The Brain Instruction Manual for Leaders

What nobody told you about working with humans

PRINTABLE SHIFTS TOOLKIT

Welcome to your Printable Shifts Toolkit,

Each shift here is designed to help you apply the core principles from the book in real time.

Simply find the shift that matches your situation, print it if you wish, and put it to work. Whether you're leading a meeting, managing stress, or navigating a tough conversation, these tools will support you every step of the way.

Let's make your shifts happen!

Bruna and Tom

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This toolkit is just the beginning. Join the community and receive two fresh Shifts each month, plus exclusive content, the secret chapter, and access to bonus resources.

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THE DISSENT SHIFT: Make It Super Safe to Dissent, p. 125

What Changes When You Use It

You stop groupthink before it hardens. Instead of everyone nodding out of habit, pressure, or fear of being the difficult one, the room becomes a place where the strongest ideas survive real testing. People feel safer to speak honestly, and innovation finally has space to breathe.

How to Use It

1. Pause the quick nodding. When everyone agrees too fast, interrupt the autopilot with a calm pause.
2. Ask two grounding questions: What's the strongest argument against this idea? If our competitor were in the room, what weakness would they see? These questions give explicit permission for dissent.
3. Hold the space safely. No judgement, no punishment, no sarcasm, no subtle signals of irritation from you or others.

Signs It's Working

People start sharing the concerns they previously kept quiet, ideas improve quickly because they're pressure-tested instead of protected, you notice relief in the room. And you sleep better as you're more aware of what's really going on.

Quick Home Shift

At home, when everyone quickly agrees on a plan (weekend, holiday, choice of restaurant), pause and ask: *Is there anything we're not saying?* or *If someone had a different view, what might it be?* This invites quieter voices and reduces the pressure to *go along*, especially for children or teenagers who may hesitate to disagree.
You may also benefit from a Shift on how to leverage conflict.

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THE CONFLICT SHIFT: Build a Conflict Contract, p. 126

What Changes When You Use It

When you use this, conflict stops being something you avoid and you start using it. You turn disagreement into fuel instead of friction, and your meetings move from polite stagnation to productive challenge. You and your team trust each other more, because nothing important stays unsaid.

How to Use It

1. **Name the elephant**. At your next offsite or strategy session, say: *Disagreement is fuel here, not friction,* reframing conflict as a tool, not a threat.
2. **Create a Conflict Contract**. Co-define two simple rules for disagreement, such as:
   2.1. Attack the idea, never the person.
   2.2. Everyone gets two minutes before rebuttal.
   People follow what they co-design.
3. **Measure it.** After meetings, ask: *Did we disagree enough today?.* If the answer is no, you know innovation was left on the table.

Signs It's Working

You feel debates becoming productive rather than personal, people challenge ideas more freely, and your team gets sharper, faster, and more aligned. You start hearing phrases like *Let's test that*, instead of silence.

Quick Home Shift

Create a simple two-rule *family disagreement contract*. For example: *we speak calmly even when we disagree,* and *we listen before responding.* This helps children, teenagers, and partners express different views without shutting down or escalating. You'll see conflict become a moment of connection rather than a trigger.

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THE LIGHTHOUSE SHIFT: Anchor The Real Problem, p. 147

What Changes When You Use It

You stop focusing on the wrong problem and shift to the real one. By reducing ambiguity on the perception of the situation, your CFO stays calm, which keeps your thinking sharp, intuitive, and strategic. Instead of spiraling into details or emotion, you anchor yourself and others to direction.

How to Use It

1. Ask the two essential questions
What's the real problem here? (intentionally staying in the Threat state for a limited, controlled time just to clarify the issue at hand).
If that doesn't unlock the situation, you could ask:

- What evidence do we have and what assumptions are we making?
- If we solved just one thing here, what would make everything else easier?

What's the outcome I actually need to reach? (shifting towards the Optimal state)

- *How will it sound, feel and look then? What will happen that's not happening now?*
- *What behaviour or outcome tells us we are on the right track?*

If you can't reach clarity immediately, you can add a quick SCARF lens to scan where the problem might be:

1. *Could this be a problem of someone feeling diminished, overlooked, or not fully recognised?* (**Status**)
2. *Could this be a problem of uncertainty, unclear expectations, or not knowing what's coming next?* (**Certainty**)
3. *Could this be a problem of someone feeling they've lost choice, control, or a say in the situation?* (**Autonomy**)
4. *Could this be a problem of someone feeling outside the circle, misunderstood, or not fully included?* (**Relatedness**)
5. *Could this be a problem of something feeling uneven, inconsistent, or unfair?* (**Fairness**)

Signs It's Working

There's no circling endlessly around the problem, you and others don't get lost into the details, you feel slightly relieved by having a clear, detailed desired outcome everyone knows is the destination. Decisions come faster and emotions aren't taking over the discussion. Bonus point:

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others feel safer when you're in the room, always steering the conversation towards a productive point.

