

18 Dares

One small thing to practice from each chapter. Most take five minutes. No special supplies needed.

Chapter 1

WATCH IT LIKE SULLY (TRY THIS)



Pick one thing that's been bothering you.

It doesn't have to be big. The drawer that sticks. The cousin you keep arguing with. The way your room never stays clean. Something small that comes back.

Write down what you think the problem is. One sentence.

Then ask: *what if that isn't the real problem?*

Sit with the question for a minute. Don't force an answer. Just see what shows up.

The drawer that sticks. Maybe it's not the drawer. Maybe the dresser shifted when someone moved it while painting. The cousin you keep arguing with. Maybe it's not the cousin. Maybe it's always the same topic that sets them off, and the rest of the time they are fine. The room that never stays clean. Maybe it's not how messy you are. Maybe there are no places to put the stuff you have, and the floor is the only available shelf.

The real problem might be sitting right next to the named one, slightly out of focus.

You don't have to look hard. You just have to look. Bonus round, if somebody's around: read them your one sentence (just the problem, nothing else) and ask what they think is really going on. They're seeing it fresh, so they might spot what you're too close to see. If they name a different problem than you did, that's

worth chasing. It doesn't mean they're right. It means there's something there to look at.

Chapter 2

FIVE IN FIVE (TRY THIS)



Sully walked that path one thousand and ninety-five times. You get five minutes. Sit in your kitchen for five minutes.

Not on your phone. Not doing homework. Not waiting for dinner. Just sitting. Don't look for anything. Let your eyes go wherever they want.

If sitting still is hard, it's fine to stand, pace, or hold something while you look.

Then, at the end of the five minutes, write down five things you noticed that you'd never noticed before. They have to be real. Actual things in your kitchen. They can be tiny. The chip in the corner of a tile. The way the cabinet handle is slightly crooked. A small spot on the wall where the paint went on thicker than the rest. The sound the refrigerator makes that you've been hearing for years and never registered.

Five things you'd walked past a thousand times. Five things that were already there.

Then—and this is the part that's easy to skip—the next day, do it in a different room. Then a different room. Then somewhere outside your house.

After about a week, something starts happening. You'll be walking past something on a normal day, not even trying, and you'll notice it. You'll see the chip in the tile that's been there for years. You'll see the crack in the sidewalk that's been there since before you were born.

That's the muscle waking up.

Got a friend handy? Both of you sit in the same room for five minutes, then compare lists. The things on their list that aren't on yours—that's this whole chapter, happening right in front of you.

Chapter 3

SIXTY SECONDS, TWO JOBS (TRY THIS)



Look around the space you're in right now. Anywhere. The room, the seat you're sitting in, the spot you can see out the nearest window.

Find one thing that's wrong. Not catastrophically wrong. Just slightly off. A picture hanging crooked. A drawer not fully closed. A stack of stuff that's tipping. A spot where the paint has chipped.

Write down what it is.

Now ask the path-one question: why is it that way? Spend thirty seconds thinking about the cause. The picture's probably crooked because somebody bumped into it. The drawer's probably not closed because something's in the way. The stack is probably tipping because the bottom thing isn't flat. Don't solve anything yet. Just figure out why.

Now find a different thing. Not wrong, just regular. The lamp on the table. The chair you're not sitting in. The corner of the room where nothing's happening.

Ask the path-two question: what could go here that would make this better? Spend thirty seconds. Don't make it something practical. Make it something interesting. A different chair. A plant. A row of small weird objects. Something the corner doesn't have right now.

Sixty seconds. Two different jobs. Same noticing muscle, both times. You'll feel the gear-shift in the middle when you go from why to what if. The kind of question you're asking just switches. That gear-shift is the chapter.

If a grown-up is nearby, ask them: what would you change about this room? Their answer will be different from yours. Neither of you is wrong. That's the point.

Chapter 4

THE TEN-COUNT (TRY THIS)



Sully charged a green bean. Ten seconds would have saved him.

