

Workbook

Think-Write-Share & Six Strategic Questions

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Red Team Coaching™



The general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple ere the battle is fought.

The general who loses a battle makes but few calculations beforehand. Thus do many calculations lead to victory, and few calculations to defeat.

Sun Tzu

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Welcome!

Dear Coach,

I want to commend you on your decision to elevate your coaching skills by registering for the Red Team Coaching Boot Camp.

This intensive 90-minute session is your gateway to the world of Red Team Thinking. During the Boot Camp, you'll discover the origins and principles of Red Team Thinking, and how it can revolutionize your coaching practice. You'll be introduced to the science and psychology behind this innovative approach, which has its roots in military and intelligence strategies.

Most importantly, you'll learn two powerful techniques that you can immediately implement to help your clients think more strategically, engage in more productive conversations with their teams, and navigate complex challenges with confidence.

We're excited to bring this cognitive capability to the global coaching community, where I believe it will have an even greater impact. Red Team Thinking is uniquely suited to help leaders and decision-makers become more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty - essential skills in our rapidly changing world.

The Red Team Coaching Boot Camp is designed to equip you with insights and tools to help your clients make better decisions, lead more effectively, and achieve greater success in their careers. As a result, you'll become an even more valuable asset to your clients.

I'm confident you'll find these techniques immensely useful in your coaching practice. This Boot Camp is just the beginning of your Red Team Coaching journey. It will provide you with a powerful differentiator and make you stand out in the competitive coaching marketplace. More importantly, the enhanced value you'll bring to your clients will position you as an indispensable ally and sought-after advisor.

Onward!



Bryce G. Hoffman

Red Team Thinking® for Coaches

What Is Red Team Coaching

Red Team Coaching is the next step in our evolution of Red Team Thinking. Red Team Thinking is a new approach to decision making based on *decision support red teaming*, a revolutionary methodology developed by the military and intelligence agencies to help organizations understand and navigate the risks and opportunities presented by today's complex and rapidly changing world.

Red Team Thinking relies on a set of applied critical thinking and groupthink-mitigation techniques to meet the challenge of today's volatile, uncertain, and hyperconnected operating environment. These tools allow individuals and organizations to make better decisions faster and create plans with optionality that are resilient and adaptable.

We have modified these tools and techniques to meet specific needs of coaches. They will help you help your clients:

- Engage critical thinking
- Enable distributed decision making
- Encourage diversity of thought
- Identify and understand threats and opportunities
- Make better decisions faster in their complex world
- Develop "The Three Cs" – **CLARITY**, **CAPABILITY**, and **CULTURE**

Engaging critical thinking: Survey after survey has revealed that applied critical thinking is fast becoming one of the most essential skills for leaders today – and one of the most difficult to find. While critical thinking was once an essential part of post-secondary education in many countries, that is no longer the case. Colleges and universities have increasingly focused their curricula on more specialized courses that are ostensibly designed to prepare students for their future careers in relatively narrow fields. Unfortunately, this narrowed focus often leaves graduates without a practical understanding of how to think and make decisions in the real world. Red Team Coaching will help you help your clients develop these essential skills and use them in their work every single day.

Enabling distributed decision making: Distributed decision making means allowing frontline leaders – those at the coalface who have the best visibility and the most current information – to make decisions themselves in order to respond effectively in real time to the challenges and opportunities they are facing. Doing so makes organizations for adaptable, more resilient, and better able to cope with new developments and changing circumstances. In the military,

this approach is referred to as *mission command*, or *Auftragstaktik* by the Germans who pioneered this concept in 1800s and used it with great effect in World War I and World War II. Since then, other nations have tried hard to emulate this approach by giving lower-ranking officers the authority to think for themselves and modify their orders if necessary to achieve the desired outcome. Businesses around the world are also waking up to the benefits of this approach, but most still struggle to implement it. Red Team Coaching helps coaches help their clients do just that by showing them how they can give their subordinates the tools they need to make good decisions for themselves – and the confidence to allow it.

