

The Core Protocols V. 3.01

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The following Core Protocols are made up of both commitments and protocols.

The Core Commitments

1. Engage when present.
 - Know and disclose
 - i) what I want,
 - ii) what I think, and
 - iii) what I feel.
 - Always seek effective help.
 - Decline to offer and refuse to accept incoherent emotional transmissions.
 - When I have or hear a better idea than the currently prevailing idea, I will immediately either i) propose it for decisive acceptance or rejection, and/or ii) explicitly seek its improvement.
 - Personally support the best idea i) regardless of its source, ii) however much I hope an even better idea may later arise, and iii) when I have no superior alternative idea.
2. Seek to perceive more than I seek to be perceived.
3. Use teams, especially when undertaking difficult tasks.
4. Speak always and only when I believe it will improve the general results/effort ratio.
5. Offer and accept only rational, results-oriented behavior and communication.
6. Disengage from less productive situations
 - When I cannot keep these commitments,
 - When it is more important that I engage elsewhere.
7. Do now what must be done eventually and can effectively be done now.
8. Seek to move forward toward a particular goal, by biasing my behavior toward action.
9. Use the Core Protocols (or better) when applicable.
 - Offer and accept timely and proper use of the Protocol Check protocol without prejudice.
10. Neither harm—nor tolerate the harming of—anyone for his or her fidelity to these commitments.
11. Never do anything dumb on purpose.

The Core Protocols

Pass (Unpass)

The Pass protocol is how you decline to participate in something. Use it anytime you don't want to participate in an activity.

Steps

1. When you've decided not to participate, say "I pass."
2. Unpass any time you desire. Unpass as soon as you know you want to participate again by saying "I unpass."

Commitments

Hold reasons for passing private.

Pass on something as soon as you are aware you are going to pass.

Respect the right of others to pass without explanation.

Support those who pass by not discussing them or their pass.

Do not judge, shame, hassle, interrogate or punish anyone who passes.

Notes

In general, you will not be in good standing with your Core Commitments if you pass most of the time.

You can pass on any activity; however, if you have adopted the Core Commitments, you cannot pass on a Decider vote and you must say "I'm in" when checking in.

You can pass even though you have already started something.

Check In

Use Check In to begin meetings or anytime an individual or group Check In would add more value to the current team interactions.

Steps

1. Speaker says "I feel [one or more of MAD, SAD, GLAD, AFRAID]." Speaker may provide a brief explanation. Or if others have already checked in, the speaker may say "I pass." (See the Pass protocol.)
2. Speaker says "I'm in." This signifies that Speaker intends to behave according to the Core Commitments.
3. Listeners respond, "Welcome."

Commitments

State feelings without qualification.

State feelings only as they pertain to yourself.

Be silent during another's Check In.

Do not refer to another's Check In disclosures without explicitly granted permission from him or her.

Notes

In the context of the Core Protocols, all emotions are expressed through combinations of MAD, SAD, GLAD, or AFRAID. For example, "excited" may be a combination of GLAD and AFRAID.

Check In as deeply as possible. Checking in with two or more emotions is the norm. The depth of a group's Check In translates directly to the quality of the group's results.

Do not do anything to diminish or augment your emotional state. Do not describe yourself as a "little" mad, sad, glad, or afraid or say "I'm mad, but I'm still glad."

Except in large groups, if more than one person checks in, it is recommended that all do so.

HAPPY may be substituted for GLAD, and SCARED may be substituted for AFRAID.

Check Out

Check Out requires that your physical presence always signifies your engagement. You must Check Out when you are aware that you cannot maintain the Core Commitments or whenever it would be better for you to be elsewhere.

Steps

1. Say "I'm checking out."
2. Physically leave the group until you're ready to Check In once again.
3. Optionally, if it is known and relevant, you can say when you believe you'll return.

Commitments

Return as soon as you can and are able to keep the Core Commitments.

Return and Check In without unduly calling attention to your return.

Do not judge, shame, hassle, interrogate, or punish anyone who checks out.

Notes

It is a misuse of Check Out if you use it to get unwarranted attention, express anger behaviorally, cause disruption, and so on. However, if you do want to do any of these things, you need to check out.