Quick Home Shift

Kids often feel the problem but can't see it clearly. Anchor them with two gentle questions: *What's really upsetting you? And what do you wish would happen instead?* It gives their brain a lighthouse, a direction that calms the swirl.

For teenagers, add Autonomy: *Hit pause. What's the real issue here, and what's the outcome you want for you?* Teens tend to settle when they feel ownership of the destination.

Quick tip: finding the *real* problem and agreeing on it can take ages, especially since we've established that dissent and disagreement are welcome.

To stop this step from expanding endlessly, allocate a specific amount of time to define the problem. You could say: *We have 15 minutes to understand and agree on what the problem actually is. After that, we move to solutions, even if it's not perfect.*

This creates focus without shutting people down (the brain loves containers and boundaries).

THE INSIGHT TRIGGER SHIFT: Get Helpful Insights When Needed, p. 172

What Changes When You Use It

Instead of wasting hours on a problem, you focus on creating the conditions that enable insights to emerge. In such a state, your Default Mode Network gets online and you may get helpful insights that help you solve the problem.

How to Use It

1. Set a clear target: what would the ideal outcome look and feel like here? Name the outcome you want, not the problem you want to escape.

2. Trigger a positive internal state

Briefly picture the issue already solved. Feel what becomes easier or possible so your CFO says: *ok, let's invest energy here.*

3. Step away on purpose
Walk, shower, cook, or sit somewhere quiet: no scrolling, no noise, ideally some white noise to facilitate insights.

4. Let your mind wander
Don't chase the answer, let the insights show up as a small nudge, a sentence, or a new angle that suddenly *lands*.

5. Capture the insight
When something clicks, pause and note: *What's this telling me? How does this fit into the problem I need to solve? Where could this information be useful?*

Signs It's Working

You get more insights when you need them, so that you reduce the time it takes to solve problems. This can also help you make important decisions quicker and with more confidence. As a bonus, the more you follow up on your insights, the more you'll notice that they're almost always useful and you'll develop more self-trust.

Quick Home Shift

When a child or teen feels stuck, help them form one clear question, then invite them to step away and do something relaxing. Later ask: *Did any new idea pop up?*
Celebrate even the tiniest insight, so you teach them to trust their inner signals (which will do wonders for their self-trust and confidence as adults).

THE SAFE SHIFT: Make Change Possible, p. 188

What Changes When You Use It

You'll stop fighting resistance and start working *with* your CFO, so change feels doable, sensible, and worth the energy, instead of overwhelming or risky.

How To Use It

When change shows up, run these four steps, always in this order:

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SEE the Payoff
Turn a vague intention into a visible return. Ask:

- *What's the one change I want to make?*
- *Why does it matter now?*
- *What will be easier once this change happens?*

Make the outcome concrete, familiar, and emotionally recognisable.
If the CFO can't *see* the return, he won't invest.

ANCHOR the Risk
Reduce uncertainty by containing exposure.

- **BREAKING** the change into clear, manageable steps
- **IDENTIFYING** the resources you already have
- **CLARIFYING** what additional support would make progress smoother
- **ANTICIPATING** obstacles and think through how you'll handle them
- **SPEAKING** to people who have already walked a similar path and borrow their map

Familiarity lowers perceived risk, unlocking momentum.

FIND the Evidence
Decide in advance how you'll know the change is happening.

- **How will you know the change is actually happening?**
- **What small signals will show progress?**
- **What tells you effort is paying off?**

Track movement so you keep the CFO engaged.

EASE the Cost
Lower the long-term energy spend by turning the key steps into habits.

- Repeat key actions the same way, at the same time if possible
- Reduce decisions and every unnecessary expense
- Turn effort into habit

Make the new path cheaper to travel than the old one.

Signs It's Working

You'll notice less internal friction and procrastination, stronger commitment, and no self-

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sabotage, along with steadier progress and lightness along the journey. When the CFO stops questioning every step, the SAFE Shift has landed.

Quick Home Shift

Kids and teens resist change for the same reason adults do: their CFO can't see the payoff and overestimates the risk. When you need them to accept a change, try this SAFE shortcut: *What will be easier once this change happens? What's the smallest first step we can try?*
It turns change from *a threat* into *an experiment*.

For teenagers: add a certain extent of Autonomy to reduce resistance:
Let's test this for a week. If it doesn't work, we adjust.
When teens feel the risk is contained, their CFO relaxes and cooperates more.

Now, if this is how change becomes possible for you, the next, unavoidable question is: how do you help your team embrace a change they most likely didn't ask for?

