

# Solution **Seeking System**

The Complete Guide

A Blockchain Process  
By David and Shannon Baxter

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# Chapter 1:

# The Solution Seeking System

A framework for democratic problem solving, leadership, and communication.

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## Introduction

The **Solution Seeking System (SSS)** is a structured communication framework designed to help individuals and organizations solve interpersonal problems, navigate conflict, and continuously improve their shared environments. It was developed at Beanchain Coffee, a worker-directed café committed to cooperative principles, as a way **to foster understanding, accountability, and trust** without relying on traditional hierarchical discipline systems.

Unlike top-down management methods, the **Solution Seeking System is meant to work in concert with whatever management or conflict resolution tools are already being used.** It's a philosophy that can be applied in tandem with others to **encourage co-creation of solutions through compassion, clarity, and introspection.** The system works alongside most leadership models and can be applied in a wide range of settings: workplaces, relationships, and community groups.

This system is an attempt to **provide a simplified strategy** for creating strong communication, effective leaders, and the shared understanding needed in order for Democracy to thrive in workplaces that seek to adopt it. In addition to the **Communication Protocol**, it provides documentation for the **Wisdom Principles** that support their use. The **Communication Protocol** is a communication pattern that is meant to create mutual understanding and **solutions.** The **Wisdom Principles** are concepts that are important to the success of that pattern. There are no shortcuts to good communication; one needs to understand their tools and have the courage of their convictions to be effective at it.

**We want to see democracy in the workplace, stronger relationships, understanding easier to achieve, and for the systems that we are a part of to serve us all better.** The Solution Seeking System is meant to help us all find solutions to these problems and more. **We hope it helps you.**

## Use it now with our GPT's

Feel free to use our ChatGPT Tools as an interface to our work. You can get help with specific issues or learn more about the system using the GPT's we designed to assist in the effective use of the SSS.

# Guide



## [Solution Seeking Guide](https://chatgpt.com/g/g-68981adb38108191a91907d44138505d-solution-seeking-guide)

<https://chatgpt.com/g/g-68981adb38108191a91907d44138505d-solution-seeking-guide>

I can guide you through the use of the Solution Seeking System in order to navigate conflict and find great solutions!

Helps with:

- Resolve specific conflicts
- Understanding yourself and thinking about others with compassion
- Planning productive communication

In a structured, step-by-step way.

# Mentor



## Solution Seeking Mentor

<https://chatgpt.com/g/g-6897eb5ac1d48191af7e78fefef86909-solution-seeking-mentor>

I can help you with anything related to the Solution Seeking System.

- Explain the framework
- Understand the 3-step Communication Protocol
- Learn the Wisdom Principles
- Understand the Leadership Tools or build your own!

## Explore our Online Documentation

Explore and learn more about Solution Seeking System in our online version of the guide at: <https://www.solutionseeking.com/>

## Purpose and Vision

### What It Aims to Do:

- Help people **solve communication breakdowns** and interpersonal conflicts
- **Foster** a healthy workplace **democracy**
- **Turn workplaces and communities into Living Systems**, adaptive, participant-driven ecosystems
- **Empower individuals** to participate in understanding, collaboration, and system design

### The Bigger Picture:

By enabling better communication and decision-making, SSS tackles core drivers of poverty like disempowerment, inequality, and organizational dysfunction. **The end goal is to build a cooperative, just, and responsive economy supported by resilient systems.**

**“If we want to have Democracy** in the workplace through systems like Cooperatives, **we first need great communication.** Communication is hard, and we’re trying to put a common sense framework around good communication and problem solving.” – David Baxter

## Philosophical Foundations

The Solution Seeking System is based on mutual **understanding** because no lasting solution can be built on guesses. Before we try to solve a problem, we need to understand what each person experienced, what they meant, what they needed, and what they were afraid of. We also need to understand ourselves: our reactions, assumptions, emotions, and goals. **Understanding is the bridge** between introspection and action.

This is why the system treats patience, vulnerability, bravery, and compassion as practical tools rather than abstract values. **Patience** gives people time to explain and process. **Vulnerability** allows people to share what is actually happening beneath the surface. **Bravery** makes difficult conversations possible. **Compassion** keeps the goal focused on care rather than punishment. Together, these qualities help people build shared language, check assumptions, and move from reaction into clarity.

That same process can improve larger systems. Workplaces, communities, families, and friendships often break down when people lack a reliable way to understand one another and turn that understanding into action. The Solution Seeking System creates a repeatable path: understand yourself, understand each other, then seek a solution. When used consistently, this path helps **systems** become **Living Systems**: systems that learn, adapt, and improve through the solutions created by the people inside them.

### The Four Pillars of Understanding:

- **Patience:** To understand a perspective other than your own takes time.
- **Vulnerability:** Openness is required to share needs and fears.
- **Bravery:** Honest conversations often require courage.
- **Compassion:** Understanding someone does not require agreement, only care.

**“Understanding is the principle that supports all others in the Solution Seeking System. The presupposition that everyone is genuinely capable of understanding one another with enough patience, bravery, vulnerability, and compassion is the foundation that the process we're building here is built upon.”** – David Baxter

## Key Terminology

The language and concepts that support a better understanding of the Solution Seeking System.

### System

Any group of people working or interacting together (e.g., a team, a relationship, a community, or an organization). A system can contain many other **systems** within it.

### Living System

A system that is actively built and improved using **Solutions** generated through the **Communication Protocol**. A **Living System** is actively changing to better serve those who are a part of it through the application of **Solutions**.

### Solution

An actionable and measurable plan, pattern, or tool that can improve a **System**.

### Leader (Servant)

A person who takes responsibility for the health of the **System** and its people, not for control, but in an effort to help it thrive and grow.

### Leadership Tools

**Practices that apply the Communication Protocol** to real-world issues in a way that best suits the **System** in which they are used.

### Wisdom Principles

Ethical values (e.g. fairness, understanding) that guide SSS use and are used within the **Communication Protocol**

### Communication Protocol

1. **Introspection**
2. **Mutual Understanding**
3. **Solution Seeking**

The three-step communication pattern forms the foundational pattern of the SSS. To use this protocol correctly, one must understand the **Wisdom Principles**. This process produces **Solutions** as an output that can be applied to a **system** to make it a **living system**.

# The Communication Protocol

This 3-step process is the core protocol of the SSS

## 1. Introspection

*First, understand your perspective, and then work to understand the other perspective with compassion.*

- a. Forgive and move past initial feelings. Don't be blinded by passion.
- b. Identify your actual feelings, needs, and motivations.
- c. Avoid reactive emotions or blame.
- d. Check your intentions: Are you trying to help, punish, or control? We should be trying to help.
- e. Ground yourself in kindness, clarity, and emotional honesty by applying compassion and critical thinking.
- f. **Example:** Instead of being hurt that someone was rude to you, and risk being rude back. Ask yourself some questions like: "Why does that hurt me?", "Could I have misunderstood them?", "Why might they have acted that way?", "What might they be feeling?", "Do they know they hurt my feelings?". Answer those questions and ask yourself more uncomfortable questions until you understand your feelings and perspective.

## 2. Mutual Understanding

*The Other Person's Perspective is unknowable until you ask them.*

- a. Ask clarifying and reflective questions.
- b. Assume **Good Faith**.
- c. Avoid jumping to conclusions or assigning intent.
- d. Use patient listening to uncover deeper truths.
- e. **Effective communication is essential for reaching mutual understanding** and building trust. It requires the wisdom principles of **bravery, patience, empathy, flexibility, good faith, and trust**. The goal is to reach understanding through open and vulnerable dialogue.

### 3. Solution Seeking

*Now that we understand each other, what can we do together?*

- a. Generate actionable, measurable(if possible), and mutually beneficial solutions.
- b. Look for patterns, habits, or tools; not just one-time fixes.
- c. Use creative thinking and experiment where needed.
- d. **Example:** After discussing scheduling issues, the team might agree to add a shared calendar and do 5-minute shift check-ins.

## Wisdom Principles

Wisdom Principles are the “source code” of the system. They guide how each part of the Communication Protocol is applied. Each Wisdom Principle is documented using a consistent format that makes it easy to use and learn.

### Wisdom Principle Format

#### 1. Description

- a. What it is
- b. How it is used within the Solution Seeking System

#### 2. Best Practices

- a. Clear guidance on using or understanding this principle

#### 3. Goals

- a. What we're trying to accomplish with this principle

#### 4. Antigoals

- a. What we don't want to result from the use of this principle

#### 5. Practice Patterns and Education

#### 6. FAQ and Common Issues

- a. This can be built over time as we encounter them
- b. Should contain solutions and clarifications concerning the principle
- c. A great example of using solution seeking in the Solution Seeking System

## Wisdom Principles

1. Understanding
2. Good Faith
3. Forgiveness
4. Humility(and understanding Pride)
5. Compassion and Empathy
6. Bravery
7. Vulnerability
8. Patience
9. Fairness
10. Integrity (Consistency)
11. Flexibility
12. Critical Thinking

Each principle is meant to be teachable, practicable, and integrated into how leaders and systems operate.

