



THE 11 PM TEST

(LEADER GUIDE)

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Why Cabinet Teams Perform Trust But Don't Practice It

Duration: 35-40 Minutes

Purpose: To facilitate meaningful dialogue about trust as foundational infrastructure rather than soft skill, helping team members examine their collective capacity for relationships that transcend role and survive leadership seasons while honestly assessing current trust levels.

PRE-SESSION PREPARATION

- Send the lesson to participants 48-72 hours before the session
- Request that they honestly reflect on one strategic priority your team has struggled to implement
- Set up meeting space that encourages vulnerable dialogue (round table preferred)
- Prepare chart paper or digital whiteboard for capturing the three trust questions
- Prepare sticky notes for anonymous Level assessment activity
- Consider your own example of a time you attempted Level 5 work with Level 1-2 trust—be ready to share this vulnerability

OPENING (5 minutes)

Framework for Your Opening:

“Welcome, everyone. Today we’re using the CORE process—Call It, Own It, Response, Execute—to explore why some leadership teams perform trust but don’t practice it, and what we can do to build trust infrastructure together.

Before we start, I want to share something vulnerable: [DESCRIBE A SPECIFIC TIME WHEN YOU REALIZED YOUR TEAM WAS ATTEMPTING HIGH-LEVEL WORK WITHOUT THE TRUST FOUNDATION TO SUPPORT IT]. [DESCRIBE WHAT HAPPENED AS A RESULT]. [DESCRIBE WHAT YOU LEARNED OR REALIZED].

That pattern tells me something: [EXPLAIN WHAT THIS REVEALS ABOUT YOUR TEAM’S CURRENT TRUST INFRASTRUCTURE]. That’s on me to help us change. And it’s on all of us to practice together.

Today, we’re going to examine our trust levels honestly—not to assign blame, but to build the foundation that makes our strategy actually work. This conversation will feel uncomfortable at times. That’s where the growth lives.

Let’s begin.”

Example for this lesson topic:

“Welcome, everyone. Today we’re using the CORE process—Call It, Own It, Response, Exe-

cute—to explore why some leadership teams perform trust but don’t practice it.

Before we start, I want to share something vulnerable: Three months ago, we spent an entire cabinet meeting agreeing on our enrollment priority. Everyone nodded. Everyone committed. Then over the next two weeks, I had four separate one-on-one conversations where people shared concerns they hadn’t voiced in the meeting. We were attempting Level 5 work—managing institutional change—with Level 1-2 trust infrastructure.

That pattern tells me something: We’re agreeing professionally but not committing authentically. We’re performing trust but not practicing it. That’s on me to help us change. And it’s on all of us to practice together.

Today, we’re going to examine our trust levels honestly—not to assign blame, but to build the foundation that makes our strategy actually work. This conversation will feel uncomfortable at times. That’s where the growth lives.

Let’s begin.”

C: CALL IT - QUESTIONS OF CLARITY (7 minutes)

Group Discussion:

“Based on the lesson, what’s the difference between performing trust and practicing trust?”

Listen for: Recognition that performing trust is professional behavior in meetings; practicing trust is relationships that transcend role and survive seasons.

“The lesson mentions that you cannot skip competency levels. What does ‘sequential trust development’ mean in this context?”

Listen for: Understanding that trust is Level 1 foundation; empowerment is Level 2; collaboration requires both Levels 1-2; change management is Level 5 and requires all prior foundations.

“What are the Three Trust Questions, and why do they matter?”

Listen for: The 11 PM phone call test, who embraces the leader you’re becoming, and making decisions WITH vs. TO the team.

Facilitation Notes:

- Capture key insights on shared space (chart paper or whiteboard)
- Clarify any misconceptions about trust as “soft” vs. trust as “infrastructure”
- Reference the lesson’s key insight: “High individual competence doesn’t automatically create team capacity”
- Write the three trust questions where everyone can see them throughout the session

O: OWN IT - QUESTIONS OF MEANING (8 minutes)

Individual Reflection: (3 minutes)

“Think about a strategic priority your team ‘agreed on’ in the past year. On a scale of 1-5, what trust level was your team operating at when you attempted that work?”

