



THE PLAYBOOK · FOR LEADERS AND TEAMS

THE NARRATIVE PLAYBOOK

CHECK THE STORY. REWRITE IT. BEGIN AGAIN.

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A note from Norliza

Thank you for downloading this playbook. You may have seen me speak, you may be about to, or you may simply follow my work. However you found it, I wrote it for you, and it is my gift.

I have lived a difficult life, and the one thing that has carried me through it is conviction. Not certainty, but the decision to keep applying myself when things were hard. Over time I learned that energy put into becoming better does more for you than energy put into the problem itself.

I also learned how powerful the stories we hold about ourselves can be. For a long time I believed I was the problem. Because of what I had been through, and because of what I had achieved, I accepted a story about myself that was not accurate. Questioning that story, instead of accepting it, is what allowed me to keep moving forward.

That is why this playbook belongs in leadership. Leaders and teams carry stories too: about what is possible, what has failed before and what they are capable of. Those stories shape decisions, set the pace of change and decide whether a team begins. The three moves here are a practical way to **Check** a story, **Rewrite** it so it is accurate and useful, and **Restart** with one focus and one small step.

Restarting has not always been easy for me. In my earliest days I could not simply refocus the next minute. I needed time to process what I had been through, as you may need too. What mattered was that I kept applying myself. The more you try, the more you grow.

Use this on your own, or with your team. I hope it serves you well.

Norliza

IN THIS PLAYBOOK

01 Check
Is your statement accurate?

02 Rewrite
Change the narrative without lying to yourself.

03 Restart
Focus on one thing and begin again.

You do not need to start with certainty, resources or advantages. You need the conviction to begin.



Is the story you tell yourself accurate?

The sentences we repeat about ourselves and our teams quietly decide what we try, what we avoid and when we begin. This is not positive thinking. Check the statement, rewrite it so it is accurate and useful, and take one small step. Allow about 30 minutes.

01 Check

Is your statement accurate?

02 Rewrite

Change the narrative without lying to yourself.

03 Restart

Focus on one thing and begin again.

THIS IS FOR YOU IF YOU ARE

- A leader guiding a team through change, restructure or a difficult year
- A team caught in “we always” or “that never works here”
- A professional returning from a setback, a new role or a career change
- Anyone who knows the next step but has not yet begun
- An organisation planning a team reset, offsite or leadership session

WHY IT MATTERS AT WORK

The stories a team tells about itself shape what it attempts. Checking them for accuracy, rewriting them and agreeing a first step is a practical way to support clearer decisions, resilience through change and follow-through on priorities.

If you are struggling, please speak with your doctor or your EAP provider, or visit thesupportpages.com.au.



How to use this playbook

START HERE

Read, answer, then keep one sentence

Each move has a short framing, a question and space to write. Write by hand if you print it, or type into the lines. Keep answers short: one sentence is enough. The aim is one new sentence you believe and one small step you will take.

Why we write it down

A thought that stays in your head can loop. On paper it has edges, and you can test it. Distance from a thought is often what makes it possible to change.

FOUR GROUND RULES

- Be accurate before you are kind. A rewrite you do not believe will not hold.
- Keep the facts. You are changing the meaning, not denying what happened.
- If something heavy comes up, pause. You can speak with your doctor, your EAP provider or someone you trust.
- This is a tool, not a verdict. Return to it whenever the old story comes back.



MOVE 01

CHECK

Is your statement accurate?

-
- Write down the sentence you keep telling yourself
 - Separate the fact from the story and the feeling
 - Look for the words always, never, everyone and no one
 - Test it against the evidence on both sides

01

Check

PULL THE SENTENCE APART

Fact, Story, Feeling

Most of what we say to ourselves arrives as one sentence: "I always freeze in front of senior people." Inside it are three different things. The fact is what a camera would have recorded. The story is the meaning you attached to it. The feeling is what the story does to you. Most of the weight sits in the story, and the story is the one part you are allowed to question.

