Expanded Guide: Knowing What to Do —and Doing It

On Stoic Living Discussion Series · Guide 3 of 12 · March

For facilitators. Read before the meeting, after the Meeting Primer and the core reading (about 15 minutes).

The Meeting Primer introduces the readings and key terms. The meeting guide gives the sequence and timing. This guide helps you lead inquiry into appropriate action, then use a short rehearsal to test the understanding reached. Weekly practice experience is useful material; participation begins from the shared case.

What the practice and discussion are for

March brings sound judgment and well-directed desire into fitting conduct. The discussion explores why a response fits, what roles require, and how repeated action can remain responsive to circumstances. The application then asks participants to name and try a response, explain its grounds, and consider an alternative. A cue illustrates Week 12's support for follow-through within this application.

The workplace case is a meeting adaptation of Week 12's interruption example. It brings useful expertise, a colleague's need, and one's own work into the same choice. The reveal changes both the available information and the time available. Participants can test whether their response still fits.

Weeks 9–12 supply different parts of this work. Week 9 chooses, justifies, and performs a fitting action. Week 10 asks what a role requires under the broader claims of justice. Week 11 finds the virtue a changed situation calls for and gives it an action. Week 12 makes one fitting response easier to recall through a cue, repetition, and review.

The fifth discussion question lightly connects the quarter. Use Week 13's attention to judgment, desire, and action to inform that conversation. Participants can answer from the shared case, even if this is their first meeting.

Progress concerns how reliably someone performs the chosen response when it is called for and still fits. Consider the reason, execution, and adaptation together. Learning in hindsight can prepare a better response; distinguish that preparation from something the participant actually carried out.

Leading it Socratically

- **Ask what makes the response fit.** Have someone give the reason before the group decides the answer sounds admirable.
- **Move from a trait to an act.** If someone says “be respectful,” ask what they could say or do at the pause in the case.
- **Include the people affected.** The colleague, people depending on your work, and any shared obligations may each have a claim.
- **Test a proposed exception.** Ask what fact changes the response. A reason that supports waiting can also help identify when interruption is warranted.
- **Hear alternatives.** More than one response may admit a reasonable account. Invite a different one and compare what it serves.
- **Rehearse the moment.** Let a short exchange show whether the chosen words do the work their speaker intends.

Keep members’ examples voluntary. Ask about what someone tried and what happened, and let them decide what to retain. Suggestions can be offered as experience or possibilities, with their reasons.

0–10 minutes — Open and encounter the case

Welcome everyone and read the shared case aloud:

> A colleague asks for help with a task due today. You have useful experience, and you begin explaining what they should do. They try to add something, but you continue — you think you already understand the problem. You also have your own deadline approaching.

Ask: “What needs considering before you decide how to respond?” Hear two or three initial interpretations. Leave them open for examination and carry them straight into question 1. Everyone can reason from these facts; invite experience without requiring a report of completed practice.

10–55 minutes — Discussion: five questions, with the reading

Explore reasons and alternatives before teaching the three-step method. The sample observations below support follow-up questions; let participants develop and challenge their own accounts. Each question has a purpose, two follow-ups, and something to listen for. The meeting guide prints the first follow-up as the probe.

1. What makes a response fitting in this situation?

Purpose: identify the facts and reason that make the proposed action appropriate.

- What do you need to understand before offering useful help?
- What would be missing from the reason "I want to be seen as helpful"?

Listen for attention to the colleague's actual need and the limits of your knowledge. Recognition can be welcome, while understanding the difficulty supplies a reason for listening even if no praise follows.

2. What does your role call for, and when might that change?

Purpose: make roles useful guides to judgment in a particular situation.

- How do your responsibilities to your colleague and your own work bear on this?
- Would being their manager change your responsibility or the time you could reasonably give?

Listen for roles described through responsibilities rather than automatic rules. A colleague may reasonably offer bounded help; a manager may owe additional support. Neither role settles every demand without considering others affected by the work.

