



# The Candor Quick-Start Calendar

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## How To Get the Most from This Guide

1. Start by taking the self-assessment on the pages 2-3 to determine what skills and practices to prioritize. If you're not sure about what the skills entail or how to do them,
  - A video overview of *reflective listening practices* is [here](#).
  - A video overview of *leading candor conversations* is [here](#).
  - A video overview of *managing strong emotions* is [here](#).
2. With your self-assessment in mind, skim the rest of this document, noting which practices might be most relevant and valuable to your development.
3. Thinking of the week (or day) to come, which skill set might be most useful to focus on? Which practice might be helpful to try out? You can use the calendar on page 10 to schedule practices if you like.
4. At the end of each day/week, make a few notes to yourself about how it went: what worked? What didn't? What might you do differently next time? You can use the worksheet on page 11 to track your progress.
5. Keep at it for a month, then take the self-assessment again to see where you've improved, and which additional practices you might want to add.

## Listening & Candor/SBI Skills: Self-Assessment

How would you rate yourself against these standards for listening, candor and managing strong emotions? How would others rate your skill? Be thoughtful in your assessment. You can tailor the candor calendar assignments based on your responses.

Listening Standards	Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Excellent
1. Set aside distractions (phone, computer, etc) and give full attention to the other person when they have a stronger need to talk					
2. Body language and eye contact convey interest and engagement					
3. Reflect the core of what the other person has said					
4. Convey empathy by reflecting the feelings the other person is expressing					
5. Summarize the key issues the person has raised before changing topics					
6. Refrain from default communication habits (questioning, advising, reassuring, etc)					
7. Wait until the Yes (signifying the other person is done talking) before taking your speaking turn					
8. Keep the conversation interactive by inviting the other person's reactions to each thought/idea before sharing more of your own					

Candor Standards	Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Excellent
9. State your perspective in a respectful way (versus "bailing" out of the conversation or "bruising" with words/tone/body language)					
10. Turn expectations of others into shared standards of behavior or performance					
11. Use behaviors and examples (what a video camera would record) to discuss performance issues rather than inferences					
12. Don't exaggerate the actual or potential impact of someone's behavior or performance					


<b>Managing Strong Emotions Standards</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
13. Invite – and listen to – others’ different perspectives and ideas					
14. Reflect others’ defensiveness (excuses, etc) before restating your needs.					
15. Identify the other person’s real needs beneath their strong emotions in challenging conversations					
16. Follow up after difficult conversations to make sure the agreements made are on track and to repair the relationship (if necessary)					

### The Skill Practices at-a-Glance

The assignments below should take no longer than 15 minutes each to complete.

- Practices 1-10 focus on reflective listening skills (in green – see pages 4-6).
- Practices 11-20 focus on aspects of candor conversations (in blue – see pages 6-8).
- Practices 21-25 focus on managing strong emotions (in grey – see pages 8-9).

Each week there’s a “bonus” assignment to help you reflect on and deepen your skill use. Here’s the overview:

<b>1. Relationship Check-In</b>	<b>2. Give Your Full Attention to Someone</b>	<b>3. Listen for The Heart of It</b>	<b>4. Reflect Three (Or More) Times</b>	<b>5. Reflect Emotions</b>	<b>Bonus #1. Notice When You Don’t Listen</b>
<b>6. Keep Your Reflections Brief</b>	<b>7. Try an Email Reflection</b>	<b>8. Reflect to The <i>Yes</i></b>	<b>9. Help Someone Clarify Their Problem</b>	<b>10. Reflect A Different Point of View</b>	<b>Bonus #2. Reflect What You See, Not What They Say</b>
<b>11. Start Seeing Standards</b>	<b>12. Turn Your Expectations into Standards</b>	<b>13. Be Specific and Objective</b>	<b>14. Describe the Tangible Results</b>	<b>15. Deliver An SBI</b>	<b>Bonus #3. Identify The Key Behaviors That Matter</b>
<b>16. Accentuate the Positive</b>	<b>17. Lead A “Self-Feedback” Conversation</b>	<b>18. Focus on Performance Patterns</b>	<b>19. Practice Giving Balanced Feedback</b>	<b>20. Make Your SBI Discussion A Discussion</b>	<b>Bonus #4. Do Your Confrontation Homework</b>
<b>21. Who’s Got the <i>Red</i>?</b>	<b>22. Don’t Take It Personally</b>	<b>23. Invite Others’ Candor</b>	<b>24. Don’t Try to Control Anyone’s Emotions but Your Own</b>	<b>25. Follow Up After a Confrontation Conversation</b>	<b>Congratulations You’re Done!</b> 