Encouraging diversity of thought: Diversity and inclusion are hot topics in almost every workplace today. Companies and other organizations say they want to promote diversity and inclusion. Some spend a great deal of time and money on training and awareness programs. Many make a conscious, and often well-publicized, effort to promote and recruit individuals from diverse backgrounds. However, what most organizations don't do is actually listen to the diverse perspectives and ideas these people bring to the table. That's a shame, because listening to different perspectives is one of the keys to good decision making. The best idea can't win if it is never even heard. That is why Red Team Coaching includes an array of techniques designed to help your clients surface ideas and insights from their entire team – because as the head of our D&I practice, Ellie Cloke, likes to say, "Diversity without inclusion is delusion."

Exposes threats and opportunities: One of the greatest fears every leader faces is the fear of the unknown. Not knowing what you don't know makes it hard to sleep at night and difficult to move forward with confidence. Therefore, if you can help your clients see potential risks that lie ahead *and* uncover opportunities they might have missed, you will make yourself an invaluable ally. Red Team Coaching will help you do just that by providing you with tools you can use to help your clients gain better visibility into the challenges they face and develop new options they had not considered.

Making better decisions faster in today's complex world: The aim of all of the above is to help individuals and organizations consistently make good decisions as quickly possible. Speed is essential because things change quickly in today's world. What was the right decision yesterday, may not be the right decision tomorrow. A leader must make sure that the choices they have made remain sound and be prepared to modify their plans when necessary. That is why we refer to decision making as a *practice*, not a *process*. A process has a start and a finish; a practice is something you do regularly that improves your performance over time. The tools and techniques you will learn in this course are designed to help leaders make good decision making second nature. That is the goal of Red Team Thinking, and it should be your goal as a Red Team Coach!

Develop “The Three Cs”: By using the Red Team Thinking tools and cultivating the Red Team Thinking mindset, you can help your clients develop what we like to refer to as The Three Cs – CLARITY, CAPABILITY, and CULTURE – that we believe are essential to the success of any organization. Let’s look at each of these in more detail to understand why:

- **CLARITY:** Every organization shrouds itself in comforting lies that are designed to insulate it from the hard truths it doesn’t want to look at. Yet, it is these comforting lies that hold us back – both as individuals and as organizations. Only by dispelling this fog of lies and tackling those truths can we move forward. This is what we mean by CLARITY. But CLARITY is also about creating alignment, because when people are confused about their mission and unclear about their goal, they cannot row together in the same direction.
- **CAPABILITY:** Applied critical thinking and problem-solving skills have been identified by companies around the world as the most essential to success in today’s challenging and uncertain world. Developing this CAPABILITY in your clients is a key aim of Red Team Coaching. Developing this same CAPABILITY in organizations is a key aim of Red Team Thinking. Why? Because seeing the truth doesn’t matter much if you can’t do anything about it.
- **CULTURE:** By creating CLARITY and developing this CAPABILITY, you can start creating a Red Team CULTURE – a culture that is innovative, resilient, and ready for whatever tomorrow brings. This is essential, because as you have no doubt heard before, CULTURE eats strategy for breakfast every single day.

What Red Team Thinking Is

Red Team Thinking is both a mindset and a set of tools. The tools of Red Team Thinking are drawn from the tradecraft of intelligence analysts and the research of cognitive psychologists. They are designed to challenge assumptions, pressure-test plans, surface alternative perspectives, generate new options, and ensure that the best ideas win, regardless of where they come from in an organization. These techniques work well enough by themselves, but the real power comes from coupling these techniques with a Red Team Thinking mindset. Adopting a Red Team Thinking mindset means taking nothing for granted. It means thinking the unthinkable, questioning the unquestionable, and being willing to challenge everything – not for the sake of argument, but to ensure that what you think is true actually is. Once you start looking at the world with this critical eye, you will be amazed at what you see. You will be stunned to discover how poorly thought-out many plans are, how little people think about the second- and third-order impacts of their decisions, and how much what passes for planning is really just kicking the can down the road. It’s like taking the Red Pill and seeing through The Matrix. Once you do, you can’t unsee it. Gaining that penetrating insight will help you help your clients see more clearly, too.