Check Out if your emotional state is hindering your success, if your receptivity to new information is too low, or if you do not know what you want.

Check Out is an admission that you are unable to contribute at the present time.

Ask For Help

The Ask For Help protocol allows you to efficiently make use of the skills and knowledge of others. Ask For Help is the act that catalyzes connection and shared vision. Use it continuously, before and during the pursuit of any result.

Steps

1. Asker inquires of another, “[Helper’s name], will you X?”
2. Asker expresses any specifics or restrictions of the request.
3. Helper responds by saying “Yes” or “No” or by offering an alternative form of help.

Commitments

Always invoke the Ask For Help Protocol with the phrase “Will you . . .

Have a clear understanding of what you want from the Helper or if you do not have a clear understanding of what help you want, signal this by saying “I’m not sure what I need help with, but will you help me?”

Assume that all Helpers are always available and trust that any Helper accepts the responsibility to say “No.”

Say “No” any time you do not want to help.

Accept the answer “No” without any inquiry or emotional drama.

Be receptive of the help offered.

Offer your best help.

Postpone the help request if you are unable to fully engage.

Request more information if you are unclear about the specifics of the help request.

Do not apologize for asking for help.

Notes

Asking for help is a low-cost undertaking. The worst possible outcome is a “No,” which leaves you no further ahead or behind than when you asked. In the best possible outcome, you reduce the amount of time required to achieve a task and/or learn.

Helpers should say “No” if they are not sure if they want to help. They should say nothing else after turning down a request for help.

You cannot “over-ask” a given person for help unless he or she has asked you to respect a particular limit.

If you don’t understand the value of what is offered, or feel that it wouldn’t be useful, or believe yourself to have considered and rejected the idea offered previously, assume a curious stance instead of executing a knee-jerk “But . . .” rejection. (See the Investigate protocol.)

Asking in time of trouble means you waited too long to ask for help. Ask for help when you are doing well.

Simply connecting with someone, even if he or she knows nothing of the subject you need help on can help you find answers within yourself, especially if you ask that person to Investigate you.

Protocol Check

Use Protocol Check when you believe a protocol is being used incorrectly in any way or when a Core Commitment is being broken.

Steps

1. Say "Protocol Check."
2. If you know the correct use of the protocol, state it. If you don't, ask for help.

Commitments

Say "Protocol Check" as soon as you become aware of the incorrect use of a protocol, or of a broken Core Commitment. Do this regardless of the current activity.

Be supportive of anyone using Protocol Check.

Do not shame or punish anyone using Protocol Check.

Ask for help as soon as you realize you are unsure of the correct protocol use.

Intention Check

Use Intention Check to clarify the purpose of your own or another's behavior. Use it when you can't imagine a positive outcome resulting from the current behavior. Intention Check assesses the integrity of your own and another's intention in a given case.

Steps

1. Ask "What is your/my intention with X?" where X equals some type of actual or pending behavior to the person whose intention you want to know.
2. If it would be helpful, ask "What response or behavior did you want from whom as a result of X?"

Commitments

Be aware of your own intention before checking the intention of another.

Investigate sufficiently to uncover the intention of the person or his actions.

Make sure you have the intention to resolve any possible conflict peacefully before intention checking someone else. If you do not have a peaceful intention, Check Out.

Do not be defensive when someone asks you what your intention is. If you can't do this, Check Out.

Notes

If conflict arises that seems irresolvable, Check Out and Ask For Help.

Decider

Use Decider anytime you want to move a group immediately and unanimously towards results.

Steps

1. Proposer says "I propose [concise, actionable behavior]."
2. Proposer says "1-2-3."
3. Voters, using either Yes (thumbs up), No (thumbs down), or Support-it (flat hand), vote simultaneously with other voters.
4. Voters who absolutely cannot get in on the proposal declare themselves by saying "I am an absolute no. I won't get in." If this occurs, the proposal is withdrawn.
5. Proposer counts the votes.
 Proposer withdraws the proposal if a combination of outliers (No votes) and Support-it votes is too great or if proposer expects not to successfully conclude Resolution (below). You can approximate "too great" by using the following heuristics: a) approximately 50% (or greater) of votes are Support-it, OR b) the anticipated gain if the proposal passes is less than the likely cost of Resolution effort, OR c) the anticipated gain if the proposal passes TIMES the estimated percentage likelihood that proposal will ultimately pass with Resolution effort is less than or equal to the cost of proceeding to Resolution.
6. Proposer uses the Resolution protocol with each outlier to bring him in by asking, "What will it take to get you in?"
7. Proposer declares the proposal carried if all outliers change their votes to Yes or Support-it. The team is now committed to the proposed result.

