

Caught Leading

A note from the person who gave you this:

Hello.

Thanks for spending a little time with these workbooks.

They aren't races.

They're walks.

Some people move through one in an afternoon.

Others take their time over days or weeks.

Either is just fine.

I won't ask you to agree with everything here.

I won't ask you to finish every page.

I won't ask you to do every exercise.

I'll simply invite you to notice a few ordinary moments as you go.

If something stays with you, wonderful.

If nothing does, that's okay too.

Thank you for taking the walk anyway.

I'm glad you're here.

— *Frank*

Caught
Leading

A Workbook

By

Frank Wood



A CAUGHT SOONER BOOK

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This book was written to be shared in spirit. Please feel free to recommend it, lend it, or give it to someone who may find it useful.

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For more information, visit
caughtsooner.com

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Welcome

Yes, this is a workbook.

Eight lessons.

Some short stories. A few small questions along the way.

Nothing here is going to transform you.

Not the goal.

The goal is smaller.

To notice the thing a little sooner than you might have.

That's it.

And — worth saying.

This workbook works with you. Not on you.

Some part of you brings the willingness to look.

The lessons meet that part.

Where the willingness goes, the work goes.

That part is yours.

It does ask something of you.

A little focus.

Not a lot.

Enough to be in the room while you're reading.

If this is your first Caught book — welcome.

Different door. Same you.

If you've been to another one of these — welcome back.

Different room. Same porch.

This workbook will explore something that may already be operating in you.

A line, a look, a move, a version of you that arrives before you've quite chosen it.

Lesson 1 will both name the workbook's focus and offer you an anchor
— a way of helping visualize the book's focus.

The pace is yours.

Take what you take.

Come in.

A Note from David

Hello.

I'm glad you're here.

You can call me David.

You'll find me throughout the Caught workbooks, audio lessons, and other conversations that live around this work.

Over the next few lessons, I'll be walking alongside you through this workbook.

Whether you're sitting with a coffee, taking a walk, riding a train, or spending a few quiet minutes in your favorite chair, think of these pages less as a class and more as a conversation.

As you read, you may notice stories, questions, and small moments to reflect on. There are no grades here. No right pace. No finish line.

Just ideas to sit with.

If it helps, imagine me as a workbook companion. A friendly voice beside you on a porch, a park bench, or a walk around the neighborhood.

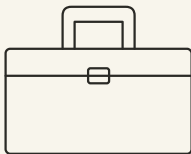
Take what helps.

Leave what doesn't.

And take your time.

I'm glad you're here.

— *David*



LESSON 1

Leading is a word

*Leading also lives in the moments that arrive before
we've chosen how to meet them.*

Glad you stayed.

This one's for someone who is sometimes in the position of reaching for a tool toward another person.

That might be you in the kitchen with a teenager.

At the job site with a crew.

In the meeting with a team.

On the sideline with a player.

In the parish hall with a deacon.

In the office with someone you've been managing for a while.

Whatever shape it takes for you, you've been doing leading for some time and you have a process, a method, an approach. Whatever you call it.

Your experience. The training you sought. The mentors. The ways you've found that mostly work.

If that's you —

What you find here may help.

To meet those moments a little differently.

Glad you came in.

STORIES.

Two short moments before we go further. No hurry.

The conversation.

He'd been thinking about it for a few days.

Something needed to be said to one of his people. He planned what he wanted to say. He picked Tuesday because it was quieter.

They sat down.

The first part came out fine.

The second part came out sharper than he meant.

He saw it land.

She nodded at the right moments. She thanked him. She left.

He sat there for a minute.

That wasn't what I was trying to do.

— *I've sat in that chair after.*

— *Different conversation. Same minute afterward.*

The sideline.

She'd told herself, on the drive over, that she wasn't going to coach from the bleachers today.

Her daughter was eleven. The game was a Saturday morning thing. Through the first half she did pretty well. Cheered the right people. Didn't say anything about the spacing.

Second half, her daughter missed a pass in the middle of the field.

Pretty routine. The kind of thing a kid misses.

Something came out of her mouth.

Loud enough that her daughter heard it from the field.

Sharper than she meant.

Her daughter looked over. Then looked away. Then kept playing.

The mom watched her daughter for the rest of the game. The way her shoulders were sitting. The way she didn't quite look at the bench between plays.

She knew.

She just knew.

— *I've yelled across the field.*

— *Different game. Same drive home.*

Most of us have a version of one or the other.

The conversation that didn't go where we meant it.

The thing we said that was bigger than the moment.

The look that lingered a fraction too long.

The reply that came out sharper than we'd have written it if we'd given ourselves another minute.

Same shape.

Different rooms. Different volumes.

Here's the part that's worth looking at.

Whatever ran in us in those moments — it doesn't stay there.

It rides into the next conversation. The next message. The next room we walk into.

The people in those rooms get the residue. The ones we live with get the residue. The ones we lead get the residue.

Sometimes — and this is the one that lands later — we pay for it too.

The version of the leader we wanted to be in that moment is now somewhere we can't quite reach.

That's the cost.

Not the conversation. Not the moment.

