The Stoic Strategist Decision System

The Core Decision Loop Workbook for Clear Decisions Under Pressure

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The Stoic Strategist Framework

The framework connects Stoic discipline, intelligence analysis, and strategic thinking with practical decisions. This applied workbook, *The Stoic Strategist Decision System*, provides additional structured practice. The main ebook stands on its own, with guidance, examples, and Clarity Drills.

Core Decision Loop

Detection → Constraint → Execution → Review

Notice pressure or distortion, compare and test the options against your standards, carry out a chosen action, and review the result.

Stoic Response Protocol

Label → Pause → Control → Choose

Label the response, create a pause, identify what you control, and choose deliberately. Breathing is one possible way to create the pause.

From the Brief to Action and Review

The six-step Decision Brief records the reasoning for one decision. Define the decision and examine the situation support Detection. Compare realistic options and test the preferred option support Constraint. Commit to a next step records the plan for Execution. Set the review point prepares for Review. Completing the form does not carry out the action or review its result. Act on the commitment, then use the separate Decision Review to examine what happened.

This Workbook's Place

Decision Toolkit Upgrade contains this workbook, the Tool Selector, three worked examples, reusable forms, and onboarding guide. Complete Decision Toolkit contains the main ebook and identical upgrade resources. The standalone Decision Brief uses the core prompts taught in the free guide *Before You Decide*; it adds convenient working space.

How to Use the Decision System

Use this workbook to examine a real decision, choose a response, and review what happened. Its drills turn the ideas in *The Stoic Strategist* into practical questions and written commitments.

Where This Workbook Fits

This workbook puts the Core Decision Loop into practice:

Detection → Constraint → Execution → Review

The Stoic Response Protocol helps you pause when pressure rises. This workbook supports the fuller assessment that follows: what is happening, what matters, what you will do, and when you will reconsider.

How the Drills Work

Each drill gives a suggested time, a situation in which to use it, and prompts with space for your answers. The times are starting points, not deadlines. Allow more time when the consequences or uncertainty warrant it.

Keep most responses to one or two sentences. Be specific enough that you can return later and understand the evidence, assumptions, and reasons behind your choice. Use a separate sheet if an answer needs more room.

Practice and Progression

Start with one current decision and a Decision Brief. Use the Tool Selector to choose a relevant drill where needed, then return its findings to the brief. Act and review without waiting to finish the workbook. For broader study, work through the chapters at a pace that allows time for action and review.

Use current or recent decisions. Hypothetical scenarios can help you rehearse; return to real decisions to test what you have learned.

Revisit Chapters 6–10 for influence, pressure, adaptation, and ongoing review. Record a date or situation beside your answers when repeating a drill.

Common Pitfalls

Watch for answers that remain abstract, assumptions presented as facts, and commitments you never act on. If a prompt is uncomfortable, examine why before skipping it. Reflection is useful when it informs a choice or helps you learn from one.

What to Review

Look for changes in how you recognize pressure, examine evidence, and follow your principles. Evaluate the process separately from its outcome: careful decisions can have poor results, and weak decisions can sometimes succeed.

About the Examples

The historical recaps summarize examples from the main book. The unnamed workplace and analyst cases are illustrative scenarios. Source notes identify the historical references and adapted methods.

The Core Decision Loop

The loop gives you a repeatable sequence for examining a decision and learning from it.

Detection → Constraint → Execution → Review

1. Detection

Notice when emotion, bias, or external pressure may be affecting your interpretation. Name the decision and distinguish what you know from what you assume.

Watch for: reacting before checking what happened.

2. Constraint

Test the options against your principles, priorities, resources, and limits. Use the three-part filter to select an action:

- **Right:** Does it respect my principles?
- **Smart:** Does the evidence support it?
- **Sustainable:** Can I accept the likely consequences over time?

Watch for: rationalizing a convenient choice or overlooking a tradeoff.

3. Execution

Carry out the chosen action. State what you will do, when you will do it, and what sign would prompt you to stop or change course.

Watch for: making a commitment without acting, or drifting from the agreed limits.

