

Cue / Script / Choice

A worksheet for finding the second between what happens to you and what you do about it.

Leadership gets described as a set of decisions. Most of it is faster than that. Something occurs, and a response arrives already formed, and you deliver it before you have decided anything. The response is competent, and it is usually the same one you delivered last time, and it belongs to a version of you that was solving a different problem.

There is a gap in there. It is short; by most accounts about a second. Development happens inside it. Everything below is a way of finding yours.

Three terms

CUE

An event. A question in a meeting. A message with an edge on it. A silence that runs a beat too long. Cues are small and they are specific, and you can usually name yours to the sentence.

SCRIPT

The response that fires without asking permission. It is inherited: from a family, a first boss, a room you survived, a role that once worked. It runs fast because it was rehearsed for years. Speed is why it feels like character rather than choice.

CHOICE

The interval between the two. It exists whether or not you use it. The whole practice is noticing you are standing in it while you are still standing in it.

Who wrote this line?

That is the question to carry. When a response arrives fully formed, ask where it came from, and when it was written, and for whom. Most scripts were written by someone protecting something that no longer needs protecting.

A NOTE ON SCRIPTS

Every script was an intelligent solution to a real situation, and every script is still trying to solve that situation now. The work is authorship: knowing which line is yours and choosing whether to say it again.

Five that show up constantly

These five account for most of what people bring to coaching. Read them as calibration for your own mapping on the next page. Recognition is the point; the specific move matters less than seeing the shape.

PROBLEM	CUE	SCRIPT	ONE AVAILABLE MOVE
Impostor experience	You are the least credentialed person in the room	Prove I belong	Ask the first real question before making any statement
Hard feedback	Someone's work is off	Soften it, delay it, sandwich it	One observation, one impact, one question. Then count to ten and let them fill it
Delegating	Work you could do faster yourself	Easier if I just do it	Name the result, the boundaries, and the check-in date. Leave the method alone
Unnamed conflict	Two people quietly disagree	Keep the peace and translate in the one-on-ones	Say it in the room: "There seem to be two positions here." Then stop talking
Not being heard	You speak and the room does not move	Add words, hedge, accelerate	Breathe before you begin, and land the end of the line rather than trailing off it

WHY THE MOVES LOOK SO SMALL

A script is a piece of timing, so interrupting one is a matter of timing. That is why counting to ten after feedback does more work than a new communication model does. The small move is the one available in the second you actually have.

BEFORE YOU MAP YOUR OWN

Work from one week, and work from events you can date. A cue you can place in a room on a Tuesday will yield something; a cue described as "when people are difficult" will not.

Map your own

Three rows is plenty. Fill the first two columns from memory, and leave the fourth column blank until you have sat with the third for a while.

CUE

What happened, and when

SCRIPT

What arrived already formed

COST

What it bought, what it spent

MOVE

One thing available in the gap

WHO WROTE THIS LINE?

Take the script that appears most often above. Where did you learn it, and who taught it, and what was it protecting at the time?

IS THAT STILL TRUE?

Name what has changed since the script was written: your authority, your competence, the stakes, the people in the room.

One week

Widening the gap is a practice of attention rather than effort. Run this for five working days and keep the ambition low.

DAYS ONE AND TWO — NOTICE ONLY

Change nothing. Catch the script after it has already fired and note the cue that set it off. Late recognition is the whole skill in its first form, and it arrives earlier on its own once you start looking.

DAYS THREE AND FOUR — ONE BREATH

When you catch a cue, take one breath before responding. Keep the same response if you want it. The point is establishing that the interval is real and that you can stand in it.

DAY FIVE — ONE SUBSTITUTION

Pick one cue and one alternative move from your grid. Use it once. Note what happened in the room, including whether anyone noticed, which they usually do not.

WHAT I NOTICED

WHAT TENDS TO GO WRONG

People try to widen every gap at once and abandon the practice by Wednesday. One cue is enough. The second you win in one place transfers, because you are training the noticing rather than the response.