Expanded Guide: What Am I Trying Never to Face?

On Stoic Living Discussion Series · Guide 8 of 12 · August

For facilitators. Read before the meeting, after the Meeting Primer and the core reading (about 15 minutes).

The Meeting Primer introduces the readings and terms. The meeting guide supplies timing. This guide helps you keep attention on the aversion that governs a choice and the priority the participant is learning to give it.

What the discussion and application are for

Give expense and displeasure their practical weight. Examine the point where avoiding them seems to authorize a misleading account, and ask why honesty could deserve greater concern even if deception worked. The object and priority of aversion matter. Continuing to dread the conversation can coexist with understanding why deception is worse to choose. No physical discomfort exercise or confession is needed.

August develops courage through the Discipline of Desire. We identify an external cost we want to avoid, notice what avoiding it might seem to authorize, and rehearse becoming more averse to our own misuse of choice.

The borrowed drill comes from Week 34. It gives a real inconvenience a place in the discussion. A repair bill may strain a budget. A friend's annoyance may threaten an easy relationship. The pressure to mislead the friend shows how escape can become more important than honesty.

The weekly progression prepares this comparison. Week 31 audits the outcome behind avoidance and its priority. Week 32 uses finite time to reconsider what we keep postponing. Week 33 gives repeated experience of wanting relief while preserving good judgment. Week 34 brings those preparations into Re-Aim Aversion.

The meeting rehearses that final exercise. It asks for no physical challenge or disclosure of a serious loss. Someone who has done a weekly exercise can describe what it revealed; a newcomer can reason from the drill case.

Progress concerns how much authority avoidance of wrongdoing gains relative to escape from the external. A person may still dislike the bill intensely. They may recognize the better priority while finding it hard to endorse. Let them name the difficulty honestly.

Leading it Socratically

- **Find the actual object of avoidance.** "I don't want this conversation" may mean "I don't want my friend to be angry." Ask one further question if needed.
- **Give the cost its reasonable weight.** Hear why the money or relationship matters before testing its authority over honesty.
- **Locate a real conflict.** Ask what the person is tempted to choose. If no poor choice appears, do not require an admission.
- **Compare priorities.** Ask what makes deception worse to choose, including if it successfully avoids the bill.
- **Distinguish honesty from self-blame.** A fair account preserves uncertainty about a fault that may have existed earlier.
- **Keep the sentence connected to reasons.** Repeating an admirable priority can begin a rehearsal. Ask what would help the speaker mean it when the pressure returns.

0–10 minutes — Open and encounter the case

Welcome everyone, explain the discussion agreements, and read the case aloud:

> You borrowed a friend's power drill and broke it. You want to avoid the repair cost and your friend's annoyance. Letting them assume it was already faulty seems an easy escape.

Ask the opening question printed in the meeting guide. Hear two or three interpretations without settling them. Carry the differences straight into question 1. Prior weekly experience is welcome, but everyone has the facts needed here; no personal disclosure or practice report is required.

10–60 minutes — Discussion: five questions

Give expense and displeasure their practical weight. Examine the point where avoiding them seems to authorize a misleading account, and ask why honesty could deserve greater concern even if deception worked. Hear competing reasons before introducing the full application method. The follow-ups are resources for inquiry, not a script that must all be completed.

Each question has a purpose, two follow-ups, and something to listen for. The first follow-up is the booklet's probe.

1. What are you trying to prevent besides the repair bill?

Purpose: identify the outcome behind an ordinary avoidance.

- If the bill disappeared, what would you still want to avoid?
- What does your friend's possible annoyance seem to say about you?

Listen for distinct objects such as embarrassment, distrust, or tension. More than one can matter. Ask which one gives the imagined escape its strongest appeal.

2. When does a reasonable precaution become a demand for escape?

Purpose: recognize when preventing an external outcome begins to govern character.

- What are you beginning to make honesty depend on?
- What would distinguish choosing a suitable time from waiting until a good response was guaranteed?

Listen for conditions that give another person's answer authority over a sound choice. A practical precaution can remain reasonable when it leaves room for a disappointing response.

