WORKSHOPSKILL · PARTICIPANT KIT

The Advantage Compass — Participant Workbook

The guide in print, a frame to write after every debrief question, and session notes pages.

Folder: `advantage-compass` · Category: self-assessment · solo · 25 min · paper or online · assessment-type

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25
MINUTES

25 min
SETTING

The Advantage Compass — Facilitator Guide

A personal strategy tool, not a personality test. The Advantage Compass crosses two axes every career decision already depends on — where you are strong, and what the future needs — and maps your work into four quadrants. One of them is your golden track: the work you should double down on. Two of them are traps with familiar names: firefighting, and burnout.

Why another self-assessment

Most self-assessment stops at inventory: here are your strengths, here are your weaknesses, good luck. An inventory cannot answer the question that actually matters — *given my strengths, where should I spend the next year?*

The Compass borrows from corporate strategy, where this question was solved decades ago. SWOT analysis tells a company not just what it has, but where to commit resources. The Compass imports that move and rebuilds it for a person, with one deliberate upgrade: it adds **time** as an axis. Companies fight over market share; people fight over their calendar. The interesting conflicts — vision against today's fires, strength against the drag of weakness — only become visible when time is in the model.

The result is one page: four quadrants, each naming what your work there is worth and what it costs.

Three ways to run this folder

- **Solo, with an agent (25 min).** Hand the folder to your AI agent via `SKILL.md`, or paste the items from `advantage-compass-assessment.json` into a FormLM form — same 6 items, automatic scoring, every re-run comparable.
- **Teaching the model (25 min + Q&A).** The facilitator notes (`advantage-compass-facilitator-notes.pdf`) carry the full run of show: the trap opening, the axes as questions, the live demo with your own audit, and the answers to the questions you will get — and `advantage-compass-slide-deck.html` puts the 16 slides on any screen: a presenter drawer with notes and a run-of-show clock, a live audit device the room can watch fill. The PDF edition is for the lectern or printing.
- **Workshop, offline (25 min per run).** Print one A4 answer sheet (`advantage-compass-paper-form.pdf`) per participant plus the poker deck (`advantage-compass-prop-cards.pdf`). Pens, not devices; calendars, not memories.

New to the folder? `advantage-compass-start-here.md` maps every file to its use.

The two axes

Horizontal — Strength × Weakness. What you do with low effort and high output, versus what drains you for average results. Self-ratings work here because you are the only witness to your effort: the question is not *am I good at this* but *what does this cost me*.

Vertical — Vision × Pain. Vision is the work you want to be doing in three years — the pull. Pain is today's problems, deadlines, and other people's emergencies — the push. The gap between them is where careers are decided.

The quadrants:

Quadrant	Axes	Plain name	What it is worth
1	Vision × Strength	The golden track	Compounds — every hour makes the next hour more valuable
2	Vision × Weakness	The learning zone	Worth exactly one investment: enough to unblock the golden track
3	Pain × Strength	The firefighting track	Efficient, praised, and worth less every month
4	Pain × Weakness	The burnout trap	Costs energy, produces mediocrity, proves nothing

How to run it

Four steps, about 25 minutes, paper or online.

Step 1 — Collect evidence, not opinions (10 min). List the last two weeks of work, hour by hour if you can. For each block, mark two things: how good you are at it (strong / weak) and who wanted it (your vision / today's pain). Opinions about yourself arrive pre-flattered; a calendar does not lie.

Step 2 — Place the evidence (5 min). Sort every block into a quadrant. Most people discover their actual calendar is 15% golden track, 60% firefighting, and the rest damage. That number is the assessment.

Step 3 — Read the map (5 min). Three questions, in order: Which single block in Q1 is worth protecting first? Which Q3 obligation could be delegated or automated within a month? Which Q4 commitment should be ended, not improved?

Step 4 — Commit to one move (5 min). One concrete change, dated, with a check-back date in two weeks. Not a life plan — one move. The Compass is re-run monthly; strategies are revised, not regretted.

