

SKIP LEVEL

strategic leadership for leaders ready to think two levels up

EPISODE 120 · WORKSHEET

EPISODE 120

Settle Nothing in the Heat

When a colleague crosses a boundary in front of other people, the next sixty seconds decide whether you build a bridge or burn one. Maya and Marcus walk through the protocol for that moment: settle nothing in the heat, ask the colleague aside and set a date, prepare with a mentor, and arrive at a meeting designed for listening — with commitments on both sides.

KEY STRATEGIES & IDEAS

1. Flooding Shuts Down Thinking

John Gottman called it flooding. Once your heart rate climbs past roughly one hundred beats a minute, your capacity for nuanced thinking, empathy, and problem solving collapses — and your body needs at least twenty minutes to settle.

2. The Aside Always Has a Date

Avoidance says, we should talk sometime, and hopes the problem dissolves. This protocol names what happened and schedules the real conversation. The date is the signature of the whole approach.

3. Three Conversations at Once

Stone, Patton, and Heen show that every difficult conversation is really three: the what happened conversation, the feelings conversation, and the identity conversation. Walk through all three in advance — yours and your best guess at theirs.

4. Speak So They Can Hear It

The D style needs the bottom line first, the I style needs room to talk and face saving, the S style needs gentle pacing and safety, and the C style needs facts and processing time. Shape how you open around what they can hear.

The proof: Owen had set one clear boundary: any change to their shared timeline would come to him first. When Claire announced a changed deadline as a done deal, he felt the heat instantly — and did not correct her in front of everyone. He asked her aside, set a date, and both prepared with advisors. In the meeting, they built no verdict about who was wrong. They defined mutual actions for both of them.

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ACTION & REFLECTION STEPS

- [ ] **Step one — practice the aside before you need it.** Write a calm, brief statement that names what happened without defense or attack and ends by setting a date, and rehearse it until it sounds like you.

My aside statement:

- [ ] **Step two — choose your preparation person now.** Name the mentor or advisor you would call in the interval, someone who will challenge your story kindly.

My preparation person:

- [ ] **Step three — walk through the three conversations on paper.** Before your next difficult conversation, write what happened as you see it, what you are feeling, and what feels at stake for your identity. Then write your best guess at their three too.

Their three conversations, as I guess them:

- [ ] **Step four — start reading style.** Notice who is direct, social, steady, or analytical, and shape how you open your next hard conversation around what they can hear.

- [ ] **Reflect on this:** think about the last hard conversation you handled in the heat. What might have changed if it had been given a date, a mentor, and preparation on both sides?

  - [ ] I have named the mentor I would call in the interval.

Think two levels up. — Maya & Marcus

Joe Dutkiewicz

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