

LEADERSHIP IN LIFE COACHING

THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY THAT GETS
AMBITIOUS PROFESSIONALS
PROMOTED, RESPECTED, AND RELIED ON

The Visibility & Influence Playbook



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Before We Begin

You made a great decision picking this up. Now let's make it count.

Why you are here

You are talented, hard-working, and delivering real results. But somewhere between the quality of your work and the recognition you deserve, something is getting lost. You are not being seen in the right rooms. Your ideas are not landing the way they should. The promotion — the influence, the respect — feels like it should already be yours.

That gap is almost never about capability. It is almost always about communication. And communication is entirely learnable — and it compounds fast once you start getting it right.

Every framework, script, and worksheet in the pages ahead is designed for one purpose: to close the gap between how good you are and how clearly the right people can see it.

A brief introduction

I spent 10 years working at the head office of one of the world's largest Fortune 500 retailers — in the room where commercial strategy was built and major decisions were made at scale. I then went on to consult for them before leaving to build my own business and property portfolio in Ontario, Canada, alongside my husband Nigel.

Across my experiences, one pattern kept showing up: the professionals who rose fastest were not always the most technically skilled. They were the ones who communicated with clarity, confidence, and strategy.

That observation became the foundation of everything I now teach. I help ambitious professionals get seen for the right things, influence the decisions that matter, and build the reputation that opens doors — without waiting for someone else to notice them first.

Everything you need is in these pages. Let's get to work. — Amy

INTRODUCTION

The Shift That Changes Everything

I want to start with something that happened to me — because it might be the most important story in this entire guide.

I noticed my leadership team was starting to respond differently to my emails. The replies changed.

☒ SOUNDS LIKE BRAGGING	✓ SOUNDS LIKE LEADERSHIP
"Can you clarify?"	"Approved."
"What's the ask?"	"Yes — do it."
"Let's discuss."	"Agree with your recommendation."
"Not sure what you need from us..."	"Go ahead and align the team."

That shift didn't happen because I had more to say. It happened because I stopped making leaders work to understand me — and started giving them a clear decision path.

"Leadership teams don't need more information. They need clarity and a next step. The person who consistently gives them that is the person they promote."

The Real Problem Most Ambitious Professionals Face

The truth is that promotion decisions are not made primarily on performance. They are made on perception — and perception is built through communication.

Every email you send. Every meeting you show up to. Every time you choose to speak up — or stay silent. Every interaction with a senior leader. You are constantly, whether you realise it or not, communicating your leadership potential to the people who make decisions about your career.

Most ambitious professionals were taught to keep their head down, do excellent work, and wait to be noticed. That strategy feels safe. It feels professional. But it has one fatal flaw: it doesn't work.

The Communication Strategy Gap

The gap between where you are and where you deserve to be is not a performance gap. It is a communication strategy gap. And once you understand this — you can close it fast.

How This Guide Works

This guide is structured in five parts. Each part builds on the previous one — from the inside out. We start with self-awareness, because you cannot communicate strategically from a place of confusion about who you are and what drives you. From there, we move through visibility, influence, leadership communication, and finally your concrete 90-day action plan.

Each chapter contains frameworks you can use immediately, worksheets to make the learning concrete, and specific language you can adapt to your own situation. Nothing in this guide is theoretical for the sake of it. Every single strategy is something you can apply in your next conversation, your next meeting, or your next email.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- 1 Read one chapter at a time:** Do not rush — depth beats speed here
- 2 Do the worksheets:** Writing activates a different kind of thinking
- 3 Apply one strategy before moving on:** Implementation beats information
- 4 Return to the frameworks:** These are tools you'll use for years
- 5 Share what you learn:** Teaching accelerates your own mastery

PART ONE

THE FOUNDATION

Know yourself before you lead others.

Self-awareness is not a soft skill. It is the bedrock of every communication strategy in this guide – and the most consistently underestimated edge that ambitious professionals have access to.

Chapters 1-3

Why Self-Awareness Is Your Most Underestimated Leadership Tool

Most people skip chapters like this one. They want to get straight to the tactics – the scripts, the frameworks, the things they can use in tomorrow’s meeting. And we will get there. Every framework in this guide is practical and immediately applicable.

But here is the thing about communication strategy: if you don’t know what drives you, the tactics won’t hold. You’ll apply them inconsistently, revert under pressure, and wonder why they work for other people but not for you. The self-awareness you build in this chapter is not a warm-up. It is the infrastructure everything else runs on.

“You cannot communicate strategically from a place of confusion about who you are. Self-awareness is not a reflection exercise – it is competitive intelligence.”

Why Self-Awareness Accelerates Careers

Here is something that consistently surprises ambitious professionals when they first encounter it: most of the communication habits that are quietly undermining their career are not the result of poor skills. They are the result of unexamined drivers.

A professional driven by a deep need for Recognition communicates very differently under pressure than one driven by Achievement. A professional whose primary driver is Significance will make different choices in meetings, in emails, and in relationships than someone driven by Affiliation. When you don’t know your own drivers, you act on instinct – and your instincts, under pressure, will default to what feels good for you, not what creates the right impression.

When you understand your drivers, everything changes. You can spot the moments when your instincts are helping you – and the moments when they’re working against the impression you want to make. That awareness is not just useful. In a competitive environment where most people are operating on autopilot, it is a significant and sustainable advantage.

The critical distinction: Your core motivators explain WHY you communicate the way you do under pressure. Once you understand that – you can choose HOW you communicate instead of simply reacting. That shift from reactive to intentional is one of the most important moves you will make in this entire guide.

Understanding Your Core Motivators

Core motivators are the deep reward patterns that drive your behaviour – particularly under pressure and in high-stakes situations. They are not personality traits, and they are not fixed labels. They are the underlying needs your brain is constantly working to satisfy, whether you are aware of them or not.

Research in organisational psychology consistently shows that people have 2–3 primary motivators that are non-negotiable for sustained engagement, and several secondary ones that enhance satisfaction when present. Understanding where yours sit tells you an enormous amount about why certain

situations energise you, why others drain you, and – crucially – where your communication instincts are most likely to get you into trouble.

RECOGNITION

The need to be seen, acknowledged, and credited for your contribution.

At work: You are energised when your work is noticed by the right people. You feel most engaged in high-visibility roles and situations where your contribution is clearly attributable. You can do exceptional work, but if it goes unseen, something feels missing.

Communication risk: Under pressure, Recognition-driven communicators often over-explain their involvement or front-load their contributions before the point, which can read as insecure rather than confident. The fix is strategic – not suppression, but timing and framing.

You likely recognise this in yourself if: You notice immediately when your idea is repeated by someone else and you're not credited. You work harder when you know senior leaders are watching. You feel flat after high-quality work that nobody sees.

ACHIEVEMENT

The need to set high standards, hit targets, and demonstrate measurable results.

At work: You are energised by stretch goals, clear metrics, and the momentum of progress. You are a natural self-starter who performs best when outcomes are measurable and standards are high. Vague expectations and ambiguous success criteria frustrate you.

Communication risk: Achievement-driven communicators can over-focus on results at the expense of relationships and process. In a leadership context, this can make them seem task-obsessed or dismissive of others' contributions. Strong communicators learn to narrate results in a way that includes the team, not just the outcome.

You likely recognise this in yourself if: You track your own performance more closely than anyone asks you to. You find it hard to leave tasks unfinished or partially done. You feel a disproportionate sense of satisfaction when you hit a difficult target.

AUTHORITY

The need to lead, direct, and have genuine influence over decisions and outcomes.

At work: You are energised when you have ownership. Executing someone else's vision feels diminishing to you – you want to set the direction, not just follow it. You naturally fill leadership vacuums and feel most engaged when you have real decision-making power.

Communication risk: Authority-driven communicators can inadvertently telegraph impatience with process or hierarchy, which can create friction with the very leaders whose support they need. Learning to influence upward before leading is a critical skill for this type.

You likely recognise this in yourself if: You regularly have a view on how things could be done better, even in areas outside your formal remit. Being told to execute without being consulted on strategy frustrates you. You are most engaged when you have real ownership.

AFFILIATION

The need to belong, to be trusted, and to do meaningful work with people you respect.

At work: You are energised by connection and team cohesion. The quality of your relationships at work has a significant impact on your engagement and performance. You are most effective when you feel psychologically safe and genuinely valued by the people around you.

Communication risk: Affiliation-driven communicators can avoid difficult conversations or uncomfortable positions in order to preserve relationships, which over time damages their credibility as a leader. The most effective professionals with this driver learn that healthy challenge is a form of respect – not a threat to connection.

You likely recognise this in yourself if: You are deeply affected by fractured team dynamics or trust issues at work. You are at your most creative and productive when there is genuine cohesion in your team. You find purely transactional work environments draining.

ADVANCEMENT

The need to grow, progress, and be moving toward something more.

At work: You are energised by progression – new skills, new levels, new challenges. You need to feel that your career is moving. Stagnation is one of the most demoralising experiences you can have, even if the role is objectively comfortable and well-compensated.

Communication risk: Advancement-driven communicators can come across as restless or perpetually dissatisfied, which can make senior leaders hesitant to invest in them. Learning to communicate ambition as vision – rather than impatience – is a critical reframe for this type.

You likely recognise this in yourself if: You feel a sense of growing unease if a role has plateaued, even when things are going well. You are energised by learning curves and become disengaged when a role becomes routine. You are constantly thinking about what is next.

SIGNIFICANCE

The need for the work itself to matter – to have real impact on something beyond metrics.

At work: You are energised by purpose and meaning. You can deliver strong results in any environment, but you sustain that performance over time only when you believe the work genuinely matters. Work that is profitable but purposeless will drain you regardless of the compensation.

Communication risk: Significance-driven communicators can be perceived as idealistic or difficult to align around purely commercial goals. The most effective professionals with this driver learn to translate their sense of purpose into the language of business outcomes – which allows them to lead with meaning without losing credibility.

You likely recognise this in yourself if: You find yourself energised by conversations about why the work matters, not just what needs to be done. You are most engaged when you feel the organisation stands for something. You lose motivation quickly in environments where profit is the only measure of success.

An important note before you assess yourself: Most ambitious professionals have 1–2 primary motivators and several secondary ones. You will also notice motivators you think you “should” have – ones that feel like the right answer. Resist the urge to self-edit. The assessment only works if you answer based on what actually drives you, not what sounds most professional or ambitious.

The Core Motivator Assessment

For each statement below, score your honest level of agreement from 1 to 10:

SCORING GUIDE	
1 – 3	Strongly disagree / Not true for me
4 – 6	Somewhat agree / Partially true for me
7 – 10	Strongly agree / Definitely true for me

Go with your gut. Your first instinct is almost always your honest answer.

SCORE	RECOGNITION
1. _____	I feel most satisfied when my work is specifically noticed and acknowledged by the right people.
2. _____	When I deliver strong results but nobody senior sees them, something feels missing – even if I know the work was excellent.
3. _____	I am more engaged and productive when I know that key people are watching or aware of my contribution.
4. _____	Being in a visible role, or on a high-profile project, energises me in a way that behind-the-scenes work does not.
5. _____	I notice immediately when someone else receives credit for work I contributed to or originated.
6. _____	Public recognition – in meetings, in front of leadership, or in company communications – matters more to me than I sometimes admit.
7. _____	I care about my professional reputation and how I am perceived at a senior level.
8. _____	I am energised by opportunities to demonstrate my capability in front of influential stakeholders.
TOTAL	Add your 8 scores together. RECOGNITION Total: _____ / 80

SCORE	ACHIEVEMENT
1. _____	I set high personal standards for my work and find it difficult to submit something I am not proud of.
2. _____	I am most engaged when I have clear, stretching targets to work towards.
3. _____	I track my own performance and progress more closely than is formally required.
4. _____	Ambiguity around what “success” looks like frustrates me – I need to know what I am aiming for.

SCORE	ACHIEVEMENT
5._____	I feel a disproportionate sense of satisfaction when I complete a difficult task or hit a challenging goal.
6._____	I find it hard to sustain motivation in environments where performance standards are low or inconsistently applied.
7._____	I often raise the bar for myself beyond what others expect, even when it creates more work.
8._____	I am most energised when I am working at the edge of my capability – where success is not guaranteed.
TOTAL	Add your 8 scores together. ACHIEVEMENT Total: _____ / 80

SCORE	AUTHORITY
1._____	I feel most energised when I have genuine ownership and decision-making power over outcomes.
2._____	Executing someone else's vision – even when I respect it – is less satisfying than setting the direction myself.
3._____	I regularly have a view on how things could be done better, even in areas outside my formal role.
4._____	Being involved in decisions at the strategic level matters to me more than most people realise.
5._____	I feel underutilised when I am given a task to complete rather than a problem to solve.
6._____	I naturally fill leadership vacuums in teams and meetings – I find it uncomfortable when no one is leading.
7._____	Having influence over significant outcomes is one of the most motivating things I can experience at work.
8._____	Being consulted, not just informed, is important to my sense of engagement and value.
TOTAL	Add your 8 scores together. AUTHORITY Total: _____ / 80

SCORE	AFFILIATION
1._____	The quality of my relationships at work significantly affects my engagement and performance.
2._____	I am more creative, productive, and committed when I genuinely like and respect the people I work with.
3._____	Working in environments with fractured trust or poor team dynamics drains me more than almost anything else.

SCORE	AFFILIATION
4. _____	Being part of a high-performing, cohesive team is one of the most energising experiences I have had at work.
5. _____	Feeling genuinely valued by my colleagues and managers matters to me, not just professionally but personally.
6. _____	I find purely transactional work environments – where relationships are purely functional – difficult to sustain.
7. _____	I am willing to put extra effort in when I feel a strong sense of loyalty to the people I work with.
8. _____	Being excluded from the informal networks and conversations at work feels genuinely demotivating.
TOTAL	Add your 8 scores together. AFFILIATION Total: _____ / 80

SCORE	ADVANCEMENT
1. _____	I need to feel that my career is moving forward – stagnation demotivates me even when things are going well.
2. _____	I am most engaged when I am learning something new or developing a new skill.
3. _____	Once a role becomes routine or I stop being challenged, my motivation drops significantly.
4. _____	I think about career progression more regularly than my peers seem to.
5. _____	The prospect of a flat or plateaued career path is one of the most demotivating scenarios I can imagine.
6. _____	I feel a growing sense of restlessness when I stay in the same position for too long without visible movement.
7. _____	Access to development opportunities, stretch assignments, and career coaching matters a great deal to me.
8. _____	I am energised by conversations about my potential and future roles, even when they are exploratory.
TOTAL	Add your 8 scores together. ADVANCEMENT Total: _____ / 80

SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE
1. _____	I need to believe that my work genuinely matters – not just that it is productive or profitable.
2. _____	I can deliver strong results in any environment, but I sustain performance over time only when the work feels purposeful.

SCORE	SIGNIFICANCE
3. _____	Work that is commercially successful but lacks meaning or wider impact does not satisfy me long-term.
4. _____	I am energised by conversations about why the work matters, not just what needs to be delivered.
5. _____	I feel most alive professionally when I can connect my day-to-day work to something larger than the task itself.
6. _____	I lose motivation quickly in environments where everything is measured purely in financial terms.
7. _____	Being part of an organisation whose mission I genuinely believe in is one of the strongest drivers of my commitment.
8. _____	I regularly think about the legacy or impact of my work, not just the immediate outputs.
TOTAL	Add your 8 scores together. SIGNIFICANCE Total: _____ / 80

Scoring Your Results

Transfer your six totals here, then use the guide below to interpret your profile:

MOTIVATOR	YOUR SCORE	CLASSIFICATION
Recognition	Score: _____ / 80	Primary / Secondary / Supporting / Not a Driver (circle one)
Achievement	Score: _____ / 80	Primary / Secondary / Supporting / Not a Driver (circle one)
Authority	Score: _____ / 80	Primary / Secondary / Supporting / Not a Driver (circle one)
Affiliation	Score: _____ / 80	Primary / Secondary / Supporting / Not a Driver (circle one)
Advancement	Score: _____ / 80	Primary / Secondary / Supporting / Not a Driver (circle one)
Significance	Score: _____ / 80	Primary / Secondary / Supporting / Not a Driver (circle one)

WHAT YOUR SCORES MEAN

SCORE RANGE	WHAT IT MEANS	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE AT WORK
70 – 80	PRIMARY Motivator	Non-negotiable. If this is not present in your work, you will be unfulfilled regardless of salary, title, or recognition from others.
50 – 69	SECONDARY Motivator	Strongly enhances your satisfaction. You can function without it, but your best work and greatest engagement happen when it is present.
30 – 49	SUPPORTING Motivator	A nice-to-have. Contributes to your satisfaction but is not a dealbreaker when absent.
Below 30	NOT a Core Driver	This motivator does not significantly influence your behaviour or fulfilment. That is completely fine.

Most people have 1–2 primary motivators: If you have more than two scores in the 70–80 range, revisit them – some may reflect your aspirations more than your current behavior. Your PRIMARY motivators are the ones that – when absent – create a persistent, nagging sense of dissatisfaction regardless of other circumstances. Your secondary motivators enhance fulfilment. Your lower ones are genuinely nice-to-have. This distinction matters because we will use your profile to understand your communication instincts throughout the rest of this guide.

Your Motivator Profile

With your scores in hand, now complete the following. Be specific – vague answers here will produce vague insights later.

My Primary Motivator(s) – score 70 or above (the non-negotiables):

My Secondary Motivator(s) – score 50–69 (strongly enhancing):

One thing I have been denying about what actually drives me at work:

A motivator I thought I “should” have but scored lower than expected:

From Motivators to Communication – The Critical Link

Now that you have identified your primary motivators, the next step is connecting them to your communication behaviour. This is where the self-awareness work starts to pay dividends directly.

Below is the key question your motivators help you answer:

“Under pressure – in high-stakes meetings, with senior leaders, when I need something important – which direction does my communication instinct pull me, and is that helping or hurting my credibility?”

Here is how each motivator typically shows up in communication under pressure:

MOTIVATOR	INSTINCTIVE BEHAVIOUR	THE STRATEGIC SHIFT
Recognition	Over-signals own contribution before making the point; mentions who did the work before what the work achieved.	Lead with the insight or outcome first. Your contribution becomes obvious when the quality of the thinking is clear.
Achievement	Focuses on results at the expense of context or relationships; can appear to dismiss the process or team.	Narrate results in a way that includes the team. “We achieved X through Y approach” builds credibility and loyalty.
Authority	Communicates impatience with process; may challenge decisions before building the relationship needed to influence them.	Influence before you lead. Build trust with key stakeholders before positioning your own direction.

MOTIVATOR	INSTINCTIVE BEHAVIOUR	THE STRATEGIC SHIFT
Affiliation	Avoids uncomfortable positions or necessary challenge to preserve relationships; hedges to keep peace.	Reframe challenge as a sign of respect. The leaders people trust most are those willing to say the difficult thing.
Advancement	Signals restlessness or impatience; ambition can read as dissatisfaction rather than drive.	Frame ambition as vision, not urgency. "I want to grow into roles where I can contribute at this level" lands very differently than "I need to progress."
Significance	Can appear disconnected from commercial priorities; purpose-talk without business anchoring can lose credibility.	Translate purpose into outcomes. "This matters because it creates X for our customers/team/business" is far more persuasive than "this is the right thing to do."

The Energy Audit – One Week of Real Data

Self-assessment is a strong starting point. But the most revealing data about your motivators doesn't come from a worksheet – it comes from your actual week at work.

Run this simple audit for the next five working days. After each significant communication interaction – a meeting, an important email, a one-to-one, a presentation, a difficult conversation – take 90 seconds to make a brief note using this framework:

QUESTION	WHAT TO TRACK
After this interaction, do I feel energised or drained?	Rate 1 (drained) to 5 (energised). Track the pattern over the week.
Did my communication serve me – or just feel natural?	Natural and effective are not the same thing. Note the difference.
Did I get the response I intended?	If not, what did I say that may have created a different impression?
Was I reacting from a motivator-driven instinct?	Which of the 6 motivators was most active in how I showed up?
What would a more strategic version of this communication have looked like?	Write one sentence on what you'd do differently with this new awareness.

YOUR ENERGY AUDIT – END OF WEEK REFLECTION

The communication situations that consistently energised me this week:

The communication situations that drained me or where I felt I didn't show up well:

The motivator-driven instinct I noticed most often in myself:

One specific moment where my instinct and my strategic interest were in conflict — and what I did:

Before you move to Chapter 2: You should now have a clear motivator profile — your primary and secondary drivers, and the beginning of an awareness of how they show up in your communication. If the energy audit is still in progress, that's fine — run it alongside Chapter 2. The data you gather this week will make every subsequent chapter richer. The goal right now is not to fix anything. It's to see clearly. Everything else follows from that.

→ **Chapter 2: Your Communication Identity**

Your Communication Identity

What you're currently projecting — and what you intend

Right now, whether you are aware of it or not, you have a communication reputation. Every person you interact with at work has formed an impression of you based on how you communicate — not just what you say, but how clearly, how confidently, and how consistently you show up when it matters.

Most ambitious professionals have never deliberately examined theirs. They assume that if their work is strong, the impression they make will naturally follow. It doesn't. Perception is built from a hundred small communication moments — and without intentional awareness, those moments often tell a very different story from the one you intend.

This chapter is about closing that gap. Not by performing a version of yourself that isn't authentic, but by understanding how you are currently landing — and making deliberate choices about how you want to.

“The most powerful moment in a professional's career is not when they learn a new skill. It is when they see — clearly, for the first time — the gap between how they intend to come across and how they actually do.”

The Reputation Gap

The reputation gap is the distance between your intended communication identity — “I want to be seen as strategic, decisive, and credible” — and your actual communication reputation — what people would genuinely say about how you show up.

This gap is almost always larger than people expect. Not because they are poor communicators, but because most of us are rarely given honest, specific feedback about how we come across. We receive feedback on our outputs — the quality of our work, our results, our deliverables. Almost nobody gives us feedback on our communication — the way we position ourselves in meetings, the impression our emails create, the presence we project in high-stakes moments.

So the gap grows, quietly, without us knowing it exists. And in the meantime, the promotion goes to someone else, the visibility opportunity goes to a colleague, and the senior leadership meeting invite doesn't come.

Why this matters more than most professionals realise: Research consistently shows that promotion decisions are driven more by perception than performance. The people making decisions about your career are not reviewing your spreadsheets — they are remembering how you showed up in that leadership meeting, how you handled the difficult conversation, how your email landed when the stakes were high. Your communication reputation is being built every single day, whether you are managing it or not.

Auditing Your Current Communication Reputation

Before we build anything new, we need an honest picture of where you are today. This is intelligence-gathering, not self-criticism. Work through the questions below as honestly as you can — the quality of your answers here will directly determine the quality of the shifts you make later.

If I asked my manager to describe how I communicate in three words, they would most likely say:

If I asked a peer I trust to be honest with me, the word they would add that my manager might not say:

The feedback I receive most often – formally or informally – about how I communicate:

The feedback I have NEVER received but wish someone would give me:

A recent communication moment where I know I did not land the way I intended:

How I WANT to be described – my communication ambition in three words:

The most revealing question in that audit: The gap between “how I think I come across” and “how I want to come across” is your communication development priority. If you find it difficult to identify how you actually come across, that is itself significant information – it suggests you may be operating without enough feedback to calibrate. We will address that directly in this chapter.

The Four Communication Identities

Through working with ambitious professionals across organisations, the same patterns emerge consistently. There are four recognisable communication identities — and most people lead strongly with one of them. Recognising yours is the first step to evolving it.

Read each one carefully. You are looking for the identity that feels uncomfortably familiar — the one that describes what you default to under pressure, not what you aspire to. There is no judgment here. Each identity has real strengths. The goal is awareness, not criticism.

The Over-Explainer

“Let me give you the full context first...”

What it looks like: Before getting to the point, you lay down extensive background. You walk the listener through your reasoning, your research, the alternatives you considered, the challenges you encountered. By the time you make your actual ask or recommendation, your audience has mentally checked out — or worse, they’ve answered a different question entirely.

The impact on your credibility: You come across as thorough, but not decisive. Leaders start to associate your communication with length rather than clarity. In meetings, people’s eyes drift. Emails get skimmed rather than read. And your most important points — buried in context — get missed.

The strategic shift: This usually comes from a very understandable place: you want to demonstrate that you know your material, that you have done the work, that your recommendation is grounded. The irony is that leading with the point actually signals more confidence in your thinking, not less. A clear opening statement says: “I know this so well that I can summarise it in one sentence.” That is the impression you want.

The Qualifier

“I might be wrong, but... / Sorry to interrupt, just a thought... / This is probably obvious, but...”

What it looks like: You hedge before you have even started. Phrases like “I might be wrong”, “just a quick thought”, “sorry to take up your time” and “I’m not sure if this is helpful” become verbal habits — reflexive softeners you deploy even when you are confident in what you are saying.