4. Review

Compare what happened with what you expected. Consider the evidence available at the time, what you controlled, and what changed. Decide what to repeat or adjust.

Watch for: judging the process only by whether the outcome was favorable.

Using the Loop

Move through the stages in order, but return to an earlier stage when new evidence changes the situation. The framework supports judgment; it does not make the decision for you.

System Application Sequence

Use this sequence when a situation calls for a deliberate decision. Each drill practices one or more stages of the Core Decision Loop.

1. **Identify the Situation**
   Name the decision, pressure, or uncertainty that needs attention.
2. **Select a Relevant Drill**
   Choose a chapter and drill that match the situation.
3. **Complete the Assessment**
   Use the suggested time as a guide. Write concise answers and mark important gaps or assumptions.
4. **Act on the Result**
   Choose a specific action, further investigation, or deliberate pause. Set a time to act or review.
5. **Review and Adjust**
   Assess the process and outcome separately. Record what you learned and what you will change.

Practice becomes useful when you return to your commitments and examine what followed.

CHAPTER 1

Stoicism: A Decision Framework for Clarity Under Pressure

Core Concept Summary

- Stoicism offers practices for examining judgment and choosing a response when conditions are unstable.
- It is structured around four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance.
- The Stoic Strategist uses these as decision criteria under pressure, not abstract ideals.

Historical Example: Austerlitz

At Austerlitz in December 1805, Napoleon made his right flank appear vulnerable. As Allied troops moved toward it, French forces attacked the weakened Allied center on the Pratzen Heights. The example illustrates attention to terrain, timing, and the opponent's movements; victory alone does not establish that a decision was wise or just.

Drill 1: The Sphere of Control Protocol

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Use: During active stress or distraction

This exercise distinguishes actions available to you from conditions you must account for but cannot control.

Define the situation with precision. Use one sentence.

Situation (1 sentence):

List only what matters. Maximum 3 items per column.

Within My Control	Outside My Control

Decision (1 sentence each):

What will I deliberately stop focusing on?

What is the single controllable action I will execute next (within 24 hours)?

Drill 2: Virtue-Based Correction

Suggested Time: 8 minutes

Use: After action or during reflection

Use the same situation. One sentence per field. Include the reason where the prompt asks for it.

Use these questions to review your judgment. If no lapse occurred, note what helped you act well.

Wisdom	What did I see clearly, and what did I miss?
Courage	Where did I hesitate or avoid necessary action?
Justice	Did I treat people fairly and consider their interests?
Temperance	Where did I show restraint, or need more of it?

Drill 2: Virtue-Based Correction: continued

Correction Priority (select one):

Which virtue needs the most attention in this situation?

Action Commitment (1 sentence):

What specific behavior will I change in the next similar situation?

Drill 3: Stoic Operating Principle

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

Use: Daily or before high-pressure events

Keep each line precise. Name a specific situation and behavior.

This defines how you will operate when pressure is present.

"In the face of _____*,*

I will maintain _____*,*

by executing _____*."*

Execution Check (1 sentence):

Where will I apply this within the next 24 hours?

_____

CHAPTER 2

Intelligence Analysis: Seeing Reality Under Uncertainty

Core Concept Summary

- Intelligence analysis is a structured method for developing evidence-based assessments under uncertainty.
- It interprets incomplete or conflicting information to support decisions.
- It requires discipline to detect and correct bias before it distorts judgment.

Historical Example

The Iranian Revolution exposed weaknesses in U.S. assessments of the Shah's position. A 1979 congressional review examined intelligence performance before November 1978. Use the example to consider how an analyst can test an established view as political conditions change.
Identify one factor (bias, information gap, or assumption) and state how you will guard against it.

Response (1 sentence):

Drill 1: Problem Definition Protocol

Suggested Time: 8 minutes

Use: At the start of any unclear or emotionally charged situation

Define the issue with precision. Use one sentence to state the issue.

Define what the analysis needs to answer before collecting more information.

Issue (1 sentence):

Convert the issue into a precise analytic question. One sentence only.

Analytic Question (must be answerable):

Test (1 sentence):

Does this question identify something I can investigate using evidence?