The residue.

And there's another cost.

The one that doesn't show up in any single moment.

The one that builds underneath.

A morning that starts already loaded.

A meeting walked into already deciding what we were going to say.

Someone we lead, read through the lens of the last one we led who let us down.

A conversation that didn't land because a part of us was already in the next one.

The hours spent rerunning instead of being here.

What didn't happen — because the carrying was happening.

In this workbook, what makes those moments come out the way they do has a shape.

Something you've built across years.

Something real. Something useful.

Something you'd defend if pressed.

We'll call it your toolbox.

What this workbook is for.

Here's what I want you to know before we go further.

Whatever you've tried — it came from somewhere real.

There isn't a clean way to make the wrong reach stop.

This workbook isn't going to ask you to.

Not to fix the toolbox.

Not to replace it.

Not to abandon what you've built.

To notice when the wrong tool is about to come out.

Sooner than you might have.

That noticing is enough.

One thing.

This might help focus the lesson for you. It might change. But for now

—

Bring to mind one thing. A person, a moment, a relationship.

Someone you've been trying to reach. A team that's been a little off. A kid whose room you've been standing outside of.

Just hold it. Nothing to write.

Before we close this lesson, two thoughts to sit with.

— *I've reached for the hammer when the drill bit was right there.*

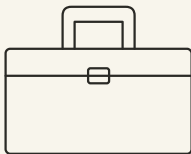
— *I'm here. On the bench.*

See you in Lesson 2.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

What gets left behind.



LESSON 2

What gets left behind

*The moment is over for us. It isn't always over for
the people who were in it with us.*

Glad you're back.

Last lesson — the small moments. The chair. The field. The minute after.

The residue. The version of yourself you wanted to be that's now somewhere you can't quite reach.

This lesson is about who else carries it.

STORIES.

Two short moments before we go further. No hurry.

The hallway.

She was walking back through the building after lunch.

One of her people stopped her in the hall. Quick question about a project past its deadline.

She answered.

Her answer was short. The tone was shorter.

She kept walking.

She didn't think about it again until later that afternoon. When she noticed he hadn't come by the way he usually did on Wednesdays.

She thought — that was probably the hall.

— *I've answered like that in a hall.*

— *Different question. Same tone.*

The kitchen.

It was almost dinner. Her daughter was at the counter, doing homework.

Her daughter asked her something. Quick question. Not a big one. She answered.

Her answer was short. The tone was shorter.

She kept moving.

Her daughter didn't ask the follow-up she would have asked. She finished her homework and went to her room a little earlier than usual.

The mom noticed at bedtime.

That was probably the counter.

— *I've answered like that at a counter.*

— *Different child. Same tone.*

She walked away from the hall.

She kept moving in the kitchen.

Both of them were done with the moment.

The moment wasn't done with them.

The person in the hall went back to his desk. Wondered briefly what he'd said wrong. Decided he'd be a little more careful next time.

The daughter went to her room. Didn't think about it in words. Just didn't come back downstairs for the second glass of water she would have come for.

Neither of them mentioned it.

Neither of them needed to.

The moment had already moved into its second act.

The first cost is the moment itself.

The second cost is what the moment leaves in the people who were in it with us.

They keep it.

Quietly. Without telling us. Sometimes for a while.

It doesn't take much to leave behind. A tone. A look. A line that read sharper than we meant.

It lands somewhere we don't track.

The version of us that walks into the next room walks in carrying nothing.

We left it behind.

The room we walk into may already be carrying it for us.

The toolbox.

Before we go further, picture an actual one.

The one in your garage. Or your dad's. Or the basement.

Open it.

Hammer. Screwdriver. Tape measure. Drill. Bits.

Some you've used so often they sit in their spot worn down. Some are there because someone gave them to you. Some you bought for one project and haven't touched since.

That's a toolbox.

The one you carry into leading is shaped like that.

Different specifics. Same kinds of tools.

Particular to you. Earned across years.

It's a real toolbox. You built it.

More than likely you've reached into your box for one thing and pulled out another.

You've reached for the dinner-time update and pulled out the lecture.

You've reached for the regular one-on-one and pulled out the written warning.

You've reached for the bedtime routine and pulled out the lecture about wasting time.

You've reached for the morning huddle and pulled out the all-hands.

Not once. Not occasionally.

More times than you can count.

Not because the other one wasn't in the box.

Because something in the moment made you reach past it.

The reach.

The reach is what came out toward the person in front of you.

The tool that surfaced. The gesture that delivered it. Same moment.

Sometimes the right tool. Sometimes the wrong one.

Always toward someone.

Jen.

Jen has a magnet on her file cabinet.

Six bullets about active listening.

Reflect back.

Paraphrase.

Eye contact.

Show that you're listening.

Don't interrupt.

Acknowledge the feeling.

She has two certificates in her field. She's thinking about a third.

When someone is on their way to a hard conversation, she'll
sometimes point at the magnet.

That'll certainly help them.

Jen means it.

Some of the time the magnet helps. Some of the time the person
figures it out a different way.

Jen doesn't always find out which.

The magnet is a public reminder.

