

YOU ARE BEING ASKED TO APPROVE SOMETHING.

The meeting is moving fast. Everyone seems comfortable. Your signature is the last remaining step.

But something doesn't sit right.

That matters.

Here's what to do about it.

CARD 1 — HOLD THE ORIGINAL QUESTION

Write down what you're being asked to approve.

Do not let the meeting quietly replace it with easier questions.

If your question is "Are we operationally ready?" then "Training is 87% complete" and "Testing has passed" may be useful, but neither automatically answers your question.

Keep it visible.

CARD 2 — WHAT DOES THIS ACTUALLY ESTABLISH?

For every assurance you receive, ask: What exactly does this establish?

Not what it suggests. Not what everyone seems to think it means.

What does it establish?

Then ask: What conclusion am I being asked to draw from it?

Then: What evidence connects the two?

CARD 3 — DON'T LET YOUR QUESTION DISAPPEAR

If your question stays the same while the answers keep changing, stop.

You: "Are we ready?"

Them: "Training is 87% complete."

You: "Does that establish readiness?"

Them: "The system has passed testing."

Say: "I don't think we've answered my question."

Or: "Can you answer the original question directly?"

You are not being difficult. You are keeping the question from disappearing.

CARD 4 — TRUE DOES NOT MEAN RELEVANT

A statement can be completely true and still fail to answer your question.

"The auditors signed off." What does that establish? That an audit was completed. What does it not automatically establish? That every relevant fact was independently verified.

"Legal reviewed it." Establishes: Legal advice was obtained. Does not establish: Every issue relevant to your decision was legally established.

"Testing passed." Establishes: Testing occurred. Does not establish: The system is ready under every condition that matters.

Ask: Is this relevant to what I'm approving?

CARD 5 — WATCH THE JUMP

Watch for this pattern:

X was reviewed → therefore X is under control.

The process was completed → therefore the outcome is sound.

Training was completed → therefore people are competent.

Testing passed → therefore the system is ready.

Whenever you hear one used to justify the other, ask: What establishes that bridge?

CARD 6 — COUNT EVIDENCE, NOT ENDORSEMENTS

You may hear: Legal reviewed it. Compliance reviewed it. Finance checked it. IT reviewed it. Audit reviewed it.

That sounds like five confirmations.

Ask: How many independent pieces of evidence do we actually have?

Five people agreeing with the same assertion are not necessarily five independent confirmations.

Trace backwards. Who established this originally? What did they rely on? Who independently verified that?

Sometimes five layers of review rest on one original assertion.

CARD 7 — WHAT HASN'T BEEN TESTED?

When you hear "Everything has been checked," ask: What hasn't been tested?

What was outside the scope?

What assumptions were accepted?

What conditions were not tested?

Remember: Untested does not mean unsafe. It means untested.

You are not turning every unknown into a red flag. You are stopping an unknown from quietly becoming a known.

CARD 8 — WATCH THE SCOPE

Every assurance has a boundary.

What exactly was reviewed? Under what conditions? What was outside the scope?

What assumptions did the review depend on?

A completed review tells you a process occurred. It does not automatically tell you that every proposition relevant to your decision was established.

CARD 9 — DON'T CONFUSE CONSENSUS WITH EVIDENCE

If everyone appears comfortable, ask: What question did everyone actually answer?

"Everyone has looked at it" is not the same as "The proposition has been independently established."

None of these proves you are wrong:

- Everyone else is comfortable
- We've already discussed this
- The auditors didn't raise it
- Legal has signed off

They may simply make it socially harder for you to keep asking.

CARD 10 — WHEN THE ROOM MAKES YOU FEEL UNREASONABLE

If you find yourself thinking: Am I overthinking? Am I being difficult? Maybe I should just trust them.

Pause.

You do not need to prove that your concern is correct.

Ask: Has my original question actually been answered?

If the answer is no, you have discovered an unanswered question.

That is enough reason to keep asking.

CARD 11 — THE BURDEN SHIFT

You may start with: "Has this been established?"

The room may subtly move to: "Why don't you believe it?"