Drill 2: Known vs Unknown Separation

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Use: Before making any decision under uncertainty

Limit entries to what is operationally relevant. Maximum 4 per column.

Separating known facts from gaps makes it easier to see where a decision depends on assumptions.

Known Facts	Important Gaps

Decision (1 sentence each):

Which unknown, if resolved, would most change my decision?

What is my next step to reduce that uncertainty (within 24 hours)?

Drill 3: Assumption Stress Test

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Use: When you feel confident in a conclusion

Aim for one sentence per response. Include the reason where the prompt asks for it.

Test the assumption against a plausible alternative and evidence that could challenge it.

Primary Assumption (1 sentence):

Alternative Explanation (1 sentence):

If this assumption is wrong, what is the most likely alternative?

Disconfirming Evidence (1 sentence):

What specific evidence would prompt me to change my view?

Bias Check (1 sentence):

Is this assumption influenced by fear, ego, or habit?

Adjusted Judgment (1 sentence):

What is my updated assessment after this test?

Drill 4: Analyst's Rehearsal Loop

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: Before finalizing a decision

Use this sequence to check the question, evidence, and proposed action before committing.

Aim for one sentence per response. Do not expand scope.

1. Actual Question (1 sentence):

What is the real decision point?

---

2. Information Requirement (1 sentence):

What do I need to know, and how will I recognize it?

---

3. Blind Spot Check (1 sentence):

What might I be missing due to proximity or bias?

Final Output (1 sentence):

What decision or action will I take now?

CHAPTER 3

Strategic Thinking: Structuring Decisions Under Uncertainty

Core Concept Summary

- Strategy connects objectives with actions and resources while accounting for uncertainty.
- It aligns ends (objectives), ways (approaches), means (resources), and risk (exposure and limits).
- Effective strategy forces tradeoffs and adjusts as conditions change.

Historical Example

In June 1944, Eisenhower decided to launch the Normandy invasion while weather and operational conditions remained uncertain. Preparation and advice informed the choice; they could not guarantee its outcome.
Identify one aspect of that process (rehearsal, contingency planning, or shared intent) that you can apply to your current strategic initiatives.

Drill 1: Ends–Ways–Means–Risk Alignment

Suggested Time: 12 minutes

Use: When defining or evaluating any initiative

Compare your objective with the approaches, resources, and risks it requires.

Define the initiative with precision. Use one sentence.

Initiative (1 sentence):

Be precise. Each field must be actionable and specific.

A mismatch between these elements can make a plan difficult or impossible to carry out.

Strategic Element	Your Input
Ends: Define the outcome in measurable terms	
Ways: List no more than 2 viable approaches	

Drill 1: Ends–Ways–Means–Risk Alignment: continued

Strategic Element	Your Input
Means: Identify actual resources available now	
Risk: Identify a likely failure and the loss you could accept	

Alignment Check:

Where does my plan rely on assumptions rather than current capability?

Decision:

What must I adjust immediately to bring ends, ways, means, and risk into alignment?

Drill 2: Strategic Integrity Check

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: Before committing to a plan

Mark honestly. Unchecked items identify questions to resolve before proceeding.

This check identifies weaknesses before commitment.

- ☐ I can state the objective in one clear sentence.
- ☐ My approach aligns with long-term priorities.
- ☐ I have identified risks, not just opportunities.
- ☐ I have checked how urgency and emotion affect my reasoning.
- ☐ I know what I will stop doing to make this succeed.

Critical Gap:

Which unchecked item poses the greatest risk to success?

Correction:

What will I change before proceeding?

Drill 3: Strategic Position Statement

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

Use: To clarify direction before execution

Name the objective, approach, and risk you are choosing.

This statement defines your strategic direction under current conditions.

"Given current reality, I will pursue _____

by executing _____

while accepting the risk of _____."

Execution Trigger:

What action will I take in the next 48 hours to initiate this strategy?