Commitments

Propose no more than one item per proposal.

Remain present until the Decider protocol is complete; always remain aware of how your behavior either moves the group forward or slows it down.

Give your full attention to a proposal over and above all other activity.

Speak only when you are the proposer or are directed to speak by the proposer.

Keep the reasons you voted as you did to yourself during the protocol.

Reveal immediately when you are an absolute no voter and be ready to propose a better idea.

Be personally accountable for achieving the results of a Decider commitment even if it was made in your absence.

Keep informed about Decider commitments made in your absence.

Do not argue with an absolute no voter. Always ask him or her for a better idea.

Actively support the decisions reached.

Use your capacity to “stop the show” by declaring you “won’t get in no matter what” with great discretion and as infrequently as possible.

Insist at all times that the Decider and Resolution protocols be followed exactly as per specification, regardless of how many times you find yourself doing the insisting.

Do not pass during a Decider.

Unceasingly work toward forward momentum; have a bias toward action.

Do not look at how others are voting to choose your own vote.

Avoid using Decider in large groups. Break up into small subgroups to make decisions, and report status only in the large group.

Notes

Vote No only when you really believe the contribution to forward momentum you will make to the group after slowing or stopping it in the current vote will greatly outweigh the (usually considerable) costs you are adding by voting No.

If you are unsure or confused by a proposal, support it and seek clarification offline after the proposal is resolved. If you have an alternate proposal after receiving more information, you can have faith that your team will support the best idea. (See “The Core Commitments” earlier in this chapter.)

Voting No to make minor improvements to an otherwise acceptable proposal slows momentum and should be avoided. Instead, offer an additional proposal after the current one passes or, better yet, involve yourself in the implementation to make sure your idea gets in.

Withdraw weak proposals. If a proposal receives less than seventy percent (approximately) Yes votes, it is a weak proposal and should be withdrawn by the proposer. This decision is, however, at the discretion of the proposer.

Think of yourself as a potential solo outlier every time you vote No.

Vote Absolute No only when you are convinced you have a significant contribution to make to the direction or leadership of the group, or when integrity absolutely requires it of you.

Resolution

When a Decider vote yields a small minority of outliers, the proposer quickly leads the team, in a highly structured fashion, to deal with the outliers. The Resolution protocol unabashedly promotes the proposal by focusing on bringing outliers in at least cost.

Steps

1. Proposer asks outlier “What will it take to get you in?”
2. Outlier states in a single, short, declarative sentence the precise modification required to be in.
3. Proposer offers to adopt the outlier’s changes or withdraws the proposal.

Notes

If the outlier’s changes are simple, a simple Eye Check is performed to determine if everyone is still in.

If the outlier's changes are complex, the proposer must withdraw the current proposal and then submit a new proposal that incorporates the outlier's changes.

If the outlier begins to say why he voted No or to explain anything other than what it will take to get him in, the proposer must interrupt the outlier with "What will it take to get you in?"

Perfection Game

The Perfection Game protocol will support you in your desire to aggregate the best ideas. Use it whenever you desire to improve something you've created.

Steps

1. Perfectee performs an act or presents an object for perfection, optionally saying "Begin" and "End" to notify the Perfector of the start and end of the performance.
2. Perfector rates the value of the performance or object on a scale of 1 to 10 based on how much value the Perfector believes he or she can add.
3. Perfector says "What I liked about the performance or object was X," where X accounts for the points given.
4. Perfector offers the improvements to the performance or object required for it to be rated a 10 by saying "To make it a ten, you would have to do X."

Commitments

Accept perfecting without argument.

Give only positive criticisms: what you like and what it would take to "give it a 10."

Abstain from mentioning what you don't like or being negative in other ways.

Withhold points only if you can think of improvements.

Use ratings that reflect a scale of improvement rather than a scale of how much you liked the object.