Next time something goes wrong, count to ten before deciding what the problem is.

Out loud is fine. Quietly is fine. Sing the numbers if you want to.

Ten seconds isn't long. It feels long the first few times you do it. That's the feeling of urgency that the chapter just told you not to trust. Notice it. Let it pass.

In those ten seconds, look at the thing again. Ask one question: what else could this be? Don't answer the question fully. You don't have time. Just let one alternative show up.

Sometimes the alternative is the answer. The shirt you can't find isn't lost. It's in the laundry. The dog who won't come when you call her isn't ignoring you. She can't hear you over the dishwasher. The math problem you can't solve isn't hard. It's easier than you thought, and you skipped the first step.

Sometimes the alternative isn't the answer, and your first guess holds. That's fine. Now you're acting on a guess you've checked, which is different from acting on a guess you haven't.

Ten seconds. One alternative. Then you can act.

Try it for a week. For most people, the counting fades and the beat starts showing up on its own. If it takes longer, keep counting. That's normal too.

Two-player version: next time something goes wrong for both of you, count to ten together. Out loud. See who cracks first. It's usually the grown-up.

Chapter 5

GET ONE WRONG (TRY THIS)



Sully was wrong for three weeks. He lived. You only need to be wrong once a day.

Be wrong on purpose this week. Once a day.

Here's how. Pick something where you're not totally sure, and make a small guess out loud. "Dinner's going to be pasta." "The next car that passes will be blue." "It's going to rain tomorrow."

Say it out loud, where someone you trust can hear you.

Then find out if you were right.

Some of the time you'll be right. Cool. Move on.

The rest of the time (and it'll be a lot of the time, because guesses are guesses), you'll be wrong, in front of someone, on the record.

Pay attention to what happens next.

You'll feel the flinch. Notice it. Don't fight it. Just see it.

Then notice what happens in the room.

Nothing happens in the room.

The other person says, "huh, no, it's supposed to be sunny," and goes back to whatever they were doing. They don't think less of you. Usually they don't even remember by dinner.

The flinch was lying about how big the moment was. The flinch made it feel like everyone was watching. They weren't. They were thinking about their own stuff.

A week of being wrong on purpose, out loud, about small things, and the flinch starts shrinking. Not all the way. But enough to feel.

That's how this skill starts.

Chapter 6

BEAT BAZ (TRY THIS)



Baz threw ten ideas at a mop. One of them had a seed. Your target: ten.

Best version: find one other person. A sibling, a friend, a parent, a grandparent. Anyone who'll do this with you for five minutes.

Pick a small problem. Doesn't matter what. The shoelaces. The sock drawer. The thing about the alarm clock.

Set a timer for two minutes.

Each of you, separately, write down five ideas. Don't show each other yet. Don't judge your own ideas. Just get five out.

When the timer goes off, put your two lists side by side. You have ten ideas.

Read them out loud. Don't argue about which are good. Just read.

Then ask this question: which one has a seed?

Not which one is best as written. Which one has something inside it that could become a real solution if you changed a few parts.

Bonus rule: the seed has to come from somebody else's list, not your own.

Why? Because the move you're practicing is one most people never learn. The move is finding the good part inside somebody else's weird idea. That's what makes teams work. That's what turns nine wrong ideas into one right one.

Nobody around? Baz will play. Reread his ten, then beat them: ten ideas about your problem, at least three as unhinged as “train the cat.” Then go seed-hunting. One seed from your own weirdest three, and, harder, one from Baz’s ten that could jump to your problem.

If you can’t find a seed today, try again tomorrow with a different person. Or rematch Baz; he never runs out.

Chapter 7

SAY IT LIKE BAZ (TRY THIS)



Pick something easy. Don’t start with the hardest version of this skill. You don’t have to raise your hand in class on Monday morning and announce a wild theory about photosynthesis. That’s the advanced version.

Start small.

