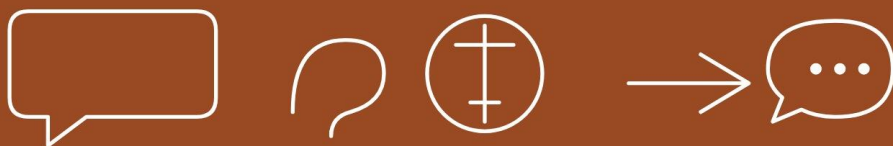


CLAIRE HALDEN

SAY EXACTLY ENOUGH

**THE QUIET TACTICS
THAT KEEP YOU IN CONTROL
OF ANY CONVERSATION**



THE KNOWLEDGE, SIMPLY COLLECTION

SAY EXACTLY ENOUGH

*The Quiet Tactics That Keep You in
Control
of Any Conversation*

CLAIRE HALDEN

KNOWLEDGE, SIMPLY

Say Exactly Enough

The Quiet Tactics That Keep You in Control of Any Conversation

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All examples are composites. Any resemblance to specific people, companies or negotiations is coincidental.

Knowledge, Simply collection

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A METHOD THAT WORKS

The same structure in every chapter, so you always know where to look.

Every technique in this book is presented through the same seven steps. There are no long theories and no jargon: you get what the technique is, why it works on people, how it is used, where it fails and how to recognise it when someone uses it on you.

- 1 What It Is**
A short, plain explanation of the technique.
- 2 Why It Works**
The psychological and practical reasons behind it.
- 3 How to Use It**
How it looks in real situations, with sample wording.
- 4 Examples in Action**
Scenarios from business, leadership, negotiation and everyday life.
- 5 When It Backfires**
The situations where the technique costs you more than it gains, plus what makes it fail.
- 6 When It's Used on You**
How to recognise it from the other side of the table and how to answer.
- 7 Key Takeaway**
The essence in a few lines.

The last two steps are the ones most books leave out. They are also the ones that protect you, because the techniques in this book are used on you far more often than you will ever use them on others.

CONTENTS

A Method That Works	3
Introduction	6
PART I · HOLDING YOUR POSITION	
1 Read First, Speak After	11
2 Strategic Ambiguity	15
3 Open-Ended Phrasing	19
4 Vague Keywords and “It Depends”	22
5 “Maybe” and the Clock	26
6 The Tactical “No”	29
PART II · CONTROLLING THE FRAME	
7 Reframing	34
8 Context and Sequence	37
9 Presupposition	40
10 Pre-Framing	43
11 The Controlled Choice	46
12 Contracts and Written Words	49
PART III · RHYTHM AND REFLECTION	
13 Silence	55
14 Questions and Role Reversal	58
15 Timing	62
16 The Echo Effect	65
17 Mirroring	68
18 Emotional Ambiguity	71
PART IV · DIRECTING THE CONVERSATION	
19 Double Meaning and Layered Messages	76
20 Strategic Contradictions	79
21 Walking Back a Statement	82
22 Using Negatives to Affirm	85
23 Speaking to Opposing Audiences	88
24 When Not to Use Any of This	91
Conclusion	94
Appendix: The Twenty-Four Moves	96

Sources & Further Reading	98
About the Author	100

SAYING JUST ENOUGH

Why the strongest position in a conversation is the one you have not closed.

Communication is not only about what you say. It is about what you leave unsaid.

Some of the most influential people in any field have mastered the art of saying just enough to persuade, to shape an outcome and to keep control, without ever locking themselves into a fixed position. This is the essence of strategic ambiguity.

It lets you stay flexible while others commit. It helps you influence decisions without forcing them. It allows you to appear open while keeping control over what is actually understood.

- It is why politicians speak in statements that mean different things to different audiences.
- It is why senior executives rarely give a definitive answer in an interview.
- It is why the most effective negotiators say less and achieve more.

Ambiguity is a tool. Not to confuse, but to stay in control.

WHY LESS IS MORE

Most people believe good communication means being as clear and detailed as possible. That is only half true. Saying too much narrows your options, exposes your weak points and hands other people your own words to use against you.

Think of contracts. Some of the most powerful clauses are the ones with room for interpretation. In a negotiation, whoever names a number first usually loses leverage. In an argument, whoever over-explains ends up justifying themselves.

1 It keeps people engaged

They work harder to understand you, which means they pay attention.

2 It makes others go first

Silence and open phrasing draw out their position before you show yours.

3 It leaves room to adapt

You can adjust without contradicting yourself.

4 It protects you from commitments

What you never promised cannot be held against you.

When you say less, people interpret your words, then follow their own hopes in doing it. If someone assumes you meant something favourable to them, you only correct them when it suits you.

WHY SCRIPTS FAIL

This is where most books on communication go wrong; it is worth saying at the start.

They hand you lines to memorise: say this when they push on price, say that when they ask for a deadline. Real conversations do not work that way. If you walk into a room with prepared answers, you become predictable exactly when you need to be fluid. The other side hears it. Rehearsed lines sound rehearsed.

What actually works is different. You read the person in front of you within the first minutes and you adapt: warmer or drier, lighter or harder, patient or blunt. It is closer to changing clothes than to reciting a script. The same negotiator, in the same day, can be relaxed and joking with one counterpart and deliberately cold with the next, because those are the two registers each of them responds to.

THE RULE OF THIS BOOK

Prepare your objective, your limits and your reading of the other side.
Do not prepare your sentences.

So treat the techniques that follow as a repertoire, not as a script. Once you know what each move does, you will recognise the moment that calls for it and the words will come out in your own voice. The sample phrases here are illustrations, not lines to repeat.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

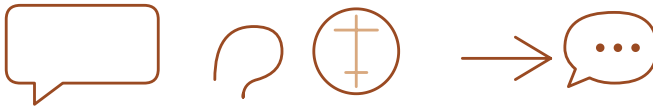
The book is organised in four parts. Part I is about holding your position, so nobody can pin you down. Part II is about controlling the frame in which a discussion happens. Part III is about rhythm and reflection: silence, timing, questions, mirroring. Part IV is about directing a conversation towards an outcome. It closes with the chapter on limits, the one that keeps all of this from turning against you.

You can read it in order or open it at the technique you need. Either way, start with the next chapter: it is the one that makes the rest usable.

PART I

HOLDING YOUR POSITION

How not to be pinned down



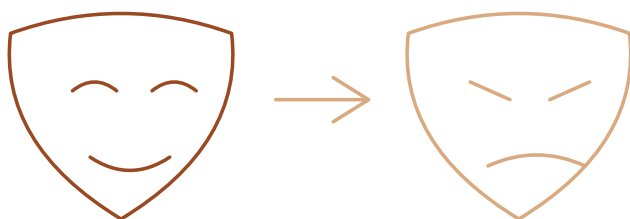
The ability to stay flexible is what separates people who control a conversation from people who are controlled by it.

This part covers the foundations: how to say less while keeping influence, how to avoid being pinned to a number, a date or a promise, plus how to shape what people understand without making commitments you may regret.

It opens with the skill that comes before all the others: reading the person in front of you and choosing the register that fits them. Everything after that is a move you can pick up when the moment calls for it.

READ FIRST, SPEAK AFTER

The move that comes before every technique in this book.



WHAT IT IS

Before any technique, there is a reading. In the first minutes of a meeting you decide who you are dealing with and which version of yourself will work with them: open and informal, measured and formal, or hard and direct.

This is not a checklist you run through. It is perception, immediate and fast. Rigid or accommodating. Decision maker or messenger. Comfortable or under pressure from someone above them. Interested in the substance or in being right. Within a few exchanges you know, and you adjust.

The best image for it is changing clothes. The same negotiator, on the same day, can walk out of one meeting where he joked for an hour and into another where he barely smiles. Nothing about him changed except the register, because the register is chosen for the person across the table, not for himself.

WHY IT WORKS

1 **People trust what feels familiar**

A counterpart who is formal reads informality as sloppiness. A counterpart who is informal reads formality as distance. Matching their register removes friction before the substance is even discussed.

2 **It buys information before you spend any**

While you adapt, they talk. How they react to a light remark, a direct question or a pause tells you more than their opening statement.

3 **It keeps you unpredictable**

If your manner is set in advance, it can be prepared against. If it is a response to them, there is nothing to prepare against.

4 **It protects the only asset you cannot rebuild**

Your credibility. Everything else in a negotiation can be recovered; a reputation for saying things that do not hold cannot.

HOW TO USE IT

1 **Prepare the objective, not the sentences**

Know what you want, what you will not accept and where you stand up and leave. Leave the wording to the room.

2 **Decide what the thing is actually worth**

If you are representing someone, their instructions are the starting point, not the script. A number you do not believe in is a number you cannot defend. Defending it badly collapses the whole negotiation. If the client wants a billion and the asset is worth six hundred million, pushing for a billion does not serve the client: it ends the conversation and makes the person asking look unserious.

3 **Choose the register in the first minutes**

Warm, neutral or hard. Then stay coherent with it until something changes.

4 **Re-read continuously**

Their reactions are the signal. When they harden, when they go quiet, when they start repeating themselves, the register that worked five minutes ago may be the wrong one now.

5 **Keep one option always available**

The ability to stop. Everything in this book works better when leaving the table is a real possibility rather than a bluff.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Two meetings, one day.** The morning counterpart is informal and quick, so the tone is light and the deal moves through jokes and short sentences. The afternoon counterpart is formal and defensive, so the same person speaks slowly, uses full sentences and never interrupts. Same file, same objective, two different people in the chair.
- **The instruction you cannot follow.** A client insists on a figure the market will never accept. You present the case at the level you can defend, keep the client's ambition visible as a direction rather than a demand. The negotiation survives.
- **The take-it-or-leave-it.** The other side opens with: this is the price, there is nothing to discuss. The answer is not an argument. It is to thank them for making your day simpler and to start closing the folder. Most of the time the position softens before you reach the door.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **Adapting into agreement.** Matching someone's register is not the same as accepting their terms. If flexibility of manner turns into flexibility of substance, you have adapted yourself out of the deal.
- **Getting angry by accident.** Sometimes irritation becomes the register, which works: a sharp reaction can break a deadlock. It works when you notice it and let it happen, not when it happens to you.

- **Bluffing an exit you cannot afford.** Walking away only works if you are genuinely prepared to walk. Do it once without meaning it and you have taught the other side to ignore it.
- **Misreading the room.** Informality with someone who wanted respect can cost you the meeting before the first proposal.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Someone mirrors you a little too well.** Sudden and perfect agreement on style, pace and language is often technique rather than affinity (Chapter 17).
- **Someone tests your registers.** A joke, then a hard question, then silence: they are looking for which one moves you.
- **Someone arrives with lines.** Prepared people are not linear. They contradict themselves when the conversation leaves their script. The contradiction is your opening: slow down, ask the same question in a different form and watch the two answers fail to match.
- **Someone plays indifference.** The posture of having nothing to lose is the most common performance in negotiation. Test it with a concrete, small, verifiable request and see whether the indifference survives.