3. What response could you justify, and what would carrying it out involve?

Purpose: compare justified responses and distinguish a good intention from what someone would actually say and do.

- How could you offer useful help while being honest about the time available?
- What makes asking a question, offering limited help, or declining reasonable here?

Listen for a response supported by facts and responsibilities. Ask participants to compare alternatives, including their costs. "I want to help" leaves open how to understand the need, state a limit, and carry out an offer.

4. How can repetition strengthen good judgment as well as a habit?

Purpose: examine what repetition strengthens and why a familiar response still needs judgment.

Introduce the core reading here: "Epictetus connects repeated activity with the habits we strengthen. Let's read this short passage." Read *Discourses* 2.18.1–7 aloud, then ask question 4. Let members connect the text with the responses already proposed. Keep this reading and discussion within the 45-minute discussion allocation.

- What would justify changing the response you prepared?
- After missing a cue, what could you correct or try at the next opportunity?

Listen for a reason to adapt grounded in what the situation requires. A changed responsibility may warrant a new response. Simple reluctance to perform the fitting one calls for a different examination.

5. How could a clearer judgment and a looser demand help you act here?

Purpose: make one light connection across the quarter's Assent, Desire, and Action.

- What might you assume or want that makes listening harder?
- If you left "I already know her point" unsettled and released a need to impress, what response would become easier?

Listen for a concrete connection. Examining an assumption and loosening a wish for recognition can help someone listen and answer what was actually said. Use this one case; participants need no account of their whole quarter.

Going deeper, for a room that is ready: When two different responses fit, what makes choosing and carrying out one reasonable? Ask how the person would remain open to correction after choosing.

55–80 minutes — Application: test your understanding

Return to the workplace case. Invite two plausible responses and compare the reasons for each. Ask what the discussion has changed in the group's initial interpretations. Use the following three steps once to try a response. Keep sample answers in reserve until participants have offered their own. Volunteers may speak the roles, or the group can propose the words together.

1. Notice. What facts, people, and responsibilities matter here? Consider the colleague's unfinished explanation, what your expertise does and does not establish, and the people depending on your own work.

> **Sample response:** "I have started advising before hearing what has happened. I need to understand the difficulty and be clear about my own deadline."

2. Choose. I will do this because it fits these circumstances. Compare a bounded offer with another reasonable response. Give each a reason. Then identify a moment that could help someone remember the chosen response when the situation recurs.

> **Sample response:** "I will pause and ask what they have tried, because my advice needs to fit the actual problem. When I notice myself preparing advice before they finish, I will let them explain."

Ask whether listening commits you to taking on the task. Consider what a reasonable boundary would sound like and what would justify a different response.

3. Follow through. When the cue appears, do it if it still fits. Try the conversation aloud. The colleague begins, "The task is due today. I've tried…" The helper pauses, hears the explanation, and gives a clear answer about what help is possible.

> **Sample response:** "I jumped ahead. What have you tried? I have ten minutes before I need to return to my deadline; let's see what would be useful in that time."

Ask what the words accomplish and whether the stated limit can actually be kept. Invite a second response with a different reasonable boundary. The group should be able to explain what each serves and what it leaves unresolved.

The reveal (if time allows). The colleague explains that the usual method has already failed, and your own deadline has just moved forward. What changes about your reasons and the help you can offer? Try a revised response.

> **Sample response:** "My first suggestion won't help, and I now need to return to my task. I can suggest someone who knows the other method, if you'd like."

Test that offer too: is there someone suitable, and can you reasonably direct the colleague to them? An honest limit or a different contribution may be justified. Ask what the new facts require, then hear the revised words. Finish by asking what trying the response clarified about the reasons discussed.

80–90 minutes — Close

Ask: "What became clearer about appropriate action, or what remains unsettled?" Hear brief answers and leave room for disagreement. Someone may have revised an initial view; invite the reason for the change.

