

Making Decisions When Nothing Feels Clear

How to act from your values when certainty isn't available.

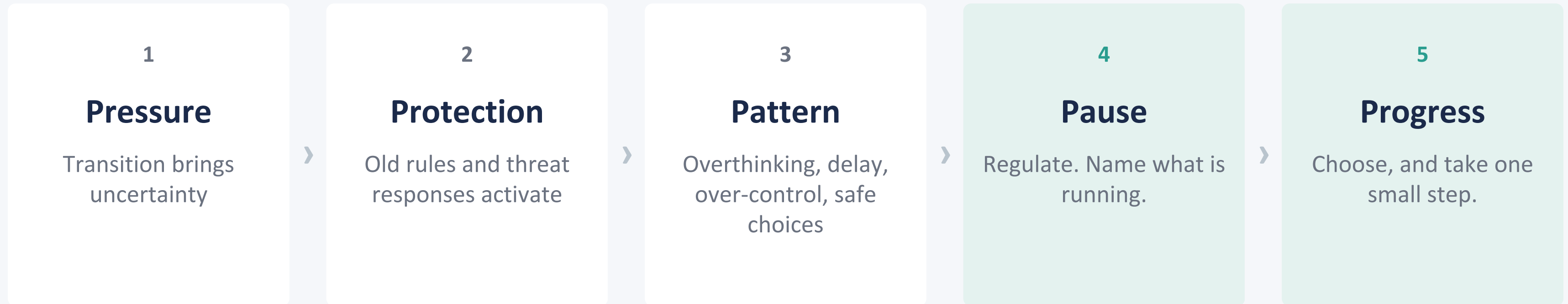


Dr Nick Earley

Chartered Clinical Psychologist & Executive Coach

WHERE WE ARE

The pathway from sessions one and two



Tonight is the handoff from Pause to Progress — how the person you have been becoming actually decides.

When the map changes

WHAT TRANSITION CHANGES

- Role
- Routine
- Status
- Finances
- Timing
- Family expectations
- What opportunities exist

WHAT THAT DOES

- 1 Uncertainty rises
- 2 The body treats it as threat
- 3 Attention narrows
- 4 The old rule gets louder
- 5 The familiar pattern feels necessary

The pattern is not random. It is trying to reduce uncertainty.

You cannot make the map stable. You can strengthen the compass.

BREAKOUT ROOMS • 8 MINUTES

Breakout 1



What decision are you circling?

Your partner helps you find the loop. They do not solve your decision.

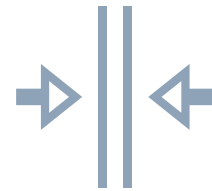
8 minutes

WHAT PRESSURE DOES

Pressure creates false urgency

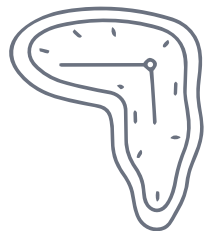
Narrowed options

You see two paths when there are six.



Time distortion

“I have to decide now” —
when usually you don't.



Threat over nuance

Black-and-white thinking; the
grey disappears.



Relief-seeking

Choosing to stop the discomfort,
not to move forward.



The skill is not deciding faster. It is noticing what is driving the decision.

WHEN PRESSURE SPEEDS UP OUR THINKING

A useful way to notice how decisions change under pressure

Kahneman (2011), Evans (2008)

FAST



Automatic · intuitive · pattern-based

Useful when

Experience is relevant
Speed matters
The situation is familiar

Under pressure

We can react to what we fear rather than what is actually happening.

SLOW



Deliberate · effortful · reflective

Useful when

Stakes are high
Information is incomplete
Assumptions need testing

Under pressure

We can also overthink, endlessly analyse and delay.

Good decisions aren't always slower. The skill is knowing when your first response needs checking.

