

A COMPANION TO THE BOOK

THE LEADERSHIP TEAM DISCUSSION GUIDE

Everyone Assumed You Knew · Josh Aragon

This is for a leadership team reading the book together. One chapter per session, twelve sessions, or four sessions of three if your calendar is honest about itself.

HOW TO RUN IT

Everyone reads the chapter first. In the room, open with the question, spend most of the time on the argument, and leave with the exercise assigned to named people with a date. A session that ends without an assignment was a book club, not a working meeting.

THE ONE RULE

Nobody answers on behalf of the organization. Every answer is first person, about the room you actually run. The moment answers turn into "we as a company," the session has stopped being useful.

THE SENIOR PERSON GOES FIRST

Every time. On every question. If the most senior leader in the room answers second, everyone else calibrates to what is safe rather than what is true, and you will spend twelve sessions collecting agreement you already had.

1 YOU ARE NOT THE EXCEPTION

OPEN WITH	Am I actually successful, or am I just doing a whole bunch of stuff?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	Everyone in this room can recite a rule they hold their people to, and everyone has a quiet carve-out for their own situation. Name yours out loud. Not the team's, yours.
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Each person writes the one standard they enforce that they personally get an exemption from. Read them around the table. Nobody comments, nobody defends. Just read them.

2 SEE THE VISION

OPEN WITH	Could five people, picked at random, tell a stranger where we're going and why, without the deck?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	The ranking is an output, not the first thing to ask for. Do we actually have a picture of what winning looks like, simple enough to see, or do we have a priority list standing in for one?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Before this meeting, ask five people at random the question. Bring their actual words. Read them out. The gap between the five answers is the work.

3 COACH DON'T MANAGE

OPEN WITH	In our last three one-on-ones, who did most of the talking?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	Every ninety-second answer teaches the same lesson one more time: don't bother thinking, the boss is quicker. Are we building people who get stronger, or people who get answers?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	For the next two weeks, each leader tracks one number: how many times they answered a question they could have asked back. Bring the number. The number is the conversation.

4 CLEAR THE WAY

OPEN WITH	What is the single biggest thing in our people's way right now, and what did we do about it this week?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	Our teams know where the wall is. They have almost certainly stopped mentioning it, because nothing happened the last three times they did. What have we taught them by not moving it?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Each leader asks their team one question this week: what is in your way that you have stopped bringing up? Bring the answers here unedited. Then assign owners and dates in the room.

5 BECOME A LEARNER

OPEN WITH	When did each of us last learn something badly, in front of the people we lead?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	The important part is never the dramatic outcome. It is the moment someone turns from cataloguing why change is impossible into drafting what it would require. Which are we doing right now?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Each person names one thing they do not understand well enough for their role, and one date by which they will have started. Say it in front of the team, because that is the exercise.

6 CHOOSE YOUR ROOMS

OPEN WITH	Which meetings get worse when we walk in, and have we stopped attending any of them?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	His title was the wall. He was staying out from accuracy, and being correct is what locked him out of his own company for six months. Where is our accuracy costing us the room?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	List every recurring meeting each leader attends. Mark the ones that would run better without them, and the ones where their absence is why the truth never reaches them. Cancel or attend accordingly.

7 INSPIRE DON'T MOTIVATE

OPEN WITH	Can we connect what our teams did last week to why it matters, without using a number to do it?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	People go to see inspirational speakers, not intimidating ones. So why do the methods we call motivation look so much like the second thing?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Each leader takes three minutes with one person this week and connects their work to the human on the other side of it. Report back on what changed in the conversation, not in the metrics.

8 COMMIT TO IMPROVEMENT

OPEN WITH	Has anything about how we work changed in the last quarter because we learned something about ourselves, and did it stick?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	Improvement was never the meeting. It is a standing decision, renewed on purpose, forever. Have we quietly decided we have arrived?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Put one item first on the next retrospective, especially if the team thinks it does not need one: why we think we've arrived. Let the silence sit before anyone answers.

9 INTENTIONALLY BUILD CULTURE

OPEN WITH	Could each of us write down three behaviors we are deliberately building, and would our teams recognize them as real?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	Nearly every behavior is free, and there is rarely a perk in anyone's honest film of their own company. So what is actually in ours, and who put it there?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Each leader writes the three behaviors they think define the culture. Then ask three of their people to do the same, separately. Compare the lists in the next session.

10 CHANGE THE SYSTEM

OPEN WITH	When something fails repeatedly, do we change the system before we evaluate the people inside it?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	Somewhere there is a total nobody has ever added up: the standing meetings, the escalations, the favors that became structure one yes at a time. Who here could produce that number?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Pick one recurring failure. Map the system around it before naming a single person. Then find the total nobody has added up, print it, and bring it to the next meeting.

11 DELEGATE

OPEN WITH	When we hand something off, does the person get the intent and the information, or just the task?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	How many of today's decisions live with us out of habit, power, or fear rather than fit? Nobody wants to be transformed; everybody wants to be part of the transformation.
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Each leader lists every decision they made this week. Against each one: is the person deciding this the best person to decide it, and would moving it speed us up? Move three.

12 PROTECT THE TEAMS

OPEN WITH	When pressure came down from above last time, did it stop with us before it reached our teams?
THE ARGUMENT WORTH HAVING	Our structure answers one question every day: whether knowing the truth out loud is safe. What has ours been answering?
DO THIS BEFORE NEXT TIME	Ask the room: when was the last time someone below us told us something that cost them to say, and what happened to them afterward? Answer honestly, then fix what the answer reveals.

*A no isn't a verdict. It's a page number.
everyoneassumedyouknew.com · the scored Gap Check, the field card, and the rest of the toolkit.*