

You can be wrong out loud

A short book about defending a position you've stopped believing in because backing down feels like losing

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, which is carrying on defending something after you've privately stopped believing it. Not lying, exactly. You said a thing, somebody pushed back, and somewhere in the pushing you saw that they had a point, and the next sentence out of your mouth was a defence anyway. Then another. The argument went on for ten more minutes, or three more days, about a position that had nobody left inside it.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that holding on makes sense from the inside. Backing down feels like losing standing, in front of a partner, a colleague, a group chat, a teenager, and the feeling arrives faster than any reasoning about it. The second is that the standing you're protecting is mostly not the standing other people are measuring. There's research on how people judge those who admit they were wrong, and it points the other way from the feeling. The third is practical. The moment you privately change your mind is the useful event, and there's a short sentence that goes with it, and the sentence gets easier and the evening gets better every time you say it. Chapters 20 to 23 cover how.

This isn't a book about arguing less. Some things are worth arguing about and some positions are worth holding under pressure, and chapter 15 keeps room for the honest middle, where you're not wrong yet but you're not sure any more. If the argument you keep having is the same one with the same person in a different costume, that's a different habit, and the earlier book *You don't have to win this one* is about it.

Two cautions.

If the person pushing you to concede is someone who pushes until you give in, about everything, and then holds what you conceded against you, that isn't what this book is about. Chapter 24 says where the line is, and it isn't where they'd draw it.

And if you've noticed that you're holding on harder than you used to, snapping at people over nothing and unable to let a small thing go, and it's come with feeling low or irritable most of the day for a fortnight or more, the NHS says to see a GP. Irritability and intolerance of others are on their list of symptoms of depression. The arguing can wait until you've been.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

Tuesday, the roundabout, and the moment you knew

It's Tuesday evening and you're in the car on the way to your in-laws, and you've said the second exit is quicker. Your partner says the third. You explain why the second is quicker, and it's a good explanation, and about halfway through it you remember the roadworks that have been on the second exit since March. You know, at that moment, that the third is quicker. You've known it for about a second.

What you say next is that the roadworks are nearly finished. You have no idea whether the roadworks are nearly finished. Then you say that even with the roadworks it's about the same, and then that it depends on the time of day, and by now you're at the roundabout and you take the second exit, and you sit in the roadworks, and neither of you says anything for a mile. You arrive four minutes later than you would have and about forty minutes further apart.

Or it's the meeting version. You said last week that the new supplier would be cheaper, and someone has brought the figures, and the figures say otherwise, and you can see they say otherwise, and you hear yourself saying the figures don't include the onboarding cost. You don't know whether they include the onboarding cost. Or it's the group chat, where you said the film came out in 2009 and somebody has posted a screenshot saying 2011, and you type "pretty sure it was released earlier in some countries". It wasn't. You're going to spend the next hour waiting to see whether anyone replies.

These are invented, but I'd guess yours is close. Some words. **The line** is the position you took, whatever it was, and are now holding. **The turn** is the moment, mid-sentence or in the car afterwards or at two in the morning, when you privately stop believing the line. **Holding** is what you do after the turn, which is carry on defending the line anyway. **The climb-down** is the alternative, which is saying out loud that you were wrong. **The five words** are the climb-down in its shortest form, "I was wrong about that," and chapter 21 is about them. **The slide** is the third option, which is quietly coming round to the other view without ever saying the line was wrong, and chapter 12 is about that. **The salvage** is the bit you were right about, held up to cover the bit you weren't. **Standing** is the thing you think you're protecting by holding. **The audience** is whoever you think is watching. And **the tab** is what holding costs, which chapter 18 adds up.

Before you go on, do one thing. For a week, notice the turn. Don't change anything yet. When you feel yourself privately stop believing something you're saying, make a mark somewhere, on your phone or on the back of your hand, and note what you did in the next thirty seconds. Held, climbed down, or slid. You'll want the marks in chapter 20.

Why holding makes sense

Nobody holds a line they've stopped believing because they've weighed it up and decided that's the honest course. They hold because at the turn, with the other person waiting for the next sentence, holding is the only move that doesn't cost anything right now. It's worth being honest about what it gives you, because a habit that gave you nothing wouldn't be a habit.

It gives you your standing, or seems to. You said a thing with confidence, and if the thing was wrong then the confidence was wrong too, and the confidence is part of how people see you. Holding keeps that in place for another minute. It spares you a particular discomfort, the one that comes with the words "you're right", which lands somewhere in the chest and feels, for a moment, like being smaller. It denies the other person the gloat, which you can already see forming. It feels like integrity, because you're being consistent, and consistent people are people you can rely on. And it has momentum. You're already talking. The next defence is easier to produce than the first silence.

Underneath those there's a set of beliefs, and they're the chapters that follow. That backing down makes you look weak. That everyone will remember. That the other person would never admit it, so fairness means you don't have to either. That having said it, you're bound to see it through. That you're not wrong, you're just not putting it well. That consistency is a virtue and changing your mind is the opposite of one. That the argument has become about the principle. That one climb-down will open the door to all of them. That it'd be humiliating. That you can quietly come round to

it later without anyone noticing. That you were partly right, which settles it. That sounding unsure means not being heard. That online it's different. And that you'd rather be wrong than give them the satisfaction. Each of those has something true in it, and each is doing the same job, which is making the next sentence of defence the only thing you can say.

Holding is an answer to a real fear. This book isn't going to tell you the fear is silly. It's going to look at whether the standing you're protecting is the standing other people are measuring, because there's research on that and it doesn't come out the way the fear says. Then it'll add up the tab, which is longer than one bad evening. And then it'll give you the sentence, and the moment to say it, so that the turn stops being a thing you have to hide.

"If I back down, I'll look weak"

This is the belief underneath the others, so it goes first. You said a thing, you were wrong, and admitting it in front of people will lower you in their eyes. Confidence is part of how they see you, and a climb-down is confidence being withdrawn.

Adam Fetterman and Kai Sassenberg tested a version of this on people whose standing depends more than most on being right. In 2015 they surveyed 281 published scientists about what happens to a researcher's reputation when a finding of theirs fails to replicate, which is about as public a way of being wrong as an academic can manage. The scientists overestimated how much damage the failed replication would do. And when the researcher admitted the finding was probably wrong, the damage to their reputation was smaller than when they didn't. Admitting it wasn't the thing that hurt. Refusing to was.

That's one study of one profession, and a scenario study at that, so hold it lightly. But it fits a much larger picture of how people judge each other. Susan Fiske, Amy Cuddy and Peter Glick, reviewing the research in 2007, describe two dimensions on which people size each other up almost immediately, warmth and competence. Warmth is whether you mean well. Competence is whether you can do what you intend. The two are judged separately, and people who come across as high on both get the best of every reaction.

