



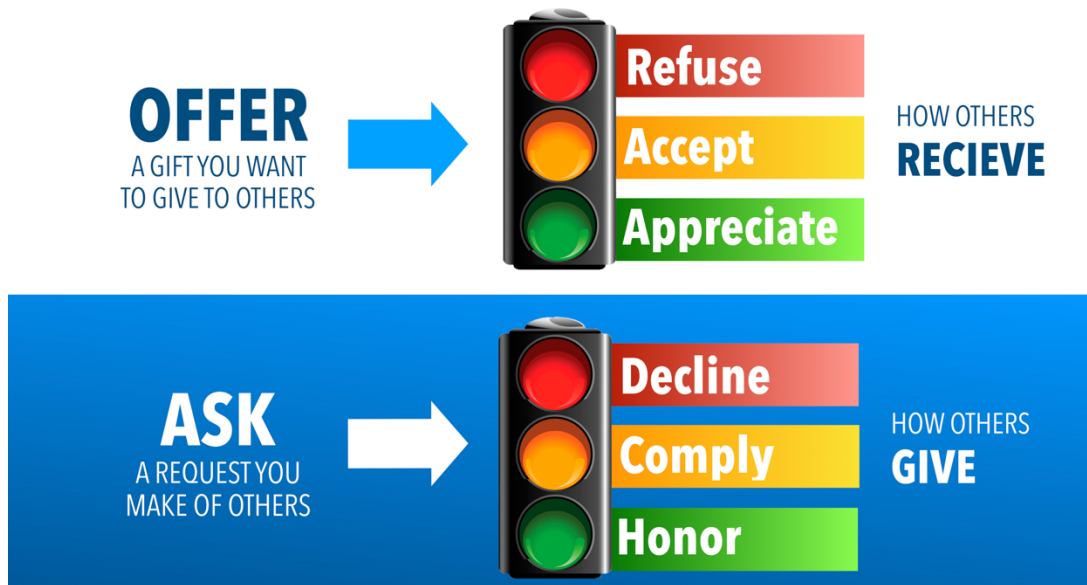
PENCIL PROCESS GUIDEBOOK

A critical element of getting people moving in the same direction at the same time is forming agreements. We all make agreements, often they are unspoken and informal. Just as often we don't have a shared understanding of the agreement. That's where things go wrong.

The "Pencil Process" is designed to create better agreements and shared meanings. This output is written in pencil (metaphorically). That means it can be amended and changed as needed. There's a formality to how it is created, but it remains informal in how it is treated.

The main purpose is to make expectations explicit through a process of naming and matching what you want and what you offer. This helps surface gaps in expectations, which informs the creation of clear agreements.

The dynamic of forming agreements can be depicted like this:



DEFINING THE TERMS:

Let's define a few key terms and their relationships:

OFFERS

An Offer is simply a contribution you make, gift you give, or value you create for others. Usually an Offer is connected to your unique expertise, skill set, role, vantage point, or just what you enjoy doing. This doesn't mean it is always for the benefit of others though. Sometimes we give because it serves us somehow.

RECEIVING

The people who receive your Offer may respond in one of three ways:

- 1) *Refuse*: Something they don't want or need
- 2) *Accept*: They may not need it, but they can accept it
- 3) *Appreciate*: An offer they want and are grateful for

ASKS

An Ask is a request for what you need or want from others in order to make your job easier, more effective, or more enjoyable. An Ask is focused exclusively on another person's behaviors, not their character, intent, or emotional state.

GIVING

The people on the other side of your Ask, may respond in one of three ways:

- 1) *Decline*: Something they are not able to give
- 2) *Comply*: They are able to do it with neutral or low engagement
- 3) *Honor*: A service they are eager to give

By understanding these distinctions you can begin to:

- Have more honest conversations
- Identify respective boundaries
- Find out the level of engagement
- Have more realistic expectations
- Develop a shared understanding

Next we enter the process itself. This may seem to be overly designed and prescriptive, but my experience is, when dealing with potentially emotionally charged issues (which this often can be), it is better to trust and follow an agreed upon process. This tends to deescalate emotions and create greater chances of agreement.

THE PENCIL AGREEMENT PROCESS

This process can be used in a variety of contexts to negotiate behaviors and agreements, including personal settings (like marriage).

It is best used when you feel things aren't working right in a partnership or in a team you lead, you've had a few conversations, but you can't seem to get the right results or behaviors to change the way you need them to. It is time to engage in a process that will get you better results.

This is especially helpful when there is some level of mistrust or emotional static in the system because it grounds people in they are going to *do*, not how they feel. It still respects the emotional dimension without being ruled by it.

I'll outline the general steps and then show you how it's different in certain contexts.

PHASE 1: PREPARATION

STEP 1: Enroll Others in This Process

Invite people to join you as part of this process to form better agreements and get strong alignment in the team or partnership.

