Calibration Trap

Practice guide · solo, with an optional team workshop

What this is: a personal practice that builds better judgement over time. This tool doesn't improve one decision — it improves the decision-maker. You predict with a stated confidence, check it against what actually happens, and slowly discover where your certainty can and can't be trusted. Run it on your own as a repeatable habit — or use the team workshop below to learn the practice in one sitting, then keep it going alone. It takes a few minutes per prediction; the value builds up with repeated use.

The one line to hold: the loop is the engine — comparing your stated confidence against reality, again and again, is what changes judgement. The chips are an optional amplifier, never the mechanism. **Confidence is a feeling, not evidence.** (Calibration means checking whether your confidence matches what actually happens.)

· WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

GOOD FIT

You make repeated judgement calls — estimates, risk calls, "this will work" predictions — that carry a confidence you've never checked against outcomes. Use predictions you'll know the answer to within days or weeks, not years.

WRONG TOOL

You need a better estimate right now › Estimate the Unknown. You want a confidence read on one upcoming call › How-Sure Line. You're working back from a future goal › Future Back.

What makes it work: repetition builds a record. One round is a taster; your calibration history — the record of how sure you were versus how often you were right — only appears across ten to twenty predictions. One prediction teaches little; a calibration history teaches a lot.

PART 1 THE CORE PRACTICE

run it solo or in a team

1 · WHAT IS THIS REALLY DOING?

The one idea

THE ONE IDEA

Confidence feels like evidence — but it isn't. We usually remember how confident we felt, not whether that confidence was justified. By writing your confidence down before the outcome, then comparing it with reality, you discover where your judgement is reliable — and where it repeatedly misleads you. That discovery, reached yourself, is what changes how you decide.

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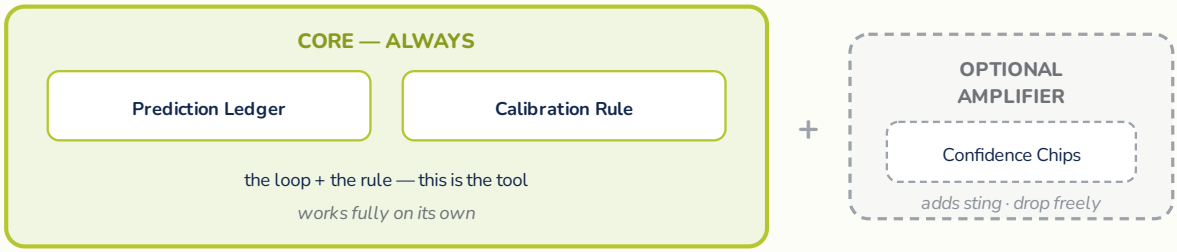
2 · WHAT DO I NEED?

What you'll need

What	Why it's there
Prediction Ledger (core)	The heart of the tool — where you log each prediction, your stated confidence, the actual outcome, the gap, and a Surprise Log line for the badly-wrong ones. Reusable: you keep it going over time.
Calibration Rule card (core)	Where you write the one trigger-bound rule you leave with. The close that turns the read into a change.
A facilitator (team workshop only)	Runs the first session, keeps the chips playful, and sets people up to keep the Prediction Ledger going on their own afterwards.
Confidence Chips (optional amplifier)	Chips you stake on how sure you are; overstated certainty loses them. They add the feeling of losing something, which makes the lesson land harder. Drop them freely — the tool works without them.

Problem Solving · Make Decisions · a few minutes per prediction, over time · team workshop 45–60 minutes. The value is in the repetition, not any single session.

CORE ACTIVITY — AND ONE OPTIONAL AMPLIFIER



The chips make the lesson sting harder — they are never what makes it work.

3 · HOW DO I RUN IT?

The loop

The same five steps whether you run alone or in a workshop. Solo, you keep the Prediction Ledger yourself; in a team, everyone keeps their own — calibration is personal.