Now look at what a climb-down does on each. On competence, it costs you a little, because you were wrong about something, but the other person already knew that, and the amount they knew it

didn't change when you said it. On warmth, it gains you a lot, because someone who can say "you're right" is someone who isn't going to fight you for the last word, and that's the first thing people want to know about anybody. Holding runs the other way. It gains you nothing on competence, since the wrongness is already visible, and it costs you on warmth, because now you're someone who'd rather be wrong than say so.

I'm extending Fiske's framework here rather than reporting a finding about climb-downs, so treat the accounting as my interpretation. But the direction is the point. The weakness you're worried about is a small loss on a dimension where the loss has already happened. The thing you're not counting is the gain on the dimension people actually watch first.

"Everyone will remember it"

The audience is the reason holding feels like protection. If nobody were watching, you'd say "oh, the roadworks, you're right" and take the third exit. It's the eyes on you that make the turn into a threat, and the belief is that those eyes are keeping a record.

Look at who's actually there. In the car, it's one person, who has already forgotten which exit you argued for by the time the kettle's on at your in-laws, because they're thinking about their mother. In the meeting, it's six people, four of whom are looking at their laptops and one of whom is wondering whether the meeting will overrun. In the group chat, it's nine people, seven of whom haven't opened it. The audience you're holding for is the one in your head, and the one in your head is paying much closer attention than any real one.

There's research on why your own climb-down looks worse to you than the same climb-down looks to anyone watching. Anna Bruk, Sabine Scholl and Herbert Bless ran seven studies in 2018 on what they called the beautiful mess effect. People imagined themselves, or others, in situations where they'd have to show something they'd rather hide, admitting a mistake among them, and rated how it would come across. People judged their own showing much more harshly than they judged others doing the same thing. The explanation the researchers give is that you see your own admission up close, all the wobble and the heat in your face, and you see someone else's from a distance, where it just looks like honesty.

Test this on yourself the other way round. Think of the last time someone climbed down in front of you. A colleague who said "actually, I've looked again and you're right about the dates." A friend who said "no, I had that wrong." What did you think of them? My guess is that you thought slightly more of them, and that you'd forgotten it within a day, and that if you're struggling to think of an example at all, that's because climb-downs don't register as events. They register as the argument ending.

The audience will remember the argument if it went on for twenty minutes and ended with you both silent in the roadworks. It won't remember a climb-down, because there was nothing to remember. That's what you're protecting yourself against.

"They'd never admit it, so why should I"

This one has a grievance in it, and the grievance is often fair. The person you're arguing with holds too. You've seen them do it, on the roundabout and the figures and the film, and it seems to you that if you're the one who always climbs down then you're the one who's always wrong, and that isn't true and it isn't fair.

Two things about that. The first is that their holding is the same habit as yours, and it's not evidence that they think they're right. Karina Schumann and Carol Dweck ran four studies in 2014 on who accepts responsibility after doing something wrong, and found that the people who did it more readily were the ones who saw personality as something that changes rather than something fixed. Their reading is that accepting fault feels less threatening if you think of yourself as a person who can grow past it. The people who hold hardest, on that account, aren't the most certain. They're the ones for whom being wrong feels most like a verdict on who they are. If that's the person across from you, their holding tells you nothing about the roadworks.

The second is that "why should I" has an answer that's nothing to do with fairness. It's that your climb-down is the only move in the room that's yours to make. You can't make them admit anything. You can wait for them to go first, and you've been waiting for years, and the waiting has produced a lot of silent miles. Or you can say the five words, and then one of two things happens. Either they climb down too, which is much more common than you'd think,

because your climb-down has taken the loss out of theirs. Or they don't, and you've still ended the argument and kept the evening, and their holding is now visibly theirs alone.

If it's always the same argument with the same person, in different clothes, that's the habit the earlier book *You don't have to win* this one is about, and it's worth reading alongside this one. This book is about the moment inside any argument, with anyone, when you know. What they know is their business. What you do at the turn is yours.

"I've said it now, I have to see it through"

You said it with some force. You may have said it twice. There's a feeling that having invested that much in the line, the investment obliges you, and that climbing down now would waste everything you've already said.

This is an old and well-studied trap, and it has a name. Barry Staw described it in 1976 as escalating commitment to a chosen course of action. In a 1977 follow-up with Frederick Fox, the two summarised the earlier finding, that people were most likely to keep pouring resources into a failing course when they'd been personally responsible for the bad outcome so far, and found the effect again in the short term, though it faded as time went on. Dustin Sleesman and colleagues gathered the research in a 2012 meta-analysis of the many things found to drive it. The mechanism, put plainly, is that having chosen something that's going badly, people put more in rather than less, because putting more in feels like the only way to make the earlier choice come right.

An argument is a small version of this. The sentences you've already said are the investment. The turn is the moment the investment is revealed to be failing. And the next defence, the one about the roadworks nearly being finished, is you putting more in. The more you've said, the more it feels like there is to lose, and so the longer you hold.

Here's the thing about what you've already said. It's gone. Nothing you say next can make the earlier sentences true, and nothing you say next can get them back. If you've paid for a cab to the wrong address, the fare's spent whether you get out or sit there while the meter runs. The only question left is whether you want to keep paying.

The climb-down doesn't waste what you've said. What you've said was wasted at the turn, when it turned out to be wrong, and there's nothing to be done about that. What the climb-down does is stop the meter. Every sentence of holding after the turn is a new sentence that's also wrong, and those are the ones you've still got a choice about.

"I'm not wrong, I'm just not explaining it well"

This one is subtle, because it arrives dressed as humility. You're conceding something, which is that your explanation isn't landing. What you're not conceding is the line. If only you could put it better, they'd see it. So you try again, and again, and each version is a little further from anything you believe.

Kunda, reviewing the research on motivated reasoning in 1990, put her finger on how this works. People can reach the conclusion they want to reach, she wrote, but only if they can build what looks like a reasonable justification for it. The wanting doesn't produce the belief directly. It produces a search for reasons, and the search stops when it finds enough to make the belief look respectable. Notice what that means for the third version of your explanation. It isn't a better account of something true. It's a more strenuous search for a justification, and the strain is the sign.

There's a test for this, and it comes from a different line of research. Leonid Rozenblit and Frank Keil showed in 2002 that people believe they understand how things work, zips and flush toilets and helicopters, in far more detail than they actually do, an illusion they called the illusion of explanatory depth. It collapsed the moment people were asked to write out, step by step, how the thing worked. Philip Fernbach and colleagues did the same in 2013 with political positions. Asking people to explain in detail how a policy would actually work made them less confident in it and their views more moderate. Asking them to list reasons for their view did nothing. Reasons are cheap. Mechanism is where you find out what you know.