3. What would be worse to choose than facing this unwelcome cost?

Read Enchiridion 2 here, when the group compares the objects of aversion. Ask what aversion promises and what changes when it is directed toward our own misuse of choice. Return to the borrower's competing concerns; do not require participants to claim that they already feel the better priority.

Purpose: make the proper object of aversion concrete.

- Why would misleading a friend matter even if it worked?
- What sort of trust does the misleading account ask the friend to place in it?

Listen for reasons concerning honesty and fair dealing. "I might get caught" is another external consequence. Ask whether the wrong remains a reason when that risk is removed.

4. What could make you more willing to bear the cost without seeking hardship?

Purpose: connect willingness to a worthwhile purpose and a better priority.

- What worthwhile priority is the wish for relief putting on hold?
- How might limited time change the weight you give waiting for the perfect conversation?

Listen for honesty or care for the relationship gaining importance. Chosen difficulty serves a purpose in the weekly course; the amount of discomfort itself cannot establish better valuation.

5. What would show that your aversion was being re-aimed?

Purpose: locate progress in what the person most wants to avoid.

- Could you still dread the response while becoming less willing to deceive?
- Looking back, what could reveal that protecting your image mattered more than giving an honest account?

Listen for a shift in the authority of competing concerns. Someone may reject the misleading escape more firmly or recognize where the external still governed them. Either gives a useful

account of what needs practice.

Going deeper, for a room that is ready: How can wanting to avoid wrongdoing become a wish only to avoid being seen doing wrong? Ask what the person would want if nobody else ever learned the choice they made.

60–80 minutes — Application: compare what to avoid

Compare avoiding the repair bill and annoyance with avoiding an intentionally misleading account. Use Name → Compare → Re-aim once. The earlier fault revealed later should test honesty under uncertainty, rather than requiring the borrower to accept blame for damage they may not have caused.

The object and priority of aversion matter. Continuing to dread the conversation can coexist with understanding why deception is worse to choose. No physical discomfort exercise or confession is needed.

Keep sample responses in reserve until participants have offered and questioned their own accounts. Use the method once to test the discussion's conclusions.

Hear two or three answers per step. Several aversions may be plausible. The group need not decide which one every borrower would feel.

1. Name. What external cost do I want to avoid, and why? Ask what would remain unwelcome if the expense vanished. The borrower might still dread being thought careless or losing permission to borrow again.

> **Sample response:** "I want to avoid an unexpected bill and my friend's annoyance. I also want to avoid being seen as someone who cannot be trusted with things."

The cost can remain important. Naming it clearly helps locate the comparison. Avoid praising a person for caring less about money without hearing what the money would provide.

2. Compare. What poor judgment or choice might I accept to escape it? In this case, the temptation is to let the friend accept a misleading explanation. Ask what is wrong with that choice apart from the risk of being found out.

> **Sample response:** "I could let my friend think I know the drill was already faulty. That would make their decision depend on an account I cannot honestly give."

The wrong concerns the use of choice. It is distinct from the drill's failure, the size of the bill, and the friend's own response. A participant can seek a fair division of responsibility without accepting a false story.

3. Re-aim. I would prefer to avoid this cost, but it would be worse to choose this wrong. Fill both parts with the specific concerns. Have someone say why they want the second aversion to have more authority.

> **Sample response:** "I would prefer to avoid the expense and displeasure, but it would be worse to mislead my friend to escape them. I want honesty to matter more than getting through this comfortably."

Ask whether the sentence feels credible under the imagined reaction. If someone says they would be honest only if the friend promised to stay calm, return to which mission is governing which.

The reveal (if time allows). Your friend says the drill had been sticking before you borrowed it and asks whether it was already broken. The facts about the fault are now less straightforward.

> **Sample response:** "I would prefer to avoid paying for a fault that was already there, but it would be worse to claim certainty I don't have. I know it stopped working while I used it; I don't yet know why."

The borrower need not accept responsibility for damage they did not cause. Ask whether the original aversion was mainly to a fair cost, an uncertain accusation, or any displeasure at all. The reveal can make that distinction clearer while retaining honesty as the governing priority.

