

The Sun Tzu Diagnostic

Five Questions Before Engagement — Chapter 1 Framework

KEYSTONE TEMPLATE — INCLUDED IN BOOK

Before engaging any resistor, answer five questions. This takes five minutes and prevents you from walking into engagements where the terrain favors your opponent. If you can't answer all five, you're not ready to engage.

ENGAGEMENT DETAILS

STAKEHOLDER / SITUATION

DATE OF ASSESSMENT

THE FIVE QUESTIONS

1

What do they stand to lose?

Be specific: status, workflow control, expertise relevance, headcount, budget authority, narrative control. The more precisely you can name the loss, the more accurately you can predict their behavior.

2

What do I actually have the power to do?

Be honest: what decisions are yours to make? What resources do you control? Where does your authority end? Don't plan beyond your actual power—plan to the edge of it and build alliances for the rest.

3

Can I win without direct confrontation?

Sun Tzu's supreme excellence. Can the data speak for itself? Can a first follower carry the message? Can the contrast between your deliverables and theirs make the argument without you narrating it?

4

What terrain favors me?

Data-driven meetings. Demo environments. Written communication where evidence is documented. Anywhere your preparation advantage is visible and their political advantage is neutralized.

5

What does victory actually look like here?

Not "they admit they were wrong." Real victory: the initiative moves forward, the resistance becomes irrelevant, the organization benefits, and you're positioned for the next engagement. Define this before you engage.
