



YOUR TEAM ISN'T SILENT BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOTHING TO SAY

(LEADER GUIDE)

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73% of Educational Leaders Report Their Cabinet Stays Silent During Critical Decisions (And It's Not a Personality Problem)

Duration: 40 Minutes

Purpose:

To facilitate an honest dialogue about communication patterns in your leadership team, helping members recognize which conversation layers they operate in and practice moving between layers with intention to build genuine Team Communication Intelligence.

PRE-SESSION PREPARATION

- Send the lesson to participants 48-72 hours before the session
- Request that they identify one recent moment when they stayed silent in a team meeting despite having something to say
- Set up a meeting space that encourages open dialogue (round or square table if possible, not theater-style)
- Prepare chart paper or digital whiteboard for capturing the three conversation layers
- Consider your own example of staying silent or misreading a conversation layer—prepare to share this vulnerably

Critical Note: This session works only if you model vulnerability first. Your team needs to see that you recognize your own communication gaps before they'll feel safe naming theirs.

SESSION FLOW WITH CORE PROCESS

OPENING (5 minutes)

Framework for Your Opening:

Use this structure to open any Leader {CORE} session. Customize the bracketed sections to fit your context and the specific lesson topic.

“Welcome, everyone. Today we’re using the CORE process—Call It, Own It, Response, Execute—to explore [LESSON TOPIC/FOCUS AREA].

Before we start, I want to share something vulnerable: *[DESCRIBE A SPECIFIC RECENT EXAMPLE WHERE YOU EXPERIENCED THE PATTERN/PROBLEM THE LESSON ADDRESSES]. [DESCRIBE WHAT YOU THOUGHT OR HOW YOU FELT]. [DESCRIBE WHAT YOU LEARNED OR REALIZED].*

[NAME THE PATTERN/INSIGHT]: [EXPLAIN WHAT THIS TELLS YOU ABOUT YOUR TEAM'S CURRENT REALITY]. That's on me to help us change. And it's on all of us to practice together.

Today, we're going to [DESCRIBE WHAT THE SESSION WILL DO]—not to assign blame, but to [DESCRIBE THE POSITIVE OUTCOME YOU'RE BUILDING TOWARD]. This conversation will feel uncomfortable at times. That's where the growth lives.

Let's begin."

Key Elements Your Opening Must Include:

- Brief explanation of CORE process
- Your specific vulnerable example (not hypothetical) that relates to the lesson topic
- Acknowledgment that you share responsibility for current patterns
- Frame as building systems together, not fixing individuals
- Set expectation that discomfort indicates growth
- Clear statement of what the session will accomplish

C: CALL IT - QUESTIONS OF CLARITY (8 minutes)

Group Discussion:

"Based on the lesson, what are the three conversation layers that happen simultaneously in team meetings?"

Listen for: Recognition of Practical (what we're doing), Emotional (how we're feeling), and Social (who we are to each other) layers.

"The lesson states that 'most leadership breakdowns happen because we don't match the conversation layer the other person needs to have.' What does that mean in practice?"

Listen for: Understanding that mismatched layers create the appearance of communication while actually talking past each other.

"How does this connect to Team Intelligence—specifically the $IQ \times EQ \times PQ$ formula?"

Listen for: Recognition that IQ handles practical layer, EQ handles emotional layer, PQ creates structures for social layer.

"What's the difference between optimizing for agreement versus optimizing for alignment?"

Listen for: Agreement is surface-level consensus; alignment is genuine shared understanding and commitment.

Facilitation Notes:

- Capture the three layers on chart paper where everyone can reference them throughout the session

- Clarify that all three layers are legitimate and necessary—none is “better” or more “professional” than others
- Reference the lesson’s key insight: “High individual intelligence doesn’t automatically create collective capacity for genuine dialogue”
- Watch for signs that team members are already recognizing patterns in your own team dynamics

O: OWN IT - QUESTIONS OF MEANING (10 minutes)

Individual Reflection: (4 minutes)

“Think about a recent cabinet meeting where you stayed silent despite having something to say. Which conversation layer were you operating in? Which layer was the team operating in?”

“When you think about our team’s communication patterns, which layer do we spend most of our time in? Which layer do we avoid?”

“On a scale of 1-10, how psychologically safe do you feel voicing disagreement or concern in our cabinet meetings? What would need to change to move that number higher?”

Paired Discussion: (6 minutes)

Have participants share their reflections with a partner (pair people who don’t typically collaborate closely).

Partners should ask: “What makes it difficult to voice what you’re actually thinking in our team meetings? What would make it easier?”