So here's the test. When you catch yourself thinking you're just not explaining it well, stop explaining it to them and explain it to yourself, silently, step by step. Not the reasons the second exit is quicker. The actual route, the roadworks, the minutes. If the explanation holds up, you've got a better version to offer, and you should offer it. If it falls apart in your head somewhere around the roadworks, that was the turn, and it happened before you started the third version.

"Being consistent is a virtue"

You've been told, and you've told other people, that you should say what you mean and stand by it. People who change their view every time someone pushes are people nobody can rely on. Consistency is a virtue, so changing your mind is a small vice, and holding is the virtue defending itself.

There's a real value here and this chapter isn't going to pretend otherwise. But look at what's being kept consistent. There are two different things you could be consistent about. One is your conclusions. The other is your method, which is that you believe things for reasons, and you update when the reasons change. Those two consistencies come apart the moment the reasons change, and at that point you have to pick. You can keep the conclusion and abandon the method, or keep the method and abandon the conclusion. Holding keeps the conclusion. It's consistent the way a stopped clock is.

The fear behind this belief is a particular one. It's that people watching will see the change of mind as flip-flopping, weathervane behaviour, believing whatever the last person said. Mark Leary and colleagues looked at that in 2017 as part of a set of four studies on what they called intellectual humility, which they define as the degree to which someone recognises that their beliefs might be wrong. In the third study, people high on that measure were less inclined to see a politician who'd changed position as flip-flopping. People low on it were more inclined. That tells you something useful about the audience. The people who'll judge your change of mind harshly are the people who'd have judged your holding

harshly too, because they're the ones who can't imagine being wrong themselves. The rest see a person who's just learned something.

You can also make the difference visible, and this is the practical bit. Flip-flopping is a change of conclusion with no reason attached. A climb-down is a change of conclusion with the reason said out loud. "I've just remembered the roadworks, the third is quicker." Nobody hearing that thinks you're a weathervane. They think you remembered the roadworks. Chapter 22 is about saying the reason, and it turns out to be the part that makes the whole thing look like what it is.

"It's the principle now"

Somewhere around the fourth defence, the argument stops being about the roundabout. You can feel it change. It's now about whether you're the kind of person who gets bullied out of a view, or whether they always have to be right, or whether you're allowed an opinion in this house. The roundabout is long gone. What's left is the principle, and you can't climb down from a principle.

Look at how it got there. Ross, Lepper and Hubbard ran two experiments in 1975 in which people were given false feedback about how well they'd done at a task, and then told, thoroughly, that the feedback had been made up and had nothing to do with their performance. Their beliefs about their own ability persisted anyway. The evidence the belief was built on had been removed, and the belief stayed standing, in the person and in people watching. The researchers called it perseverance, and it's one of the most reliable things in the field. Beliefs outlive their reasons.

That's what's happened to the line. It was built on the roadworks not existing. The roadworks turned out to exist. The line should have fallen over at that point and instead it's still there, and because it's still there and has no reasons under it any more, it needs something else to hold it up. The principle is what it found. "It's not about the roundabout" is true, but not in the way it sounds. It's not about the roundabout because the roundabout stopped supporting the line ten minutes ago, and the line went looking for a new foundation.

The second argument, the one about the principle, is a different argument from the first one, and it's worth noticing that you're now having it. It's the argument about whether you were wrong in the first argument. It has no roadworks in it, nothing that could be checked, and no natural end. Two people can have it for years. And it started at exactly the moment the first argument was lost, which is the moment you could have said so.

Here's the useful thing about the second argument. It can't survive the five words. "I was wrong about the roundabout" ends the first argument, and the second one, having nothing to be about, ends with it. The principle, whatever it was, is still there for you to hold, on some other day about something that's actually about it.

"If I concede this, I'll have to concede everything"

There's a floodgate belief. One climb-down and the wall's breached. If you admit the roundabout, then the supplier figures are next, and the film, and before long you're someone who's wrong about everything and knows it. Better to hold the small ones so the big ones stay dry.

Peter Kim and colleagues ran two studies in 2004 on how trust gets repaired after someone's been accused of a lapse, and the answer depended on what kind of lapse it was. When the matter was competence, getting something wrong, an apology repaired trust better than a denial. When the matter was integrity, being dishonest, a denial worked better, provided the person really was innocent. The reason is what each response says about you. An apology for a competence lapse says "I got that one wrong and I can see it." A denial of a competence lapse, when the evidence is against you, says something worse.

Now put that next to holding. Being wrong about the roundabout is a competence matter, and a small one. Everyone is wrong about roundabouts. The climb-down treats it as what it is and repairs it in one sentence. Holding does something odd. It takes a competence matter and, by making you defend something you can see is false, turns it into an integrity one. The question in the other person's head changes from "did they know about the roadworks" to "are they going to keep saying that when they obviously know." That's a bigger question, and denial doesn't help you with it, because the evidence is on the table.

So the floodgate runs the other way from the belief. Each small climb-down closes something. It keeps the roundabout a roundabout. Each hold opens something, because it invites the integrity question, and once that's open it colours everything else you say. The person who admits the small ones is the person whose big claims get believed, because they've shown their claims are the kind that get withdrawn when wrong.

I'm extending Kim's finding from the workplace it was tested in to the car, so take the application as my reading. But the shape of it is one you've seen. Think of someone you know who never admits the small ones. Now think about how much weight you give their big ones.

"It'd be humiliating"

Strip the reasons away and this is often what's left. The climb-down feels humiliating. Not looks. Feels. There's heat in the face and a drop in the stomach and a sense of being visibly smaller, and the sentence "you're right" has to be pushed out through all of it. Holding avoids the feeling, and avoiding a feeling that strong doesn't need a reason.

Karina Schumann, reviewing the research on why people don't apologise, names three barriers, and they map onto the climb-down closely. The first is not caring enough about the other person or the relationship. The second is the threat to how you see yourself. The third is believing the apology won't work anyway. Most of the beliefs in this book so far live in the third one. This chapter is about the second, and it's the one that isn't a belief at all. It's a feeling, and arguments don't reach it directly.

What reaches it is looking at it. So look. How long does the feeling last? Not the imagined version, the actual one, on the occasions you've climbed down. My observation, and I'm offering it as that, is about a minute. There's the heat while you say the words, a beat of silence after, and then the other person says "no worries" or "I'd forgotten too" or changes the subject, and the heat goes. The minute is unpleasant. It is a minute.

Now look at the alternative. Holding doesn't avoid the feeling. It spreads it. There's a low version of the same heat under every defence, because you know the defence is false while you're making it, and that version doesn't end when the argument does.