1. Predict, with a confidence	**2–3 min**	*Write a specific prediction about something you'll find out soon — "the migration finishes this sprint" — and state how sure you are as a percentage.* Keep it private for now.
2. Stake your confidence (optional)	**1–2 min**	*Amplifier only: if you're using chips, stake some on how sure you are — higher confidence, more at risk.* Skip this entirely if you're not using chips; the loop works without it.

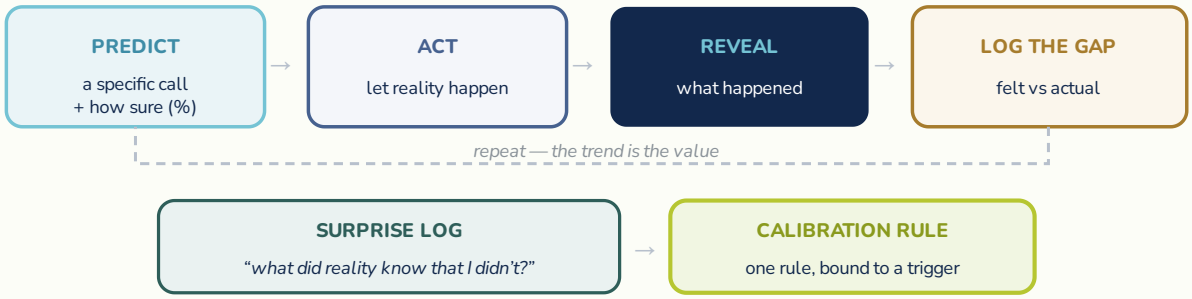
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3. Let reality happen	**over time**	*Carry on with the work. When the outcome becomes known — later that day, next week or next sprint — return to your Prediction Ledger and record what actually happened.* Mark whether your confidence was justified; lost chips, if any, come off here.
4. Log the gap and the surprise	**2–3 min**	*Look for a pattern between how confident you felt and how often you were right.* For any badly-wrong call, add one Surprise Log line: **what did reality know that I didn't?**
5. Write one calibration rule	**3–4 min**	*Name the pattern and bind it to a trigger: "when I'm above 90% sure, I'll seek one disconfirming piece of evidence before I commit."* That rule is what changes the next decision.

What makes a good prediction: specific, time-bound, and its outcome will clearly become known — "the migration finishes this sprint". What to avoid: vague or unfalsifiable calls — "the project will go well", "this strategy is correct" — which reality can never clearly confirm or deny.

THE LOOP — THE ENGINE THAT BUILDS CALIBRATION

you compare certainty against reality, again and again — that is what changes judgement



Confidence is a feeling, not evidence.

FACILITATOR TIP (team workshop)

Keep the chips light — a stake you lose with a laugh, never a public shaming. The moment it feels like ranking people, the room stops being honest about its confidence. The chips exist to make the miss sting a little, not to score anyone.

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PART 2 WHY IT WORKS & MAKING IT STICK

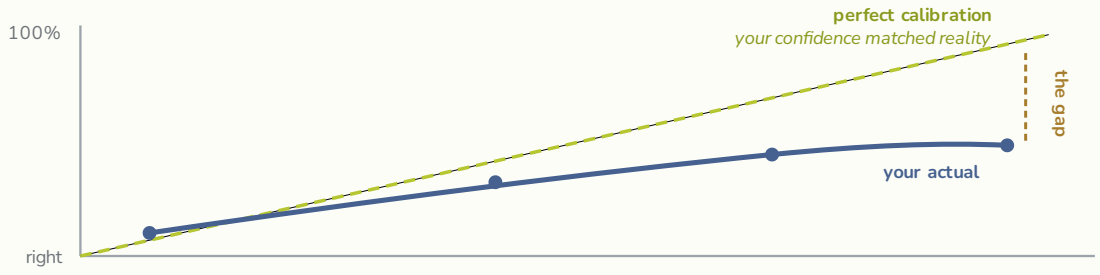
the payoff

4 · WHY DOES THIS WORK?

Why it works

Confidence feels like evidence, but it isn't. By writing down how sure you are before the outcome, then comparing it with reality afterwards, you make your judgement visible instead of relying on memory. Over time you discover where your confidence is trustworthy — and where it repeatedly misleads you. A rule tied to that pattern improves every future decision.

