way wasn’t working.”
- “I can hold a strong position while changing how I communicate it.”
- “I can be firm or light, intense or easygoing, depending on what will move the situation forward.”

Between Now and Session 3

1. Choose one real pressure situation in your work or life. Apply all four strategies at least once, and prepare to discuss in-depth with your colleagues.

2. Document:
 - What triggered you.
 - What you did differently.
 - What you learned about your bait-taking patterns.

3. Identify one situation coming up where you will need to take a clear stand without flinching. Track what happens, and prepare to report your experience to colleagues.

Bring your notes, reflections, and observations to **Session 3 on November 12**. We will not be discussing theory — we will be debriefing your real examples.

Notes