It's there in the silent mile, and in the car home, and at two in the morning when the roadworks come back to you. You've traded one minute of the full feeling for an evening of the diluted one, and the evening is longer.

The feeling is real and it's not going to stop arriving. What changes with practice is not its size but its meaning. The first few times, it feels like being lowered. After a while it feels like the moment before the argument ends, which is a thing you start to want.

"I'll just quietly come round to it"

There's a third option between holding and the climb-down, and it's the one most people take most often. You stop defending the line, you don't say you were wrong, and a few days later you're taking the third exit as though you'd always taken it. Nobody had to lose. It feels like the kind version.

Donald Ferrin and colleagues studied this in 2007, under the name reticence. They compared three responses to being accused of a lapse, apologising, denying, and saying nothing much either way, and found reticence the weakest of the three. When the matter was about competence, saying nothing failed to do what an apology does, which is show you can see the error and mean to do better. When it was about integrity, it failed to do what a denial does. It got the worst of both, in two laboratory studies in two countries. The person who says nothing looks like someone who either hasn't noticed they were wrong or has noticed and won't say.

That's what the slide looks like from the outside. The other person watched you argue for the second exit for ten minutes, and now you're taking the third, and you haven't said a word about it. They notice. They always notice. What they can't tell is whether you've changed your mind or just given up, and whether you know you were wrong or have quietly rewritten it in your head so that you weren't. It's like a wall that's been repainted over a crack. The crack's still there, and everyone who knew it was there can see the paint.

The slide also has a cost you don't see until later, which is that it keeps the second argument alive. Because the line was never withdrawn, it can come back. Six months on, when the route comes up again, your partner says "you were the one who insisted on the second exit," and you say "I never insisted," and you're both right, because the line was neither held nor dropped. It was left.

The climb-down is a sentence. The slide is a silence you'll have to explain later. Of the two, the sentence is the shorter job, and it's the only one that closes the matter, because it's the only one where both of you heard it close.

"I was partly right"

You were, probably. The second exit is quicker when there aren't roadworks. The supplier is cheaper on the headline price. The film did come out in 2009 somewhere, at a festival. There's nearly always a salvage, and the salvage is what the line clings to at the turn. "Well, I was right that it's normally quicker." True. And?

The salvage is holding in a smaller room. You've conceded the big thing without saying so, and moved the argument onto the small thing, where you can still win. The other person can hear the move. What they wanted was one sentence about the roundabout, and what they've got is a sentence about roundabouts in general, which is true and which nobody was disputing.

The test is whether the right part changes anything. Sometimes it does. If the supplier is cheaper on the headline price and the onboarding cost is a one-off, that's a real consideration and it belongs in the meeting. But say it after the climb-down, not instead of it. "I was wrong about the total, the figures are clear. The headline price is still lower, if that matters for next year." Now the salvage is information, not defence, and people can use it.

Mostly, though, the right part doesn't change anything, and saying it is just a way of not being fully wrong out loud. Watch for the word "but". "I was wrong about the roadworks, but normally it is quicker." Everything before the "but" was the climb-down. Everything after it is the salvage, and the "but" tells the listener which half you meant. If the second half is needed, give it its own sentence, later, or not at all.

There's a pride in being partly right that's worth naming, because it's a good instinct pointed the wrong way. You want your claims to have had something in them. They did. The way to honour that is to be the kind of person whose claims get withdrawn cleanly when they're wrong, so that the ones you don't withdraw carry weight. The salvage does the opposite. It teaches people that even your climb-downs have a defence in them, which means none of your sentences quite close.

"If I sound unsure, nobody will listen"

Some people hold back because they think confidence is what gets them heard. In a meeting where everyone's certain, the person who says "I might have that wrong" gets talked over. So you keep the certainty up, even after the turn, because dropping it would be dropping out of the conversation.

There's a study that complicates this. Uma Karmarkar and Zakary Tormala ran three experiments in 2010 on how the certainty a speaker expresses affects whether people are persuaded, and found that it depended on whether the speaker was seen as knowing what they were talking about. Speakers seen as having no particular expertise were more persuasive when they sounded certain. Speakers seen as experts were more persuasive when they expressed some uncertainty. The researchers' explanation is that each combination is a small surprise, and the surprise makes people pay attention. An expert who says "I'm not sure" is interesting. An expert who's certain about everything is furniture.

That was consumer research, with product reviews, and I'm carrying it further than it was tested, so treat what follows as my reading. In most of the rooms where you're holding, you're the expert, in the sense that matters. It's your area, or your family, or your project, and people already credit you with knowing things. For that person, certainty is expected and adds nothing. Uncertainty said out loud, "actually, I'm not sure that's right any more," is the thing that makes people look up.

There's a longer game here too. Certainty is a currency and you spend it every time you use it. If you're certain about the roundabout and the supplier and the film, and you're wrong about the roundabout and hold anyway, your certainty about the supplier is worth less next week, because people have seen what it's backed by. If you're certain about the supplier and say "I'm not sure" about the roundabout, the certainty about the supplier is worth more, because they've seen that you hand it out selectively.

The person who is never unsure isn't listened to more. They're discounted, quietly, by everyone who's noticed that their certainty doesn't track anything.

"I might still be right"

Everything so far has assumed that at the turn you know. Often you do. But sometimes the turn isn't a switch to the other view. It's a loss of confidence in yours. You said the second exit, they said the third, they've mentioned the roadworks, and you're now genuinely unsure. You haven't been proved wrong. You've been made uncertain, and it feels as though the only two sentences available are "I'm right" and "you're right", and neither is true.

There's a third sentence, and this chapter is about giving yourself permission to say it. "I'm not sure any more." It isn't a climb-down and it isn't holding. It's an accurate report of where you are, and it's the most honest thing that can be said at that moment, because it's the only sentence that matches the inside.

Tenelle Porter and Karina Schumann looked at what makes disagreements go better, in four studies published in 2018, and the factor they examined was intellectual humility, which they describe as recognising the limits of what you know and appreciating what the other person knows. People higher in it were more open to hearing the other side's reasons during an imagined disagreement, and in a third study chose to read a larger share of opposing views when given the choice. "I'm not sure any more" is what that openness sounds like in a car. It's the sentence that lets the other person's roadworks into your account of the route.

Notice what it does to the argument. Holding says "the second is quicker" and waits to be proved wrong. The climb-down says "the third is quicker" and ends it. "I'm not sure any more" says "tell me

about the roadworks," and the argument turns into a conversation about the route, which is what it should have been from the start. Nobody has lost. The line has been set down rather than dropped, and you can pick it up again if the roadworks turn out to have finished.