Honoring her training. Honoring what she knows.

She has reached for the hammer when the drill bit was right there.

More times than she can count.

And not just at work.

Jen has teenagers.

They will tell her about it if you ask.

The reach isn't a flaw.

It's part of having a toolbox.

The same toolbox that got us through a lot of difficult terrain across a lot of years.

Sometimes the right tool comes out.

Sometimes the wrong one does.

The training didn't change between those two moments.

Something else did.

This workbook isn't going to teach you better tools.

Your tools are real.

It's going to look at what happens in the half-second before the reach.

Because that's where the difference between the hammer and the drill bit gets made.

THE REACH — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back the moment you held in Lesson 1.

Or a different one that has surfaced — that's fine too.

Where it happened. Who was there.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — what came out of you?

The words. The text when you hit send. The expression you didn't plan.

Or the thing you didn't say that still landed.

What got delivered.

That was the reach.

Name it

3.

Now — what else was in the box?

The other tool. The other reach.

The dinner-time update. The regular one-on-one. The bedtime routine. The checklist.

Yours may be different.

The one that was right there. Two inches from your hand.

Or the one you've owned for years that would have fit better.

That was the drill bit.

In a word or two

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

You named what came out.

You named what was also in the box.

The drill bit was there the whole time.

It still is.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

Where we haven't looked.

See you in Lesson 3.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — after a moment when something came out a little hotter or sharper or shorter than you meant:

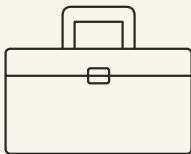
Notice the room afterward.

The face of the person who was there. The quiet.

Not fix it. Not apologize for it. Not redo it in your head.

Just notice that it's still there.

That is enough.



LESSON 3

Where we haven't looked

There's one place we tend not to run the question.

Still here.

Last lesson — the toolbox. The one you've built across years. The small thing that was right there. The bigger one that came out anyway.

Something in the moment made you go right past it.

This lesson is about that something.

STORIES.

Two short moments before we go further. No hurry.

The files.

Three people had left her team in the last eighteen months.

Three different reasons.

One left for a manager.

One left for education.

One left for personal loss outside work.

She'd written something up after each one.

Three different files. She'd been busy. She hadn't put them next to each other.

Last Tuesday she pulled them out.

She read the first one. Then the second. Then the third.

She read them again.

She sat with the three files on her desk for a few minutes.

In every one, she'd focused on strategic direction.

All three.

Different reasons. Same focus.

She thought — huh.

That's me.

— *I've looked at files like that.*

— *Different files. Same handwriting.*

The Sunday.

She was standing at the kitchen counter on a Sunday night.

Her teenager was upstairs.

She'd just done the homework conversation.

The line had come out of her mouth like it always does.

Really — have you given your best effort?

She'd said the same line about chores last Tuesday.

She'd said it about the writing assignment the Sunday before.

She'd said it about math two weeks before that.

Different moment. Same line.

She was holding her coffee.

She thought — huh.

This isn't the homework.

— *I've stood at the counter like that.*

— *Different Sunday. Same line.*

Most of us have looked at something we've been running and noticed something.

The pattern isn't in what we were looking at.

The pattern is in us.

A move we keep making.

Something about us that keeps showing up wherever we go.

We run analysis on the work all the time.

The project. The team. The numbers.

The kid's homework. The marriage. The friend who keeps doing that thing.

And we have a response we tend to run.

Often.

Most of the time.

Sometimes always.

What's around us varies.

Our response — more similar than we might have noticed.

Different person at the door. Same first sentence out of our mouth.

Different problem on the desk. Same first move.

Different Sunday night. Same line.

Different file. Same focus.

Huh.

What if the pattern is mine.

Held lightly.

Not as a verdict.

Not as a confession.

Not as somewhere to beat yourself up.

Just as a question.

With some breath around it.

Nothing to fix yet.

Just somewhere new to look.

THE PATTERN — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

Specific moments — not in general.

1.

Bring back two or three moments — across work, or across home, or across both — that resembled each other.

Not exactly the same.

Something in common.

Just the moments.

Write them in a couple of words

2.

Now — was there a similar response across them? Your response.

The knee-jerk move. Your knee-jerk move.

Like the mom and her line.

Did it fit this moment?

Name it

3.

Now — how were they different?

Different person. Different problem. Different room.

Different reasons each one happened.

In a word or two

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

What had your handwriting on it?

You didn't decide what to do with it.

You just noticed yourself in a few places that resembled each other.

That's enough for this week.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

Position.

The small space we step into when we notice ourselves.

See you in Lesson 4.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — if you find yourself looking hard at something
that's gone wrong, after the usual looking:

Ask one more question.

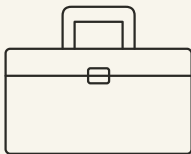
What's been the same in me across these.

Not as judgment.

Just as a question.

Sooner than you might have.

That is enough.



LESSON 4

Position

The small space between a moment arriving and the response forming.

Good to see you.

Last lesson — the question turned around. The pattern with your handwriting on it.

You noticed yourself in different places that resembled each other.