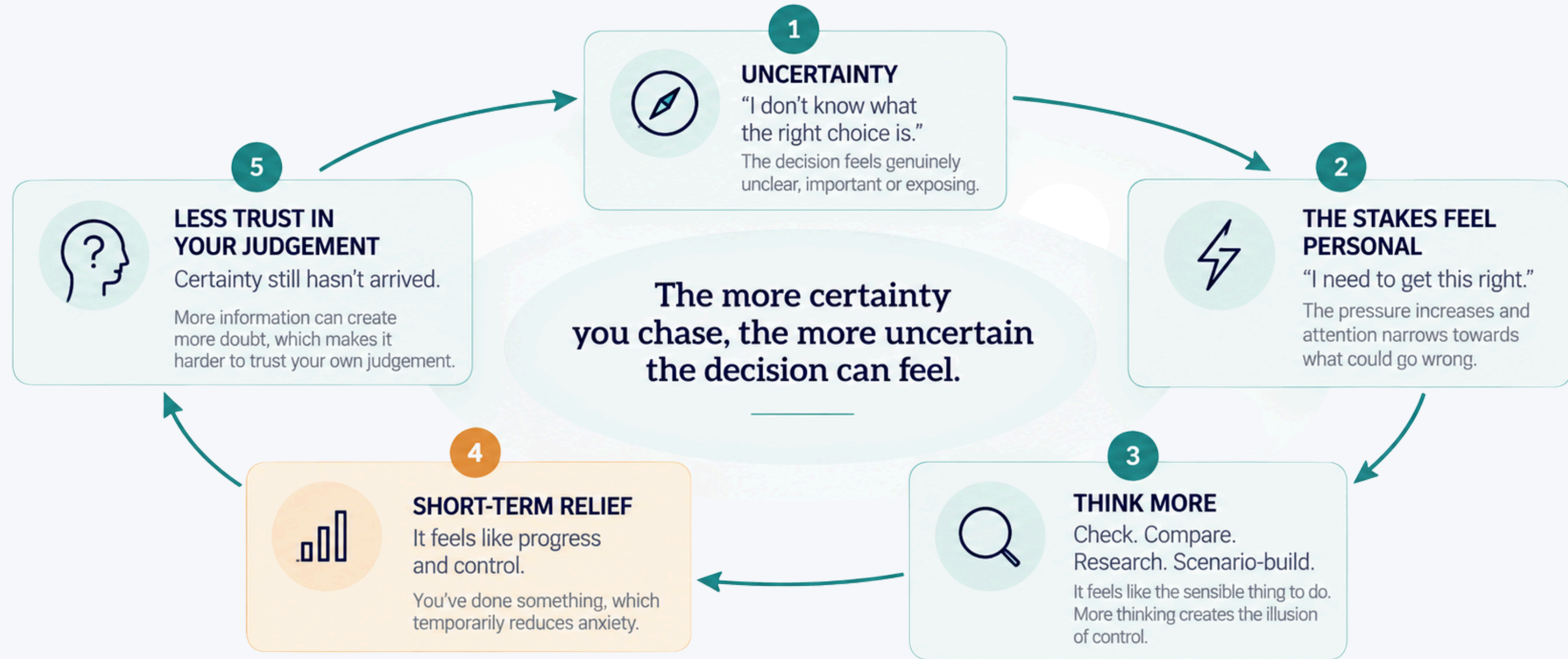
FROM SESSIONS ONE AND TWO

Sarah and James: two familiar patterns, new decisions



THE PATTERN THAT SHOWS UP MOST

The overthinking loop



Overthinking is an attempt to feel certain enough to act. The trap is that certainty never arrives.

THE MOST USEFUL DISTINCTION TONIGHT

Problem to solve — or uncertainty to carry?

A PROBLEM TO SOLVE

- Specific and nameable
- There is a possible next step
- Thinking leads somewhere
- It eases when you act

UNCERTAINTY TO CARRY

- No action is available yet
- It depends on things outside your control
- Thinking loops back on itself
- It intensifies the more you think

You cannot think your way into certainty. You can decide how you carry it — and what you do next.

Fact, Interpretation or Prediction?

Type **FACT** or **INTERPRETATION** in the chat. Don't overthink it.