The impact on your credibility: Every qualifier costs you a fraction of credibility. Individually, they seem like politeness. Cumulatively, they signal uncertainty — and leaders promote people who appear certain. The Qualifier’s ideas and recommendations often go unactioned not because they are wrong, but because the communication does not inspire confidence in them.

The strategic shift: Qualifiers usually come from a desire to be collaborative and non-threatening. That is a strength — but it is being expressed in the wrong moment. Strong collaborative communicators make their point clearly first, then invite challenge: “My recommendation is X. I’d like to stress-test this with you.” That is confident and open. “This might not be right, but maybe X?” is neither.

The Silent Expert

“I’ll wait for the right moment... / I didn’t want to interrupt... / I said it in the report...”

What it looks like: You do exceptional work. Your analysis is rigorous, your thinking is sharp, your outputs are consistently strong. But you do not speak up in group settings unless you are certain you have something definitive to add. You wait for the perfect moment that rarely arrives. In meetings, you speak less than your contribution warrants. Across the organisation, you are invisible by default.

The impact on your credibility: Silence is invisible in a room but deafening in a career. The people making promotion decisions cannot advocate for what they have not seen. If you are consistently the most prepared person in the room but say the least, you are handing your credibility gap to someone who may be less prepared but more present. Quiet competence is under-rewarded in almost every organisation.

The strategic shift: The Silent Expert's challenge is not confidence in their work – it is comfort with visibility. The shift starts small: commit to speaking in the first ten minutes of every significant meeting, even if it is a single observation or a sharp question. Presence precedes confidence, not the other way around. The more you speak, the more natural it becomes. And the more natural it becomes, the more senior the rooms you will be invited into.

The Strategic Communicator

The target identity – and entirely learnable.

What it looks like: You lead with the point. You give people exactly what they need to move forward – no more, no less. Your emails are clear, your meeting contributions are purposeful, and your presence in a room signals that you understand what matters and why. People feel clearer after they have interacted with you. Leaders find you easy to work with – which is one of the most valuable professional reputations to have.

The impact on your credibility: You are perceived as leadership material before you have the title. Opportunities find you because you make it easy for people to say yes to you. Your ideas get actioned because they land with clarity and conviction. You are the person people think of when a high-visibility opportunity arises.

The strategic shift: This is not a personality type. It is a set of learned habits and deliberate choices, practised consistently over time. Every strategy in the rest of this guide moves you in this direction. You do not need to transform overnight – you need to make one better communication choice today, and then another tomorrow.

Honest self-assessment: Most people have a primary identity they default to under pressure, and a secondary one that shows up in specific situations – for example, the Strategic Communicator in familiar territory who becomes the Qualifier in front of senior leadership. The identity you default to under pressure is the one to focus on first.

My primary communication identity – the one I default to most often, especially under pressure:

The specific situation where this identity shows up most – and what triggers it:

The identity I want to move towards – and the single habit that would get me closest to it.

The Strategic Communicator's Core Principle

Every strategy in this guide flows from one foundational principle. It is simple to state and transformative to apply consistently:

“Before every communication – email, meeting, presentation, or conversation – ask: what does this person need from me right now to move forward, and how do I make that as easy as possible for them?”

This question shifts your default mode from transmitting to connecting. Most people communicate to get something off their plate – to share what they know, to cover themselves, to demonstrate effort. Strategic communicators communicate to help the other person move forward. That shift in orientation changes everything about how you show up.

THE FULL HEAD ASSUMPTION

The most useful mental model for strategic communication is this: assume that every person you communicate with has a completely full mind.

Because they do. Leaders especially. They are managing multiple priorities, fielding constant requests, making decisions on incomplete information, and operating under time pressure you may not be able to see. When you show up to that context and give them clarity – a clean decision, a clear recommendation, a one-sentence summary of what you need – you are not just being efficient. You are being genuinely helpful.

That experience of being helped is what builds the relationship and the reputation that drives careers forward. People promote and champion the professionals who make their working life easier, not harder.

COMMUNICATION THAT DRAINS THEIR HEADSPACE	COMMUNICATION THAT CLEARS THEIR HEADSPACE
Long emails with the request buried at the bottom	Decision at the top, context only if needed
Bringing a problem without a proposed solution	Problem + recommendation + next step
Meetings that end without clear actions or owner	Every conversation closes with “who does what by when”
Updates that require follow-up to be actionable	Updates that are complete and forward-ready
Explanations of process before sharing the outcome	Outcome first, process available if asked
Vague asks that require a back-and-forth to clarify	Specific, single-touch requests with all context included

THE SHOULDER RELAX TEST

Here is a simple and memorable test you can apply to every piece of significant communication before you send or say it:

When the person receives this – does their shoulder relax, or tense?

A shoulder-relaxing email is one where the reader opens it and immediately knows what is being asked of them, has all the information they need to act, and does not need to send a follow-up for clarification.

A shoulder-tensing email is one where the reader has to hunt for the request, realises they need more information before they can act, or has to forward it to someone else with their own layer of explanation.

Apply this test before you send anything important. It will change your written communication faster than almost any other single habit.

Put Yourself in Their Shoes – Every Time

The most consistent habit of strategic communicators is this: before any significant communication, they pause and put themselves in the shoes of the person receiving it.

This is not a complex exercise. It takes fifteen to thirty seconds. But most people never do it – they are so focused on what they need to communicate that they never consider what the other person needs to receive.

BEFORE EVERY COMMUNICATION, ASK:	WHY IT MATTERS
What is this person’s current priority – and how does my message relate to it?	Communication that lands in the context of someone’s priority gets actioned. Everything else gets queued or ignored.
What do they already know – and what context do I actually need to give them?	Most over-explanation comes from not thinking about what the recipient already knows. Give them what they are missing, not everything you know.
What is the ONE thing I need them to do, think, or feel after this?	If you cannot answer this in one sentence, you are not clear enough on your own message. Clarity for them starts with clarity for you.
What is the most natural objection or question they will have – and have I pre-empted it?	Anticipating the question reduces back-and-forth and signals that you have thought it through. Every unnecessary follow-up is a communication inefficiency that costs you credibility over time.
Am I making it easy to say yes – or am I creating friction?	The answer to this question tells you whether your communication is serving you or the other person. The best communication serves both at once.

This pre-communication habit is not just about politeness or empathy. It is fundamentally strategic. The people who consistently apply this – who make their communication easy to receive, easy to act on, and easy to say yes to – are the ones who build reputations for clarity and leadership thinking.

And that reputation compounds. Leaders start forwarding your emails with less explanation attached. Colleagues describe you as someone who “gets it”. Senior stakeholders begin to trust your judgement –

because your communication consistently gives them the impression that you are thinking about the bigger picture, not just your own corner of it.

The Touchpoint Reduction Strategy

One of the clearest signals of communication maturity – and one of the least-discussed – is the ability to reduce the number of back-and-forths a task or conversation requires.

In most organisations, communication inefficiency is the background noise that nobody notices until someone eliminates it. Every unnecessary clarifying email, every “as discussed, just confirming...” message, every meeting that needs another meeting to actually resolve things – these are small costs that accumulate into a significant drain on both productivity and perception.

When you consistently resolve things in fewer exchanges, something important happens: people start to associate you with efficiency and good judgement. Your manager stops chasing you for updates because you are already proactively providing them. Your colleagues begin to seek you out for decisions because they know you will not add to their workload. Leaders notice – because efficient communicators are rare, and when they find one, they promote them.

“Think about reducing the number of touch points in every task and interaction. This signals that you are thinking about efficiency – not just completion. That distinction is what separates a contributor from a leader.”

PRACTICAL TOUCHPOINT REDUCTION HABITS

Answer the follow-up question before it is asked

Before you send any request or update, identify the most likely clarifying question and answer it in the same message. This single habit can cut your email back-and-forth in half.

Make your request complete and forward-ready

If someone might need to forward your message to get a decision, make sure it contains everything the next person will need. Write it as if it might travel two levels up without your commentary.

Confirm actions – not just discussions

After every significant conversation, send a brief, one-paragraph summary of what was decided and who owns the next step. “Just confirming: we agreed to X, I will do Y by [date], you will do Z by [date].” This eliminates the ambiguity that generates unnecessary follow-up.

Proactively update – before you are chased

“Just keeping you updated on X – on track for Friday” removes the anxiety that generates check-in emails. Being chased is a communication failure. Getting ahead of it is a leadership signal.

Use “decision needed” framing for high-stakes asks

When you need a decision, say so clearly and give a timeline. “Decision needed by Wednesday so we can move” is infinitely better than leaving the urgency implicit and waiting to see if they respond in time.

A recent situation where unnecessary back-and-forth cost time or created a poor impression. What could I have included in the first message to prevent it?

One communication habit I will start this week to reduce touchpoints with my manager or key stakeholders:

Every Level. Every Time. Word Gets Around.

There is a misconception that strategic communication only applies upward – that you need to be intentional about how you communicate with your manager and senior leaders, but that lateral and downward communication is less important.

This is one of the most career-limiting beliefs an ambitious professional can hold.

Here is how your reputation actually forms in most organisations: your colleagues talk. The way you show up with them – the clarity of your communication, the respect you show for their time, the consistency of your follow-through – creates an impression that travels. And the person that impression eventually reaches is your manager, your manager’s manager, and the people in rooms you are not in when your name comes up.

Your boss will feel the energy your colleagues have around you. If your team find you clear, reliable, and straightforward to work with, that energy reaches upward. If your team find you vague, inconsistent, or difficult to get clear answers from, that also reaches upward – often without a word being formally said.

Strategic communicators apply the same level of intentionality to every interaction – not because they are performing, but because they understand that their reputation is built in every direction simultaneously.

CHAPTER 2 – KEY REFLECTIONS

Use these questions to consolidate what you have worked through in this chapter. Be specific – the more concrete your answers, the more actionable your next steps will be.

My current communication reputation – the honest version, not the version I’d prefer:

The single most important communication shift I need to make – based on this chapter:

One person in my organisation I will ask for honest feedback on how my communication lands – and what I will ask them specifically:

This week: the one communication habit I am committing to practise before moving to Chapter 3:

Before you move to Chapter 3: You should now have a clear picture of your current communication identity, the reputation gap you are working to close, and at least one specific habit you are committing to change. Awareness without action is just information – choose one thing from this

chapter and apply it before you open Chapter 3. It does not need to be the biggest shift. It needs to be a real one.

→ **Chapter 3: Confidence as a Strategy, Not a Feeling**

Confidence as a Strategy, Not a Feeling

How to build the kind of presence that gets you taken seriously

“Just be more confident.”

If you have been on the receiving end of this advice, you will know exactly how useless it is. It is the career equivalent of telling someone who cannot sleep to “just relax.” It identifies the symptom and offers no path to the cure.

The reason this advice fails is that it is based on a fundamentally flawed assumption: that confidence is a feeling you either have or do not have. That it arrives when conditions are right, when you feel ready, when you have enough experience, enough credentials, enough certainty about the outcome.

It does not work that way. Confidence is not a feeling you wait for. It is a practice you build — through specific, repeatable communication habits that change how you show up in interactions, and over time, how you feel about showing up.

“Confidence is not a prerequisite for strategic communication. It is the result of it. You do not wait to feel confident before you act — you act in ways that build confidence, and the feeling follows.”

The Confidence Inversion

Most people believe the sequence works like this:

Feel confident → Communicate confidently → Get the results

The research — and the lived experience of people who have made this shift — shows the sequence is inverted:

Communicate strategically → **Get better results** → **Build confidence**

This means you do not wait until you feel confident to speak up in that meeting, ask for that opportunity, or have that difficult conversation. You choose the behaviour first. The feeling is built through the doing — not the other way around.

And here is the practical implication of that: every single strategy in this chapter is something you can apply in your next interaction, regardless of how you feel going into it. Confidence is not a state you achieve. It is a direction you move in — one communication choice at a time.

What strategic confidence looks like from the outside: It does not look like loudness, aggression, or certainty about things you cannot know. Strategic confidence looks like clarity about your position, composure under pressure, willingness to speak when it matters, and the ability to hold your ground without defensiveness. It is the kind of presence that makes people feel like they are in good hands — which is precisely what senior leaders are looking for when they are deciding who to promote.

The 7 Habits of Strategic Confidence

What follows are seven specific, communication habits that build confidence through practice and consistent use. They are ordered from the most immediately applicable to the most nuanced. Start with the first one. Master it in a week. Then add the next.

You do not need all seven at once. You need one, applied consistently, to begin shifting your communication reputation.

1 Lead With Your Point — Every Time

The single most powerful confidence signal in professional communication is stating your conclusion before your reasoning. “My recommendation is X, and here is why” is fundamentally different from walking someone through your analysis and hoping they reach the same conclusion at the end. The first version signals that you trust your thinking enough to stake a position on it immediately. The second version — however thorough — signals that you need the full context to feel safe making the statement. Under pressure, in high-visibility moments, with senior leaders in the room, this difference is enormous.

Try this: Next time you are in a meeting and want to contribute, state your position in your first sentence. “I think we should do X.” Then build the case. Do not warm up to it.

2 Speak in the First Ten Minutes

There is a well-documented psychological dynamic in group settings: the longer you wait to speak, the harder it becomes. Every minute of silence in a meeting makes your first contribution feel higher-stakes in your own mind — which increases the likelihood that you will keep waiting, which increases the stakes further, and so on. Breaking this cycle requires a simple commitment: speak in the first ten minutes of every significant meeting. It does not need to be your most important point. It can be a sharp observation, a clarifying question, a brief summary of what you are hearing. The goal is to establish your presence in the room before the conversational dynamics solidify.

Try this: Before your next meeting, decide what you will say in the first ten minutes. Write one sentence. Commit to saying it. The content matters less than the habit of presence.

3 Remove Your Qualifiers

Qualifiers are the verbal habits that pre-emptively undercut your own message. “I might be wrong but...”, “this is probably obvious...”, “sorry to interrupt...”, “just a thought...”, “I’m not sure if this is helpful...” — each one costs you a small fraction of credibility. Cumulatively, they define you. The irony is that most qualifiers come from a desire to be collaborative and polite. But there is a critical difference between being open to challenge — which is a strength — and pre-apologising for your own ideas before anyone has pushed back. The first builds trust. The second erodes it.

Try this: For one week, eliminate “just”, “sorry” and “I might be wrong” from your professional communication entirely. Replace them with nothing — or with confident framing: “Here is my thinking:” instead of “I’m not sure if this is right, but...”

4 Make the Statement – Then Invite Challenge

Strategic confidence is not about being closed to other perspectives. It is about the order in which you present your thinking. The most credible communicators state their position clearly and then open it up for challenge – rather than hedging the position before they have even made it.

Try this: *Instead of “I’m not sure – it could go either way – but maybe X might work?” try: “My view is X. I’d like to stress-test that with you – what am I missing?” The position is clear. The openness is genuine. The credibility is intact.*

5 Get Comfortable With Silence

Silence after a strong statement is one of the most underused confidence tools in professional communication. Most people, having made their point, immediately fill the pause with more words – elaborating, softening, back-filling. This is almost always a mistake. Silence after a clear statement signals strength. It communicates that you believe what you just said and that you do not need to talk the other person into agreeing with it. Filling every pause signals the opposite – that you are unsure your point landed, or uncertain it was right, and that you need the other person’s verbal validation before you feel safe stopping.

Try this: *After making your key point in your next important conversation, stop. Let it land. Count silently to three if you need to. Resist the urge to add “...if that makes sense?” or “...does that sound right?”*

6 Always Close With a Next Step

Confident communicators do not leave things open-ended. They close loops – not because they are controlling, but because ambiguity is the enemy of momentum, and eliminating ambiguity is a leadership habit. In conversations, meetings, and emails, always close with an explicit next step: who does what, by when. This is not aggressive. It is not pushy. It is the behaviour of someone who is thinking about outcomes, not just exchanges. And it signals, consistently and clearly, that you are the kind of person who makes things happen rather than the kind of person who participates in conversations about making things happen.

Try this: *At the end of your next significant meeting or important email, close with: “So the next step is [X], owned by [person], by [date] – does that capture it?” Make this a non-negotiable habit.*

7 Bring a View – Not Just a Report

There is a fundamental difference between someone who tells you what happened and someone who tells you what it means and what should be done about it. The first is a reporter. The second is a leader. Every time you share an update, a piece of analysis, or a result – add your interpretation and your recommendation. “Here is what happened, here is what I think it means, and here is what I recommend we do next.” This one habit, applied consistently, repositions you from contributor to strategic thinker in the eyes of the people who make decisions about your career.

Try this: *In your next update to a senior stakeholder, add one sentence after the facts: “My read on this is...” or “Based on this, my recommendation is...” Do not wait to be asked for your opinion. Offer it.*

The Language of Strategic Confidence

Confidence is not just about what you say — it is about how you say it. The language choices you make signal your level of certainty, authority, and composure to everyone in the room. Below are the most common language patterns that undermine confident communication — and the direct replacements that build it.

WITHOUT STRATEGIC CONFIDENCE	WITH STRATEGIC CONFIDENCE
"I just wanted to quickly check in..."	"I'm following up on X — here's where we are."
"Sorry to bother you, but..."	"I need your input on something important:"
"This might not be the right idea, but maybe we could consider..."	"My recommendation is X. Here's why:"
"I think I might have seen something similar in the data that could possibly suggest..."	"The data shows X. My read is that we should Y."
"Does that make sense? / Am I being clear?"	(State the point. Pause. Let them respond.)
"I'm not sure if this is relevant, but..."	"Here's something relevant to this:"
"We might want to think about possibly exploring..."	"I recommend we do X. Here's the case for it:"
"Let me know if you have any questions." (email sign-off)	"I'll follow up by [date]. If anything needs to move before then, I'm reachable on [channel]."

A note on authenticity: None of these replacements require you to be someone you are not. They require you to express who you are more clearly. The goal is not to perform confidence — it is to remove the communication habits that are obscuring the confidence you already have in your own thinking. Most people who struggle with this are not actually uncertain about their ideas. They are uncertain about whether it is acceptable to be certain. It is. In fact, it is expected at every level above the one you are currently at.

Confidence in High-Stakes Moments

The habits above build baseline confidence through everyday communication. But there are specific high-stakes moments — an unexpected question from a senior leader, being challenged in front of a group, a moment of public pressure — that require a particular kind of composure.

These moments feel disproportionately high-risk because you can't usually rehearse them. Here is a framework for navigating any high-stakes moment with composure:

THE SITUATION	WHAT TO SAY	WHY IT WORKS
You are asked a question you do not know the answer	"That's a good question — let me think about that and come back to	Saying "I don't know but I'll find out" is one of the most credible things

THE SITUATION	WHAT TO SAY	WHY IT WORKS
to Instinct: Guess, over-explain, or apologise for not knowing	you with a considered answer by [time]. My initial instinct is X, but I want to make sure I'm giving you the right information."	you can say. Guessing and getting it wrong is not.
Your idea is challenged publicly – and the challenge feels unfair Instinct: Become defensive, backtrack immediately, or over-explain your reasoning	"I hear you – let me make sure I understand the concern. Is the issue with X specifically, or the broader direction?" Then respond to the actual objection, not the emotional charge of the moment.	Staying curious under pressure signals far more strength than winning the argument. It also gives you time to think.
You make a mistake in front of senior leaders Instinct: Over-apologise, catastrophise, or try to immediately fix everything at once	"I got that wrong – let me correct it. The right answer is X." Clean acknowledgement. Correction. Move forward. No drama.	The way you handle being wrong is watched more closely than the mistake itself. Leaders who acknowledge errors cleanly and move on are trusted. Those who over-apologise or become defensive are not.
You are put on the spot for an opinion in a meeting Instinct: Give a non-answer, say "it depends", or defer to the room	"Based on what I know right now, my view is X – though I'd want to know more about Y before being fully confident." A provisional position is better than no position.	"It depends" and "I'd need to look into it" are credible once. Used habitually, they signal that you do not form views – which is the opposite of a leadership reputation.

The 30-Day Confidence Habit Challenge

Insight without implementation is just information. This section is where the chapter becomes your practice.

Choose one habit from the seven above – the one that, if you applied it consistently, would have the biggest impact on how you are currently perceived. Not the easiest one. The most impactful one. Commit to applying it every day for 30 days. Use the tracker below for the first week, then continue the practice without the tracker. Most people notice a shift in how others respond to them within 10 days. The habit tends to feel natural by day 30.

The habit I am choosing for my 30-day challenge:

The specific situation where I will apply it first – and when:

What I will use as my measure of success – what will I notice when this habit is working?

7-DAY IMPLEMENTATION TRACKER

Use this to record where you applied your chosen habit each day and what you observed. Specificity matters – the more concrete your notes, the faster your self-awareness compounds.

DAY	WHERE I APPLIED IT	WHAT HAPPENED	WHAT I NOTICED
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			

After 7 days: What has changed in how people respond to me? What have I noticed about my own communication?

The Compound Effect of Confident Communication

One of the most important things to understand about the habits in this chapter is that their value compounds. A single clear statement in a single meeting might not change your career. Seven clear statements across seven meetings, followed by consistent follow-through, a reputation for bringing recommendations rather than just problems, and the habit of speaking early in every significant conversation – that combination, sustained over 90 days, changes how you are perceived at a fundamental level.

And changed perception leads to changed opportunity. When senior leaders begin to experience you as someone who communicates with clarity and composure, they start to think of you differently. They include you in conversations you were not in before. They give you the stretch assignment. They mention your name in rooms you have not entered yet.

That is the real return on strategic confidence. Not a single impressive moment – a sustained, cumulative impression of someone who is ready for the next level.

“You do not need to transform overnight. You need to make one better communication choice today, and then another tomorrow. The compounding does the rest.”

Completing Part One: You have now worked through the three foundational chapters – your core motivators, your communication identity, and the strategy of building confidence through consistent habits. This is the infrastructure everything in Parts Two through Five rests on. If you have done the work here honestly – completed the assessments, answered the worksheets specifically, and committed to

at least one daily habit – you are already ahead of the majority of ambitious professionals in your organisation.

Moving into Part Two: Visibility

Part One was about understanding yourself – your drivers, your current identity, and the habits that build strategic confidence. Part Two is about how you show up in the organisation. How promotions actually get decided. How to own the rooms you are in. How to make sure the right people know what you are capable of – and start thinking of your name.

→ **Part Two: Visibility – Chapter 4: How Promotions Actually Happen**

PART TWO

VISIBILITY

Being seen for the right reasons.

Part One was about understanding yourself — your core motivators, your communication identity, and the habits that build strategic confidence. That work was internal. This is where it pays dividends externally. Visibility is not about self-promotion. It is about strategic presence — consistently showing up in ways that signal leadership capability to the people who make decisions about your career. The chapters in this section give you the specific strategies to do that.

Chapters 4 - 7

How Promotions Actually Happen

What nobody tells you about how career decisions really get made

There is a version of how promotions work that most ambitious professionals believe — and a version of how they actually work. The gap between the two is responsible for more stalled careers than almost any other single factor.

The version most people believe goes like this: work hard, deliver excellent results consistently, and eventually the right people will notice. Your performance will speak for itself. Your contributions will compound. And at the right moment, your manager will recognise that you are ready and put your name forward.

This version is not entirely wrong. Results matter. Competence matters. Consistent delivery matters. But they are the floor, not the ceiling. They are what gets you considered — not what gets you chosen.

“Results get you into the conversation. Perception gets you the outcome. Most people invest almost entirely in the former and wonder why the latter keeps eluding them.”

How the Decision Actually Gets Made

In most organisations, promotion decisions are made in conversations that you are not in. A leader has a role to fill or a level to fill it at. They think about who they trust. They think about who they have seen handle complexity, ambiguity, and pressure well. They think about whose name comes up when someone needs to be relied on. And then they have a conversation with their peers and a shortlist forms — often before a formal process has even begun.

Here is the critical insight: if your name is not already in that leader’s mind before the conversation starts, you are at a significant disadvantage. And your name gets into their mind through your communication — the clarity you bring to meetings, the quality of your recommendations, the reliability of your follow-through, the way you make their job easier every time you interact with them.

The promotion conversation you are not in: “We need someone for this. Who do I trust to handle it? Who have I seen think clearly under pressure? Whose name comes to mind when I think about someone who is ready for the next level?” — Your job is to be the answer to those questions before they are even asked. That happens through consistent, strategic communication over weeks and months — not through a single impressive moment.

The Three Criteria That Drive Every Promotion Decision

Promotion decisions in most organisations are driven by three distinct criteria. Understanding them – and how they interact – is the foundation of a strategic approach to advancement.

RESULTS	PERCEPTION	READINESS
What you deliver. The quality and consistency of your outputs, your reliability, your technical competence. This is the baseline – without it, nothing else matters. But across most of the organisations where promotion conversations happen, results alone are the minimum entry requirement, not the differentiator.	How you are seen. Your communication reputation, your executive presence, the impression you create in high-stakes moments. This is where most ambitious professionals are losing ground without realising it – because perception is built in every interaction, whether you are managing it intentionally or not.	Whether leaders can see you in the next role before you are in it. Not “can they do the job?” but “do they already look, think, and communicate like someone at that level?” This is the question that separates the person who gets chosen from the person who is told “not yet – keep doing what you are doing.”