Those are different questions.

You do not have to prove the proposition is false.

You can say: "I don't have sufficient basis to approve this yet."

That is not an accusation. It is a governance statement.

CARD 12 — IF SOMEONE ANSWERS WITH A QUESTION

If you ask: "Did X happen?" and receive: "If X happened, wouldn't Y have happened?" — pause.

Ask: "Did you answer my original question?"

Then: "What proposition are you asking me to infer?"

And: "What evidence establishes that inference?"

You don't have to accuse anyone. Simply restore the conversation.

Try: "I understand the inference. But I asked whether X happened."

CARD 13 — WHO ACCEPTS THE REMAINING UNCERTAINTY?

You may hear: "Legal is comfortable. Compliance is comfortable. Finance is comfortable."

Ask: Who is actually accepting the remaining uncertainty?

Not who discovered it. Not who documented it.

Ask: Who is accepting the residual risk?

The uncertainty may sit between departmental remits. That does not mean someone is hiding it. It may simply mean nobody has consciously owned it yet.

CARD 14 — UNCERTAINTY DOES NOT HAVE TO DISAPPEAR

You don't need to hear: "There is no uncertainty."

A legitimate decision can look like:

"We don't know X. The probability of Y is low. We have not tested Z. The consequence of Z would be significant. We have decided to proceed anyway."

That can be good governance.

The problem is not uncertainty itself.

The problem is unacknowledged uncertainty masquerading as established fact.

CARD 15 — DOES YOUR SIGNATURE TRANSFER THE RISK?

If your signature is required, ask: What becomes my responsibility when I sign?

Which uncertainties am I being asked to accept?

Have those uncertainties been explicitly identified?

You do not have to accept uncertainty merely because everyone else has become comfortable around it.

CARD 16 — YOU DON'T NEED TO PROVE SOMETHING IS WRONG

You do not need:

- insider information
- proof of misconduct
- knowledge of someone's motives
- a better solution
- certainty that the project will fail

You can simply ask:

What does this establish?

What conclusion am I being asked to draw?

What connects the two?

That is enough.

CARD 17 — USE "NOT YET"

You do not have to say "No."

You can say "Not yet."

Not until:

- the original question is answered
- the relevant evidence is provided
- the scope is clear
- the missing test is completed
- the assumption is made explicit
- someone consciously accepts the remaining risk

"Not yet" is not obstruction. Sometimes it is simply what responsible decision-making looks like.

CARD 18 — IF YOU NEED ONE SENTENCE

"I understand these reviews have been completed. I'm still trying to establish what specifically gives us sufficient basis for the conclusion I'm being asked to approve."

Or shorter:

"What exactly establishes the conclusion I'm being asked to approve?"

Or, if you need to stop the conversation:

"I don't think my original question has been answered yet."

CARD 19 — THE THREE QUESTIONS

If you remember nothing else, remember these:

- 1. What is established?** What do we actually know from the evidence?
- 2. What is inferred?** What conclusion are we drawing from that evidence?
- 3. What is being approved?** What am I actually being asked to put my name behind?

If they align: Proceed.

If they don't: Stop and investigate the bridge.

Not because something is necessarily wrong. Because you don't yet know what you think you know.

CARD 20 — BEFORE YOU SIGN

Ask yourself:

Am I being asked to approve something that has actually been established, or something that has merely been surrounded by assurance?

If you can answer that clearly: Sign or decline accordingly.

If you cannot: Ask. Clarify. Document. Escalate.

You are not required to manufacture certainty.

You are required to know what you are putting your name behind.

Remember: The uncertainty does not disappear.

It gets your name on it.

IF YOU ONLY HAVE 2 MINUTES

Read these in order:

Card 1: Write down what you're being asked to approve.

Card 2: For every assurance, ask: What does this actually establish?

Card 19: The three questions (What is established? What is inferred? What is being approved?).

Card 20: Before you sign, know what you're signing.

Want to understand what is going on?

→ Return to the [full explanation at Centreline Clarity](#)

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→ [Snapshot](#)