Notes

A rating of 10 means you are unable to add value, and a rating of 1 means you can add essentially all the value of the object with your ideas. If you cannot give ideas to make an object better, you must give it a 10, even if you don't like it.

The important information to transmit in the Perfection Game protocol improves the performance or object. For example, "The ideal sound of a finger snap for me is one that is crisp, has sufficient volume, and startles me somewhat. To get a 10, you would have to increase your crispness."

As a perfectee, you may only ask questions to clarify or gather more information for improvement. If you disagree with the ideas given to you, simply don't include them.

Personal Alignment

The Personal Alignment protocol helps you penetrate deeply into your desires and find what's blocking you from getting what you want. Use it to discover, articulate, and achieve what you want. The quality of your alignment will be equal to the quality of your results.

Steps

1. **Want.** Answer the question: "What specifically do I want?"
2. **Block.** Ask yourself, "What is blocking me from having what I want?"
3. **Virtue.** Figure out what would remove this block by asking yourself "What virtue—if I had it—would shatter this block of mine?"
4. **Shift.** Pretend the virtue you identified is actually what you want.
5. **Again.** Repeat steps 2 to 4 until this process consistently yields a virtue that is powerful enough to shatter your blocks and get you what you originally thought you wanted.
6. **Done.** Now write down a personal alignment statement in the form "I want [virtue]." For example, "I want courage."
7. **Signal/Response/Assignment.** Create a signal to let others know when you are practicing your alignment, and provide a response they can give you to demonstrate support. For example, "When I say/do 'X,' will you say/do 'Y'?" Optionally, turn it into an assignment by saying you will do X a certain number of times per day, where X equals an activity that requires you to practice living your alignment.
8. **Evidence.** Write, in specific and measurable terms, the long-term evidence of practicing this alignment.
9. **Help.** Ask each member of your group for help. They help by giving the response you would like when you give your signal that you are practicing your alignment.

Commitments

Identify blocks and wants that are specific and personal.

Identify blocks that, if solved, would radically increase your effectiveness in life, work, and play.

Choose a virtue that is about you and preferably one word long. For example: integrity, passion, self-care, peace, fun.

Choose a signal and response you will initiate several times per day that is positive, meaningful to you, and looks different than normal behavior.

Ask for help from people who know you and/or know alignments.

Identify evidence that is measurable by an objective third party.

Notes

A personal block is something you find within yourself. It does not refer to circumstances or other people. Assume that you could have had what you want by now, that your block is a myth that somehow deprives you of your full potential.

Identify both immediate and long-term evidence of your alignment. Write down results that start now (or very soon), as well as results you'll see at least five or more years in the future.

The most successful responses are unique, memorable, dramatic in some way, and often flamboyant. (However, a moment's ritual silence in a usually noisy environment is always a vivid response.)

When members of a team are completing their personal alignments together (asking each other for help), the final step of the process is most powerful if done as a ceremony.

If you are struggling with figuring out what you want, adopt the alignment "I want self-awareness." There is no case where increased self-awareness would not be beneficial.

Investigate

Investigate allows you to learn about a phenomenon that occurs in someone else. Use it when an idea or behavior someone is presenting seems poor, confusing, or simply interesting.

Steps

1. Act as if you were a detached but fascinated inquirer, asking questions until your curiosity is satisfied or you no longer want to ask questions.

Commitments

Ask well-formed questions.

Ask only questions that will increase your understanding.

Ask questions only if the subject is engaged and appears ready to answer more.

Refrain from offering opinions.

Do not ask leading questions where you think you know how he or she will answer.

Notes

Avoid theorizing about the subject or providing any sort of diagnosis.

Consider using the following forms for your questions:

What about X makes you Y Z?

Would you explain a specific example?

How does X go when it happens?

What is the one thing you want most from solving X?

What is the biggest problem you see regarding X now?

What is the most important thing you could do right now to help you with X?

Ineffective queries include the following:

Questions that lead or reflect an agenda.

Questions that attempt to hide an answer you believe is true.

Questions that invite stories.

Questions that begin with "Why."

Stick to your intention of gathering more information.

If you feel that you will explode if you can't say what's on your mind, you shouldn't speak at all.
Consider checking your intention or Check Out.