KEY TAKEAWAY

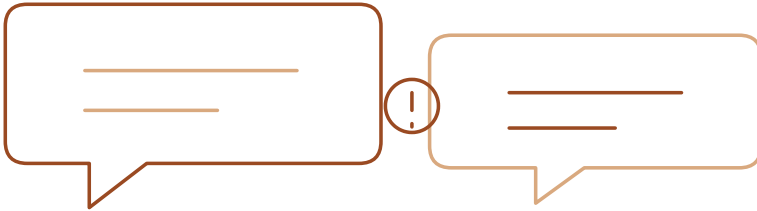
Read the person, then choose the register. Everything else in this book is a move; this is the judgement that tells you which move to make.

Prepare your objective and your limits, never your sentences. A rehearsed line sounds rehearsed. The person across the table hears it before they hear your argument.

NEXT · Chapter 2: strategic ambiguity, the core move this whole book is built on.

STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

Keeping your options open while others close theirs.



WHAT IT IS

Strategic ambiguity is the deliberate use of flexible, multi-interpretative language to keep control of a conversation. It lets you shape perception without fully committing to a position.

It is used everywhere: in diplomacy, in corporate communication, in contracts, in ordinary social life. Politicians use it to avoid alienating voters. Chief executives use it to manage expectations. Lawyers use it to leave room for a favourable reading. At its core it is about keeping your options open while other people believe they understood you perfectly.

WHY IT WORKS

1 People hate uncertainty and fill the gaps themselves

Leave a statement open and most people complete it in the direction of their own expectations. They do the work of convincing themselves.

2 It makes the other side go first

With no clear answer to react to, people keep talking, clarify their own position or try to guess yours out loud. Either way you learn more than you gave.

3 It keeps you from being held to a commitment

The moment you state something definitively it can be quoted back to you. Ambiguity leaves you room to move when circumstances change.

A chief executive says: “We are exploring all opportunities for growth.” Investors hear expansion. Employees hear stability. Competitors hear a possible move. The sentence commits to nothing.

HOW TO USE IT

Being vague takes precision. The point is not to say something blurry; it is to say something that works in several readings at once.

1 Choose broad wording over declarations

“This project has real potential” suggests support. “I fully support this project” hands over a commitment you may not want to keep.

2 Answer with a question

“What do you see as the critical factor here?” moves the conversation to them, gathers information and reveals nothing (Chapter 14).

3 Use conditional and exploratory forms

“We are evaluating the options carefully” buys time. “We will decide soon” starts a clock you did not want to start.

READ THE ROOM FIRST

Ambiguity is a register, not a habit. Used with a counterpart who wants concrete answers, it reads as evasion and costs you exactly the credibility you are trying to protect (Chapter 1).

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Diplomacy.** “Our country remains committed to stability in the region.” Allies read support, adversaries read openness, nothing is promised.
- **Corporate.** “We are looking at several avenues for growth.” Investors imagine acquisitions, staff imagine promotions, partners imagine joint ventures.
- **Negotiation.** “We are open to any structure that works for both sides.” Cooperative in tone, empty in concessions.
- **Everyday life.** “I am keeping my options open.” Optimism to some, availability to others, a commitment to none.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **With people who need certainty.** Banks, regulators, auditors and most technical counterparts read ambiguity as a warning sign and start digging.
- **When it lasts too long.** Ambiguity buys time once. Repeated across meetings it becomes a reputation for never saying anything, which is the end of your influence.
- **When the other side writes it down.** A vague sentence in a term sheet or an email can be read against you as easily as for you. Vagueness protects you in conversation and exposes you in writing (Chapter 12).
- **When a decision is genuinely needed.** Teams cannot execute an ambiguous instruction. The cost of the confusion lands on you.

WHEN IT’S USED ON YOU

- **Listen for the verb.** “Exploring”, “evaluating”, “looking at”, “considering”: activities, not commitments. Ask what has actually been decided and by whom.
- **Ask for the next observable fact.** Not “are you interested?” but “what happens on your side by Friday?” Ambiguity survives opinions

and dies on dates and names.

- **Repeat their sentence back in concrete form.** “So the board has approved a mandate to negotiate?” Either they confirm, which is now a commitment, or they correct you, which tells you where the real position is.
- **Write it down.** A short email summarising what you understood turns their flexibility into something they must either accept or amend.

KEY TAKEAWAY

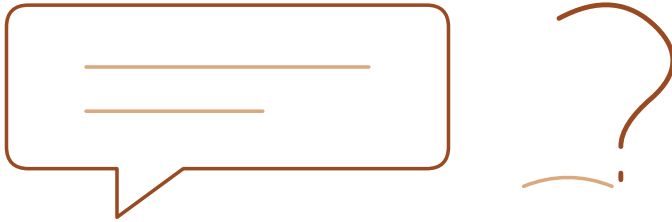
Strategic ambiguity is not evasion. It is control over interpretation: people fill the blanks with their own expectations. The less you commit, the more room you keep.

Use it where interpretation is the currency, not where a decision is. And remember that the person across the table has read the same chapter.

NEXT · Chapter 3: open-ended phrasing, the everyday version of this move.

OPEN-ENDED PHRASING

The everyday version of ambiguity.



WHAT IT IS

Open-ended phrasing means using statements and questions that allow more than one reading instead of forcing a fixed response. It keeps a conversation fluid, encourages the other person to say more and stops you from boxing yourself in.

Instead of “this deal is a priority”, you say “this is something we are looking at closely”. The first sentence commits you. The second leaves room, while still sounding engaged. Done well, it makes you sound considered rather than evasive.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 It makes the other person elaborate**
“That is an interesting perspective” invites them to keep explaining. You learn how they think while giving nothing away.
- 2 It leaves room to adjust**
“We are confident this plan will work” traps you if it fails. “We think this plan has real potential” lets you move later without

contradicting yourself.

3 It puts you in charge of the flow

Answering a yes-or-no question with “that is something we are considering; what are your main concerns?” hands the pressure back and buys information before you decide.

HOW TO USE IT

1 Replace declarations with exploratory forms

“This strategy has strong advantages” instead of “this strategy is the best option”. It invites discussion rather than debate.

2 Answer with a direction, not a date

“We are moving that way and I am reviewing the details” keeps engagement without starting a clock.

3 Turn closed questions into open ones

“What do you see as the biggest advantage here?” makes them justify their position and reveals their reasoning.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Negotiation.** “Can you match this competitor’s price?” becomes “which parts of our offer matter most to you?” The discussion moves from price to value.
- **Leadership.** Instead of “this report needs work”, ask “what changes would make this report stronger?” You get the fix without dictating it.
- **Sales.** “Is this your final offer?” answered with “what would make this proposal work for you?” keeps you uncommitted and gathers information.
- **Everyday life.** “Do you want to come?” answered with “what is the plan?” keeps the decision yours.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the question was fair and simple.** Open phrasing used on a direct, reasonable question reads as dodging; people remember it.
- **With people who have authority over you.** A board, a regulator or a client who asked for a straight answer hears evasion, not nuance.
- **Used constantly.** If nothing you say ever lands anywhere, colleagues stop bringing you decisions, which is the quiet end of your influence.
- **Written down.** An open sentence in an email is read later by someone looking for a commitment or for its absence. Both readings can hurt you.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Count the verbs of intention.** Looking, considering, exploring, reviewing: none of them is a decision.
- **Ask the closing question.** “What would have to be true for this to be a yes?” It converts an open answer into conditions you can work with.
- **Offer the binary yourself.** “I will take that as a no for now. We can revisit in a month.” Most people correct you if it is really a yes.
- **Repeat back in writing.** The summary email is the simplest way to turn fluid language into a position.

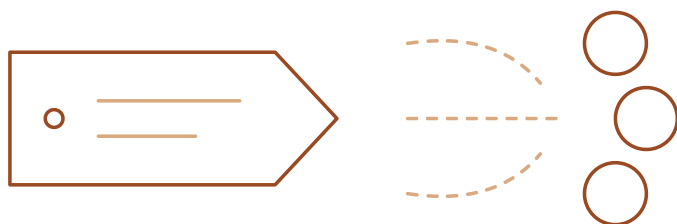
KEY TAKEAWAY

Open phrasing keeps conversations flexible, makes others reveal more and lets you steer without committing.

Use it while things are still being shaped. Once a decision is genuinely needed, the same technique costs you credibility.

VAGUE KEYWORDS AND “IT DEPENDS”

Words everybody agrees with, answers nobody can hold you to.



WHAT IT IS

Some words sound meaningful and are deliberately undefined: value, innovation, results, alignment, efficiency, quality, sustainability. Everyone hears them, nods and feels they understood you, although nothing specific has been said.

The same principle works in answers. “It depends” is not indecision when it comes with a condition attached: it turns a yes-or-no trap into a discussion about the variables, which is where you want the conversation anyway.

Both are forms of selective clarity: enough information to satisfy the other side, not enough to lock you in.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 People project their own meaning**
Say “efficiency” and one person hears lower costs, another faster delivery, a third fewer meetings. All three feel aligned with you while imagining different things.
- 2 Nobody argues against quality**
Vague keywords carry positive weight and are almost never challenged, so they build agreement before any substance is discussed.
- 3 They leave the definition open**
Once people agree that growth matters, you decide later whether growth means revenue, market share or capability.
- 4 “It depends” signals judgement, not hesitation**
A fast answer looks impulsive. A conditional answer looks considered; it moves the burden of clarification back to them.

HOW TO USE IT

- 1 Build alignment first, define later**
Start with “our focus is long-term value”. When the moment suits you, define it: “for us, value means the same margin with half the complexity.” They agreed to the principle before they knew your meaning.
- 2 Always attach a condition**
“It depends on the volume and the payment terms.” The bare phrase sounds evasive; with a condition it sounds like expertise and it opens the ground you chose.
- 3 Use it where precision would cost you**
“We are targeting a meaningful improvement in results” is safe. “We guarantee ten per cent growth” is a hostage you have handed over.
- 4 Turn it into a question**
“It depends. What is the deadline you are working to?” You are now gathering information instead of defending a position.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Corporate.** “Our focus this year is sustainable growth.” Investors hear profitability, staff hear stability, customers hear responsibility.
- **Sales.** “This property offers exceptional value.” The first-time buyer hears affordability, the investor hears return.
- **Negotiation.** “Is that your best price?” answered with “it depends on volume and timing” reopens a conversation that was being closed.
- **Internal meeting.** “We need more efficiency” lets operations, finance and marketing each hear their own project.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **With technical counterparts.** Engineers, auditors and lawyers treat undefined words as a gap to be filled; they will fill it their way.
- **When your team has to act on it.** Vague instructions produce vague work; the cost comes back to you.
- **When it becomes your default.** A reputation for saying nothing memorable is hard to reverse.
- **“It depends” without a condition.** On its own it sounds like someone who has not done the work.

WHEN IT’S USED ON YOU

- **Ask for the definition.** “When you say value, what are we measuring?” The answer tells you whether there is a position behind the word.
- **Ask what it depends on.** Then ask who controls that variable. If the answer is them, the condition is a lever, not a fact.
- **Put numbers where the adjective was.** “Significant improvement” becomes “so, above eight per cent?” Watch whether they accept the figure.
- **Notice the pattern in writing.** A document full of agreeable words and empty of commitments is a negotiating position, not a proposal.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Vague keywords create instant agreement and leave the definition in your hands. “It depends” converts a trap into a discussion about variables.