## Leadership Tools

The **Solution Seeking System** is designed to be applied across many leadership philosophies or styles, **empowering them** to be more useful and tailored to their participants. It doesn't replace the current leadership model, only assists. The **Communication Protocol** can be used with existing **leadership tools** to produce **Solutions** that can be implemented in a **system** to improve it. A system being acted on in this way is called a **Living System**.

The Solution Seeking System can be layered onto existing leadership styles. You don't need to change your structure, just improve how people communicate within it. The protocol adapts to:

- Teams
- Friendships
- Partner relationships
- Customer interactions
- Community organizing
- Businesses

**Building the Communication Protocol into leadership tools** is pretty straightforward.

1. **List the tools you use.** What are their goals, use cases, and triggers(When to use it)? What was the reason you felt you needed to create that process in the first place?
2. Determine **which parts of the Communication Protocol could be used within that tool** and make a note of it.
3. **Use best practices from the Communication Protocol** in your leadership tools and **keep track of the Solutions created** to make sure that your system can grow as more solutions are found.

Through this process, you may find that some of your already existing tools are unnecessary or redundant. The more concise your toolset is, the easier it will be to teach to others. Making sure to teach about the tools being used and why is a great way to avoid any culture shock when introducing new patterns to an existing System.

Within your leadership tools, you may use Introspection (Step 1) to prepare for the conversation. Mutual Understanding (Step 2) is useful for having difficult conversations that are meant to help others understand you and them better. If some kind of solution is found through the tool, then Solution Seeking (Step 3) is also involved. Almost all tools we use, in some manner, include all 3 steps but are tailored to the situation and the goals that the tool is meant to address.

By mapping out the use of the **Communication Protocol** in your pre-existing tools, you can adapt them to the Solution Seeking System and be able to recognize the **Solutions** you're already producing so that your **System** can be a constantly growing, learning, and **Living System**.

# Chapter 2:

## Communication Protocol

The **Communication Protocol** for Solution Seeking is the core process of the Solution Seeking System, a framework for resolving disagreements, improving relationships, and generating sustainable solutions in any setting. It is designed to replace reactive, adversarial conversations with a structured, respectful approach that leads to understanding and actionable results.

The protocol follows three steps:

1. **Introspection** – Understand yourself first: your feelings, needs, and goals.
2. **Mutual Understanding** – Work to fully understand the other person's perspective, and ensure they understand yours.
3. **Solution Seeking** – Collaboratively develop and agree on specific, measurable solutions.

This guide is meant to be both a teaching tool and a practical reference. You can use it to prepare for important conversations, guide real-time dialogue, or review your process afterward. Each step includes mindset principles, best practices, and example prompts to help you stay grounded in compassion, curiosity, and clarity.

The goal is not to “win” a conversation, but to understand and be understood and then to co-create solutions that strengthen the system you're part of. Whether you're addressing a small misunderstanding or a long-standing challenge, this protocol gives you a repeatable path to repair, growth, and trust.

## How to Use This Guide

- **Before a Conversation** – Read through the Introspection section first. Answer the guiding questions and check your intentions before engaging.
- **During a Conversation** – Use the Mutual Understanding step as your compass. Refer to the best practices and example phrases to stay focused on clarity, compassion, and curiosity.
- **When Moving to Action** – Follow the Solution Seeking step to shape ideas into clear, measurable, and fair solutions.
- **After the Conversation** – Review the outcome together. Use the follow-up and evaluation guidance to adjust as needed and ensure the solution is working.
- **As a Learning Tool** – Revisit this document regularly to sharpen your skills and integrate the process into your everyday interactions.

By using the protocol consistently, you will build stronger relationships, resolve conflicts more effectively, and contribute to a culture of trust, fairness, and shared problem-solving.

## Step 1: Introspection

Effective conflict resolution begins with understanding ourselves before engaging with others. By examining our own feelings and perspectives first, we create a foundation for more productive conversations and lasting resolutions.

### What's Required for Introspection

Before initiating a conversation about a problem with another person, it's essential to understand your own feelings and reactions. Introspection requires:

- **Critical thinking:** Examining your thoughts objectively
- **Compassion:** For both yourself and the other person
- **Forgiveness:** Being willing to move past hurt
- **Humility:** Being willing to admit mistakes and learn from them

### Understanding Your Emotions

#### Recognizing Emotional Signals

Fear, anger, shame, and frustration are all indicators of a problem. They are not the problem itself. If you hold onto them, you won't be able to explore other perspectives or get a deeper understanding of your own.

- Treat emotions as notifications rather than the problem itself
- Acknowledge emotions, then let them go to explore the real issue
- Allow yourself to move past the initial reaction and work to understand the feelings that that reaction is the result of

#### The Introspection Process

1. **Think about your Perspective:** Write down or recount your current perspective on what had happened.
2. **Identify your first impression:** What is the most clear emotion you're feeling right now? It could be Frustration, Anger, Fear, Embarrassment, Shame, or something else.
3. **Start digging deeper:** Now we need to examine that first impression and figure out why we're feeling this way. This is where we use **Forgiveness**. We need to allow ourselves to move past the discomfort so we can understand why we feel it. Ask yourself what other emotions, experiences, and motivations added up to your initial feelings.

4. **Name your feelings:** After digging deeper, we can identify (and ask more questions about) the feelings we think lead us to our initial emotions.
5. **Ask more questions:** Keep asking yourself questions until you feel you have a good understanding of how you felt and why you felt that way. This is where **Critical Thinking** will help a lot! Some examples are:
  - "Why does that hurt?"
  - "Was it anger that I saw? Why did they feel that way?"
  - "What is the tension I feel?"
  - "Why does that matter?"
  - "Why do I feel that way?"
6. **Explore with Compassion:** Now think about **them**. Put yourself in their shoes and exercise both **Empathy** and **Compassion**. The other person is a human that has a past, who has fears, who has good days and bad days. We all want something relatively similar from life: safety, connection, and purpose. Some examples of questions you may want to ask are:
  - "Is it possible there's something else going on that made them act that way?"
  - "Could I have misunderstood them?"
  - "What could compel me to act the way they did?"
  - "Could I have done something that was misunderstood by them?"
  - "Could I have done something differently that would have had a better outcome?"
7. **Identify Outcomes:** What can you take from your introspection that can help you in the next step: Mutual Understanding? We should try to look for a few things here:
  - **Good questions** to ask them when we talk to them that may help create clarity for both of us.
  - **Objectives** for the conversation. What do we want to achieve when we talk to them?
  - **A clearer way to express ourselves** when we talk to them. Clarity is Kindness, and the clearer we can be about our actions, intentions, and feelings, the better they can understand us.

## Here's an example of an Introspection



## Exploring Multiple Perspectives

### Your Perspective

An example from an imaginary workplace setting:

- **Your Perspective:** “Brian snapped at me a little bit and didn't let me finish talking when I tried to tell him he was putting the mop away wrong.”
- **Initial reaction:** "I was angry"
- **Start Digging:** “Why was I angry at him for that?”
- **Naming your feelings:**
  - "I was trying to help him, but it felt like he was lashing out at me in return and angry at me for trying to help."
  - “I wanted him to appreciate what I was trying to do, but it seemed like he didn't, and now I feel this tension.”
  - “It was rude to be unkind to me when I wasn't trying to be unkind to him.”
- **Digging Deeper(Asking more questions):**
  - “Was it anger that I saw? Why did he feel that way?”
  - “What is the tension I feel?”
  - “Why does that hurt?”
- **Exploring With Compassion:**
  - "Maybe it wasn't anger but insecurity that he didn't know the right way to put the mop away or fear that I would see him as unintelligent or something.”
  - “Maybe it's uncertainty about the future. If that interaction didn't go well, what will happen next time I try to talk about something?”
  - “I was putting effort into being helpful, but it wasn't recognized; it was seen as something else. Now I'm afraid he thinks I'm something I'm not.”

### Their Perspective

**A crucial reminder:** The other person's perspective is unknowable until you ask them.

- Reflecting on the fact that you don't know their perspective yet
- Considering alternative explanations with compassion: "Maybe it wasn't anger but insecurity that he didn't know the right way."
- Remembering that just as you didn't fully understand your feelings initially, they may not understand theirs

## Preparing for Conversation

After thorough introspection, prepare for dialogue by considering:

1. What do I want to ask?
2. What are my goals for the conversation?
3. How can we avoid this problem in the future?
4. What could help them understand where I'm coming from?

## What to Avoid

- Not being willing to listen or understand
- Gossiping to others and damaging relationships
- Intending to hurt the other person
- Remaining stuck in secondary emotions like anger

## Final Thoughts on Introspection

Introspection is the foundation of effective conflict resolution. By understanding your own feelings, considering multiple perspectives with compassion, and preparing thoughtful questions, you create the conditions for productive dialogue. Remember that the goal is not to "win" but to understand and be understood, ultimately finding solutions that work for all parties involved.