## LISTENING PRACTICES

### PRACTICE ONE: RELATIONSHIP CHECK-IN

Think about the people with whom you work. How many of them find you approachable? One way to assess this is to ask yourself: Who talks to you? Who doesn't? How comfortable are people when they're telling you about a problem? What do you do to create that comfort or discomfort? Now ask yourself: Do you want to change that? What could you do to make yourself more available? More valuable?

### PRACTICE TWO: GIVE YOUR FULL ATTENTION TO SOMEONE

Shut your laptop. Silence your phone. Turn toward the person speaking. Give them your attention and eye contact. Shift your focus to what they're saying, not the thoughts and reactions running through your mind. Notice the difference your attention has on the speaker and the quality of the conversation.

### PRACTICE THREE: LISTEN FOR THE CORE

No matter how comfortable or uncomfortable you feel with reflecting, next time you're listening to someone talk, try to discern the heart of what they're saying. What do they think, feel, and believe, behind their words? Even if you don't reflect out loud, try doing it in your head: "*They feel \_\_\_\_\_ because of \_\_\_\_\_.*"

### PRACTICE FOUR: REFLECT THREE (OR MORE) TIMES

Today, make a point of getting in three reflections in low-stakes situations. Ask someone how they're doing and reflect what they say. Tell someone you trust that you'd like to practice your listening skills and invite them to talk about a challenge they're experiencing. Summarize a point that someone makes in a meeting. Keep your ears open for reflecting opportunities and get in your reflecting "reps."

### PRACTICE FIVE: REFLECT EMOTIONS

Emotions are often at the core of what others are trying to communicate. Today practice reflecting emotions along with the content of what the other person is telling you. For example: "You're *worried* that what you said in that meeting is going to come back to haunt you." Or "you're *relieved* that conversation went better than you thought it would." Be as specific as you can. Rather than catch-all words like "*frustrated*" or "*concerned*" or "*upset*," try "*discouraged*" or "*overwhelmed*." Listen for and reflect positive emotions too – "*thrilled*," "*energized*," "*amazed*," etc.

### **BONUS #1: NOTICE WHEN YOU *DON'T* LISTEN**

This weekend tune into your personal interactions. At the end of the day or weekend, think back on your conversations. How did they go? What “default” responses did you use instead in listening? (Hint: Most people rely on one of the “four As”– advising, asking questions, agreeing, or avoiding). Where might listening have helped?

### **PRACTICE SIX: KEEP YOUR REFLECTIONS BRIEF**

As Franklin Roosevelt once said of public speaking, “Be sincere; be brief; be seated.” The same holds true for reflecting. If the person tells you a chapter, make your reflection a paragraph. If they tell you a paragraph, make your reflection a sentence. Try omitting phrases like “So what you’re saying is...” “Let me see if I understand what you’re telling me...” Today practice capturing the core of what they’re saying as briefly as you can.

### **PRACTICE SEVEN: TRY AN EMAIL REFLECTION**

Many emails are brief and don’t require a reflection; others express concerns or problems someone is experiencing. Today try briefly restating the other person’s issue before offering your thoughts or suggestions. For example, “Your recommendation is that we cut our losses rather than invest more time in this project.” *Note: If the issue is complex or the emotions are strong, consider picking up the phone or having an in-person conversation.*

### **PRACTICE EIGHT: REFLECT TO THE *YES***

When you reflect today, reflect until the other person says something like, “Yes, that’s it” or “Exactly,” “You’ve got it.” Remember that in this case *Yes* doesn’t mean that you’re in agreement, it’s their confirmation that you understand the issue from their frame of reference. You may have to reflect three or more times before you get to *Yes*. Be patient with yourself and the other person; once you get there, you’ve earned the right to respond from your frame of reference.

### **PRACTICE NINE: HELP SOMEONE CLARIFY *THEIR* PROBLEM**

Your job today is to help someone think clearly about a problem, not solve it for them. This is one of the toughest habits to break. Instead of jumping in with solutions, see what happens when you listen and reflect: “*Your* problem is...” or “The issue *you’re* struggling with is...” Start by seeing if they can resolve it themselves.

