Commitment Stress Test

Facilitation guide · team, one facilitator

What this is: a short, facilitated activity you run in a meeting right after a team agrees to something that matters — a deadline, a deliverable, a hand-off. You test the commitment before you rely on it, by surfacing the conditions each "yes" depends on. One facilitator runs it; everyone else takes part. It takes about 20–30 minutes and needs nothing but the worksheet and a pen each.

The one line to hold: the easy "yeses" you collect are often the sound of the meeting ending, not people committing. Your job is to turn every "yes" into "yes, provided…" before you trust it. **A commitment without conditions isn't a commitment.**

· WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

GOOD FIT

Right after a team has agreed to something you now depend on — a deadline, a deliverable, a hand-off — and you want it to actually happen. Especially when the "yes" came quickly, when several people depend on each other, or when you've been burned before by agreements that disappeared by Monday.

WRONG TOOL

You need people to **support** a decision, not **execute** a task › Stakeholder Alignment Sprint. You're facing resistance to a change or initiative › Surface Honest Resistance. You need to check the message was understood, not that intent is real › Echo Test.

The shift this tool makes: it doesn't ask "are you confident?" It asks "what has to stay true?" A confidence score tells you how someone feels; a condition tells you what has to become true — and only one of those is something the room can act on.

PART 1 RUNNING THE TEST

team, one facilitator

1 · WHAT IS THIS REALLY DOING?

The one idea

THE ONE IDEA

A meeting quietly rewards the nod. When you ask "can everyone get this done by Friday?", agreeing feels easy and raising a doubt feels risky — so the public "yes" and the private "this worries me" never meet, and the commitment is untested from the moment it's made. This tool tests it before you rely on it: each person privately writes what would make the commitment *hold*, then what would make it *break*, and the room turns those conditions into a commitment you can actually count on.

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2 · WHAT DO I NEED?

What you’ll need

What	Why it’s there
A real, live commitment	Something the team has actually just agreed to, that matters. Not a hypothetical — a commitment you’re about to depend on. Test one at a time.
A facilitator (core)	One person runs the activity and stays neutral — they surface conditions, they don’t judge them. They can take part too, but their real job is to keep the room testing the commitment, not the people.
One worksheet per participant (core)	It carries the two waves — the holds-if conditions and the breaks-if conditions — and ends with each commitment re-stated. Private writing is what makes the honesty safe, so everyone needs their own.
A pen each, and a shared surface	A board or flip-chart for the facilitator to cluster conditions where the whole room can see them.

Alignment · Win Buy-In · about 20–30 minutes, depending on how many commitments you test and how many blockers surface. Run it in the same meeting the commitment was made.

3 · HOW DO I RUN IT?

The run-sheet

Test only one commitment at a time. If the meeting produced several, run the tool separately for each. **Write the exact commitment on the board first, in one plain line, so everyone tests the same thing.** Then run the two waves. The facilitator column tells you who does what at each step; the whole activity works only if the private writing stays private and the reveal stays anonymised.

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1. Name the commitment	**2 min**	*Facilitator writes the exact commitment at the top of the board, in one plain line.* Everyone is now stress-testing the same thing. One facilitator runs the room; everyone else takes part.
2. Write "holds if…", privately	**3 min**	*Each person finishes "This commitment holds if…" on their own worksheet.* What must stay true for this commitment to succeed. No talking, no ratings — conditions.
3. Reveal & cluster the holds-if	**4 min**	*Participants hand their worksheets to the facilitator, who reads the conditions aloud without naming who wrote them.* Group the ones that repeat. The room sees what everyone agrees the commitment depends on. *Try: "I'm going to read out the conditions you wrote — without names. Listen for the ones that repeat."*
4. Write "breaks if…", privately	**3 min**	*Each person finishes "This commitment breaks if…" on their worksheet.* The things that would stop it. Private again, so the honest doubts get written down.
5. Reveal & cluster the breaks-if	**5 min**	*Again, worksheets go to the facilitator, who reads them aloud without naming anyone and groups them.* The shared blockers, dependencies and assumptions surface here — often the same one sits under several commitments.
6. Resolve each blocker	**5–8 min**	*Work the grouped blockers one at a time.* Every blocker must finish as one of four: ☐ Resolved ☐ Owner assigned ☐ Plan changed ☐ Accepted risk. A blocker that reaches none of these stays visible — an untested part of the commitment.
7. Re-commit, out loud	**3 min**	*Each person re-states their commitment with its conditions attached — "I'll deliver this, provided _____."* Facilitator captures each on the worksheet. That re-stated line is the commitment you can now count on.

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TWO WAVES — BUILD IT UP, THEN PRESSURE-TEST IT

WAVE 1 · HOLDS IF

"This commitment holds if…"

write privately
→ reveal (no names)
→ cluster

the room starts on "how we make this work"

→

WAVE 2 · BREAKS IF

"This commitment breaks if…"

write privately
→ reveal (no names)
→ cluster & discuss

the shared blockers surface here

Holding conditions first, breaking conditions second — safety before pressure.

