



EPISODE 3

The Information Tax at the Top

Gallup's 2026 State of the Global Workplace (160+ countries) found senior leaders score **ten points higher on loneliness** than the people who report to them. But this isn't a wellness story — it's an information story. Every promotion narrows the circle of people willing to tell you the truth. The higher you go, the more filtered everything reaching you becomes — and you end up making bigger decisions with worse information. That is the **information tax**.

KEY STRATEGIES & IDEAS

How the filtering happens (it's not a conspiracy — it's human nature plus hierarchy): **Fear** — nobody wants to bear bad news, so it gets softened on the way up. **Flattery** — calling the boss's ideas brilliant feels safer than challenging them. **Distance** — fewer hallway chats and candid coffees where real truth used to slip out. Willpower doesn't fix it; **structures** that route truth to you do.

The flip: **become the person who tells the truth upward**. Your boss is already paying the tax — the person who brings honest, unfiltered perspective becomes indispensable. When Tim Cook advised Apple's incoming CEO John Ternus, he didn't lead with product bets; he said the human, relational side of the job matters more than any product decision. Without real relationships, you don't get real information.

1. Audit Your Feedback Environment

Ask: *when was the last time someone's input actually changed my thinking?* If you can't remember, your loop has already gone quiet — and you're junior to the people this hits hardest, so fix it now while it's cheap.

2. Build One No-Stake Peer Relationship

Not your boss, not your reports. An outside peer group, a mentor, a coach — someone who will tell you when you're wrong because they don't need anything from you.

3. Practice Telling the Truth Upward

In your next one-on-one, say the thing everyone knows but nobody says — respectfully, with a solution attached. Senior leaders are starved for it.

4. Look Downward

Where might you be taxing your own team? Do people soften bad news before it reaches you? Do you punish the messenger, even subtly, with your reaction? The filter starts with you.



5. Ask “What Am I Not Hearing?”

End every big decision by asking it out loud, in the room. It gives people explicit permission to bring what they've been sitting on — and it signals exactly the kind of leadership that gets you promoted.

ACTION & REFLECTION STEPS



Write down the last time someone's input changed your mind. If it's been more than a month, your feedback loop needs work — starting today.

The last time someone's input changed my mind:



Identify one peer with zero stake in your decisions and schedule a real conversation with them.

My no-stake peer:



In your next one-on-one, deliver one honest, useful truth along with a proposed solution.

The truth I'll bring (with my proposed solution):



Tonight, reflect: when someone brings you bad news, what does your face do? Train yourself to reward the messenger.

Think two levels up. — Maya & Marcus