Most ambitious professionals invest the vast majority of their energy in Results – the column that, above a certain threshold, stops being the deciding factor. Perception and Readiness are where promotion decisions are actually made, and they are built almost entirely through how you communicate.

The investment imbalance most ambitious professionals have:

Results	Perception	Readiness
~80% of effort	~15% of effort	~5% of effort
<i>Gets you considered</i>	<i>Gets you chosen</i>	<i>Gets you prioritised</i>

The Promotion Myths That Keep People Stuck

The beliefs below are extraordinarily common – and each one is costing people time, opportunity, and career momentum. Work through them honestly and ask yourself which ones you have been operating on.

WHAT MOST PEOPLE BELIEVE	WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS
Good work speaks for itself.	Good work is the entry requirement. It rarely speaks loudly enough to be heard by the people making the decision – unless you help it.
If I were ready for promotion, someone would have told me.	Most managers do not proactively manage your career – they manage their team. You must be the

WHAT MOST PEOPLE BELIEVE	WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS
	one who initiates and owns the promotion conversation.
I just need to wait for the right opportunity.	Opportunities are given to people who are already visible and trusted. Waiting is not a strategy – it is the absence of one.
Being political is distasteful – I just want to be judged on my results.	Strategic visibility is not politics. It is making sure the people making decisions about your career have accurate information about your capability.
My manager knows what I am doing – they will advocate for me.	Your manager may know. But advocacy is driven by how easily they can make the case for you – and that depends entirely on how clearly you have communicated your readiness.
“I was told “not yet” – so I need to keep waiting.	“Not yet” is feedback, not a timeline. It means something specific is missing from the perception of your readiness. This chapter will help you identify what that is and close the gap.

The myth I have been most operating on – and what it has cost me:

The Visibility Problem – Why Hard Work Is Invisible

Here is a truth about organisations that is almost never made explicit: the vast majority of excellent work that gets done is invisible to the people making promotion decisions.

You deliver exceptional analysis. Your immediate team sees it. Your manager probably knows. But the VP three levels up – the person whose opinion will carry significant weight when your name comes up – has never seen it, been told about it, or had any reason to think about it in relation to you.

This is not their failure. It is not your manager’s failure. It is a visibility gap – and it is yours to close.

“If the right people do not know what you are capable of, that is not their fault. It is a communication gap. And it is yours to close – not because you owe anyone visibility into your work, but because your career depends on it.”

Closing the visibility gap does not mean bragging. It does not mean self-promotion in the performative, political sense that makes most ambitious professionals uncomfortable. It means being intentional about how, when, and to whom you communicate your contribution – so that the people making decisions about your career have accurate information.

There is a meaningful difference between those two things. Bragging is about ego. Strategic visibility is about equity – making sure the assessment of your readiness is based on what you are actually capable of, not just what happens to be visible from where your manager is sitting.

Self-advocacy is not arrogance – it is accuracy: When you make your contribution visible strategically, you are not seeking unfair advantage. You are correcting an information imbalance that would otherwise allow a less capable but more visible colleague to be assessed more favourably. Strategic visibility is about being seen as you actually are – not more, and not less.

What “Readiness” Actually Looks Like

Readiness — the third promotion criterion — is not a checklist of skills and experiences. It is a felt sense that a leader has about whether they can see you operating successfully at the next level.

And that felt sense is built almost entirely through communication. When a senior leader thinks “she’s ready” or “he’s not there yet”, they are almost never thinking about your technical skills. They are thinking about how you showed up in that leadership meeting. The clarity of your last recommendation. Whether you handled the difficult stakeholder conversation with composure. Whether you bring problems with solutions attached, or just problems.

THE READINESS SIGNALS LEADERS ARE LOOKING FOR

You think in outcomes, not tasks

What this looks like: You do not just complete what you are given — you understand why it matters and what success looks like. You connect your work to the bigger picture without being prompted.

How to demonstrate it: In your updates and recommendations, consistently link what you are doing to the business outcome it serves. “I’m completing X, which gives us Y, which addresses Z.”

You manage upward proactively

What this looks like: You do not wait to be chased for updates. You do not surface problems without solutions. You keep the right people informed without creating noise or dependency.

How to demonstrate it: Send brief, proactive updates before they are requested. “Keeping you in the loop on X — on track for Friday. No action needed from you, just wanted you to have visibility.” This sentence alone changes how you are perceived over time.

You handle complexity with composure

What this looks like: When things get difficult — conflicting priorities, ambiguous direction, high-stakes decisions under pressure — you stay calm, think clearly, and communicate with steadiness rather than urgency or anxiety.

How to demonstrate it: When facing complexity, lead your communication with your assessment and recommendation before your concerns. “Here’s the situation, here’s my read, here’s what I recommend. Happy to walk through the risks if that’s useful.”

You communicate peer-to-peer with senior leaders

What this looks like: You do not become deferential, over-cautious, or artificially formal in the presence of seniority. You engage with senior leaders as peers — with appropriate respect, but without diminishing your own intelligence and perspective.

How to demonstrate it: Before interactions with senior leaders, remind yourself: your job is to help them solve a problem or make a decision. Focus on that, and the peer-to-peer dynamic tends to follow naturally.

You bring the solution, not just the problem

What this looks like: Every time you raise an issue, challenge, or risk, you come with at least one proposed path forward. You are not offloading problems — you are presenting them as decisions to be made.

How to demonstrate it: Before raising any issue with a senior stakeholder, write one sentence: “My recommendation is...” Even if your recommendation is ultimately overridden, having one signals that you have thought it through.

You invest in relationships, not just outputs

What this looks like: You understand that career advancement requires trust – and trust is built through relationship, not just performance. You are visible to the right people in the right way, not just when you have something to deliver.

How to demonstrate it: Find one genuine reason to engage with a key stakeholder every two to three weeks – a relevant insight, a helpful piece of information, a brief check-in. Not transactional. Not performative. Real.

The readiness signal I am currently missing – and what it would take to demonstrate it.

Your Visibility Action Plan — Starting This Week

Visibility is not a campaign you run. It is a set of consistent habits you build into the way you already work. The five actions below are not additional workload — they are a reorientation of communication you are already doing.

1 Identify the Three People Who Most Need to Know Your Work

Not your manager — they know. Think about the leaders one to two levels above you who have influence over your next role, and who currently have limited direct visibility of your capability. These are your Tier 1 visibility targets. Everything else in this section works in service of building their perception of your readiness.

In practice: Write three names. Be specific — not “senior leadership” but actual people. Then ask yourself: “Do they know what I am working on and what I am capable of? If not, why not, and what would change that?”

2 Volunteer for One Cross-Functional Project

Cross-functional projects are one of the highest-leverage visibility opportunities available to any ambitious professional. They put you in front of people who do not normally see your work — which means a single well-executed project can change how an entire layer of leadership perceives you.

In practice: One project, well executed, where the right people can see you thinking and communicating clearly — is worth more career advancement than six months of excellent but invisible work.

3 Share Insights, Not Just Updates

When you report progress, the default is to share what happened. The visibility upgrade is to share what you think it means and what should happen next. “Here is where we are AND here is what I recommend.” This one habit repositions you from someone who executes to someone who thinks strategically — and it costs you about one additional sentence per update.

In practice: In your next update to a senior stakeholder, add: “My read on this is [X]. Based on that, I recommend [Y].” Do not wait to be asked.

4 Make Your Manager’s Job Easier — Intentionally

Your manager advocates for you partly because they genuinely believe in your capability, and partly because your success makes them look good. When you make your manager’s job easier — by bringing clarity, solutions, and proactive communication — you create a natural alignment between their interests and your advancement. This is not manipulation. It is smart.

In practice: Think about one thing your manager worries about, chases people for, or regularly has to spend time clarifying. Then eliminate that friction for them, consistently, without being asked. Your visibility with them changes fast.

5 Have the Promotion Conversation — Before You Think You Are Ready

Most ambitious professionals wait too long to have an explicit conversation about their advancement. They wait until they feel ready, until the timing feels right, until they have more to show. The problem is that by the time you feel ready, the conversation is often happening without you.

In practice: You do not need to ask for a promotion in this conversation. You need to open a dialogue: “I want to be in a position to be considered for [X]. What does that path look like from where you are sitting – and what would I need to demonstrate?” This one conversation, done well, changes everything.

The most important thing about this conversation: Ask for specific, actionable feedback – not general encouragement. “What would you need to see more of from me specifically to advocate for me at the next level?” This question cuts through vague developmental feedback and gives you something concrete to work with. Most managers are not asked this directly. The ones who are asked tend to give much better answers – and remember the person who asked.

CHAPTER 4 – YOUR PROMOTION STRATEGY WORKSHEETS

The three people whose perception of my capability matters most to my next promotion (names, not titles):

For each person above – what do they currently know about my work, and what is missing?

The readiness signal I most need to start demonstrating – and the specific context I will demonstrate it in:

One cross-functional project or visibility opportunity I will pursue in the next 30 days:

My opening line for the promotion conversation with my manager – what I will actually say:

Before you move to Chapter 5: You should now understand the three criteria that drive promotion decisions, which ones you have been over-investing in, and the specific visibility gaps you are working to close. You have a short list of the people who matter most to your advancement and at least one concrete action to start this week. Chapter 5 gives you the strategies to put this into practice in the room where most of your visibility opportunities occur – the meeting.

→ **Chapter 5: Meeting Mastery – Own the Room Without Dominating It**

Meeting Mastery

Own the room without dominating it

Meetings are the most concentrated visibility opportunity available to any ambitious professional – and most people are almost entirely underutilising them.

Think about the meetings you attend in any given week. Each one is a room containing decision-makers, influencers, and peers – people who are actively, if unconsciously, building an impression of your thinking, your composure, and your leadership potential. Every meeting you attend without a deliberate communication strategy is a missed opportunity. Every meeting you attend with one is a compounding investment in your visibility.

This chapter is not about becoming the loudest person in the room. It is about becoming the clearest – the person whose contributions are always worth waiting for, whose presence shifts the quality of a conversation, and whose name senior leaders associate with sharp, strategic thinking.

“Every meeting is an opportunity to demonstrate how you think, how you communicate under pressure, and whether you are someone people want in the room when important decisions get made. Most people show up. Strategic communicators show up with intention.”

The Meeting Visibility Gap

Before we look at strategy, it is worth understanding the specific ways that meetings are currently costing ambitious professionals visibility and credibility – because most of these happen without the person being aware of them.

THE VISIBILITY GAP	WHAT IT COSTS YOU
Speaking too late – or not at all	By the time you feel ready to contribute, the conversation has moved on. You speak infrequently enough that your presence in the room feels passive.
Over-qualifying before making the point	You hedge your contributions so heavily that by the time the point arrives, it has already lost its impact – and sometimes another person makes the same point more directly thirty seconds later.
Saving your best contribution for the end	You wait until you have the perfect thing to say. The meeting ends. The moment passes. You leave having said less than you intended.
Letting your ideas get attributed to others	You make a contribution that does not immediately land, someone else builds on it – and they get the credit.

THE VISIBILITY GAP	WHAT IT COSTS YOU
Going off-topic under the pressure to speak	Feeling the need to contribute, you say something that is not quite relevant or sharp enough, which paradoxically undermines your credibility more than silence would have.
Being reactive rather than shaping the agenda	You respond to others' points rather than introducing your own framing, which means you are perpetually playing catch-up rather than setting direction.

The meeting visibility gap I recognise most in myself – and the specific meeting type where it shows up:

The Before–During–After Framework

Strategic meeting communication does not start when you enter the room. It starts before — with preparation that takes ten minutes and multiplies your impact tenfold. And it does not end when the meeting finishes — the follow-through after a meeting is where much of the visibility value is created.

BEFORE	DURING	AFTER
Read the agenda — identify where your contribution fits	Speak in the first 10 minutes — every time	Send a brief summary of what was decided and who owns what
Write one or two points you want to make	Lead with your point, then the reasoning	Follow up on any commitment you made — ahead of deadline
Know your position before you enter	Build on others' ideas and attribute clearly	Build on your contribution in writing to the right people
Identify who in the room matters most to your visibility	Reclaim your contributions if they go unattributed	Note what landed well and what you'd do differently
Decide when you will speak — commit to the first 10 minutes	Close with next steps — don't leave outcomes open	Flag anything unresolved that could reflect well on you to lead

The Speak–Early Strategy

Of all the meeting strategies in this chapter, speaking early is the single most impactful — and the one most people resist most strongly.

The psychological dynamic is well documented: the longer you wait to speak in a meeting, the higher the stakes feel for your first contribution. Every minute of silence raises the internal bar — “I need to say something worth the wait now.” Which means you wait longer. Which means the bar rises further. Which means by minute fifteen, you are sitting on a contribution that would have landed perfectly in minute two but now feels like it needs to be exceptional to justify the delay.

The strategy is simple and entirely learnable: commit to speaking in the first ten minutes of every significant meeting, regardless of whether you feel ready. The content of your first contribution matters far less than the fact of it.

Why speaking early works beyond just “being heard”: Research on group dynamics consistently shows that people who speak early in meetings are perceived as more confident, more senior, and more credible — regardless of their actual seniority. Speaking early also shapes the conversational space: when you contribute early, you influence the framing of the discussion, which means subsequent contributions are often responding to your thinking rather than the other way around.

FIVE WAYS TO SPEAK EARLY WHEN YOU ARE NOT SURE WHAT TO SAY

Ask a sharp clarifying question

You do not need a point ready — you need a question. “Before we get into the detail — can we get clear on what decision we are trying to reach in this meeting?” This question alone establishes you as a strategic thinker and often improves the meeting for everyone.

Offer a brief framing observation

“From what I can see, there are really two distinct issues here — X and Y. Are we trying to address both today, or focus on one?” This does not require you to have the answer. It requires you to be thinking about structure, which is a leadership signal.

Build on the opening comment

“Building on what [Name] just said — I think the key question this raises is...” You acknowledge the contribution, position yourself as engaged, and add your angle. The contribution is attributed to you, not the person you built on.

State a position and test it

“My initial read on this is X — though I’d like to hear the room before I commit to that.” You have contributed. You have shown you have a view. You have invited dialogue without overcommitting. Strong all round.

Flag something you want to come back to

“I have a perspective on the X piece — I’d like to come back to that when we get there.” You have spoken. You have signalled that you have something substantive to offer. The expectation is now set for your contribution later.

My next significant meeting. Which of the five early-entry strategies will I use — and what will I say?

Making Your Ideas Land – and Stay Yours

One of the most frustrating experiences for ambitious professionals is watching someone else receive credit for an idea they contributed first. This happens more often than it should – and it almost always comes down to one of two things: the idea was not stated clearly enough as a position, or it was buried in so much context that it was lost before it landed.

The fix for both is the same: lead with the point, state it as a position, and make it clearly attributable to you in the moment. Not after the meeting. Not in the follow-up email. In the moment, before it drifts.

THE POINT-FIRST STRUCTURE FOR MEETING CONTRIBUTIONS

Structure every significant meeting contribution like this:

STEP	WHAT TO SAY
Position	“My view on this is X.”
Evidence	“Here’s what’s driving that thinking: [one or two supporting points].”
Implication	“Which means I think we should [next step / recommendation].”
Invitation	“I’m interested in whether others see it differently.”

WHEN YOUR IDEA GOES UNATTRIBUTED

It happens – even with the clearest initial contribution. Someone hears your point, internalises it, and later voices a version of it as their own – not necessarily maliciously, but in a way that means the room attributes the idea to them. Here is how to reclaim it gracefully in the moment and after:

TIMING	APPROACH	WHAT TO SAY
In the moment – immediately after it happens	Respond directly and without hesitation – do not wait or let the moment pass.	“That is exactly the direction I was suggesting – glad it resonates. Let me build on it: [add your next layer of thinking].” You have reclaimed ownership and moved the conversation forward simultaneously.
In the meeting – slightly later	Find a natural moment to reference your earlier contribution directly.	“Coming back to the point I raised earlier about X – I think it connects to what [Name] said and suggests we should [recommendation]. I’d like to take that forward if there’s appetite.”
After the meeting – in writing	Follow up with the relevant people and establish ownership in writing.	“Following up from today’s meeting – I wanted to share some further thinking on the [X] point I raised, since it seemed to gain some traction. Here is how I would recommend we take it forward: [detail].” You

TIMING	APPROACH	WHAT TO SAY
		have documented your contribution and proposed ownership of the next step.

The Meeting Language Upgrades

The specific language you use in meetings creates an immediate impression of your thinking level and leadership readiness. Below are the most impactful language swaps – the ones that shift how you are perceived without requiring you to say anything you do not already mean.

INSTEAD OF THIS	SAY THIS
“Sorry, just to jump in quickly...”	“I want to add something here:”
“That’s a really good point – building on that...”	“Building on that – my view is [X]:” (credit without excessive flattery)
“I’m not sure if this is relevant, but...”	“Here’s something that’s directly relevant:”
“We could maybe think about possibly doing X?”	“My recommendation is X. Here’s the case for it:”
“Does that make sense to everyone?”	“Does anyone see it differently?” (opens dialogue without seeking validation)
“I’ll look into that and come back to you at some point.”	“I’ll come back to you on that by [specific day]. What do you need from me by then?”
“I think we’re probably all saying the same thing here...”	“Let me see if I can bring this together: what I’m hearing is [X]. Is that an accurate summary?”
“Sorry – can I just check – what exactly are we deciding today?”	“Before we go further – let’s confirm the decision we’re making today. Is it [X] or [Y]?”

Strategy by Meeting Type

Not all meetings are the same – and the communication strategy that works in a team standup is different from the one that works in a leadership review. Here is how to calibrate your approach by meeting type.

MEETING TYPE	YOUR PRIORITY	STRATEGY
Leadership / Executive Reviews	Every word counts. Over-contribution is as costly as under-contribution. Make your point count.	Arrive with one or two clear, well-evidenced positions. Speak deliberately and at a measured pace. If you are presenting, open with the conclusion. If you are contributing, lead with your recommendation. Never

MEETING TYPE	YOUR PRIORITY	STRATEGY
		say “I’m not sure” to a senior leader – say “My current view is X, pending further information.”
Cross-Functional / Stakeholder Meetings	Being heard and understood across the context gap. People do not know your work the way your immediate team does.	State your point without assuming shared context. “From a [your function] perspective, the key consideration is X – and the reason that matters here is Y.” Speak to the decision the room is trying to reach, not the detail of your own workstream.
Team Meetings / Direct Team	Demonstrating leadership thinking even when there is no formal audience.	Do not coast in familiar company. Your team communicates your reputation upward and laterally. Use team meetings to practise your communication habits – point-first contributions, proactive agenda-shaping, closing with explicit next steps.
Problem-Solving / Brainstorm Sessions	Contributing original thinking and building on others’ ideas in ways that are clearly additive.	These meetings reward energy, curiosity, and the ability to synthesise quickly. Build on others’ contributions explicitly and offer to synthesise at natural breaks: “Let me try to bring these threads together:”
1:1 Meetings with Your Manager	Being known as strategic, proactive, and ready for the next level.	Arrive with an agenda – your one-to-one is not your manager’s meeting to fill. Share your wins in outcome terms, not effort terms. Always include your read on a situation, not just a status update. End with: “What should I be focused on over the next fortnight that would be most valuable to you?”

The meeting type where I most need to upgrade my approach – and the one specific change I will make:

THE ONE-WEEK MEETING MASTERY CHALLENGE

The fastest way to embed these strategies is to apply them with intention for a single defined week — not trying to do everything at once, but committing to one or two habits across every meeting you attend.

The two meeting habits I am committing to for the next five working days:

MEETING	WHAT I COMMITTED TO	WHAT I ACTUALLY DID	WHAT I NOTICED
Meeting 1			
Meeting 2			
Meeting 3			
Meeting 4			
Meeting 5			

After five meetings: What shifted? What feedback did I receive, and what did I notice about how people responded to me?

Before you move to Chapter 6: Meetings are your most frequent visibility opportunity — which means the compound effect of small improvements here is enormous. You do not need to transform your meeting presence overnight. You need to speak earlier, make your points cleaner, and follow up more consistently than you did last week. Chapter 6 takes visibility beyond the meeting room — into the strategic relationships that determine whose name gets mentioned in the rooms you are not yet in.

→ **Chapter 6: The Strategic Relationship Map**

The Strategic Relationship Map

Who needs to know you – and how to make sure they do

Visibility is not just about how you show up in the room. It is about which rooms you are known in – and whether the people making decisions about your career have enough direct experience of your thinking to advocate for you confidently.

Most ambitious professionals manage their relationships reactively. They build good working relationships with the people they interact with regularly, and they are professional and competent with everyone else. But they rarely step back and ask: which relationships are genuinely strategic for my career, and am I investing in them with the same intentionality I bring to my work?

This chapter changes that. You are going to map your strategic relationships systematically – identify who matters most to your advancement, understand how each of those people currently perceives you, and build a specific communication plan for each tier. Not because relationships should be transactional, but because leaving your most important professional relationships to chance is a career strategy with a very low ceiling.

“Your next promotion will not be decided by your performance review. It will be decided in a conversation between people who either know your work well enough to advocate for you – or do not. Your job is to make sure the right people are in the first category.”

Strategic Relationships vs. Networking

Before we go further, it is worth distinguishing between what this chapter is about and what it is not about.

Networking – in the conventional sense of attending events, collecting contacts, and maintaining a broad professional presence – has its place. But it is not what moves careers forward in organisations. What moves careers forward in organisations is a small number of deep, trust-based relationships with the right people, sustained through consistent, high-quality communication over time.

You do not need a hundred people to know your name. You need ten people to know your work well enough to say something credible about it in a room you are not in. The goal of this chapter is to identify who those ten people should be – and to build the kind of communication relationship with each of them that makes genuine advocacy possible.

The difference that matters: Weak-tie networking creates surface-level awareness – people know of you. Strategic relationship investment creates deep-tie advocacy – people know you well enough to be specific about your capability, your potential, and why you should be considered for the next opportunity. Only the second type changes careers.

The Three-Tier Relationship Framework

Not all professional relationships carry equal weight for your advancement. Understanding the three tiers — and the different communication investment each requires — is the foundation of a strategic relationship plan.

TIER 1 — DECISION MAKERS

Who they are: Your direct manager. Their manager. Key senior stakeholders in your function who are involved in decisions about your career or have significant influence over those who are.

Why they matter: This tier controls the formal levers of your advancement. Without a strong relationship here — specifically without these people having direct, positive experience of your strategic communication — your promotion case is built on second-hand information at best.

How to communicate with them: Consistent and intentional. Every significant interaction with Tier 1 people is a visibility opportunity. Bring your best communication to every touchpoint — written and verbal. Never let a Tier 1 relationship go passive for more than three weeks. Find genuine, non-transactional reasons to engage.

TIER 2 — INFLUENCERS

Who they are: Senior peers. Cross-functional leaders. People who work closely with your Tier 1 relationships and whose informal endorsement — or silence — shapes how your capability is discussed. Internal champions who have sponsored others before.

Why they matter: Tier 2 people do not make the formal decision, but they shape the informal narrative. When your name comes up in a senior conversation, the people in that room will have already formed an opinion based partly on what their Tier 2 network has said about you. This layer is often the most underinvested — and it is where careers get quietly stuck.

How to communicate with them: Valuable and reciprocal. The strongest Tier 2 relationships are built on genuine mutual regard — you bring them value, they develop a view of your capability, and that view travels. Find ways to be useful to Tier 2 people that are not transactional: share a relevant insight, acknowledge their contribution publicly, connect them with someone who can help them.

TIER 3 — YOUR NETWORK

Who they are: Direct reports, peers, cross-functional colleagues, and everyone else you interact with regularly. Your team. The people who experience your communication style most frequently and at closest range.

Why they matter: As established in Chapter 2 — your boss feels the energy your colleagues have around you. Tier 3 people are the most frequent architects of your reputation. They are also the talent pipeline for future Tier 1 and Tier 2 relationships as careers develop.

How to communicate with them: Consistent and respectful at every level. You cannot afford to communicate with different levels of care across tiers. The habits you build in Tier 3 are the ones that show up — for better or worse — when you are in a Tier 1 conversation. Treat every interaction as a reputation data point.

Building Your Strategic Relationship Map

Now it is time to make this concrete. Work through the map below tier by tier. For each person, be honest about the current quality of the relationship and what they are likely to think of you right now. Then identify the specific next communication move that will either strengthen the relationship or shift the perception.

Resist the urge to fill the map with aspirational relationships. These should be real people in your actual current organisation whose view of you genuinely matters to your next career step.

