FACILITATOR PLAYBOOK

Martin Gonzalez & Josh Yellin

This playbook includes:

> An easy guide for current or aspiring facilitators of the Bonfire Moment.

> Preparation checklists, room layout, the flow of the day, and outlines for each module.

> Tweaks to make for larger groups.

We urge facilitators to begin by reviewing the preparation check lists as soon as they commit to running a Bonfire Moment.

Preparation checklists

One month prior to the workshop:

› Select a date and block it from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

› Ideally, choose a Friday (or the day at the end of the workweek), soon after a milestone event or big deadline and never right before.

› Keep all calendars clear of side meetings.

Decide who should participate.

› **For an early-stage startup:** Everyone working full-time or a large portion of their time (cofounders and early employees).

› **For a larger startup:** The CEO and their leadership team (direct reports to the CEO).

› **For a team within a larger organization:** The team leader and their direct reports, sometimes called "the intact team." Do not include others in different parts of the organization.

› **Don't include:** Investors or board members.

  › Mentors (excluding the facilitator if applicable).

  › Interns.

  › External or internal customers.

Find a venue that will allow for focused, distraction-free dialogue:

› Consider another office space (not your own), a living room, rented room at a coworking space or business hotel, or the outdoors.

› Avoid your day-to-day work area.

› Decide which feedback tool you will use. The experience will be meaningful and effective regardless of whether you use the self-assessment or the 360-degree assessment, but they require different preparation (see appendix C).

One week prior to the workshop:

› **Send a reminder to participants along with some guidelines:** that they block off the full day, prepare to part with their devices, and settle any urgent work tasks prior.

› Set aside a notebook for taking notes, and an internet-enabled device (mobile, tablet, laptop) to be left at a device parking lot and used only at designated times.

› Print participant workbooks[1] or have copies of this book available.

Gather optional additional materials:

› Whiteboard and marker to write any notes or topics to revisit when time runs out

› Post-its, pens

› Single-purpose timer to keep track of time and stay off your phone

One day prior to the workshop:

› Ensure that all materials are complete.

› Set up the space for the day: chairs in a circle with no tables.

› Have a plan to shift the space for Block 3's Bullshit Circle: floor pillows or bean bags, a darkened room, laptops playing a bonfire video.[2]

› Arrange for food delivery so as not to waste time moving to a different location for lunch.

Overview of the Day

One-minute overview: The Bonfire Moment is split into four blocks across one full day.

›   **Block 1: Face Hard Truths.** Participants reflect on their leadership skills with the help of a structured self-assessment (or the 360-degree assessment if they chose this option), and receive coaching from their peers.

›   **Block 2: Notice Hidden Dynamics.** Participants write up their individual User Guides that contain their personal motivations, work styles and preferences, expectations, and exit scenarios, and share them with the team.

›   **Block 3: Drop the Masks.** Team members reflect and share the self-doubts and insecurities they bring to work and the ways they cope.

›   **Block 4: Resolve Unspoken Issues.** The team selects from a list of common sources of conflict and aligns on the most burning issues and elephants in the room.

Five-minute rhythm of the day: This is a blow-by-blow overview of the day, as discussed in chapters 8 through 11.

Block 1: Face Hard Truths
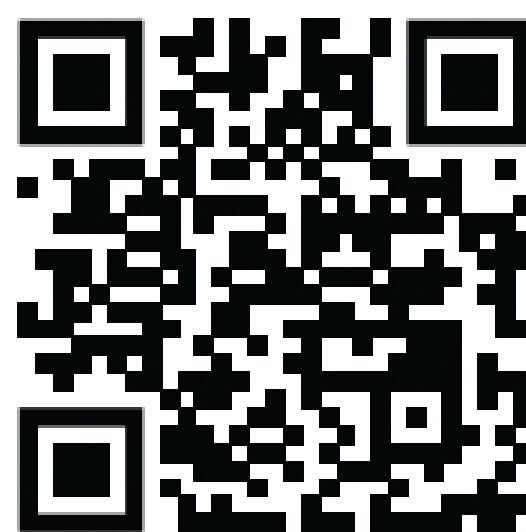
Time required:
2 hours and 5 minutes +
15-minute break

Materials needed:
❯ Participant workbook or copies of this book
❯ Phones/laptops to access self-assessment
❯ Chairs in a circle, no table
❯ Timer

9:00 a.m.   **Start:** The facilitator sets the group's expectations by sharing an overview of the day and some ground rules: no screens, no bullshit, no bragging, no spilling.

