



Building Intentional Culture

The reading list, the research, and the 90-day path for making pauses part of how the team runs

Essential reading

Book	Author	The core idea
<i>Good Leaders Ask Great Questions</i>	John Maxwell	Questions show you value others' insights and create space for growth
<i>Wait, What?</i>	James E. Ryan	Five simple questions that create profound understanding
<i>Humble Inquiry</i>	Edgar H. Schein	Real influence comes from curiosity, not authority
<i>Turn the Ship Around!</i>	David Marquet	Leadership at every level creates resilient teams
<i>Think Again</i>	Adam Grant	Learning requires the pause to rethink
<i>Start with Why</i>	Simon Sinek	Connection to meaning drives engagement

Why this matters

The research on structured communication in healthcare points the same direction: teams that build in deliberate pauses identify problems earlier, staff who report feeling heard stay longer, and structured communication practices are consistently linked to fewer safety events (see the AMA Journal of Ethics on accountability sharing, Press Ganey's engagement research, and Joint Commission communication data). Pausing is a patient-safety practice and a team culture tool.

The 90-day path

First 30 days	First quarter	Long term
Choose one pause point and practice it daily. Use the standard language. Notice the impact. Build consistency before breadth.	Expand to all the pause points. Bring the team into the practice. Document what's working; address what isn't.	Build pauses into systems — huddle formats, handoff protocols — so the culture survives turnover. Measure and share.

When you blow it

You will. You'll rush the huddle, snap in a challenge moment, or wave someone off mid-"got a minute." The practice includes the repair: name it plainly and reopen the door.

"I moved too fast this morning. Let's back up — what did I miss?"

"I didn't give you my attention earlier. I have it now."

A visible repair teaches the team what the culture really is.

Question bank for pause points

Morning huddle

- What would make today successful for everyone?
- Where might we need extra support today?

Before the case

- What might be challenging about this one?
- What would excellent teamwork look like here?

Between cases

- What worked well that we should continue?
- What would make the next one smoother?

Handoffs

- What's the most important thing I should know?
- What are you watching or concerned about?

Challenge moments

- What are you seeing that I might be missing?
- How do you think we should approach this?

One-on-ones

- What's one thing that would make your work easier?
- What should I be asking you that I'm not?

Want this as a session for your team or conference? This guide comes from Heather's work on pause points and intentional culture — and pairs with "Coaching & Difficult Conversations."
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