TIER 1 – DECISION MAKERS			
NAME / ROLE	CURRENT RELATIONSHIP QUALITY	WHAT THEY THINK OF ME NOW	MY NEXT COMMUNICATION MOVE

TIER 2 – INFLUENCERS			
NAME / ROLE	CURRENT RELATIONSHIP QUALITY	WHAT THEY THINK OF ME NOW	MY NEXT COMMUNICATION MOVE

TIER 3 – YOUR NETWORK			
NAME / ROLE	CURRENT RELATIONSHIP QUALITY	WHAT THEY THINK OF ME NOW	MY NEXT COMMUNICATION MOVE

The relationship I have been most neglecting – and what I will do about it in the next two weeks:

The Tier 2 person most likely to have influence over my next promotion – and what they currently think of me:

Strategic Relationship Communication — Situation by Situation

Knowing who your strategic relationships are is the first step. The second is having specific, practical communication strategies for building and maintaining each tier. Below are the highest-leverage situations — and exactly what to do in each.

SITUATION	WHAT TO DO	WHAT TO SAY / SEND
You want to build visibility with a senior leader you rarely interact with	Find a genuine, low-friction reason to initiate contact — not a favour request. Share something relevant and valuable without asking for anything in return.	"I came across this [article / insight / piece of work] that I thought you'd find relevant given [specific context]. Sharing in case it's useful — no action needed."
You have completed a high-impact piece of work but it hasn't reached the right people	Create a concise, forward-ready summary and share it proactively with Tier 1 and Tier 2 people who would benefit from knowing about it.	"Wanted to make sure you had visibility of this — [one sentence summary of the work and its outcome]. Happy to walk through the detail if useful, otherwise just wanted it on your radar."
A Tier 2 influencer has done something noteworthy	Acknowledge it specifically and publicly where appropriate. Generic compliments land poorly. Specific, genuine recognition builds relationship fast.	"I wanted to flag — what [Name] did on [X] was genuinely impressive. The way they [specific detail] made a real difference to [outcome]." (to their manager or in a relevant group setting)
You want to strengthen a Tier 1 relationship that has gone passive	Reactivate with value, not a check-in. Arrive with something useful rather than a conversation about nothing in particular.	"I have been thinking about [X challenge they mentioned] — I have a perspective on it that might be useful. Would fifteen minutes work this week or next?"
You are about to enter a high-stakes situation with a Tier 1 person who does not know your work well	Create context before the meeting. A brief, confident note that frames your thinking in advance shapes how they receive your contribution.	"Ahead of [meeting] — wanted to share my current thinking on [X]. My view is [position]. Looking forward to the discussion."
A colleague is being consistently credited for work you contributed to	Address it proactively in writing — to the right people, without drama.	"Just wanted to make sure the contribution from my side on [X] is visible — I led [specific element] which [outcome]. Happy to share more detail if useful."

The Visibility Cadence — How Often and How

One of the most common mistakes ambitious professionals make with strategic relationships is inconsistency. They invest heavily when something important is happening — a promotion conversation

is imminent, a high-profile project is underway – and then let the relationship go passive in between. This creates a pattern where senior leaders only hear from you when you need something, which undermines the very trust you are trying to build.

Strategic relationship investment needs to be a consistent rhythm, not a series of peaks. Here is a simple cadence that keeps your key relationships active without creating noise or appearing transactional:

TIER	MINIMUM CADENCE	WHAT COUNTS AS CONTACT
Tier 1 Decision Makers	Every 2–3 weeks	A proactive update on relevant work. A brief check-in with genuine intent. A meeting contribution that demonstrates your thinking. An email that shows strategic awareness. Any touchpoint that leaves a positive impression.
Tier 2 Influencers	Every 3–4 weeks	Sharing a relevant insight. Acknowledging their contribution specifically. A brief, value-adding interaction at a meeting or event. A direct message with something genuinely useful. An introduction to someone who can help them.
Tier 3 Your Network	Ongoing – every interaction	Every touchpoint counts: the clarity of your emails, the consistency of your follow-through, the way you show up in team settings. This tier is built through habitual communication quality, not specific initiatives.

WHAT “VALUE-ADDING” CONTACT ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

The risk with a cadence framework is that it becomes mechanical – scheduled check-ins that feel hollow and transactional. Value-adding contact is the opposite of this. It is specific, relevant, and gives the other person something they did not have before. Here are concrete examples:

A relevant industry insight

“I came across this analysis of [X trend] – given what you’re working on with [Y], I thought it might be useful. [Brief summary]. Happy to discuss if helpful.”

A connection that serves them

“I’ve been thinking – [Person A] is doing really interesting work on [X], and given your focus on [Y], I think a conversation between you two could be genuinely valuable. Would you like me to make an introduction?”

A specific acknowledgement

“I wanted to say – the way you handled [specific situation] in the [meeting/project] was impressive. The [specific thing they did] made a real difference to [specific outcome].”

A forward-ready update

“Keeping you in the loop on [X] – we’ve reached [milestone]. The next step is [Y] which I’m leading. No action needed from you – just wanted you to have visibility.”

An insight from your work that connects to theirs

“We’ve been seeing something interesting in [your area] that I think has direct implications for [their area]. Worth a fifteen-minute conversation – would that be useful?”

My Tier 1 communication plan for the next 30 days – one specific action per person:

My Tier 2 communication plan – one genuine, value-adding touchpoint per person in the next 30 days:

Navigating Difficult Relationship Dynamics

Not every strategic relationship is a straightforward investment opportunity. Some of the relationships that matter most to your career are also the most complex to navigate – a manager who underestimates you, a senior peer who is competitive rather than collaborative, a stakeholder who has formed an incorrect perception of your capability.

These situations require a specific kind of communication strategy – one that is neither confrontational nor passive. Here is how to navigate the most common difficult dynamics:

Your manager underestimates your capability

Why this happens: This is almost always a visibility gap, not a judgment of your actual ability. They do not have enough direct experience of your strategic thinking to form an accurate picture.

Strategy: Increase the strategic content of every interaction. Stop giving updates and start giving recommendations. “Here is where we are, here is my read on it, here is what I recommend next.” Do this consistently for four to six weeks and the perception shifts.

A senior peer is competitive rather than collaborative

Why this happens: Competitive dynamics in organisations are almost always driven by perceived scarcity – of credit, of opportunity, of visibility. Fighting back creates a conflict narrative that rarely serves either party.

Strategy: The most effective counter-strategy is to be the more generous communicator – consistently. Credit their contributions specifically and publicly. Build on their ideas visibly. Over time, the contrast between your generosity and their competition becomes apparent to the people who matter.

A key stakeholder has formed an incorrect perception of you

Why this happens: Incorrect perceptions rarely correct themselves. They need a direct, evidence-based counter-narrative – delivered calmly and without defensiveness.

Strategy: Find a natural moment to provide evidence that contradicts the perception. If they think you are not strategic: present a highly strategic recommendation to them directly. If they think you are not reliable: be the first person to deliver on something they care about, ahead of the deadline.

You need to rebuild trust after a mistake or misunderstanding

Why this happens: Trust, once damaged, does not rebuild through explanation or apology alone. It rebuilds through consistent demonstration of the behaviour that was in question.

Strategy: Acknowledge the specific issue clearly and without over-explaining. Then rebuild through action – not words. If the trust issue was around reliability, be the most reliable person they work with for the next ninety days. Actions over apologies, always.

The most challenging relationship dynamic I am currently navigating – and the strategy I will apply:

Before you move to Chapter 7: You now have a Strategic Relationship Map — a clear picture of the people who matter most to your advancement, an honest assessment of where each relationship currently stands, and specific communication actions for each tier. Chapter 7 moves from who you build relationships with to how you show up in every interaction — the signals of executive presence that shape how people experience you before you have said a word.

→ **Chapter 7: Executive Presence — The Signals You Send Before You Speak**

Executive Presence

The signals you send before you speak – and why they matter more than you think

There is a moment that happens in every high-stakes professional setting – a leadership meeting, a senior presentation, a room full of people whose opinions matter – where an impression is formed before a single word has been said.

The way you enter. Where you choose to sit. Whether you look settled or scattered when you arrive. Whether you reach for your phone the moment there is a pause. The steadiness of your eye contact when someone challenges you. The pace at which you speak when you know the answer. The quality of your stillness when you do not.

These signals are not superficial. They are the data points that senior leaders – often unconsciously – use to form a view about whether you are ready for the next level. And they operate completely independently of what you say. Which means you can deliver a brilliant insight and undermine it simultaneously through the physical and vocal signals surrounding it.

This chapter is about making those signals deliberate – not by performing a version of yourself, but by removing the unconscious habits that are working against the impression you intend to make.

“Executive presence is not a personality type. It is not charisma or height or a naturally authoritative voice. It is the ability to signal leadership credibility through the totality of how you show up – and every single element of it is learnable.”

What Executive Presence Actually Is

Executive presence is one of the most frequently cited – and least clearly defined – concepts in professional development. Most people have an intuitive sense of what it feels like in a room: the person who walks in and the energy shifts slightly. The person whose contributions land differently, whose composure under pressure is noticeable, who projects capability before they have demonstrated it.

But what is actually producing that effect? Research on executive presence consistently identifies three interconnected dimensions:

GRAVITAS	COMMUNICATION	APPEARANCE
How you project confidence, composure, and credibility. The quality of your stillness under pressure. Your ability to hold a position without becoming defensive. The sense that you have thought things through and are not easily rattled.	The clarity, confidence, and precision of how you express yourself – verbally, vocally, and in writing. The ability to command a room’s attention, to land a point cleanly, and to make complex things understandable.	How you show up physically – the signals of energy, intentionality, and professionalism that you project before you speak. Less about aesthetics, more about the impression of deliberateness and readiness.

This chapter focuses primarily on Gravitas and the physical and vocal dimensions of Communication — the signals that operate before and alongside what you say. The written and verbal content of your communication is covered in depth across the rest of the guide.

Why this matters for promotion: Research by leadership development firm Sylvia Ann Hewlett found that executive presence accounts for 26% of what gets people promoted. In environments where multiple high performers are competing for the same opportunity, this dimension is often the deciding variable. The person with stronger presence who also has strong results will almost always be chosen over the person with stronger results and weaker presence.

The Seven Presence Signals

Below are the seven most impactful non-verbal and physical presence signals – and the specific practices that build each one. Work through them as a self-assessment: which signals are you currently sending with intention, and which are you sending by default?

1 How You Enter a Room

Without it: You arrive slightly rushed, look briefly uncertain about where to sit, settle in by checking your phone, and seem to arrive at the meeting rather than to it.

With it: You enter deliberately – not dramatically, but unhurriedly. You scan the room with easy eye contact, move to a seat that positions you well, and arrive settled. The impression is of someone who belongs in that room, not someone hoping they do.

Practice this: Before your next important meeting, pause for three seconds before entering. Take one breath. Decide where you will sit before you walk in. Walk to that seat without hesitation. It costs nothing and changes everything about your first impression.

2 Where You Sit

Without it: You default to whatever seat is available when you arrive, often at the edge or in a secondary row if the meeting room has them, which physically removes you from the decision-making centre of the room.

With it: You arrive early enough to choose, and you choose deliberately – near the centre of the table, positioned where eye contact with key decision-makers is natural, where you can be easily heard without raising your voice.

Practice this: For your next three significant meetings, arrive two minutes early specifically so you can choose your seat. Sit at or near the centre of the table. Notice how different the energy feels – and how differently people engage with you.

3 Physical Stillness Under Pressure

Without it: When challenged, you shift in your seat, look briefly away, or touch your face. Your body language reads as anxious even when your words are composed. The physical signal contradicts the verbal one, and people's instincts respond to the body first.

With it: You receive challenge with stillness. You maintain easy eye contact. Your body communicates that you have heard the challenge, that you are taking it seriously, and that you are not rattled by it. This stillness is itself a signal of leadership.

Practice this: In your next meeting, practise the deliberate pause before responding to any challenge or question. Not a dramatic pause – a brief, composed one. Stillness first, then your response. This single habit shifts how challenge lands on you more than almost any other.

4 Eye Contact Quality

Without it: You make strong eye contact with safe people in the room (those you know, those who are nodding) and avoid eye contact with those who might challenge you – which paradoxically draws attention to exactly those relationships.

With it: You distribute eye contact evenly around the room, including to the people you find most intimidating. When making an important point, you hold eye contact slightly longer than feels entirely comfortable — which is precisely when the signal of confidence lands most strongly.

Practice this: *In your next group setting, consciously include the most senior person in the room in your eye contact rotation — particularly when making your key points. Most people look away from seniority. Looking toward it, steadily, sends a signal of peer-level confidence.*

5 Pace and Tone of Voice

Without it: Under pressure or in high-visibility settings, your pace increases — which is almost universal but counterproductive. Faster speech signals anxiety. It also reduces the impact of your actual content, because listeners cannot absorb information at the rate you are delivering it.

With it: You speak at a measured, deliberate pace — slower than your natural speed under pressure. You use tonal variation to signal emphasis rather than volume. You allow pauses at key moments, which creates space for your point to land and signals that you are not rushing to fill silence.

Practice this: *Record yourself speaking in a low-stakes setting — a team meeting, a call. Listen back specifically for pace and filler words (“um”, “so”, “like”, “you know”). Most people are surprised by what they hear. Then, in your next important meeting, consciously slow your pace by 20% from the first sentence.*

6 How You Handle Technology in the Room

Without it: Your phone is on the table, face-up or periodically checked. Or your laptop is open during discussions where you are not presenting. The signal, regardless of your actual attention level, is that something else might be more important than what is happening in this room.

With it: Your device is closed or face-down — out of your visual field and out of the room’s visual field. You are demonstrably fully present. In a world where divided attention is universal, full presence is a presence signal in itself — and a rare one.

Practice this: *For the next week, no devices on the table during meetings — even when others have theirs out. If you need to reference something, do so deliberately and name it: “Let me pull up the numbers.” Presence is most visible when it contrasts with the default around you.*

7 The Quality of Your Composure When You Do Not Know

Without it: A flash of visible panic, an overly hasty response, an elaborate explanation, or the verbal equivalent of a flinch: “Oh — I’m not sure... let me think... I might be wrong but...” The presence signal is of someone who finds not-knowing genuinely threatening.

With it: A brief pause. An honest, composed acknowledgement — “I don’t have that information to hand — let me come back to you by [time] with a considered answer.” Then move forward. The signal is of someone who is at home in uncertainty — which is the primary environment of senior leadership.

Practice this: *Prepare your standard response to not-knowing in advance, so it is available when you need it: “My current thinking is X — I want to make sure I’m giving you the right answer so let me confirm and come back to you by [time].” Knowing what you will say removes the anxiety of not knowing what to say.*

Your Executive Presence Self-Audit

Score yourself honestly on each signal below – 1 being a significant gap you are aware of, 10 being a genuine strength. Then identify the context where the gap is most visible. This is your starting point, not your ceiling.

PRESENCE SIGNAL	SCORE (1-10)	WHERE I NOTICE THE GAP MOST
How I enter a room – deliberate, unhurried, settled	___ / 10	
Where I sit – central, positioned to contribute	___ / 10	
Physical stillness under pressure – composed, not reactive	___ / 10	
Eye contact quality – even, unhurried, includes senior people	___ / 10	
Pace and tone of voice – measured, varied, uses silence	___ / 10	
Technology relationship – full presence, device discipline	___ / 10	
Composure when I do not know – honest, calm, forward-moving	___ / 10	

The presence signal where I have the most to gain – and the specific situation I will practise it in first.

Voice, Pace, and the Verbal Habits That Undermine Presence

Beyond the physical signals, there are specific vocal and verbal habits that consistently undermine the impression of executive presence — even when everything else is working well. These are the patterns that, once you become aware of them, you will start to notice everywhere.

HABIT	WHAT IT SIGNALS	THE SHIFT
Upward inflection (“uptalk”)	Statements sound like questions. Every sentence ends with a rising tone that invites confirmation — which signals uncertainty about your own content.	End declarative statements with a downward inflection. Practice this in low-stakes conversations first. Record yourself. Most people are surprised by how often they do this.
Filler words (um, so, like, you know)	Individual filler words are unremarkable. In high-stakes settings, their frequency becomes the signal — they suggest that your thinking has not kept pace with your speaking.	The fix is not to eliminate fillers but to replace them with silence. A brief pause does everything a filler does, and it sounds like composure rather than uncertainty.
Over-explaining after a strong point	You make a clear, confident point — then immediately dilute it by adding qualifications, elaborating unnecessarily, or asking if it made sense. The strong point is buried.	After your key point, stop. A natural pause. Let the point land. Resist the urge to fill the space with softening language. The silence validates the point.
Volume that drops at the end of sentences	A common pattern under pressure — your volume and confidence start strong, then trail off as the sentence ends. The most important word in your sentence is often the last one.	Consciously sustain your volume through to the end of the sentence, particularly when stating your key point or recommendation. The end of your sentence should be as strong as the beginning.
Speed acceleration under pressure	Most people unconsciously increase their speaking pace when stakes rise. This signals anxiety, reduces clarity, and makes it harder for listeners to absorb your content.	Before high-stakes moments, set a deliberate internal pace — slightly slower than feels natural. The composed speaker is always slower than the anxious one. Deliberately slow your first sentence; the rest tends to follow.

PRESENCE-BUILDING VS. PRESENCE-DIMINISHING HABITS

Many presence-undermining habits are so ingrained they feel natural – or even polite. The table below maps the most common ones to their strategic replacements.

PRESENCE-DIMINISHING HABIT	PRESENCE-BUILDING REPLACEMENT
Checking your phone while waiting for a meeting to start	Settle in, make easy eye contact with people as they arrive, appear unhurried and present from the moment you enter
Prefacing your point with “This might be a silly question, but...”	Ask the question directly. If it is a good question – and it usually is – the framing undermines it unnecessarily
Physically shrinking in your chair during a challenge	Sit forward slightly, maintain eye contact, and receive the challenge with stillness
Laughing nervously at the end of a serious statement	Let the statement stand. A smile is fine. A nervous laugh suggests you are not sure the statement deserved to be made
Nodding excessively to signal you are listening	Listen with controlled stillness. An occasional nod is natural; continuous nodding reads as anxious agreement
Breaking eye contact when someone senior enters the room	Acknowledge their arrival with a brief nod, then continue your conversation or contribution without interrupting it
Rushing to fill silence after someone finishes speaking	Allow a genuine pause before responding. The pause signals you are considering their point – which is more compelling than the speed of your response
Sitting back in your chair when challenged as if creating distance	Lean slightly forward. Physical openness under pressure signals confidence rather than defensiveness

Executive Presence in Virtual and Hybrid Settings

Executive presence did not become less important in virtual and hybrid environments. It became more technical – because the signals that work in a room have to be deliberately translated into a digital context where many of them are lost or distorted by default.

Most people approach virtual meetings with less intentionality than they bring to in-person ones. Which means that in an environment where everyone is slightly less intentional, the person who has thought carefully about their virtual presence stands out significantly.

Camera quality and positioning

Your camera should be at eye level or slightly above — not looking up at you from a laptop screen, which creates an unflattering and inadvertently submissive angle. Eye level communicates peer-to-peer engagement. Invest in lighting — a ring light or window in front of you rather than behind you transforms how you appear on screen. These are small investments with disproportionate presence impact.

Camera eye contact

In virtual settings, eye contact means looking at the camera — not at the faces on your screen. This is counterintuitive because the faces are where the social cues are, but looking at the screen means you appear to be looking slightly down or sideways to the people watching. Practice looking at the camera when making key points.

Background and environment

Your background communicates something about your intentionality. A clean, neutral background — physical or virtual — signals that you have thought about the impression your environment makes. Clutter, an unmade bed visible in a corner, or a low-quality virtual background that flickers are all subtle presence-diminishing signals that accumulate over time.

Microphone quality and audio

Nothing undermines virtual presence faster than poor audio. People will forgive a less-than-perfect camera but they will disengage from poor audio within seconds. If you are in important virtual meetings regularly, a USB microphone is among the highest-return presence investments you can make. At minimum, use headphones with a microphone rather than relying on built-in laptop audio.

Visible engagement when not speaking

In virtual meetings, your visible engagement when others are speaking is a presence signal. Looking off-screen, appearing distracted, or being visibly on a second screen while someone else is contributing — all of these are noticeable in a way they might not be in a physical room. In important virtual meetings, make visible engagement a deliberate practice.

The virtual presence signal I most need to upgrade — and one practical change I will make before my next online meeting:

Your 30-Day Presence Practice Plan

Executive presence is built through repetition in low-stakes settings so it is available without effort in high-stakes ones. Choose one signal from this chapter — the one with the biggest gap between where you are and where you want to be — and commit to practising it every day for 30 days across every relevant interaction.

The one presence signal I am committing to for 30 days:

How I will know it is working – what I will notice in how people respond to me:

The specific meeting or interaction where I will apply it first:

WEEK	WHERE I PRACTISED IT	WHAT I NOTICED
Week 1		
Week 2		
Week 3		
Week 4		

Completing Part Two: Visibility You have now worked through the four chapters of Part Two – how promotions actually get made, how to own your meeting presence, how to build and invest in your strategic relationships, and how to develop the physical and vocal signals that project leadership readiness before you have said a word. Part Three is where visibility becomes influence – where you move from being seen to actively shaping how people think, decide, and act.

→ **Part Three: Influence – Chapter 8: The Psychology of Influence**

PART THREE

INFLUENCE

Making your ideas land, stick, and get actioned

Visibility gets you noticed. Influence determines what happens next. The chapters in Part Three are about the specific communication strategies that make your ideas land with clarity, move people to action, and build the kind of credibility that shapes decisions — even in rooms you are not in.

Chapters 8 - 11

The Psychology of Influence

Why people say yes – and how to make it easier for them to say yes to you

Influence is not persuasion in the manipulative sense – getting someone to do something they would not otherwise do through pressure, politics, or framing games. That approach produces compliance at best and backlash at worst, and it is not what this chapter is about.

Real influence is something simpler and more sustainable: making it easy for the people around you to understand your thinking, trust your judgement, and move in the direction you are recommending. It is the ability to reduce friction – cognitive, emotional, and relational – between your idea and the action you want to happen.

This chapter gives you the frameworks and language to do exactly that. Not by becoming more persuasive in the conventional sense, but by becoming clearer – because clarity is the most powerful influence tool available, and it is the one most professionals systematically underuse.

“People do not say no to good ideas. They say no – or more often, they say nothing, and nothing happens – because the path forward was not clear enough. Your job is to make the path so clear that saying yes is the easiest thing in the room.”

How Decisions Actually Get Made

Before you can influence a decision effectively, it helps to understand how decisions actually get made – particularly in organisational contexts where there are competing priorities, limited time, and multiple stakeholders with partially overlapping information.

The uncomfortable reality is that most decisions in organisations are not made through careful, rational deliberation of all available options. They are made quickly, often under cognitive load, by people who are already managing more than they can comfortably process. Which means that the communication surrounding a decision – how clearly the options are framed, how easy it is to identify the recommendation, how obvious the next step is – has an enormous influence on the outcome, often more than the underlying merits of the options themselves.

The cognitive load principle: Every piece of communication creates cognitive load for the person receiving it – the mental effort required to process it, understand it, and decide what to do with it. When cognitive load is high, people defer, delegate, or default to the status quo. When cognitive load is low – when the path forward is clear, the decision is explicit, and the recommendation is well-reasoned – people move. Your job as an influential communicator is to do the cognitive work so they do not have to.

There are three questions every decision-maker is trying to answer, usually simultaneously and often under time pressure. When your communication answers all three efficiently, you dramatically increase the probability of action:

THE QUESTION IN THEIR MIND	WHAT YOUR COMMUNICATION MUST ANSWER
1 What exactly is being asked of me here?	The decision, action, or response you need – stated explicitly and early.
2 Why does this matter enough to act on now?	The stakes, the timing, and the consequence of inaction – in their terms, not yours.
3 What is the path of least friction forward?	A clear recommendation, with the next step named and owned.

The 5-Part Decision Framework

The most consistently effective influence tool for professionals in organisational settings is a simple five-part framework that structures any significant communication – a recommendation, a proposal, a request for resources, a position you need buy-in on – so that the person receiving it can understand it, evaluate it, and act on it with minimum friction.

This framework works in emails, in meetings, in presentations, and in one-to-one conversations. It is not a rigid script – it is a thinking structure that ensures you have done the cognitive work before the other person has to.

STEP	THE ELEMENT	WHAT TO WRITE / SAY
1	The Decision Needed	One sentence. What exactly are you asking for? A decision, an approval, a resource, a direction. Be specific. Do not bury it.
2	Why It Matters	2–3 sentences. Why does this decision matter – to them, to the team, to the business? Frame it in their priorities, not yours.
3	The Options	Two or three clear options briefly described. This shows you have thought it through and respects their autonomy to choose.
4	Your Recommendation	One clear recommendation with one clear reason. “I recommend Option A because X.” Do not hedge. Do not present options without a view.
5	The Next Step and Timing	What happens after they say yes – who does what, by when. Make it easy to move.