STEP 2: Fill Out the Pencil Process Form

Using the [Pencil Process Form](#) (separate download), in advance of any meeting, each participant spends time making a list of their Offers. These are the behaviors, attributes, or contributions each person feels adds value to the other(s). This could include experience they bring or just something they need from others. This could be a time to let people know about expertise they have that others don't know about.

In the second half of the [Pencil Process Form](#), each person lists their ASKS. Here they identify the requests of others. Be sure to specify who the request is addressed to, it could be the team or an individual. Focus requests on specific behaviors or words, rather than feelings, intent, or character. It helps to frame request using phrases like "Would you be willing to..." "Are you able to..."

STEP 3: Share Your Pencil Process Form in Advance of Meeting

Be sure to give everyone a chance to review each other's forms, make notes, and reflect on what is written. Sometimes this will set off tripwires and trigger

you emotionally. This is a good time to get yourself emotionally grounded and clear your triggers. You may want to talk through it with a friend or coach in order to bring your best self to the meeting.

PHASE 2: DISCUSSION

STEP 1: Focus Person Verbally Shares Pencil Process Form

When you meet, print out enough forms for everyone to review. Each person walks through their form while others listen. Whoever is sharing is the Focus Person: In this role you are verbally sharing what you've written and making any comments you would like to add clarity and color.

STEP 2: Listeners Respond to the OFFERS

When the Focus Person is complete, listeners will first make any comments about the OFFERS made. You may note any areas where the listener would like to *refuse, accept, or appreciate* the offers. Listeners are also encouraged to identify any OFFERS they appreciate or enjoy that the Focus Person didn't list.

STEP 3: Listeners Respond to the ASKS

Then the listeners will move to ask any clarifying questions about the requests being made. Once this is complete, they may respond with their agreement to either *decline, comply, or honor* the requests. A listener can also ask to modify a request to make it more acceptable.

PHASE 2: LIVING AGREEMENTS

STEP 1: Finalize Agreements

After the Focus Person has shared, and listeners have responded and shared their willingness to meet the requests and accept the offers, revise the Pencil Process Form to reflect the agreements.

STEP 2: Revisit the Agreements in 90 Days

Once the agreements are finalized, remember that these are written in pencil and will need to be revisited and evolved overtime. Set the expectation that it may take a few months to understand the expectations and make them work for everyone. Set a time about 90-days out to revisit agreements.

ADJUSTMENTS BASED ON CONTEXT

Equal Partnerships

In the case of equal partnerships, where the power dynamics are more like a marriage than a boss/employee relationship, just follow the process outlined above.

Teams with a Leader

This is best used when a leader is feeling like the team isn't working well together or they aren't responding to directives. The goal here is for the Leader to convey what the team can expect of her, and what she expects of them. And vice versa. In the case of a leader wanting to get alignment and agreement from her team, the process needs to respect some basic power dynamics.

1. The leader must determine and communicate clearly which Offers and Requests she makes are non-negotiable. In this case, it means team members are not permitted to **Refuse** or **Decline** those. Make that known in advance so people realize those are off limits.
2. Make absolutely clear that you want their honest feedback and experience on every other item. You must demonstrate the ability to truly listen and not punish, otherwise this process won't work. Some level of trust needs to be established to do this. One way to check that is to ask a team member who you think will give you honest feedback about the process you are proposing.
3. The leader presents first and allows the team to ask any clarifying questions. Then the leader leaves the meeting for pre-set period of time (or until she is called back in) so the team can discuss their response to her Offers and Requests. They will also be asked to formulate their individual requests into a single joint Offers and Requests.
4. When the leader returns, a member of the team will present their list of Offers and Requests for her consideration. Here again, the dynamic is usually such that a leader has the prerogative to decline or refuse these. But at least she knows about them.

PENCIL PROCESS SAMPLE #1

Name: Charlie COO

Company: ACME

Date: Today

OFFERS

The following list represents what this leader offers another person or team. An offer isn't always a gift; sometimes we give something that matters to us, but not to others. Receivers should read list below and put one of the letters below next to each offer:

D = An offer I really appreciate, *desire*, or need

A = An offer I can *accept*, but is not a need for me

R = An offer I will need to *refuse*.

[Instructions: make a list of as many behaviors, attributes, or contributions that you feel add value to the team]

What I Offer the Team:

- A space for partners to share openly and honestly
- To make time anytime you need me to weigh in or offer feedback on anything
- To publically support the decisions that we make even if I'm not fully excited
- To ask novel questions and provide new perspective that are relevant
- The experience on building scalable organizations. How do we scale culture? Should we have an interview process? I've built to a large scale before
- Work hard to give the benefit of the doubt to colleagues and teammates.
- I bring a systemic and long-term perspective. Understanding second or third order impacts. The ability to see the system overtime and hold that perspective.
- A non-anxious presence in the midst of transition or difficulty
- I offer friendship at work. I like having friends at work, and welcome that from my partners.