My role is changing

I'm falling behind

AI will affect parts of my work

Everyone else seems more certain than me

I haven't decided what I want to do next

I should know by now

There are fewer opportunities at my level

If I change direction, I'll lose everything I've built

I have transferable skills

I'm too old to start something new

My organisation is restructuring

My experience gives me options

I haven't been promoted this year

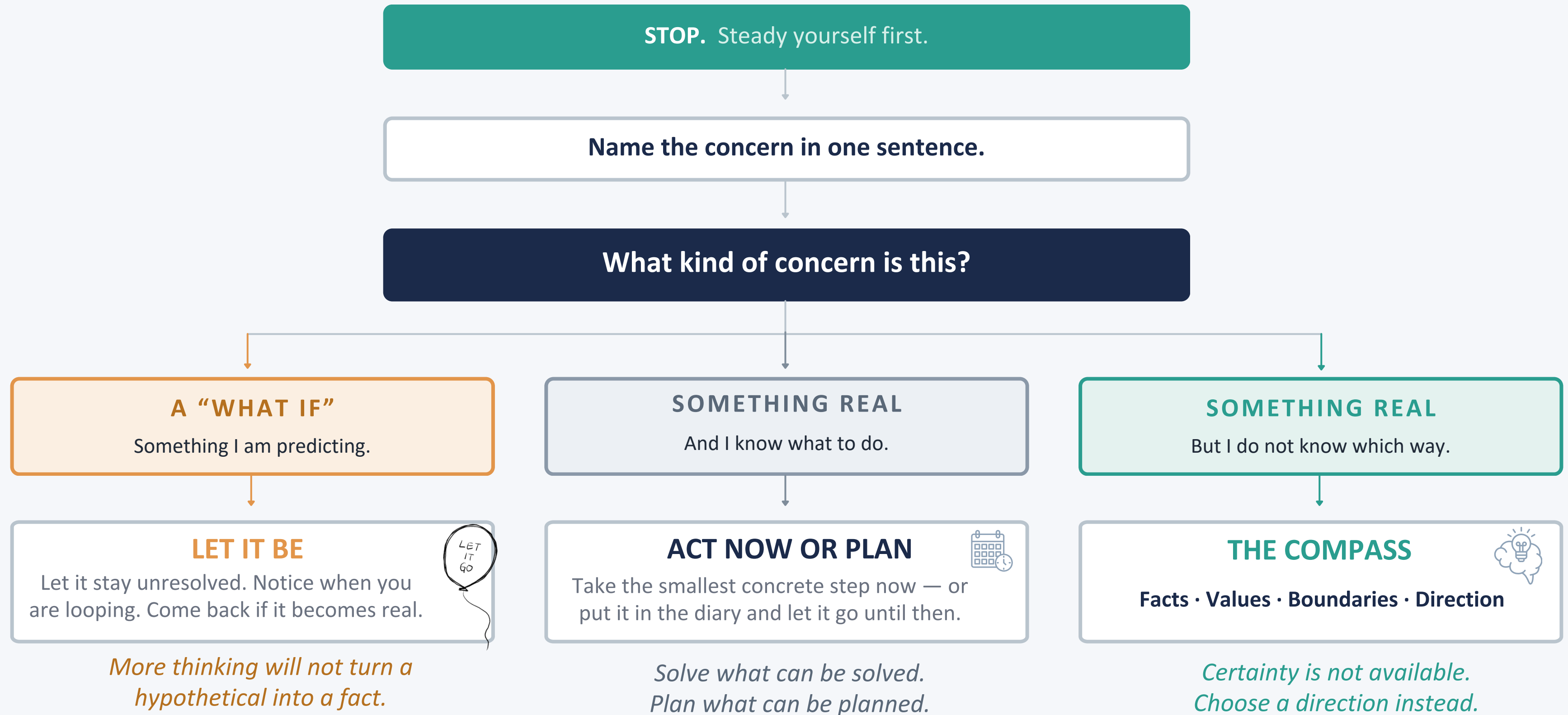
They don't value me

I don't know what happens next

Not knowing means I'm making the wrong decision

What do I actually know — and what am I predicting?

The Transition Decision Check



BREAKOUT ROOMS · 8 MINUTES

Breakout 2

Map the loop — not the decision



When you get stuck on it, what tends to happen next?

More checking? More research? Delay? Seeking reassurance? Choosing the safest option?

Your partner helps you find the loop. They do not solve your decision.

8 minutes

DEBRIEF

What did you notice?