Why this framework works – and why most people resist it: The most common objection is: “But what if they disagree with my recommendation?” The answer is: then you will have a much better conversation than if you had presented the options without one. A clear recommendation invites a specific counter-argument – which is productive. A list of options without a recommendation invites your audience to do the thinking you should have done – which is frustrating, and which often ends with no decision at all. Having a view is not arrogance. It is the job.

The Framework in Action — Side by Side

The best way to understand the power of this framework is to see the same communication request written without it and with it. Both examples contain the same underlying information. The difference is entirely in the structure.

The Scenario: You need your manager to approve bringing in an external facilitation resource for a strategy session that the team has been trying — and failing — to run internally.

UNSTRUCTURED REQUEST	USING THE 5-PART FRAMEWORK
<p>Hi [Name], hope you're well. I wanted to follow up on the strategy session we've been trying to organise. As you know we've had a few attempts at running it internally but it hasn't really come together the way we needed it to, and I think part of the problem might be that it's hard to facilitate something objectively when you're also a participant with a stake in the outcome. I've been doing a bit of research and I think it might be worth considering whether we could look at bringing in an external facilitator — I've found a couple of options who seem good. I know budget is tight so I completely understand if it's not possible, but I thought it might be worth raising. Let me know what you think.</p>	<p>Hi [Name] — decision needed: I'd like your approval to bring in an external facilitator for the strategy session. Why it matters: We've run three internal attempts and each one stalled because participants — understandably — struggled to be both contributors and neutral facilitators simultaneously. The session is now four weeks overdue, and the team is losing momentum on decisions that depend on it. Options: (A) External facilitator — estimated £1,200–1,500, one day. (B) We assign an internal facilitator from outside the core team — lower cost, but limited availability and mixed track record. My recommendation: Option A. The cost is recoverable against the efficiency gains from actually making the decisions we've been deferring. Next step: If you're happy to approve in principle, I'll confirm the preferred supplier by Thursday.</p>

Both messages contain roughly the same information. The first requires the reader to do the work of identifying the request, the context, the options, and the ask. The second gives them all of that, in order, with a recommendation and a next step. One creates friction. One removes it.

The “forward-ready” test: Before sending any significant communication, ask yourself: could my manager forward this to their manager without adding a word of explanation? If the answer is no — because the request is buried, the recommendation is absent, or the next step is unclear — it is not ready. The ability to write something that is “forward-ready two levels up” is one of the clearest signals of leadership communication maturity.

PRACTICE — REWRITE YOUR OWN COMMUNICATION

Think of a current situation where you need a decision, approval, or direction from someone — ideally something real and in progress.

Your communication — without the framework

Draft your existing / instinctive version here:

Your communication — with the framework

1. Decision Needed:

2. Why It Matters:

3. The Options:

4. My Recommendation:

5. Next Step + Timing:

“Don’t Explain How the Sausage was Made” – Lead With Output, Not Process

One of the most reliably career-limiting communication habits is leading with process when the other person only needs to hear the outcome.

You know what went into getting to this point. The research, the iterations, the difficult conversations, the failed approaches, the late nights. You are aware of all of it, and there is a natural instinct to want the person receiving your work to understand how much went into it – to see the effort, to appreciate the complexity, to understand why it was hard.

Most of the time, they do not need any of that. They need to know what you found, what it means, and what you recommend. The process is the sausage. They want the outcome on the plate.

“Nobody needs to know how the sausage was made. They need to know what it tastes like and whether it is what they ordered. Lead with the outcome. The process is available on request.”

EXPLAINING THE SAUSAGE	LEADING WITH THE OUTCOME
“So I’ve been working on this for the past few weeks, and it was quite complex because there were a lot of moving parts – I had to pull data from three different systems and the numbers weren’t aligning initially, but eventually I managed to reconcile them and here is what I found...”	“The analysis is complete. Here is the key finding: [X]. What this means for us is [Y]. My recommendation is [Z].”
“I went back and forth on this a few times because the options were quite evenly balanced, but after considering all the factors I eventually landed on...”	“My recommendation is [X]. The primary reason is [one reason]. The alternative I considered was [Y] – I discounted it because [one reason].”
“I know this took longer than we planned, and there were a few unexpected complications along the way that I should explain...”	“Here is where we are: [status]. The delay was caused by [one reason]. We are back on track for [date]. Nothing needed from you – just keeping you informed.”
“I’ve put together quite a detailed analysis of this, so bear with me while I take you through all the considerations...”	“The short version: [one sentence conclusion]. I have the full analysis available if you want to go deeper – but the recommendation stands on its own.”

Six Principles of Influential Communication

Beyond the frameworks, there are six underlying principles that consistently show up in the communication of the most influential professionals. These are not tactics – they are orientations that, once adopted, change the quality of every significant communication you produce.

1 Frame in Their Interest, Not Yours

The most common influence failure is framing a request or recommendation in terms of what it means for you — your project, your team, your goals — rather than what it means for the person you are trying to move. Influential communicators translate their needs into the other person's priorities before they open their mouths.

In practice: *Instead of "This would help my team hit our targets" — try "This solves the bottleneck that's been holding up your delivery timeline." Same underlying point. Completely different frame. The second one is about them.*

2 Anticipate the Objection and Address It First

The most persuasive communicators do not wait for the objection to come. They identify it in advance, acknowledge it directly, and address it as part of their initial communication. This does two things: it signals that you have thought beyond your own perspective, and it removes the objection's power because it is no longer new information to the room.

In practice: *At the end of your recommendation, add: "The most likely concern with this approach is [X]. Here is how I have accounted for that: [response]." You have taken the wind out of the objection before it is raised — and demonstrated thoroughness in the process.*

3 Give Them One Thing to Decide, Not Many

Complexity is the enemy of action. When you present multiple decisions, multiple options without a clear recommendation, or multiple parallel asks, the natural human response is to defer — to wait until things are clearer, to ask for more information, to hold off until the decision has been decomposed into something manageable. The influential communicator does that decomposition work before the conversation.

In practice: *Before any important communication, ask: what is the one thing I need from this person? If there are multiple things, which one is most important? Which one enables the others? Start there, and be explicit: "There is one thing I need from you on this — [X]."*

4 Use Concrete Numbers, Not Vague Impressions

Influence is strengthened by specificity. "This will save significant time" is weaker than "This will reduce the process from three days to four hours." "Customer satisfaction has improved" is weaker than "NPS has moved from 34 to 51 in six months." Numbers do not just add credibility — they make the impact tangible in a way that qualitative language cannot.

In practice: *In your next significant proposal or recommendation, identify one specific number that anchors the impact. If you do not have an exact number, a reasonable estimate with a range is still stronger than a vague impression: "Roughly 40% reduction in turnaround time — possibly more once the process beds in."*

5 Help Them Feel Accomplished, Not Just Informed

The most influential communicators leave people feeling clearer, more capable, and better equipped after an interaction — not just more informed. The distinction matters because people remember how communication made them feel, not just what it contained. When your communication helps someone feel like they can move forward with confidence, they associate that feeling with you — and they seek you out again.

In practice: After a complex brief, add a short “what this means in practice” paragraph that translates the complexity into clear action. After delivering difficult feedback, close with what the person’s specific strength is and how this learning will accelerate it. The goal is not to soften — it is to equip.

6 Make Every Touchpoint Smaller Than Expected

One of the least-discussed but most powerful influence habits is consistent delivery ahead of expectation. Not heroic overdelivery on major projects — small, consistent beats: the email that arrived the same day rather than two days later, the summary that was cleaner than necessary, the follow-up that arrived before it was chased. These small beats compound into a reputation for reliability that becomes one of your most valuable professional assets.

In practice: “Reduce the number of touchpoints in every task and interaction” — this means doing the work that prevents unnecessary follow-up, anticipating the next question, and delivering more completely the first time. Every interaction that requires fewer exchanges than the other person expected is an influence investment.

Influence When the Conditions Are Against You

The frameworks and principles above work well when the conditions are favourable — when the person you are trying to influence is open, the stakes are clear, and the relationship is solid. But some of the most important influence moments happen in less comfortable territory: when you are junior in the room, when the politics are complex, when you are trying to shift a decision that has already been informally made.

You are the most junior person in the room and need your idea to land

Strategy: The hierarchy gap is most effectively bridged by the quality and clarity of your framing, not by positioning yourself. Arrive with the most well-prepared, clearly structured contribution in the room. Lead with the outcome. Anticipate the objection. Use the framework. The clarity of your communication will do what seniority cannot — it demonstrates the calibre of your thinking directly.

What to say: *“Based on the data I’ve been looking at, my recommendation is X. The key reason is Y. The main risk I see is Z — and here is how I’d suggest we address it.” Clear, structured, forward-thinking. No apology for having a view.*

A decision has been informally made and you believe it is the wrong one

Strategy: Do not try to reverse the decision in the meeting where it was announced — that is the moment of lowest receptivity. Instead, find a private conversation with the right person, acknowledge their reasoning, and introduce new information or a different frame that makes reconsidering feel natural rather than like a reversal.

What to say: *“I’ve been thinking about the direction we agreed on [X]. I want to make sure I’m not missing something, because I’ve come across [specific new information / different angle] that I think changes the picture slightly. Would you have fifteen minutes to walk me through your thinking? I may be able to add something useful.”*

You need to influence someone who is resistant or defensive

Strategy: Resistance is almost always about threat perception — the person feels that your recommendation challenges their decision, their expertise, or their position. The most effective counter is to explicitly reduce the threat: acknowledge their perspective first, find genuine points of agreement, and introduce your position as a complement rather than a contradiction.

What to say: *“I think we’re actually largely aligned on [X] — where I see it slightly differently is [Y]. I’m not sure that changes the overall direction, but I think it’s worth making sure we’ve accounted for it. Could we take five minutes to look at it together?”*

You need to influence upward without overstepping

Strategy: Upward influence requires a specific combination: a clear position, genuine intellectual humility about what you might be missing, and framing that serves their goals rather than substituting for their judgement. You are not telling them what to do — you are giving them your best thinking so they can make a better decision.

What to say: “I wanted to share my perspective on [x] – I may not have the full picture, but based on what I can see, my view is [position]. I think it’s worth considering because [reason in their terms]. Happy to be challenged on this – what am I missing?”

CHAPTER 8 — YOUR INFLUENCE PRACTICE

A current situation where I need to influence a decision or get buy-in – and how the 5-Part Framework would change my approach:

A recent communication I sent that was “explaining the sausage.” What was the outcome version I should have led with?

The influence principle I most need to embed – and the first situation I will apply it in:

Before you move to Chapter 9: The 5-Part Decision Framework is the single most immediately applicable tool in this guide. Before you read another chapter, find one real communication situation you are currently navigating and rewrite it using the framework. The exercise takes ten minutes and the shift in how it lands will be immediate. Chapter 9 gives you the other great influence tool – the art of strategic storytelling, and why stories move people in ways that data and arguments alone never will.

→ **Chapter 9: Strategic Storytelling**

Strategic Storytelling

Why stories move people in ways that data and arguments alone never will

Data convinces. Logic informs. Stories move people to act.

This is not a soft distinction. It is grounded in decades of research on how the brain processes information. When you present a fact or an argument, the language-processing areas of the brain engage. When you tell a story, the sensory, emotional, and motor areas activate simultaneously — the listener's brain essentially begins to experience what you are describing. The result is a fundamentally different kind of engagement, a different quality of attention, and a dramatically higher rate of recall and action.

For ambitious professionals, this has a very practical implication: if you want your ideas to land, to be remembered, and to inspire action — particularly in high-stakes moments with senior stakeholders — you need to be able to tell your story well. Not a personal anecdote. Not a meandering narrative. A sharp, purposeful, professionally constructed story that makes your experience, your thinking, and your impact concrete and memorable.

“Numbers get acknowledged. Stories get remembered. Arguments get debated. The professional who can do all three — who can anchor their data in a story and their story in a recommendation — is the one whose ideas get actioned.”

Why Stories Work — The Science in 60 Seconds

When researchers at Princeton scanned the brains of a speaker and listener engaged in conversation, they found that the listener's brain patterns began to mirror the speaker's — a phenomenon called “neural coupling.” The stronger the neural coupling, the better the comprehension and retention. And neural coupling is significantly stronger during narrative than during factual recitation.

What this means practically: when you tell a well-structured story about a problem you solved, a decision you navigated, or a result you achieved — the person listening is not just processing information. They are, in a neurological sense, experiencing a version of it alongside you. That shared experience is what makes stories stick in a way that slide decks and status updates simply cannot replicate.

There is also a trust dimension. Stories make claims that are testable — they describe specific situations, specific actions, and specific outcomes. When you tell a story credibly, you are not just asserting that you are capable; you are demonstrating it with evidence. For senior stakeholders who are assessing your readiness for the next level, this is qualitatively different from a confident statement about your skills.

The professional relevance: Most ambitious professionals think of storytelling as something that happens in presentations or interviews. In reality, the ability to use story strategically applies to every high-stakes communication: making a business case, building credibility with a new senior stakeholder, recovering from a setback, advocating for yourself in a performance conversation, or leading a team through uncertainty. Story is not a presentation technique. It is a communication infrastructure.

The SCAR Framework

The most reliable structure for a professional story is four elements — Situation, Challenge, Action, Result. Together they form the SCAR framework: a tight, purposeful narrative arc that gives the listener everything they need and nothing they do not.

What makes SCAR different from other story frameworks is its precision. Each element is doing specific work, and each has a discipline around it — a constraint that prevents the story from expanding into the kind of meandering narrative that loses rooms rather than holding them.

ELEMENT	THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS
S — SITUATION	What was the context? One sentence. Just enough so the listener knows where they are.
C — CHALLENGE	What was the real problem — the obstacle, the pressure, the stakes? This is where the story creates tension.
A — ACTION	What did YOU do? Not what the team did. Not what happened. What did you specifically decide, initiate, or lead?
R — RESULT	What changed because of your action? Quantify where possible. Connect the outcome to something the listener cares about.

The most important discipline in SCAR: The Action element is singular — it is what YOU did. Not your team, not the process, not circumstances that worked in your favour. When you are building a professional story for a promotion conversation, a performance review, or a moment with a senior stakeholder, the story must be clearly about your contribution, your decision, your leadership. “We” is fine for context. But the Action element must have a single subject: you.

SCAR in Practice — The Same Story, Structured and Unstructured

The difference between an unstructured professional story and a SCAR-structured one is not about adding content — it is about removing everything the listener does not need and sequencing what remains for maximum impact.

UNSTRUCTURED VERSION	SCAR-STRUCTURED VERSION
<p>“So there was this project we were working on — it must have been about eighteen months ago — and it was getting quite complicated. There were a lot of stakeholders involved and to be honest the brief had never been entirely clear from the start, and I think that was part of the problem. We’d been going back and forth for weeks and nobody was really making a decision and the client was getting frustrated. I ended up kind of taking the lead at some point — I set up a meeting and put together some options and I think that helped. It seemed to go well and we got the contract renewed in the end.”</p>	<p>S — Eighteen months ago our team was mid-way through a major client delivery. The brief had shifted twice and three different stakeholders were giving conflicting direction.</p> <p>C — The project had stalled for six weeks. No one was making a decision, the client was losing confidence, and there was a real risk of losing the contract renewal — worth around £400,000 to the business.</p> <p>A — I called a halt to the existing approach and requested a single decision-making conversation with the client’s senior sponsor. I prepared a three-option brief, presented a clear recommendation with the rationale, and ran the meeting myself.</p> <p>R — The client chose our recommended option on the day. The project delivered on the revised timeline, and the contract was renewed at 15% above the previous value. The client specifically cited the clarity of our communication as a reason for the renewal.</p>

The structured version is shorter, clearer, and significantly more impactful. The listener knows exactly what happened, what you did, and why it mattered — without having to do any interpretive work. That is the goal of every professional story you tell.

Building Your Professional Story Library

The most influential professionals do not construct their stories on the spot. They have a library — a set of five to seven pre-built, SCAR-structured stories that cover the key themes of their professional contribution. When the moment arrives — in a performance review, a senior stakeholder conversation, an interview, a promotion discussion — they reach for the right story rather than constructing one under pressure.

Your story library should cover five core categories. The goal is to have one strong, well-practised story for each category — one you can deliver in under two minutes, that lands with clarity, and that you could tell comfortably in front of your most senior stakeholder.

Story 1 — Problem-Solving Under Pressure

Use when: Performance reviews, promotion conversations, “tell me about a challenge you’ve faced”

S	SITUATION	
C	CHALLENGE	
A	ACTION	
R	RESULT	

Story 2 — Leading Without the Title

Use when: Demonstrating leadership readiness before the formal role, cross-functional influence stories

S	SITUATION	
C	CHALLENGE	
A	ACTION	
R	RESULT	

Story 3 — Delivering Results Under Constraint

Use when: Demonstrating resilience, resourcefulness, and commercial impact

S	SITUATION	
C	CHALLENGE	
A	ACTION	
R	RESULT	

Story 4 – Influencing Without Authority

Use when: Demonstrating strategic communication and stakeholder management capability

S	SITUATION	
C	CHALLENGE	
A	ACTION	
R	RESULT	

Story 5 – Navigating Failure or Setback

Use when: Demonstrating self-awareness, resilience, and growth – the story most people avoid building but most need

S	SITUATION	
C	CHALLENGE	
A	ACTION	
R	RESULT	

The Seven Most Common Professional Story Mistakes

Even professionals who understand the SCAR framework make these mistakes consistently. Knowing them in advance helps you identify them in your own stories before they reach the room.

COMMON STORY MISTAKE	THE FIX
Making the situation too long	The situation is context, not the story. One to two sentences maximum. If the listener needs more context to understand the challenge, add one sentence – not a paragraph.
Using “we” throughout – including the Action	Context and results can be “we.” The Action must be “I.” If the listener cannot identify what you specifically did, the story does not build your credibility – it builds the team’s.
A result that is vague or unmeasured	“It went well” and “the team was pleased” are not results. “Revenue increased by 22%”, “the project delivered three weeks ahead of schedule”, “we retained a client worth £350k” – these are results. Always try to quantify.
Telling the story chronologically instead of purposefully	Chronological stories bury the most interesting part under setup. Start with a hint of what is at stake, then build. Or lead with the result: “We saved the account. Here is how it happened.”
Over-explaining the technical detail	Your listener does not need to understand the technical complexity – they need to understand the decision, the difficulty, and the impact. Translate your expertise into business terms, always.
Being too modest in the Action	Many professionals, particularly those who are collaborative by nature, systematically understate their individual contribution. If you led it, say you led it. If you made the call, say you made the call. Accuracy is not arrogance.
Not connecting the Result to something the listener cares about	The most powerful ending connects your result to the listener’s world – their team, their metrics, their challenges. “Which is relevant to the situation you mentioned in [X context]” transforms a story from impressive to useful.

When to Use Which Story

Having the stories built is one thing. Knowing when to deploy them – and how to introduce them naturally – is the other.

SITUATION	WHICH STORY TO REACH FOR
A senior leader asks what you've been working on	Story 3 (results under constraint) – lead with the outcome, offer the story as evidence.
A performance review conversation	Stories 1 and 3 for results evidence; Story 5 for growth and self-awareness (it makes you memorable and trusted).
A promotion conversation with your manager	Story 2 (leading without the title) – the most direct evidence of readiness for the next level.
Meeting a new senior stakeholder for the first time	Story 1 or 3 – brief, high-impact, connects your background to something relevant to them.
You're asked "tell me about yourself" in any context	A 90-second version of Story 1 or 2 that positions you at your strongest point, ending with a forward-looking line about where you are headed.
Trying to influence a decision with a resistant audience	Story 4 (influencing without authority) – shows you understand the dynamic they are sceptical about and have navigated it before.
After a visible setback or mistake	Story 5 – used proactively, this story builds more trust than almost anything else. It shows security, self-awareness, and growth.
A job interview or internal application	All five – mapped to the competencies they are assessing. Have a story ready for every likely question category.

Introducing a story naturally: The most common concern about using prepared stories is that they will feel scripted. The fix is simple: introduce the story with a genuine connection to what is being discussed. "That actually connects to something I navigated last year –" or "I had a similar situation when [brief context]." This framing makes the story feel responsive, not rehearsed – because it is responsive.

The Two-Minute Story Test

Every story in your library should pass the two-minute test: you can tell it, from Situation through to Result, in under two minutes, with no notes, and it lands with clarity and impact for someone who knows nothing about the context.

This is the test because two minutes is roughly the attention span available to you in a spontaneous professional conversation. If your story takes four minutes to reach the result, you will lose the room at minute two – which means your strongest material never lands.

The discipline of reducing a story to two minutes is also the discipline of knowing what matters in it – which is the same discipline that makes your day-to-day communication clearer, your

recommendations sharper, and your meeting contributions more impactful. Storytelling is a compression skill. The better you get at it, the better every other communication you produce becomes.

“If you cannot tell it in two minutes, you do not know it well enough yet. Not because the story is too complex – because you have not done the work of finding what is essential in it.”

CHAPTER 9 — BUILD YOUR FIRST SCAR STORY

Choose the story type that is most immediately relevant to you — where you are in your career right now, and what you most need to be able to demonstrate. Work through it below. Draft it rough first, then tighten it to under two minutes.

Story type I am building — and why this one first:

S SITUATION	<i>One or two sentences. Just enough context.</i>
C CHALLENGE	<i>The real problem. The stakes. What was at risk.</i>
A ACTION	<i>What YOU specifically did. One clear decision or initiative.</i>
R RESULT	<i>The outcome. Quantified if possible. Connected to the business.</i>

Refined version — timed at under 2 minutes, written as you would say it:

The moment I will use this story first — and with whom:

Before you move to Chapter 10: Build one story completely before you move on. Not a draft — a finished, two-minute, deliverable story that you could tell in your next performance review or senior stakeholder conversation. That single story, well-built, will do more for your visibility and influence than all the frameworks in this chapter read but not applied. Chapter 10 addresses the other side of influence: the conversations that most ambitious professionals are avoiding — and why avoiding them is costing them more than having them ever would.

→ **Chapter 10: Difficult Conversations Without Damage**

Difficult Conversations Without Damage

How to say the hard thing – and come out the other side with the relationship intact

There is a conversation you have been putting off.

You know the one. It has been sitting in the background for weeks – maybe longer. Every time the right moment presents itself, you find a reason to wait. The timing is not quite right. You do not want to damage the relationship. You are not sure how they will react. You are hoping the situation will resolve itself.

It almost certainly will not. And every week you leave it, the situation costs you something – credibility, trust, momentum, clarity, or simply the quiet toll of carrying something unresolved. The conversations most ambitious professionals avoid are almost always the ones that, once had, they wish they had had months earlier.

This chapter is about how to have those conversations – the ones that feel genuinely difficult – with clarity, composure, and enough skill to come out the other side with the relationship intact and the issue resolved. Not perfectly. Not painlessly. But productively.

“The conversation you are avoiding is almost certainly less damaging to have than the cost of not having it. The relationship risk is usually much lower than you fear. The cost of continued avoidance is almost always higher than you have accounted for.”

The Real Cost of Avoidance

Most ambitious professionals calculate the risk of a difficult conversation in terms of what might go wrong if they have it. They almost never calculate the cost of what is already going wrong because they are not having it. This second calculation tends to be much larger – and much more consequential for their career.

CONVERSATION AVOIDED	THE REAL COST OF NOT HAVING IT
Not addressing underperformance in a direct report	The team sees you enabling the problem. Your credibility as a leader erodes quietly. The underperformer does not improve. Eventually the cost escalates – in morale, in output, and in how leadership perceives your ability to manage.
Not challenging a decision you believe is wrong	You become complicit in an outcome you could have influenced. Over time, staying silent in the wrong moments builds a reputation for passivity – not diplomacy – at the senior level.
Not addressing a colleague who is taking credit for your work	The pattern continues and compounds. The person making decisions about your career continues to

CONVERSATION AVOIDED	THE REAL COST OF NOT HAVING IT
	associate your contribution with someone else's name. The longer you wait, the harder it becomes to address without appearing reactive.
Not having the promotion conversation because the timing feels wrong	Your manager operates without the information that you are ready and actively seeking advancement. Another opportunity cycle passes. The conversation you needed to have six months ago is now a year overdue.
Not telling your manager you are struggling or need support	The problem continues, often visibly. What could have been a brief, trust-building conversation becomes a performance conversation – on their terms, not yours.
Not addressing a boundary that has been crossed	The behaviour continues. Resentment builds. The relationship – which could have been repaired with one honest conversation – deteriorates quietly until it reaches a point where repair is much harder.

The conversation I have been avoiding – and an honest calculation of what it has already cost me:

Why Difficult Conversations Feel So Hard

Before we look at how to have these conversations well, it is worth understanding why they feel so hard — because the feeling is not irrational, and acknowledging it makes it easier to manage.