### **PRACTICE TEN: REFLECT A DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW**

Disagreements at work are inevitable and listening to points of view we don’t agree with or like can be challenging. But demonstrating understanding (if not agreement) can keep you and the other person/people regulated and set the table for problem solving. Today, when you hear something you don’t like or disagree with, reflect before you respond with your own point of view. Notice the impact that has on the tone of the conversation.

## **BONUS #2: REFLECT WHAT YOU SEE, NOT WHAT THEY SAY**

If you're talking with someone and get the sense that something may be bothering them more than they're letting on, try reflecting their body language rather than their words. For example, "You said you're not upset about [issue] but you've sighed a few times and you keep looking at the floor. Maybe it's bothering you more than you think." Not only does that communicate what you're observing, it opens the door for the person to take the conversation to a deeper level – if they want to.

## **CANDOR PRACTICES**

### **PRACTICE ELEVEN: START SEEING STANDARDS**

Do you remember what SBI stands for? STANDARD (a policy, norm, or shared expectation), BEHAVIOR (what the person actually did in relation to the standard), BEHAVIOR (the tangible or possible outcome of the action). Of the three, the Standard is often the least obvious. So today, notice the Standards against which you measure performance – your own performance and that of others.

### **PRACTICE TWELVE: TURN YOUR EXPECTATIONS INTO STANDARDS**

Some of the biggest issues in candor discussions are the discoveries that your expectations are not clear or aren't shared by the other person. Is there someone who's not doing things as you would like them to be done or who is ignoring an important part of their job? Rather than be puzzled by the person's actions (or lack of action), make time today to state or restate your standard clearly. Don't wait for things to get worse; clarify the standard today.

### **PRACTICE THIRTEEN: WHEN IT COMES TO BEHAVIORS, BE SPECIFIC AND OBJECTIVE**

When it comes to candor we often think our reaction to a person's behavior and the actual behavior as the same thing. But our reactions are often judgmental and have loaded inferences. If your initial thought is, "Lee never listens," ask yourself what a video camera would record that creates that impression. For instance, "Lee states their point of view before I'm finished speaking." Or "Lee continues looking at their computer while I'm talking." Today, practice translating your reactions into objective behaviors.

### **PRACTICE FOURTEEN: IMPACT – DESCRIBE THE TANGIBLE RESULTS**

Stating the standard and behavior without the impact can result in a "So what?" In creating your SBI name the tangible impacts (cost, waste, numbers, time, morale, etc) created by the behavior meeting or not meeting the standard.

### **PRACTICE FIFTEEN: DELIVER AN SBI**

Today, don't just *think* about an SBI – share it, and see what kind of response you get. Start small; think of someone who would be open to coaching/developmental feedback from you. What's something they could do differently that would benefit them? Let them know you've got a suggestion if they're open to it. Offer your SBI and reflect that person's reactions whatever they may be. Practicing your SBI skills in this way is a good warm up for more challenging candor conversations.

### **BONUS #3: IDENTIFY THE KEY BEHAVIORS THAT MATTER**

As you think about the people you lead or work with, there's a lot you might like to change. They can't change everything. When thinking about where to start ask yourself: what change would create the biggest bang for the buck? What would the person be most motivated to change? What would be easiest for them to change? Start with the performance and behaviors that truly matter and go from there.

### **PRACTICE SIXTEEN: ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE**

People rarely get “positive” feedback or enough of it. Part of the reason is that we don't tune in to what's going well. Today, notice three things that *are* going well at work. Whose work contributed to that success? Using the SBI format (at least the Behavior and Impact) tell each person specifically what they did well and why it matters. If you can't find three things, look harder or deeper – the good is there, hiding in plain sight.

### **PRACTICE SEVENTEEN: LEAD A “SELF-FEEDBACK” CONVERSATION**

Instead of giving your feedback or advice, invite someone to coach themselves. Help that person think through a recent performance experience (a presentation, a challenging conversation, etc). Ask them what they did well, then listen. Then ask them what would they do differently next time, and listen. Can you hear the Standard they hold for themselves, the Behavior they liked or didn't, and the Impact? Try including those in your reflections to help them learn from their experience.