80–90 minutes — Close

Ask what became clearer or what question remains unsettled. Invite the reason for a changed view, and let a well-supported disagreement remain. End with the single take-home invitation and a brief transition to the next theme. The full method has already appeared during application; do not repeat its steps as an assignment.

Misunderstandings to watch for

IF YOU HEAR…	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
"The bill is indifferent, so ignore it."	Moral classification erases practical cost.	Ask what provision or fair arrangement the expense deserves.
"If I'm afraid, I'm doing badly."	A feeling establishes the person's priority.	Ask which choice they are prepared to accept or reject.
"Courage means accepting all the blame."	Willingness requires an inaccurate account.	Ask what the facts support about responsibility.

IF YOU HEAR...	THE MISUNDERSTANDING	TRY
“I should choose the hardest option.”	Difficulty is good in itself.	Ask what purpose the harder option serves.
“I’ll be honest if they won’t be angry.”	Character becomes conditional on a response.	Ask which mission is governing the other.
“I said it, so my aversion has changed.”	The sentence establishes a new priority.	Ask what made the priority hard to mean under pressure.
“I noticed only afterward.”	Later recognition cannot train valuation.	Ask what they most wanted to prevent and what they now want to value.

Facilitating the people in the room

WHO	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TRY
The avoider	Describes the activity but not the feared outcome.	Ask what they hope will never happen during it.
The budget realist	Gives the bill serious practical weight.	Preserve that concern and compare what it could justify.
The self-blamer	Accepts responsibility beyond the evidence.	Use the reveal to distinguish honesty from unsupported blame.
The toughness tester	Wants a more extreme challenge.	Ask which aversion the challenge would train and why that serves character.
The reputation protector	Wants the friend to think well of them.	Ask what would be worth avoiding if the choice stayed private.
The expert	Repeats that virtue is the only good.	Ask how that would change the borrower’s re-aiming sentence.
The talker	Supplies several stories before others enter.	Stay with the shared case and invite another willing voice.
The quiet member	May be considering a priority silently.	Offer a question about the borrower and allow passing.

When an example is painful. Thank the speaker without pressing for details. Offer the drill case, a pause, or moving on. Nobody needs to disclose a loss, undertake discomfort, or prove willingness to the room.

Questions you may be asked

“Is avoiding discomfort always a mistake?” No. Relief, prevention, and practical care can be reasonable. The exercise asks whether escape has begun to justify a misuse of choice.

“Does re-aiming mean the original fear disappears?” The lesson allows the external to remain unwelcome. Practice concerns the priority you give to rejecting dishonesty or injustice.

“Must I pay for the drill?” A fair arrangement depends on the facts. This exercise examines what you want to avoid and what you might compromise to avoid it. It can support an honest inquiry without deciding the bill in advance.

“How does the finite horizon fit?” Week 32 uses a limited period as a modern teaching device to reconsider conditions that keep worthwhile priorities waiting. Here, one question can expose whether we demand an ideal response before valuing honesty.

“Do we need a discomfort exercise?” This meeting uses oral rehearsal of Re-Aim Aversion. The weekly course offers repeated chosen discomfort as one way to prepare willingness. Members can join this meeting without doing it.

Adapting the practice and discussion

- **Mostly newcomers.** Explain aversion through the borrower’s wish to escape one outcome. Keep the comparison concrete.
- **Mostly experienced members.** Use the reveal and the question about image. Invite what an earlier weekly exercise revealed about priority.
- **Online.** Read the re-aiming sentence slowly and hear different completions. Passing is welcome.
- **A large group.** Let pairs compare two plausible aversions in the same case and explain which concern they want to give priority.
- **Short on time.** Skip the reveal or shorten question 4. Retain a specific external cost, a real tempting choice, and the reason for rejecting it.

After the meeting, send a short recap through your group’s usual channel with one or two insights or open questions and the single take-home invitation. Experiences and fresh questions are equally welcome at the next meeting.

Source lessons: On Stoic Living, Weeks 31–34.