There's a version of this that runs through the whole book. You don't have to have a position on everything, and the positions you have don't have to be held at full strength. A view held lightly can be set down without a climb-down. A view held hard has to be dropped. Most of the roundabouts and suppliers and films in your week don't deserve the hard version, and if you hold them lightly to begin with, the turn arrives as a shrug.

"It's different online"

The group chat, the reply thread, the comment under someone's post. You said 2009, the screenshot says 2011, and the difference from the car is that there's a record. The climb-down would be written down, with your name on it, where anyone could scroll back and see it. That feels worse than the car, and the belief is that public reversal costs more than private.

Adam Fetterman and colleagues tested this in the setting itself. In four experiments published in 2022, with 679 participants altogether, people watched an argument unfold on a social media wall in which one user was shown to be wrong, and then either admitted it, refused to, or didn't reply. The user who admitted it was rated higher on reputation than the one who refused, and people were more willing to interact with them afterwards. The reputation rating explained the willingness. Admitting it, in writing, in public, made the person look better, not worse.

There's a reason the written version might actually be easier, and it's that the audience can see the whole thread. In the car, your partner only has your tone to go on. Online, everyone can scroll up and see what you said, see the screenshot, and see what you say next. If what you say next is "pretty sure it was released earlier in some countries," they can see exactly what that is. If it's "ha, 2011, I was wrong," they can see that too, and the whole exchange takes on the shape of a person being corrected and taking it well, which is a good shape.

Two practical things. Say it in the same thread, under the correction, not somewhere else later. And don't delete the original. Deleting is the slide in its online form, and the screenshot has already been taken. The record you're worried about is the record of you holding. The record of you climbing down is the one you'd want anyone to find.

If the online argument is with a stranger who's enjoying it, the climb-down still ends it, and it ends it faster than anything else you could type. What it doesn't do is win. Nothing online wins. It closes, and closed is the best available outcome.

"I don't want to give them the satisfaction"

You can see it on their face already. The small smile, the "told you", the way they'll say "so I was right" at the in-laws. The climb-down hands that to them, and there's a part of you that would rather sit in the roadworks for an hour than see it.

This one deserves a straight answer rather than a study, because there isn't a study that reaches it. The gloat is real. Some people do it. And the belief that holding denies them the satisfaction is wrong in a way that's worth spelling out, because holding gives them more.

Watch what the gloat feeds on. It feeds on a contest. "So I was right" is a sentence about a competition, and it lands when there's been one. If you've held for ten minutes and then, finally, conceded in the roadworks, the gloat has a lot to work with. There was a fight, they won it, and the concession was dragged out of you, which is the most satisfying kind. If you say the five words at the turn, twenty seconds in, there's been no contest. "The third, you're right, I forgot the roadworks." What does "told you" land on? There was nothing to tell. You've given them a fact, not a victory, and the gloat, if it comes, looks odd, because it's a victory lap round an empty track.

Then say nothing. This is the part that takes practice. The gloat wants a response, a "yes, all right" or a "you don't have to be like that," because the response is what turns it into a second

argument. Give it nothing and it dies in a sentence. Most people, hearing themselves say "told you" into a silence, hear how it sounds and stop.

There's also a longer answer. The gloat is theirs. It's a thing they do, and it says something about them, and the people watching can see it as clearly as they can see your climb-down. You're not responsible for how they take your honesty. You're responsible for the honesty. If someone gloats every time you're straight with them, that's information about the relationship, and chapter 24 comes back to it. But the number of people who gloat at a clean climb-down is much smaller than the number who gloat at a dragged-out one, because the clean one gives them nothing to hold.

What holding costs you

The belief underneath the whole habit is that holding is free. The argument ends eventually, everyone moves on, and nothing's been spent. This chapter adds up the tab, and I'd like you to read it against the marks you made in chapter 1.

The first item is the evening. Every hold is an argument that ran longer than it needed to, and the time after it is worse than it would have been. The silent mile. The dinner where you're both being careful. The hour after the group chat where you keep checking. Holding doesn't end an argument. It extends one, and then it extends the recovery.

The second is the second argument. Chapter 9 described how the line, once it's lost its reasons, goes looking for a principle to stand on. That argument doesn't end when the evening does. It's there next time, as "you always have to be right" and "you never let anything go," and each hold adds to it. Some of the things you're arguing about this year are the second arguments from things you held three years ago.

The third is the slide's bill. If you took the slide instead of holding, it comes due later, in the "I never said that" conversations, where you're now arguing about what you said rather than whether it was true. Those are worse than the original, because there's no roadworks to check.

The fourth is the effort. Holding is work. You have to keep producing defences for a thing you don't believe, and each one has to be checked against the last one for consistency, and you have to manage your face. That's attention, taken from whatever else was going on. It's not much per argument. It's a lot per year.

The fifth is the quietest and, I think, the largest. People stop telling you when you're wrong. Not out of spite. Out of economy. If correcting you costs them twenty minutes and a bad evening, they'll do it less, and then they'll stop, and you'll be wrong about more things for longer, with nobody to say so. Porter and Schumann's work in chapter 15 found that people who recognise the limits of what they know are more open to the other side's reasons. The reverse is that people who hold don't get offered reasons any more. The habit that's meant to protect your standing ends up protecting your errors.

What it does to them

You've been counting the cost to you. There's another tab, and it's the one that decides what kind of household or team you're in.

Start with the person across from you. They watched you hold. They know you knew about the roadworks, because they saw your face at the moment you remembered, and they watched you say the roadworks were nearly finished anyway. What they've learned isn't that you're wrong about roundabouts. It's that you can't be told. Not about roundabouts, not about anything, because the thing they saw wasn't about the roundabout. So next time they have a correction for you, they weigh it. Is this worth twenty minutes? Usually it isn't. So they keep it, and the two of you settle into the topics where corrections don't come up, which is a narrower set every year.

At work it's the same and quicker. A junior colleague who watched you hold on the supplier figures has learned something about what happens when they bring figures. They'll bring fewer. The ones they do bring will come with softening, "I might have this wrong, but," which is the sound of someone protecting themselves from your holding. You'll hear less that's true and more that's careful.

With a child it's the sharpest. Children learn what being wrong means by watching what adults do when they're wrong. If they see you climb down, cleanly, and the world doesn't end, they learn that being wrong is a thing that happens and gets fixed with a sentence. If they see you hold, they learn that being wrong is a catastrophe to be defended against at all costs, and they'll defend accordingly, at

seven and at seventeen. You'll then be having arguments with a teenager who won't back down, and wondering where they got it. The earlier book *Not in front of the children* is about putting things right with children on the same day, and the climb-down is that habit's cousin.