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Red Team Thinking is both a science and an art. Red Team Thinking is rooted in cognitive science and the psychology of decision making. For centuries, it was assumed that human beings generally made the best decisions possible with the information they had available. But in the past few decades, researchers have found that is not the case. They have discovered an uncomfortable truth: Each of us – no matter how smart, well-educated, or experienced we may be – are influenced by a dizzying array of cognitive biases and logical fallacies that skew our decision making and lead us in unintended directions without us even being aware of it. Red Team Thinking not only makes us aware of these biases and fallacies, but also offers us a means of overcoming them. The art of Red Team Thinking lies in deciding which tools and techniques to use under which circumstances. The Red Team Thinking tools are like the clubs in a golf bag. Each one has its own purpose, so using them effectively involves more than just knowing how to swing them correctly. You also must know where and when to use them. Successful use of Red Team Thinking also depends not just on knowing when to use these tools, but also when to stop using them and act.

Red Team Thinking is about embracing change. Red Team Thinking is predicated on the understanding that there is no end state for any company and no equilibrium in the marketplace. Change is the only constant. No matter how dominant or great an organization or business is today, the only way it can stay great is to continue to evolve. As MIT management guru Peter Senge wrote in his seminal work *The Fifth Discipline*, “a corporation cannot be ‘excellent’ in the sense of having arrived at a permanent excellence; it is always in the state of practicing the disciplines of learning, of getting better or worse.” By understanding this yourself, you will be able to help your clients better cope with this reality and use it to their advantage.

What Red Team Thinking Is Not

Red Team Thinking is not an excuse for inaction. General George S. Patton famously said, “A good plan, violently executed now, is better than a perfect plan next week.” But an unexamined plan will never be as good as one that has been subjected to critical analysis. Red Team Thinking can be used to provide an in-depth, formal analysis when that is merited, but these tools and techniques are designed to be used quickly and efficiently without slowing down the decision-making process or preventing a decision from being made when one is required. By using them in this way, you will be able to help your clients make better decisions faster.

Red Team Thinking is not fortune-telling. Some of the Red Team Thinking tools are designed to help us understand the different ways in which the future *could* unfold so that you can modify our plans to better ensure success or mitigate the impact of potential failures. Using them, you can help your clients better navigate their complex world. But none of these techniques offer a crystal ball. The only way to avoid surprise is to expect the unexpected. By understanding that as a coach, you can help your clients prepare for whatever tomorrow brings.

Red Team Thinking is not negative or cynical. There is a big difference between being critical and being negative, just as there is a big difference between being sceptical and being cynical. These are important distinctions. Sceptics ask tough questions to make sure they are making the right choice and moving forward in the best direction; cynics ask tough questions to undermine confidence and cast everything in a negative light. As a Red Team Coach, you should always be sceptical, but they should never be cynical. You should always use these tools in a constructive and collegial manner, and you should teach your clients to do the same. Otherwise, they run the risk of alienating their colleagues, making it impossible for them to listen to their analysis and learn from their insights.

Red Team Thinking is not a panacea. Red Team Thinking is not a replacement for a good product or a compelling service, but it can help to make a company's products and services better. Red Team Thinking cannot overcome the business cycle, but it can help a company better weather its ups and downs. Red Team Thinking cannot prevent new competitors from entering the marketplace, but it can help a company respond more effectively when they do. Red Team Thinking cannot change an organization that does not want to evolve, but it can provide powerful insights and guidance to those that do. Red Team Thinking is not a replacement for good leadership, but it can make a good leader great.

The Origins of Red Team Thinking

"Red teams are established by an enterprise to challenge aspects of that very enterprise's plans, programs, assumptions, etc. It is this aspect of deliberate challenge that distinguishes red teaming from other management tools."