## Step 2: Mutual Understanding

Creating a shared understanding is the **first step to finding a lasting solution** to a problem. Without taking the time to explore each other's perspectives, we risk making hasty decisions that will lead to more misunderstandings and frustration. That exploration is uncomfortable because it means acknowledging our fears, faults, and allowing ourselves to shift our perspective to see the other person more clearly. By engaging in these conversations with vulnerability and trusting that the other person will do the same for you, we can build a mutual understanding, and that makes finding actionable solutions possible.

### Essential Mindset

- **Nothing can be resolved until understanding is reached**
- Our goal is to understand, not to win or be correct.
- Understanding requires talking and mutual vulnerability
- Approach conversations with trust and a willingness to be uncomfortable

### What's Required for Mutual Understanding

- **Bravery:** Courage to initiate difficult conversations
- **Patience:** Allowing time for thoughts and feelings to be expressed
- **Empathy:** Seeing situations from the other person's perspective
- **Compassion:** Caring about the other person, attempting to understand their perspective
- **Flexibility:** Adapting your approach based on the conversation
- **Good Faith:** Assuming positive intent from the other person

### Preparing for the Conversation

#### Setting the Stage

- **Coordinate timing:** Work with others to make time for the talk
- **Create privacy:** Find a space free from external pressures and interruptions
- **Ensure comfort:** Make the environment comfortable for both parties
  - Consider offering food/drinks: A thoughtful gesture that helps reduce stress

- Showing that you are thinking about them is a good way to encourage Good Faith during the conversation.

## Important Considerations

- **One-on-one format:** Avoid bringing additional people to the conversation as this can:
  - Make the other person feel ganged up on
  - Push them into a defensive position
  - Create social discomfort if their image is damaged in front of others
- **Allow cooling-off time:** If tensions are high, give people time to process. However, don't wait so long that the events aren't clear enough for meaningful conversation. Find the right balance.
- **Set a specific time:** Ask for commitment to a specific day and time rather than leaving it indefinite.

## Starting the Conversation

### Initial Approach

- **Express gratitude:** Thank the person for being willing to talk
  - Example: "Hey Brian! Thank you for agreeing to talk to me."
- **Remember:** Talking about difficult topics is hard; acknowledge their willingness

### Setting the Tone

- **Clarity is kindness:** Be clear and upfront about your intentions
  - Example: "I wanted to talk about a communication issue I think we had and find a good way to fix it for us."
- **State your goals explicitly:**
  - To be understood and to understand
  - To help, not hurt
  - To fix the issue

## Sharing Your Perspective

### Presenting Your View

- **Ask permission:** "Do you mind if I give you a breakdown of the issue from my perspective?"
  - What if they say no?
    - **Reassure them of your goals and intention.** It's natural for people to fear this kind of vulnerability. Past experiences, the discomfort required, and negative outcomes in the past can easily convince people to avoid difficult conversations.
    - **Let them know you don't want to win or be right, just to be understood and understand them.** It's easy to feel like someone isn't interested in understanding where you are coming from. Assure them that you want to do that for them so they will be more likely to want to do that for you.
    - **If they won't talk, you can't make them.** In the end, communication is a two player experience. It requires both to participate. You can do your part but you can't make them to the same, we're all individuals with agency and the power to make choices. You can do your best to compel and reassure but that is all. **If this is the case, you may have to let them know that you are always open to talking when they are.**
- **Define the problem:** Clearly articulate how you see the situation
- **Stay calm:** Avoid aggression, jabs, or unkind accusations
- **Keep it conversational:** Allow for responses and maintain dialogue

### Managing Responses

- If they say: "Absolutely! What's going on?" - Proceed with your perspective
- If they say: "I think I know what this is about!" - Suggest a structured approach:
  - "I think it's important that I help you understand my perspective on the situation and then have you help me understand yours so we can find a solution. Is it ok if I go first for the sake of clarity?"
- **Get buy-in:** Asking permission ensures it feels like a collaborative process and makes it more likely that it will be a collaborative process!

## Understanding Their Perspective

### Inviting Their View

- **Make a clear transition:** "Thank you for letting me explain my perspective. Can you help me understand how you felt and the way you see what happened?"
- **Create space:** Allow them to fully express themselves without interruption

### Active Listening Principles

- **Be patient:** Let them say everything they want to
- **Reserve judgment:** Don't lead with emotions
- **Trust their honesty:** Assume they are being truthful
- **Manage your reactions:**
  - If you feel frustrated or angry, set those emotions aside temporarily
  - Listen for context before reacting
  - Filter what they say through empathy to temper your feelings
  - Design responses that work toward your goals

## Asking the Right Questions

### Exploring Emotions

- **Inquire about feelings:** "How did that make you feel?"
- **Be patient:** Resist feelings of anger or frustration
- **Remember your goal:** To understand, not to win an argument

### Digging Deeper

- **Help them explore reasons:** "Do you think you felt that way because of...?"
- **Show understanding:** "I see what you mean, I would feel that way if I felt like someone was thinking that too."

- **Explore underlying concerns:** "Do you think that may be rooted in a fear that someone may see you as...?"
- **Summarize for clarity:** "Sounds like you felt that way because of..."

### Important Reminders

- **This is the hard part** - they haven't had the opportunity to process their feelings as you have
- **Be careful and patient** - if they feel you're hostile or unkind, they'll shut down
- **Remember your goals:** to understand, fix, and improve communication/trust
- **Respect** the difficulty of untangling emotions
- Keep your eyes on the **goals** even when tensions rise
- Design your responses purposefully
- Think about both perspectives, **not just yours**
- Explore with **compassion**
- Just as you may not have fully understood your feelings initially, **they may not fully understand theirs**

### Final Thoughts on Mutual Understanding

Effective communication is a "two-player game" that requires mutual participation and respect. By approaching difficult conversations with empathy, clarity, and purpose, you create an environment where understanding can flourish and conflicts can be resolved constructively. Remember that vulnerability and trust are essential components of meaningful communication, and the willingness to engage in uncomfortable conversations demonstrates your commitment to the relationship.

## Step 3: Solution Seeking

Solution seeking is the third step in a collaborative problem-solving process. After developing a mutual understanding of the problem and each other's perspectives, this phase focuses on transforming emerging ideas into concrete, actionable solutions with clear accountability measures.

### What's Required for Solution Seeking

To effectively engage in solution seeking, participants should cultivate:

- **Humility** - To remain open to others' ideas
- **Patience** - Throughout the iterative process
- **Critical Thinking** - For evaluating potential solutions
- **Flexibility** - To adapt as needed during implementation

### The Solution Seeking Process

#### 1. Problem Restatement

- Clearly articulate the problem as understood by all parties
- Incorporate mutual understanding gained during previous stages
- Ask if the restatement sounds right to all involved
- Confirm understanding to ensure everyone feels heard and is committed to moving forward

#### 2. Brainstorming Solutions

- Engage all parties in generating potential solutions
- Ask if they can think of good approaches to address the problem
- Encourage diverse perspectives and creative thinking
- Consider various approaches without immediate judgment

#### 3. Refining Solutions

A good solution should have these key characteristics:

- **Actionable** - Involves specific steps or actions that can be taken
- **Testable** - Includes measurable metrics to assess effectiveness
- **Effective** - Designed to produce tangible effects that directly address the problem
- **Time-bound** - Contains a clear timeframe for implementation and evaluation

#### 4. Implementation

- Put the agreed-upon solution into action
- Execute the planned steps within the designated timeframe
- Maintain accountability throughout the process

#### 5. Follow-Up

- After the timeframe has elapsed, check on the results
- Schedule a follow-up meeting (planned in advance) to discuss outcomes
- Gather feedback from all parties involved

#### 6. Evaluation and Iteration

- Assess how everyone feels about the solution
- Evaluate whether the solution is equitable for all parties
  - If it only benefits one person or party, it's not perfect yet
  - Some discomfort may be necessary for growth, but solutions should feel fair to all
- If the solution isn't working effectively, be prepared to:
  - Iterate on the current approach
  - Develop a new solution altogether
  - Maintain patience and persistence throughout multiple attempts

### Final Thoughts on Solution Seeking

The solution seeking process transforms mutual understanding into concrete action. By following this structured approach and embodying the essential qualities of humility, patience, critical thinking, and flexibility, parties can develop solutions that are not only effective but also equitable and sustainable. Remember that

finding the right solution may require multiple iterations, and persistence is key to successful resolution.

# Chapter 3:

# Wisdom Principles

## Introduction

**The Wisdom Principles are the ethical and behavioral foundations of the Solution Seeking System (SSS).** They guide how we approach problem-solving, communication, and decision-making, ensuring that our processes lead to equitable, sustainable, and human-centered outcomes.

These principles are not rules to be followed blindly; they are tools for thinking, reflecting, and interacting with others in ways that foster trust, understanding, and progress. Every time we engage in the **Communication Protocol (Introspection → Mutual Understanding → Solution Seeking)**, these principles help us stay grounded in the values that make the process effective.

By consistently practicing these principles, individuals and teams create a shared culture where conflicts become growth opportunities and solutions serve everyone involved.