And there's what it does to the argument itself. A conversation where both people can be wrong out loud is a conversation that can get somewhere. It can find the roadworks and take the third exit. A conversation where one person can't is a conversation about that person, forever, whatever it's nominally about. The people around you know which kind they're in with you. The good news is that it's decided one sentence at a time, and the next sentence is yours.

Noticing the turn

The method has three parts, and this is the first. You can't climb down at the turn if you don't notice the turn, and most people don't, because it's fast and because the next defence covers it. Look at your marks from chapter 1. If you made fewer than you expected, that isn't because the turn didn't happen. It's because it went past unmarked.

What it feels like. The turn has a signature, and it's worth learning yours. For most people there's a small physical drop, a half-second where the ground under the line goes. Then, almost at once, a reach. You reach for a weaker argument than the one you were using, because the strong one just failed. "The roadworks are nearly finished" is weaker than "the second is quicker," and you can feel the step down as you take it. If you're listening for one thing, listen for the step down. When the argument you're about to make is worse than the one you just made, the turn has happened.

What else to watch for. The subject changing to their tone. "There's no need to be like that" arrives at the turn more often than at any other moment, because tone is the only ground left. The volume rising. A sudden interest in a detail that doesn't matter, like which month the roadworks started. A "well, anyway." And the pull towards the phone, to check, which is often a pull to check something you already know.

Name it silently first. For the first week or two, don't try to say anything. Just notice the turn and say to yourself, silently, "that was it." Then carry on doing whatever you'd have done, holding or

sliding, and don't judge it. The point is to catch the moment, and catching it is a separate skill from acting on it. Once you can catch it reliably, the next two chapters give you the words, and the words are much easier to say if you've already located the moment they belong to.

Afterwards counts. A lot of turns arrive in the car home, or in bed, or three days later when the roadworks come up. That's still the turn, and it still gets a mark, and chapter 22 is about what to do with a late one. The habit isn't about being faster than your own mind. It's about not pretending the turn didn't come.

The five words

The second part is the sentence. I've called it the five words, and the exact words matter less than the shape, but here they are. "I was wrong about that."

Why those. "I was wrong" says the thing. "About that" fences it, so it's about the roundabout and not about you. It's in the past tense, which puts the wrongness where it is, behind you. It has no "sorry" in it, because being wrong about a roundabout isn't a fault, and the earlier book *You've apologised enough* is about what happens when every correction comes wrapped in an apology. If there's real harm to apologise for, that's a different sentence and it comes after this one.

What comes next. Nothing. This is the hard part. Say the five words and stop, and let the silence sit there for a beat, and let the other person fill it. They will. "No worries." "I only remembered because of last week." "So the third, then." The beat is where the argument ends, and if you fill it yourself, you'll fill it with the salvage or the second argument or a joke, and the ending gets missed.

What not to add. "But." "To be fair." "In my defence." "Although." Each of these is a hinge, and everything on the far side of it undoes what was on the near side. If you catch yourself reaching for one, stop at the full stop instead. Whatever you were going to say after the hinge can be said in five minutes, as its own sentence, if it still seems worth saying, and it usually doesn't.

Where it comes from. Roy Lewicki and colleagues, in two studies published in 2016, looked at which parts of an apology make it work and found that acknowledging responsibility and offering to put things right mattered more than the others. The five words are the first of those, on its own, sized for a roundabout. There's nothing to put right after most turns except the route, and taking the third exit is the offer.

Practise it out of season. Say it about something that doesn't matter, when nobody's arguing. "I was wrong about the bins, it's Thursday." The words need to be in your mouth before you need them, because at the turn, with the heat in your face, you'll reach for whatever's nearest, and you want it to be these.

Changing your mind out loud

The third part is for the bigger turns, the ones where you'd argued a position for a while, or in front of people, or at work, and five words isn't quite enough because people want to know what happened. This is the climb-down with its reason attached, and it's the version chapter 8 promised, the one that makes a change of mind look like what it is rather than like a weathervane.

Three sentences. What you thought. What changed. What you think now. "I said the new supplier would be cheaper. I've seen the onboarding figures and they take it over the old one. I think we should stay where we are." That's the whole thing, and none of it needs a fourth sentence. The middle one is the important one, because the reason is the difference between changing your mind and just changing sides. If there's no reason, you're not ready to say it yet, and "I'm not sure any more" from chapter 15 is the honest placeholder.

When. As soon as you have the reason, and in the same room if you can. Within the hour is better than within the day, and within the day is much better than within the week. A late climb-down is still worth doing, and chapter 25 is about that, but each day it waits, the slide sets a little harder, and people have started to plan around your line.

Where. In front of the same people who heard the line. If you argued for the supplier in the meeting, the change of mind goes in the meeting, or in the same thread, not in a quiet word with one

person afterwards. The audience that heard the line is the audience that needs to hear the reason, and telling one of them privately is the slide with a witness.

Thank the person if it fits. "Thanks for bringing the figures" is worth saying, once, plainly, if someone brought you the thing that changed your mind. It costs nothing and it's the most direct way to make sure they bring the next thing. Don't overdo it. One sentence. Chapter 19 described what happens to the corrections when correcting you is expensive, and this is what makes it cheap.

What it isn't. It isn't a speech about how you value being challenged, or a reflection on your own openness. Those are about you and they're a way of making the climb-down into a performance, which is the salvage in a better suit. Three sentences. What you thought, what changed, what you think now. Then the meeting moves on, which is the whole point.

The decision

You've got the argument and the method. What's left is to decide, and I'd like the decision to fit in one sentence.

When I notice the turn, I say so in the same conversation.

Three parts.

The first is the noticing, from chapter 20. The step down to a weaker argument, the reach for their tone, the "well, anyway." That's the signal, and the signal is the whole cue. You're not deciding whether you're wrong, which is a decision the turn has already made for you. You're noticing that it's been made.

The second is the sentence, from chapter 21 or 22 depending on size. Five words for the roundabout. Three sentences for the supplier. Then the beat of silence, and nothing after the full stop.

The third is the scope. The same conversation. Not later, not privately, not in a corrected version of the story next week. If the turn comes late, the rule becomes the next conversation, and chapter 25 covers that. But the default is now, because now is when it costs one minute and later is when it costs an evening.

There's a form of planning that helps with rules like this, and it's been tested many times. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran reviewed ninety-four studies of it in 2006. You decide in advance what you'll do and when, in the form "when this happens, I'll do that," and people who plan that way follow through much more often than people who only hold the intention. So write three.

When I catch myself reaching for a weaker argument than the one I just made, I'll stop and say "I was wrong about that."

When someone shows me a figure or a fact that changes my view in a meeting, I'll say what I thought, what changed and what I think now, before the meeting moves on.