Both work while you are building alignment. Both fail the moment someone has to execute.

NEXT · Chapter 5: “maybe” and the management of time.

“MAYBE” AND THE CLOCK

Non-commitment as a position, time as a lever.



WHAT IT IS

“**M**aybe” is the deliberate use of non-committal agreement: it is possible, I will think about it, let us see how this develops, that could work. Nothing is refused, nothing is promised; the other side stays engaged.

Its twin is temporal ambiguity: soon, in due course, early next quarter, once the review is complete. Instead of a date you give a direction, which shows movement without handing over a deadline.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 Open questions keep people invested**
An unresolved answer pulls people back. They return, they improve the offer, they explain more, all to obtain the closure you have not given.
- 2 It reads as judgement**
A quick yes or no can look impulsive. “Let me look at all the angles” suggests weight behind the decision.

3 It keeps the relationship running

A definitive answer ends the exchange. A maybe keeps it alive on your timing.

4 Time is where most pressure comes from

Control the time references and you control the perceived urgency without changing anything you actually do.

HOW TO USE IT

1 Tie the maybe to something you control

“That is possible if we can align on the budget” is an open door with your hand on the handle.

2 Speak in ranges

“Early next week” instead of “Monday at nine”. You keep the expectation and lose the trap.

3 Anchor timing to conditions, not dates

“We proceed once the legal review is done” moves the discussion from when to what has to happen first.

4 Use progress language

“We are finalising the last elements” conveys movement without defining arrival.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Negotiation.** “It is close to what I am looking for. Let me think it over.” The offer often improves before you have said anything else.
- **Project management.** “We are on track for the end of the quarter” covers any date before the quarter ends.
- **Leadership.** “I am not ready to decide today. I am not saying no either.” The team knows where things stand without a commitment.
- **Sales.** “You will see results sooner than you expect” creates anticipation without a date to miss.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the other side has an alternative.** A maybe is only powerful if they cannot simply go elsewhere. With a competitor waiting, delay is a gift to them.
- **When it is repeated.** The second maybe is leverage. The fourth is a reputation for wasting people's time.
- **With people who have their own deadlines.** A counterpart under pressure from a board will not wait; they will replace you in the plan.
- **When it stops being a choice.** If you are using maybe because you cannot decide, the technique is covering a problem instead of solving it.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Set the expiry yourself.** "Our terms hold until Friday." A maybe loses its power against a clock it does not control.
- **Ask what would turn it into a yes.** If they cannot name a condition, there is no deal behind the maybe.
- **Check who is waiting for whom.** If every next step depends on their internal process, you are being parked.
- **Keep a parallel option alive.** The only real defence against delay is not needing this one to work.

KEY TAKEAWAY

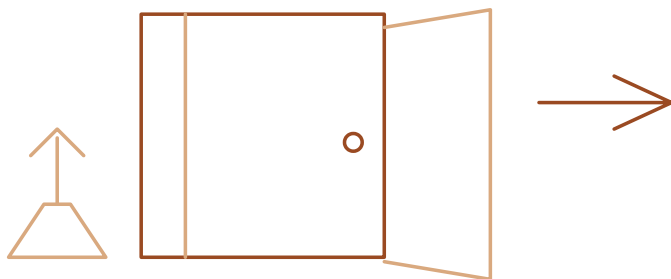
Maybe keeps people engaged and time flexible. It works when they need you more than you need them; it costs you when that balance shifts.

Give direction instead of dates, conditions instead of promises. Always know what your own deadline really is.

NEXT · Chapter 6: saying no without closing the door.

THE TACTICAL “NO”

Refusing without shutting anything down.



WHAT IT IS

The tactical no is the art of declining without closing possibilities or damaging the relationship. It sounds cooperative and stays open, while the refusal itself is clear.

A blunt no can sound aggressive and end the conversation. A well-built one protects your position and keeps the exchange alive: you are not just refusing, you are redirecting.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 It preserves the relationship**
“Next week is difficult. What does your timing look like after that?” declines and keeps the door open in the same sentence.
- 2 It replaces rejection with redirection**
“That does not fit our current priorities, but here is what might” gives them somewhere to go.

3 It escapes the yes-or-no trap

“There are a few elements I need to clarify before deciding” is a no that nobody can quote as one.

4 It protects your time without making you the difficult one

Boundaries stated calmly are rarely contested.

HOW TO USE IT

1 Soften the words, not the substance

“That is not a direction we are exploring right now” is a refusal delivered as information.

2 Offer something adjacent

“I cannot take the project on. I am happy to review the outline.” Support without agreement.

3 Widen a closed question

“Friday is tight with our current schedule. What is the latest you could accept?” The refusal is in there and so is the next step.

4 Keep the real no available

Some situations need it. When the other side opens with a take-it-or-leave-it, the strongest answer is to thank them for making your day simpler and start closing the folder. It only works if you are genuinely ready to leave (Chapter 1).

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Supplier.** “That is not a direction we can take right now. We can look at other ways to lower your total cost.”
- **Manager.** “This quarter is not the moment for that. Let us revisit after the review.”
- **Sales.** “That is outside the current scope. I can propose a package that includes it.”
- **Everyday life.** “I cannot make that day. Let us plan something next week.”

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the softness hides the answer.** If they leave the room thinking it was a yes, you have created a problem instead of avoiding one. The refusal has to be unmistakable, even when the wording is gentle.
- **When the alternative you offer is worse than the refusal.** Do not invent a consolation prize you cannot deliver.
- **Repeated with the same person.** Three graceful refusals read as one clear no that nobody had the courage to say.
- **When a hard no would have earned more respect.** With some counterparts, clarity is the only thing that registers.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Translate the sentence.** “Not right now”, “not a priority this quarter”, “let us revisit”: these are refusals with a calendar attached.
- **Ask what changes the answer.** If nothing would, it is a no and you can stop spending time on it.
- **Test the door.** Propose the smallest version of your request. A real maybe accepts it; a disguised no does not.
- **Do not chase the politeness.** The warmth is real and irrelevant. Work with the substance.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A tactical no protects your priorities without making anyone feel dismissed. The words are soft, the boundary is not.

Keep the blunt version in reserve. Knowing you will use it when it matters is what makes the polite version credible.

NEXT · Part II: controlling the frame in which the discussion happens.

PART II

CONTROLLING THE FRAME

Deciding how things are understood



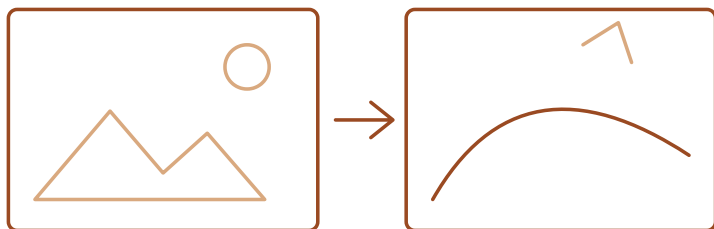
Part I was about not being pinned down. This part is about something more ambitious: deciding the terms on which a discussion happens before the discussion starts.

People do not judge facts in isolation. They judge them inside a frame: what came before, what they are compared to, which assumptions were never questioned, which options were put on the table. Change the frame and the same facts point somewhere else.

The chapters here move from the most visible technique to the least. Reframing happens in the open. Context and sequence work quietly around your words. Presupposition and pre-framing act before anyone notices there is a position to argue with. The controlled choice decides the menu. The last chapter takes all of this into the place where it is written down and becomes binding: contracts.

REFRAMING

Changing the angle instead of arguing the facts.



WHAT IT IS

Reframing means taking a statement, an idea or a problem and presenting it from a different angle, one that serves your position. You are not disputing the facts. You are changing the frame through which they are seen.

Strong communicators rarely argue content. They reshape context. It is elegant, it avoids confrontation and it works in negotiation, leadership, conflict and sales alike.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 People react to context more than to content**
“We lost two million” and “we invested two million in a long-term position” describe the same number. They produce opposite reactions.
- 2 It avoids resistance**
“You are wrong” invites defence. “Let me offer another way of looking at it” invites thought. The narrative shifts without anyone

losing face.

3 It neutralises objections

“This project is risky” answered with “that is exactly where the upside sits” does not deny the risk. It changes what the risk means.

HOW TO USE IT

1 Turn negatives into positions

“They are bigger than us” becomes “they are slower than us”. “This will take time” becomes “that gives us room to get it right”.

2 Use their own assumption as your argument

“We cannot afford mistakes” answered with “which is exactly why we test it now, while the stakes are small”. Their concern becomes your reason.

3 Change the emotional register with a comparison

“This is a hard negotiation” becomes “this is a puzzle; we are looking for the pieces that fit”. The tone moves from conflict to joint work.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Negotiation.** “Your budget is too small for this” answered with “then the value has to come from what we prioritise inside it”.
- **Leadership.** “We are behind schedule” answered with “we still have time to change the things that will show in the result”.
- **Sales.** “You are more expensive” answered with “we are, because of what it removes from your costs later”.
- **Crisis.** “Is the company in trouble?” answered with “this is the moment we are using to fix something that needed fixing”.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the frame denies a real problem.** Reframing a genuine failure as an opportunity in front of people who are living the consequences reads as contempt.

- **When it becomes a reflex.** A person who reframes every objection stops being persuasive and starts being predictable.
- **When the other side names it.** “You are reframing this” is a hard sentence to recover from, so the reframe has to sound like a thought, not a technique.
- **In writing, later.** A reframe that sounded generous in the room can look like spin when it is quoted six months on.

WHEN IT’S USED ON YOU

- **Restate the fact without the adjective.** “So the delay is four months.” Frames collapse when you put the number back on the table.
- **Ask what would count as bad news.** If nothing would, you are inside a frame rather than a conversation.
- **Separate the two questions.** What happened; what it means. Most reframes work by merging them.
- **Accept the frame when it is useful.** Sometimes their framing gives you a better position than your own. Take it.

KEY TAKEAWAY

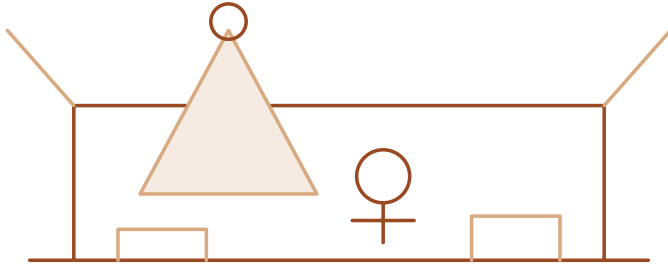
Reframing changes the angle without touching the facts, which is why it meets so little resistance.

It works when the frame is honest enough to survive scrutiny. When it is not, it becomes the thing people remember.

NEXT · Chapter 8: what comes before your words decides what they mean.

CONTEXT AND SEQUENCE

The stage is part of the message.



WHAT IT IS

The same words carry different meanings depending on what surrounds them: what came immediately before, what they are compared with, where they are said and in what mood the room is.