We catastrophize the outcome

The brain's threat-detection system is not well-calibrated for professional conversations. When we imagine a difficult conversation going badly, we tend to picture the worst-case scenario — the other person becoming upset, the relationship being permanently damaged, things escalating beyond what we can manage. In reality, most difficult conversations go significantly better than the version we have imagined in advance.

We conflate the relationship with the issue

Many ambitious professionals avoid difficult conversations because they believe that raising the issue threatens the relationship. The opposite is usually true: the relationship is already being affected by the unresolved issue. A well-handled difficult conversation almost always strengthens the relationship — because it demonstrates respect, honesty, and the belief that the relationship can handle directness.

We do not know what to say or how to start

The absence of a clear structure is one of the most significant barriers to having difficult conversations. When we do not know how to open, we default to avoidance. This chapter gives you that structure — a clear, repeatable framework that makes the opening the easiest part of the conversation rather than the most daunting.

We carry the wrong goal into the conversation

The goal of a difficult conversation is not to win, to be right, or to make the other person feel bad about their behaviour. The goal is to resolve the issue in a way that is fair, clear, and preserves the working relationship. When you enter a conversation with the wrong goal, it shapes everything about how you approach it — and it almost always makes the outcome worse.

The CLEAR Framework

CLEAR is a five-step structure for any difficult conversation — whether you are addressing underperformance, raising a grievance, challenging a decision, or having a conversation about your own career. It is not a script. It is a sequence that ensures the conversation moves through the stages it needs to reach a productive outcome, without derailing into either aggression or avoidance.

STEP	ELEMENT	WHAT YOU DO / SAY
C	CONTEXT	Name the situation specifically and factually — no interpretation yet. “I want to talk about what happened in the leadership meeting on Tuesday.”
L	LANDING POINT	State the impact — on you, on the team, on the work. “The effect of that was X.” Factual, not dramatic.
E	EXPLORE	Invite their perspective before you respond to it. “I’d like to understand how you saw that situation.” Then genuinely listen.
A	ALIGN	Find the shared interest. “We both want X” — the common ground that makes moving forward possible. This is not conceding. It is strategic.
R	RESOLVE	Name the specific change you need. “Going forward, what I need is X.” One request. Clear. Actionable. Owned.

The step most people skip — and why it matters most: The Explore step is the one most people rush past. They name the issue and immediately move to their position — what they need, what needs to change, what they think should happen. Inviting the other person’s perspective first — and genuinely listening to it before responding — does several things: it gives you information you may not have had, it signals respect, and it reduces defensiveness. The person who feels heard before being challenged is significantly more likely to engage constructively with what follows.

CLEAR in Practice — Five High-Stakes Scenarios

Below are the five most common difficult conversation scenarios for ambitious professionals, with a specific opening and approach for each. These are not the only conversations you will need to have — but they are the ones that come up most often and carry the most career consequence.

Scenario 1 — Addressing Underperformance in Your Team

Context: A direct report is consistently missing deadlines or producing work that is below the standard required. You have not raised it directly yet.

Opening line: “I want to talk about [specific project or pattern] — not to criticize, but because I think there’s something we need to address together. The deadline was missed on [X], and before that [Y]. I’d like to understand what’s been getting in the way, because I want to find a way to support you that actually helps.”

What to watch for: The temptation is to soften this to the point where the seriousness is lost. Be clear about the pattern — not as an attack, but as a fact. Vague feedback does not give the person what they need to change. The conversation must be specific enough that both parties leave knowing what needs to be different.

Scenario 2 — Pushing Back on a Decision You Believe is Wrong

Context: A decision has been made by someone senior to you that you believe is flawed — and staying silent will make you complicit in an outcome you could have prevented.

Opening line: “I want to raise something about [the decision] — not to be difficult, but because I think there’s a risk we haven’t fully accounted for. I might be missing something, so I’d like to share my concern and understand how you’ve weighed it. Is now a good moment, or can we find fifteen minutes this week?”

What to watch for: The framing here is critical. You are not telling them they are wrong — you are offering a perspective they may not have considered and inviting dialogue. This keeps the conversation collaborative rather than oppositional and gives them a face-saving way to adjust the decision if your concern is valid.

Scenario 3 — Addressing a Colleague Who is Taking Credit for Your Work

Context: A peer is consistently presenting your ideas or work in ways that attribute the contribution to them — either in meetings or in communications to senior leaders.

Opening line: “I’d like to talk about something that’s been bothering me — I want to raise it directly with you because I think we can sort it out. In [specific meeting / situation], the [specific piece of work] was presented in a way that didn’t make my contribution visible. I’d like us to find a way to handle this differently going forward — it matters to me for obvious reasons.”

What to watch for: Be specific about the instance. Avoid generalisations (“you always...”) which invite defensiveness. The goal is to make the pattern visible and to agree a different approach — not to accuse. If they are doing it knowingly, naming it directly tends to stop it. If they are doing it without realising, this conversation is genuinely helpful to them.

Scenario 4 – Telling Your Manager You Are Not Getting What You Need

Context: You are not getting the development, the feedback, the visibility, or the recognition you need – and the absence is affecting your engagement and your career trajectory.

Opening line: *“I’d like to have an honest conversation about where I am and what I need. I want to be transparent because I think it’s important and because I trust that we can talk about it. I’m not getting [specific thing] at the moment, and the effect of that is [specific impact]. I want to understand if there’s something on your side that’s driving that, and I want to tell you what would make a real difference.”*

What to watch for: This conversation requires courage because it involves vulnerability – admitting a need to someone who has power over your career. The framing that makes it work is openness without complaint: you are not criticizing them, you are giving them information they need to support you well. Most good managers respond to this conversation positively.

Scenario 5 – Setting a Boundary That Has Been Crossed

Context: A colleague, stakeholder, or manager is behaving in a way that is affecting your work, your wellbeing, or your professional standing – and it has happened more than once.

Opening line: *“I want to raise something with you directly, because I think it’s important and I’d rather address it with you than let it continue. In [specific situation], [specific behaviour] happened. The impact on me was [specific impact]. I’d like this to be different going forward – specifically, what I need is [one clear ask].”*

What to watch for: Factual. Specific. Forward-looking. The boundary conversation fails most often when it is either too vague (“I just feel like...”) or too charged (“This is completely unacceptable...”). The CLEAR structure keeps it in the productive middle: honest about what happened, clear about the impact, and precise about what needs to change.

The Language of Difficult Conversations

The specific words you use in a difficult conversation carry enormous weight — not just in what they mean, but in how they land. Certain language patterns consistently inflame conversations that could have been productive. Others consistently de-escalate and open dialogue.

LANGUAGE THAT INFLAMES OR WEAKENS	LANGUAGE THAT OPENS AND ADVANCES
"You always..." / "You never..."	"On [specific occasion]..." — specific instances are undeniable. Patterns without evidence invite arguments about the pattern.
"I feel like you don't care about..."	"The impact of [specific behaviour] on me has been [specific impact]." Feelings need evidence to be heard in professional contexts.
"To be honest..." / "Honestly..."	Say what you mean, without the preamble. "Honestly" implies that what came before was less honest.
"I'm not trying to attack you, but..."	Remove the disclaimer and make the statement. Disclaimers make the listener brace for impact — the opposite of what you want.
"This isn't a big deal, but..."	If it were not a big deal, you would not be having the conversation. Say: "I want to raise something important with you."
"Does that make sense?" (after giving feedback)	"What's your reaction to that?" — invites genuine dialogue rather than just comprehension-checking.
"I just wanted to mention..."	"I want to talk about [X]." Own the conversation from the first sentence.
"I don't know if this is relevant, but it's been bothering me..."	"There's something specific I'd like to address with you." Confident entry, no pre-apologising.

When It Gets Hard Mid-Conversation

Even well-prepared difficult conversations can reach moments of real tension — an unexpected emotional reaction, a challenge to your version of events, a defensive response that threatens to take the conversation off course. Here is how to navigate the most common derailment points:

They become defensive or upset

What to do: Pause. Do not rush to fill the silence or soften your position prematurely. Let the emotion settle before continuing.

What to say: *"I can see this is landing hard. I want to make sure I'm being fair to you — so before I say anything else, can you tell me how you see this?"*

They challenge your version of events

What to do: Do not argue about the facts. Acknowledge the difference in perception and redirect to the impact and the forward-looking ask.

What to say: *"I hear that you saw it differently — and I want to understand that properly. What I know is that the effect on my side was [X]. Can we focus on how we handle this differently going forward, regardless of how we got here?"*

They become hostile or dismissive

What to do: Name what is happening without escalating. Do not match their tone. Hold your position calmly.

What to say: *"I notice this conversation has become heated — I'd like to continue it, but I think we'll get a better outcome if we both take a moment. Can we pick this up later today or tomorrow when we're both in a better place to have it properly?"*

You feel yourself getting emotional

What to do: Slow your pace. Breathe. Use a pause deliberately. It is completely acceptable to need a moment.

What to say: *"I want to make sure I'm saying this well — give me a second." Then continue. Acknowledging that you are managing your own response signals self-awareness, not weakness.*

The conversation ends without resolution

What to do: Not every difficult conversation resolves in a single session. Name the lack of resolution explicitly and propose a next step.

What to say: *"I don't think we've got to a resolution yet — and that's okay. I'd like us to continue this. Can we agree to come back to it by [specific time], with both of us having had a chance to reflect?"*

After the Conversation — What Most People Miss

The conversation itself is only part of the work. What happens in the 24–48 hours after a difficult conversation often determines whether it has actually resolved anything — or whether both parties retreat to their positions and the situation quietly continues.

Send a brief, forward-looking follow-up

Within 24 hours — not immediately after the conversation — send a short message that confirms what was discussed and agreed. Keep it factual and non-dramatic. “Following our conversation — just confirming: we agreed [X], and the next step is [Y] by [date]. Let me know if I’ve captured that correctly.” This creates a record, removes ambiguity, and signals that you are treating the conversation as resolved rather than ongoing.

Follow through on what you committed to — first

If you made any commitments in the conversation — to provide information, to change something about your own approach, to follow up on something — do it before you expect anything from the other person. Your follow-through demonstrates good faith and makes it easier for them to do the same.

Do not re-litigate it

Difficult conversations that have been had should be considered closed unless the behaviour or situation genuinely continues. Re-raising a resolved issue — even indirectly, through tone or reference — reopens it without the structure to resolve it again. If the situation does continue, address it directly: “I raised this last week and I’m still seeing [X] — I’d like us to address it again.”

Acknowledge the courage it took — in both directions

Having a difficult conversation well is a leadership act. Receiving one well is too. If the other person engaged with honesty and good faith, a brief, genuine acknowledgement — “I appreciate that we were able to talk about that” — strengthens the relationship and signals that directness is safe with you. This is the behaviour of someone who builds trust through difficult moments rather than avoiding them.

The conversation I will have in the next 7 days — and why I have waited long enough:

CONVERSATION PREPARATION WORKSHEET — CLEAR

Use this before any difficult conversation you need to have. Completing it takes ten minutes and changes the quality of what follows significantly. Do not rely on preparing in your head — the act of writing it forces a precision that internal preparation almost never achieves.

The conversation I am preparing for — who, what, and why now:

C — Context (factual, specific)	<i>Write the situation in one or two sentences — no interpretation, no emotion.</i>
L — Landing Point (the impact)	<i>What effect has this had — on you, on the work, on the team? Keep it factual.</i>
E — Explore (their perspective)	<i>What question will you ask to understand their view before you respond?</i>
A — Align (shared interest)	<i>What do you both want here? What is the common ground you can return to?</i>
R — Resolve (the ask)	<i>What specifically do you need to change going forward? One clear request.</i>

My opening line — word for word, as I will say it:

The outcome I am aiming for — what does a successful conversation look like?

Before you move to Chapter 11: Identify the conversation you have been avoiding and set a date to have it — before you open Chapter 11. Not “this week sometime.” A specific day. A specific person. Preparation done. Chapter 11 is about the written word — emails, updates, and the communication that creates your reputation in writing.

→ **Chapter 11: Written Communication That Commands Respect**

Written Communication That Commands Respect

How your emails, updates, and messages build – or erode – your leadership reputation

Your written communication is working for you or against you right now – and you probably do not know which.

Every email you send, every update you write, every Slack message or brief you put into the world is creating an impression in the mind of the person who receives it. That impression is forming whether you are thinking about it or not. And unlike a meeting contribution – which is spoken once and then forgotten by most people within 48 hours – written communication stays. It can be forwarded, re-read, screenshotted, and referenced months later.

The professionals who understand this treat every significant piece of written communication as a visibility opportunity. Not in a performative sense – but in the sense that they write with the same intentionality they bring to a senior stakeholder conversation. They know that clarity on the page is indistinguishable from clarity of thought. And that a consistently strong written voice builds a reputation that compounds silently across an organisation.

“Your email is not a way of getting a message to someone. It is a sample of your thinking. Every significant piece of written communication you send is a data point in someone’s ongoing assessment of your leadership readiness.”

How Written Communication Builds – or Erodes – Your Reputation

Most ambitious professionals are significantly more intentional about their verbal communication – meetings, presentations, one-to-ones – than they are about their written communication. The assumption is that writing is functional: it gets information from one person to another. That assumption is costing them.

Here is what your written communication is actually communicating, beyond the content of the message:

WHAT YOUR WRITING SIGNALS	HOW THE READER EXPERIENCES IT
The clarity of your thinking	Clear writing signals a clear mind. Muddled, over-complicated writing signals the opposite – even when the underlying thinking is sound.
Your respect for the reader’s time	A concise, well-structured message says “I have done the work so you don’t have to.” A long, unstructured one says the opposite.

WHAT YOUR WRITING SIGNALS	HOW THE READER EXPERIENCES IT
Your confidence in your own position	Hedged, qualified, tentative writing signals uncertainty. Direct, specific writing signals someone who trusts their own thinking.
Your level of preparation	A message that answers the likely follow-up question before it is asked signals a mind that thinks ahead. One that generates three follow-up emails signals the opposite.
Whether you are leadership material	Leaders write like leaders before they have the title. Senior readers notice — consistently and often unconsciously — whether written communication feels like it comes from someone at their level or below it.

The Architecture of a High-Impact Email

The most consistently effective professional emails share the same underlying architecture — regardless of their subject, their audience, or their length. Understanding this architecture lets you apply it deliberately rather than stumbling across it by accident.

ELEMENT	WHAT IT DOES
SUBJECT LINE	Specific, action-oriented, and forward-ready. Not “Quick question” or “Following up” — but “Decision needed: [X] by Thursday” or “Update on [project] — no action required.” The subject line is the first impression. Make it do work.
OPENING LINE	The most important sentence in the email. Lead with the point — the decision needed, the key finding, the action required — not the context that led to it. “I need your approval on [X]” before “As you know, we have been working on...”
CONTEXT (if needed)	Two to three sentences maximum. Only the context the reader needs that they do not already have. Ask yourself: what does this specific person already know? Give them what is missing, not everything you know.
RECOMMENDATION OR ASK	State it directly and once. “My recommendation is X.” “I need Y by Z.” Do not bury it. Do not repeat it. Say it, support it briefly, and move on.
NEXT STEP	Every significant email should close with a clear next step — who does what, by when. “I will follow up by [date].” “Please confirm by [date] so I can proceed.” “No action needed — I’ll update you when this moves forward.” Remove the ambiguity.

The forward-ready test: Before sending any significant email, ask: could my manager forward this to their manager with no additional explanation attached? If the answer is no — because the ask is unclear, the context is missing, or the recommendation is buried — rewrite the opening. The ability to write a “forward-ready” email is one of the most consistently noticed written communication signals at senior levels.

The Same Email – Two Ways

Below is the same professional situation written as most people would write it – and then rewritten using the architecture above. The information is identical. The impression created is entirely different.

The Scenario: You need sign-off from your director on a budget reallocation before end of week, or a project milestone will be delayed.

THE COMMON VERSION	THE HIGH-IMPACT VERSION
<p>Subject: Budget question Hi [Name], Hope you're well. I wanted to follow up on the budget situation for the Henderson project. As you know we've been tracking spend closely and there's been a bit of a shift in what we need across the different workstreams. Basically the issue is that the tech work has come in higher than we budgeted for, but we've underspent on the external consultancy line because we ended up handling more of that internally, which is actually a good thing but it means the numbers don't line up the way we planned. I think we could reallocate from one line to the other but I wanted to check with you first before doing anything. I know it's been a busy week so no rush, but do let me know when you get a chance. Thanks</p>	<p>Subject: Approval needed – Henderson budget reallocation by Friday Hi [Name], I need your approval to reallocate £8,400 from the consultancy line to the technology line on the Henderson project. Without this by Friday, the Phase 2 milestone will slip by at least two weeks. Why this has arisen: We handled more of the consultancy work internally than planned (saving £11,200), but the technology build has run £8,400 over budget due to a scope change agreed in March. Net position: We are £2,800 under the overall project budget. The reallocation tidies the line items without increasing total spend. If you're happy to approve, a brief reply confirming works – I'll action it same day. Thanks,</p>

Both emails contain the same information. The first requires the reader to do the work of identifying the ask, understanding the context, and deciding whether it is urgent. The second does all of that work for them – in fewer words. The first takes approximately 90 seconds to process. The second takes 20. Over weeks and months of correspondence, that difference compounds into a reputation.

THE TEN WRITTEN COMMUNICATION RULES

These are the ten habits that, applied consistently, elevate written communication from functional to exceptional. None of them require more time — most require less. They require more intention.

1 Lead with the point — every time

State your conclusion, recommendation, or ask in the first sentence. Not after the context. Not at the end of the email. In the first sentence. Every significant written communication should be openable, readable only as far as the first sentence, and actionable from that sentence alone.

In practice: Swap: *“Please see below my findings on the Q3 performance review.”* → *“Q3 performance is 12% below target. My recommendation is to adjust the forecast.”*

2 Write for skim-reading

The people you most need to influence are the people with the least time. Structure your emails so that the key information is visible to someone reading at speed: the ask in sentence one, the most important supporting point in the next paragraph, and the next step in the closing line.

In practice: Swap: *Use short paragraphs. One idea per paragraph. The first sentence of each paragraph should be its most important sentence.*

3 Eliminate every word that is not doing work

The most common written communication weakness is length. Most professional emails contain 30–40% of words that could be removed without losing any information. “I just wanted to quickly reach out to touch base on...” can almost always become “I’m following up on...”

In practice: Swap: *“I hope this email finds you well. I wanted to take a moment to touch base regarding the project update you mentioned in your last message...”* → *“Following up on the project update:”*

4 Use specific numbers, not vague impressions

Vague quantifiers — “significant”, “substantial”, “a lot”, “some improvement” — weaken written communication because they force the reader to estimate. Specific numbers do the work for them and signal precision of thought.

In practice: Swap: *“There has been a notable improvement in response times”* → *“Response times have reduced from 4.2 days to 1.8 days over the past six weeks.”*

5 Answer the follow-up question before it is asked

Every significant email will generate one obvious clarifying question. Identify that question before you send — “What do you need from me?” “By when?” “What happens if we don’t act?” — and answer it in the email itself. This single habit can eliminate an entire round of back-and-forth.

In practice: Swap: *Before sending, ask: “What will they reply with if I don’t add one more sentence?” Then add that sentence.*

6 Close with a clear next step

Every significant email should close with explicit clarity about what happens next — who acts, by when, and what they need to communicate back. An email that ends without a clear next step creates ambiguity that generates unnecessary follow-up. “Let me know your thoughts” is not a next step.

In practice: Swap: “I look forward to hearing from you” → “I’ll follow up if I haven’t heard by Thursday — or feel free to call if it’s easier.”

7 Match tone to the stakes — not the habit

Many professionals default to the same tone regardless of the situation — consistently formal, or consistently casual. Strategic written communication matches its tone to the specific context: crisper and more direct with senior leaders, warmer and more relational in team communication, more precise in external correspondence.

In practice: Swap: Before writing, ask: who is this for, what do they need, and what tone serves this specific moment?

8 Never write in emotion — always write in outcome

The emails most likely to damage professional relationships are the ones written when the writer is frustrated, defensive, or reactive. Once sent, an emotionally written email cannot be unsent. The discipline is simple: draft it, don’t send it. Return to it in 30 minutes. Remove the emotion. Focus on the outcome you need. Then send.

In practice: Swap: If you find yourself writing “I’m frustrated that...” or “This is not acceptable...” — save the draft. Return to it. Rewrite it as: “The situation is [X]. What I need is [Y] by [Z].”

9 The subject line is a sentence, not a label

Most professional subject lines are labels: “Update”, “Question”, “Project X”. The subject line of a high-impact email is a sentence that tells the reader the most important thing about the email before they open it — including whether action is required, what kind, and by when.

In practice: Swap: “Feedback” → “Feedback on your proposal — one change needed before Friday.”
“Update” → “Project X on track — no action required, FYI only.”

10 Re-read before you send — every time

One re-read before sending a significant email costs 60 seconds and prevents more career damage than almost any other single habit. Read it as the person receiving it, not the person writing it. Is the ask clear from sentence one? Is the tone right for the relationship and the stakes?

In practice: Swap: Establish a one-sentence check before every important send: “Does this make the path forward as clear as possible for the person receiving it?”

Proactive Updates — The Written Habit That Changes Careers

Of all the written communication habits in this chapter, the one with the highest return on investment for ambitious professionals is the proactive update — the message you send before you are chased for it.

In most organisations, the default communication pattern is reactive: people share information when asked for it, respond when followed up, and report progress when their manager requests an update. This reactive pattern is so universal that it effectively becomes invisible — it is how things work, and nobody thinks much about it.

The proactive communicator stands out immediately — not because the information itself is dramatically different, but because the act of sharing it without being prompted signals a quality of mind that leaders specifically associate with readiness for greater responsibility. It says: “I understand what matters to you, I am thinking ahead of my own tasks, and I do not need to be managed.”

“Being chased for an update is a communication failure. Getting ahead of it is a leadership signal. The difference between those two positions is often a single short email sent 24 hours earlier.”

UPDATE TYPE	STRUCTURE	WHAT IT SIGNALS
Progress update (on track)	Status → milestone reached → next step → timeline.	Proactive, low-noise. Removes anxiety before it builds. The reader trusts you are across it.
Progress update (at risk)	Current status → the risk → your mitigation → what you need (if anything).	Shows you have identified the issue before it becomes a problem and are already solving it. The opposite of a surprise.
Completion update	What is complete → the outcome → what this enables → next step.	Closes the loop without requiring follow-up. Confident and forward-looking.
Keeping someone informed (no action needed)	One sentence of context + “No action needed — just wanted you to have visibility.”	Builds trust through transparency. The reader appreciates being kept informed without being asked to do anything.
Flagging a risk early	The risk → its potential impact → your proposed mitigation → the decision or input you need.	Demonstrates the kind of forward-thinking, risk-aware communication that is specifically associated with senior leadership.

The one-sentence update: Not every update needs structure and substance. Sometimes the most powerful written communication is a single sentence, sent before you are asked: “Just keeping you across [X] — on track for Friday, nothing needed from you.” This type of message takes fifteen seconds to write and removes the anxiety that generates unnecessary check-in emails. Do it consistently with your Tier 1 relationships and watch the dynamic shift within a month.

Your Written Communication Audit

Before you apply the rules in this chapter, it helps to have an honest picture of where your written communication currently stands. Work through the questions below as specifically as you can – general answers produce general improvement. Specific answers produce real change.

The last important email I sent – did it lead with the point? What was the actual opening line?

The feedback I have received (or noticed myself) about my written communication – what patterns come up?

The written communication habit I most need to change – and one specific email this week where I will apply it:

Three people I will start sending proactive updates to – and the cadence I will commit to:

THE PRE-SEND CHECKLIST

Use this before sending any significant written communication. It takes 60 seconds and catches the most common written communication errors before they reach the reader.

✓ BEFORE YOU SEND – CHECK THIS

- Does the opening line state the key point, ask, or recommendation?
- Is the subject line a sentence that tells the reader what they need to know before opening?
- Have I answered the most likely follow-up question already?
- Is there a clear next step – who does what, by when?
- Have I removed any words or sentences that are not doing work?
- Does the tone match the stakes and the relationship?
- Am I writing in outcome – not emotion or frustration?
- Could my manager forward this two levels up without adding explanation?
- Have I re-read it as the recipient, not the sender?

Completing Part Three: Influence You have now worked through the four chapters of Part Three – the psychology of influence, strategic storytelling, navigating difficult conversations, and the written communication habits that build your leadership reputation. These are the skills that move you from being visible to being genuinely influential – from someone people notice to someone people actively advocate for. Part Four is Leadership Communication – how to lead people through uncertainty, how to give feedback that changes behaviour, and how to build the kind of communication culture that makes you the person others want to work for and with.

PART FOUR

LEADERSHIP

Communicating like the leader you are becoming.