U.S. Department of Defense

Red Team Thinking's roots run deep – all the way back to the Greek philosopher Socrates (c. 470-399 B.C.E.), who used probing questions to challenge the prevailing wisdom of his contemporaries and uncover powerful truths. This was really the start of critical thinking, but it did not end there.

During the European Renaissance Pope Sixtus V created the office of the *advocatus diaboli* or "devil's advocate" in 1587 C.E. to deliberately challenge candidates for sainthood. This appears to be the first instance of an organization developing a formal process for challenging its own thinking in a contrarian way, but it was not the last.

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In the early 1800s, the Prussian military developed a new concept called *Kriegsspiel* or “wargaming” that it used to stress-test strategies through tabletop exercises before implementing them on the battlefield. To do this, Prussian officers divided themselves into two groups. One group played the Prussian side, represented on the gameboard by pieces painted in their national color, blue. They were the *blue team*. The other side played enemy, represented by red game pieces. They were the *red team*. This is where the terms red team and *red teaming* originate. It is also the first example of an organization using a formal, deliberate process to stress-test its own strategies, and militaries around the world soon adopted this approach once they saw how effective it could be.

During the Cold War, for example, the United States military and intelligence agencies set up red teams to get inside the head of their Soviet adversaries to try to understand their thinking and anticipate their moves on the global geopolitical chessboard. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the disastrous wars that followed them, the American military and intelligence agencies began using a similar approach to challenge not just their strategies and plans, but also the assumptions and beliefs that informed these strategies and plans in order to make better decisions. They called this approach *decision-support red teaming*.

This formal red teaming approach proved to be tremendously valuable and was rapidly adopted by allied militaries and intelligence agencies around the world. However, it also created its own challenges. Formal red teaming:

- Requires outside facilitators or a dedicated, in-house team
- Requires extensive training
- Can be time-consuming
- Can create political challenges within an organization
- Can slow down decision making if not conducted in a focused and disciplined manner

Red Team Thinking was created to overcome these deficiencies and enable individuals and organizations to employ these game-changing tools and techniques more easily and effectively.

Red Team Thinking, in contrast:

- Does not require a separate red team
- Can be used informally with a small, ad-hoc group or even individually
- Easier to learn and simpler to practice
- Works at every level of an organization
- Does not require buy-in from others
- Is fast and adaptable, allowing you to make better decisions faster

Red Team Coaching

As stated previously, Red Team Coaching represents a further evolution of Red Team Thinking. It is designed to use these same principles and techniques to help individuals become better leaders, better managers, and better decision makers. Understanding how to help individuals think for themselves – and to do so critically, creatively, and three-dimensionally – is the first step to helping organization create a Red Team Culture.

Moreover, mastering the techniques you learn in this course with individual coaching clients one-on-one will allow you to better lead group red teaming exercises if you choose to continue your training and become a Certified Red Team Instructor and, ultimately, a Certified Red Team Leader.

Why We Need Red Team Thinking Today

"In 2025, analytical thinking, creativity, and flexibility will be among the most sought-after skills."

World Economic Forum (October 2020)

"All humans think, but few consciously focus on the process of thinking."

Training Industry (March 2022)

"Demand for ... higher cognitive skills will grow."

McKinsey (June 2022)

Applied critical thinking and decision making are two of the most needed skills in the world today. Demand for these skills is so high because we now live and work in a world defined by:

- **Volatility**
- **Uncertainty**
- **Complexity**
- **Ambiguity**
- **Hyperconnectivity**

This was the case before the present pandemic, and the world has only become more volatile, more uncertain, more complex, more ambiguous, and more hyperconnected since Covid-19 first emerged.

The other reason we need Red Team Thinking is because most organizations die from self-inflicted wounds. If you study the history of business you will find few corporations that went bankrupt because of a new competitor or a new technology; rather, it was their reaction to that new competitor or new technology (or lack of reaction) that destroyed their business. Others have fallen victim to internal politics and infighting. Red Team Thinking is designed to combat complacency, overcome inertia, and help companies think disruptively about their own business before someone else disrupts them.