You are not changing the story. You are changing the stage on which it is told.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 Judgement is relative**
“Two million in profit” sounds like a recovery after a year of losses and like a collapse after a year of ten. The sentence never changed.
- 2 The lead-in sets the lens**
Announce a delay straight and it reads as failure. Announce it after describing what was fixed in the product and it reads as care.

3 **Emotion travels with information**

The same launch date feels urgent after a description of competitors and exciting after a description of features.

HOW TO USE IT

1 **Set the frame before the fact**

“We secured one of the largest budgets this department has had” before naming the figure. The number is unchanged; its meaning is not.

2 **Choose the comparison**

Sales up five per cent looks strong against an industry at two and weak against your own twenty last year. Both comparisons are true. Pick the relevant one and be ready to defend the choice.

3 **Control the setting and the order**

News lands differently in a tense meeting than at a celebration. Sequence matters as much as wording: what people hear first becomes the standard for everything after it.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Business.** Layoffs announced days after record profits read as greed. The same measure explained after industry-wide pressure reads as survival.
- **Public affairs.** A contested decision released after a crisis looks decisive; released after a scandal it looks like a distraction.
- **Sales.** A discount of a thousand feels large after a competitor’s five hundred and small after a three thousand trade-in.
- **Internal.** Difficult feedback given right after a success is heard as improvement rather than punishment.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the comparison is obviously chosen.** Everyone knows the other benchmark exists. Using the flattering one without

acknowledging it costs you more credibility than the number ever would.

- **When the sequencing looks like burial.** Bad news released late on a Friday is a signal in itself. Every journalist knows it.
- **When people compare notes.** Different framings for different rooms survive only until two rooms talk to each other.
- **When the context is doing all the work.** If the fact cannot stand once the staging is removed, you have a problem to solve, not a message to shape.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Ask for the other comparison.** “How does that look against last year?” The answer is usually the real one.
- **Notice the preamble.** A long build-up before a number is a frame being installed. Listen for the number and evaluate it cold.
- **Watch the calendar.** Announcements timed to a distracting event deserve a second reading.
- **Read the sequence backwards.** Put the conclusion first and see whether the argument still holds.

KEY TAKEAWAY

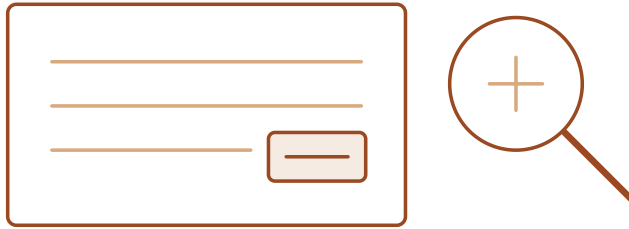
Context decides meaning. What comes before your sentence, what it is compared with and where it is said can change its reading entirely.

Use staging to make a true statement land correctly. Use it to make a false one land well and you are building a problem with a delay on it.

NEXT · Chapter 9: assumptions nobody stops to question.

PRESUPPOSITION

Ideas accepted because nobody was asked to accept them.



WHAT IT IS

Presupposition means building an assumption into a sentence so that the listener processes the visible part and accepts the hidden part without examining it.

“Do you think this strategy will work?” invites debate. “When this strategy works, what is the next step?” does not. The success is now the ground on which the question stands, while the listener answers something else.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 It bypasses resistance**
A direct claim can be rejected. An embedded one is rarely noticed, because attention goes to the explicit question.
- 2 It sets the frame without defending it**
“When we open in Europe...” makes the expansion the default. What remains to discuss is how and when, never whether.

3 It creates ownership

When someone answers inside your assumption, they start building on it. People defend what they helped construct.

HOW TO USE IT

1 Put the outcome inside the question

“Once the agreement is signed, which market do we start with?” assumes the signature and moves attention downstream.

2 Make the claim a background fact

“Given how much you care about quality, this proposal will make sense to you.” The premise is presented as already shared.

3 Combine it with open timing

“When this becomes the standard, we will already be there” assumes inevitability without committing to a date (Chapter 5).

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Sales.** “When you start seeing results, what do you want to tackle next?” assumes both the purchase and its success.
- **Leadership.** “Once the team settles into the new process, output will rise further” assumes the process is happening.
- **Recruitment.** “When you join us, how do you see the role developing?” moves the conversation past the decision.
- **Negotiation.** “After closing, who manages the transition on your side?” treats closing as settled.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the assumption is contested.** Embedding something the other side actively disputes reads as a trick and hardens them.
- **With careful listeners.** Lawyers, auditors and experienced negotiators hear presuppositions the way musicians hear a wrong note.

- **When it reaches paper.** A presupposition in a draft becomes a claim you may have to prove.
- **When you start believing it yourself.** The technique works on the speaker too, which is how people end up planning for an outcome nobody agreed to.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Answer the hidden part first.** “Before the next step, we have not agreed that this works. Let us take that first.”
- **Listen for “when”, “once”, “after”.** Time words are the usual carriers.
- **Beware of “as you know” and “given your...”.** Both install a premise as common ground.
- **Repeat the sentence without the assumption.** If it now sounds like a request rather than a fact, you have found it.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Presupposition puts your conclusion in the part of the sentence nobody argues with, then invites the other person to build on it.

It is the most effective technique in this book on people who are not listening carefully; it is the most damaging on people who are.

NEXT · Chapter 10: preparing the ground before the conversation begins.

PRE-FRAMING

Planting the reading before the message arrives.



WHAT IT IS

Pre-framing is what you say before the substance, so that the substance is judged the way you want. Presupposition hides an assumption inside a sentence; pre-framing places it in the minutes before the sentence.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 First impressions set the standard**
The first frame offered becomes the reference for everything after, because people evaluate against what they already have in mind.
- 2 It disarms objections in advance**
“I know the budget is the concern here, which is why the structure is built around cost” addresses the resistance before it is spoken, when it is still cheap to address.
- 3 It fixes the emotional tone**
“We have a serious problem” and “we have a real opportunity” describe the same situation. The audience will follow the one you

choose.

HOW TO USE IT

- 1 **Open with the criterion, not the proposal**
“The question we should judge this against is whether it survives a bad quarter.” Anyone who accepts the criterion has half accepted your conclusion.
- 2 **Plant short phrases early**
“I think you will find this simpler than it looks.” When they see it, simplicity is what they are looking for.
- 3 **Name the objection and place it**
“Some will say the timeline is ambitious. That is precisely the point of doing it now.”
- 4 **Use the setting**
A cost proposal presented during a budget review is already half framed. Put the same proposal into a growth meeting and it sounds defensive.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Board meeting.** Five minutes on the risk of doing nothing before presenting the plan that carries risk.
- **Client pitch.** A short story about a project that failed on integration, before showing the part of your offer that handles integration.
- **Internal.** Announcing an unpopular process right after a period of visible chaos that the process fixes.
- **Media.** Framing a decision as a choice between two hard options before saying which one you took.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the frame is too heavy.** A long preamble signals that something unpleasant is coming, so people brace before you get there.

- **When the audience knows the trick.** Experienced listeners discount a proposal exactly as much as its introduction is polished.
- **When the criterion turns against you.** Set a standard early and you will be measured by it later, including in the parts of your case that do not meet it.
- **When events overtake it.** Pre-framing ages badly. If the situation changes between the framing and the decision, the framing becomes evidence of misjudgement.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Ask for the proposal first.** “Show me what you are proposing, then tell me how to think about it.”
- **Write down your own criteria before the meeting.** They are much harder to displace when they already exist on paper.
- **Notice the pre-emptive objection.** Whatever they disarm early is usually the weakest part of the offer. Go straight there.
- **Separate the story from the numbers.** A strong opening story is often a substitute for a weak spreadsheet.

KEY TAKEAWAY

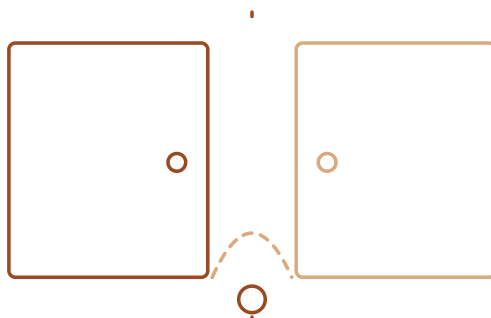
Pre-framing sets the standard by which your message will be judged, before the message exists.

The person who defines the criteria usually wins the discussion that follows, which is why the criteria are worth more attention than the arguments.

NEXT · Chapter 11: designing the options.

THE CONTROLLED CHOICE

Deciding the menu, not the meal.



WHAT IT IS

The controlled choice gives the other person a real decision inside a set of options you designed, all of which work for you. It is not forcing a choice; it is building the menu.

It is standard in sales (packages that are all profitable), in negotiation (trade-offs that protect the core) and in leadership (autonomy inside boundaries).

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 People commit to what they chose**
A decision someone made themselves gets defended and justified. Compliance becomes ownership.
- 2 It removes the yes-or-no fight**
“Do you want this?” invites refusal. “Would you rather start with A for speed or B for thoroughness?” replaces refusal with preference.

3 It reduces decision fatigue

Two or three well-built options are easier than an open field; the person feels helped rather than handled.

HOW TO USE IT

1 Make every option acceptable to you

If one branch of the menu hurts you, it is not a controlled choice; it is a gamble.

2 Differentiate on dimensions they care about

Speed against thoroughness, cost against scope, control against simplicity. The trade-off has to be real or the choice feels fake.

3 Let them shape one option

“Which of these two, or tell me what you would change in the second?” The invitation to modify makes the whole set feel like theirs.

4 Keep the number small

Two or three. More options invite comparison shopping and delay.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Negotiation.** “Would you rather extend the current agreement or start a new one with the revised terms?” Both work for you.
- **Leadership.** “Do you want to run this alone or pick someone to run it with?” Either way the project has an owner.
- **Sales.** “Standard package or the tailored version?” Either way it is a sale.
- **Scheduling.** “Tuesday morning or Thursday afternoon?” The meeting is no longer in question.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the options are transparently equivalent.** People feel handled and start asking what is not on the menu.

- **With sophisticated counterparts.** They will answer with a third option, which puts you on their ground.
- **When the excluded option was the right one.** Designing out the obvious solution damages you when it later becomes obvious to everyone.
- **In consumer contexts.** Choice architecture that hides the cheap option or the exit is regulated in many markets, with enforcement increasing.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Ask what is not on the list.** “What is the option you did not put in front of me?”
- **Name the decision above the choice.** Before choosing between A and B, confirm you have decided to do anything at all.
- **Take the third path.** “Neither. Here is what would work.” The menu only holds if you accept it.
- **Watch the middle option.** Three choices usually exist to make the middle one look reasonable.

KEY TAKEAWAY

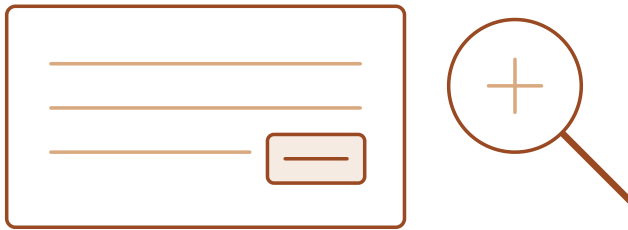
A controlled choice turns resistance into preference by moving the conversation from whether to which.