This lesson is about the space where the noticing happens.

STORIES.

Two short moments before we go further. No hurry.

The truck.

He'd known the guy for six years.

Mornings on the job site went a certain way. Coffee. Brief hello.

Punch list. Day started.

This morning the guy was sitting on the tailgate.

Most mornings he was standing. Talking. Smiling.

This morning was different.

The foreman walked up. Was about to run the punch list.

Something stopped him.

Half a second.

The guy was looking down at his boots.

The foreman put his coffee on the truck.

Morning. You good?

The guy didn't say anything for a few seconds.

Then he said — yeah. I'm good.

The foreman waited.

The guy said — my brother. The doctor called yesterday.

The foreman nodded.

Sat down on the tailgate.

They sat for a few minutes.

The punch list happened later.

— *I've stood at a truck like that.*

— *Different guy. Same half-second.*

The phone call.

She called her daughter at college on a Sunday afternoon.

They talked on Sundays.

Her daughter answered.

Hi, Mom.

She was about to ask about classes.

Something in the hi stopped her.

Half a second.

She held the phone.

Hi honey. How are you, really?

There was a pause.

Her daughter started crying.

— *I've held a phone like that.*

— *Different child. Same half-second.*

Some of you have done some version of this.

The half-second that arrived before the next sentence.

The look that caught you before you moved past.

The hello that didn't quite sound like the hellos before it.

Some part of you read the moment.

And the rest of you slowed down enough to let the reading happen.

Position.

In this workbook we'll call it Position.

The small space between a moment arriving and the response forming.

Where you see what's in front of you.

Not what your training expects to see.

What's actually there.

Position is not a technique.

Not a framework.

Not something the book is going to install in you.

You know this from the inside.

You've felt this before.

Two small examples before we go further.

One home. One work.

The move — sit on the edge of the bed and listen.

Your move — sat on the edge of the bed and lectured.

The move — when offering feedback, stop to permit processing.

Your move — you gave the feedback and kept talking.

Same toolbox. You know your response.

What came out wasn't quite what the moment was actually asking for.

Same experience. Same toolbox.

Different move.

Because the seeing happened first.

Or didn't.

Position is what makes the move yours.

Half a second.

Eyes.

Position.

Enough room for your move not to run the room.

POSITION — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment when something happened in a hello, or a posture, or a tone of voice, or a quiet.

Whether or not you stopped at it.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — what were you taught to do in moments like that one?

The trained response. The framework. The thing your training would have run.

That was the move.

Name it

3.

Now — what did you actually do?

What came out.

Whether it was the trained move, or something else.

That was your move.

In a word or two

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

What made your move yours?

You named the move.

You named your move.

You noticed a moment existed between them.

That was Position.

You knew this from the inside.

You've felt this before.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

What you're carrying.

The thing that loads up the moment before the moment arrives.

See you in Lesson 5.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — see if you can find the small space between the moment and the response.

Not push it open.

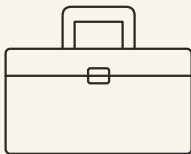
Not analyze it.

Just notice it's there.

Your move comes from inside it.

Sooner than you might have.

That is enough.



LESSON 5

What you're carrying

*By the time we respond, we're not always
responding to what's in front of us.*

Here you are.

Last lesson — Position. The small space.

Half a second. Eyes. Then your move.

This lesson is about what sometimes fills the space, sometimes very quickly.

STORIES.

Two short moments before we go further. No hurry.

The call with mom.

She was on the phone with her mother.

Tuesday afternoon. A quick check-in.

She'd mentioned, briefly, that work had been hard.

Her mother said —

You have so much to learn, don't you.

Something in her chest tightened.

Not because her mother was wrong.

Because every conversation she'd ever had with her mother arrived at once.

Forty-three years of don't-yous.

All present.

She said — yeah, Mom. Maybe.

She got off the phone.

She sat for ten minutes.

— *I've sat after a call like that.*

— *Different word. Same forty-three years.*

The email.

He was opening his email on a Monday morning.

The vendor he'd been working with for nine months had sent something at seven a.m.

Update on the shipment — it's going to be one day late.

He started typing a response.

Halfway through the second sentence — he stopped.

He read what he'd written.

It wasn't an answer to a one-day-late shipment.

It was an answer to every vendor he'd ever worked with who'd been one day late and then three days late and then weeks behind.

He'd been writing to the previous one.

He deleted the draft.

He sent — got it. Thanks for the heads up.

— *I've started an email like that.*

— *Different vendor. Same memory.*

Most of us have had moments where what was actually in front of us got loaded up with everything else.

A spouse said something. We answered every prior spouse-conversation.

A direct report missed a deadline. We responded to every prior direct report.

A teenager rolled their eyes. We brought decades of teenagers into the room.

The moment in front of us —
became a moment that wasn't really in front of us anymore.

The pile.

We'll call it the pile.

What we carry into the moment before the moment shows up.

The pile is real.

Pattern recognition got us through a lot.

Years of moments. Years of learning what tends to follow what.

Three different hammers in there. Claw. Ball-peen. Sledge.