# Understanding

## 1. Description

### What it is

Understanding is the act of perceiving another person's perspective, needs, and intentions as clearly as possible while also fully grasping your own. It is not mere agreement; it is a mutual recognition of where each party is coming from, even when perspectives differ.

### How it is used within the Solution Seeking System

Understanding is the foundation of the entire system. It is the bridge between introspection and action: only when both parties feel seen, heard, and accurately represented can solutions be co-created effectively. The Communication Protocol's second step, Mutual Understanding, exists to operationalize this principle.

## 2. Best Practices

- Listen without preparing your rebuttal; focus on their meaning before your response.
- Approach every interaction with curiosity rather than assumption.
- Use clarifying questions to ensure you're hearing what the other person actually means.
- Summarize what you've heard and invite corrections: "What I'm hearing is \_\_\_\_\_. Did I get that right?"
- Recognize that you cannot know their perspective without asking.
- Accept that understanding can exist without agreement; the goal is clarity, not consensus.

### 3. Goals

- Build a shared language and an accurate mental model of the other person's experience.
- Reduce misinterpretation and assumption-based conflict.
- Create emotional safety so both parties feel their perspective matters.
- Enable solution-seeking to focus on the actual problem rather than misperceptions.

### 4. Antigoals

- Forcing agreement before understanding.
- Using "understanding" as a tactic to win an argument rather than genuinely connecting.
- Pretending to understand to avoid discomfort.
- Over-analyzing to the point where the conversation never moves to solutions.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Active Listening Exercise:** Partner with someone and share a short personal story. The listener must repeat the story back in their own words until the speaker confirms accuracy.
- **Assumption Check:** Before responding, list two alternative explanations for the other person's behavior.
- **Language Swap:** Rephrase emotionally charged statements in neutral, curiosity-driven language.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: What if I think I already understand them?**

A: Confirm anyway. Your internal picture might not match their lived experience.

**Q: What if they refuse to explain their perspective?**

A: Use patience and gentle invitations. You may need to model vulnerability by sharing your own perspective first.

**Q: What if I understand but still think they're wrong?**

A: That's fine; understanding is not agreement. Continue to solution-seeking with respect for their viewpoint.

**Example of Solution Seeking in Action**

Two coworkers argue over scheduling. One believes the other is avoiding weekend shifts. Through the Understanding step, they discover the person has been caring for an ill family member on weekends. With this clarity, they collaborate on a temporary coverage plan instead of harboring resentment.

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# Good Faith

## 1. Description

### What it is

Good Faith is the genuine intention to be honest, fair, and constructive in your interactions. It means approaching communication with the assumption that others are also trying to act with integrity, even if mistakes happen.

### How it is used within the Solution Seeking System

Good Faith is a prerequisite for trust. It underpins the Communication Protocol, especially in the Mutual Understanding and Solution Seeking stages. Without Good Faith, conversations risk becoming defensive or manipulative, making lasting solutions impossible.

**Good Faith** has been a cornerstone of our organization since the beginning, and is the first thing we read to people in an interview to set both tone and good expectations. The statement goes as follows:

We're here to **work together** to create something really unique and positive.

This will involve **trust and vulnerability**. Being able to talk to each other, learn about each other, and most importantly, understand each other's experiences. Sometimes this can mean we need to wade through some uncomfortable topics, but if we go into every exchange in "good faith" we can achieve that goal.

I would define **good faith** as believing that the other people in the conversation will:

- Listen and understand
- Alter their perspective and change their minds
- Work towards the same goal
- Care about you

**And be willing to do the same for them.**

The goal is that this will translate into earned **respect, curiosity, and a deep understanding** of each other's drive.

For me, it means...

- I'll overlook a personal slight and replace any anger with compassion.
- I work hard to understand that we all have different cultures and accept that something that offends me may not even be a blip on someone else's radar, so I'll address it carefully and with kindness.
- If someone gives me criticism, I'll take it cheerfully and ask many questions because I think of that as a gift. You've taken the time and were vulnerable enough to attempt to share your thoughts with me.

## 2. Best Practices

- Begin every interaction by assuming positive intent unless there is clear evidence otherwise.
- Speak truthfully, even when it's uncomfortable.
- Avoid withholding information that would materially affect understanding.
- Show consistency between your words and actions.
- If you commit, follow through, or explain openly why you cannot.

## 3. Goals

- Foster trust between participants.
- Reduce defensiveness and suspicion in conversations.
- Create a cooperative environment where people feel safe to share honestly.
- Encourage openness to feedback and new ideas.

## 4. Antigoals

- Using Good Faith as an excuse to avoid healthy skepticism (trust should be balanced with discernment).
- Blindly accepting harmful actions without questioning them.
- Expecting Good Faith from others while acting in bad faith yourself.
- Using “assume good faith” to silence valid concerns.

## 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Intent Check:** Before speaking, ask: “Am I saying this to help or to hurt?”
- **Evidence Balance:** Assume positive intent while still verifying facts if something feels off.
- **Transparency Drill:** Practice explaining your reasoning when making a decision or taking action.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

### Q: **What if I suspect they’re not acting in good faith?**

A: Use clarifying questions to test your assumption before drawing conclusions. Document behavior patterns if necessary.

### Q: **Does Good Faith mean I have to trust everyone completely?**

A: No, Good Faith is about starting with trust and openness, not ignoring evidence of harm.

## Example of Solution Seeking in Action

Two team members disagree about inventory ordering. One thinks the other is deliberately delaying orders. Through Good Faith, they explore possible reasons and find that the ordering system’s notifications are going to an old email address. They fix the address and prevent further delays without assigning blame.

# Forgiveness

## 1. Description

### **What it is**

Forgiveness is the conscious decision to release resentment or the desire for retribution against someone who has caused harm, whether the harm was intentional or accidental. It does not mean forgetting, excusing, or condoning harmful behavior; it means choosing not to let past harm dictate present or future actions.

### **How it is used within the Solution Seeking System**

Forgiveness is essential for keeping the Communication Protocol functional. It enables participants to move beyond hurt feelings or past mistakes so they can engage honestly in Mutual Understanding and Solution Seeking. Without forgiveness, conversations remain anchored in past grievances rather than focused on constructive solutions.

## 2. Best Practices

- Recognize your feelings and process them before attempting forgiveness.
- Separate the act from the person; condemn the behavior without dehumanizing the individual.
- Communicate clearly about the harm before attempting to resolve it.
- Practice self-forgiveness when you fall short of your own standards.
- Use boundaries to prevent repeat harm while still letting go of bitterness.

### 3. Goals

- Create space for mutual understanding by removing emotional roadblocks.
- Preserve and repair relationships where possible.
- Encourage accountability without punitive motives.
- Allow participants to focus on present solutions instead of past pain.

### 4. Antigoals

- Forgiving to avoid addressing the real issue.
- Using forgiveness to dismiss or minimize harm.
- Expecting instant forgiveness from others.
- Confusing forgiveness with reconciliation, trust may still need to be rebuilt.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Perspective Shift:** Imagine the other person as a flawed but well-intentioned human, not just their harmful act.
- **Boundary Mapping:** After forgiving, define what's needed to prevent similar harm.
- **Release Exercise:** Verbally acknowledge the harm, then consciously state that you are releasing the need to punish.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: How do I forgive if they haven't apologized?**

A: Forgiveness is for your peace, not their comfort. You can release resentment without granting them reconciliation or trust.

**Q: Won't forgiving too easily make people think harm is acceptable?**

A: Not if it's paired with accountability. Forgiveness addresses emotion; accountability addresses behavior.

### Example of Solution Seeking in Action

You feel deeply hurt by something that a friend said to you when you made a joke. You choose to forgive so that you can look past the initial feelings and ask yourself why you felt that way, why they may have reacted the way they did, and get a better understanding of the situation before talking to them about it. Clearly, something made the other person feel like they needed to defend themselves; you can't start to understand what that was unless you can examine what your own feelings are telling you about yourself. That act of getting past your own feelings so you can ask more questions is the first step of Introspection, and it's a hard one to master.

---

# Humility (and Understanding Pride)

## 1. Description

### **What it is**

Humility is the recognition that your perspective, knowledge, and abilities are limited, and that others have valuable insights you may lack. It is the willingness to learn, admit mistakes, and give credit where it's due.

Understanding Pride means acknowledging the human desire for dignity, recognition, and self-worth, and noticing when that desire becomes a barrier to listening or collaborating.

### **How it is used within the Solution Seeking System**

Humility makes Mutual Understanding possible. It allows you to genuinely consider another's perspective and accept that your own view may be incomplete.

Recognizing Pride helps you identify when defensiveness or ego is getting in the way of solution-seeking. Together, they create a balance between self-respect and openness to change.

## 2. Best Practices

- Admit when you don't know something or when you've made a mistake.
- Give full credit for others' contributions.
- Ask questions with the intention of learning, not confirming your own beliefs.
- Reflect on moments when Pride might be pushing you to defend your image over finding the truth.
- Choose curiosity over winning.