_____

CHAPTER 4

Uncertainty: Structuring Action Without Complete Information

Core Concept Summary

- Some uncertainty remains even after careful preparation.
- Clarity comes from disciplined observation, separating signal from noise before action is taken.
- SWOT and red-teaming help you examine constraints and challenge assumptions.
- A structured review helps you judge whether more information is worth the delay.

Historical Example

During Apollo 13, an oxygen tank explosion endangered the crew and ended the planned lunar landing. Astronauts and ground teams worked together to conserve resources, manage carbon dioxide, and plan the return. Engineers on Earth developed procedures the crew could carry out with the materials aboard.
Identify one principle (calibrated process, resourcefulness, or teamwork) and state how you will apply it.

Response (1 sentence):

Drill 1: Uncertainty Framing Protocol

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Use: When hesitation or ambiguity delays action

Separate the known facts, desired outcome, and reasons for hesitation.

Define the situation without interpretation. State what you observed and mark anything uncertain.

Situation (1 sentence):

Primary Concern (1 sentence):

What outcome am I trying to avoid?

Desired Outcome (1 sentence):

What outcome am I trying to achieve?

Source of Hesitation (1 sentence):

Is the delay driven by missing information, fear of consequence, or competing priorities?

Drill 2: Personal SWOT Under Constraint

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Use: Before acting in uncertain conditions

Use SWOT to examine your capabilities, limits, and exposure under current conditions.

Limit entries to what directly affects this situation. Maximum 3 per quadrant. Use specific observations.

Strengths (Internal Advantage, Max 3)	**Weaknesses (Internal Limitation, Max 3)**
Opportunities (External Advantage, Max 3)	**Threats (External Risk, Max 3)**

Check that each entry describes this situation and that you can explain the evidence behind it.

Drill 2: Personal SWOT Under Constraint: continued

Decision (1 sentence each):

Which single factor most influences my next move?

What adjustment will I make based on this analysis?

Drill 3: Red-Team Reversal Protocol

Suggested Time: 8 minutes

Use: When confidence rests on an untested assumption

This protocol tests your position against failure, opposition, and missing information.

Aim for one sentence per response. Do not defend your current position.

Give the alternative explanation a fair hearing before defending your current view.

Failure Condition (1 sentence):

If I am wrong, the most likely reason is:

Opposing View (1 sentence):

A credible opposing view would argue:

Missing Information (1 sentence):

The most important missing information is:

Revised Assessment (1 sentence):

What changes after this test?

Drill 4: Controlled Action Selection

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

Use: To move forward without waiting for certainty

Aim for one sentence per response. Action must be executable within 72 hours.

Choose a feasible next action and compare its risks with the risks of waiting.

Next Action (1 sentence):

Risk of Action (1 sentence):

What could go wrong if I act?

Risk of Inaction (1 sentence):

What happens if I delay?

Commitment (1 sentence):

Will I act, gather more information, or wait? Give the reason and a review time.

CHAPTER 5

Conflict: Structuring Control Under Pressure

Core Concept Summary

- Conflict can narrow attention and make assumptions harder to question.
- The Stoic Strategist examines emotions before choosing a response.
- Adapted center of gravity questions help identify sources of influence in a conflict.
- Objectives, relationships, power, and emotion can all shape a conflict.

Illustrative Scenario Recap

In the illustrative scenario "The Misguided Retaliation," a leader responds to a peer's distorted account by documenting decisions, communicating directly with leadership, and creating shared accountability. Those actions support a credible response without guaranteeing a fair hearing.
Identify one leverage point and state how you will apply it. Focus on influence, not reaction.

Response (1 sentence):

Drill 1: Conflict Framing Protocol

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Use: At the onset of conflict or escalation

Describe the situation without narrative or judgment. Use no more than two sentences and distinguish observations from assumptions.

This protocol separates facts, objectives, and constraints before response.

Conflict Description (max 2 sentences):

Underlying Issue (1 sentence):

What is actually at stake beneath emotion?

Your Objective (1 sentence):

What outcome am I trying to secure?

Constraint (1 sentence):

What must I preserve regardless of outcome (role, reputation, relationship)?

Drill 2: Center of Gravity Analysis

Suggested Time: 10 minutes

Use: Before responding or escalating

Identify what sustains each party's position and what could support a constructive resolution.

