
PRE CONVERSATION

Instrument Check

Pre-Conversation

INSTRUMENT CHECK

A PRACTICAL PROTOCOL FOR LEADERS WHO WANT TO CREATE
CONDITIONS WHERE HONEST COMMUNICATION IS POSSIBLE

WHY THIS EXISTS

Elite performers in aviation, surgery, and sport do not leave their internal state to chance before high-stakes moments. They check their instruments. They name their mental state. They create the micro-gap between where they have been and where they are going.

Leaders rarely do this. They move from one meeting, one difficult email, one stressful interaction directly into the next. Whatever they were carrying comes with them. It leaks into tone, posture, and patience and the room adjusts.

People say less. They manage the message. The real issue stays underground.

This protocol takes 60 seconds. It is not a journaling exercise. It is an instrument check — the same discipline that changes outcomes in every other high-performance field.



The gap between noticing
what you are feeling and
choosing what you do
next is where leadership
actually happens.

THE 60 SECOND PROTOCOL

Use this before any high-stakes conversation: a difficult feedback conversation, a team meeting after a challenging period, a one-on-one where something important needs to be said.

1. Pause physically

Stop what you are doing. Put down your phone. Close the laptop. Take two slow breaths. You are signalling to your nervous system that the previous context is over.

2. Name your current state

Ask honestly: what am I carrying right now? Stress, frustration, urgency, distraction, tiredness, defensiveness? You do not need to fix it. You need to see it.

3. Check your intent

Ask: what do I actually want from this conversation? To be heard? To solve something? To understand? To correct? Naming intent makes it visible — and visible intent is easier to align.

4. Choose your posture

Decide how you want to show up. Curious. Open. Direct. Steady. You are not performing a mood. You are choosing a starting orientation.

5. Enter deliberately

Now go in. Not perfectly — deliberately.

PRE- CONVERSATION CHECKLIST

RUN THROUGH THIS BEFORE CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER. IT TAKES UNDER A MINUTE.

- ☐ I have physically stopped and transitioned out of the previous context.
- ☐ I can name at least one thing I am currently carrying emotionally or physically.
- ☐ I know what I want from this conversation.
- ☐ I have chosen the posture I want to bring in.
- ☐ I am prepared to hear something I was not expecting.
- ☐ I will ask before I assert.
- ☐ If this conversation goes somewhere difficult, I will stay in the moment.

QUICK SELF-ASSESSMENT

REFLECT ON THE LAST THREE SIGNIFICANT CONVERSATIONS YOU LED. USE THIS AS A DIAGNOSTIC, NOT A JUDGEMENT.

Question	Rarely	Sometimes	Consistently
I paused before entering the conversation.			
I could name what I was carrying beforehand.			
I was genuinely curious rather than certain.			
I noticed when I became defensive and adjusted.			
The other person said what they actually needed to say.			
I left feeling the conversation was real, not managed.			

30-DAY HABIT BUILDER

INTEROCEPTION IS A SKILL, NOT A PERSONALITY TRAIT. IT IS BUILT THROUGH DELIBERATE REPETITION. USE THIS TO TRACK YOUR PRACTICE OVER 30 DAYS.

Week	Focus	Days Practised
One	Pause and breathe before every significant conversation. Nothing else required.	Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri
Two	Name one internal state before each conversation. Write it down if it helps.	Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri
Three	Add the intent check. Ask: what do I actually want from this conversation?	Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri
Four	Run the full protocol. Notice what shifts in the conversations that follow.	Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri

END WEEK REFLECTION

AT THE END OF EACH WEEK, SPEND FIVE MINUTES WITH THESE QUESTIONS:

Where did the protocol create a noticeably different conversation this week?

Where did I skip it — and what happened as a result?

What is one thing I want to do differently next week?

NOTE FROM STEVE

Leadership presence is not a personality trait. It is a practice. The leaders who create environments where honest communication is possible are not naturally calmer or more emotionally gifted than others. They have simply built the discipline to notice what they are carrying before they walk into the room.

That discipline starts here. One conversation at a time.