9:15 a.m.   **Self-assessment:** The facilitator prepares the team to assess their individual skills by sharing the underlying structure behind the assessment questions. After filling out their questions on the online tool, participants read the summary of insights and write down some of their early reflections.

To quickly access the self-assessment, have participants scan this QR code:

9:45 a.m.   **Peer coaching:** Each teammate gets 20 minutes to focus on one area where they'd like input from the group. This is an opportunity to untangle the thoughts and reactions they might have from the self-assessment summary.

11:05 a.m.   **Fifteen-minute break:** Congrats! You're now done with the first block.

Block 2: Notice Hidden Dynamics

Time required:
2 hours and 30 minutes
(including a working lunch) +
10-minute break

Materials needed:
❯ Participant workbook or copies of this book
❯ Lunch provisions

11:20 a.m. | **User Guide overview:** The facilitator shares the rationale behind the User Guide, its sections, and the right mindset to approach this task.

11:30 a.m. | **Individual authoring:** The team spends an hour filling out their User Guides.

12:30 p.m. | **Team huddle:** The team shares their responses for each section of the User Guide, over a long lunch.

1:50 p.m. | **Ten-minute break:** Well done! Tidy up the space after lunch and take a quick break.

Block 3: Drop the Masks

Time required:
1 hour + 15-minute break

Materials needed:
› Change of environment
› Four laptops playing a video of digital bonfire
› Timer

Before 2:00 p.m.	**Set up the space:** The facilitator darkens the room and places pillows in a circle on the floor, with four laptops in the center showing a digital bonfire
2:00 p.m.	**Circle up:** The facilitator explains the goals, structure, and guardrails of the self-disclosure exercise. Then the facilitator offers the first personal story, to set the tone. In silence, everyone else reflects on their fears and insecurities and the self-preserving narratives they may be using to hide them.
2:20 p.m.	**The Bullshit Circle:** Each team member shares their reflections. The others listen without passing judgment or offering advice. It's a time to genuinely connect on a human level.
2:50 p.m.	**Debrief:** After everyon finishes their stories, take 10 minutes to decompress, share realizations, and show gratitude for this moment of raw honesty.
3:00 p.m.	**Fifteen-minute break:** Congrat! You just finished the hardest part of the day. Time to stretch and fuel up for the final push.

