Expanded Guide: Before You Judge Someone

On Stoic Living Discussion Series · Guide 4 of 12 · April

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

The Meeting Primer introduces the terms and readings. The meeting guide gives the flow and timing. This guide helps you make the shared case a careful examination of a judgment about someone.

What the discussion and application are for

Distinguish conduct, motive, character, and a verdict about what someone deserves. Let real criticism stand where supported, and examine reassuring explanations by the same standard. The test is the accuracy, scope, and fairness of the judgment. A complaint or boundary can be mentioned, but performing it is not the measure of understanding.

April practices justice in what we accept as true about other people. Start with a precise account of conduct. Hear the added claim, test it, and ask what conclusion preserves the person's claim to fairness. A fair examination can strengthen criticism as well as qualify it.

The interruption case adapts Week 14 to a team meeting. The case is small enough for newcomers to discuss without disclosing a private conflict. It also makes a common addition audible: "He thinks nothing I say is worth hearing." That is more than a report of two interruptions.

Week 14 separates conduct from judgments about motive and character. Week 15 brings another true and relevant perspective beside the troubling fact. Week 16 examines a verdict about what the person deserves, including any wish for payback. Week 17 questions labels that put a person beyond fair consideration. Together, these develop the same examination of what happened and what we added.

Let participants acknowledge a real pattern. A fair account can include repeated interruptions and the effect on other speakers. Ask what further evidence a claim about intention requires. If someone proposes a reassuring explanation, examine that by the same standard.

Progress concerns the accuracy and fairness of the judgment. A feeling of irritation may remain. A reasonable boundary can remain. Give urgent protection priority where needed, then return to any added judgment when circumstances permit.

Leading it Socratically

- **Ask for the claim in the speaker's words.** Restate it briefly and let them correct you before you test it.
- **Return to observable details.** "What did we hear or see?" helps reveal the step from conduct to motive.
- **Keep real patterns visible.** Ask what repeated conduct establishes, then what it leaves uncertain.
- **Ask for another truth.** A shared relationship or responsibility can broaden the account. A guessed excuse needs examination.
- **Test the proposed verdict separately.** A claim about suffering or humiliation needs its own reason, even when the initial criticism is justified.
- **Invite disagreement with reasons.** "Who would draw a different conclusion from those facts?" allows a measured judgment to stand or change.

0–10 minutes — Open and encounter the case

Welcome everyone, explain the discussion agreements, and read the case aloud:

> At a team meeting, a colleague interrupts you twice. A judgment forms: **"He thinks nothing I say is worth hearing."**

Ask the opening question printed in the meeting guide. Hear two or three interpretations without settling them. Carry the differences straight into question 1. Prior weekly experience is welcome, but everyone has the facts needed here; no personal disclosure or practice report is required.

10–60 minutes — Discussion: five questions

Distinguish conduct, motive, character, and a verdict about what someone deserves. Let real criticism stand where supported, and examine reassuring explanations by the same standard. Hear competing reasons before introducing the full application method. The follow-ups are resources for inquiry, not a script that must all be completed.

Each question has a purpose, two follow-ups, and something to listen for. The first follow-up is the booklet's probe.

1. Where does describing the interruption become judging the person?

Read Enchiridion 45 here, as the group separates description from evaluation. Ask what additional knowledge the evaluation needs, then return to the interruption. The passage does not require ignoring evidence or abandoning criticism.

Purpose: hear the addition that needs examination.

- Which words in the first impression go beyond what happened?
- What details would let someone who was present check the description?

Listen for the difference between an act, a motive, and a total judgment. A judgment that an interruption was unfair can be supported by facts about whose turn it was.

2. What evidence would support a broader judgment about the interruptions?

Purpose: recognize the force and limits of evidence about a pattern. Discuss what a pattern could establish hypothetically; reserve the new case facts for application.

- What does the pattern establish, and what does it leave open?
- What fact would make you revise the claim that this is directed at you?

Listen for conclusions proportionate to repetition. Several incidents can support a recurring problem without supplying direct knowledge of someone's entire character.

3. What other true fact deserves a place beside the conduct?

Purpose: broaden the judgment through a relevant truth.

- How could you include it without excusing the interruption?
- How would you check whether a suggested second perspective is actually established?

Listen for a relationship or shared responsibility, rather than an invented benign motive. The fact that everyone deserves a fair turn matters without making the interruption acceptable.

4. What changes when "that was unfair" becomes "he deserves to suffer"?

Purpose: examine an additional verdict that may attach to a real wrong.

- What purpose would make a consequence fair in this case?
- Would the proposed consequence still seem warranted if it brought no satisfaction from his discomfort?

Listen for reasons such as protecting discussion or giving a clear account of a repeated problem. If no wish for payback appears, let that stand. The group need not invent one.

5. What fairness is still owed to someone whose conduct you rightly oppose?

Purpose: retain human standing alongside a warranted criticism.

- Could you keep a firm criticism while withdrawing a total label?
- What would fair consideration permit if trust or continued closeness were unwise?

Listen for a person remaining answerable to the same standards as anyone else. Fairness can include a boundary, a complaint, or protective distance.

Going deeper, for a room that is ready: When does a warranted judgment of a pattern become a claim that nothing the person says deserves consideration? Ask whether reliability in a particular matter and human standing are being treated as the same claim.

60–80 minutes — Application: test a fair judgment

Compare two judgments: “He repeatedly prevents people from finishing” and “Nothing anyone says matters to him.” Ask what grounds each would need. Use Describe → Test → Keep it fair once, then introduce the pattern if useful. Finish by asking what criticism remains justified and what wider claim should change.

The test is the accuracy, scope, and fairness of the judgment. A complaint or boundary can be mentioned, but performing it is not the measure of understanding.