Flat-head screwdriver, Phillips, ratchet set.

Each for a specific situation. Each useful when the situation matches.

Most of the time the pile saves us time.

Sometimes the pile takes the focus.

Runs faster than the moment.

Answers the wrong question.

The vendor isn't the prior vendor.

The mother isn't every prior mother-conversation.

This kid isn't every prior kid.

This direct report isn't the one who left in March.

This spouse isn't the one who said the thing in 2019.

This Tuesday isn't last Tuesday.

This one is its own one.

Said quietly. Half-second.

That's enough to interrupt the pattern.

The pile doesn't have to go away. It doesn't have to be analyzed. It doesn't have to be argued with.

Just — noticed.

And then — this one is its own one.

Then your move comes from where the moment actually is.

Not from where the pile has been.

THE PILE — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment when what was in front of you felt loaded.

Heavier than the moment seemed to deserve.

Or faster. Or sharper.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — what was actually there?

The specific email. The specific sentence. The specific look.

Just what was in the room.

That was the moment.

Name it

3.

Now — what else arrived at the same time?

Prior moments that resembled this one.

People who weren't in the room but showed up anyway.

That was the pile.

In a word or two

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

What came with you that wasn't in the room?

You named the pile.

You named what wasn't in the room.

This one is its own one.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

What the room is carrying.

See you in Lesson 6.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — when you walk into a moment that feels familiar:

See if you can notice the pile arriving with you.

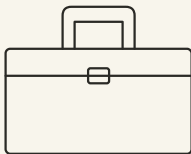
Then say to yourself — quietly —

This one is its own one.

That's all.

Sooner than you might have.

That is enough.



LESSON 6

What the room is carrying

Before you got there, the room was already loaded.

Glad you're back.

Last lesson — what you're carrying. The pile arriving with us into the moment. The blur of this and every other moment that resembled this one.

Take your time getting settled. I'll wait.

STORIES.

Two more, same shape. One about a person. One about a delivery.

This time we're looking at what was in the room before we got there.

Read them slowly.

The conversation.

She walked into the one-on-one with a plan.

Three things to discuss. The order she'd been taught. The way she usually ran these.

Jenny was already sitting at the table, recently promoted and still learning.

Something was off.

She didn't know what. She wasn't sure she should know what.

She started with the first thing on her list.

The answer she got back was close. Not the right emphasis though.

The answer felt tight. A little flat.

She kept going. Second thing. The answer was the same shape. Same flatness.

She paused.

Inside her something said —

This isn't Jenny.

She set the list down.

She said —

You good?

She saw the exhale.

Jenny exhaled. Then she clarified the real issue. Not on the checklist.

— *I've sat across from someone whose chest was tight.*

— *Different person. Same room weather.*

The delivery.

The compliance requirement came down from corporate on a Wednesday.

New documentation from all suppliers. Detailed financial disclosure. Updated insurance certificates. Vendor assessment forms.

He pulled up the supplier list.

First name on it had been with him nine years. Small operation. The owner did most of the work himself. He'd kept prices stable through two hard quarters when he didn't have to.

He was about to forward the form letter.

He stopped.

He knew what the package was about to do to that small operation.

He picked up the phone instead.

The supplier answered on the second ring.

They talked for fifteen minutes.

The leader said the package was coming. Said it would be more than the relationship had space for. Said it had to come anyway.

The supplier asked practical questions about what he'd need to submit.

The supplier said he appreciated the call.

— *I've made that call.*

— *Or I've sent the form letter.*

Both of them noticed something the plan couldn't see.

Both of them set the planned thing aside long enough to make a different reach.

The plan didn't have words for it.

A tight chest. A flat answer. A small operation about to receive a package the relationship couldn't absorb.

The plan has its categories — development point, performance issue, vendor compliance.

The room had something else underneath.

Something the plan doesn't have a word for.

The first time you really see this, rooms start looking different.

The plan was running.

The room was too.

The plan isn't wrong.

It does what it was built to do.

It just has a layer it doesn't reach.

Most of us have been operating without the layer.

Not because we didn't care about it.

Because nothing in our training taught us to look for it.

Some conversations land. Some don't.

A fair number of the ones that don't — the room was carrying something the plan couldn't see.

And the plan ran anyway.

THE ROOM — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment.

A meeting. A phone call. A hallway exchange. A one-on-one.

Just where it happened. The room. The setting.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — as you entered, what were you walking in to do?

The agenda. The trained sequence. The form letter. The standard questions.

Whatever your training would have you do.

That was the plan.

Name it

3.

Now — what was the room actually carrying when you got there?

The held-back word. The relief that came before the words. The shoulders dropping when you said good morning.

Or whatever was actually there before you started running the protocol.

That was the room.

In a word or two

4.

As you look at Q1-3, anything surprise you?

Anything jump out?

Write a word or two

Not to fix.

Not to solve.

Not to figure out.

Just to notice.

Sooner than you might have.

Often the room is carrying more than we realize.

Let's take a look from a few different perspectives.

In the management suite the plan was the quarterly review. The room was carrying the CFO's preoccupation with something nobody could name.