Questions for the Receivers:

Is there anything significant you experience I offer that I did not list here?

REQUESTS

The following list represents what this leader requests of the team, a request could be honored, or complied with, need clarification, or in some cases declined. Receivers should read these requests and put a letter below next to each request:

- H = A request I am glad to *honor*
- C = A request will *comply* with if needed
- D = A request I must respectfully *decline*
- I = Need more *information* to clarify

[Instructions for making requests: List out the requests you may have of others. Specify who the request is addressed to, it could be the team or individuals. Focus your requests on specific behaviors or words, rather than feelings, intent, or character. It helps to frame your request using phrases like “Would you be willing to...” “Are you able to...”]

My Requests for Jodie:

1. I appreciate how considerate and mindful you are of letting others speak first in meetings. I understand why you do that and see the value. However, I’m wondering if you would be able to speak up earlier and more often in our group meetings? Knowing your perspective or position is very helpful to frame the conversation. I have periodically wished we had more time to process and debate what you raise, but because it happens late in a meeting, we run out of time.

My Requests for Sam:

1. You have become a far more patient and thoughtful leader over the years. There are a few key language cues that really support this, especially when challenging other’s ideas and approaches in a meeting:
 - a. When you find yourself feeling or wanting to say “this is a bad idea” or “I don’t want to spend the money” or “These guys don’t know what they are doing,” instead of expressing that sentiment out loud (which I can understand! Believe me.), would you be willing to start your initial contact with phrases like:
 - i. “I’m not sure I understand how you got there, could you help bring me along?”
 - ii. “I think about that differently, tell me more
 - iii. “Could you tell me what you’re trying to solve for so I can weigh in better?

2. Would you be willing to email me more often related to business decisions, not for approval, but for seeking out perspective and building our relationship? It really helps our partnership. It feels worse when I am interjecting. I also enjoy the “business building” part of these conversations.
3. Could we explore how to make more time to talk about macro and larger context issues so that I can be more focused in when we go into our big decision-making meetings with the larger team?

PENCIL PROCESS SAMPLE #2

Name: SAM, CFO

Company: ACME

Date: Today

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[Instructions: make a list of as many behaviors, attributes, or contributions that you feel add value to the team]

What I Offer the Team:

- _____ Hands on experience growing this kind of business of similar size.
- _____ Ability to assess talent and character
- _____ Ability to get things done
- _____ Ability to maintain a good balance between optimism and risk control/reality
- _____ Ability to recognize the most important 1-2 variables that will most likely determine the outcome of a business decision
- _____ Good at motivating a team
- _____ Hands on leadership, in the office and in the business
- _____ Willingness to devote time to the partnership and personally invest in the relationships
- _____ Willingness to look in the mirror and grow, and willingness to own mistakes openly
- _____ Willingness to learn and be coached

Questions for the Receivers:

Is there anything significant you experience I offer that I did not list here?

REQUESTS

The following list represents what this leader requests of the team, a request could be honored, or complied with, need clarification, or in some cases declined. Receivers should read these requests and put a letter below next to each request:

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Requests for Charlie:

1. I appreciate you are a big picture thinker and your role requires this. However, we are still a small business that requires all hands on deck. Would you be willing to work more “in” the business in a few specific ways?

These include:

- Continue to take the lead on any potential or current investments where you have a lot of strength and expertise. (i.e. HR, Culture, Finance)
 - Provide greater line of sight for fundraising efforts
2. A number of team members have a perception (possibly misplaced) that you come to meetings with limited preparation. I think it’s based on the optics during the meeting. Would you be willing to adjust the optics to convey preparation and presence?

Three behaviors that would help this include:

- Make notes and write questions on the documents in advance of the meeting, so more of your attention is on the team members presenting and speaking during the meeting
 - Look at your phone as little as possible during the meeting
 - Your ability to think beyond the playing field is welcome, but sometimes it feels like it leads to discussions that aren’t germane. Could you play an active role in keeping conversations relevant or helping us understand how a line of inquiry is related?
3. Would you be able to consult me before giving my team members directives or projects?



PENCIL PROCESS FORM

Name:

Company:

Date:

OFFERS

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R = An offer I will need to *refuse*.

[Instructions: make a list of as many behaviors, attributes, or contributions that you feel add value to the team]

What I Offer:

-

Questions for the Receivers:

Is there anything significant you experience this person offers that they did not list?

REQUESTS

The following list represents what this leader requests of the team, a request could be honored, or complied with, need clarification, or in some cases declined. Receivers should read these requests and put a letter below next to each request:

- H = A request I am glad to *honor*
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My Requests:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.