It works only when every option genuinely suits you and none of them insults the intelligence of the person choosing.

NEXT · Chapter 12: where words stop being conversation and start being binding.

CONTRACTS AND WRITTEN WORDS

Writing what holds, reading what hides.



WHAT IT IS

Everything in this book gets more serious when it is written down. In a contract, wording does not shape perception for an afternoon: it decides who owes what, for how long and with what way out.

This chapter works in both directions, because in practice you need both. How to write clauses that do what you intended; how to read a document to find what somebody else put in it.

WHY IT WORKS

1 Attention collapses after the headline terms

Once price, scope and dates are agreed, concentration drops. Definitions, conditions and boilerplate are read fast, which is exactly where meaning lives.

2 Definitions govern everything above them

A contract defining “launch” as the moment materials are approved rather than the public release date moves every downstream deadline without touching the schedule.

3 Qualifiers change the nature of an obligation

“Best efforts”, “reasonable”, “material”, “substantial”: each converts a duty into a discussion.

4 Placement signals importance

A protective clause sitting in general provisions attracts less negotiation than the same clause in the main obligations.

HOW TO USE IT: WRITING

1 Define the terms that carry money

Net profit, completion, delivery, confidential information, change of control. If a number depends on a word, define the word.

2 Choose your qualifier deliberately

An absolute duty is a risk; an unqualified “best efforts” is a promise that means little. Decide which you are giving and write it on purpose.

3 Write for the person who reads it in a dispute

Not for the person shaking your hand today. The right test is whether a stranger in three years reaches your reading without your help.

4 Say what happens when it goes wrong

Termination, notice, cure periods, consequences. Most contract pain comes from silence, not from hostile clauses.

THE RULE THAT DECIDES THIS CHAPTER

A clause that only works if the other side does not notice it is not clever drafting; it is a future dispute. In most legal systems ambiguity in a document is construed against the party that drafted it. Many jurisdictions strike out terms that are unfair or not transparent in standard-form contracts. Hidden meaning is the weakest position on paper.

HOW TO USE IT: READING

1 Read the definitions first

Then read the clauses that use them. Most surprises are already visible here.

2 Search the qualifiers

Look for reasonable, material, substantial, promptly, best efforts. Each one is a place where you will need agreement later.

3 Go to the exit clauses before the commercial ones

Termination, automatic renewal, exclusivity, change of control, limitation of liability. The bad news lives at the back.

4 Run the failure cases

What happens if they are late, if you are late, if the volume never arrives, if the key person leaves? If the document is silent, that silence is the answer.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Earn-out.** Net profit defined to exclude certain costs raises the figure on which payments are calculated. Whoever writes that definition writes the price.
- **Non-compete.** Competition defined narrowly leaves room the other side expected to be closed.
- **Licence.** Rights granted “in connection with the project” rather than “for the project only” cover a great deal more.
- **Confidentiality.** Defining confidential information as everything exchanged, rather than what is marked, is broad protection that looks like standard text.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the counterparty’s lawyer reads properly.** Which is the normal case. A buried advantage found in review costs you trust in the whole document.

- **When you have to enforce it.** Clever wording is tested exactly when relations are worst and a tribunal is reading it cold.
- **When the term is unenforceable.** An advantage that a court will strike out is not an advantage; it is a false sense of safety.
- **When the deal is long.** You will live inside this text for years, including the parts you wrote to be flexible for you.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Ask why a word is there.** “Why reasonable and not thirty days?” The answer tells you what they expect to need.
- **Rewrite the sentence as a scenario.** “So if the report is late by two weeks, nothing happens?” Wording gets clear fast when it becomes a story.
- **Mark every defined term.** Then read the definition and the clause side by side.
- **Never negotiate the last version at midnight.** Deadline pressure is a drafting technique in itself (Chapter 15).

KEY TAKEAWAY

On paper, the technique that matters is precision: define what carries money, choose your qualifiers on purpose, write the failure cases.

Read the other side's draft the same way. Definitions first, qualifiers second, exits third. The headline terms are the part they expect you to read.

NEXT · Part III: rhythm, silence, questions and reflection.

PART III

RHYTHM AND REFLECTION

Pace, pauses, questions, mirrors



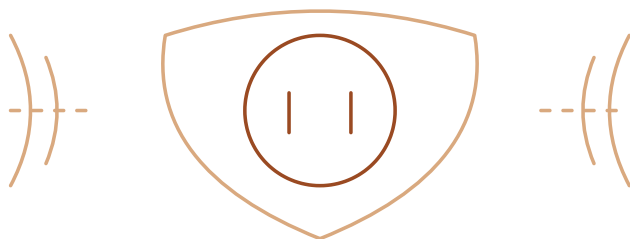
The techniques in the first two parts work on words. The ones here work on everything around them: when you speak, how long you wait, what you ask instead of answering, how closely you match the person in front of you.

They are quieter than the rest of the book and they carry more weight. A pause of three seconds can change an offer. A question instead of an answer can move a whole negotiation. A repeated phrase can decide which idea people remember a month later.

They are also the techniques most often used on you, usually by people who are very good at them.

SILENCE

The pause that makes other people talk.



WHAT IT IS

Most people rush to fill every gap in a conversation, because silence feels like weakness. Used deliberately, it is the opposite. In negotiation, the person who talks less usually holds the better position.

Silence is not saying nothing. It is knowing when saying nothing has more effect than anything you could add.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 People fill the gap**
Say “that does not work for us” and then stop. Very often the other side starts negotiating against themselves.
- 2 It creates authority**
A pause before answering makes the answer sound considered. Speed reads as eagerness, which is a position you rarely want to show.

3 It transfers the mental load

When you do not react, people work to interpret you, revealing how they think while they do it.

HOW TO USE IT

1 The pause before answering

Two or three seconds before you respond to a difficult question. It costs nothing and changes how the answer is received.

2 The non-response

When an offer arrives, do not reply immediately. Let the silence sit on the table and see what they add to it.

3 The refusal to react

When someone is pushing or provoking, stillness is the answer. Nothing deflates a prepared provocation like an absence of reaction.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Negotiation.** The client proposes a lower rate. You look at them and say nothing. Within seconds they add services to justify it.
- **Interview.** You state your number and stop. The other side fills the pause with what else they can offer.
- **Leadership.** A risky proposal is made. You wait before responding; the room turns quiet and your answer carries more weight.
- **Conflict.** A sharp comment is thrown at you. You do not answer. The other person softens it themselves.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **With people who are comfortable in silence.** Some counterparts will simply wait longer than you, so the technique becomes a contest you did not intend to enter.
- **On the phone or in video calls.** Without a face to read, a long pause reads as a connection problem or as rudeness.

- **Across cultures.** In some places a pause is respect; in others it is hostility. Know which room you are in.
- **When it substitutes for a decision.** Silence used to avoid saying something difficult only postpones the same conversation.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Do not fill it.** If you made an offer and they went quiet, the next word is theirs. Wait.
- **Name it if it drags.** “I will leave that with you” hands the silence back.
- **Never improve your own offer in a vacuum.** Bidding against yourself is the most common cost of discomfort.
- **Use the time.** A pause is also yours: check your notes, look at your limit, breathe.

KEY TAKEAWAY

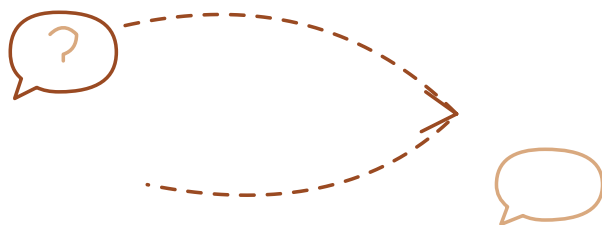
Silence makes other people reveal, decide and often concede. The discipline is not in staying quiet; it is in being comfortable while you do.

The moment you fill your own silence, it belongs to the other side.

NEXT · Chapter 14: answering with questions, then letting them lead the way you chose.

QUESTIONS AND ROLE REVERSAL

Answering without answering, leading without pushing.



WHAT IT IS

Two techniques that belong together. Answering with a question sends the pressure back and gathers information. Role reversal goes further: it makes the other person feel they are leading, while the road they are walking is one you built.

“Are you willing to lower the price?” answered with “what price would you consider fair?” moves the concession to them. “You should choose this option” becomes “would you rather start with A or B?”, which puts the decision inside your frame.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 The person asking is in charge**
Questions dictate the flow. Answers follow it.

2 It reveals their reasoning

“What are you comparing it to?” tells you what you are really competing against.

3 It buys thinking time

A question is the cheapest way to take thirty seconds when you need them.

4 People defend what they feel they chose

A conclusion someone reached themselves is not argued with. That is why role reversal reduces resistance.

HOW TO USE IT

1 Answer direct questions with open ones

“Will you reduce the fee?” answered with “what budget are you working with?”

2 Make them justify their own position

“Why are you against this?” answered with “what makes you confident in the alternative?”

3 Let them speak first, then echo their priorities

“You said the priority is lowering risk. That is why this option fits.”
Your proposal arrives as their conclusion.

4 Frame your suggestion as a response

“Based on what you described, this seems to fit. What is your view?” You lead without pulling.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Sales.** “Can you match their price?” answered with “which parts of the offer matter most to you?”
- **Negotiation.** “Can we sign today?” answered with “which of these terms is non-negotiable for you?”
- **Leadership.** “Will we get more budget?” answered with “what would you need in order to hit the target with what we have?”

- **Conflict.** “Do you think this is my fault?” answered with “what do you think caused it?”

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When it becomes an interrogation.** Three questions in a row without a single answer feels evasive and cold.
- **When they asked something fair.** Some questions deserve an answer; refusing one costs more than the information would have.
- **With people who ask better questions than you.** The technique rewards whoever is more patient, not whoever started.
- **When the choice is transparently steered.** If both options are obviously yours, role reversal looks like a manoeuvre rather than respect.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Answer briefly, then ask back.** “Yes, within reason. What is your reason?” You give a little and keep the initiative.
- **Notice when you are the only one talking.** It is a reliable sign that the other side is running this technique on you.
- **Insist once.** “I will come to that. First, what is your answer?” Most people concede the point.
- **Check whose options you are choosing between.** Ask what a third option would look like (Chapter 11).

KEY TAKEAWAY

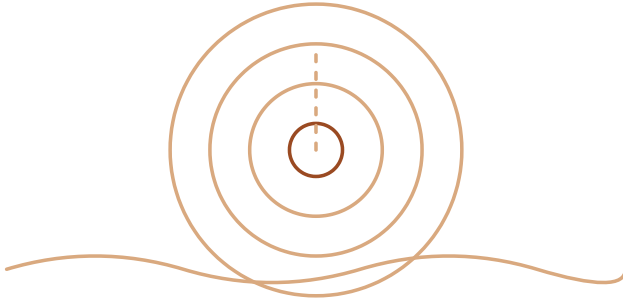
Questions keep you in control, gather information and buy time. Role reversal turns your outcome into their decision.

Both fail the moment they feel like technique. Give real answers often enough that your questions keep working.