FACILITATOR TIP

The whole test lives or dies on one thing: it examines the commitment, never the person. The moment the room starts asking "who's not going to deliver?", the private writing gets faked and you learn nothing. Keep the language on the commitment — "what does *this* depend on?" — not on individuals. And while you collect conditions, don't let anyone debate whether one is valid: capture every condition first, discuss later. Arguing during the reveal shuts down the honesty you just created.

PART 2 GETTING IT RIGHT

why it works & common mistakes

4 · WHY DOES THIS WORK?

Why it works

Meetings reward agreement more than honest doubt, so a public "can everyone do this?" collects nods rather than truth. Writing privately removes that pressure, while asking for conditions — rather than a yes-or-no or a confidence score — shifts the room from "do you agree?" to "what has to stay true?" Engineers reason far better about systems than about their own certainty, so a conditions question gets you richer, more honest data — and it surfaces the hidden risks before the work begins, not at the deadline.

THE SIGNATURE OUTPUT — A COMMITMENT PASSPORT

THE COMMITMENT
ship the feature by Friday

↓

HOLDS IF
✓ the staging env is ready by Wed ✓ the API contract is signed off

↓

BREAKS IF
✗ QA capacity slips

↓

ACTION
owner: Sam · plan changed — QA re-sequenced

"I'll deliver this, provided the staging env is ready by Wed."

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5 · WHAT IF IT GOES WRONG?

Common mistakes

What happened	The fix
It turned into "who's lying?"	The instant the room tests people instead of the commitment, the private writing gets faked. Pull it back to the commitment: "what does **this** depend on?" — never "who won't deliver?"
People wrote ratings, not conditions	"7/10 confident" tells you a feeling; "holds if staging is ready by Wednesday" tells you what to act on. If someone writes a score, ask them what has to become true for it to be a 10.
The reveal wasn't anonymised	If conditions are read out with names attached, people soften them. Collect the worksheets and read them without attribution — every time.
Someone argued with a condition before everything was collected	Capture every condition first; debate begins only after the wall is complete. Arguing over one condition during the reveal stops others from offering theirs.
A blocker was left unresolved	Every blocker must land on one of the four outcomes — resolved, owner, plan changed, accepted risk. An un-dispositioned blocker is an untested commitment still wearing a "yes".
An untested "yes" left the room	If any commitment has no condition attached by step 7, it hasn't been tested. Send it back through the waves before you rely on it.

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Before the meeting ends

- ✓ The exact commitment is written where everyone can see it
- ✓ Both waves were written privately and revealed without names
- ✓ Every surfaced blocker landed on resolved, owner, plan changed, or accepted risk
- ✓ Every commitment left the room as "yes, provided _____" — none of them bare

6 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS STICK?

Take it back to work

THE HABIT

Before you trust the next "yes", ask one question:

What has to stay true for this to hold?

The more you run it, the more an untested "yes" starts to feel incomplete — you begin hearing the missing condition before you leave the room. Over time the team stops handing out untested agreements, because everyone knows a commitment now comes with its conditions attached.

Appendix · Reference

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

7 · A WORKED RUN

Watch a "yes" get tested

A team agreed in sprint planning to ship a feature by Friday. Everyone said yes. The delivery lead ran the test before the sprint started.

Stage	What surfaced
1 · The commitment	"Ship the feature by end of sprint (Friday)." Written on the board.
2–3 · Holds if…	Clustered: staging environment ready by Wednesday; API contract signed off; no scope added mid-sprint. The room agreed on what the yes depended on.
4–5 · Breaks if…	Clustered: QA capacity slips (written by three people — a shared blocker); the upstream service misses its own hand-off; a reviewer is on leave Thursday.
6 · Resolve	QA capacity slips → **owner assigned** (Sam re-sequences). Upstream hand-off → **plan changed** (mock the interface). Reviewer on leave → **accepted risk**, with a named backup. Every blocker lands on one of the four outcomes.
7 · Re-commit	"I'll deliver this, *provided the staging env is ready by Wednesday and QA is re-sequenced*." A real commitment — with its conditions attached.

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8 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

The real need	Use this
Test whether an agreed commitment will actually be executed	**This tool — Commitment Stress Test.** Surface the conditions each “yes” depends on, resolve the blockers, re-commit.
Win **support** for a decision from many stakeholders	**Stakeholder Alignment Sprint** — secures backing for a decision. That’s support; this is execution. Align first, then stress-test the commitment.
Surface honest resistance to a change or initiative	**Surface Honest Resistance** — for resistance to a change, not a hollow task commitment.
Check a message or brief was actually understood	**Echo Test** — confirms understanding was received, not that the intent to act is real.

The move underneath: ask people to write privately what a commitment depends on, before the room can nod it past. That same move — make the private condition safer to say than the doubt is to swallow — is one of the Gym’s most reusable, wherever an easy “yes” hides a hard truth.

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