

A LEADER'S PLAYBOOK · THE FIVE MOVES THAT PAIR TO THE FIVE STAGES

Breaking the Spiral™

Every stage of The Silent Spiral™ has a paired move. Each move is what the exit sounds like. The spiral is predictable — and so is the way out. Adapted from *Failure to Communicate*.

HOW TO USE THIS

Identify which stage of The Silent Spiral™ your team is currently in. Then run the move paired to that stage. The moves don't require a different personality, a certification, or a perfect moment. They require **one person choosing to say the harder, truer thing** instead of the easier, familiar one.

01 Test the Assumption

Pairs with Stage 01: Assumption · receipt and understanding are unconfirmed

Confirm that the message was received *and* understood. Don't ask "any questions?" Ask what they understood the next step to be. Access isn't the same as understanding.

SAY THIS

"I sent the email, but I want to confirm — can you tell me what you understood the next step to be?"

02 Break the Silence

Pairs with Stage 02: Silence · "no questions" is being misread as agreement

Name the silence out loud. Ask the direct question — not the open one. If this were going to fail, what would be the reason? Make it easier to say the hard thing now than to live with it later.

SAY THIS

"Nobody pushed back, and that actually concerns me. What are we not saying?"

03 Make It Safe

Pairs with Stage 03: Frustration · systemic failure is being misread as personality

Acknowledge the frustration without defending the system. Move the spotlight off the person and onto the process. Document together. Put a name and a deadline on the fix.

SAY THIS

"You've raised this before and I hear you. This time, let's document it together and put a name and a deadline on the fix."

04 Close the Loop

Pairs with Stage 04: Workaround · shadow infrastructure is running in parallel

When you find a workaround, treat it as a signal, not a sin. Trace it back to the official process that failed. Fix the real system, or formally adopt the workaround — don't accept the parallel.

SAY THIS

"I'd rather fix the process than have you work around it. What would make the real system actually usable?"

05 Name It

Pairs with Stage 05: Failure · the post-mortem is about to assign blame

Before assigning blame, map where the information stopped flowing — and why. The question is not who dropped the ball. The question is where in the system did the handoff break down. Name the failure as a system problem so the next one can be prevented.

SAY THIS

"We have a communication failure. I'm naming it so we can fix it — not so we can punish someone."

THE RULE: The spiral doesn't break itself. *But it breaks faster than you think* once someone decides to name what's actually happening.