



## THE COMPROMISE TRAP

# Decision-point Tools

This document contains six simple tools you can use whenever you feel pressure to compromise. They are meant to help you weigh out healthy and unhealthy compromise, take advantage of all of your options, and respond with skill, so you avoid the compromise trap and help the right thing happen.

These tools are based on the six personal foundations outlined in [The Compromise Trap](#). Your personal foundations provide the internal reinforcement system that enables you to act creatively and independently in challenging situations. They help you keep a broad perspective and take courageous action, uncovering ways to “redefine the game” in situations where there seem to be few options. When you are under pressure, your personal foundations help you to stay true to yourself and avoid unhealthy compromise. When you are pursuing a larger goal, they enable you to be a positive force, influencing your organization and others for the better. The stronger your foundations, the more you are able to influence effectively and thrive regardless of the circumstances.

There are six personal foundations that create this internal reinforcement system:

1. **Reconnect to your strengths:** The ability to access confidence, creativity and self-awareness to guide your choices.
2. **See the larger field:** Sustaining a broad perspective so you recognize choicepoints, act on your true priorities, and see all your options.
3. **Define a worthy enough win:** Having a sense of mission and a reason for courage to help you focus your efforts and weigh hard choices.
4. **Find your real team:** Having strong relationships with your family, close allies, and other professionals to give you well-being, perspective, and reinforcement.
5. **Make positive plays:** Having a broad range of constructive actions you can use under pressure – including the ability to say no.
6. **Keep your own score:** Developing internal guideposts to evaluate your progress and determine what is “enough”.

Each of the six tools in this document is designed to help you use one of the six foundations.

The six tools are:

Tool #1: Activating Your Strengths Under Pressure

Tool #2: Questioning the Deal

Tool #3: Defining a Worthy Enough Win

Tool #4: Tapping Your Allies in a Crisis

Tool #5: Which Positive Play?

Tool #6: Mini-After-Action Review

You can use them in any order, though normally there is a logical sequence from #1 to #6. You may also find them helpful in situations where you want to influence a situation for the better, not just under pressure to compromise.

## TOOL # 1

### Activating Your Strengths Under Pressure

*This simple activity is one you can use anywhere at any time to increase your resourcefulness. It works by having you alternate between activating the stressful situation in your mind and then activating your strengths.*

*Helps with: Reconnecting to your strengths.*

□ **Think of a situation.**

Think of the context or situation in which you'd like to have greater access to your strengths. Pick out an area on the floor a few feet away from you to represent that context. Now imagine yourself in that situation, seeing what you see, hearing what you hear, and feeling what you feel. As the experience begins to feel real, step forward into the designated area on the floor. Allow the feeling to increase and, just as it begins to peak, step back out of the area.

□ **Activate your strengths.**

Recall a time when you felt joy—the feeling of “I’m glad to be here”—perhaps one of the peak experiences I invited you to consider above. As that experience begins to feel real, step into the area on the floor. As it begins to peak, step back out. Do the same for two other types of memories: a time when you felt warmth toward another person—the feeling of “I’m glad you’re here”—and a time when you felt conviction, or “I know what I know.” Once you’ve practiced with these memories, step into the area on the floor, access all those strengths at once, and allow them to mix like a blender. Step out again.

□ **Bring your strengths into the situation.**

Finally, step directly into the area on the floor and bring all those strengths with you. Think about the challenging context or situation with which you began the exercise. What is it like now? What happens? Think about a time in the future when it will be useful to have access to these strengths.

## TOOL # 2

### Questioning the Deal

*This simple thought process will help you distinguish between healthy and unhealthy compromises, weighing what you could be giving up, what you expect to gain, and any hidden costs of compromise.*

*Helps with: Seeing the larger field*

#### **What am I being asked to do or go along with?**

What is this situation really about—on the surface and in terms of the hidden factors at play?

ON THE SURFACE	HIDDEN FACTORS
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

#### **What do I have to gain?**

What am I being offered, on the surface or implicitly? What negatives might I expect to avoid by making this compromise? (Avoiding pain counts as a gain too.) How important/valuable are those gains in terms of my core values? How credible is the offer or my expected gain, given everything I know now?

ON THE SURFACE	HIDDEN FACTORS
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

#### **What would I be giving up?**

What need, want, interest, commitment, or value would I be giving up or relaxing if I went along with this compromise? How important/valuable is that in terms of my core values (for example, ego versus keeping a promise)? Are there less obvious factors I would be giving up or putting at risk, as well?

Consider basic moral reasoning as you answer:

- Consequences: Who is affected or harmed? By how much?
- Rights: Whose rights might be infringed? Is this within my/our legitimate authority?
- Duties: What are my/our duties and obligations in this situation?
- Values: Is this true to what I consider my core values or my character?
- Care: What are the core relationships here, and what is my/our duty of care toward them?