The next time you’re sitting with people you trust (your family, a friend, your dog if you have one) and a thought arrives that isn’t fully formed, try saying it out loud.

Start with “I’m not sure, but...” or “This might be weird, but...” or “What if...”

Then say the thing.

Notice what happens.

Probably nothing bad. Probably the other person says “huh, interesting” or “that doesn’t really work because X” or “wait, that might actually be something.”

Probably you feel a little weird for thirty seconds and then completely fine.

Once you’ve done it three or four times in low-stakes places, the muscle starts working. You’ll find yourself saying things in slightly higher-stakes places. Then higher. Then one day you’ll say something at the moment when it matters most.

Nobody else is saying anything, and you can feel that you're the one who's supposed to. Your mouth will already know how to open.

That's how this works.

Chapter 8

THREE IMPOSSIBLES (TRY THIS)



Baz's list had a marching band in it, and the pillow inside it won the day. That's the standard.

Pick a small problem. Something easy. Not "world peace." Something like "my dresser drawer keeps sticking" or "I never know where my socks are."

Set a timer for three minutes.

Write down ten possible solutions.

Here's the rule: at least three of them have to be impossible. Not just impractical. Impossible. A robot. A trained squirrel. A wormhole. Something that actually couldn't happen.

When the timer ends, look at the impossible ones. For each one, ask: what part of this could be real?

The trained squirrel might be impossible. A small sticker on the drawer that you can find by touch in the dark, that might be the real version of the trained squirrel.

Most of your impossible ideas will be junk. That's okay. You only need one of them to have a seed.

Wild ideas get wilder with two brains. If somebody's around, trade ideas back and forth. Each one has to be weirder than the last. The weird ones are doing the real work.

Chapter 9

ADD THE BELL (TRY THIS)



Baz improved a rope that wasn't broken, with one bell. Find your rope.

Pick something in your house that already works. Anything. The thing has to actually be doing its job. Not broken, not annoying. Just something functional that you use.

A chair. A spoon. A bookshelf. A backpack. A shoe.

Now write down five ways you could expand or combine it.

The rules:

- At least two of the five have to be expansions (adding to what it already does).
- At least two have to be combinations (joining it with something else).
- At least one has to be ridiculous.

Don't filter. Some of your ideas will be impossible. Some will already exist (good, that means someone else already had the same idea). A few will be the kind of thing that, if you actually built it, might be useful to somebody, somewhere.

You don't need to build any of them.

The exercise isn't about producing an invention today. It's about training your eye to look at finished things and see unfinished things. That's the eye every inventor has, and no one is born with it. You build it by practicing.

A chair plus wheels is an office chair. A chair plus rockers is a rocking chair. A chair plus a tray is a high chair. A chair plus a footrest is a recliner. (You can't even open the chair drawer in your brain without finding inventions already made.)

That's the world you live in. Almost everything is something else plus a part.

Chapter 10

DASH'S FOUR-WORD QUESTION (TRY THIS)



Today, the next time somebody tells you something. Anything. Ask one question.

How do you know?

Use any version. Pick a soft one. The point isn't to corner anybody. The point is to find out where the information came from.

Notice the answer. Notice whether it's a real source or a fog.

Then (bonus round) ask it of yourself. Pick something you believe is true. A fact, a rule, anything. Ask yourself, in your head, how you know.

Sometimes the answer will be clean. You read it. You saw it. Someone reliable told you.

Sometimes you'll realize you don't know how you know. That's the most useful thing this exercise teaches you. That fact you've been telling people for two years? You may have picked it up from a yellow dog at the park.

Now you know which ones to look up.

Chapter 11

SWITCH TEAMS (TRY THIS)



Pick something you have an opinion about. Something small. Pizza toppings, video games, best season of the year, books vs. movies, cats vs. dogs. Anything

where you have a strong preference and somebody you know has the opposite preference.

Now, for five minutes, make the strongest case you can for THEIR side.

That means their reasons, not yours. And it means the real version. Not a weak version you set up so you can knock it down.