THE TEAM CHANGE SHIFT: Lead Others Through the New, p. 200

What Changes When You Use It

Your team moves through change without spiralling into threat, cynicism, or paralysis. Instead of reacting to uncertainty, their brains shift toward clarity and safety. Resistance softens because ambiguity is reduced, energy stops leaking into speculation and fear, and people can re-engage. The change becomes manageable, navigable, and far less costly for everyone involved. Most importantly, people feel led, not abandoned or lost.

How to Use It

1. Make the payoff visible (SEE)
What pain will be reduced? What improves day to day? What success looks and feels like for them.

2. Contain uncertainty (ANCHOR)
Name what stays stable, time-box unknowns or updates, break the transition into phases.

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3. Prove progress (FIND)
Faster decisions? Clearer ownership? Less friction or rework? Make small wins visible early.

4. Make the new way cheaper (EASE)
Clear decision rules, simple defaults, predictable routines, the brain follows the lowest-cost path.

5. Create safety for concerns
Acknowledge fears instead of dismissing them and invite questions before speculation fills the gap.

6. Review progress together
What has improved? What's still unclear? What should we adjust? What can we celebrate?

7. Keep connection high
Share updates, invite input, create open conversations, connection reduces threat.

Signs It's Working

You'll notice curiosity replacing fear, conversations become more constructive and the resistance softens, or becomes more honest and transparent. Overall, energy rises instead of draining.
When these signs appear, the *Shift* is working, you're leading your team's brains through change in an effective way.

Quick Home Shift

When a family change is needed (curfew, screens, chores, study time), start with the why in their language: how it helps them, what frustration it removes, what will feel/be easier.
Then show the small steps, remove obstacles, and celebrate tiny progress. Kids and teens adapt faster when they understand the point and feel part of the process.

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THE RESET SHIFT: Stop the Ugh… Spiral Before It Starts, p. 214

What Changes When You Use It

You enter meetings with more energy, clarity, and capacity to think, listen, and respond. Instead of letting an automatic negative prediction drain you before the conversation even begins, you interrupt the spiral and give your brain a different expectation, one that keeps your cognitive functions fully online.

How to Use It

1. Name the script
Say or write the exact prediction your brain is making:
This will be a waste of time, She will get defensive, It'll be the same mess as last time.

The moment you name it, the unconscious loop becomes conscious, and it loses power.

2. Break the pattern
Do one small thing differently before joining the meeting: stand up, change your spot, stretch for 30 seconds, or walk while you think.
Your brain receives a new signal: *New input, a new outcome is possible.*

3. Micro reframe
Ask yourself: *What's one useful thing I could get or give in this meeting?* Pick just one, even a 1% shift resets the emotional prediction and opens capacity.

This takes about 90 seconds, and it prevents your brain from poisoning the meeting before it starts.

Signs It's Working

You enter the conversation with your Innovation & Growth department online, so you can ask the right questions, listen differently, interrupt less, and find at least one moment of genuine curiosity. You may notice the other person reacting more softly, or simply feel the meeting is lighter and shorter than expected.

Quick Home Shift

When your child or partner shows up already annoyed or resigned, the classic Ugh… energy, ask gently: What's going on for you right now? Then suggest one tiny pattern break: a short walk, a stretch, a different room. Follow with: What's one good thing you hope comes out of this

conversation?
It resets their prediction the same way it resets yours.

THE READINESS SHIFT: Align Before You Speak, p. 221

What Changes When You Use It

You prepare both your brain and theirs for a safe, clear, effective conversation. Instead of rushing in reactively, you enter with presence, emotional neutrality, and intention, exactly what high-stakes conversations require. Your energy is clean, your message is grounded, and you avoid triggering unnecessary threat signals.

How to Use It

Before the conversation, pause and ask yourself:

> *Are my facts clear, and separate from my assumptions?*
> Your message lands cleanly only when you're not mixing data with stories.
>
> *Can I frame my interpretation as a hypothesis, instead of a truth?*
> This keeps their brain open instead of defensive.
>
> *Am I genuinely curious about their thinking path?*
> Curiosity softens your tone and invites theirs.
>
> *Is my energy stable enough to stay present, instead of reactive?*
> If not, then regulate first, state precedes strategy.
>
> *What's the real problem I need to solve here?*
> This becomes your lighthouse, everything else flows from it.
>
> *What outcome do I want for both of us?*
> Win-win is always the best strategy, as any great negotiator knows.

If you can answer *yes* or *I'm ready* to most of these, your brain is prepared.
If not, be smart: pause, regulate, and reset your intention.

Signs It's Working

You feel calmer and more grounded going in. You interrupt less, defend less, and listen more.

