



Easy to Do the Right Thing

Leading the Conversation

A facilitator's guide to the parable exercise

Before you go in

You don't need to have the answers. The parable does most of the work. Print enough copies for everyone in the room. Trust it.

Opening the room

This reframes the problem before anyone has a chance to anchor on the familiar diagnosis. Keep it short and don't elaborate — the parable does the explaining.

"We all know [process] isn't working the way it should. We've all felt the frustration — the same conversations, the same workarounds, the same gaps. We've tried [training / guidance / instructions] and it hasn't shifted enough.

Today we're going to come at it from a different angle — and stay open to wherever that takes us.

Before we get into it, I'd like everyone to read something short."

Hand out the parable. Wait until everyone has finished.

Silent thinking — 2 minutes

This is where individual thinking happens before any voice can anchor the room. Don't rush it and don't fill the silence.

"Before we share anything — take two minutes quietly to yourself. Think about [process] through the miller's eyes. Not what's going wrong, and not who isn't doing what. Just: where does someone in our process face the same kind of choice or difficulty the apprentices faced?"

Further silent thinking — three lenses

These lenses deepen the thinking before anyone shares. They often surface ideas that the first two minutes didn't reach.

"Before we share — take a moment to look at what you've written through these three lenses. Add to it or amend it if something new comes up.

1. What are the two most important outcomes our process must reliably deliver — our version of the flour and the dry mill via the wheel turning and avoiding flooding?

2. Where is someone being asked to overcome a natural human reluctance — to ask for help, to stay vigilant, to choose the harder path?

3. Where is doing the right thing harder than doing something else?"

Give the room another two minutes of quiet to review and add.



Running the discussion

The parable reference does two things: it keeps the room in the right frame, and it prevents ideas from becoming personal. An idea mapped to the miller's story belongs to the story, not to the person who offered it.

When you're ready to hear ideas, ask each person to identify which part of the parable their idea most closely mirrors — before they share the idea itself. The miller's competing priorities. The wheel apprentice's judgement about when to ask for help. The sluice apprentice's vigil for a rare event. The moment the miller's assumption changed. What he did next.

Start with the parallels that appear most unique within the room. The familiar ones will share with the confidence of crowds so they come later.

Then hear the idea behind each parallel.

If the room reverts

This will happen. It isn't a failure — it's the natural pull of the existing diagnosis. One question returns the room without argument.

If someone says “but surely the real problem is the training” — don't argue and don't concede.

Ask: “Which part of the miller's story does that sit in?”

The parable absorbs the pushback. You don't have to.

If the room gets stuck — prompts to draw on

Use these one at a time, only when needed. They're not a checklist — they're a rescue.

- What is our equivalent of the barrier of asking for help relative to struggling alone?
 - Where is our equivalent of someone having to maintain vigilance for something that rarely happens?
 - What small change — costing nothing but our ability to identify it — would make the right thing the natural thing?
 - Where might there be capability in our team that our current design is preventing us from utilising?
 - What part of the miller's story haven't we talked about yet?
-

What you're looking for at the end

For now a win is a group of ideas that come from the right mindset. Things we can potentially change once and benefit from over and over — because human nature won't change.