When I've climbed down and the other person says "told you," I'll say nothing and let it pass.

What to expect. This is my expectation and not a finding. The first week, you'll notice the turn about half the time and act on it less than that, and the times you do act on it will feel worse than they look. The minute of heat will be a full minute. By the second week the heat will be shorter, because you'll have learned that the beat of silence after the five words gets filled by the other person and not by the ceiling falling in. Somewhere in the first month, someone will climb down to you, unprompted, about something small, and you'll realise it's because you did it first. The number of second arguments will fall, because there'll be fewer first arguments left open to feed them. Phillippa Lally and colleagues, following 96 volunteers who were forming a new daily habit, found it became automatic over weeks and months rather than days, and that missing a day didn't set it back much. Expect the same shape. Slower than you'd like, and forgiving of a bad Tuesday.

Work, the group chat, a partner, a child, when you were half right, when they gloat, when you weren't wrong, and when it's more than arguing

The rule is one sentence and life isn't. Here are the cases people raise, each in turn.

At work, above or below you. With a boss, the fear is that the climb-down costs you credibility at the moment you can least afford it. Chapter 3's evidence is that the cost runs the other way, and there's a practical point on top. Your boss has almost certainly already seen that you were wrong. What they're waiting to see is what you do about it, and three sentences in the meeting is the version that makes you someone they can send into a room. With someone junior, the case for the climb-down is stronger still, because they're learning from you what happens when they bring a correction, and chapter 19 is about what they learn if it's holding.

In the group chat. Same thread, under the correction, no deleting, and then put the phone down. The hour of checking afterwards is the tab, and you can decline to pay it by not looking. If someone piles on, the five words have already been said and there's nothing to add. Silence in a group chat reads as calm.

With a partner. This is where holding costs most and where the five words do most, because the person across from you is the one who'll be there next Tuesday. If it's the same argument every time in different clothes, You don't have to win this one is about that. If it's the ordinary turn, the roundabout, the bins, what your mother

said, the rule is the rule, and it's worth saying that a partner who hears "I was wrong about that" cleanly, a few times, will start saying it back.

With a child. Children of any age can hear the five words and it's one of the most useful things they can hear you say. "I was wrong, the bus does go at ten past." Then the beat, then move on. Don't turn it into a lesson about admitting mistakes, because the lesson was the sentence. If the argument got heated and you shouted, the earlier book *Not in front of the children* covers putting that right the same day, and it's a separate job from the roundabout.

When you were half right. Chapter 13. Wrong part first, in its own sentence, full stop. If the right part still matters five minutes later, it gets its own sentence then. No "but".

When they gloat. Chapter 17. Nothing. Let it land on nothing. If the same person gloats every time and it's making you hold to avoid it, say so once, at a calm moment and not at the turn. "When I say I was wrong, I'd rather you didn't do the told-you thing." That's a request, and most people can meet it.

When you weren't wrong. The turn is a thing that happens inside you. It's not the same as being pushed. If someone's insisting, and getting louder, and you've checked inside and the line's still standing, that's not the turn, and the five words would be a lie. Say "I've heard you and I still think the second," and let them hold if they want to. And if there's someone in your life who pushes on everything until you concede, and then keeps a record of what you conceded, the honesty this book asks for isn't owed to them in that

form. Conceding to end pressure is a different habit from climbing down at the turn, and if that's what's happening, the person to talk to is someone outside the argument.

When it's more than arguing. If you've noticed that you're holding on harder than you used to, that small corrections make you furious, that you can't let anything go, and it's arrived alongside feeling low or hopeless most of the day for a fortnight or more, the NHS lists irritability and intolerance of others among the symptoms of depression, and says to see a GP. The arguing is the part you've noticed. It may not be the part that needs attention first.

When you held again

It'll happen. Some Tuesday three weeks in, the turn will come, and you'll notice it, and you'll say the roadworks are nearly finished anyway. You'll know while you're saying it. And afterwards there'll be a particular flatness, worse than the old kind, because now you know what you did.

Two things about that evening. The first is that it doesn't undo the three weeks. Lally's study, from chapter 23, found that missing a day of a new habit didn't much affect whether it formed. A hold is a missed day. I'm extending that from the daily routines they studied to this, so take it as my reading, but the shape fits what I've seen. The habit is the noticing and the sentence, and you noticed. What you didn't do was the second part, once. That's not the habit gone. That's the habit with a gap in it.

The second is that the climb-down is still available, and late is fine. The rule says the same conversation, and that's the aim, but the next conversation is the fallback and it's a good one. "About the roundabout on Tuesday. I remembered the roadworks halfway through and kept going anyway. You were right." That's four sentences and it does more than the five words would have done on the day, because it also admits the holding, and the other person has almost certainly never heard anyone admit that. It's the strongest version of the climb-down there is.

Then ask which belief was doing the holding. Go back to the chapter titles. Was it the audience, chapter 4? The gloat, chapter 17? The sense that you'd said it too firmly to take back, chapter 6?

Usually one of them was louder than the others on that day, and knowing which tells you where the practice goes. If it was the audience, the next few climb-downs want to be in front of people. If it was the gloat, practise the silence.

What doesn't help is going over the evening. The earlier book *It's already over* is about replaying old mistakes as if another viewing would change the ending, and the held argument is exactly the kind of scene that invites it. Do the late climb-down, note the belief, and let the scene go. There'll be another turn by Thursday, and that one's the one you can still do something about.

Tuesday, the roundabout, the five words

It's a Tuesday a couple of months on, and you're in the car on the way to your in-laws, and you've said the second exit is quicker. Your partner says the third. You start to explain why, and halfway through the explanation you remember the roadworks, and the ground goes under the sentence, and you feel the reach for something weaker.

You stop. "Actually, the roadworks. I was wrong about that, the third's quicker." There's a beat. Your partner says "I only know because of last week," and you take the third exit, and you're at the in-laws four minutes early and talking about something else. That's all it was. A sentence, a beat, and an evening that went the way evenings go when nobody's sitting in roadworks to be right.

The turn will keep coming. Being wrong isn't a thing you get past. What changes is what happens in the second after, and it changes one sentence at a time. Some of the sentences will be late and some will be five words and some will be three sentences in a meeting, and a few Tuesdays will be held, and none of that is the point. The point is that the turn has stopped being something to hide.

So here's the one thing. The next time you feel the ground go under something you're saying, don't reach for the weaker argument. Say the five words, and then say nothing, and see what fills the silence. It's usually the other person, and it's usually kind, and it's always shorter than the roadworks.

Notes

These notes give the sources behind the claims in each chapter, and say where I'm giving my own interpretation. The book isn't medical or psychological advice. If holding on has come with low mood, or with conflict at home that frightens you, your GP is the person to ask first. The examples throughout, the roundabout on the way to the in-laws, the supplier meeting, the film in the group chat, the teenager and the bus, are invented to illustrate and aren't drawn from real people.