You're genuinely interested in what they say, not bracing for it. They open up faster, and you catch the hooks that reveal how they see the situation. You both walk away with a clearer path forward and no emotional residue.

Quick Home Shift

Before addressing a tense moment with a partner or child, ask yourself: *What outcome do I want for us?* and *What state am I entering with?*
Then regulate for ten seconds before speaking. Their openness will match your steadiness, then use the STATE 2.0 model.

THE SHARED MEANING SHIFT: From Guessing to Understanding, p. 233

What Changes When You Use It

You dramatically reduce misunderstandings and prevent a lot of avoidable conflict, helping your team move from friction, assumptions, and resistance to clarity, ownership, and smoother collaboration, even across cultural and generational differences. The team turns differences into advantages instead of friction.

How to Use It

1. **Create safety before solving**. Explicitly name the psychological safety rules so people know it's safe to speak up.

2. **Co-investigate the *real* problem**. Share the context from your perspective, then ask the team:
    - *What do you think the real problem is?*
    - *What would an ideal outcome look like?*

3. **Define a shared lighthouse**. Agree on a clear ideal outcome. Hold this outcome steady throughout the process to guide decisions and behaviour.

4. **Map differences openly**. Invite everyone to share their filters around a few essential topics: communication, feedback style, speaking up, how decisions are made, boundaries

and availability, motivation, working rhythms, and what respect, privacy, and success/celebrations look like.

5. **Co-create the rules of collaboration**. Define, together, how you work across those key areas and others that may emerge from the collective sharing.

6. **Install a simple awareness mechanism**. Assign a rotating *ambassador* whose only role is to notice drift and bring the team back to shared meaning.

7. **Two months later check in with the team**: *What's working? What needs adjusting?* to keep the system alive.

Signs It's Working

Misunderstandings become rare and far easier to resolve. *Why did they do that?* naturally shifts into *Ah, that's their filter, makes sense*. People stop taking things personally, and the team corrects itself kindly: *Remember, this is how we said we'd communicate*. Conflict feels more productive than threatening, new joiners integrate more easily, and the energy in the team moves from defensive to genuinely collaborative.

Quick Home Shift

Generational gaps at home often show up as power struggles because everyone assumes they're *speaking the same language* when they're not.

Instead of correcting behaviour, try asking:
What do you think this situation means?
And what outcome would feel fair to you?
Way more productive than adding more rules, trust me on this.

For teenagers in particular:

Invite co-creation: *Let's agree on how we want to handle this going forward, shall we?*
Teens are highly sensitive to this, they crave to be seen and treated as adults, so cooperation is your best way to define the rules and they're more likely to stick.

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THE POISE SHIFT: Lead Yourself Before You Lead the Room, p. 260

What Changes When You Use It

Master your internal state before it shapes the room. The POISE Shift is a 10-second reset designed to intercept your brain's prediction loop and stop tension from leaking into your team. POISE is a 10-second reset that helps you lead yourself first, so tension doesn't leak into the space and shape everything that follows.

How to Use It

P - Pause
Catch the rush: a tight jaw, shallow breath, or sense of urgency is your cue to stop for a moment, before it spills into your tone or posture.
O - Open
Soften one thing in the body: drop the shoulders, relax the face, lengthen the exhale. The body sends *safe enough* signals way faster than thoughts.
I - Inquire
Check for accuracy, ask yourself: *Is this a real risk, or am I tired, stretched, or overloaded?* Don't act on an unverified signal.
S - Shift
Change something physical: stand up, take a step, widen your visual field, or move to a different spot. A small context shift helps the brain update its prediction.
E - Evaluate
Notice your energy budget. Low sleep? Missed lunch? Back-to-back meetings? Naming the energy math makes your leadership more humane, for you and for others.

Signs It's Working

When you use POISE, you become the anchor rather than the variable. You think more clearly under pressure, leak less tension, and your presence steadies the room before your words even begin.
People stay more open, conversations de-escalate faster, and decisions land with less friction because your system signaled safety first.

Quick Home Shift

Your family mirrors your nervous system instantly. At home, a softening jaw or a simple *Give me a second, I'm coming in a bit hot* can reset the entire household atmosphere before a conflict even starts.

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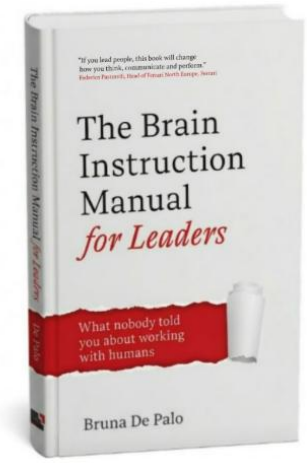

Leadership doesn't change in one big moment. It changes through small *Shifts*, repeated consistently. Choose one, put it into practice, and see what happens next.

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