ON THE SURFACE

HIDDEN FACTORS

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**What are the hidden “costs of compromise”?**

Beyond what I would be giving up directly, what else might I have to lose by making this compromise? How will I feel in the long run about this?

Consider the costs of compromise:

- Greater internal stress
- Tuning out (acclimatizing over time)
- Escalating commitment to prove I was right
- Increasing need for external validation
- Setting precedents with bullies
- Loss of reputation/trust
- Neglecting a real business need

ON THE SURFACE

HIDDEN FACTORS

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Is this a healthy compromise?**

Does this amount to giving up something less important for something more important, especially when I consider the hidden costs of compromise? Do I need to look for a better alternative?

Consider drawing a graph to weigh out your choice, listing on the right your expected gains and on the left what you would be giving up and the hidden costs of compromise.

This should not be a strict quantitative exercise but a thought process to help you think through each element carefully.

ON THE SURFACE

HIDDEN FACTORS

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**TOOL # 3**

**Defining Your Worthy Enough Win**

*You can use these two questions whenever you are under pressure and want to make sure you are focused on a worthy enough win.*

*Helps with: Define a worthy enough win*

**What is important enough here to be a reason for courage?**

*What really matters to me here and why? What is important but not necessarily getting enough attention? What are the potential consequences and risks in this situation? Who could be harmed? What is possible if we act wisely?*

---

---

---

**What's the both/and question?**

Use your answer to the first question to frame a new question where one side is your reason for courage and the other side is the source of the pressure to compromise. For example: *How can we have more of x and y? How can we effectively weigh long-term important factors and short-term urgent drivers in our decision-making? How can we protect important values and minimize costs?* Your both/and question becomes your worthy enough win, your goal as you move into action.

---

---

---

## **TOOL # 4**

### **Tapping Your Real Team in a Crisis**

*These questions can help you improve the quality of your thinking; keep your family, allies, and professional network informed as you sort out a challenge; and help you access the support you need to handle a difficult situation.*

*Helps with: Find your real team*

□ **With your family:**

Have you been trying to get my attention about something? What do you need me to understand? Can you help me sort out what to do in the face of some unhealthy pressure I am facing? How can I help the best thing happen? How can we make sure your needs and concerns are addressed and you are fully involved?

□ **With your circle of allies:**

Can you help me sort out how to engage in a tough situation? Here's the unhealthy pressure I'm facing, what I think it would mean if I went along, and how I'd like to redefine the game. Can you remind me of the core values and the higher priorities I told you were important to me? How might I best apply them here? Have you ever faced a similar situation? What might I be missing? How can I best help my family through this? How should I tap my professional network?

□ **With your professional network:**

Can you help me test my thinking about a tough situation? Here's the unhealthy pressure I'm facing, what I think it would mean if I went along, and how I'd like to redefine the game. What might I be missing? What would you need to know to be certain my diagnosis is accurate? If my assessment is accurate and I don't act, what might the consequences be? What could I do to help the right thing happen here? Would you be willing to help influence the situation for the better?

**TOOL # 5**

**Which Positive Play?**

*This tool helps you identify the most effective positive play in response to whatever unhealthy pressure you face.*

*Helps with: Make positive plays*

**What is my worthy enough win?**

What risks, costs, or opportunities are important enough to be a reason for courage? What is important but not necessarily getting enough attention? Where would innovation help? What is the both/and question I am pursuing?

---

---

---

**What is within my control?**

Is this a healthy compromise after all? If I agree to this, what side effects do I need to help manage? Are there ways I need to take responsibility, admit mistakes, or re-negotiate commitments or expectations? Where might I need to set a positive limit, either because of a bottom line or because it is the best way to influence? (Consider healthy compromise, candid conversations, and positive limits.)

---

---

---

**Where do I need to influence others?**

Who could act differently for the best or right thing to happen? What would I propose or negotiate for? Who might also see the need or help raise the visibility of important considerations? Who might be able to help push the envelope on inherent tensions and trade-offs?

---

---

---

**What are my alternatives?**

At what point would it be better to exit? How can I make the most positive difference as I go? If more-drastic measures are called for, how can I do so responsibly and support myself and my family in the process?

---

---

---

**How can I back myself up?**

Whom of my allies shall I tap? Who deserves or needs to be involved? What support do I need?

---

---

---

**TOOL # 6**

**Mini After-action Review**

*Use these five questions after an important effort or interaction so that you learn as much as possible from your experience and improve your impact going forward.*

*Helps with: Keeping your own score*

- What was my intention for the situation?**
  
- What was my strategy? My goal(s)?**
  
- What did I actually do? How did I behave?**
  
- What outcome did I get? Was it what I expected, or was it something different?**
  
- What do I most appreciate about how I used my strengths in this situation? What could I change to move toward greater alignment and impact next time?**

YOUR NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---