Expanded Guide: Doing the Right Thing When It Is Hard

On Stoic Living Discussion Series · Guide 9 of 12 · September

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

The Meeting Primer introduces the terms and reading. The meeting guide gives timing. This guide helps you bring a justified responsibility into a short rehearsal of the words and actions that would fulfill it.

What the discussion and application are for

Establish why a clear answer is owed before rehearsing it. Compare the costs of speaking and staying vague, then examine the priority of correction when an earlier answer has misled others. The application tests reasons, execution, and responsiveness. Rehearsing an apology does not establish completed amends; others' disappointment does not by itself show that the limit is wrong.

September practices doing the fitting thing when it is hard and returning to it after falling short. The exercise locates a responsibility, prepares a response to a likely difficulty, and carries it through with attention to correction.

The trip-cost case comes from Week 36. It is an ordinary matter where one person's reluctance can leave others planning from an unclear answer. The contribution is truthful speech followed by whatever the corrected arrangement requires.

Week 35 prepares for the recurring demands of a worthwhile responsibility. Week 36 performs warranted speech and listens to the response. Week 37 makes amends after a lapse. Week 38 puts competing present demands in order and acts on the justified priority. These support one practice of carrying out a fitting response under difficulty.

The reveal asks what changes if the person has already said yes. Recovery then requires a real correction and any further responsibility the earlier commitment created. Avoid treating an imagined apology as completed amends.

Question 5 draws one light connection across the quarter, informed by Week 39. It asks how a checked forecast and better-directed aversion could help this person speak and follow through. The shared case gives a newcomer enough to answer.

Progress concerns what the person actually attempted, completed, or adapted. A response can be sound and still leave someone disappointed. A complete rehearsal prepares action; actual execution needs its own occasion.

Leading it Socratically

- **Locate the responsibility before rehearsing.** Ask what others can reasonably rely on and why a clear answer belongs to the person.
- **Hear the cost of the fitting act.** Disappointment or embarrassment may remain. Give those costs room without letting them decide the duty.
- **Make the response small enough to perform.** A first sentence or a clear next act can bring a general commitment into view.
- **Rehearse an objection.** Let another volunteer give a plausible response, then hear how the speaker would listen and answer.
- **Ask what new facts change.** A cheaper plan might warrant reconsidering. A stronger wish to be liked alone gives a different kind of reason.
- **Return after a lapse.** Ask what the person affected still needs and what the speaker can now supply.

0–10 minutes — Open and encounter the case

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

> Your friends are planning a weekend trip. You want to join, but the cost exceeds what you can responsibly spend. Saying **"I'll work something out"** would let them plan around a commitment you cannot make.

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.

10–55 minutes — Discussion: five questions

Establish why a clear answer is owed before rehearsing it. Compare the costs of speaking and staying vague, then examine the priority of correction when an earlier answer has misled others. 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. What makes speaking about the cost your responsibility?

Read Meditations 5.1 here, as the group considers what gives responsibility its claim despite reluctance. Ask how Marcus connects human work with social purpose while acknowledging

rest. Apply that question to the information the organizer needs; do not turn it into a demand to ignore limits.

Purpose: identify the reason that gives warranted speech its claim.

- What might the friends reasonably rely on if you stay vague?
- What would be missing from a response chosen only to avoid an awkward exchange?

Listen for an account of what the organizer needs to know. Truthful speech serves their ability to decide and the speaker's responsibilities.

2. What difficulty can you prepare for without deciding their response?

Purpose: anticipate one pressure and rehearse a fitting answer.

- What could you say if someone is disappointed by your limit?
- How would you leave room for a genuine alternative you had not considered?

Listen for preparation that remains responsive to the actual exchange. The aim is a truthful contribution with consideration, even if the other person never approves.

3. What needs attention first, and what can responsibly wait?

Purpose: put the present demands in an order the person can carry out.

- Which part must happen before the organizer can plan accurately?
- What later question about the friendship need not be resolved before that answer?

Listen for a concrete next act within the time available. The question about booking has a deadline; uncertainty about how others feel can remain while the person communicates a needed fact.

4. How can you return to a responsibility after your own lapse?

Purpose: make a correction and amends part of the continuing work. Consider an earlier unclear or mistaken answer hypothetically; the staged reveal will supply a specific lapse later.

- What amends would give the others information your earlier answer withheld?
- What would you need to find out before saying the repair was complete?

Listen for precise acknowledgment and a useful next action. A difficult response from the organizer does not by itself remove the reason to make amends.

5. How could clearer judgment and re-aimed aversion help you follow through?

Purpose: connect Assent, Desire, and Action lightly through this one occasion.

- What feared reaction could otherwise decide your response for you?

- What could you judge more carefully and become more unwilling to compromise before giving the answer?

Listen for a connection between checking "They'll think I'm letting them down," giving honesty priority over escape from displeasure, and actually speaking the limit. No broader review is required.

Going deeper, for a room that is ready: What would distinguish a justified change of commitment from abandoning it because the work became uncomfortable? Ask how the purpose, capacity, and people affected bear on the distinction.

55–80 minutes — Application: rehearse a responsible response

Compare two possible clear answers and what each lets the organizer reasonably assume. Use Locate → Prepare → Carry through once to rehearse an exchange, including an objection. If time allows, add the earlier yes and identify the correction and any further repair now owed.