Focus on influence, not surface behavior. Maximum 3 entries per column. Mark assumptions that need checking.

Their Strengths	My Strengths	Points of Influence

Treat this map as a working assessment. Check it against what the other party says and does.

Decision (1 sentence each):

Which single leverage point will I act on?

How can I use this influence fairly and limit the risk of escalation?

Drill 3: Emotional Separation Protocol

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: When emotion begins to drive response

This exercise helps you examine how emotion is affecting your interpretation.

Aim for one sentence per response. Include the reason where the prompt asks for it.

Uncontrolled emotion distorts perception before it distorts action.

Defended Position (1 sentence):

What am I defending (idea, reputation, control, or expectation)?

Neutral Assessment (1 sentence):

What would an objective third party say is happening?

Release Point (1 sentence):

What changes if I focus on understanding the issue rather than defending my position?

Adjusted Position (1 sentence):

What is my position after considering another interpretation?

Drill 4: Controlled Response Design

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: Before taking action in conflict

Use your assessment to design a specific, proportionate response.

Aim for one sentence per response. Choose an action within your control.

Planned Response (1 sentence):

Escalation Risk (1 sentence):

How could this response worsen the situation?

Stability Check (1 sentence):

Does this action preserve my constraint (role, reputation, relationship)?

Measure of Success (1 sentence):

What outcome defines success beyond immediate victory?

CHAPTER 6

Power and Influence: Directing Action Within Systems

Core Concept Summary

- Power operates through networks, trust, and control of information flow.
- Justice provides a standard for examining whether influence is being used fairly.
- Stakeholder mapping identifies people whose authority, knowledge, or relationships affect a decision.
- Effective influence may require listening, explaining the purpose, and addressing practical concerns.

Illustrative Scenario Recap

In the illustrative scenario "The Quiet Lever," a logistics manager addresses supervisors' concerns about a proposed change. She offers a relevant role in a pilot, agrees on staffing safeguards, and sets a review date. Her influence depends on listening and following through.
What concern should I investigate before trying to persuade someone?

Drill 1: Influence Mapping Protocol

Suggested Time: 12 minutes

Use: When attempting to drive change in a system

Identify who can approve, support, obstruct, or be affected by the change.

Include people affected by the change, even when they have little formal authority.

Define the domain clearly. Avoid generalization. Name the change you are considering.

Domain or Initiative (1 sentence):

Identify only relevant actors. Limit to key individuals.

Role / Influencer	Motivation / Interest	Influence (High / Medium / Low)

Drill 1: Influence Mapping Protocol: continued

Decision:

Which single individual has the greatest impact on my outcome?

_____

What motivates them most in this situation?

_____

Drill 2: Influence Alignment Check

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: Before attempting to influence others

Check whether your understanding of stakeholders rests on evidence or assumptions.

Mark honestly. Unchecked items identify gaps to investigate.

- ☐ I understand who benefits from the current state.
- ☐ I understand what each key stakeholder values and fears.
- ☐ My approach aligns with their incentives, not just my goals.
- ☐ My influence approach remains within ethical boundaries.
- ☐ I am not relying on authority alone to achieve compliance.

Critical Gap:

Which unchecked item will most undermine my influence?

Adjustment:

What will I change before engaging?

Drill 3: Ethical Constraint Definition

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

Use: Before applying influence under pressure

State the limits you will observe when using influence.

Name a boundary and how you will uphold it.

Explicit limits help you recognize when persuasion risks becoming manipulation.

Non-Negotiable Boundary (1–2 sentences):

Pressure Test:

What situation would tempt me to violate this boundary?

Reinforcement:

How will I maintain this boundary when pressured?

Drill 4: Influence Action Design

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: Before putting an influence plan into practice

Choose an action that addresses a specific person's relevant concern.

Design one useful action and consider how others may respond.

Person to Engage:

Planned Action (specific and observable):

Expected Effect:

What change in behavior or perception do I expect?

Risk:

How could this action fail or backfire?

Execution Commitment:

When will I execute this action?