### 3. Goals

- Foster openness to new ideas and perspectives.
- Reduce defensiveness during conflict resolution.
- Strengthen team relationships by valuing all contributions.
- Build a culture where learning is prioritized over ego.

### 4. Antigoals

- False humility (pretending to be unsure just to appear agreeable).
- Using humility as an excuse to withdraw from responsibility or leadership.
- Allowing Pride to shut down productive dialogue.
- Equating humility with lack of self-worth.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Ego Check Pause:** When feeling defensive, ask yourself: “Am I protecting my point or my pride?”
- **Contribution Highlight:** In group work, name at least one thing each person added that improved the result.
- **Learning Posture Drill:** Begin at least one meeting per week by stating something you’ve recently learned from a teammate.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: How can I balance humility with confidence?**

A: Humility doesn't mean devaluing yourself; it means knowing your worth while remaining open to others' input.

**Q: How do I know if Pride is getting in the way?**

A: Notice if you're feeling the need to "win," correct minor details unnecessarily, or prove you're right at the expense of progress.

### Example of Solution Seeking in Action

Two leaders disagree about a new workflow. One feels strongly their plan is superior, but after practicing humility, they invite feedback and learn the other's approach addresses a compliance issue they had overlooked. Pride could have led to conflict; humility led to a hybrid solution that satisfied both.

---

# Compassion and Empathy

## 1. Description

### What it is

**Compassion is the commitment to act with care toward others**, especially when they are struggling, even if you don't fully agree with them.

**Empathy is the ability to understand and emotionally connect with someone else's experience**, either through shared experience (emotional empathy) or perspective-taking (cognitive empathy).

Together, they allow you to see the humanity in others and respond in ways that protect dignity and foster trust.

### How it is used within the Solution Seeking System

Compassion and Empathy are essential for every stage of the Communication Protocol.

- In **Introspection**, they help you soften judgment toward yourself and others.
- In **Mutual Understanding**, they help you hear what's beneath someone's words or behavior.
- In **Solution Seeking**, they ensure outcomes consider emotional and relational needs, not just logistical ones.

## 2. Best Practices

- Listen without interrupting, especially when emotions are high.
- Show understanding verbally (“I can see why that would be frustrating”) and nonverbally (eye contact, open posture).
- Ask open-ended questions that invite deeper sharing.
- Acknowledge pain or struggle before trying to solve the problem.
- When offering feedback, lead with care and clarity, not criticism.

## 3. Goals

- Build trust and rapport even in disagreement.
- Ensure people feel valued beyond their role or performance.
- Reduce defensiveness by showing you see and respect the other person’s perspective.
- Create solutions that meet both practical and human needs.

## 4. Antigoals

- Using empathy to manipulate emotions or gain an advantage.
- Becoming so emotionally absorbed that you can’t think critically about the problem.
- Overpromising out of compassion, leading to unrealistic expectations.
- Assuming you know how someone feels without asking.

## 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Emotion Paraphrasing:** After hearing someone's concern, restate both the content and the emotion you believe they're expressing.
- **Pause Before Problem-Solving:** Give at least 60 seconds after someone shares a struggle before offering a solution.
- **"Imagine Being Them" Drill:** In conflict preparation, write down what the other person might be feeling and fearing.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

### **Q: What if I don't actually feel empathy toward them?**

A: You can still act with compassion by choosing to treat them with care, even without an emotional connection.

### **Q: Can empathy ever make things worse?**

A: Yes, if it leads to overidentifying with the other person to the point where you can't stay objective. Pair empathy with boundaries.

## Example of Solution Seeking in Action

A barista repeatedly arrives late. Instead of jumping to discipline, the manager uses empathy to learn that the employee's bus route was changed, adding 20 minutes to their commute. Together, they adjust the schedule to start 30 minutes later. The problem is solved, and the relationship stays intact.

---

# Bravery

## 1. Description

### What it is

**Bravery is the willingness to act or speak despite fear, discomfort, or uncertainty.**

In communication, it means engaging in honest dialogue even when the topic is difficult, emotionally charged, or risks misunderstanding.

### How it is used within the Solution Seeking System

Bravery is the driving force that gets people into the room for Mutual Understanding. It's required to share your truth openly, to invite feedback, to acknowledge mistakes, and to confront problems before they grow. Without bravery, the Communication Protocol stalls at Introspection because people avoid necessary conversations.

## 2. Best Practices

- Prepare for discomfort, but commit to the conversation anyway.
- Use "I" statements to own your perspective without attacking.
- Pair bravery with compassion; courage without care can come across as aggression.
- Take the first step; don't wait for the other person to raise the issue.
- Practice bravery in small moments so it becomes easier in high-stakes situations.

### 3. Goals

- Address issues early before they escalate.
- Build a culture where hard truths can be spoken respectfully.
- Encourage mutual openness by modeling vulnerability.
- Show that the relationship is worth the discomfort of honesty.

### 4. Antigoals

- Mistaking impulsiveness for bravery; acting without thought is recklessness.
- Using bravery as a cover for venting or attacking.
- Forcing others into vulnerability before trust is built.
- Speaking up without also being willing to listen.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Fear Audit:** Write down your top three fears about having a difficult conversation, then list what could be gained by having it anyway.
- **Low-Stakes Courage Reps:** Practice speaking up in small group settings when you'd normally stay quiet.
- **Role-Reversal Practice:** Act out a difficult conversation from the other person's perspective to reduce fear and increase empathy.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: What if bravery makes the other person defensive?**

A: Bravery must be paired with vulnerability and kindness. The goal is openness, not confrontation for its own sake.

**Q: How can I be brave if I'm worried about consequences?**

A: Weigh the risks of speaking up against the costs of silence; often, unaddressed issues cause greater harm over time.

### Example of Solution Seeking in Action

A worker notices safety hazards in the storage area but fears upsetting management. They choose bravery, documenting their concerns and requesting a meeting. Management acknowledges the risk and works with staff to reorganize the space, preventing possible injuries.

---

# Vulnerability

## 1. Description

### **What it is**

Vulnerability is the willingness to openly share your thoughts, feelings, uncertainties, and needs without hiding behind defenses or pretending to have it all figured out. It's the act of letting others see your authentic self, including imperfections and fears.

### **How it is used within the Solution Seeking System**

Vulnerability is what transforms Mutual Understanding from surface-level dialogue into a meaningful connection. It signals trust and invites reciprocity; when one person is willing to be open, it lowers the other's guard. In Introspection, vulnerability helps you acknowledge your own biases and mistakes; in Solution Seeking, it allows you to ask for what you truly need.

## 2. Best Practices

- Share personal perspectives honestly, even when they reveal uncertainty or discomfort.
- Use vulnerability intentionally, share what is relevant to the conversation or relationship.
- Pair vulnerability with boundaries to protect your well-being.
- Acknowledge when you don't have an answer, and invite collaboration.
- Model vulnerability as a leader to normalize openness in others.

### 3. Goals

- Build trust and deepen relationships through openness.
- Create space for authentic dialogue rather than guarded negotiation.
- Reduce misunderstandings caused by hidden emotions or unspoken needs.
- Encourage a culture where mistakes and growth are accepted.

### 4. Antigoals

- Oversharing in ways that derail the conversation or overwhelm others.
- Using vulnerability as a strategy for manipulation.
- Expecting instant emotional reciprocity from others.
- Sharing sensitive information without ensuring psychological safety.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Rehearsed Honesty:** Prepare one honest statement you've been avoiding and practice delivering it calmly.
- **Small-Step Sharing:** Start with low-risk disclosures to build trust over time.
- **Need Naming:** Clearly state what you need from the other person instead of hinting or assuming they'll guess.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: How do I know when it's safe to be vulnerable?**

A: Look for signs of good faith, respectful listening, and emotional safety. Start small and increase openness as trust is earned.

**Q: Won't vulnerability make me look weak?**

A: In healthy systems, vulnerability signals strength, it shows courage to be honest despite risk.

### Example of Solution Seeking in Action

A team member admits in a meeting that they've been feeling overwhelmed and falling behind. Rather than hiding the issue, their openness prompts the team to redistribute tasks temporarily and create a workload review process. The honesty prevents burnout and builds stronger team support.

---

# Patience

## 1. Description

### What it is

Patience is the ability to give time and space for understanding, problem-solving, and growth to occur without rushing the process or forcing outcomes. It involves tolerating discomfort, uncertainty, and delays while maintaining a constructive mindset.

### How it is used within the Solution Seeking System

Patience supports all three stages of the Communication Protocol:

- A. In **Introspection** it allows for deeper self-reflection before acting.
- B. In **Mutual Understanding** it provides the time necessary for someone to fully express themselves without interruption.
- C. In **Solution Seeking**, it ensures solutions are well-thought-out and sustainable rather than rushed and reactive.

## 2. Best Practices

- Allow others to finish their thoughts before responding.
- Recognize that emotional processing takes different amounts of time for different people.
- Break complex issues into smaller steps to make the process manageable.
- Schedule follow-up conversations rather than forcing resolution in one sitting.
- Stay present during slow or repetitive dialogue; sometimes repetition is part of clarity.