The Psychology of Red Teaming

Red Team Thinking is based on the latest research in neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and human decision making. Scientists and psychologists working in these fields have identified two forms of thinking.

- **System 1 Thinking:** Automatic, intuitive, instinctual.
- **System 2 Thinking:** Deliberate, methodical, analytical.

Dr. Daniel Kahneman, who won the Nobel Prize for his work in this area, calls System 1 Thinking “a machine for jumping to conclusions.” System 2 Thinking is much more rigorous and reliable. But there is a problem: “Its operations are effortful, and one of its main characteristics is laziness, a reluctance to invest more effort than is strictly necessary. As a consequence, the thoughts and actions that System 2 believes it has chosen are often guided by ... System 1.”

That leads us to make some very bad decisions, both as individuals and as organizations. Why? Because all of us – no matter how smart we are, no matter how well-educated we are, no matter how experienced we are, no matter how successful we are – fall victim to a dizzying array of cognitive biases and heuristics that skew our thinking in ways we are not even aware of.

- **Cognitive Bias:** Cognitive biases are inherent, systematic errors in our thinking that follow predictable patterns.
- **Mental Heuristics:** Heuristics are often-unconscious mental shortcuts that help us make quick decisions – though not necessarily the correct ones.

How does Red Team Thinking help?

Red Team Thinking helps overcome cognitive bias, mitigate groupthink, and improve organizational decision making by:

- Offering tools to counter unconscious biases
- Engaging “System 2” thinking
- Providing techniques to surface alternative perspectives
- Allowing all voices to be heard
- Forcing you to challenge your own assumptions
- Leveraging the wisdom of the group to overcome the blind spots of the individual
- Enabling you to make better decisions faster in today’s complex world

Liberating Structures: Think-Write-Share

One thing a person cannot do, no matter how rigorous his analysis or heroic his imagination, is to draw up a list of things that would never occur to him.

Thomas Schelling

To further support the concept of Red Team Thinking, we use a number of simple groupthink mitigation techniques that we collectively refer to as *Liberating Structures*. A core principle of Red Team Thinking is to start with divergent thinking and move toward convergent thinking in order to ensure that the best idea wins, regardless of where it arises from within the organization. Too often, people with good ideas keep them to themselves. Often, this is because they conflict with those espoused by others above them in the organizational hierarchy. In other cases, this self-censorship is the product of a lack of confidence. Either way, the only way to make sure the best idea gets a fair hearing is make sure that all ideas are on the table.

The most basic of these techniques, and the most important, is called *Think-Write-Share*.

Think-Write-Share

This technique may seem very simple, but it was originally developed by the U.S. Army and is based on some very powerful neuroscience. Here's how it works:

STEP 1: Start by asking team members to think about a problem or question.

STEP 2: Have each person write down their thoughts.

STEP 3: Then share them with the group.

This sequence is important because, too often, people working together in groups are in a rush to share their ideas. They are eager to demonstrate how smart they are or establish their expertise with the topic under consideration. Red Team Thinking is not about intellectual grandstanding; it is about taking the time to consider everybody's ideas fully.

More importantly, taking a minute to *think* before writing or speaking forces everyone to engage System 2 thinking. By requiring a short amount of time for silent reflection at the beginning, team members have a chance to consider their responses before sharing them with the group.

Writing those responses down is important, too, because it forces people to “own” their answers. It is far easier to equivocate when people are just blurting out the first thing that comes to mind. This method also forces people to pre-commit to an idea and not modify their thinking based on what they hear from the rest of the group. Moreover, neuroscience has demonstrated that the act of writing deepens cognition, further engaging System 2 thinking. That is why you may often find that you change or modify your initial answer when you start writing it down.

The final step, sharing, is essential because a key aim of Red Team Thinking is promoting diversity of thought and moving from divergent thinking to convergent thinking.