NEXT · Chapter 15: when you say it.

TIMING

The same words, a different moment.



WHAT IT IS

Timing is deciding when a message is delivered. The same words produce different results depending on the moment, the setting and the state of the person receiving them.

Good timing is rarely accidental. It means waiting, moving early or holding back entirely until the conditions favour the reading you want.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 Receptiveness changes constantly**
A proposal lands differently on a stressed Monday and after a closed deal.
- 2 Timing sets the emotional frame**
Criticism after a success is heard as improvement. The same words after a failure are heard as blame.
- 3 Late pressure is leverage**
Raising a request when withdrawal would be expensive for the other side changes the arithmetic of the discussion, which is why

experienced counterparts try it.

HOW TO USE IT

- 1 **Read the state of the room before speaking**
A great argument delivered to a distracted person is a wasted argument.
- 2 **Attach your message to an event**
A budget request after results are announced. A structural change after new funding. The event carries part of the message for you.
- 3 **Use the pause inside the sentence**
“There is one thing that changes this.” A short silence, then the point. Attention concentrates in the gap (Chapter 13).
- 4 **Wait on purpose**
Sometimes the strongest move is to let the situation develop and speak once the other side has committed.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Negotiation.** A key piece of information introduced only after the other side has stated their position publicly.
- **Leadership.** A restructuring announced alongside new funding rather than alone.
- **Sales.** Scarcity mentioned once interest is clear, never before it.
- **Personal.** A difficult subject raised when there is time to finish the conversation rather than at the door.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **Late demands.** Raising a new condition at the last minute works once and poisons everything after it. Many counterparts will walk out on principle. They will also remember.
- **Waiting too long.** Perfect timing that arrives after the decision is just a missed opportunity.

- **Obvious opportunism.** News released to ride someone else's crisis is usually noticed.
- **Pressure that feels engineered.** Deadlines invented to force a signature invite the other side to test whether they are real.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Treat a last-minute change as information.** It tells you how they will behave after signature.
- **Ask what changed.** "What is different from last week?" If nothing is, the timing is the tactic.
- **Never decide inside someone else's clock.** If the deadline is theirs, ask what happens if it passes.
- **Postpone the decision, not the conversation.** "I can answer tomorrow morning" removes most of the pressure without ending anything.

KEY TAKEAWAY

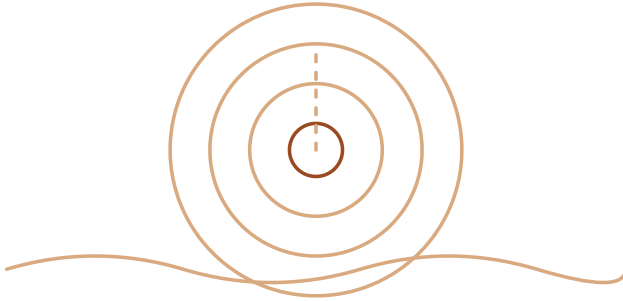
When you speak can matter more than what you say: timing sets receptiveness, emotional framing and leverage.

The technique is patience; its limit is trust. A last-minute manoeuvre buys one negotiation and costs the next three.

NEXT · Chapter 16: the words people remember because you repeated them.

THE ECHO EFFECT

Repetition as quiet agenda-setting.



WHAT IT IS

The echo effect is the deliberate repetition of a few chosen words or ideas across a conversation, a presentation or a series of meetings, until they become the terms in which the subject is discussed.

This is not saying the same thing over and over. It is placing the same two or three anchors in different sentences, so that people leave with them.

WHY IT WORKS

1 **Familiarity feels like truth**

The more often people hear a phrase, the more readily they accept it. Repetition raises both memory and belief, which is one of the best-documented effects in psychology.

2 **It sets the criteria**

A manager who keeps saying “long-term stability” gets proposals judged on stability. The agenda moves without an argument.

3 It builds identity

Consistent association with a few words is how people and companies become known for something.

HOW TO USE IT

1 Choose two or three anchor words

Positive, adaptable, true. If you cannot defend the word, do not anchor on it.

2 Vary the sentence, not the word

“A scalable solution”, “scaling without extra cost”, “the scalability is the point”. Same anchor, three different shapes.

3 Repeat across channels

Meeting, email, slide, follow-up. Multi-channel repetition is what makes a term stick.

4 Let others carry it

When your counterpart starts using your word in their own sentences, the work is done.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Sales.** An adviser who returns to “secure” throughout a meeting leaves the client associating the service with safety.
- **Leadership.** A chief executive who repeats “collaboration” in every update gradually makes teamwork the default standard.
- **Public communication.** A campaign that repeats one phrase across speeches and interviews owns that phrase in the end.
- **Negotiation.** Repeating “workable structure” instead of “concession” quietly changes what the discussion is about.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When it becomes a slogan.** People notice, then the word turns into a joke inside the organisation.

- **When reality contradicts it.** Repeating “transparency” in a company that hides things accelerates cynicism instead of belief.
- **When the word is empty.** Anchors that mean nothing make you sound like a press release (Chapter 4).
- **When someone else owns the word.** Repeating a term your competitor has built makes you the echo.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Count the repeats.** If a word appears in every paragraph, it is an anchor, not a description.
- **Ask what it means here.** A defined anchor is a position. An undefined one is advertising.
- **Do not adopt their vocabulary.** The moment you use their word, you have accepted their frame. Use your own.
- **Check the evidence behind the word.** Repetition is not proof, however familiar the phrase has become.

KEY TAKEAWAY

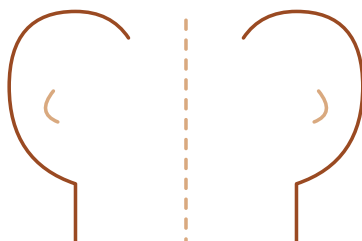
A few words repeated with intent become the terms in which a subject is understood, plus the criteria by which decisions are judged.

Choose anchors you can defend. Repetition makes a true claim persuasive and a false one memorable.

NEXT · Chapter 17: matching the person in front of you.

MIRRORING

Alignment that happens below the words.



WHAT IT IS

Mirroring is the subtle reflection of the other person's pace, tone, posture and vocabulary, so that they feel understood and in step with you. It is not imitation, which is obvious and insulting; it is alignment.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 Similarity builds trust**
We cooperate more easily with people who seem to work the way we do. The effect is automatic and largely unconscious.
- 2 It lowers defences**
Matching a calm, deliberate pace takes tension out of a hostile meeting faster than any argument.
- 3 It makes ideas easier to accept**
A proposal phrased in someone's own vocabulary feels like a continuation of their thinking rather than an intrusion into it.

HOW TO USE IT

1 **Match pace and volume first**

Speed and loudness are the easiest signals to read and the least noticeable to adjust.

2 **Use their words**

If they say “efficiency”, do not answer with “optimisation”. Use their term and you inherit their meaning.

3 **Match the register, not the mood**

Reflect seriousness with seriousness, energy with energy, but never mirror anger. Matching hostility escalates it.

4 **Wait a beat**

Adjust after a short delay. Immediate copying is visible and it destroys the effect.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Sales.** A relaxed client is met with a lighter tone; a formal one gets full sentences and no jokes.
- **Negotiation.** With an analytical counterpart, you lead with numbers and drop the adjectives.
- **Leadership.** With someone who thinks slowly and carefully, you slow down, which is usually the harder discipline.
- **Difficult conversation.** Lowering your voice when the other person raises theirs pulls the volume of the room down within a minute.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When it is seen.** Obvious mirroring reads as mockery and it is very hard to recover from.
- **When you mirror the wrong thing.** Copying nervousness, aggression or confusion amplifies it in both of you.
- **When it costs your own register.** Some counterparts need to meet someone different from themselves. A calm person is more useful to a panicking client than a second panicking person.

- **When it replaces substance.** Rapport opens the door; it does not close the deal.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Notice sudden similarity.** Perfect agreement on style, pace and vocabulary inside ten minutes is a technique more often than a coincidence.
- **Change something deliberately.** Shift your pace and see whether they follow. If they do, you know what is happening.
- **Separate warmth from terms.** Ask yourself what has actually been agreed. Rapport is not a concession.
- **Stay yourself.** The most effective defence is a register that does not move just because theirs does.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Mirroring builds trust below the level of argument, which is why it works even on people who know about it.

It is alignment, not imitation. The moment it is visible, everything it gained is lost.

NEXT · Chapter 18: controlling the emotional signal.

EMOTIONAL AMBIGUITY

Managing the signal, not hiding the feeling.



WHAT IT IS

Emotional ambiguity is the deliberate choice to keep your emotional state unclear, so that others project onto it. It is not coldness. It is deciding how much of your reaction is visible, in the same way you decide how much of your position is visible.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 Unclear reactions keep people engaged**
If they cannot tell whether you are pleased or unconvinced, they stay attentive and often improve their offer pre-emptively.
- 2 It lowers the temperature**
“I am disappointed” escalates. “This is interesting. Let us go through the detail” carries the same message without triggering defence.
- 3 It holds different audiences at once**
“This brings both opportunities and risks” lets optimists and sceptics each hear agreement.

HOW TO USE IT

1 **Control tone and face before words**

A measured tone and open but restrained body language do most of the work.

2 **Choose words that carry two weights**

“That is ambitious” reads as praise to a supporter and as doubt to a sceptic.

3 **Be precise on facts, undefined on feeling**

“The figures show a fifteen per cent drop” followed by “we will think about what that means”. Clarity where it matters, space where it helps.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Negotiation.** An offer met with a pause and a small nod. They cannot tell whether they overbid, so they keep working.
- **Leadership.** A risky proposal met with “that is an interesting direction”. Nobody disengages and nothing is endorsed.
- **Public statement.** “We recognise there are different views on this decision.” Supporters hear openness, critics hear acknowledgement.
- **Feedback.** A neutral delivery that leaves the person thinking about the work rather than about your mood.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **With people who need to know where they stand.** Teams read a permanently neutral leader as disapproval, often correctly.
- **When praise is due.** Withholding a clear positive signal costs you loyalty for no gain whatsoever.
- **In conflict at home.** Ambiguity in personal relationships is not strategy; it is distance, read as such.
- **When it is really avoidance.** If you cannot say what you think, the technique is covering a decision you have not made.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Ask for the verdict, not the feeling.** “Is this a yes, a no or a not yet?”
- **Do not fill the emotional gap.** Their neutrality is not an invitation to improve your terms (Chapter 13).
- **Watch the second meeting.** Patterns are visible over time even when single reactions are not.
- **Take written confirmation of what was agreed.** Tone is deniable; a summary is not.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Emotional ambiguity manages the signal so that people react in the way that suits the conversation, without escalation.

Use it in negotiation and in public communication. Use it with your own team and you will slowly train them to stop telling you things.

NEXT · Part IV: directing the conversation towards an outcome.