In the salon the plan was the standard consultation. The room was carrying the client's tightness from before she sat down.

In the driveway the plan was the goodbye before school. The room was carrying my teenager's mood I'd been watching for three days.

This may apply in your leading too.

The plan was running.

The room was too.

NEXT LESSON.

A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

What made that small space available.

And what becomes possible when the training has somewhere to operate from.

See you in Lesson 7.

CARRY THIS.

This week — once — when you walk into a room — a meeting, a call, a hallway moment —

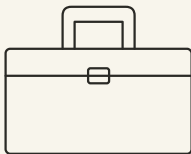
Before you do the thing you'd planned to do, see if you can notice what the room is carrying.

Not analyze it. Not name it. Not decide what to do about it.

Just notice that it's there.

Sooner than you might have.

That is enough.



LESSON 7

The half-second

One quiet move. Followed all the way through.

Here we are.

Last lesson — the moment asks.

Position is what makes the asking audible.

This lesson is one moment. Followed through.

Longer than the others.

Take it slow.

THE STORY.

The email.

Tuesday morning. Seven-forty-seven.

She opened her laptop with her coffee.

The email was at the top.

Carl. Sent at 11:14 the night before.

She read the first paragraph.

Read it again.

The tone was wrong.

The sentences weren't sentences a colleague writes to a colleague.

One named another team member by first and last name and called him a problem.

One implied an escalation Carl had no authority to suggest.

The last paragraph crossed a line she'd have to address.

She read the email twice more.

Her body had already started running the plan.

The plan had been to forward it to HR.

Something stopped her.

Half a second.

She looked at the timestamp again.

11:14 PM.

Carl didn't email her at 11:14 PM.

He never had in six years.

She picked up the phone.

She called Jen in HR.

Wanting to talk. Something short of escalating.

The five words.

Jen answered.

Hi. What's up.

She described the email.

Read parts of it aloud.

Said —

I'm thinking I have to escalate this.

Jen didn't answer right away.

Then Jen said —

Have you talked to Carl.

She paused.

The plan had been escalation.

The moment asked for something else.

She thanked Jen.

Hung up.

The walk.

She walked down the hall.

Carl's office door was open.

He was at his desk.

His face had gray under his eyes.

He looked up.

She saw his shoulders.

She came in.

She sat down.

Hey, Carl.

He didn't say anything.

She said —

I read your email this morning.

He put his hand over his mouth.

He said —

Oh god.

He started crying.

She let him cry.

After a while he said —

I didn't remember writing all of it.

He said —

My wife was diagnosed last month.

He said —

Severe depression.

He said —

I was up with her until one in the morning.

He said —

I don't know what I'm doing.

She listened.

She listened for a long time.

She didn't take notes.

She wasn't escalating now.

The wake.

The email got handled differently.

Carl spoke with the colleague he'd named in the email. Apologized.

They worked it out across two weeks.

Carl took family leave.

The work was covered.

She walked out of Carl's office that afternoon at three-fourteen.

— *I've sat in an office like that.*

— *Different person. Same half-second.*

The debrief.

The next morning the manager called Jen back.
Twenty minutes. The whole story.
Saying what happened.
Saying thank you.
Jen listened.
Then said something quiet — glad you went down the hall.

Jen later.

Yeah, the HR Jen.

It was Wednesday night.
Jen was at her kitchen counter. The dishes were drying.
She'd been thinking about the call.
Two things rose.

The first was Carl.
Carl's wife. The depression. The way these things happen in lives.
A man up with his wife until one in the morning.
A man trying to hold it together.
A man sending an email at 11:14 PM he didn't fully remember writing.

Her chest tightened.

She thought about her own husband's mother three years ago.

The diagnosis. The year that followed.

She thought about how Carl had looked at his desk that morning
when the manager had walked in.

They'd been close to losing Carl.

The second was the magnet.

The one on her file cabinet at the office.

Six bullets about active listening.

Show that you're listening.

Don't interrupt.

Reflect back.

Paraphrase.

Eye contact.

Acknowledge the feeling.

She thought about what the training would have said that morning.

Set clear behavioral expectations.

Document the pattern.

Escalate to formal performance management.

Maintain professional boundaries.

She hadn't said any of that.

She had said —

Have you talked to Carl.

Where did those words come from.

She knew where they came from.

Her own kitchen three years ago. Sitting with her husband on a Wednesday night when his mother's diagnosis had come in. Watching him.

Her teenagers the year they were thirteen and eleven. The night the older one had come down at midnight. Not for snacks.

Thirty years of moments where the trained move and her move had been the same. And the times they hadn't.

The magnet was real.

The training was real.

Same training. Same toolbox.

Different move.

She looked at the magnet in her head.

The magnet was Jen. Six bullets. Active listening. The framework her job ran on.

She thought about what she'd said that morning.

Have you talked to Carl.

Just — have you talked to Carl.

Those words were Jen too.

Same person. Different source.

Both Jens.

Same kitchen.

She turned off the kitchen light.

Went to bed.

The half-second.

The manager's half-second had been in front of her coffee.