You'll find this is hard. Your brain will try to fight you. It will keep slipping back into "yeah, but here's why I'm right." Five whole minutes of staying on their side feels like a long time.

It will probably feel uncomfortable.

That's the muscle. The uncomfortable part is the muscle being built.

When you finish, ask yourself: did you have to admit any part of their side was actually pretty good?

If yes, you just did something hardly anyone does.

If no, do it again tomorrow with a different topic. Eventually you'll find one.

Braver version: ask somebody who disagrees with you to give you their best reason. Just listen. You don't have to change your mind. You just have to hear it all the way through.

Chapter 12

COUNT THE DEFINITELYS (TRY THIS)



Start tonight, at dinner: count the definitely's. That's the whole first night. Every one that crosses the table, counted.

Then stretch it out. For the next few weeks, listen to the people around you when they're talking about something they're sure about.

At first, just tune your ear. The hedgers (“I think,” “maybe”) are easy; it’s the “definitely,” “obviously,” “everyone knows” people you’re training yourself to hear. Pick a few of them. Notice which topics they’re most certain about.

Then just watch. You don’t have to say anything. You don’t have to correct anyone. Just pay attention over a few weeks to what actually happens.

Keep score both ways. When somebody who sounded completely certain turns out to be wrong, write it down. When they turn out to be right, write that down too. Same for the hedgers. Don’t decide the pattern in advance. Count it.

Once your ears are tuned to it, it doesn’t go away. You’ll start to know who in your life is worth listening to on what topics. Not by how sure they sound, but by how often the sureness turned out to be earned.

If you’ve got a partner in this, compare notes after a week: who did each of you hear hedge? Who sounded sure? Keep the list going.

Chapter 13

KEEP THE RECEIPTS (TRY THIS)



Think of something you used to believe and don’t anymore. It can be small. It can be silly. Maybe you used to think a certain food was gross until you actually tried it. Maybe you used to think a certain class was going to be terrible, and it turned out fine. Maybe you used to think a kid in your class was mean, and then they helped you with something.

Write down three columns. Column one: What did you use to think? Column two: What changed it? Column three: What do you think now?

Do three rows. Three beliefs, three updates.

Now look at the middle column. The “what changed it” column. For each one, ask yourself: did you see something new, or did somebody just keep telling you you were wrong? Seeing something new is an *evidence update*. Somebody pushing you is a *pressure update*.

Evidence updates are the move. Pressure updates usually don’t stick. You might still think the old thing underneath.

The cleanest mind-updaters in the world keep a kind of running list of evidence updates. They know what they used to think and what changed it. They’re not embarrassed about it. The list is the receipt for thinking carefully.

Tonight, ask a grown-up for something they used to believe and don’t anymore. Grown-ups have great ones. Ask what changed their mind. That part is the treasure.

Chapter 14

SAY THE LINE (TRY THIS)



Sully had the truth in his mouth and swallowed it. Your job is catching the swallow.

Part one is just watching. For the next few days, catch yourself folding. It’s quick and small, so you’ll have to pay attention: somebody says a thing you’re pretty sure is off, everybody agrees, and you feel your own answer go down instead of out. You nod. You say “yeah.” Don’t fix anything yet. Just count them. Most people fold more than they think, and finding that out is half the exercise.

Part two: once. Just once. Say the line instead. Pick a small one. Everyone’s calling that show great and you were bored the whole way through. Somebody repeats a “fact” you know is wrong. Say what you saw or what you think, once, plainly, without a speech attached. Then let the room do whatever it does.

Notice two things. First, your own mouth fights you in the second before you say it. Second, nothing much happens after. Over small things, in most rooms, the room doesn't bite. If yours does, that's information too—Chapter 7 talked about those rooms. Once in a while, somebody quietly agrees with you. Somebody who was folding too.

You don't have to win the room. You just have to stop voting against your own eyes.

