

## Design a Test of Your Big Assumption

Testing Big Assumptions is at the heart of overturning an immunity to change.

*The purpose of a test is to see what happens when you intentionally alter your usual behavior in order to learn about the accuracy of your Big Assumption. (The purpose of a test is to “get information” not immediately to improve or “get better.”)*

A good test meets **S-M-A-R-T** criteria:

- 1) **S-M: safe and modest.** You might ask yourself, “what can I risk doing, or resist doing, on a small scale that might seem inadvisable if I held my Big Assumption as true, in order to learn what the results would actually be?”
- 2) **A: actionable** in the near-term & relatively easy to carry out within the next week or so.
- 3) **R-T: researches** the question, “how accurate is my Big Assumption?” and, like any good research, it requires collecting data (e.g., how people respond to you, as well as *your feelings*). The test **tests** your Big Assumption and should be designed so that it can generate disconfirming data, if it exists. It shouldn’t be some clever way to prove that your Big Assumption is true!

The easiest way to design a test can be to start with the end in mind: what data would lead you to doubt your Big Assumption? (If you can’t imagine what data could challenge or cast doubt on your assumption, then you don’t have a testable assumption.) Work backwards from there to figure out what action you could take that could generate that data.

Or you could design a test by thinking first about your behavior: what behavior you could change (start or stop doing) that would get you useful information about your Big Assumption?

- Alter a behavior from your Column 2
- Perform an action that runs counter to your Column 3 Commitment
- Start directly from your Big Assumption (Column 4): “What experiment would give me information (as to whether, e.g., the if-then sequence built into the assumption is really so certain)?

EXAMPLE TEST DESIGN:

My Big Assumption Says:	So I will (Change my Behavior This Way)...	And collect the following data ...	In Order to Find Out ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being nice keeps me safe and peaceful and protects my relationships</li> <li>• There are no costs to my being nice</li> </ul>	<p>I'm due to meet individually with each member of my leadership team next week. I'll plan for them like I usually do. And then I'll watch myself "being nice". I will ask the person what s/he is taking away from our meeting.</p> <p>I'll write down everything right away so I don't skip over anything.</p>	<p>How do I feel when I am nice? When I sugar coat? How do I feel about myself? What does the person walk away with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ <i>Is there anyone to whom you'd like to give a "heads-up" or ask to serve as an observer who can give you feedback after the fact?</i></li> </ul> <p>Not really; I will ask each person what s/he is taking away from our meeting.</p>	<p>Does being nice bring me a feeling of peace and safety? Does it work as well as I think it does? How costly is it for me to be nice?</p>

REFLECTIONS ON YOUR TEST RESULTS:

My Big Assumption Says:	So in Order to Test it I Changed my Behavior This Way...	This is What I Observed Happening ...	And This is What it Tells me about my Big Assumption
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being nice keeps me safe and peaceful and protects my relationships</li> <li>• There are no costs to my being nice</li> </ul>	<p>I met individually with each member of my leadership team and then watched myself "being nice". I only asked Sunji what she was taking away from our conversation.</p> <p>I wrote down everything I noticed right away.</p>	<p><b>Outside:</b> When I asked Sunji what she was taking away from our conversation, she said "This deliverable has a tighter timeline than I realized. I'm concerned that with everything else on my plate, I won't get it done on time." That wasn't my message. And then we had to spend more time discussing her concern.</p> <p><b>Inside:</b> When I sugar coated: I felt tense and worried that I was showing I was hiding something I felt crappy about myself, like I was weak. I felt relief that the conversation was over and nothing bad happened, but also felt bad that nothing productive happened. Felt like it was a waste of time. I felt worst of all after the conversation with Sunji bc I knew for sure she didn't get it. I realized those bad feelings hung over into my next meeting.</p>	<p>Being nice has costs to me and to the other person. In a certain way, being nice protects me in the moment but I pay a price even then for being indirect. And I paid a price even later in the day. On top of it, I see that I actually caused Sunji to worry about something that was beside my point. I see that if I was more direct with her, she could be more effective dealing with what's on her plate.</p>

TESTING YOUR BIG ASSUMPTION, TIME 1:

My Big Assumption Says:	So I will (Change my Behavior This Way)...	And collect the following data ...	In Order to Find Out Whether ...
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Is there anyone to whom you'd like to give a "heads-up" or ask to serve as an observer who can give you feedback after the fact?</li> </ul>	

REFLECTIONS ON YOUR TEST RESULTS, TIME 1:

My Big Assumption Says:	So in Order to Test it I Changed my Behavior This Way ...	This is What I Observed Happening ...	And This is What it Tells me about my Big Assumption

TESTING YOUR BIG ASSUMPTION WORKSHEET, TIME 2:

My Big Assumption Says:	So I will (Change my Behavior This Way)...	And collect the following data ...	In Order to Find Out Whether ...
		<p><input type="checkbox"/> Is there anyone to whom you'd like to give a "heads-up" or ask to serve as an observer who can give you feedback after the fact?</p>	

REFLECTIONS ON YOUR TEST RESULTS, TIME 2:

My Big Assumption Says:	So in Order to Test it I Changed my Behavior This Way ...	This is What I Observed Happening ...	And This is What it Tells me about my Big Assumption