CHAPTER 7

Fear and Pressure: Maintaining Decision Control Under Stress

Core Concept Summary

- Fear distorts perception, compresses time, and reduces perceived options.
- Courage means acting on sound judgment despite fear and real or perceived risk.
- Structured analysis gives you questions to return to when pressure narrows your attention.
- The objective is not to remove fear, but to prevent it from controlling decisions.

Drill 2 adapts Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB), following the four steps in the U.S. Army's March 2019 ATP 2-01.3. Drill 3 separately considers your own response options.

Illustrative Scenario Recap

In the illustrative scenario “The Decision to Speak Up,” an analyst examines a proposal that would weaken oversight. After considering possible developments, the analyst submits an evidence-based memo through the designated internal review channel and proposes amendments.
What makes the memo a proportionate response, and what risks remain?

Drill 1: Pressure Identification

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

Use: When emotional or operational pressure is rising

Name the fear and the impulse it creates before choosing a response.

Situation (specific and current):

Primary Fear (state it directly):

Immediate Impulse (what you feel like doing):

Distortion Check:

Mark all that contribute to this fear:

- Present facts
- Future speculation
- Social or reputational concern

Decision:

What is actually happening, independent of interpretation?

Drill 2: Rapid IPB (Decision Structuring)

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: When a decision must be made under pressure

Assess the environment and possible threat developments before choosing your own response in Drill 3.

Write one or two sentences per section.

Environment:

What are the actual boundaries, stakeholders, and constraints?

Effects:

What factors are shaping timing, urgency, or perception?

Threat:

What could cause harm, and what can it do?

Possible Threat Developments:

List 2–3 plausible developments. Distinguish what is likely from what would be most harmful.

Drill 3: Choosing a Response Under Pressure

Suggested Time: 4 minutes

Use: Immediately before acting

Consider your response options, then choose one you can explain.

Response Options:

List two or three actions available to you, using the developments from Drill 2.

_____

_____

_____

Drill 3: Choosing a Response Under Pressure: continued

Chosen Response:

Why this option:

Why does this best balance risk, outcome, and constraint?

Failure Mode:

How could this decision fail?

Mitigation:

What sign would tell me to change course, and what would I do?

Drill 4: Controlled Execution Trigger

Suggested Time: 2 minutes

Use: Immediately before action

This creates a deliberate break between impulse and execution.

Pause Action:

What will I do to interrupt reactivity (breath, step back, delay)?

Execution Statement:

State the exact action you will take clearly and simply.

Commitment:

When will I act?

CHAPTER 8

Overcoming Complexity and Ambiguity

Core Concept Summary

- Complexity arises from interacting variables that cannot be fully predicted or controlled.
- Ambiguity persists when available information supports multiple conflicting interpretations.
- Analysis and feedback from action can both improve understanding.
- Compare the risks of acting and waiting; either may be justified.

Illustrative Scenario Recap

In the illustrative scenario "The Collapsing Consensus," an analyst presents a risk assessment with decision thresholds and updates it as evidence changes. The briefing helps decision-makers act and reassess while uncertainty remains.

What change in evidence would prompt me to revise a current assessment?

Drill 1: Define the Unknowns

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: When a situation feels unclear or overwhelming

This separates confirmed reality from assumption and uncertainty.

Unclear situations are often driven by unexamined assumptions.

Situation (specific):

Known Factors:

What is confirmed and observable?

Unknown Factors:

What is unclear, missing, or uncertain?

False Certainty Risk:

Where might I be assuming more than I know?

Drill 2: Rapid OODA Cycle

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: When action is required despite incomplete information

The OODA cycle connects observation, orientation, decision, and action, followed by reassessment.

Limit each section to 1–2 sentences. Use a time limit appropriate to the decision.

Decide what evidence would justify action and what unresolved question could justify waiting.

Observe:

What signals are present right now?

Orient:

What assumptions or interpretations are shaping my view?

Decide:

What is the best provisional action?

Act:

What will I do immediately?

Drill 3: Iteration and Adjustment

Suggested Time: 4 minutes

Use: After initial action

This converts action into information for the next decision cycle.