- **WHAT DID THE LOOP GET YOU TO DO?**
 - Research · compare · check · delay · seek reassurance · choose safe
- **WHAT DID IT GIVE YOU IN THE SHORT TERM?**
 - Relief · control · a sense of progress · less exposure
- **WHAT HAPPENS IF IT KEEPS RUNNING?**
 - More doubt · less trust in your judgement · less movement

THE SHIFT

When certainty isn't available

**You will rarely have certainty in transition.
You do not need it.**

**When the facts cannot give you certainty,
your values can still give the decision direction.**

Values do not remove the risk. They make the choice yours.

THE TOOL

Use the compass

Four questions to run a decision through when the route is unclear.

1

Facts

What do I actually know — and what am I predicting?

2

Values

What matters most to me in this decision?

3

Boundaries

What am I not willing to trade away?

4

Direction

What next step would give me useful information?

Facts tell you what is known. Values help you choose where to go.

THE MOVE THAT UNSTICKS PEOPLE

Decide enough to learn

Not every decision has to be a verdict.

One exploratory conversation

A trial project

Shadowing someone for a day

One application

You don't have to choose the whole future. Choose the next experiment.

BREAKOUT ROOMS • 7 MINUTES

Breakout 3

Run your decision through the compass — and write it down

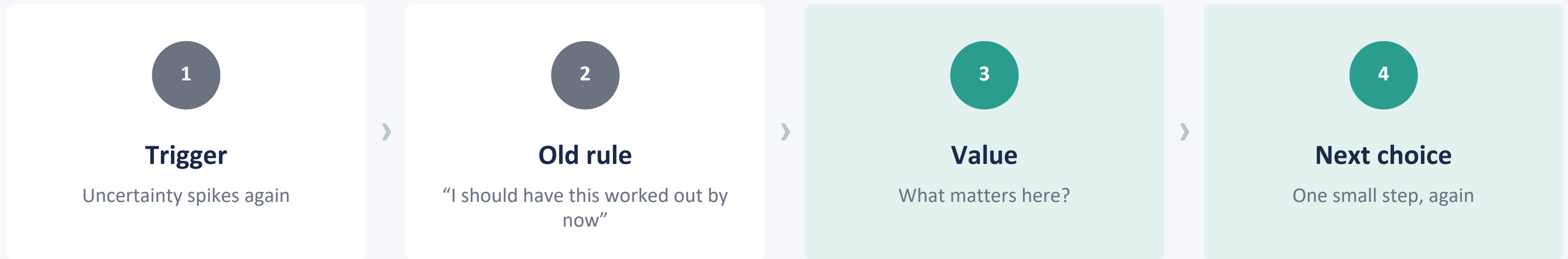
- 1 Facts — what do you know, and what are you predicting?
- 2 Values & Boundaries — What matters here — and what are you not willing to trade away?
- 3 Direction — what is the smallest informative next step?

Finish the sentence: **“In the next seven days, I will ...”**

7 minutes

EXPECT THIS

When the old pull returns



The goal is not to make the fear disappear. It is to notice the loop early enough to choose again.

BEFORE YOU GO

A good decision is not the same as a good outcome

You can decide well and still get a difficult result. Judge the decision by how it was made.



Did I use the facts that were actually available?



Did I honour what mattered to me?



Did I take a step that was proportionate?



Did I learn something I can use next time?

Hindsight will tell you what happened. It cannot tell you what you knew at the time.

TONIGHT IN ONE PLACE

You don't need certainty to make a good decision.

You need:

enough steadiness

to see the facts

enough clarity

to know what matters

enough courage

to take the next step

Then make the next decision small enough to learn from.

THE SERIES

Where we are

- 1

Why Transition Feels Harder Than It Should
 The model, the patterns, the reset

✓
- 2

When Work Becomes Identity
 Re-anchoring from role to values

✓
- 3

Making Decisions When Nothing Feels Clear
 Acting from values when certainty isn't available

TONIGHT
- 4

Building Capacity for What's Next
- Next time: the capacity that makes all of this sustainable.

OPEN FLOOR

Questions & reflection

What landed for you tonight?

What decision looks different now?

What would be useful to explore next time?

Please do drop off whenever you need to — we'll keep going for anyone who wants to stay.

Thank you

Dr Nick Earley

Clinical Psychologist & Executive Coach

drnickearley.com · [linkedin.com/in/dr-nick-earley](https://www.linkedin.com/in/dr-nick-earley)

DClinPsych | PGDip CBT | Henley Executive Coaching | HCPC Registered