### 3. Goals

- Create conditions where deeper truths and solutions can emerge naturally.
- Reduce pressure that can lead to defensiveness or poor decision-making.
- Demonstrate respect for the other person's pace of communication.
- Improve solution quality by allowing time for reflection and adjustment.

### 4. Antigoals

- Using patience as an excuse to avoid addressing a problem.
- Allowing harmful behavior to continue unchecked while “waiting it out.”
- Equating patience with passivity or disengagement.
- Forcing others to wait unnecessarily as a power move.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Pause Count:** In conversation, silently count to 3 before responding to ensure you've heard fully.
- **Timeline Check:** Ask, “Is this something we can revisit after we've had time to think it over?”
- **Reflection Rounds:** After a discussion, wait 24 hours and then reconvene to see if new insights emerged.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: What if the other person keeps delaying the conversation?**

A: Patience has limits; set a reasonable timeframe and hold both parties accountable to it.

**Q: Can patience make people think I'm not taking the issue seriously?**

A: Communicate clearly that you are intentionally allowing time for the best outcome, not avoiding action.

### Example of Solution Seeking in Action

Two coworkers disagree on a new customer service policy. Rather than forcing a decision mid-meeting, they agree to gather feedback from the team over the week. When they meet again, they incorporate several new perspectives that lead to a stronger, widely accepted policy.

---

# Fairness

## 1. Description

### **What it is**

Fairness is the practice of ensuring that decisions, actions, and outcomes are just, impartial, and considerate of everyone's needs and contributions. It means applying rules consistently while also taking into account individual circumstances.

### **How it is used within the Solution Seeking System**

Fairness is critical in the Solution Seeking stage, where final agreements must be equitable for all participants. It also fosters mutual understanding by ensuring that each person has an equal opportunity to speak, be heard, and influence the outcome. Fairness ensures that solutions do not privilege one person or group at the expense of another unless clearly justified and agreed upon.

## 2. Best Practices

- Apply standards consistently to similar situations.
- Actively seek input from all affected parties before deciding.
- Be transparent about the reasoning behind decisions.
- Consider both equality (same treatment) and equity (adjusted treatment to meet needs).
- Revisit decisions if new information shows they were not fair in practice.

### 3. Goals

- Build trust through consistent and transparent decision-making.
- Prevent favoritism, discrimination, or bias from influencing solutions.
- Create solutions that all parties see as reasonable and just.
- Support a culture where fairness is expected and upheld.

### 4. Antigoals

- Confusing fairness with always making everyone happy.
- Enforcing rules so rigidly that individual needs are ignored.
- Allowing personal bias to influence decisions.
- Using “fairness” as an excuse to avoid taking necessary action.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Fairness Audit:** Before finalizing a decision, ask: “If I were in each person’s position, would I still see this as fair?”
- **Equal Voice Round:** Ensure each person has the same uninterrupted speaking time in meetings.
- **Impact Check:** After implementing a decision, assess whether it had unintended unequal effects.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: What if fairness means some people get more than others?**

A: Fairness is not always sameness; equity sometimes requires different resources or support to create equal opportunity.

**Q: How do I handle accusations of unfairness?**

A: Listen openly, review the facts, and explain your reasoning. If you discover bias or oversight, adjust accordingly.

### Example of Solution Seeking in Action

A manager creates a new shift policy to rotate weekends evenly. One employee objects due to childcare needs. Instead of rigidly enforcing equal rotation, the Team works together to find a scheduling solution that works for everyone.

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## Integrity (Consistency)

### 1. Description

#### **What it is**

Integrity is the alignment of your actions, words, and values. It means doing what you say you will do, acting honestly, and making decisions that reflect your stated principles. Consistency is the practice of applying this alignment over time so that others can reliably predict your behavior based on your values.

#### **How it is used within the Solution Seeking System**

Integrity is the trust anchor of the Communication Protocol. It gives weight to your commitments during Solution Seeking and credibility to your perspective in Mutual Understanding. Consistency ensures that fairness, good faith, and other principles are not one-time gestures but an ongoing standard.

### 2. Best Practices

- Follow through on promises or communicate immediately if you can't.
- Apply the same standards to yourself that you expect from others.
- Be honest, even when it's uncomfortable or inconvenient.
- Admit mistakes quickly and take corrective action.
- Ensure your decisions and actions reflect the values you claim to hold.

### 3. Goals

- Build trust through reliability and honesty.
- Provide a stable foundation for collaboration and leadership.
- Reduce misunderstandings caused by unpredictable or contradictory behavior.
- Model the behaviors you expect in others.

### 4. Antigoals

- Acting according to convenience instead of principle.
- Saying one thing and doing another.
- Being so rigid in “consistency” that you refuse to adapt when new information emerges.
- Using integrity as a weapon to shame others rather than to guide your own behavior.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Commitment Log:** Track promises you make and follow up on them regularly.
- **Values Check:** Before acting, ask: “Does this match what I’ve said I stand for?”
- **Self-Application Drill:** Review your own behavior for consistency with the rules you enforce.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: What if keeping my word would cause harm I didn't foresee?**

A: Integrity includes being honest about changing course when necessary; explain the change, why it's needed, and how you'll repair any impact.

**Q: Can consistency ever become a problem?**

A: Yes, if it turns into inflexibility. True integrity includes adapting while staying true to your core values.

### Example of Solution Seeking in Action

A leader promises to review scheduling feedback before the next month's calendar. When they realize they can't meet the deadline, they inform the team in advance, explain the delay, and commit to a new timeline. The proactive honesty maintains trust despite the change.

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# Flexibility

## 1. Description

### **What it is**

Flexibility is the ability to adapt your approach, perspective, or plan in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected challenges, without abandoning your core values.

### **How it is used within the Solution Seeking System**

Flexibility keeps the Communication Protocol responsive and effective. In Mutual Understanding it allows you to adjust your assumptions as you hear new perspectives. In Solution Seeking, it helps generate creative, practical solutions that may differ from your initial ideas but better serve all participants.

## 2. Best Practices

- Listen openly to alternative ideas before making a decision.
- Treat unexpected changes as opportunities to reassess and improve.
- Distinguish between core principles (non-negotiable) and methods (adaptable).
- When possible, design solutions that can be adjusted if circumstances shift.
- Model adaptability so others feel safe suggesting changes.

### 3. Goals

- Prevent stagnation by encouraging innovation and responsiveness.
- Ensure solutions stay relevant and workable over time.
- Reduce conflict caused by rigid adherence to outdated plans.
- Support collaboration by showing willingness to meet others halfway.

### 4. Antigoals

- Changing direction so often that no one can rely on your commitments.
- Using flexibility as an excuse to avoid making decisions.
- Abandoning values or agreements at the first sign of difficulty.
- Adapting to accommodate harmful or unethical behavior.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Pivot Test:** Ask yourself, “If I had to change this plan tomorrow, what would remain essential?”
- **Option Mapping:** In brainstorming, identify at least three possible paths forward instead of defaulting to one.
- **Check-in Loop:** Build scheduled reviews into long-term solutions to see if adjustments are needed.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: How do I stay flexible without seeming inconsistent?**

A: Communicate why you're changing course and show how the new approach still aligns with your values.

**Q: What if flexibility is seen as a weakness?**

A: Frame adaptability as strength, being able to change without losing your principles is resilience, not weakness.

### Example of Solution Seeking in Action

A café changes suppliers to cut costs, but quality drops. Instead of insisting on the new supplier, the team reevaluates and negotiates a partial return to the old supplier for key items. The final approach balances quality, cost, and customer satisfaction.

# Critical Thinking

## 1. Description

### **What it is**

Critical Thinking is the disciplined process of analyzing information from many perspectives, questioning assumptions, and evaluating evidence before forming a conclusion or taking action. It combines curiosity with logic to avoid bias, emotional distortion, or groupthink.

### **How it is used within the Solution Seeking System**

Critical Thinking ensures that solutions are not just emotionally satisfying but also practical, evidence-based, and sustainable. In Introspection, it helps you separate feelings from facts. In Mutual Understanding, it helps you evaluate the accuracy and completeness of what you've heard. In Solution Seeking, it filters potential solutions to identify those most likely to work in real-world conditions.

## 2. Best Practices

- Verify facts before acting on them.
- Identify and challenge your own assumptions.
- Seek out multiple perspectives, especially those you disagree with.
- Consider long-term consequences, not just immediate relief.
- Use both qualitative (stories, experiences) and quantitative (data, metrics) information when evaluating options.

### 3. Goals

- Produce solutions that are effective, realistic, and equitable.
- Reduce the risk of decisions based solely on impulse or incomplete information.
- Encourage open, evidence-based dialogue.
- Strengthen the system's ability to adapt through informed evaluation.

### 4. Antigoals

- Using “logic” to dismiss emotions as irrelevant, feelings often contain important data.
- Overanalyzing to the point of paralysis (“analysis paralysis”).
- Using critical thinking as a tool to “win” rather than to learn.
- Ignoring context in favor of purely theoretical reasoning.