Two-player version: agree with a friend on what you're both watching for. For one week, you each get to say "line" (quietly, just to each other) when you catch the other one folding. Being caught stings for about a second. Then it starts being funny. Then it starts being rare.

Chapter 15

ASK IT LIKE PHOEBE (TRY THIS)



Phoebe doesn't dig harder. She changes the question. Her move, on your problem:

Think of a problem you've been stuck on. A real one. Not a homework one. A life one. Something that's been bothering you for a while.

Write down the question you've been asking about it. Now write three other questions about the same situation. Different angles. Different starting points. Try to make them genuinely different. Not just the original question rephrased.

If the original question was "how do I get my friend to stop being annoying?" (or anyone close to you who keeps bugging you), different questions might be: what is my friend trying to get when they do the thing? Why does it bother me specifically? What's different on the days it doesn't bother me?

Look at the four questions side by side. Does any of the new ones feel more solvable than the old one? Does any of them feel like it might lead somewhere you hadn't thought of?

If yes, work on that one for a while. See what happens. If no, keep the old one. Sometimes the original question is the right question and you just have to grind it out. That's also fine.

The skill being built here is not "never solve the original problem." The skill is checking whether the cage you're in is the right cage before you spend twelve minutes digging at the carpet.

Chapter 16

PHOEBE'S FIVE MINUTES (TRY THIS)



Next time you're in a group conversation (at lunch, after school, anywhere a few people are talking about a thing), don't talk for the first five minutes. Just listen.

This is harder than it sounds. Your brain is going to want to jump in. There's going to be a moment when you have a thing to say, and you're going to feel the pressure to say it before somebody else does. Don't say it. Hold it. Let it pass.

Listen to what people are committed to. Listen for who's defending what. Listen for what's *not* being said. What nobody is mentioning.

After the five minutes are up, ask yourself: what would I have missed if I had jumped in at the start?

Some of the time, the answer will be nothing. Some of the time, the answer will be something. When that happens, you have a choice. You can say it. Or you can hold it. Either one is fine.

Try it tonight, if dinner hands you a group conversation. After that, once a week.

Chapter 17

PIZZA VS. TACOS (TRY THIS)



Find a friend or a sibling. Pick the lowest-stakes disagreement available: pizza vs. tacos. Or chocolate vs. vanilla. Or summer vs. winter. Something where neither of you actually cares that much.

Disagree about it. Out loud. Use the shapes. “I see it differently because—” and give a real reason. “What if we tried the opposite?” And name the opposite. Let the other person respond. Don’t escalate. Don’t get louder. Don’t drag in extra arguments.

See how long you can disagree without it stopping being friendly.

If you can disagree about pizza vs. tacos for five whole minutes and still be friends at the end, you can disagree about almost anything. The reason most fights happen isn’t that the topic is too important to handle calmly. The reason is that nobody practiced the calm shapes when the topic didn’t matter, so the shapes weren’t available when it did.

Practice on pizza. The shapes will be there when you need them for something real.

No partner in range? Run both sides yourself, out loud. Your mouth needs the reps more than the argument does.

Chapter 18

KEEP ONE OPEN (TRY THIS)



Find one thing you don't know that you wish you did. Anything. A word you heard and didn't catch the meaning of. A question about your own family. Something about animals or space or how something works. Write it down.

Now, don't look it up. Not yet.

This is a question you're carrying, not a fact you're spreading. Facts you're about to repeat get checked—Chapter 10's rule still stands. This one just rides along.

Sit with not knowing for a few days. A whole week if you can stand it. If a few days is what you can do, a few days is the skill. The point isn't the time. The point is the noticing.

Notice what your brain does. Most brains will try, several times a day, to fill in the answer with a guess. Each time your brain does this, notice it, and let the question stay open.

At the end of the week, you can look it up. The looking-up part will be more satisfying than it would have been on day one.

But the more important thing isn't the answer. It's that you spent some real time being a person who can carry an unanswered question without panicking. That's the muscle. It gets bigger.