### **PRACTICE EIGHTEEN: FOCUS ON PERFORMANCE *PATTERNS***

If you're looking to change future performance, look for a pattern of strength or weakness that reappears in different areas of performance, for example: meeting deadlines, leading meetings, collaborating with others. For each pattern, note two examples that support it. Today, focus on one person and note the biggest area of strength to reinforce and biggest performance pattern that would help them improve.

### **PRACTICE NINETEEN: PRACTICE GIVING BALANCED FEEDBACK**

People tend to give either reinforcing (a.k.a. “positive”) feedback or corrective (a.k.a. “negative”) feedback. Which do you tend to give more of? Today, balance it out including both in the same SBI conversation.



### **PRACTICE TWENTY: MAKE YOUR SBI DISCUSSION A DISCUSSION**

People’s willingness to hear your feedback – and take it to heart – has more to do with the way you lead the conversation than it does with the SBI you create (although both are important). Today’s task is to keep your feedback conversation mutual and two-way. Give one piece of feedback, invite the other person’s reactions to it, and reflect until they feel heard. Repeat the cycle, making sure that there’s mutual understanding along the way so the conversation results in agreement and commitment.

### **BONUS #4: DO YOUR CONFRONTATION HOMEWORK**

Preparation doesn’t always make hard conversations easier, but it does make them more successful. This weekend think of something you need to confront someone about. Create an SBI that is accurate and as objective as possible; focus on the outcomes (performance or behavioral) you want to achieve. Make some notes about how you want to open the conversation. Consider the types of defenses they’re likely to use; imagine reflecting those reactions so you’re ready for them when they arise. Now all that’s left to do is have the conversation itself.

## **STRONG EMOTIONS PRACTICES**

### **PRACTICE TWENTY-ONE: WHO’S GOT THE *RED*?**

*Red* is shorthand for the emotions, needs, and dysregulation someone is experiencing. A high degree of *red* may show up as “bruising” energy (loud or aggressive words and gestures) or “bailing” behaviors (shutting down relationally). Most people either try to avoid these emotions or “manage” them (telling the person to calm down, get over it, etc.). Those strategies don’t work if your goal is candor. So today, when you notice or experience others’ *red*, try reflecting instead. Remember, reflecting is about understanding, not agreement. When people feel understood, they become more regulated and connected. Try reflecting emotions and notice the impact on the other person and the conversation.

### **PRACTICE TWENTY-TWO: DON’T TAKE IT PERSONALLY**

Sometimes you’re just going about your day, minding your own business, when suddenly you find yourself getting the brunt of someone’s emotions. If that happens to you today, don’t take it personally. Reflect if you can. Try not to let their *red* trigger your *red*.

### **PRACTICE TWENTY-THREE: INVITE OTHERS’ CANDOR**

The definition of candor is “to state your perspective in a respectful way – and invite others to do so as well.” When we feel strongly about an issue, we usually focus on the first part of candor, not the second. So today, after you share something you feel strongly about, ask others for their reactions or their alternative perspectives. Make it a true (vs token) invitation. Remember to listen to the *Yes* (see Day Eight) before you respond from your frame of reference.

**PRACTICE TWENTY-FOUR: DON'T TRY TO CONTROL ANYONE'S EMOTIONS BUT YOUR OWN**

People have reactions when confronted (as do we). The bad news: You cannot control their reactions, you can only wrangle your own. So, if others' express emotions that you don't like, don't think that you can change them. The good news: If you've done your homework (see Weekend Bonus #4) you have the skills to handle reactions respectfully. First, do what you can to self-regulate. Then, as best you can, reflect the other person's emotions. Eventually the other person will re-regulate too. So today, take the chance and reflect when someone is showing strong emotions. Stay with it; it may take a few cycles. Notice how listening can transform a spiraling conflict into a (more) productive conversation.

**PRACTICE TWENTY-FIVE: FOLLOW UP AFTER A CONFRONTATION**

Today, follow up on a difficult SBI conversation. Check in with the person to see how things are going, relationally and regarding the behavior itself. Express your appreciation for working through a challenging issue and find out how well the new agreement is working when you're not in the heat of battle. Do what you can to make sure the relationship is on as solid footing as possible going forward.



## Track Your Progress

	<b>What worked that I want to keep doing?</b>	<b>What do I want to do differently next week?</b>
<b>Week 1</b>		
<b>Week 2</b>		
<b>Week 3</b>		
<b>Week 4</b>		
<b>Week 5</b>		