Thinking first, then writing down your ideas enables full focus when others are sharing their ideas, this is called *active listening*. This means making a conscious effort to hear not only the words that the other person is saying but also the complete message being communicated. In order to do this, you must pay attention to the other person very carefully. This doesn't often happen, as people are usually thinking about their own responses or who will get picked next. However, with *Think-Write-Share*, you can pay more attention to each speaker because you have already taken the time to think and write down your own thoughts.

Because this method is so easy to use and so powerful, we use *Think-Write-Share* as part of almost every other Red Team Thinking tool and technique. Even if you are working by yourself, there is still value in taking time to reflect, then writing those reflections down – even if you share them with no one other than yourself. If nothing else, you can look back on them later to see how close your initial thoughts were to hitting the mark.

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Using *Think-Write-Share* with your coaching clients

You can explain this method to your coaching clients and encourage them to use it during coaching sessions. You'll be surprised at how much more thoughtful they can be when you actually give them time to think!

More importantly, you can teach your clients how to use *Think-Write-Share* with their own teams. It will allow them to hold more productive meetings, surface the good ideas that reside inside their teams, and ensure that their subordinates' voices are being heard.

By employing *Think-Write-Share*, they will become better leaders and more effective decision makers.

Six Strategic Questions™

Strategy is about making choices.

Michael Porter

The pressures of today's rapidly changing and time-constrained world often lead us to make decisions without fully considering the consequences or even making sure those decisions will actually address the problems we are trying to solve.

To make sure that does not happen, a number of strategic planning processes have been developed. While these can help organizations make better strategic decisions, these processes are often reduced to a series of boxes to be checked by planners. Moreover, in many organizations, the processes that do exist are often subverted by political pressure or even the casual musings of senior leaders, which are too often taken as direct orders even when they are not intended as such. When this happens, the work of corporate planners becomes focused anticipating what senior leaders want, rather than on what the company needs to succeed.

To combat this dangerous tendency, we have developed a simple technique that you can use with your clients to help them consider their decisions more carefully and make sure that they achieve the desired goal. *Six Strategic Questions* is based on a simple practice developed by the U.S. Army's elite Delta Force. Whenever Delta is given a new mission, its officers ask a series of questions designed to help them better understand the likely impacts that mission will have. By beginning with a clear picture of the likely end-state, they are better able to formulate an effective plan for achieving the desired results without creating new problems.

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We have modified Delta's approach to address the specific needs of business planners and decision makers, and we have evolved it to include additional questions designed to help your clients better understand the problem they are trying to solve and the strategic choices they are making. By leading your clients through a Six Strategic Questions exercise helps them:

- Create **CLARITY** about what they are actually trying to do, which allows them to create alignment on their teams and ensure that everyone is rowing in the same direction.
- Give them the **CAPABILITY** to consider the follow-on effects and unintended consequences their decisions, as well as the impact those decisions will have on key internal and external stakeholders.
- Build a **CULTURE** that thinks before it acts.

This is a simple tool to use. Whenever a client is beginning work on a new strategy or needs to make an important decision, ask the following six questions:

1. **What is the problem you are trying to solve?**
2. **Is it the right problem?**
3. **If you do this, what are you choosing not to do?**
4. **If this plan is executed, what will your organization look like?**
5. **If this plan is executed, what will your key stakeholders look like?**
6. **If this plan is executed, what will your operating environment look like?**

You can use these same questions to help your clients stress-test an existing strategy or plan prior to execution as well. Just ensure that there is still time to modify the plan before you do, because second-guessing a plan that is already being executed is unlikely to be helpful (there are other Red Team Coaching techniques that you can use to help adjust plans already underway that you will learn in more advanced classes).

Six Strategic Questions™

1. What is the problem you are trying to solve?

2. Is it the right problem?

3. If you do this, what are you choosing not to do?

4. If this plan is executed, what will your organization look like?

5. If this plan is executed, what will your key stakeholders look like?

6. If this plan is executed, what will your operating environment look like?