The known distortions

1. **The competence mirage.** You are good at Q3 work, so you keep doing it — being needed feels like being valued. The test is not *am I good at this* but *does this make next year easier or harder*. Firefighting is rewarded in the present and punished by the future.
2. **The humility discount.** Q1 strengths get under-marked because they feel effortless — *anyone could do this*. They could not. If something feels easy to you and valuable to others, it is a strength; the effortlessness is the signal, not the counterargument.
3. **The weakness project.** Q4 work gets defended as *growth*. Some is. The test: does this weakness block the golden track, or just bruise the ego? Only the blocking kind deserves training, and only up to "good enough" — minimum viable competence, not mastery.
4. **The vision confusion.** Pain is loud and vision is quiet; under deadline pressure, everything looks like Q3. If everything lands in one quadrant, the axes are being read wrong — go back to Step 1 and use the calendar, not the memory.

Facilitator notes for one-to-one use

The Compass is self-scored, but it runs powerfully as a 25-minute coaching conversation: the coachee fills Steps 1–2 alone, then reads the map out loud while you ask only the three Step-3 questions. Do not counsel; ask. The most useful facilitator move is the silence after *does this make next year easier or harder* — people answer it honestly when nobody rescues them from the pause.

For teams: run it individually first, then aggregate the quadrants on a shared wall. A team whose calendar is 80% Q3 does not have a productivity problem; it has a strategy problem, and now it can see which one.

Variations

- **The quarterly audit:** same tool, longer memory — three months of calendar instead of two weeks. Slower to run, sharper at exposing the firefighting ratchet.
- **The career crossroads version:** at a job decision, score the *offer* against the quadrants, not your calendar. A role that is 70% Q4 is a well-paid burnout; the salary is buying your Q1 hours.
- **The team allocation version:** managers map their reports' quadrants instead of their own. The honest question shifts from *who works hardest* to *who is working on the future*.

Files in this folder

- `advantage-compass-start-here.md` — the one-page map: pick your lane, file list, print lists
- `advantage-compass-slide-deck.html` — the deck as a stage tool: presenter drawer (S), run-of-show timer, live audit device, silence timer (T); white-label = three replacements
- `advantage-compass-slide-deck.pdf` — the same 16 slides as a print/lectern PDF (the deck's print fallback)
- `advantage-compass-facilitator-notes.pdf` — facilitator notes for teaching the model: the 25-minute run of show
- `advantage-compass-workbook.pdf` — the participant workbook: the model in plain words, guided working pages, a work-block log, and a re-run tracker
- `advantage-compass-paper-form.pdf` — print-and-fill A4 answer sheet: the 6 items + two-week audit, one per participant
- `advantage-compass-prop-cards.pdf` — poker-spec print sheet (63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed + cut guides): compass card, four quadrant cards, audit card, backs and blanks
- `advantage-compass-activity-poster.pdf` — A3 wall poster of the model: dial, healthy calendar, exit moves, cited theory trail
- `advantage-compass-guide.md` — this guide
- `advantage-compass-debrief.md` — how to read the map and the four exit moves
- `advantage-compass-assessment.json` — the 6 placement items + time-audit, plain JSON
- `advantage-compass-license.md` — what you may do with this kit, in plain language — CC BY 4.0 plus two attribution-free commercial tiers
- `SKILL.md` — machine-readable manifest for AI agents
- `advantage-compass-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief sheet, bound as one A4 PDF
- `*-Letter.pdf` — US Letter paper size for all four print documents (run sheet, workbook, answer sheet, facilitator notes); same content, bookmarks and linked TOC in every edition

Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the debrief and this guide with two curl commands (see `SKILL.md`), or run the whole self-assessment as a live form with one `formlm-cli smart generate` step. The paper version needs no screen: cards, a pen, and two honest weeks.