THE READ — WHERE CONFIDENCE STOPS TRACKING REALITY



The gap is widest where you felt surest — that's the discovery.

5 · WHAT WILL PEOPLE SAY?

What people say — and your move

What they say	Your response
"I'm usually about right."	"Let's find out — write the confidence down before the outcome. Memory is kind to itself; the Ledger isn't."
"This feels like admitting I'm bad at my job."	"The opposite — the best deciders know exactly where their confidence is reliable. That's a skill, not a flaw."
"I don't want to bet."	"Then don't — the chips are optional. The Ledger and the rule are the tool; drop the chips entirely."
"One round didn't show me much."	"It won't. The pattern needs ten to twenty predictions — that's why it's a practice, not a one-off."

Before you call it done (each round)

- ✓ The confidence was written down as a number, before the outcome
- ✓ The actual outcome is recorded next to it, and the gap noted
- ✓ Any badly-wrong call has a Surprise Log line — what reality knew that you didn't
- ✓ You've trended enough predictions to see a pattern — or you're still building toward it

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6 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS STICK?

Take it back to work

THE HABIT

Before your next confident call, ask: “have I ever checked whether my certainty here tracks reality?”

The Ledger is the practice; the rule is what it leaves behind. Keep your Prediction Ledger somewhere you’ll see it before planning meetings, estimation sessions or major decisions — that’s how the habit survives between sessions. Keep one prediction going at a time and your calibration history builds itself, and each rule you write builds into better judgement on every estimate, risk call and priority decision you make.

Appendix · Reference

You should not need this to start. Read it before, or if a run goes sideways.

7 · A WORKED RUN

Watch the gap surface

One analyst kept a Prediction Ledger for a month of sprint predictions.

Week 1: “90% sure the API work lands this sprint.” It didn’t — a dependency wasn’t ready. **Surprise Log:** “I didn’t check whether the upstream team had capacity.” Week 2: “85% sure the tests pass first run.” They didn’t. **Surprise Log:** “I underestimate testing, again.” By week four the pattern was undeniable: the high-confidence calls were the ones that missed, and the surprises kept naming the same two blind spots. **The rule:** “Above 85% on anything with a dependency — confirm the dependency before I commit.”

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8 · WHAT IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

Common mistakes and edge cases

You only run it once	One round can't show a trend. Commit to logging predictions for a few weeks — the calibration only appears across many.
Predictions are too vague to score	"Things will go well" can't be checked. Make each prediction specific and time-bound, so reality can clearly confirm or deny it.
The horizon is too long	"Will this strategy work in three years?" won't close in time to teach you. Log calls you'll know within days or weeks.
The chips turn competitive	If the stake becomes about beating others, drop the chips — they're optional. Calibration is you against your own past certainty, not a leaderboard.
Every prediction comes true	You're only logging safe calls. Predict things you're genuinely unsure about — the tool needs real uncertainty to calibrate against.
"Nothing surprises me anymore"	You're probably choosing predictions that are too safe. Pick decisions that genuinely carry uncertainty — a common calibration failure is only ever betting on sure things.
The read stings	That's the tool working, not failing. Discovering you're overconfident is the first step to being better calibrated — then the rule gives it somewhere to go.

9 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

The real need	Use this
Want to know whether your confidence tracks reality, over time?	**This tool — Calibration Trap.** The judgement-building practice: predict, check, and install a rule.
Need a better estimate before starting?	**Estimate the Unknown** — produces a defensible range before the fact, where this evaluates confidence after.
Need a confidence read on one upcoming call?	**How-Sure Line** — a single-instance confidence read; this is the longitudinal trend across many.
Working backwards from a future goal?	**Future Back** — plans from the outcome; a different decision job.

The family it belongs to: most tools produce a decision; this one improves the decider. Calibration Trap is the judgement-building tool — better calibration builds up across every estimate, risk call and priority decision you'll ever make.

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