THE QUESTION

Which sentence about yourself, your work or your future have you repeated so often that it now feels like a fact?

LISTEN FOR THE ABSOLUTES

The Always and Never Test

Accurate statements are usually specific. Unhelpful ones tend to carry absolutes: always, never, everyone, no one, ruined, too late. Underline them. Then ask for the last time the opposite was true, even partly. One honest counter-example does not prove the statement wrong. It proves the statement is not the whole picture.

THE QUESTION

What is the last time the opposite of your statement was true, even a little?

YOUR ANSWERS

The sentence I keep telling myself:

The fact, the story and the feeling inside it:

Evidence for it, and evidence against it:

Check: research and notes

THE RESEARCH

Stepping back changes how you reflect

People who analyse a painful event from a distance, as an observer, tend to make sense of it with less emotional reactivity than people who relive it from the inside.

Ayduk & Kross, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2010

Testing thoughts against evidence is well supported

Cognitive behavioural approaches, which include examining unhelpful thoughts against the evidence, have strong support across a wide range of conditions.

Hofmann et al., Cognitive Therapy and Research, 2012

Reappraisal changes the emotional experience

Re-interpreting a situation early reduces how strongly it is felt, without the physiological cost of suppressing it.

Gross, Psychophysiology, 2002

IF YOU LEAD A TEAM

Model it

Share one sentence you have had to correct about yourself, and what the evidence actually showed.

Coach it

When someone says “I always” or “we never”, ask: what is a time that was not true?

Watch for

Absolutes in feedback, in post-mortems and in how people describe their own track record.

MY NOTES

The statement I am testing:

The absolute word I found:

One piece of evidence I had overlooked:

02



MOVE 02

REWRITE

Change the narrative without lying to yourself.



- Keep what is true, change what is unhelpful
- Run the new sentence through three tests
- Speak to yourself by name, as you would a colleague
- Say it out loud once

Rewrite

ACCURATE, USEFUL, FORWARD

The Three Tests

A rewrite only works if you believe it, so positive thinking is not the goal. A good new sentence passes three tests. Is it accurate: could you defend it to a sceptical friend? Is it useful: does it help you decide or act? Does it face forward: does it leave room for the next step, rather than closing the door?

A WORKED EXAMPLE

Before and after

BEFORE

I always fall apart when things get uncertain.

AFTER

Uncertainty is hard for me. I have still delivered through it before. I can take one next step.

BEFORE, AS A LEADER

Our team just can't handle change.

AFTER

The last change was hard because it was unclear. When we explained it step by step, the team delivered. We can do that again.

Nothing was denied. The difficulty is still there. What changed is that each sentence is now specific, true and open.

YOUR ANSWERS

My old sentence:

My new sentence (accurate, useful, forward):

How I would say it to a colleague I respect:

Rewrite: research and notes

THE RESEARCH

Your name beats “I” under pressure

People who coached themselves using their own name or “you” before a stressful speech reported less anxiety and were rated as performing better than those who used “I”.

Kross et al., Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2014

Distance first, then reinterpret

Taking the observer’s view gives you room to find a different meaning in an event rather than replaying it.

Ayduk & Kross, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2010

Reframing is a skill that can be practised

Choosing how to interpret a situation, not only how to react to it, is one of the best-studied ways of regulating emotion.

Gross, Psychophysiology, 2002

IF YOU LEAD A TEAM

Model it

Say a rewritten sentence out loud in a team meeting, including what you changed and why.

Coach it

Replace “that failed” with “here is what that taught us, and what we will do next” and ask people to try it.

Watch for

Rewrites that deny the facts. If it would not survive a sceptical friend, it is not ready.

MY NOTES

The sentence I am retiring:

The sentence I am keeping:

Who I will say it to:



MOVE 03

RESTART

Focus on one thing and begin again.