The first three parts of this guide were about you — your motivators, your communication identity, your confidence, your visibility, your influence. Part Four is about the people around you. It is about how you communicate as a leader: through uncertainty, through feedback, and through the culture you build in your team. Leadership communication is qualitatively different from professional communication — not because the skills are different, but because the stakes are. When you lead, your words shape how people feel about their work, how much they trust the direction they are being asked to move in, and how safe they feel telling you the truth.

Chapters 12 – 13

Leading Through Uncertainty

What your team most needs from you when nobody knows what happens next

Uncertainty is the operating environment of leadership. Not an occasional interruption to normal conditions – the normal condition itself. Restructures, strategy pivots, market shifts, leadership changes, unclear direction from above: these are not exceptional events. They are the permanent texture of organisational life for anyone in or approaching a leadership role.

The question is never whether uncertainty will arrive. It is how you communicate when it does. Because in uncertainty, your team is not just watching what you say – they are reading every signal: your tone, your composure, your willingness to be honest about what you do not know, your ability to give them a direction to move in even when you cannot give them a destination.

This chapter gives you the specific communication strategies for leading through uncertainty in a way that builds trust rather than eroding it – and that positions you as the kind of leader people want to follow when conditions are difficult.

“Your team does not need you to have all the answers. They need you to be honest about what you know, clear about what you do not, and confident enough in your direction to give them something to move toward. That is what leadership communication looks like when the situation is genuinely hard.”

What Teams Actually Need in Uncertainty

Before looking at how to communicate in uncertainty, it helps to understand what teams are actually looking for from their leader in these moments – because it is frequently different from what leaders assume they need.

Most leaders, when faced with uncertainty, default to one of two responses: they either project false confidence – communicating certainty they do not have in order to avoid alarming the team – or they go silent, reasoning that it is better to say nothing than to communicate incomplete information. Both responses are well-intentioned. Both consistently backfire.

What the research on uncertainty consistently shows: Teams do not need certainty from their leaders – they need honest information, clear direction, and the sense that their leader is capable of navigating the situation. False confidence erodes trust the moment reality contradicts it. Silence generates anxiety, speculation, and rumour – which are almost always worse than the actual situation. What builds trust in uncertainty is honest, regular, composed communication that acknowledges what is not known while maintaining clarity about what is.

Honesty about the situation

Not false reassurance. Not catastrophizing. An accurate picture of what is happening, what it means, and what is being done about it. People can handle difficult information far better than they can handle being kept in the dark or being patronized with a version of events that clearly does not match reality.

Clarity about what they should do

Even when the larger direction is unclear, people need to know what to focus on right now. “Here is what I need from each of you over the next two weeks” is worth more than a detailed explanation of the strategic context. Give them something concrete to move toward.

Regular, predictable communication

In uncertainty, the absence of communication is interpreted as bad news. Establish a rhythm — a weekly update, a brief check-in — so your team knows when to expect information rather than checking anxiously for it. Predictability is itself a form of stability.

Permission to be honest with you

If your team is afraid to tell you bad news or share concerns during a period of uncertainty, you will be making decisions on incomplete information. Explicitly invite honest feedback: “I want to know what concerns you have — not so I can fix everything, but because I need to know what is actually going on.” Then respond to what you hear without punishing the messenger.

Your composure — not your performance

Teams read their leader’s emotional state and calibrate their own response to it. A leader who is visibly anxious generates anxiety in the team. A leader who is composed — not because they are suppressing their feelings, but because they have genuinely prepared themselves for difficulty — generates steadiness. You do not need to perform confidence. You need to be genuinely calm enough to be helpful.

The uncertainty my team is currently navigating — and which of the five needs above am I most failing to meet?

The Four Leadership Communication Modes

Different stages and types of uncertainty require different communication modes. The leader who communicates the same way in a slow-moving strategic review as they do in an acute crisis is not adapting their leadership to what the situation needs. Here is how to calibrate.

SITUATION	COMMUNICATION MODE	WHAT THE TEAM NEEDS TO HEAR
Slow-moving uncertainty (strategic shifts, org changes)	Steady and transparent	"Here is what I know. Here is what I do not know yet. Here is what I am doing to get clarity. Here is what I need from you in the meantime."
Acute uncertainty (sudden change, crisis, unexpected news)	Calm and containing	"Here is what we know right now. Here is what we are doing immediately. I will update you again by [specific time] as we learn more."
Prolonged ambiguity (waiting for a decision that keeps not coming)	Grounding and directive	"We still do not have a decision on [X]. While we wait, here is what I need us to focus on. Here is what we can control. I will tell you the moment I know more."
Post-uncertainty (after a decision has been made)	Forward-moving and honest	"Here is the decision. Here is my honest read on what it means for us. Here is what changes, and here is what does not. Here is what I need from each of you now."

What is consistent across all four modes: Honesty about what is known and unknown, clarity about the immediate next step, and a specific timeline for the next communication. These three elements are the minimum viable communication package in any uncertainty scenario.

Five High-Stakes Scenarios — What to Say and How

Below are the five most common uncertainty scenarios for leaders, with specific language for each. These are not scripts — they are frameworks. Adapt them to your voice, your context, and your team.

Scenario 1 — Your team asks a question you cannot answer

Common instinct: Make something up, give a vague non-answer, or deflect.

The cost: Both options — false confidence and evasion — damage trust. The team stops asking you questions because they no longer expect honest answers.

Strategic approach: Be honest about what you do not know, and be specific about when you will have an answer. Not-knowing is acceptable. Not-telling is not.

What to say: *“I do not have a clear answer on that right now — and I am not going to guess. What I can tell you is that I will have a better picture by [specific time] and I will come back to you then. In the meantime, here is what I do know: [X].”*

Scenario 2 — There is bad news you need to communicate

Common instinct: Delay the conversation until you have a solution, soften it to the point where the reality is unclear, or deliver it and immediately move on without space for reaction.

The cost: Delayed bad news compounds anxiety. Over-softened bad news confuses and erodes trust when reality arrives. Moving on without space for reaction leaves the team without the psychological processing time they need.

Strategic approach: Deliver the news clearly, give the essential context, and then make space. Do not rush past the reaction to get to solutions. The team needs a moment to absorb before they can think forward.

What to say: *“I need to share something difficult with you — and I want to give you an honest picture. [Deliver the news plainly, in one to two sentences.] I know this is not easy to hear. I want to give you a moment to take that in, and then I want to talk about what it means for us and what we do next.”*

Scenario 3 — The direction from above is unclear or contradictory

Common instinct: Pass the confusion down intact, pretend you have clarity you do not have, or complain about leadership to the team.

The cost: Passing confusion down demoralises the team and removes the stability a leader is supposed to provide. Pretending clarity you do not have backfires when reality diverges. Criticising senior leadership to your team destroys trust at multiple levels simultaneously.

Strategic approach: Translate what you do know into clear guidance for your team. You do not need complete clarity to give direction — you need enough clarity to give them something concrete to move toward.

What to say: *“I want to be honest with you — the direction from above is not as clear as I would like it to be right now. What I can give you is this: [clear, specific guidance]. I am working to get more clarity on [X] and I will update you by [specific time] when I have it.”*

Scenario 4 — Someone in the team is visibly anxious and it is spreading

Common instinct: Ignore it, address it privately but minimally, or overcorrect with false reassurance that makes the conversation feel scripted.

The cost: Visible anxiety that goes unaddressed becomes contagious. False reassurance accelerates it — because teams are better at reading inauthenticity than most leaders realise.

Strategic approach: Acknowledge the anxiety directly and without judgment. Give honest information. Then give the person something to focus on. Anxiety thrives in a vacuum of direction.

What to say: *"I want to check in — I can see this situation is weighing on people, and I understand why. I am not going to tell you not to worry, because some of your concern is completely understandable. What I can tell you is [honest update]. And what I need from you right now is [specific ask]."*

Scenario 5 — A decision has been made that you disagree with but must implement

Common instinct: Implement it while signalling your personal disagreement to the team, pretend to be enthusiastic in a way that is clearly inauthentic, or delay implementation while you process your own response.

The cost: Signalling personal disagreement undermines the direction and puts your team in the impossible position of following a direction their leader has told them is wrong. Forced enthusiasm reads immediately as false and destroys credibility.

Strategic approach: The path forward is honest alignment — acknowledging the difficulty of the decision while committing clearly to moving forward. You do not have to pretend to agree. You have to lead.

What to say: *"A decision has been made on [X]. I want to be honest with you — this was not the outcome I would have chosen, and I know some of you will feel the same way. But the decision has been made, and my job now — and yours — is to make the best of it. Here is how I think we do that: [specific direction]."*

The Language of Leadership in Uncertainty

The specific words you use when communicating through uncertainty carry more weight than in any other leadership context – because people who are anxious are paying closer attention to language, reading between the lines, and interpreting ambiguity as confirmation of their worst fears.

LEADERSHIP LANGUAGE THAT BACKFIRES	LEADERSHIP LANGUAGE THAT BUILDS TRUST
"Everything is fine – there is nothing to worry about."	"Here is what I know. Here is what I do not know. Here is what I am doing to find out."
"I cannot share anything at this stage."	"There are things I am not yet in a position to share – I will tell you as soon as I can. What I can tell you right now is [X]."
"I am sure it will all work out."	"I do not know exactly how this resolves – but I know we are in a good position to navigate it, and here is why:"
"We just need to trust the process."	"The process is [X]. Here is what it means for us practically, and here is what I need from the team while it plays out."
"I cannot tell you much, but try not to worry."	"I know the silence is difficult. I am working on getting clarity and I will update you by [specific time]."
"This will not affect you."	"Here is what this means for our team specifically – and here is what it does not change."
"I know exactly what we are going to do."	"My current thinking is [X] – I want to test that with you before we commit. What am I missing?"

Six Principles of Leading Communicatively Through Uncertainty

These principles sit beneath all of the specific strategies and scripts in this chapter. They are the orientations that make uncertainty communication work – not occasionally, when you remember to apply them, but consistently, as the default mode of your leadership.

1 Say what you know, say what you do not know, say what you are doing

This three-part structure – known, unknown, doing – is the minimum viable communication in any uncertain situation. It gives the team the honest picture, removes the anxiety of speculation, and demonstrates that you are not passive in the face of difficulty. It takes thirty seconds and it changes the energy in a room.

In practice: "Here is where we are: [known]. Here is what I do not have clarity on yet: [unknown]. Here is what I am doing to address that: [action]."

2 Give a specific time for the next update — and keep it

One of the most powerful uncertainty management tools available is a committed communication cadence. “I will update you by Thursday” does two things: it gives the team a specific time to expect information (which removes the need to check anxiously before then), and it creates an accountability structure for you to have the next update ready. Breaking this commitment — even once — damages the trust that the commitment was building.

In practice: *End every significant uncertainty communication with a specific time: “I will have more information by [day]. If anything changes before then, I will tell you immediately.”*

3 Separate the facts from your interpretation — and label both

In uncertainty, people need to know which parts of your communication are fact and which are your read on the situation. Conflating the two — stating your interpretation as if it were established fact — creates confusion and erodes trust when your interpretation turns out to be incomplete. Labelling your read as your read actually increases trust, because it signals intellectual honesty.

In practice: *“What I know for certain is [X]. My read on what this means is [Y] — though I want to be clear that is my interpretation, not confirmed information.”*

4 Stay curious rather than defensive when challenged

When your team challenges your direction or decisions under uncertainty, the defensive response — justifying, explaining, restating your position — tends to accelerate anxiety rather than reduce it. The curious response — “Tell me more about the concern” — does the opposite. It signals that you are not threatened by the challenge, that you are still gathering information, and that the team’s perspective genuinely shapes your thinking.

In practice: *When challenged in an uncertainty conversation: “That is an important concern — help me understand exactly what you are worried about, because I want to make sure I have accounted for it.”*

5 Lead with direction, not with process

When the team is anxious, the temptation is to explain everything — the process being followed, the governance structure, the timeline of decisions. Most of this is not what the team needs. What the team needs is to know what to do next. Lead with the direction. Make the process available, but do not make it the main event.

In practice: *“Here is what I need us to focus on right now: [specific direction]. I am happy to walk through the broader process and timeline — but I want to make sure we have the most important thing clear first.”*

6 Manage your own state before you manage the room

You cannot communicate composure you do not have. If you walk into an uncertainty communication carrying your own unprocessed anxiety about the situation, it will leak — in your pace, in your body language, in your choice of words. Before significant uncertainty communications, take time to process your own reaction to the situation: acknowledge it privately, get clear on what you do and do not know, and identify the one or two things you can commit to doing. Then communicate from that settled place.

In practice: *Before any significant uncertainty communication: spend five minutes alone. Write down what you know, what you do not know, and what you are doing. Then communicate those three things — in that settled state.*

The Honest Leadership Conversation – A Template

When you need to address uncertainty directly with your team – in a meeting, a one-to-one, or a written update – the following structure ensures you cover the elements that matter most. It is not a script, but it is a complete framework that you can work through in any order, adapting to the specific situation.

ELEMENT	WHAT TO COVER
Acknowledge the situation honestly	Name it. Do not minimise or dramatize. “We are in a period of uncertainty about [X] and I want to give you an honest picture of where things stand.”
Share what you know	The facts, as clearly and specifically as you can. Date-specific, decision-specific, impact-specific. One paragraph maximum.
Name what you do not know	Be explicit about the gaps. “What I do not have clarity on yet is [X]. I expect to know more by [time].” This removes the anxiety of speculation.
Give them something to do	“In the meantime, what I need from the team is [specific, concrete focus]. This matters because [one reason directly relevant to them].”
Create space for their response	“I want to know what questions or concerns you have – not because I will necessarily have all the answers, but because I want to know what is on your mind.” Then genuinely listen.
Commit to the next update	“I will update you again by [specific day and time]. If anything significant changes before then, I will tell you immediately.”

An uncertainty situation I am currently navigating – drafted through the six-element template above:

Before you move to Chapter 13: The next time your team is facing uncertainty, apply the three-part structure: say what you know, say what you do not know, say what you are doing. That one habit, applied consistently, will change how your team experiences you as a leader faster than almost anything else in this chapter. Chapter 13 addresses the other half of leadership communication – feedback that actually changes behaviour rather than just documenting a conversation.

→ **Chapter 13: Feedback That Changes Behaviour**

Feedback That Changes Behaviour

How to give – and receive – feedback in a way that actually makes a difference

Most feedback does not change behaviour. It is acknowledged, nodded at, filed mentally under “noted”, and then nothing changes. The person giving it wonders why they bothered. The person receiving it feels assessed rather than helped. And the situation that prompted the feedback continues.

This is not because feedback is inherently ineffective. It is because most feedback is delivered in a way that triggers defensiveness rather than openness, that addresses character rather than behaviour, and that ends without a clear commitment to change. The result is a conversation that feels productive in the moment and produces nothing measurable afterward.

Feedback that actually changes behaviour is a specific communication skill – and like every skill in this guide, it is entirely learnable. This chapter gives you the framework, the language, and the specific practices to make your feedback conversations one of the most powerful leadership tools you have.

“Feedback is not a conversation about the past. It is a communication about the future – about what needs to be different, why it matters, and what support is available to make the change. The moment you frame it that way, everything about how you deliver it changes.”

Why Most Feedback Fails to Change Behaviour

Before looking at what effective feedback looks like, it is worth understanding specifically why most feedback fails – because many of the failure modes are deeply ingrained habits that feel entirely normal until you see them clearly.

FEEDBACK FAILURE MODE	WHY IT FAILS — AND THE FIX
It is vague	“You need to communicate better” tells the person nothing actionable. Better at what, specifically? In which situations? Vague feedback generates vague change – which is to say, no change. Every piece of feedback must be anchored to a specific, observable behaviour.
It addresses character, not behaviour	“You are not a team player” is a character judgment. “In the last two project meetings you did not share your progress update with the group” is a behaviour observation. Character judgments trigger identity threat – which triggers maximum defensiveness. Behaviour observations are discussable and changeable.
It is buried in a compliment sandwich	The positive-negative-positive structure is so widely understood as a feedback delivery technique that

FEEDBACK FAILURE MODE	WHY IT FAILS — AND THE FIX
	<p>most people now decode it instantly — and mentally fast-forward to the “but.” The compliments feel hollow because they are. Deliver genuine positive feedback separately. Deliver developmental feedback directly, without the packaging.</p>
<p>It is delivered too late</p>	<p>Feedback given three weeks after the behaviour in question has lost its specificity and its impact. The connection between the behaviour and its consequences has weakened. Feedback is most effective when it is as close to the behaviour as possible — same day where feasible, same week at the latest for significant issues.</p>
<p>It ends without a commitment</p>	<p>Most feedback conversations end with “does that make sense?” and a nod. Nothing specific has been agreed about what changes, by when, or how you will know it has changed. Every feedback conversation should end with: “What specifically will you do differently? And when will we check in on that?”</p>
<p>It is not followed up</p>	<p>Even when a feedback conversation goes well and a commitment is made, most leaders do not follow up. Follow-up sends the signal that the commitment matters and that you are invested in the person’s development. Its absence sends the opposite signal.</p>

The feedback failure mode I most recognise in my own delivery — and a recent example where it played out.

The SBI Framework – Situation, Behaviour, Impact

SBI is the most consistently effective feedback structure available – not because it is complex, but because it is precise. It keeps feedback anchored to observable reality, free from character judgment, and connected to consequences the person can care about.

PART	ELEMENT	WHAT IT DOES AND HOW TO USE IT
S	SITUATION	Anchor the feedback to a specific, observable situation. Not “you often...” or “I’ve noticed a pattern of...” – but “In the client meeting on Tuesday” or “On the last three project updates.” Specificity removes the defensiveness that generalisations trigger.
B	BEHAVIOUR	Describe what you observed – the specific, visible behaviour. Not your interpretation of what it meant, not the person’s character or attitude – what you could see or hear. “You interrupted the client twice before they finished their point” not “you were dismissive.”
I	IMPACT	Name the effect of that behaviour – on the work, the team, the client, or the outcome. This is what makes the feedback matter: it connects the specific behaviour to a consequence the person can care about. “The client became visibly guarded for the rest of the meeting” is impact. “That was unprofessional” is judgment.

The most important discipline in SBI: The Behaviour element must describe what you could see or hear – not your interpretation of what it meant. “You seemed disengaged” is not a behaviour – it is an interpretation. “You looked at your phone three times during the client’s presentation” is a behaviour. The distinction matters enormously because your interpretation is debatable; what you observed is not. Starting from observable fact removes the most common source of feedback derailment.

SBI in Practice — Developmental and Positive Feedback

SBI works for both developmental feedback and positive feedback — and most leaders underutilise it for the second. Specific, SBI-structured positive feedback is dramatically more powerful than generic praise, and it reinforces exactly the behaviour you want to see more of.

DEVELOPMENTAL FEEDBACK EXAMPLE

Scenario: A team member is cutting across colleagues in team meetings

S — Situation:	In this morning's planning meeting,
B — Behaviour:	you interrupted Alex twice before they had finished making their point.
I — Impact:	Alex stopped contributing for the rest of the meeting, and we may have missed something important from their perspective. It also sent a signal to the wider team about whose input matters in this room.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK EXAMPLE

Scenario: A team member handled a difficult client conversation exceptionally well

S — Situation:	In the Henderson call this afternoon,
B — Behaviour:	when the client raised the delay issue, you acknowledged it directly, took ownership without defensiveness, and immediately offered a concrete resolution timeline.
I — Impact:	The client's tone shifted visibly — they ended the call sounding satisfied rather than frustrated. That is the kind of client handling that builds long-term relationships, and it directly strengthened our position going into the renewal conversation.

Why specific positive feedback matters for leadership: Generic praise — “great job today”, “well done on that call” — is appreciated but quickly forgotten and does not reinforce specific behaviour. SBI-structured positive feedback does three things: it tells the person exactly what they did that was effective (which means they can repeat it intentionally), it demonstrates that you are genuinely paying attention to their work, and it builds the psychological safety that makes developmental feedback land better when you need to deliver it.

Five Common Feedback Scenarios — Structured

The five scenarios below cover the most common situations where ambitious leaders either avoid feedback or deliver it in ways that do not produce change. Each one uses SBI as the delivery structure and includes a follow-up move.

Scenario 1 — Consistent missed deadlines

Context: A team member has missed agreed deadlines on three separate occasions in the past month. You have not addressed it directly yet.

SBI delivery: *“In the past month — on the design brief, the client report, and the quarterly review — each of the agreed deadlines was missed by two to four days without advance notice. The impact has been that the downstream work has had to be reshuffled each time, and two of those delays became visible to the client.”*

Follow-up: *“I want to understand what has been getting in the way — and then I want us to agree a specific approach that works for both of us. What I need going forward is either delivery by the agreed date, or a flag to me 48 hours in advance if something is at risk. Which of those feels achievable for you?”*

Scenario 2 — Communication that is undermining team trust

Context: You have observed a team member venting about leadership decisions to peers in a way that is affecting team morale.

SBI delivery: *“In two separate conversations this week — the one in the kitchen on Tuesday and the team lunch on Thursday — I heard you expressing frustration about the restructure decision in a way that suggested the leadership team had not thought it through. The impact is that two people came to me afterward feeling unsettled, and one of them told me they’d started to doubt whether the direction we’re heading in is sound.”*

Follow-up: *“I want to be clear that I want to hear your concerns — directly, with me, where we can actually do something about them. What I need you to stop doing is sharing frustrations about leadership decisions with the team before we have had a chance to talk them through together. Can we set up a regular slot where you bring those concerns to me first?”*

Scenario 3 — Brilliant work that is not being communicated effectively

Context: A high-performing team member is doing excellent work but communicating it in a way that makes it invisible to the people who need to see it.

SBI delivery: *“In your last three updates to the leadership team — the Q2 summary, the client risk review, and yesterday’s briefing — each one contained genuinely strong analysis, but the key finding was buried in paragraph three or four. The impact is that in two of those three presentations, the most important insight was not actioned, and I think it is because it did not land clearly enough for the room to prioritise it.”*

Follow-up: *“This is not about the quality of your thinking — that is strong. This is about how you lead with it. The shift I am asking you to make is to put your conclusion in the first sentence, every time. The rest of the analysis can follow — but the point needs to come first. Can you try that in your next update and we will debrief afterward?”*

Scenario 4 — Managing up poorly in ways that are affecting their reputation

Context: A strong team member is consistently underprepared or overly informal in senior stakeholder interactions, and it is affecting how they are perceived.

SBI delivery: *“In the two interactions you have had with the VP this month — the budget review and the project update call — you went in without a clear recommendation prepared. In both cases she had to do the*

work of drawing out your view rather than receiving it clearly. The impact is that I have heard indirect feedback that she is uncertain about your readiness for the next level."

Follow-up: *"This is entirely fixable — and fixing it matters a lot for where you want to go. Before any senior interaction, I want you to write down in one sentence: what is my recommendation? Then lead with it. Let's practise that before your next interaction with her — I will be a stand-in VP for ten minutes. When is your next meeting with her?"*

Scenario 5 — Feedback on feedback: when someone reacts poorly to being developed

Context: A team member becomes defensive or dismissive when they receive developmental feedback, which is preventing their development.

SBI delivery: *"In our last two feedback conversations — after the client presentation in March and after the team session last week — when I raised the development points, the conversation closed down quite quickly. Each time, you either explained why the situation was exceptional, or moved to reassurance that you would sort it, without us getting to the substance of what I was raising. The impact is that I'm finding it harder to give you the development input you need, because the conversations are not productive enough to make a difference."*

Follow-up: *"I want to be direct about this because I think it matters for you. The ability to receive and work with developmental feedback is one of the key things that determines how far someone progresses. I need our feedback conversations to be different — I need you to stay in them long enough for us to get somewhere useful. What would make that easier for you?"*

Receiving Feedback – The Other Half of the Skill

How you receive feedback is as important to your career as how you give it – and for ambitious professionals, it is often the more difficult skill. The natural response to feedback that challenges your self-image is defensive: to explain, to justify, to minimise, to find the error in the other person’s observation.

The strategic response is the opposite – and it is one of the most powerful credibility signals available to you. The person who receives developmental feedback with genuine openness, who asks good questions to understand it fully, and who acts on it visibly and promptly, is demonstrating exactly the kind of self-awareness and growth orientation that senior leaders associate with advancement.

“How you receive feedback tells people as much about your leadership as how you give it. The leader who says “thank you, help me understand that more” and then acts on it within a week is the leader people trust with honest information. That trust is worth more than almost any other professional asset.”