The application tests reasons, execution, and responsiveness. Rehearsing an apology does not establish completed amends; others' disappointment does not by itself show that the limit is wrong.

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

Use two volunteers to rehearse a brief exchange. One can read the organizer's question, "Are you coming? I need to know before I book." Participants may pass or comment on the case instead.

1. Locate. What needs doing now, and why is it mine? Name the actual demands before trying to solve the whole trip. The organizer needs an answer. The person needs to respect a budget and avoid leaving friends relying on a false commitment.

> **Sample response:** "Before they book, I owe them a clear answer about what I can commit to. I can care about joining while recognizing that this version costs too much."

The wider friendship matters, but it need not be settled by this one decision. Ask which present act would give the organizer enough information to proceed.

2. Prepare. What will I say or do when the difficulty comes? Have someone speak a truthful opening and anticipate one plausible objection.

> **Sample response:** "I'd like to come, but I can't commit to that cost. Please plan without me unless there's a less expensive version that works for everyone."

If the organizer says, “It won’t be the same without you,” rehearse acknowledging that without making a promise the person cannot fulfill. The exchange should leave room for an actual new proposal.

3. Carry through. Carry it out, listen, and adjust or repair as needed. Run the short conversation aloud. Ask what the organizer can now reasonably assume.

> **Sample response:** “I said I can’t join at that cost and heard their alternative. It still exceeded what I could spend, so I repeated the limit and let them plan without counting me in.”

If a genuinely affordable alternative appears, the answer may change. Listening is part of fulfilling the responsibility. Repetition of the original answer at all costs would miss that part.

The reveal (if time allows). You already said you would come, and the organizer is about to book a place for you. The person must now correct an answer others may be relying on.

> **Sample response:** “I said yes before checking what I could responsibly spend. I need to correct that before you book. I can’t commit to this cost. What arrangements have you already made on the strength of my answer?”

Have the organizer respond with what remains to be done. There might be a place to release or a shared arrangement to revisit. Ask which obligations the earlier promise created and what the person can reasonably repair. The correction does not guarantee an easy reception.

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
“Steadiness means keeping every promise regardless.”	A commitment removes future judgment.	Ask whether the promise was justified and what changed.
“If I prepared the words, I’ve done the exercise.”	Rehearsal establishes execution.	Ask what the person actually communicated at the occasion.

IF YOU HEAR...	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
“They were disappointed, so my refusal was wrong.”	Reception decides the fittingness of the act.	Revisit the responsibilities and the way the limit was stated.
“Being courageous means saying everything.”	Forceful disclosure is always fitting.	Ask what the listener needs and what serves the purpose.
“I already failed, so there’s no point.”	A lapse removes the next responsibility.	Ask what information or amends are still owed.
“The limit is true, so the tone doesn’t matter.”	Truth alone fulfills the whole duty.	Ask whether the words let the listener understand and answer.
“I’ll fix it once they forgive me.”	Repair depends on securing a response.	Ask what amends can be attempted before forgiveness.

Facilitating the people in the room

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The dependable friend	Says yes too quickly to avoid disappointing people.	Ask what the organizer needs to know before relying on the answer.
The planner	Keeps refining the script without saying it aloud.	Invite a ten-second rehearsal.
The steadfast worker	Treats every adjustment as desertion.	Ask which fact would change what the responsibility requires.
The blunt speaker	Uses truth as permission for disregard.	Ask how the same fact could be communicated with consideration.
The regretful member	Focuses on having failed rather than returning.	Ask what repair remains and who needs it.
The expert	Defines courage without naming an act.	Ask for one sentence or action in this case.
The talker	Resolves the exchange for everyone.	Invite another willing voice and compare its reason.
The quiet member	May want to observe the rehearsal.	Offer a specific question about what the organizer now knows, with passing welcome.

When an example is painful. Thank the speaker and keep the shared trip available. Members choose what to disclose. Avoid having the group prescribe the right repair for a private relationship.

Questions you may be asked

“Does steadiness require doing the original task forever?” A justified commitment gives a reason to continue, and new circumstances may give a reason to change the arrangement. Make that change openly and attend to what others have relied on.

“What if I cannot afford the trip after saying yes?” Acknowledge the earlier answer, state the limit clearly, and find out what responsibilities the commitment created. The appropriate repair depends on those facts.

“Is rehearsing enough?” Rehearsal prepares a response. If no suitable occasion arises, it remains untested. On an actual occasion, review what you did and what remains to be carried out.

“Do I need to wait until I’m comfortable?” The lesson asks for warranted action despite anticipated cost. A suitable time, needed support, or another channel can help. Comfort need not arrive before a clear and considerate statement becomes possible.

“Can my mistake become material for practice?” Yes. Acknowledge your part, make amends where you can, and examine the judgment that made the lapse acceptable. Returning preserves the standard while giving you a new occasion to meet it.

Adapting the practice and discussion

- **Mostly newcomers.** Keep the task to a clear answer before booking. Give the organizer one plausible response and rehearse listening.
- **Mostly experienced members.** Use the reveal to distinguish a blocked plan from the person’s own lapse. Ask what returning actually requires.
- **Online.** Have volunteers read the short exchange. Invite observations about the responsibility it serves.
- **A large group.** Rehearse in pairs, then hear one opening and one adjustment from willing groups.
- **Short on time.** Skip the reveal or shorten question 2. Preserve the performed response and a brief quarter connection in question 5.

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 35–38; Week 39 informs the integration question.