Progress depends on iteration, not perfect initial decisions.

Result:

What happened after my action?

New Information:

What did this action reveal that I did not know before?

Adjustment:

What will I change in my next iteration?

Drill 4: Choosing a Useful Next Step

Suggested Time: 3 minutes

Use: When you feel stuck or are waiting for clarity

Choose a limited step that offers useful information or progress at an acceptable risk.

Minimum Viable Action:

What is the smallest action that moves things forward?

Acceptable Risk:

What could this action cost, and what limit will I set?

A small test can reveal information. Check whether it is reversible and whether its risks are acceptable.

Execution Time:

When will I take this action?

CHAPTER 9

The Personal Decision Framework: Governing Decisions Under Pressure

Core Concept Summary

- Decisions under pressure reveal the principles that actually govern your behavior.
- A framework constrains behavior when emotion, pressure, or incentives distort judgment.
- Effective frameworks define priorities, enforce trade-offs, and govern action.
- A practiced framework can help you notice when pressure or convenience is displacing your priorities.

This chapter combines the tools into a personal process you can apply and review.

Your personal framework is the individualized expression of the broader Stoic Strategist Framework.

Illustrative Scenario Recap

In the illustrative scenario "A Quiet Boundary," a team leader declines extra work after checking which existing commitments it would displace. She explains the capacity conflict and offers to reconsider if priorities or resources change. Her choice may still carry a professional cost.
What boundary would I uphold even if the decision disappointed someone?

Response (1 sentence):

Drill 1: Define Non-Negotiable Principles

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: Before establishing a decision framework

This defines the principles that will constrain your decisions under pressure.

Write three principles you intend to uphold under pressure. Use one sentence each.

A lapse does not erase a principle. Use it to identify what support or correction is needed.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Failure Condition (1 sentence):

Which principle am I most likely to violate under pressure?

_____

Trigger (1 sentence):

What situation would make that lapse more likely?

_____

Drill 2: Priority Hierarchy

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: When principles or goals conflict

State which priority takes precedence in this situation and why.

List three current priorities and rank them for this situation. Keep your ethical boundaries in view.

Unranked priorities create inconsistent decisions.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Conflict Decision (1 sentence):

Why does my first priority take precedence here, and what change would make me reconsider?

_____

Tradeoff (1 sentence):

What am I willing to sacrifice to uphold my top priority?

_____

Drill 3: 3-Part Filter Under Constraint

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

Use: Before making a decision under pressure

Use the three-part filter to examine the proposed decision.

Give a brief reason for each answer.

If an answer is no or uncertain, identify what needs to change before proceeding.

Decision (1 sentence):

Right (1 sentence):

Does this align with my principles?

Smart (1 sentence):

Does this reflect current reality, not assumptions?

Sustainable (1 sentence):

Can I accept the long-term consequences?

Failure Point (1 sentence):

Which of the three is weakest?

Drill 4: Framework Enforcement

Suggested Time: 4 minutes

Use: After a decision or at regular intervals

Review whether you applied your principles and priorities consistently.

Aim for one sentence per response. Include the reason where the prompt asks for it.

Unenforced frameworks fail to constrain behavior.

Recent Decision (1 sentence):

Framework Alignment (1 sentence):

Did this decision follow my principles and priorities?

Deviation (1 sentence):

Where did I compromise or drift?

Correction (1 sentence):

What will I do differently next time?

Accountability Trigger (1 sentence):

What reminder or review will help me follow the process next time?

CHAPTER 10

Decision Framework in Action: Consistent Execution Under Pressure

Core Concept Summary

- A decision framework has value only when it is applied consistently under pressure.
- Pressure reveals whether your principles, priorities, and process hold.
- Repetition builds reliability when conditions are uncertain or unstable.
- Notice lapses in application and identify what would help you follow the process.

Apply the framework to current decisions, pressure, setbacks, and routine review.

Use these drills to see where the process helps and where it needs adjustment.

Illustrative Scenario Recap

Return to "A Quiet Boundary," the illustrative scenario from Chapter 9. The leader's decision depends on the team's capacity and commitments. If either changes, she should review the decision using the same principles.
Consistency means applying a standard thoughtfully as conditions change.