Level 1: Inconsistent reliability, limited transparency

Level 2: Basic reliability but limited vulnerability

Level 3: Consistent integrity, demonstrates vulnerability

Level 4: Psychological safety systems in place

Level 5: Institutional trust culture

“Answer the three trust questions for yourself:

- Who on this team would you call at 11 PM if your world fell apart?
- Who on this team knows the leader you’re becoming, not just the role you’re performing?
- Are we making decisions WITH each other, or announcing decisions TO each other?”

“What makes the vulnerable trust conversation difficult for this team?”

Paired Discussion: (5 minutes)

Have participants share their Level assessment with a partner (not their reflections on the three questions yet—those stay private for now).

Partners should ask: “What would change if we explicitly named the trust level required before attempting major strategic work?”

Facilitation Note: Pairs build psychological safety before whole-group sharing. Listen for themes as you circulate. The anonymous activity in the next section will reveal patterns without forcing individuals to expose themselves prematurely.

R: RESPONSE - OPTIONS FOR PRACTICE (12 minutes)

Application Exercise: (8 minutes)

Part 1: Anonymous Trust Level Assessment (3 minutes)

Give each team member a sticky note. Ask them to write down: “I believe our team operates at Trust Level ____” (1-5 scale from the lesson).

Collect sticky notes and post them on a visible surface, clustering by level.

Facilitate brief dialogue: “What does this distribution tell us about our collective assessment of trust infrastructure?”

Part 2: Strategic Work vs. Trust Foundation Analysis (5 minutes)

Working as a full team, select one strategic priority you're currently pursuing or struggled with recently.

Using the Sequential Trust Development Model, examine:

- What trust level does this priority require to execute successfully? (Level 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 work?)
- What trust level were we operating at when we attempted this work?
- What's the gap between required trust and actual trust?
- Which of the three trust questions reveals our biggest developmental need?

Capture your responses on chart paper or whiteboard.

Group Dialogue: (4 minutes)

Facilitate team discussion on what you discovered:

“What did this exercise reveal about the difference between the trust level we need and the trust level we have?”

“If we're honest, which of the five levels in the Sequential Trust Development Model represents where we actually are right now—not where we wish we were?”

“Of the Three Trust Questions, which one is most uncomfortable for us to answer? Why does that discomfort matter?”

Facilitation Note: This is the most vulnerable part. Expect significant discomfort. That discomfort is diagnostic—it shows you exactly where the trust gap exists. Your role is to hold space for honest dialogue, not rush to solutions or minimize the gap. The awareness IS the intervention.

E: EXECUTE - COMMITMENT TO PRACTICE (5 minutes)

Team Commitment:

As a team, complete this statement:

“To move from Trust Level [current level] to Trust Level [desired level], we will...”

Examples:

- “...create monthly ‘identity evolution’ conversations where we discuss who we're becoming as leaders, not just how we're performing.”
- “...establish a practice where we name the trust level required before launching major strategic initiatives.”
- “...answer the Three Trust Questions quarterly to assess our progress.”

Individual Accountability:

Each team member names:

- One relationship on this team where you will practice trust (not perform it) this month—be specific about what “practicing” looks like
- One way you’ll hold yourself accountable to building Level 1 trust foundation before attempting higher-level work

Closing (3 minutes)

“Thank you for engaging honestly in this dialogue. Building trust infrastructure isn’t comfortable—it requires us to admit where foundations are weak before we can strengthen them. But it’s the difference between teams that perform trust in meetings and teams that practice trust through seasons.

This conversation is just the beginning. Our challenge is to make trust-level assessment a regular practice, not a one-time exercise.

What’s one word that describes your biggest takeaway from today?”

Round-robin: Each person shares one word.

KEY CONCEPTS FOR REFERENCE

- “High individual competence doesn’t automatically create team capacity”
- Sequential Trust Development: Level 1 (Building Trust) → Level 2 (Empowerment) → Level 3 (Collaboration) → Level 4 (Influence) → Level 5 (Change Management)
- “You cannot skip competency levels without creating fragility in your leadership foundation”
- The Three Trust Questions: 11 PM phone call, embracing who you’re becoming, decisions WITH vs. TO
- “Performing trust vs. practicing trust”: Professional collaboration vs. relationships that survive seasons
- “67% of change initiatives fail” because teams attempt Level 5 work with Level 1-2 trust
- $IQ \times EQ \times PQ$ multiplication only works when trust infrastructure exists
- “Relationships that transcend the role” vs. “colleagues who attend meetings”
- Maria’s cabinet transformation: Level 1-2 to Level 4 in 18 months through sequential development