PART IV

DIRECTING THE CONVERSATION

Moving people towards an outcome

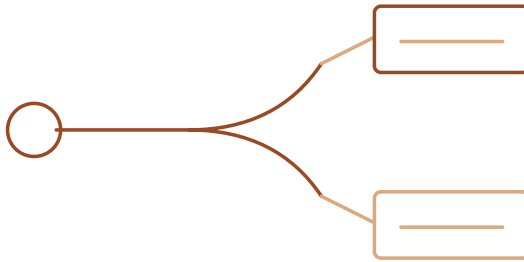


The last part is about momentum. The earlier techniques protect your position, shape the frame and manage the rhythm. These ones move a discussion towards a result.

They are also the ones with the shortest fuse. A layered message that is discovered, a contradiction that looks like dishonesty, a retraction handled badly: each of them costs more than it gained. That is why the part ends with the chapter on limits, which is not an appendix to the book but the condition that makes the rest of it usable twice.

DOUBLE MEANING AND LAYERED MESSAGES

One sentence, several readings.



WHAT IT IS

A layered message says one thing on the surface and something else underneath, without either reading being false. Everything you say is accurate. The ambiguity is in what each listener does with it.

It is how a single statement can reassure employees and investors whose interests do not align, or how a speech can make two groups feel personally addressed.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 People hear what they are ready to hear**
“We are optimistic about this partnership” is read as commitment by partners, as growth by investors, as stability by staff. Nothing was promised.

- 2 **It avoids forcing a hard truth too early**
“We are looking at how to operate more efficiently” carries the same information as a warning, without the panic that stops work.
- 3 **It preserves both readings for later**
Because you never chose one, you can emphasise whichever the situation makes true, without contradicting yourself.

HOW TO USE IT

- 1 **Map the audiences first**
If you cannot name the two groups and what each needs to hear, you cannot build the layers.
- 2 **Use one broad term everyone accepts**
Growth, alignment, progress, value. That is the surface (Chapter 4).
- 3 **Put the specific signal where only one group will catch it**
A reference, a number, a phrase that means something precise inside one community and nothing outside it.
- 4 **Let delivery decide the emphasis**
The same sentence said warmly or flatly carries different weight. Tone is part of the message.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Corporate.** “We are restructuring to position ourselves for long-term growth.” Investors hear efficiency, employees hear a future.
- **Public.** “We will modernise the city while keeping what makes it ours.” Two audiences, one sentence, no contradiction.
- **Sales.** “Built for what you need now and adaptable for later” reassures the client and keeps the scope open for you.
- **Media.** “We are committed to exploring every opportunity in this space” gives analysts a story and commits to nothing.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When the two audiences meet.** They always do eventually, then the sentence gets read side by side.
- **When one group needed the truth.** If people made decisions on the comfortable reading, the discovery is not a communication problem; it is a breach.
- **When it touches regulated information.** In listed companies, layered statements about results or plans are a disclosure issue, not a style choice.
- **When you are the only one who knows there were two layers.** That is how you end up believing your own surface reading.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Ask for the version for the other room.** “What are you telling the investors?” The comparison is the test.
- **Convert it into a commitment.** “So, no redundancies this year?” Either they confirm, which is now on record, or the second layer appears.
- **Write the summary.** Layered messages do not survive a written recap that asks for confirmation.
- **Judge by what happens next.** The real meaning shows up in decisions, not in sentences.

KEY TAKEAWAY

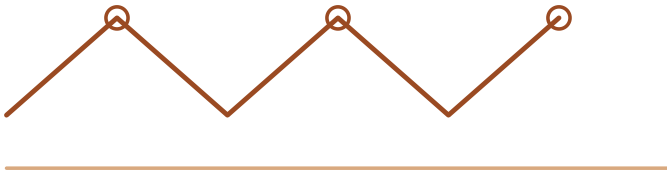
A layered message lets one statement serve audiences with different needs, without lying.

Its lifespan is exactly the time it takes for those audiences to compare notes. Build it so it survives that moment.

NEXT · Chapter 20: staying unpredictable without looking unreliable.

STRATEGIC CONTRADICTIONS

Being hard to model without being hard to trust.



WHAT IT IS

Strategic contradiction is deliberate inconsistency at the edges of your position, so that others cannot predict your next move and cannot build a fixed strategy against you.

The aim is not confusion. It is keeping enough uncertainty that the other side has to stay adaptive, which slows them down and gives you room.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 Certainty is the raw material of other people's plans**
If they cannot pin your stance, they proceed cautiously.
- 2 It holds different audiences at once**
“Committed to innovation while preserving what works” lets both camps hear their own priority.

3 It prevents a stable counter-argument

A position that shifts with context cannot be answered with one prepared rebuttal.

HOW TO USE IT

1 Keep the core fixed

Your values, your reliability and your numbers stay consistent. The variation belongs to tactics, never to facts.

2 Justify the shift with context

“Last quarter speed mattered; now quality is where we gain.” A shift with a reason is judgement, not inconsistency.

3 Vary emphasis, not substance

Profitability with investors, product with the team. Both true, different weight.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Negotiation.** Alternating signals of urgency and patience, so the other side cannot tell whether pressure or delay will work.
- **Corporate.** “Focused on our core market, open to the right opportunity.” Stability inside, ambition outside.
- **Acquisition.** Hinting at both integration and independence for the target, which keeps internal opposition from organising around one scenario.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When it reaches the facts.** Inconsistency about numbers, dates or commitments is not strategy; it is unreliability, which ends relationships.
- **Inside your own organisation.** Teams cannot execute against a moving target. What looks like flexibility outside reads as chaos inside.

- **When someone keeps a record.** Written statements sit side by side and do not care about context.
- **When it becomes your reputation.** Being hard to read is an advantage; being impossible to rely on removes you from the shortlist.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Write down each position with its date.** Contradictions are invisible in conversation and obvious on paper.
- **Ask which one holds today.** A direct question forces a choice or exposes the technique.
- **Price the uncertainty.** If they will not fix a position, make the ambiguity cost something in the terms.
- **Distinguish flexibility from evasion.** Adapting to new facts is legitimate. Adapting to whoever is in the room is not.

KEY TAKEAWAY

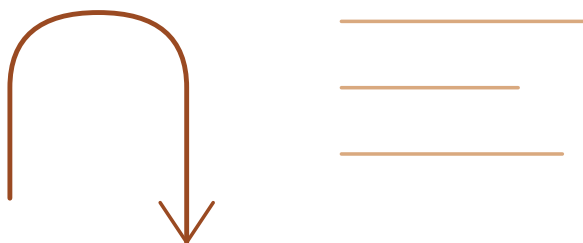
Contradictions at the edges keep you unpredictable; contradictions at the core destroy the credibility that made you worth listening to.

Keep the facts fixed and vary the emphasis. That is the whole technique.

NEXT · Chapter 21: changing your position without losing it.

WALKING BACK A STATEMENT

Changing position without paying for it.



WHAT IT IS

Walking back is the skill of reversing or softening something you said, without appearing unreliable. It is not pretending you never said it. It is framing the change as a response to new information, which is what it should be.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 People accept adaptation, not reversal**
“I was wrong” invites doubt about everything else. “With the latest numbers, the better route is this” reads as judgement at work.
- 2 It protects flexibility**
You stop defending an outdated position, which is where most credibility is actually lost.

- 3 **It lets you reposition without breaking the relationship**
A change tied to shared goals is heard as loyalty to the objective rather than a retreat.

HOW TO USE IT

- 1 **Anchor the change to an event**
“When I said that, we did not have the fourth-quarter figures.”
Never to a change of mood.
- 2 **Recast the original as conditional**
“At the time, with what we knew, that was the right call.” The past statement becomes a decision rather than a promise.
- 3 **Return to the shared objective**
“The goal is the same. This route reaches it better under current conditions.”
- 4 **Do it early**
Retractions are cheap when they are quick and expensive when the other side has already built on your first position.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Leadership.** A launch date moved by a month, presented as the decision to deliver something that works.
- **Negotiation.** A fixed price reopened by tying it to the change in scope, which is both true and defensible.
- **Public.** A position revised after consultation, framed as listening rather than as a reversal.

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When there is no new fact.** If nothing changed except your preference, everyone can see it; the framing makes it worse.
- **When it is repeated.** A second walk-back on the same subject removes the value of everything you say on it.

- **When the other side acted on your word.** If they spent money or made commitments, an elegant retraction is still a broken promise. Address the cost, not the narrative.
- **When it happens in writing after being said in a meeting.** The gap between the two versions becomes the story.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Ask what the new information is.** A real change has a cause you can name.
- **Check who bears the cost.** Adaptation that always moves the burden onto you is not adaptation.
- **Record the original.** A short note after every meeting makes retractions visible and rare.
- **Decide whether it matters.** Some walk-backs are honest and useful. Treating every one as betrayal makes you impossible to work with.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Walking back well means owning the narrative of the change: new facts, same objective, better route.

It works once per subject. After that, people stop treating your first position as real, which removes the point of having one.

NEXT · Chapter 22: what happens when you deny something.

USING NEGATIVES TO AFFIRM

Denial that plants the idea.



WHAT IT IS

Denying something forces the listener to process it first. “I am not saying this is the most important decision of your career” leaves them thinking about exactly that. The negation does not erase the idea; it installs it.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 Negation requires the concept**
To understand “not pressure”, the mind has to represent pressure. The idea survives the denial.
- 2 Denial can sound like candour**
“I am not saying it is perfect, but it is close” denies perfection while implying it.

3 **Unprompted denials invite suspicion**

“We have no plans to change the leadership team” makes people wonder about the leadership team. This works both for you and against you.

HOW TO USE IT

1 **Pair the denial with the idea you want remembered**

“I am not suggesting this is revolutionary, only that it changes how we work every day.”

2 **Use soft negatives to create curiosity**

“Not exactly a standard launch” invites the question you want to be asked.

3 **Follow the denial with your own frame**

Leave nothing empty: after the negative, give them the reading you prefer.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Sales.** “I am not here to sell you something you do not need. This has worked for companies in your position.”
- **Leadership.** “I am not proposing we rebuild the strategy, just the two parts that decide the result.”
- **Public relations.** “We are not ignoring the feedback. It is driving the next release.”

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When you deny something nobody suspected.** You have just introduced it. Now it is in the room.
- **In a crisis.** Denial-shaped statements amplify the accusation. In serious situations, say what you did and what you will do.
- **When the denial is literally true and practically false.** That gap is what people remember later; it looks worse than a plain answer would have.

- **When someone quotes only the first half.** “I am not saying this is the most important decision of your career” survives badly in a headline.

WHEN IT’S USED ON YOU

- **Hear the noun, not the negation.** Whatever is being denied is what they want you thinking about.
- **Ask the direct question.** “Are there plans to change the leadership team?” The answer to a direct question is much harder to shape.
- **Notice unprompted denials.** A denial nobody asked for is information.
- **Write down what was denied.** Later, compare it with what happened.

KEY TAKEAWAY

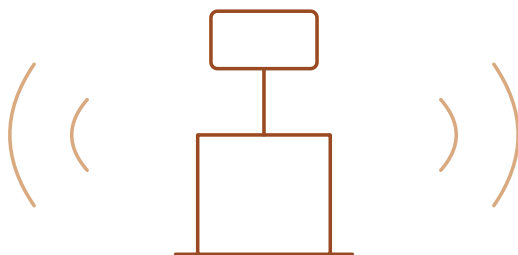
A denial makes the idea more memorable, not less. That is the technique and also its risk.