INSTINCTIVE RESPONSE	STRATEGIC RESPONSE
Immediately explain why the situation was exceptional	Pause. Take a breath. Say: “Thank you for raising that. Can you give me a specific example so I can understand it better?” Even if you disagree, understanding the other person’s experience fully before responding is always the right move.
Agree quickly to make it stop, without genuinely processing the feedback	Stay in the conversation. “What specifically would you need to see me doing differently? Can we be concrete about that?”
Go quiet and visibly withdrawn	Respond with a question or acknowledgement that keeps the conversation open: “That’s useful – it’s not how I experienced it, but I want to understand your perspective.”
Seek validation from others after the fact	Finding colleagues who agree with your interpretation of events is not processing feedback – it is avoiding it. If the feedback stings, that is data. Sit with it for 24 hours before deciding what to do with it.
Say “I appreciate the feedback” and do nothing	The real test of how you received feedback is visible in your behaviour over the following two to three weeks. Follow up with the person who gave it: “I’ve been thinking about what you raised – here is what I’ve been doing differently. I would appreciate hearing whether you have noticed a change.”

Asking for feedback – the question that changes your career: “What is the one thing I could do differently that would make the biggest difference to how I am perceived at the next level?” This

question, asked to the right person at the right moment, will give you more actionable career development information than a year of annual reviews. Most people never ask it directly. The ones who do get specific, honest answers — and the act of asking signals exactly the kind of self-awareness that makes the feedback worth giving.

Building a Feedback Culture in Your Team

Individual feedback skills matter. But the most influential leaders go further — they build a team culture where honest, regular, two-directional feedback is the norm rather than the exception. This is one of the clearest differentiators between managers and leaders: managers give feedback when performance requires it. Leaders build an environment where feedback flows continuously, in all directions, and makes everyone better.

Model it first — receive before you give

If you want your team to receive feedback well, they need to see you receive it well. Explicitly ask your team for feedback on your own leadership — in team meetings, in one-to-ones, in the conversations where it is most likely to be honest. “What is one thing I could do differently as your leader that would make your work better or easier?” Then respond to what you hear with genuine openness and visible action.

Make feedback frequent and small

Annual or quarterly feedback cycles are too infrequent to change behaviour — too much has happened, the specific examples are hazy, and the stakes of the conversation feel disproportionate to the individual observation. A culture of regular, small feedback moments — brief, specific, SBI-structured observations delivered in the moment — is far more effective and far less threatening than the formal review.

Reward the people who bring you bad news

In most teams, the default is to bring good news up and manage bad news quietly. This happens because people have learned — through experience or through observing others — that bad news is not received well. If you want to know what is actually going on in your team, you need to make bringing you difficult information genuinely safe. Respond to bad news with curiosity, not frustration. Thank people specifically for telling you things you needed to hear.

Separate feedback from performance management

When team members associate feedback conversations with consequences — ratings, pay decisions, formal process — they become defensive by default. The most productive feedback culture separates developmental conversations from evaluative ones. Not because the evaluation does not exist, but because day-to-day feedback is framed as a growth tool, not an assessment instrument.

A feedback conversation I have been avoiding — and the SBI structure I will use to have it this week:

The question I will ask my manager or a trusted senior colleague to get honest developmental feedback:

SBI PRACTICE WORKSHEET

Use this to prepare any feedback conversation — developmental or positive. The act of writing it before the conversation forces the precision that verbal preparation almost never achieves.

S — SITUATION (specific, anchored)	<i>Name the exact meeting, date, project, or interaction.</i>
B — BEHAVIOUR (observable, not interpreted)	<i>What could you see or hear? No interpretations, no character judgments.</i>
I — IMPACT (on the work, team, or outcome)	<i>What effect did that behaviour have? Factual, specific.</i>
THE ASK (specific and factual)	<i>What specifically needs to change? One clear, concrete, forward-looking request.</i>
THE COMMITMENT (what you will agree together)	<i>What will they do differently? By when? How will you both know?</i>

Before you move to Chapter 14: Before you read further, identify one feedback conversation you have been avoiding and one piece of positive feedback you have not given that you should have. Use the SBI worksheet to prepare both. The feedback you give this week — developmental or positive — will do more to establish your leadership reputation than anything you read. Chapter 14 brings the whole guide together: how to build and sustain the communication habits that make everything in this guide work not just this week, but permanently.

→ **Chapter 14: Building Your Communication System**

Building Your Communication System

How to make the habits in this guide permanent – not just intentions

You have read thirteen chapters. You have encountered frameworks, language swaps, worksheets, and principles. You have identified habits you want to build and conversations you need to have. And if your experience is like most people who work through a guide like this, there is a version of you that is genuinely energised by what you have read – and a version that is quietly wondering whether any of it will actually stick.

That question is worth taking seriously. Because reading about communication – even reading carefully, even completing the worksheets – does not change communication behaviour. What changes communication behaviour is repetition in real situations, feedback on what is landing and what is not, and a system that keeps the habits in your attention long enough for them to become automatic.

This final chapter is about building that system. Not a complicated one – a simple, realistic structure that takes the most valuable habits from across this guide and gives them a home in your actual working week.

“One habit applied consistently for 90 days will do more for your career than fourteen chapters read and not applied. The question at the end of this guide is not “what did I learn?” It is “what will I do differently, starting tomorrow, in the situation I am already walking into?””

Why Habits Beat Intentions – Every Time

Intentions are fragile. They survive until the first high-pressure moment – the meeting where you default to the old pattern because you are too focused on the content to think about the communication. The leadership conversation where you fall back into softening mode because the stakes feel too high to be direct. The email you send in reactive mode at 6pm on a Friday because you have run out of capacity to think about tone.

Habits do not require capacity. That is the point. A communication habit that is genuinely embedded does not demand a conscious decision every time – it runs as a default. The professional who leads with the point in every meeting is not making a choice each time. They are executing a pattern that has become automatic through deliberate repetition.

The implication is that the goal of working through this guide is not to understand the frameworks. It is to practise specific behaviours often enough, in enough varied situations, that they replace your current defaults. That process takes between 60 and 90 days of consistent application per habit – which is why this chapter focuses on choosing well rather than choosing many.

The single most important instruction in this guide: Do not try to change everything at once. The professionals who make the fastest and most durable communication improvements are the ones who pick one or two habits, apply them with total consistency for 30 days, and then add more. The professionals who try to apply everything simultaneously apply nothing consistently – and revert to their defaults within a week. Choose your priority. Go deep before you go wide.

The Whole Guide — In One Place

Before choosing your priority habits, here is the complete architecture of the guide — each part, its core insight, and the one habit that would most quickly move the needle in each area. Use this as a reference point when you return to the guide, and as a map for identifying where your biggest current opportunity sits.

PART	THE CORE HABIT
PART ONE — Foundation (Ch 1–3) Know what drives you and lead from there	Before any significant communication, ask — am I communicating in a way that serves this situation, or in a way that serves my comfort? Self-awareness is the foundation of every other habit in this guide.
PART TWO — Visibility (Ch 4–7) Be seen for the right things by the right people	Speak in the first ten minutes of every meeting. Send one proactive update to a Tier 1 relationship every two weeks. Enter every room with three seconds of settled pause before moving. Each of these alone changes perception within a month.
PART THREE — Influence (Ch 8–11) Make your ideas land, stick, and get actioned	Lead with the point in every written and verbal communication. One sentence — the conclusion, the recommendation, the ask — before any context. Apply this without exception for 30 days and watch how differently your communication lands.
PART FOUR — Leadership (Ch 12–13) Communicate like the leader you are becoming	Give one piece of specific, SBI-structured feedback every week — positive or developmental. And the next time your team faces uncertainty, use the three-part structure: here is what I know, here is what I do not know, here is what I am doing. These two habits alone define leadership communication.

The Core Communication Habit Stack

Across the fourteen chapters of this guide, the following habits show up most consistently as the ones that produce the fastest and most durable career impact. These are your building blocks – the handful of behaviours that, practised daily, compound into a fundamentally different professional reputation within 90 days.

COMMUNICATION HABIT	WHEN TO APPLY IT	HOW YOU KNOW IT'S WORKING
1 Lead with the point	Every email, update, and verbal contribution	People stop asking you to “get to the point.” Your recommendations get actioned faster. Senior leaders reference your ideas back to you.
2 Speak in the first 10 minutes	Every meeting where your visibility matters	You stop leaving meetings wishing you had said something. People begin to expect and seek your contribution early.
3 Proactive update before being chased	Every project or workstream with a Tier 1 relationship	You stop receiving “any update on X?” emails. Your manager tells others you are on top of things without being asked.
4 SBI feedback – positive and developmental	Weekly – one piece minimum	Your team starts developing faster. People come to you for honest input because they trust how you deliver it.
5 The deliberate pause before responding	Any high-stakes verbal interaction	People notice you seem less reactive. Your responses carry more weight because they feel considered.
6 Say what you know / don't know / are doing	Any moment of team uncertainty	Your team's anxiety visibly reduces when you communicate. Trust in your leadership increases under pressure.
7 Prepare one story per month	Before any senior stakeholder interaction	You stop leaving important conversations wishing you had a better example. Your contributions become more memorable and more credited.
8 One Tier 1 relationship touchpoint every 2–3 weeks	Ongoing – in your calendar	The people who matter most to your advancement begin to know your work at a level that makes advocacy natural.

Your 90-Day Communication Development Plan

Ninety days is the right unit of time for building a new communication habit to the point where it is genuinely automatic. Three cycles of 30 days — awareness, practice, integration — each building on the last. The plan below gives you the structure. Your job is to fill it with the specific habits that matter most for your situation right now.

PHASE	FOCUS	THE HABITS TO BUILD
Days 1–30 Foundation	Awareness	Begin noticing your current patterns without judgment. Where are you leading with context rather than point? When are you qualifying instead of stating? When do you go silent when you should speak? Log one observation per day. No action required yet — awareness first.
Days 31–60 Application	Targeted Practice	Choose your two highest-priority habits from the stack in this chapter. Apply them deliberately in every relevant situation for 30 days. Track what you notice. Do not try to change everything at once — depth over breadth at this stage.
Days 61–90 Integration	Expand and embed	Add two more habits. Review what has shifted: how people are responding to you, what feedback you are receiving, what has become automatic that previously required effort. Set your next 90-day focus based on what the first cycle has revealed.

How to choose your starting habits: Look at the habit stack above. Which two habits, if you applied them consistently for the next 30 days, would have the biggest impact on your most important current career goal? Not the most interesting ones. Not the easiest ones. The ones that would make the biggest difference to the specific outcome you are working toward — a promotion conversation, a new stakeholder relationship, a leadership credibility gap you need to close. Start there.

Making It Stick — The Four Conditions for Lasting Change

Research on habit formation consistently identifies four conditions that determine whether a new behaviour becomes permanent or reverts. Building these conditions deliberately into your development plan is the difference between a guide that changes your career and one that sits on a shelf.

1 Specificity

Vague intentions do not become habits. “I will communicate better in meetings” will not change anything. “I will speak within the first ten minutes of every meeting I attend this week” will. The more specific the target behaviour — the exact context, the exact moment, the exact action — the more likely it is to happen. For each habit you choose, define the exact trigger: when you do X, you will do Y.

In practice: Write your habit in “when-then” format. “When I open a new email that requires a decision, I will write the decision I need in the first sentence before I write anything else.”

2 Immediate feedback

Habits form fastest when the feedback loop is short — when you know quickly whether the behaviour worked. In communication, this means actively noticing how people respond: did the meeting engagement change when you spoke early? Did your manager action the recommendation in your email more quickly when you led with it? Did the team seem calmer when you gave them the three-part uncertainty update? Pay attention to the signal.

In practice: After applying a new habit in a significant situation, take 60 seconds to note: what changed? How did people respond? What would you do differently next time? Even a brief mental note creates the feedback loop that accelerates habit formation.

3 Accountability

Habits that only exist in your own awareness are fragile. Habits that exist in relationship with someone else — someone who will notice if you revert and will ask how it is going — are significantly more durable. This does not require a formal coaching relationship. It requires one person who knows what you are working on and has permission to ask about it honestly.

In practice: Tell one person — a trusted peer, a mentor, a manager who would be interested — what you are working on specifically. Ask them to observe you in the situations where the habit applies and to give you honest feedback. Then ask them again in four weeks.

4 Compassionate persistence

You will revert. Not once — repeatedly. Particularly under pressure, in the situations where the stakes are highest and the old default feels safest. This is not failure — it is how habit change works. The difference between professionals who build lasting new habits and those who do not is not the frequency of reversion. It is the speed of recovery. Notice the reversion. Name it to yourself. Then apply the habit in the next relevant situation.

In practice: “I reverted in that meeting” is not a reason to abandon the habit. It is a data point about the conditions under which the old default is strongest. Use it to prepare better for that specific context next time.

How to Know It Is Working

Communication habits are different from most professional development goals because the measurement is in other people's responses — not in your own sense of how you are doing. The most reliable signals that your communication is shifting are external, not internal.

THE SIGNAL	WHAT IT MEANS
People begin acting on your recommendations more quickly	Your communication is becoming clearer and more action-oriented — the path forward is easier to see.
Senior people reference your contributions back to you	Your ideas are landing and being attributed to you — visibility is increasing.
You are being included in conversations earlier	Your presence is being sought, not just accommodated — you are becoming someone whose input shapes decisions before they are made.
People come to you for advice on how to communicate something	Your communication reputation is becoming a known asset — people associate you with communication clarity.
You receive specific, unsolicited positive feedback on your communication	The shift has become noticeable enough that people are commenting on it — which means it is changing how they experience you.
Difficult conversations resolve faster and more cleanly	Your frameworks are working — you are getting to resolution more efficiently than before.
You feel less anxious before high-stakes communication moments	The habits are becoming automatic — you no longer need to consciously apply them because they are part of how you operate.

YOUR COMMUNICATION COMMITMENT

This page is the most important page in the guide. Not because of what is printed on it — but because of what you write on it. The commitment you make here, made specifically and in writing, is the difference between a guide that was interesting to read and one that actually changes your career.

Write as specifically as you can. Then share it with someone who will hold you to it.

My single most important communication habit to build in the next 30 days:

The specific situation where I will apply it first:

The person I will ask to hold me accountable and give me honest feedback:

What I will notice in how others respond to me if this habit is working:

My 90-day communication goal — what will be different at the end of that period:

A final word The professionals who advance fastest are not always the most technically skilled. They are not always the most experienced. They are almost always the ones who communicate most clearly — who make their thinking visible, who build the relationships that matter, who show up in difficult moments with composure and directness, and who help the people around them do their best work. That is what this guide has been building toward. Not a set of techniques to perform — a set of habits to embody. The difference between technique and habit is repetition. And repetition starts with the next conversation you have, the next email you send, the next meeting you walk into. You already have everything you need. Start with one habit. Apply it consistently. Notice what changes. Then build.

→ **Chapter 15: Your 30-Day Visibility Action Plan**

Your 30-Day Visibility Action Plan

A week-by-week plan that puts everything into practice – starting now

This is not a summary of the guide. It is an activation of it.

Everything you have read across fourteen chapters comes down to this: what are you going to do differently, starting this week? The 30-day plan in this chapter gives you a structured, week-by-week sequence of actions – drawn from the most high-impact habits in the guide – that will begin to shift how you show up, how you are seen, and how your communication lands.

The plan is designed to be challenging but achievable. Each week builds on the last. Each action is specific enough to complete in the context of your normal working week – no additional time required, just different choices about how you use the time you already have.

Work through it in sequence. Complete the reflection at the end of each week before moving to the next. Use the daily tracker to build the three core habits into your daily routine. And at the end of 30 days, use the progress review to set your next cycle.

“Thirty days of consistent application will do more for your career than the next three years of good intentions. The plan starts today – not when the timing feels right, not when things quieten down. Today.”

BEFORE YOU START — YOUR BASELINE

Before you apply a single action from this plan, take ten minutes to answer the three questions below. These are your baseline — the starting point you will measure your progress against at the end of 30 days. Be specific. Vague baselines produce vague measurement.

How I am currently perceived by the people who matter most to my next career step — as specifically as I can describe it:

The single biggest communication gap between where I am and where I want to be:

The specific career outcome I want this 30-day plan to move me toward:

THE THREE DAILY HABITS — RUNNING THROUGHOUT ALL 30 DAYS

These three habits run every day for the full 30 days — they are not weekly actions, they are daily commitments. Everything else in the plan builds on top of these. If you do nothing else from this plan, do these three things every day and your communication will shift visibly within a fortnight.

#	DAILY HABIT	THE SPECIFIC COMMITMENT
1	Lead with the point	Every email that requires a decision, approval, or action starts with that decision, approval, or action — in sentence one. No exceptions. Set a daily reminder for the first week until it becomes instinctive.
2	Speak in the first ten minutes	In every meeting where your visibility matters, make a contribution — a question, an observation, a position — before ten minutes have passed. Commit to it before the meeting starts, not when the moment arises.
3	Send one proactive update	Once per day, send one piece of written communication that the recipient was not expecting and did not have to ask for. A brief update, a relevant insight, a forward-looking note. Small, specific, unrequested.

WEEK 1 Visibility — Be seen for the right things

Days 1–7 | **Daily habit:** Before each meeting, write down the one point you will make. Make it in the first ten minutes.

Focus for this week:

This week is about making your work and your thinking visible to the people who most need to see it. You are not doing more work — you are communicating the work you are already doing more strategically. Every action this week connects something you are already doing to someone who needs to know about it.

YOUR ACTIONS THIS WEEK:

- 1 Map your three most important Tier 1 relationships — the people whose perception of your work matters most to your next career step. Write their names down.
- 2 Send a proactive, forward-ready update to each of your three Tier 1 people about something you are currently working on. One email each. Lead with the outcome.
- 3 In your most important meeting this week, speak in the first ten minutes and make at least one point-first contribution: position, then reasoning.
- 4 Identify one piece of high-impact work you completed recently that the right people do not know enough about. Find a natural, non-transactional way to surface it.
- 5 Book a conversation with your manager — not a formal meeting, just a brief check-in — and use it to share your thinking on something strategic, not just an update.

End of week reflection: What did you notice this week? Where did you find it hardest to be visible? What response did you get when you were?

WEEK 1 HABIT	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Lead with the point (1 email / contribution)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Speak in first 10 mins (1 meeting)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
One proactive update sent	<input type="checkbox"/>						

WEEK 2 Influence — Make your ideas land and get actioned

Days 8–14 | Daily habit: Before sending any significant email: write the decision or recommendation in sentence one before anything else.

Focus for this week:

This week is about the quality of your communication — specifically, whether what you say and write creates clarity and movement or creates noise and deferred action. Every action this week involves rewriting or restructuring something you would normally send without thinking.

YOUR ACTIONS THIS WEEK:

- 1 Take one email you are about to send that involves a decision or recommendation. Rewrite it using the 5-Part Decision Framework: decision needed, why it matters, options, recommendation, next step.
- 2 In one meeting this week, practise the Point-First structure for every contribution: your position first, your reasoning second. No qualifiers before the point.
- 3 Identify one situation where you have been “explaining how the sausage was made” in your updates or presentations. Rewrite it to lead with the destination — the outcome, the finding, the recommendation.
- 4 Build or refresh one SCAR story this week — a specific, structured professional story you can use in the next senior interaction you have.
- 5 Send a value-adding touchpoint to one Tier 2 relationship — a relevant insight, a genuine acknowledgement, or a connection to someone who could help them. Not a favour. Just value.

End of week reflection: Where did leading with the point feel uncomfortable? What did you notice about how quickly people responded when the communication was cleaner? What needs more work?

WEEK 2 HABIT	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Lead with the point (1 email / contribution)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Speak in first 10 mins (1 meeting)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
One proactive update sent	<input type="checkbox"/>						

WEEK 3 Difficult conversations — Close the loops you have been avoiding

Days 15–21 | Daily habit: Before any challenging interaction: write down the one thing you need from it. Walk in knowing your ask.

Focus for this week:

This week is about the conversations you have been carrying. Not all of them — one of them. The most important one. The one that, if you had it well, would remove a weight you have been managing for weeks. This is the week you have it.

YOUR ACTIONS THIS WEEK:

- 1** Use the CLEAR framework to prepare the difficult conversation you identified in Chapter 10. Write your opening line word for word.
- 2** Have the conversation. This week. Not when the timing is perfect — this week. Schedule it on Monday so it cannot be avoided.
- 3** Within 24 hours of the conversation, send the brief forward-looking follow-up that confirms what was discussed and agreed.
- 4** Ask one person you trust — your manager, a senior peer, or a mentor — for specific developmental feedback: “What is the one thing I could do differently that would make the biggest difference to how I am perceived at the next level?”
- 5** Give one piece of specific, SBI-structured positive feedback to a team member or colleague this week. Not “great job” — a specific situation, a specific behaviour, a specific impact.

End of week reflection: How did the difficult conversation go? What surprised you? What did you learn about the cost of having waited this long? What feedback did you receive that you most need to sit with?

WEEK 3 HABIT	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Lead with the point (1 email / contribution)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Speak in first 10 mins (1 meeting)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
One proactive update sent	<input type="checkbox"/>						

WEEK 4 Leadership — Show up as the leader you are becoming

Days 22–28 | Daily habit: *At the start of each day, ask — what one communication today will most advance my career goal this month?*

Focus for this week:

The final week is about integration — bringing the habits from the first three weeks together and adding the leadership layer. This week is about how others experience you as someone who leads: who gives clear direction, who develops their people, who communicates with composure, and who is worth following.

YOUR ACTIONS THIS WEEK:

- 1** If you lead a team: use the three-part uncertainty structure in your next team communication — here is what I know, here is what I do not know, here is what I am doing. Even if uncertainty is low, practise the structure.
- 2** Give one piece of SBI developmental feedback this week. Use the worksheet from Chapter 13. Do not soften it to the point of uselessness — be specific, be kind, be clear.
- 3** Have your promotion conversation — or your readiness conversation. Ask your manager specifically: “What would I need to demonstrate to be considered for the next level? And what are you seeing from me right now that most needs to change?” Then listen.
- 4** In your most high-visibility interaction this week — a meeting with a senior leader, a presentation, a stakeholder call — apply two presence signals deliberately: speak in the first ten minutes, and make at least one contribution that demonstrates your thinking rather than just your knowledge.
- 5** Write your 30-day reflection — what has changed, what is still hard, what you will focus on in the next cycle. Then complete the progress review table on the next page.

End of week reflection: *What has shifted in the last 30 days? How are people responding to you differently? What have you learned about your own communication that you did not know before you started?*

WEEK 4 HABIT	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Lead with the point (1 email / contribution)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Speak in first 10 mins (1 meeting)	<input type="checkbox"/>						
One proactive update sent	<input type="checkbox"/>						

YOUR 30-DAY PROGRESS REVIEW

This is the most important page in the plan — more important than any of the actions. Take 20 minutes at the end of day 30 to complete it. Be specific. Be honest. The quality of your reflection here determines the quality of your next 30-day cycle.

END OF 30 DAYS — WHAT SHIFTED?	NEXT 30 DAYS — WHAT'S THE PRIORITY?
What have I noticed in how people respond to me?	Which habit from the stack do I add next?
What has become easier or more automatic?	What relationship do I most need to invest in?
What feedback have I received — direct or indirect?	What conversation am I still avoiding?
What do I still find hardest?	What is my specific 30-day goal for the next cycle?

My single biggest learning from the last 30 days — about my communication, about how I am perceived, or about what I have been avoiding:

The moment in the last 30 days where I communicated best — and what made it work:

My commitment for the next 30 days — one habit, one relationship, one conversation:

This is where it begins.

You have everything you need. The frameworks are in your hands. The language is on these pages. The specific actions are mapped out week by week. What remains is the one thing no guide can provide for you: the decision to start, and the consistency to keep going. Visibility, influence, and leadership credibility are not given to the most talented professionals. They are built by the professionals who communicate most deliberately — who choose, every day, to show up with intention rather than habit, to speak with clarity rather than caution, and to invest in the relationships that make their best work visible and their ambition legible. That professional is the one you are building, one communication at a time.

Start with Week 1, Action 1. Today.

WHAT COMES NEXT — KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING

If you would like to keep building on what you have started here, the Leadership in Life membership is a simple way to stay in momentum — without needing to figure it all out alone.

We interview executives and CEOs to understand how they became more self-aware, worked through fear and self-doubt, became stronger communicators, and rose in their careers. Then we bring those conversations — and the lessons inside them — straight to you.

WHAT'S INSIDE	DETAILS
▶ 2–3 live sessions per month	Executive interviews and real-world leadership lessons — delivered as Lunch & Learns you can attend live or watch in the replay library at your own pace.
▶ Mini sessions on leadership topics	Short, focused sessions on specific skills — the kind of targeted development that makes a difference in your next conversation, not your next annual review.
▶ A full replay library	Every session recorded and available on demand. Watch when it suits you, revisit the topics most relevant to where you are right now.
▶ An active community of ambitious professionals	Ask questions, share challenges, and learn alongside people who understand what it takes to rise. The community is where the real application happens — peer accountability, honest conversation, and support from people who are doing the same work.

Ready to keep going? No long-term commitment. Join when you are ready.

→ leadershipinlifecoaching.com/leadership-in-life