Response (1 sentence):
Where in my current environment am I tolerating misalignment with my framework?

Drill 1: Immediate Decision Application

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

Use: Before making a current decision

Apply your framework to a decision you need to make now.

Apply your framework directly. One sentence per line.

Decision (1 sentence):

Right (1 sentence):

Does this align with my principles?

Smart (1 sentence):

Does this reflect current reality?

Sustainable (1 sentence):

Can I accept the plausible long-term consequences?

Decision Status (1 sentence):

Proceed, adjust, or reject?

Drill 2: Pressure Test

Suggested Time: 5 minutes

Use: When emotion or urgency is present

This tests whether your framework holds when pressure distorts judgment.

Test whether your framework holds under pressure. One sentence per line.

A rehearsal can expose a weakness while there is still time to address it.

Pressure Source (1 sentence):

Distortion Risk (1 sentence):

How might this pressure distort my judgment?

Framework Check (1 sentence):

Which element (principle, priority, or process) is most at risk?

Correction (1 sentence):

How will I maintain alignment?

Drill 3: Failed Decision Review

Suggested Time: 6 minutes

Use: After a poor decision or outcome

Review the decision process separately from the outcome. A sound decision can still have a poor result.

Identify what you knew at the time, how you decided, and what happened. Use one sentence per line.

Decision (1 sentence):

Failure Point (1 sentence):

Was the process flawed, did I depart from it, or did events develop unfavorably despite a sound decision?

Cause (1 sentence):

What evidence supports that explanation, and what remained outside my control?

Correction (1 sentence):

What will I do differently next time?

Drill 4: Consistency Check

Suggested Time: 4 minutes

Use: End of day or week

Review patterns in how you apply the framework over time.

Assess consistency across decisions. One sentence per line.

Consistency determines whether the framework becomes reliable.

Pattern (1 sentence):

Where did I consistently align with my framework?

Deviation (1 sentence):

Where did I drift?

Adjustment (1 sentence):

What will I reinforce moving forward?

Regular use makes the process more familiar and gives you choices to review. Keep returning to what you decided, what happened, and what you will change.

Final Standard

You now have a decision framework to return to when conditions are unclear and the cost of error matters.

Use it to examine the situation, test your options, and choose a response you can explain. Follow through on the decision, then make time to review it.

Keep your principles in view without treating every initial assessment as permanent. Revise a choice when new evidence warrants it. When you fall short of a standard, identify the correction and practice it.

The value of this workbook lies in the decisions you revisit and the habits you develop through use.

Jason Conley

THINK CLEARLY

ACT WISELY

HOLD THE LINE

Source Notes

The historical recaps summarize examples discussed in *The Stoic Strategist*. The unnamed workplace and analyst cases are illustrative scenarios, created to explain the methods. The exercises adapt these methods for personal and professional decisions.

Historical Examples

Austerlitz (Chapter 1). Army University Press, *History in Motion: Napoleon 1805*, on the campaign and battle.

Iran (Chapter 2). U.S. House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *Iran: Evaluation of U.S. Intelligence Performance Prior to November 1978* (1979).

Normandy (Chapter 3). National Archives, *General Dwight D. Eisenhower's Order of the Day (1944)*, including the background to his decision to proceed.

Apollo 13 (Chapter 4). NASA, *Apollo 13 Mission Details*, on the oxygen tank explosion and the crew's return.

Adapted Methods

Center of gravity (Chapter 5). Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, book VIII, chapter 4. The workbook adapts the military concept into questions about sources of influence. A workplace conflict may involve several such sources.

IPB (Chapter 7). U.S. Army, ATP 2-01.3, *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield*, March 2019. Drill 2 adapts that edition's four steps; Drill 3 separately considers the reader's response options.

OODA (Chapter 8). John R. Boyd, *The Essence of Winning and Losing* (1995), reproduced in *A Discourse on Winning and Losing* (Air University Press, 2018). The workbook simplifies the loop for practice while retaining observation, orientation, decision, action, and feedback.