Jen's half-second had been on the phone.

Carl's half-second was still happening — at his kitchen counter, or in his car, or wherever he was right now.

The long one. The one that takes weeks. The one his wife was inside of. The one he was inside of with her.

All three half-seconds were happening at the same time.

That's what Caught Leading points to.

Half a second.

Eyes.

Position.

Enough room for your move not to run the room.

The move is what your training taught.

Your move is what comes out. What you do. The tool you choose. And when.

Sometimes they're the same.

Sometimes they're not.

Position is what lets the asking get heard.

THE HALF-SECOND — A CLOSER LOOK.

Some questions, sit with these.

A specific moment — not in general.

1.

Bring back a recent moment when you almost ran the plan.

The escalation. The lecture. The form letter. The framework move.

You almost did. Maybe you did.

Just the moment.

Write it in a couple of words

2.

Now — was there a half-second you noticed?

The pause before the plan ran. The flicker. The hesitation.

Or the half-second that didn't come, and the plan ran anyway.

That was the half-second.

Whether you used it or not.

Name it

3.

Now — what would your move have been if the half-second had been used?

The thing you might have said. The walk you might have taken. The question you might have asked.

That was your move.

In a word or two

4.

I'm not sure about every person reading this question.

But if you're the one I'm thinking of — maybe even the one this question was written for — would you look up and smile?

You named the moment.

You named the half-second.

You named your move.

You named what had your handwriting.

That's the work.

The book.

You've reached the end of the lessons.

Seven of them.

The toolbox. The magnet. The pile. Position. The moment.

The half-second.

All of them have been describing the same standing place.

The place you've been standing all along, every time you caught something sooner.

The place you stand now.

You knew this from the inside.

You've felt this before.

CARRY THIS.

Not just this week.

From now on.

When the moment arrives —

Half a second.

Eyes.

Position.

Enough room for your move not to run the room.

You'll catch some moments sooner.

You'll miss some.

Either is alright.

This is the work.

The bench is here.

When you need it.

When you don't.

NEXT LESSON.

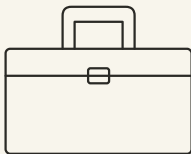
A glimpse of what's ahead. Held lightly.

In Lesson 8 you'll have a turn.

Two letters.

We'll start there.

See you in Lesson 8.



LESSON 8

Two letters

Your turn.

You're back.

Last lesson — the half-second.

Carl's email at 11:14 PM. Jen's five words instead of the magnet.

Both Jens. Same kitchen.

All three half-seconds happening at the same time.

You looked up.

Maybe you smiled.

Seven lessons taught.

This one is yours.

Here is what this lesson asks of you.

Two letters.

Both letters are to you.

One to the you with the plan already running.

One to the you with the half-second eye.

Two versions of you.

Both real.

Both yours.

A word on how to do this.

Here's what tends to land for people.

Write the first letter.

When you're done — sit with it for a moment.

You don't have to do anything with it yet. Just keep it close.

Then write the second letter.

Then read them together.

First one. Then the other. Then side by side.

That's the part that tends to do the work.

Reading them together. Both at once.

When you've read both — that's when you'll know what to do with them.

Keep them. File them. Tear them up. Frame them.

Whatever your body says.

Any way you'd like.

On paper. On a screen. In a notebook you have. In a notebook you'll buy. On the back of an envelope.

Short or long.

In one sitting or across a week.

If your body doesn't want to do this — don't.

The book continues to be the book.

The carrying continues whether you write these or not.

The first letter.

To the you with the plan already running.

The you with the agenda already in the room before the room got there.

The you with the dinner-time update that pulled out the lecture.

The you with the form letter about to be forwarded.

The you with the line that's already on its way to your daughter at the counter.

The you with the escalation about to be filed.

The hammer in your hand before the moment finished arriving.

That you is still here.

Still real.

Still running the training most of the time.

Some things you might say to that you.

You don't have to say all of them. You don't have to say any of them.

These are just here in case the body has trouble starting.

— *I see you.*

In the chair after the conversation that came out sharper than you meant.

In the car after the field.

At the counter answering a quick question with a tone shorter than the question deserved.

Wherever the reach got ahead of the seeing.

I see what came out.

— *You came by it honestly.*

Years of training. Mentors. The ways you've found that mostly work.

The toolbox you built across decades.

Real tools. Earned tools.

Tools that got you and the people you led through difficult terrain.

The toolbox is real.

— *The reach is part of having a toolbox.*

Not a flaw. Not a failure.

Same toolbox. Sometimes the right tool. Sometimes the wrong one.

The training didn't change between those two moments.

Something else did.

— *What the reach has cost.*

The face of the person who was there.

The quiet that followed.

The follow-up he didn't come by for.

The glass of water she didn't come back down for.

The version of the leader you wanted to be that's now somewhere you can't quite reach.

The residue.

— *Jen's magnet is on your file cabinet too.*

Sometimes the six bullets help.

Sometimes the person figures it out a different way.

You don't always find out which.

Either is alright.

— *You don't have to fix the toolbox.*

Not replace it.

Not abandon what you built.

The toolbox stays.