-
- Pick the one thing that matters most this week
 - Close the other loops or park them in writing
 - Choose a first step small enough to finish in 24 hours
 - Decide when and where, in advance

03

Restart

CLOSE THE LOOPS THAT FOLLOW YOU

One Focus

Starting again is hard partly because the old thing keeps following you. Unfinished tasks and open questions pull attention into the next task. The fix is not more willpower. Choose one thing that matters most this week. Write the rest down in a parking list, with a day to revisit it, so your mind is allowed to put it down.

THE QUESTION

What is the one thing that, if it moved this week, would make the rest easier?

IF IT IS NOT SMALL, IT WILL NOT START

The Smallest First Step

Big restarts fail at the first step because the first step is not really a step. Make it so small that it is hard to say no: open the document, send the one-line email, book the call. Then attach it to a time and place: “If it is Tuesday at 9am, I will send the email before I open anything else.”

THE QUESTION

What is the smallest step you could finish in the next 24 hours, and when exactly will you do it?

YOUR ANSWERS

The one thing I am focusing on this week:

The loops I am parking, and when I will revisit them:

My smallest first step, with day, time and place:

Restart: research and notes

THE RESEARCH

Unfinished work follows you

When people switch tasks before the first is finished, thoughts about it linger and make the next task harder. Finishing or deliberately parking a task reduces that drag.

Leroy, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 2009

If-then plans improve follow-through

Deciding in advance when and where you will act ("if X, then I will Y") reliably improves the chance you will do it.

Gollwitzer, American Psychologist, 1999

The effect holds across many goals

A large meta-analysis found a medium-to-large effect of implementation intentions on goal attainment.

Gollwitzer & Sheeran, Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 2006

IF YOU LEAD A TEAM

Model it

Tell the team your one focus for the week and what you are parking.

Coach it

Ask each person for one focus and one first step with a day and time. Review it in five minutes at the next check-in.

Watch for

Priority lists with ten items, and restarts that begin with a big announcement instead of a small action.

MY NOTES

My one focus:

My first step, with day and time:

The person I will tell:

Your new statement, on paper.

THE OLD SENTENCE

THE NEW SENTENCE

MY FIRST STEP, WITH DAY AND TIME

SIGNATURE

DATE

ONE QUESTION LEFT

**If the new sentence were true
a month from now, what would
you have started?**

Then read back what you wrote. Notice the answer you
rushed past: that is usually the one worth taking
seriously.



Run it with your team in 20 minutes.

0–3 min

Write it

Each person writes one sentence they keep telling themselves about the work, the team or the year ahead.

3–10 min

Check it

In pairs, each person asks: what is the fact, what is the story, and when was the opposite last true?

10–17 min

Rewrite it

Each person rewrites the sentence so it is accurate, useful and forward-facing, and says it out loud to their partner.

17–20 min

Start it

Everyone names one small first step with a day and time, and tells the room.

GROUND RULES FOR THE ROOM

Keep to work statements. Nobody is asked to share anything personal.

Nobody has to read out what they wrote, only what they will do.

Facts stay facts. The aim is accuracy, not positivity.

Leaders go first, with a real example.

End with actions, not insights.



Seven days to begin again.

Day 1

Write the sentence you keep telling yourself.

Day 2

Check it: fact, story, feeling, and the absolute words.

Day 3

Rewrite it so it is accurate, useful and forward-facing.

Day 4

Say the new sentence out loud to one person.

Day 5

Take your smallest first step.

Day 6

Notice what changed, and what the old story said.

Day 7

Keep, adjust or drop the sentence. Choose the next step.

The research behind the moves

MOVE 01 · CHECK

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MOVE 03 · RESTART

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Links open the paper or its record. Findings are summarised for a leadership audience. Individual results vary, and this playbook is not a substitute for professional advice.



IF THIS LANDED

Help your teams begin again.

Norliza delivers three signature keynotes to leadership teams, conferences and corporate audiences worldwide, each with its own practical playbook.

CHECK AVAILABILITY

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