Use it to plant something you can defend. Never use it to answer a serious accusation.

NEXT · Chapter 23: speaking to people who disagree with each other.

SPEAKING TO OPPOSING AUDIENCES

One message, two camps, no casualties.



WHAT IT IS

These are the techniques used when the room does not agree with itself: shareholders and staff, buyers and sellers, the people who want change and the people who want things kept. The goal is a message that both sides can accept without either feeling betrayed.

The name comes from politics; the mechanics are identical in corporate communication, public relations and leadership.

WHY IT WORKS

- 1 Value words are shared**
Freedom, stability, responsibility, opportunity: broad terms with positive weight that different groups fill differently (Chapter 4).
- 2 Common ground avoids confrontation**
Building on a shared goal keeps both camps in the conversation instead of forcing an argument you would have to win.

3 **Parallel assurance works**

A sentence built so each group hears its own commitment keeps everyone inside the tent while you decide the specifics.

HOW TO USE IT

1 **Name the tension and place yourself between the sides**

“There is urgency here. There is also a cost to moving badly. Our job is the balance.”

2 **Give each side one sentence that is clearly for them**

Not a hidden layer, an explicit acknowledgement. People forgive a decision they dislike far more readily than they forgive being ignored.

3 **Order the message for the room**

Start with the concern of the group that is hardest to keep, then move on.

4 **Keep the specifics for the decisions, not the speech**

Broad in the address, precise in the follow-up to each group.

EXAMPLES IN ACTION

- **Corporate.** “We are restructuring for efficiency. We will carry every affected person through the transition.” Shareholders hear the first half, staff the second.
- **Public.** “We will renew the city while keeping its character.” Developers and residents both hear their concern.
- **Board.** “The plan protects the core business and funds one bet. Both matter this year.”

WHEN IT BACKFIRES

- **When both halves cannot be true at once.** Promising efficiency and no consequences buys three weeks and costs the year.
- **When it substitutes for the decision.** Balanced language is a way to deliver a decision, not a way to avoid making one.

- **When one group is paying for the other.** They will notice, then the even-handed tone will look like contempt.
- **When repeated too often.** A leader who never takes a side ends up trusted by neither.

WHEN IT'S USED ON YOU

- **Split the sentence.** Read each half as a separate promise and ask which one has a number attached.
- **Ask what happens if they conflict.** “If efficiency and the guarantee collide, which one wins?” That answer is the real position.
- **Follow the resources.** Budget and headcount reveal the priority that the speech balanced away.
- **Give it a month.** Parallel assurances are settled by events, not by analysis.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Speaking to opposing audiences is about acknowledgement, not vagueness: each side needs to hear that its concern was understood.

The message holds only if both halves can survive together. If they cannot, you are not communicating a decision, you are delaying one.

NEXT · Chapter 24: the limits that make all of this usable more than once.

WHEN NOT TO USE ANY OF THIS

The limits that protect you.



WHAT IT IS

Every technique in this book works. That is precisely why the last chapter is about the situations where using them costs you more than not using them, plus the lines that are not worth crossing for any deal.

This is not a moral appendix. It is the practical part. The value of everything you have read depends on being someone whose words still count in two years.

THE THREE SITUATIONS WHERE AMBIGUITY IS A MISTAKE

1 When someone has to act on your words

Teams, suppliers, pilots of a project, anyone who will do something because of what you said. Ambiguity here does not protect you; it guarantees the wrong outcome and puts it on your account.

- 2 **When the subject is safety, health, money owed or the law**
In those areas an unclear sentence is not flexibility. It is exposure: to liability, to regulators, to a claim that you knew and did not say.
- 3 **When trust is the asset you are building**
Long relationships (family, partners, key clients, your own team) run on predictability. Technique deployed there produces short wins and a slow loss you will notice only when it is finished.

THE LINES WORTH KEEPING

- **Never create a false belief about a fact.** Shaping interpretation is legitimate. Inventing a fact, hiding a defect, misstating a number: those are fraud or misrepresentation, whatever the wording around them.
- **Never rely on the other side not reading.** If a clause works only because they missed it, it will be read by a tribunal at the worst possible moment (Chapter 12).
- **Never use these techniques on someone who cannot push back.** Employees, dependants, people in distress. The imbalance is what makes it exploitation rather than negotiation.
- **Never put a technique in writing where a decision is needed.** Written ambiguity is discovered, dated and quoted.
- **Never do anything you would not be able to explain afterwards, in the room, to the person it affected.** That is the only test that covers cases this chapter has not anticipated.

WHY RESTRAINT PAYS

- 1 **Reputation compounds**
Access, terms and information all improve for people who are known to be straight. That advantage is worth more than any single negotiation.
- 2 **Techniques are visible to professionals**
Anyone experienced recognises them. Overusing them marks you as someone to be managed rather than trusted.

3 The exit option depends on credibility

The strongest position in this book (being able to leave) only works if people believe you.

4 You will need the same counterpart again

Most markets are small. The person opposite you today decides something about you next year.

THE SINGLE TEST

If it only works because the other person has not noticed, it is not a technique. It is a problem with a delay on it.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

- **Be clear on facts, flexible on positions.** That is the line that keeps everything in this book usable.
- **Say the hard thing early.** Most of what ambiguity postpones gets more expensive with time.
- **Give people the version you would want.** It is also, in practice, the version that produces the fewest surprises for you.
- **Keep one register for the people who depend on you.** With them, the strategy is to be predictable.

KEY TAKEAWAY

These techniques control interpretation. They do not license inventing facts, hiding defects or pressuring people who cannot answer back.

The measure of skill is not how much you can get away with. It is whether the same people will sit down with you again.

EXACTLY ENOUGH

Twenty-four techniques, four parts, one idea underneath all of them: control belongs to the person who decides how much to say, when to say it and inside which frame it is heard.

Part I was about not being pinned down. Part II was about deciding the terms on which things are understood. Part III was about rhythm: silence, questions, timing, repetition, alignment. Part IV was about moving a conversation towards a result, plus the limits that let you do it more than once.

THREE THINGS WORTH KEEPING

1 Control is quiet

The strongest communicators are not the ones who talk most. They are the ones who say enough, at the right moment, in their own voice.

2 Preparation is about objectives, not sentences

Know what you want, what you will not accept and where you stand up and leave. Everything else is read from the room.

3 Recognition is worth more than execution

You will use these techniques occasionally. You will have them used on you constantly. The sections called *When It's Used on You* are the ones to reread.

WHAT TO DO WITH THIS BOOK

Do not try to use everything. Pick two techniques that fit how you already speak and use them deliberately for a month, until they stop feeling like techniques. Then add a third.

Watch for them in meetings, in the press, in the way offers are worded. Once you see the moves, the room changes: what looked like personality turns out to be method, while what looked like method turns out to be, quite often, habit.

Say exactly enough. Then stop.

The people who get what they want in conversation are rarely the loudest ones. They are the ones who stayed flexible, read the person in front of them, kept their credibility intact and knew when a sentence was already complete.

THE TWENTY-FOUR MOVES

One page to find the technique, one column to recognise it.

#	TECHNIQUE	USE IT WHEN	HOW TO SPOT IT
1	Read First, Speak After	Every meeting, first minutes	Their manner changes with each counterpart
2	Strategic Ambiguity	When interpretation matters more than a decision	Verbs of activity: exploring, evaluating, considering
3	Open-Ended Phrasing	Early stages, when nothing should close	Answers that describe direction, never a step
4	Vague Keywords · “It Depends”	Building alignment before specifics	Words everyone approves and nobody defines
5	“Maybe” and the Clock	When they need you more than you need them	Open answers plus timing they control
6	The Tactical “No”	Refusing without ending the relationship	“Not right now”, “not a priority this quarter”
7	Reframing	Objections, bad news, stuck positions	The fact stays, the adjective changes
8	Context and Sequence	Whenever a number needs a reading	Long preambles and chosen comparisons
9	Presupposition	Moving past a question you do not want asked	“When”, “once”, “as you know”
10	Pre-Framing	Before proposals and announcements	Criteria offered before the content

11	The Controlled Choice	Turning refusal into preference	Two options, both theirs
12	Contracts and Written Words	Anything that becomes binding	Definitions, qualifiers, clauses at the back
13	Silence	After an offer, under provocation	A pause that invites you to improve your own terms
14	Questions and Role Reversal	When you need information or time	You are doing all the talking
15	Timing	Requests, bad news, concessions	Late changes, invented deadlines
16	The Echo Effect	Building a position over weeks	The same word in every paragraph
17	Mirroring	Opening difficult conversations	Sudden similarity in pace and vocabulary
18	Emotional Ambiguity	Negotiation, public statements	A reaction you cannot read
19	Double Meaning	Audiences with different needs	Two readings that cannot both be true later
20	Strategic Contradictions	Staying unpredictable	Positions that change with the room, not the facts
21	Walking Back a Statement	New facts, changed conditions	A retraction with no new information behind it
22	Using Negatives to Affirm	Planting an idea lightly	Denials nobody asked for
23	Speaking to Opposing Audiences	Rooms that disagree with themselves	Two promises that collide in practice
24	Knowing When Not To	Always	Someone who never stops

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

Where the mechanisms described in this book come from.

FRAMES AND DECISIONS

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On contracts, the principle that unclear wording is read against the party that drafted it exists in most legal systems (*contra proferentem*), alongside rules that strike out unfair or non-transparent terms in standard-form and consumer contracts. Check the law that governs your agreement before relying on any wording.

CLAIRE HALDEN

Claire Halden has spent her professional life in rooms where the wording decides the outcome: negotiations, boards, contracts and the conversations that happen before and after them.

Her work has crossed several industries and many countries, on both sides of the table. What she noticed early is that the people who get what they want are almost never the ones with the best prepared lines. They are the ones who read the person in front of them, stay flexible and know exactly when a sentence is finished.

She writes in the first person plural because most of what is described here was tested with the partner she works and travels with. Negotiation is rarely a solo exercise anyway.

In *Say Exactly Enough* she sets out the techniques as a repertoire rather than a script, with two sections in every chapter that most books on the subject leave out: where each technique fails, plus how to recognise it when it is being used on you.

ALSO IN THE KNOWLEDGE, SIMPLY COLLECTION

- **Biohacking, Honestly:** what we tested at home for energy, recovery and focus (and what we dropped).
- **Between Wanting and Having:** the law of attraction as mental training.
- **Biohacking for Pugs: Vitality, Longevity, and Joyful Companionship:** nutrition, movement and technology for our four-legged companions.

TWENTY-FOUR MOVES

Ambiguity that keeps your options open. Silence that makes the other side talk. Questions instead of answers. Frames set before the discussion starts. Contracts that say more than they appear to.

These are the moves used every day in negotiations, boards, interviews and public statements. Most books hand you lines to memorise. Lines sound rehearsed; the person across the table hears it.

This book gives you the repertoire instead: what each technique does, where it fails, plus how to recognise it the moment it is used on you.

HOLD YOUR POSITION · CONTROL THE FRAME · SET THE RHYTHM · DIRECT THE OUTCOME

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