Some days the right tool comes out. Some days the wrong one does.

Either is alright.

— *Anything else.*

Whatever the body wants to say.

To the part of you that has been the one running the plan.

Trying to do good work with the tools you had.

Take your time.

Or don't.

The letter is yours.

[illegible]

When you're done — sit with it for a moment.

Keep it close.

You're not done with this lesson yet.

The second letter.

To the you with the half-second eye.

The you who saw the guy on the tailgate longer than usual.

The you who heard the hi that didn't quite sound like the hi's before it.

The you who set the list down and said — you good?

The you who picked up the phone instead of forwarding the email.

The you who said the five words instead of the magnet's six bullets.

The you who held one minute longer at the counter and saw your daughter notice.

That you is already here.

Has been here.

More moments than you've been counting.

Some things you might say to that you.

Again, you don't have to say any of these. These are just here in case the body has trouble starting.

— *I see you too.*

In the half-second before the plan ran.

Looking at the timestamp again.

Walking down the hall to Carl's office instead of HR.

Asking the second question instead of moving on.

I see what you did.

— *You weren't trying to be a different leader.*

You weren't running a technique.

Some part of you read the moment.

And the rest of you slowed down enough to let the reading happen.

That was it.

— *Same training. Same toolbox.*

Different move.

Because the seeing happened first.

That was you.

— *Both Jens.*

The magnet is real.

The five words are real.

Same person.

Different source.

Same kitchen.

— *You aren't the one I expected to find.*

I expected to find the you with the plan already running.

And there you were too.

The one who let the half-second arrive.

More often than you've been counting.

— *Keep seeing.*

Or don't.

Some moments the half-second will arrive.

Some moments it won't.

Both are part of this.

Either is alright.

— *Anything else.*

Whatever the body wants to say.

To the part of you that has been doing the seeing.

Without keeping track.

Take your time with this one.

It often takes longer than the first.

The body has been waiting to be allowed to count these moves.

Someone allowing them is you.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Now — read them together.

You have both letters now.

Read the first one.

Then the second one.

Then — if your body will let it happen — read them side by side.

Both at once.

This is the part the lesson has been pointing toward.

Both versions of you. On the page in front of you.

The one with the plan already running.

The one with the half-second eye.

Both real.

Both yours.

Both with you at the same time.

Take your time here.

Sit with both.

Let what happens happen.

Sometimes the body does something quiet when it reads both at once.

A small softening. A small recognition. A small smile.

Sometimes not.

Either is alright.

Then — what you do with them is yours.

Put them in a drawer.

Folder them somewhere safe.

Tear them up.

Burn them in the fireplace.

Frame them.

Read them again next year.

Where they go is yours.

The work has already happened.

That is the work.

Two letters.

Written by you.

To two versions of you who have been with you all along.

The you with the plan already running.

The you with the half-second eye.

Both real.

Both yours.

The toolbox is still here.

The magnet is still on the file cabinet.

The five words are still in your mouth when the seeing happens first.

Carl is still somewhere.

Jen is still down the hall.

The half-second is still in front of every reach.

The room is still carrying what it carries before you arrive.

Come back if you want.

They'll be here.

This was the workbook.

The carrying continues.

Some moments you'll catch sooner.

Some moments you'll miss.

Either is alright.

This is the work.

The bench is here.

When you need it.

When you don't.

A comment from the author.

Years working with people.

Never much liked wasted time.

Still don't.

Also prefer a more targeted focus.

Hence the domain.

Glad you stopped for a moment.

Hope something in here landed.

If not, hope you heard a good story.

Till we meet again.

Frank.

Caught Book Club Opportunity

There is no required way to do this.

Some people read the workbook on their own.

Some listen to the audio version.

Some do both.

Some groups read or listen together.

Some arrive having explored the lesson beforehand.

All are welcome.

Then meet.

Pull up a few chairs.

Have a coffee.

Take a walk.

Sit on a porch.

Leave an empty chair for David if you'd like.

Not because he has the answers.

Just because every now and then it helps to remember there is a quiet companion sitting with the conversation.

Ask a few questions.

What stood out?

What felt familiar?

What surprised you?

What might you be seeing differently?

What is the upside?

What is the downside?

What is the hmmm?

There is no need to agree.

There is no need to solve anything.

There is no need to leave with a plan.

Just look together for a little while.

Sometimes you will discover something about yourself.

Sometimes you will discover something about another person.

Sometimes you will discover something about the room.

Sometimes you will simply notice something sooner than you might have.

Then look up.

Smile.

Take a picture if you'd like.

And carry on.

That is enough.

Frank keeps the intention simple. If this work helps twenty more people, that will be enough.

You may read it free.

You may listen free.

You may find the physical book.

You may share it with someone else.

THE CAUGHT SOONER HOUSE

SOONER

Caught Paying the Bill

Caught Waiting

Caught Recovering

Caught Being

Caught Wanting

Caught Forgiving

28 Days · A Journal

Caught Leading

The audio

Caught Graduating

If something in these pages landed,

there's more on the porch.

Come sit awhile.

CAUGHTSOONER.COM