### 5. Practice Patterns / Education

- **Evidence First:** List what you know vs. what you assume.
- **Devil's Advocate Drill:** Intentionally argue the opposite of your belief to test its strength.
- **Outcome Projection:** For each possible solution, predict best, worst, and most likely outcomes.

## 6. FAQ / Common Issues

**Q: How do I use critical thinking without coming across as combative?**

A: Frame questions as curiosity-driven (“Help me understand how...”) rather than challenge-driven (“That doesn’t make sense”).

**Q: Can critical thinking slow down decision-making?**

A: Yes, but that’s often beneficial. Build in enough time to think without allowing the process to stall.

### Example of Solution Seeking in Action

A team is considering switching scheduling software after a vendor pitch. Instead of jumping on the new tool, they compare feature lists, test a trial version, and gather feedback from staff. They discover the existing system already supports the needed features, saving the team money and transition time.

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### Final Notes on Wisdom Principles

The Wisdom Principles are designed to work together. No single principle is sufficient on its own; each supports the others in creating a balanced approach to conflict resolution and collaboration. By applying them consistently, you strengthen the health of your system and the trust within your relationships.

# Chapter 4:

## Our Leadership Tools

The following examples are tools that we use and are great examples of the Communication Protocol being implemented in existing tools to make them compatible with the Solution Seeking System. You can make your own and use these!

### One-on-Ones

Regular, proactive check-ins to build trust, catch issues early, and grow relationships.

The desired outcomes of a One on One are:

- Sensing and addressing problems
- Establishing regular and healthy communication
- Relationship building

### Best Practices

- **Schedule One on Ones ahead of time.** It may be hard to find the time to do One on Ones so scheduling them out can make sure you have a regular frequency and you don't miss team members. Scheduling can also prevent people from feeling apprehension around the conversation or fear that they did something you want to address. It's a manifestation of "Clarity is Kindness".
- **Hold with regular frequency.** One on Ones can help dispel fears of confrontation with team members. It can help to normalize the act of communication. Make it something that feels healthy and that is looked forward to, instead of something to fear or that may have negative implications.
- **Take notes and act on them.** If concerns are uncovered or solutions are explored during a One on One make sure to write it down and find a way to act on that. Apply the solution to the system and make sure that the person

feels rewarded for participating in the communication protocol with you. This will build trust and make people feel that good faith works. It can push back cynicism and prove to people that we are in this together.

- **Listen and encourage.** One on Ones are about giving people a place to open up and talk about their experiences, thoughts, concerns, and generally seek understanding from those in a position of authority or their peers. It's not the right place to address pre-existing concerns unless the topic is broached by the person participating in the One on One. Listen and let them lead the conversation where they want it to go, offer questions and lighthearted guidance to help explore. You're here to support and learn how you can support better.

## When to give One on Ones (Triggers)

- Regularly at predictable intervals under normal circumstances
  - Every month is a good rule of thumb
- If you observe a behavior that doesn't seem healthy but doesn't break a rule and isn't specific enough for you to have a Targeted Conversation
  - Being generally sad but still performing job well
  - Seeming to engage less with others
  - Losing interest in things or seeming less motivated

## How to give One on Ones

1. Reach out to Schedule a One on One
  - a. This can be through text, email, team chat program, or in person
  - b. Make sure it's an ask, not a demand. Consent to talk is important if you want people to feel comfortable
  - c. Get a time for later that day or a day and time secured and on the calendar
2. Make sure everyone is comfortable!
  - a. Get a good space for the meeting that feels private
  - b. Ask if you can get them food or drink if possible
  - c. Make sure no one feels pressured or rushed
3. Be prepared with your notebook
4. Thank them for agreeing to sit down with you for the One-on-One and explain what a One-on-One is
  - a. "This is a time for us to just chat, hang out, and talk. We can talk about whatever you want. One-on-ones aren't about anything in particular,

just providing the space for us to make sure we understand each other."

5. Ask good questions
  - a. Question ideas in case the conversation needs a push
    - i. "How have you been doing since our last one-on-one?"
    - ii. "Are things going smoothly with everyone at work?"
    - iii. "What do you feel passionate about right now in life? Is there anything we can do to help you pursue that?"
    - iv. "Do you feel well supported by the team here?"
    - v. "Do you have any feedback for me or anything on your mind? This is a great time for us to talk about that if you do!"
6. Identify and explore problems.
  - a. If something concerning comes up that you can see becoming a problem socially, within the organization, or otherwise, now is the time to use the Core Communication Protocol to explore that.
  - b. Use Introspection to apply compassion and find the right questions
  - c. Seek mutual understanding and make sure you can see how they feel and why. Help them to get a more complete view of the problem as well.
  - d. Find a Solution that can be applied
    - i. It may be
      1. improving communication
      2. changing perception of the situation
      3. making a plan to address a problem
      4. building a tool/habit/pattern that can be used in a situation
    - ii. Make sure to follow up and see how that is working. Sometimes a solution needs a few attempts.
7. When the conversation is over, thank them and make sure they feel genuinely appreciated for being brave enough and vulnerable enough to share with you. It is not an easy task and can take a lot of energy.
8. Follow up and make sure to act on anything you promised to act on. It will damage your credibility if you don't, and build trust if you do!

The One-on-One is a relationship-building basic, and it's how you listen for potential problems that people may either not be aware of yet or be afraid to address for some reason or another. It's also a way to sort out things you can do to better serve those you lead.

## Feedback

Meant to correct behaviours and create understanding while offering a chance to ask questions. Should teach the reason behind a rule or practice. It can also serve to detect outdated policies.

### Desired outcomes of Feedback are

- Detecting outdated rules/practices
- Teaching the reason behind a rule/practice
- Correcting Behaviors
- Building trust

### Best Practices

1. **When possible, pull a person aside to give feedback.** Privacy eliminates outside pressures and possible insecurities.
2. **Be clear.** Beating around the bush just makes people work to understand you; you should be the one doing the heavy lifting and making sure that you include all necessary information.
3. **Be Kind.** Taking feedback takes vulnerability and bravery; respect that and make sure that you're coming from a genuine intention to teach and help. Use the **Introspection step in the Communication Protocol** to make sure that you aren't holding onto any secondary emotions and that you understand yourself.
4. **Explain Reasons.** Explaining the reason for a rule or guideline helps to make sure the feedback is understood well, but also allows for an opportunity to reexamine the purpose of the rule in the first place. Maybe the need has changed, and this can be an opportunity to find a new Solution that can be applied.

### When to give feedback (Triggers)

- When a **behavior is observed that doesn't conform to the system**
  - Breaking a rule
  - Performing a role incorrectly

- When an **inefficient behavior is observed** that you can help with
  - Making a mistake you've made in the past, and you may have some experience to share
  - Doing something in an unnecessarily difficult way
  - Someone being unaware of something that may help them
  
- Generally, when it's **something small** and not particularly personal or sensitive that **you want to help someone with.**

## How to give feedback

1. Use the **Introspection step in the Communication Protocol** to access the situation. Do this before you give the feedback.
  
2. Decide whether to ask the person you want to give feedback to to step aside with you or to give the feedback more quickly in the moment.
  - a. Give feedback quickly without pulling someone aside if
    - i. very urgent; like a customer's experience is on the line, or a mistake can be prevented
    - ii. not particularly complicated; guidance on a procedure that's quick and easy
    - iii. expected, like during a training process
  - b. Ask the person to step aside if
    - i. more dense information; if it's going to take a bit of explaining, and you expect questions
    - ii. The receiver looks stressed; the person you're talking to looks stressed or may benefit from a short breather
  
3. Ask for the person's attention (pull aside if necessary)
  
4. Explain your thoughts
  - a. Ask any questions needed if you need more information
  - b. Explain what you wanted to teach
  - c. Explain why that rule / best practice/guidance is in place
  
5. Allow for conversation or questions
  - a. be eager to answer questions
  - b. explore any thoughts the receiver has
  - c. This is where you may be able to detect obsolete practices and find solutions

- d. This is also where a lot of the learning will happen for both the giver and receiver of the feedback.

The whole process **should take about 30 seconds to 5 minutes**, leaning towards brevity. Sometimes, larger problems may reveal themselves to be necessary as a result of giving feedback. Those larger conversations are usually handled using the Targeted Conversation tool to avoid taking too much time right there on the spot.

## Targeted Conversations

When feedback isn't enough, or when something is complicated, involves emotions, or is more nuanced. Always private and works towards mutual understanding, then a solution to the problem. It should serve to build trust with one another and show good faith.