End with the one-sentence invitation in the meeting guide. The application steps have already done their work; the close draws together what was learned. Introduce next month's question briefly.

Misunderstandings to watch for

IF YOU HEAR…	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
"I understood it, so I've practiced it."	Understanding establishes follow-through.	"What did you do when the occasion appeared?"
"If I repeat it, it must become good."	Repetition gives a response its moral worth.	"Which responsibility does it serve? Could we be strengthening a poor response?"
"I should never interrupt."	A useful plan applies regardless of context.	Ask whether an urgent warning or a time limit could justify interrupting here.
"A good colleague always helps."	A role requires compliance.	"What would a fair disagreement contribute?"

IF YOU HEAR...	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
“The plan failed, so I couldn’t act well.”	A blocked result eliminates fitting action.	“What changed, and what response is now available?”
“I broke the streak.”	A lapse removes the next opportunity.	“What repair or repetition is possible now?”
“They liked my answer, so it was fitting.”	A welcome outcome proves a sound choice.	“What reason supported it? Did the conduct serve that reason?”

Facilitating the people in the room

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The planner	Keeps refining the response without attempting it.	Invite a ten-second rehearsal of the next sentence.
The habitual helper	Answers before hearing the need.	Ask them to model returning the floor and then listen to the finished thought.
The streak keeper	Reports counts but leaves out the circumstances.	Ask about one occasion where the response fitted or needed changing.
The loyal friend	Wants a friend’s claim to settle the matter.	Ask who depends on the work they would delay by helping.
The self-critic	Turns a missed cue into a verdict about character.	Ask what happened, what can be repaired, and when another chance may arise.
The expert	Gives a long account of appropriate action.	Ask for a reason and a concrete sentence the group can rehearse.
The quiet member	Has not yet offered a view.	Offer a turn without requiring it, and make room to finish.
The newcomer	Worries about finding the one Stoic answer.	Invite two defensible responses and compare their reasons.

When an example is painful. A missed responsibility can bring regret. Thank the speaker and let them decide how much to share. Offer the group case rather than asking the room to prescribe a repair in their life. The participant can take a question away without giving a public commitment.

Questions you may be asked

“Is an appropriate action the same as a perfectly virtuous one?” The curriculum uses appropriate action for conduct that admits a reasonable justification in its circumstances. A

fitting act by someone learning does not establish the sage's complete wisdom. We can practice sound choices while developing understanding.

"Are 'when… I will…' plans ancient?" The planning form used here is modern. Week 12 uses it to support the ancient point that corresponding activities strengthen corresponding habits. Keep the cue, response, and reason together.

"How long until it becomes automatic?" The lessons offer no deadline for developing virtue. Repetition may make a response easier to call upon. Keep examining whether it fits even as it becomes more familiar.

"Can my role require tolerating mistreatment?" Circumstances may call for correction, refusal, protection, or withdrawal. Week 10 asks what the actual relationship requires under justice. Another person's conduct can change that responsibility.

"What if the result depends on others?" It often does. Your judgment and intention belong to your use of choice; execution can be interrupted. Review the response you attempted, how you adapted, and what remains yours to do.

Adapting the practice and discussion

- **Mostly newcomers.** Use the speaker and listener roles. Offer two possible responses and ask which facts support each.
- **Mostly experienced members.** Ask what helped a chosen response become steadier. Use the reveal to test a familiar plan.
- **Online.** Read the roles aloud and let pairs rehearse in breakouts if useful. Put the cue-response form in chat.
- **A large group.** Use pairs or threes. Have each group supply one reason, cue, and short demonstration.
- **Short on time.** Shorten follow-ups or omit the reveal. Preserve time for members to compare reasons, try a response, and say what the attempt clarified.

After the meeting, send a short recap through your group's usual channel with one or two insights or open questions and the single take-home invitation. At the next meeting, experiences and fresh questions are equally welcome.

Source lessons: On Stoic Living, Weeks 9–12; Week 13 informs the integration question.