SKIP LEVEL

strategic leadership for leaders ready to think two levels up

EPISODE 119 · WORKSHEET

EPISODE 119

Don't Think Out Loud

Tossing out a half-formed idea feels honest and collaborative — until three people sprint off to build it before you have decided whether you like it. Drawing on Latriece Watkins's advice to leaders, Maya and Marcus show why your words get heavier as you climb — and how protected clarity time, writing before you speak, and labeling your thinking keep your authenticity affordable.

KEY STRATEGIES & IDEAS

1. The Thinking-Out-Loud Tax
Two levels up, the same habit becomes a tax your whole team pays. You muse about a direction, three people quietly start executing, and days later you have thought your way somewhere better and the musing has changed — so the team pays for the same work twice.

2. Private Deliberation, Public Clarity
The senior leaders you admire are not clearer speakers because their minds are tidier than yours. The untidy part simply happened somewhere their team never had to pay for it.

3. Protected Clarity Time
Watkins's first practice: make protected time to create clarity for yourself before you speak, alone with the question before the meeting where everyone will treat your answer as settled.

4. Label It
When you genuinely do want to think out loud with your team, say plainly that you are thinking, not deciding, and that nobody should act on it yet. One honest sentence saves your team from guessing which kind of words they are hearing.

The proof: Grant, a senior director famous for thinking out loud, wondered whether his team should pause onboarding for smaller clients. He was just chewing on it — but two managers started preparing a pause, and his teams spent the better part of two weeks building toward an idea he had already decided against. The rework hurt, but the hesitation hurt more: for months, his managers waited before acting on anything he said.

ACTION & REFLECTION STEPS

- [ ] **Step one — protect the clarity time.** Before your most important meeting this week, block a short stretch of quiet time to decide what you actually think. Guard it the way you would guard a meeting with your own boss, because your team pays when you skip it.

Joe Dutkiewicz
CRAYON LEADERSHIP
crayonleadership.com

SKIP LEVEL

strategic leadership for leaders ready to think two levels up

EPISODE 119 · WORKSHEET

- [ ] **Step two — write it before you say it.** Draft the biggest message you owe your team in plain sentences first. Where the writing gets fuzzy, your thinking is fuzzy, and now you know what still needs your attention.

The message I will draft first:

- [ ] **Step three — audit your last few meetings.** Ask whether anything you wondered out loud has quietly turned into work or worry on someone's list. If it has, close it out cleanly, and tell people plainly that it was a thought, not a direction.

A stray musing to close out:

- [ ] **Step four — practice the label.** Next time you explore an idea live with your team, open by naming it as thinking, not deciding, and close by naming what, if anything, was actually decided.

- [ ] **Reflect on this:** if your team treated every sentence you say this week as a decision — because at your next level they will — which habit would suddenly become too expensive to keep?

  - [ ] I have named the habit that would become too expensive to keep.

Think two levels up. — Maya & Marcus

Joe Dutkiewicz

CRAYON LEADERSHIP

crayonleadership.com