### Desired outcomes of Targeted Conversations are

- Addressing a specific problem
- Creating Mutual Understanding
- Finding a Solution that can be applied
- Building Trust

### Best Practices

- **Pull a person aside to do a Targeted Conversation.** Privacy eliminates outside pressures and possible insecurities.
- **Set the Table.** Language is subjective and we don't all have the same understanding of a topic or idea. Making sure to recognize that and respect it will help the rest of the conversation go more smoothly. Think about setting a table so that you can eat a meal with some friends. You need to have all the plates, silverware, and napkins out so that its easier to eat the meal. You could do it without all that but it would be harder and messier. For a conversation like this setting the table would be talking about the concepts, terminology, and ensuring the person you're talking to has what they need to understand your thoughts.
- **Be clear.** Beating around the bush just makes people work to understand you, you should be the one doing the heavy lifting and making sure that you include all necessary information.
- **Be Kind.** These conversations require vulnerability and bravery, respect that and make sure that you're coming from a genuine intention to teach and help. Use the Introspection step in the Communication Protocol to make sure that you aren't holding onto any secondary emotions but instead using compassion.

- **Be a good host.** You're asking someone to have a conversation with you in the hopes that you can find a solution that can be effective and helpful. Make sure to be a good host so that people feel encouraged to participate with that process, more at ease, and more appreciated. We try to get water, some food, and anything else that could make the participant feel more comfortable. Being well prepared and having put thought into your plan for the meeting is also a part of being a good host. If they can see you cared enough to really try, they will feel more inclined to as well.

## When to give a Targeted Conversation (Triggers)

- When a **repetitive behavior is observed that doesn't conform to the system**
  - Breaking a rule consistently
  - Performing a role incorrectly, even after attempts to give feedback
- When there are **chronic behavior, social, or communication issues**(especially if they have sharply increased in frequency)
  - Seeming disengaged or uninterested regularly
  - Regular difficulty communicating with others
  - Seeming frustrated but not voluntarily talking about it
- When a **more serious violation of the system** happens for the first time.
  - A policy or rule was violated that is important, but they haven't been talked to about it before.
- **Sharp emotional or behavioral changes** that are concerning

## How to give a Targeted Conversation

A **Targeted Conversation follows the Communication Protocol**. The only addition is the need for a bit more emphasis on how the problem being addressed affects the greater system you're a part of(business in this case), rather than just the more local interpersonal system(their and your relation with each other).

1. Prepare Yourself First
  - a. **Use the Introspection step of the Communication Protocol.**
  - b. Identify your real concerns, separate emotion from observation, and ensure you're entering with compassion and good faith.
2. Create Privacy and Safety
  - a. Pull the person aside in a private setting.

- b. Ensure there are no outside pressures, distractions, or onlookers.
3. Set the Table
  - a. Begin by clarifying terms, context, and intentions.
  - b. Explain why you're having the conversation and what you hope to accomplish.
  - c. Confirm that they have the background they need to understand your perspective.
4. Clearly Describe the Problem
  - a. State the specific behavior, pattern, or incident you are addressing.
  - b. Avoid vague language; clarity is kindness.
  - c. Frame the issue in terms of how it impacts both them and the larger system.
5. Invite Their Perspective
  - a. Transition by asking them to share how they see the issue.
  - b. Listen without interruption and check your understanding by summarizing what you hear.
  - c. Show empathy and patience, even (and especially) if emotions are high.
6. Work Toward Mutual Understanding
  - a. Use clarifying and reflective questions to uncover root causes.
  - b. Recognize emotions without judgment.
  - c. Ensure both parties feel seen and understood before moving forward.
7. Shift to Solution Seeking
  - a. Collaboratively explore options for improvement.
  - b. Make solutions specific, actionable, and connected to the health of the overall system.
  - c. Confirm mutual agreement and record the plan if necessary.
8. Follow Up
  - a. Revisit the conversation after an agreed period.
  - b. Check whether the solution is working and whether further adjustment is needed.

## Solution Seeking Sessions

Formal, collaborative problem-solving. This is almost identical to Targeted conversions, but it's more formal and documented. It's meant to signal a more serious problem and work to produce a solution that can be implemented.

### Desired Outcomes of Solution Seeking Sessions

- Formally and Clearly signaling the need for change
- Finding a solution to a problem that causes severe damage to a system
- Clear Communication about what the problem is
- Documentation and formal process are meant to allow more options in solution seeking

### Best Practices

- **Pull a person aside to do a Solution Seeking.** Privacy eliminates outside pressures and possible insecurities.
- **Set the Table.** Language is subjective and we don't all have the same understanding of a topic or idea. Making sure to recognize that and respect it will help the rest of the conversation go more smoothly. Think about setting a table so that you can eat a meal with some friends. You need to have all the plates, silverware, and napkins out so that its easier to eat the meal. You could do it without all that but it would be harder and messier. For a conversation like this setting the table would be talking about the concepts, terminology, and ensuring the person you're talking to has what they need to understand your thoughts.
- **Be clear.** Beating around the bush just makes people work to understand you; you should be the one doing the heavy lifting and making sure that you include all necessary information.
- **Be Kind.** These conversations require vulnerability and bravery, respect that and make sure that you're coming from a genuine intention to teach and help. Use the Introspection step in the Communication Protocol to make sure that you aren't holding onto any secondary emotions but instead using compassion.

- **Be a good host.** You're asking someone to have a conversation with you in the hopes that you can find a solution that can be effective and helpful. Make sure to be a good host so that people feel encouraged to participate with that process, more at ease, and more appreciated. We try to get water, some food, and anything else that could make the participant feel more comfortable. Being well prepared and having put thought into your plan for the meeting is also a part of being a good host. If they can see you cared enough to really try, they will feel more inclined to as well.

## When to give a Solution Seeking (Triggers)

- When a **repetitive behavior is observed that doesn't conform to the system**
  - Breaking a rule consistently, even after attempts to give feedback and targeted conversations
  - Performing a role incorrectly, even after attempts to give feedback and targeted conversations
- When there are **chronic behavior, social, or communication issues** (especially if they have sharply increased in frequency)
  - Seeming disengaged or uninterested regularly
  - Regular difficulty communicating with others
  - Seeming frustrated but not voluntarily talking about it
  - Targeted Conversations haven't worked
- When a **severe violation of the system** happens for the first time.
  - A policy or rule was violated that is important and risks imminent damage to the safety of the System.

## How to give a Solution Seeking Session

A **Solution Seeking Sessions follow the Communication Protocol.** Like the Targeted Conversation Leadership Tool, there needs to be a bit more emphasis on how the problem being addressed affects the greater system you're a part of (business in this case), rather than just the more local interpersonal system (their and your relation with each other).

An additional concern that needs to be added to the Solution Seeking Session is the need for greater preparedness and documentation. This is meant to be the mechanism that allows us to handle bad actors who may not be ready to work with you and find a solution.

1. Prepare Yourself First
  - a. **Use the Introspection step of the Communication Protocol.**
  - b. Identify your real concerns, separate emotion from observation, and ensure you're entering with compassion and good faith.
  - c. Create and store a document that is a record of your preparation and your plan for the conversation.
  
2. Create Privacy and Safety
  - a. Pull the person aside in a private setting.
  - b. Ensure there are no outside pressures, distractions, or onlookers.
  
3. Set the Table
  - a. Begin by clarifying terms, context, and intentions.
  - b. Explain why you're having the conversation and what you hope to accomplish.
  - c. Confirm that they have the background they need to understand your perspective.
  
4. Clearly Describe the Problem
  - a. State the specific behavior, pattern, or incident you are addressing.
  - b. Avoid vague language; clarity is kindness.
  - c. Frame the issue in terms of how it impacts both them and the larger system.
  
5. Invite Their Perspective
  - a. Transition by asking them to share how they see the issue.
  - b. Listen without interruption and check your understanding by summarizing what you hear.
  - c. Show empathy and patience, even (and especially) if emotions are high.
  
6. Work Toward Mutual Understanding
  - a. Use clarifying and reflective questions to uncover root causes.
  - b. Recognize emotions without judgment.
  - c. Ensure both parties feel seen and understood before moving forward.
  
7. Shift to Solution Seeking
  - a. Collaboratively explore options for improvement.
  - b. Make solutions specific, actionable, and connected to the health of the overall system.
  - c. Confirm mutual agreement and record the plan if necessary.

8. Follow Up
  - a. Document the Solution Seeking Session and its results.
  - b. Send an email to the other party that recounts how the Solution Seeking Session went and the agreed-upon solution.
    - i. This serves as a receipt and allows for further discussion.
9. Check Progress
  - a. Revisit the conversation after an agreed period.
  - b. Check whether the solution is working and whether further adjustment is needed.

## Final Thoughts on our own Leadership Tools

These tools work for us within our organization, but like people, each System (relationship, organization, club, etc.) is very different and may require different kinds of tools in order to keep them operating smoothly. Don't be afraid to invent your own or draw from other successful toolsets to get what you need in order for your living system to thrive!

# Thank you for reading this

We built this system because we know that communication and collaboration are some of the most important and hardest things we can do as humans. They're also the root of love, friendship, community, and everything good we can experience here on earth with one another.

We want to see an end to poverty because it's affected us so immensely, and providing a simple way to help people be great communicators and leaders is a step on the path towards that goal. With this, we can help create stronger Cooperatives and other kinds of community-centric, people-centric organizations. Maybe within our lifetime, we can see all people in America and beyond flourishing in systems that provide enough for everyone they are claiming to serve.

**We all deserve a better future.**

**Let's build it.**