Studies were checked on 26 September 2026 by reading their published abstracts. None was read in full, and none carried a retraction or correction notice at that date. Where a study is a laboratory experiment or a scenario study, it describes what people did in that setting and I've tried to say where I'm carrying it further than it was tested.

Chapter 1. No sources. The terms are the book's own.

Chapter 3. Fetterman and Sassenberg, "The reputational consequences of failed replications and wrongness admission among scientists", PLoS One 10, 2015, e0143723. 281 published scientists, a scenario-based survey. Fiske, Cuddy and Glick, "Universal dimensions of social cognition: warmth and competence", Trends in Cognitive Sciences 11, 2007, pages 77 to 83. A review. The accounting of what a climb-down does on each dimension is my interpretation.

Chapter 4. Bruk, Scholl and Bless, "Beautiful mess effect: self-other differences in evaluation of showing vulnerability", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 115, 2018, pages 192 to 205. Seven studies. The earlier book *Tell someone* uses the same paper for a different purpose. The claim that climb-downs don't register as events is my observation.

Chapter 5. Schumann and Dweck, "Who accepts responsibility for their transgressions?", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 40, 2014, pages 1598 to 1610. Four studies, real and hypothetical offences, correlational and experimental. The earlier book referred to is *You don't have to win this one*. The claim that the other person's climb-down becomes more likely after yours is my observation, not a finding.

Chapter 6. Staw, "Knee-deep in the big muddy: a study of escalating commitment to a chosen course of action", *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 16, 1976, pages 27 to 44, confirmed by citation only. Staw and Fox, "Escalation: the determinants of commitment to a chosen course of action", *Human Relations* 30, 1977, pages 431 to 450. Sleesman, Conlon, McNamara and Miles, "Cleaning up the big muddy: a meta-analytic review of the determinants of escalation of commitment", *Academy of Management Journal* 55, 2012, pages 541 to 562. The abstract available to me gives the scope of the review and not its figures. The application to arguments and the cab fare are mine.

Chapter 7. Kunda, "The case for motivated reasoning", *Psychological Bulletin* 108, 1990, pages 480 to 498. A review. Rozenblit and Keil, "The misunderstood limits of folk science: an illusion of explanatory depth", *Cognitive Science* 26, 2002, pages

521 to 562. Twelve studies. Fernbach, Rogers, Fox and Sloman, "Political extremism is supported by an illusion of understanding", *Psychological Science* 24, 2013, pages 939 to 946. Three experiments. The test is my suggestion.

Chapter 8. Leary and colleagues, "Cognitive and interpersonal features of intellectual humility", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 43, 2017, pages 793 to 813. Four studies, and the flip-flopping finding is study 3. The distinction between consistency of method and of conclusion is mine.

Chapter 9. Ross, Lepper and Hubbard, "Perseverance in self-perception and social perception: biased attributional processes in the debriefing paradigm", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32, 1975, pages 880 to 892. Two experiments. The account of the second argument is mine.

Chapter 10. Kim, Ferrin, Cooper and Dirks, "Removing the shadow of suspicion: the effects of apology versus denial for repairing competence- versus integrity-based trust violations", *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89, 2004, pages 104 to 118. Two studies in a workplace setting. The extension to holding is my interpretation and is said to be.

Chapter 11. Schumann, "The psychology of offering an apology: understanding the barriers to apologizing and how to overcome them", *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 27, 2018, pages 74 to 78, read as the author's preprint abstract. A review. The length of the feeling is my observation.

Chapter 12. Ferrin, Kim, Cooper and Dirks, "Silence speaks volumes: the effectiveness of reticence in comparison to apology and denial for responding to integrity- and competence-based trust violations", *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92, 2007, pages 893 to 908. Two laboratory studies in two countries. The repainted wall and the slide's later bill are mine.

Chapter 13. No research sources. The argument is mine.

Chapter 14. Karmarkar and Tormala, "Believe me, I have no idea what I'm talking about: the effects of source certainty on consumer involvement and persuasion", *Journal of Consumer Research* 36, 2010, pages 1033 to 1049. Three experiments with consumer messages. The extension to workplaces and families is mine and is said to be.

Chapter 15. Porter and Schumann, "Intellectual humility and openness to the opposing view", *Self and Identity* 17, 2018, pages 139 to 162. Four studies. The book doesn't use the paper's finding about beliefs about intelligence.

Chapter 16. Fetterman, Muscanell, Wu and Sassenberg, "When you are wrong on Facebook, just admit it", *Social Psychology* 53, 2022, pages 34 to 45. Four experiments, 679 participants.

Chapter 17. No research sources. The argument is mine.

Chapter 18. Porter and Schumann, as above. The five items and the claim that people stop offering corrections are my observations.

Chapter 19. No research sources. The earlier book referred to is Not in front of the children. The claims about what children and colleagues learn are my interpretation.

Chapter 21. Lewicki, Polin and Lount, "An exploration of the structure of effective apologies", Negotiation and Conflict Management Research 9, 2016, pages 177 to 196. Two studies. The earlier book referred to is You've apologised enough. The choice of acknowledgement as the component that matters for a roundabout is mine.

Chapter 23. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", Advances in Experimental Social Psychology 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119, for the when-then form. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", European Journal of Social Psychology 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. 96 volunteers, 82 with usable data. The rule hasn't been tested as a package and what I say to expect is my expectation.

Chapter 24. The NHS page on the symptoms of depression in adults, at nhs.uk, read on 26 September 2026. The earlier books referred to are You don't have to win this one and Not in front of the children.

Chapter 25. Lally and colleagues, as above. The extension from a missed day to a held argument is mine. The earlier book referred to is It's already over.

Looked up and not used. Wood and Porter, "The elusive backfire effect", Political Behavior 2019, and Doherty, Dowling and Miller, "When is changing policy positions costly for politicians?", Political Behavior 2016, would have suited chapters 8 and 16, but no abstract was available to me and they aren't cited. Nyhan and Reifler's 2010 paper on corrections and political misperceptions is about public beliefs rather than arguments between people, and isn't cited. Festinger and Carlsmith's 1959 experiment on forced compliance and Brehm's 1956 study of post-decision preference change are the classical sources for the idea that people come to believe what they've committed to, but PubMed carries no abstracts for either and they aren't cited. Fetterman, Curtis, Carre and Sassenberg's 2019 measure of willingness to admit wrongness had no abstract available and isn't cited. Ludwig, Schumann and Porter's 2021 preprint on humility and apology quality was read and left out as too close to book 55's ground.