Facilitation Note: This is vulnerable territory. As pairs talk, listen for themes but don’t interrupt. Psychological safety is built through listening, not through defending or explaining. You’ll have time to respond in the next phase.

After paired discussions, invite (don’t require) 2-3 people to share insights with the whole group.

R: RESPONSE - OPTIONS FOR PRACTICE (12 minutes)

Application Exercise: (8 minutes)

“We’re going to practice something right now that might feel awkward: naming which conversation layer we’re in.

I’m going to present a real scenario our team faces. As we discuss it, anyone can pause and say: ‘I think I’m in [practical/emotional/social] layer right now.’ The rest of us will listen and adjust.”

Present a real, current team challenge—something with stakes but not catastrophic.

Choose one of these or create your own:

- Upcoming board presentation about [CURRENT CHALLENGE]
- How to communicate [DIFFICULT NEWS] to staff
- Resource allocation decision between competing priorities
- Strategy for addressing [CURRENT INSTITUTIONAL ISSUE]

Sample framing: “Our upcoming board presentation about enrollment. We need to decide how to frame the decline and our response strategy. Let’s discuss this for 5 minutes, and practice naming our conversation layers as we go.”

As the team discusses:

- Model naming your own layer first: “I’m starting in practical mode—thinking about what data to present. But I’m noticing I’m moving into social mode—wondering how the board will perceive our competence.”
- Encourage team members to name their layers
- When someone names a layer, acknowledge it: “Thank you for naming that. What do you need from us right now?”
- Notice when the team shifts layers without naming it—gently point it out

Group Reflection: (4 minutes)

“What did you notice about our communication when we named layers explicitly?”

“Which layer is easiest for us to operate in as a team? Which is hardest?”

“What would it look like to practice this in our regular cabinet meetings?”

Facilitation Note: This exercise will feel awkward. That’s the point. You’re building new muscle memory. Awkwardness is evidence of growth, not failure. Don’t rush through discomfort—that’s where the learning happens.

E: EXECUTE - COMMITMENT TO PRACTICE (5 minutes)

Team Commitment:

“As a team, let’s commit to one specific communication practice for our next three cabinet meetings.”

Options to consider:

- Start each meeting by naming which layer we expect to operate in for each agenda item
- Practice “looping for understanding” (repeat back what you heard before responding)
- Create explicit space for emotional or social layer conversations before moving to practical

problem-solving

- Reserve the last 10 minutes of each meeting for: “What conversations are we not having?”

Have the team choose ONE practice together.

Individual Accountability:

Each team member completes: “To support our team’s communication development, I will personally [specific behavior] in our next cabinet meeting.”

Examples:

- “I will voice one concern or question I would normally save for a one-on-one afterward”
- “I will name when I’m shifting conversation layers”
- “I will ask ‘What conversation layer are we in?’ when I sense we’re talking past each other”

Each person shares their commitment with the group.

CLOSING (3 minutes)

“Thank you for engaging honestly in this dialogue. Building communication systems where silence is the exception rather than the norm requires all of us practicing vulnerability together.

This isn’t about becoming perfect communicators. It’s about building an environment where we can be imperfect together—where disagreement strengthens rather than threatens us, where questions are valued, and where silence happens by choice rather than fear.

Our commitment is to practice these skills systematically until having difficult conversations becomes more comfortable than avoiding them.

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

Round-robin: Each person shares one word.

“See you at our next cabinet meeting, where we’ll practice [NAME THE SPECIFIC COMMITMENT THE TEAM CHOSE]. Remember: awkward is evidence of growth.”

KEY CONCEPTS FOR REFERENCE

- “73% of educational leaders report their cabinet stays silent during critical decisions”
- Three Conversation Layers: Practical (what we’re doing), Emotional (how we’re feeling), Social (who we are to each other)
- “Most leadership breakdowns happen because we don’t match the conversation layer the

other person needs to have”

- Psychological safety: The belief that you can speak honestly without negative consequences—the single most important factor in team effectiveness
- “High individual intelligence doesn’t automatically create collective capacity for genuine dialogue”
- $IQ \times EQ \times PQ$: Practical analysis + Emotional capacity + Positional systems for inclusive communication
- “We optimize cabinet meetings for agreement when what we actually need is alignment”
- “Cabinet silence isn’t a personality problem. It’s a practice problem.”
- “Mature teams practice communication before crisis hits”

Remember: Your role is to facilitate discovery, not direct conclusions. Model the very principle you’re discussing by creating space for authentic dialogue, genuine questions, and the vulnerability that builds real Team Communication Intelligence.