Keep sample responses in reserve until participants have offered and questioned their own accounts. Use the method once to test the discussion’s conclusions.

Hear two or three brief responses at each step. One participant can voice the first impression while another describes the conduct. Keep both accounts available without deciding which person has the better temperament.

1. Describe. What did they do, and what have I added? The conduct is two interruptions. The further claim concerns the colleague’s regard for the speaker’s contributions. Someone may also add a character label such as “selfish.”

> **Sample response:** “He began speaking while I was still making my point, twice. I concluded that he doesn’t value anything I say.”

Ask whether “interrupted” itself needs clarification. If the group agrees that the speaker had the floor, retain that detail. A precise description should include what makes the conduct open to criticism.

2. Test. What supports my judgment? What else is true and relevant? Ask whether anything beyond the interruptions supports the conclusion about the colleague’s view. Then ask what other fact belongs beside the conduct. Both colleagues belong to a team whose meetings depend on a fair hearing. That shared responsibility is relevant even if they barely know each other.

> **Sample response:** “Two interruptions support concern about being heard. They don’t establish his view of everything I say. We both belong to a group where each person should have a fair opportunity to finish.”

If someone says he was trying to help, ask what supports that explanation. Another account is a possibility until it gains evidence. A fuller judgment can remain uncomfortable.

3. Keep it fair. What can I conclude while keeping their claim to fairness in view? Ask someone to state the narrower conclusion and the standard that still applies to the colleague.

> **Sample response:** "He interrupted twice, and that needs attention. I don't know why. I can criticize the interruptions while giving him a fair chance to explain."

Discussing a boundary is legitimate, but keep the exercise on the judgment it would rest on. The group can recognize an unfair interruption while leaving private motives unsettled.

The reveal (if time allows). You recall that he has interrupted several colleagues at each of the last three meetings. Ask what the pattern strengthens.

> **Sample response:** "There is a recurring pattern that affects several people. That gives stronger grounds to raise it. It also makes this a poor basis for concluding that he uniquely dismisses me."

The pattern still calls for attention. It gives more grounds for a judgment about conduct while changing the account of its target. Ask whether the group can name that difference without assuming a motive.

80–90 minutes — Close

Ask what became clearer or what question remains unsettled. Invite the reason for a changed view, and let a well-supported disagreement remain. End with the single take-home invitation and a brief transition to the next theme. The full method has already appeared during application; do not repeat its steps as an assignment.

Misunderstandings to watch for

IF YOU HEAR…	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
"Assume he meant well."	A kind guess settles the question.	"What supports that account?"
"We can't call any behavior wrong."	Fair judgment requires suspending all criticism.	Ask what facts make the interruption unfair.
"One incident proves nothing, so ignore the pattern."	Uncertainty erases repeated evidence.	Ask what the repeated conduct supports.

IF YOU HEAR...	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
“He deserves to feel what I felt.”	A real wrong authorizes payback.	Ask what the consequence should protect or repair.
“Seeing his humanity means trusting him.”	Shared standing guarantees reliability.	Ask what the evidence warrants about trust and what fairness still requires.
“My anger proves I was harmed.”	A reaction decides the judgment.	Hear the concern, then ask what happened and what was added.
“I only caught the label afterward.”	Later examination has no value.	Ask which part of the judgment the person can now defend.

Facilitating the people in the room

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The mind reader	Supplies a confident motive.	Ask what observation would support it.
The peacemaker	Quickly offers an innocent explanation.	Apply the same request for grounds.
The pattern spotter	Brings a useful history of conduct.	Ask what the history strengthens and where it leaves uncertainty.
The prosecutor	Wants the group to decide what someone deserves.	Return to the shared case and the reason for a consequence.
The expert	Gives a long account of assent.	Ask for a plain restatement of one claim in the case.
The talker	Takes the next turn before others enter.	Invite a willing new voice and allow the speaker to finish.
The quiet member	May prefer to judge the invented case.	Offer a specific question about what is known, with passing welcome.
The newcomer	Worries that criticism itself is un-Stoic.	Show how a precise judgment can retain a justified criticism.

When an example is painful. Thank the speaker and offer a pause, the shared case, or moving on. Avoid asking the group to test a private injury in public. Members can explore the method without giving details.

Questions you may be asked

“Can I ever judge someone’s character?” A broader judgment may be supported by a pattern and other evidence. Test its scope. Even warranted distrust leaves the person someone to whom fairness is owed.

“Do I have to forgive?” This exercise asks what conclusion you can stand behind. A decision about forgiveness or reconciliation may need further consideration of the relationship and circumstances.

“Does a second perspective make the wrong less serious?” Another relevant fact can change how fully you understand the situation while leaving the wrong established. Check both its truth and its bearing on the judgment.

“What if I feel angry immediately?” Some bodily reactions arise involuntarily, and assent can also happen quickly. Examine the judgment you accepted, including what you think should follow. The speed or intensity of a reaction alone cannot settle that.

“Can I act before the motive is clear?” Yes. Respond to the facts you have, including any need for protection. A fair response can proceed while the private explanation remains open.

Adapting the practice and discussion

- **Mostly newcomers.** Define conduct and added judgment through the interruption. Emphasize questions 1, 2, and 5.
- **Mostly experienced members.** Use the reveal and the question about patterns. Ask where a warranted criticism became wider than its grounds.
- **Online.** Read the case slowly and invite contrasting interpretations. Introduce the method later, during application.
- **A large group.** Let pairs test the same impression. Hear contrasting conclusions and the grounds for each.
- **Short on time.** Skip the reveal and shorten question 3. Preserve the distinction between conduct and the wider verdict.

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. Experiences and fresh questions are equally welcome at the next meeting.

Source lessons: On Stoic Living, Weeks 14–17.