The Advantage Compass — Reading Your Map

> One rule first: the quadrants do not judge you; they locate you. A map that flatters is a map that gets you lost.
>
> Use with `advantage-compass-guide.md`. Reading takes 10 minutes.

The 60-second read

Before any self-improvement plans, answer three questions in order:

1. **What share of your two weeks landed in Q1 (golden track)?** Under 20% is the norm on a first run — most calendars are hostage to Q3. The number is not a verdict; it is the baseline you are negotiating against.
2. **Which single Q3 block is the biggest hour-thief?** Not the most annoying one — the biggest. Name it in plain words: “the Tuesday report nobody reads”, “being the unofficial helpdesk”.
3. **Is anything sitting in Q4 by choice?** Pain × weakness work that nobody forced on you is the quietest drain there is. It usually wears a virtue’s clothes: “I should be more well-rounded.”

Quadrant by quadrant

Q1 — Vision × Strength: protect, then expand.

This is the only quadrant where hours compound. Two moves: first protect the existing blocks (put them on the calendar as appointments with yourself, not leftovers), then expand by subtraction — every hour reclaimed from Q3 or Q4 goes here first, not to new obligations.

Q2 — Vision × Weakness: train to “good enough”, then stop.

The learning zone is real, but it has a spending limit. The limit is *minimum viable competence*: enough to unblock the golden track, no further. A would-be speaker who fears slides learns enough slide craft to not distract — and stops. Mastery here is procrastination in a productivity costume.

Q3 — Pain × Strength: delegate, automate, or taper.

The trap wears a salary and a compliment. Three exits, in order of preference: hand it to someone whose Q3 is their Q1 (for them it is the golden track — this is what delegation actually is), automate the repeatable part, or taper your involvement down month by month. What you must not do is get better at it — excellence in Q3 raises the demand.

Q4 — Pain × Weakness: end it, don’t improve it.

Effort here has negative yield: it costs energy, produces average output, and crowds out Q1 hours. The exit is not training — it is removal. Negotiate it away, trade it, or quit the arrangement that requires it. “But it’s my job” is a Q4 answer to a Q1 question: the job description can be renegotiated, your calendar cannot be refunded.

The two-week audit, quantified

Quadrant	Your hours	Healthy share	If you are over
Q1 golden track	_____	40%+	Expand the definition — you may be hiding comfort inside “vision”
Q2 learning zone	_____	10–15%	Check for gold-plating: training past the point of unblocking
Q3 firefighting	_____	under 30%	Pick the biggest block; run the three exits
Q4 burnout trap	_____	under 5%	Something needs to end, and you already know what

The healthy shares are not commandments — they are what the calendar of a person with a strategy tends to look like. A quarter spent launching something new legitimately looks different. What is never healthy: Q3 + Q4 above 60%, quarter after quarter.

When the map disagrees with your self-image

The audit says 5% golden track; your self-image says “I’m basically doing what I love.” Both are honest — they measure different things. The self-image measures preference; the calendar measures allocation. When they disagree, believe the calendar: allocation is what the next three years will be built from. Preference is what the exit interview will be about.

The reverse distortion also pays a visit: people in a hard Q3 season (a launch, a crisis, a rescue) read their temporary calendar as a permanent character flaw. Seasons end. Re-run the compass after the season, not during it — but do re-run it. “Temporary” that is never re-examined is how Q3 becomes a career.

The exit moves, as one-liners

- Q1: “This hour makes the next hour more valuable. Protect it like a client meeting.”
- Q2: “Learn it until it stops blocking me. Then spend the rest of the budget on Q1.”
- Q3: “Being good at this is the trap. Hand it, automate it, or taper it.”
- Q4: “Improving this is still spending my best hours on my worst work. End it.”

Re-running the compass

Monthly, 25 minutes, same four steps. The point of a re-run is not the score — it is the delta: which quadrant grew, which shrank, and whether the one move from last month actually happened. A compass you consult once is a horoscope.

Session notes