Block 4: Resolve Unspoken Issues

Time required:
2 hours and 5 minutes +
10-minute break

Materials needed:
❯ Participant workbook or copies of this book

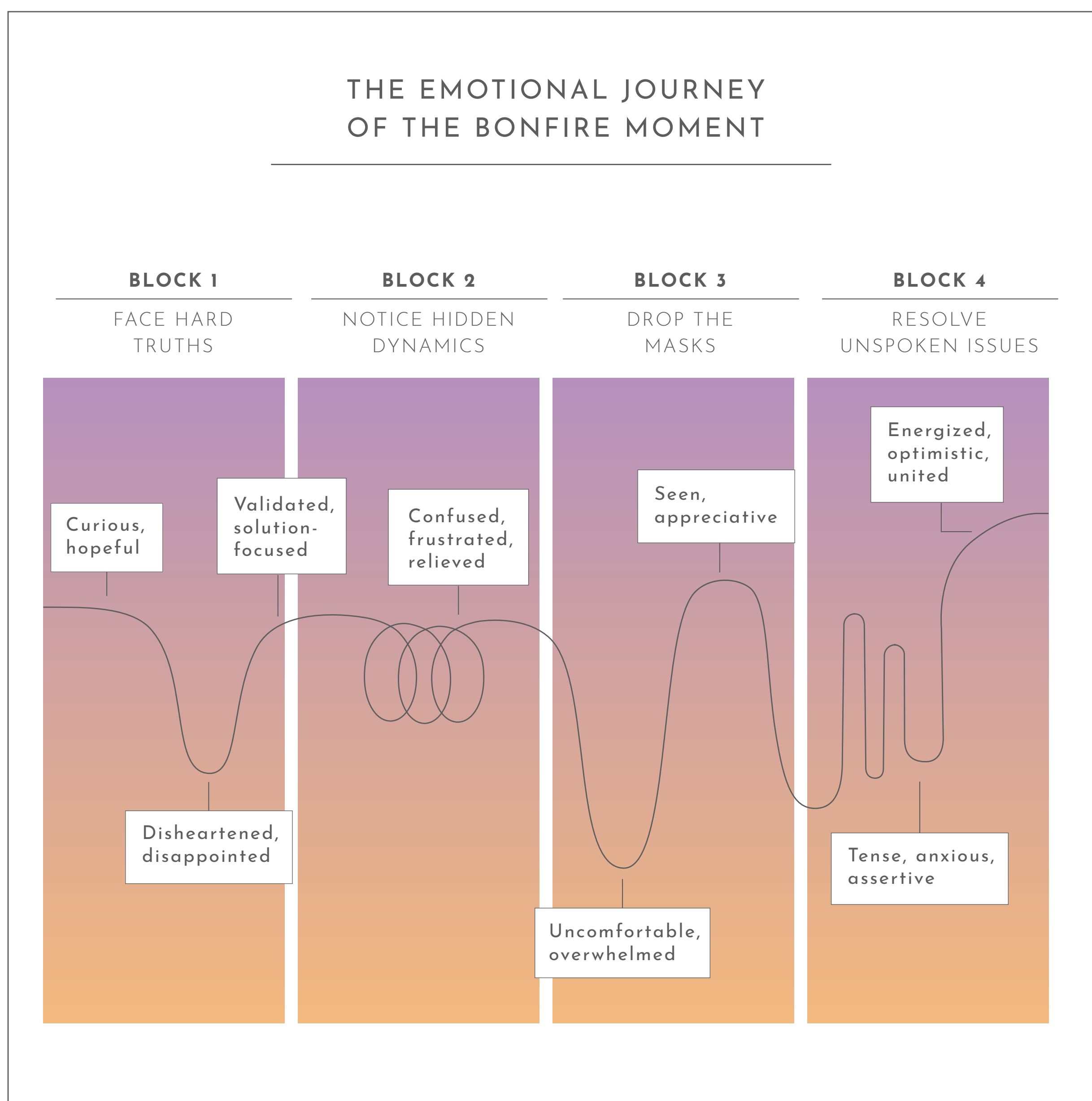|	
3:15 p.m.	**Set up the challenge:** The facilitator explains the goals of Block 4, then invites the team to read and reflect on the tactics that lead to "Class 2," productive, respectful disagreements.
3:25 p.m.	**The Team Drag Checklist:** The team reviews the twenty critical sources of misalignment, miscommunication, and conflict that startups commonly encounter. The team votes on three of these "elephants in the room" that seem most worthy of immediate attention. (See chapter 11 for the checklist.)
3:40 p.m.	**Dive in:** The team discusses their three most urgent sources of team drag, or as many as they can get through in eighty minutes, using the Class 2 disagreement guidelines.
5:00 p.m.	**Ten-minute break:** The last break of the day, a quick mental reset before the sprint to the finish line.
5:10 p.m.	**Wrap up:** After a long day of hard work, the team gathers one more time while standing in a circle. They briefly share what insights stood out and summarize the progress they made together.
5:30 p.m.	**End:** That's it. You're all done!

Supporting the Group Throughout the Day

Be ready to support the group through the emotional journey they will be on. No two Bonfire Moments are going to be alike, so continually read the room and see how you can best guide the team through it. Negative emotions are part of the design of the day, so don't try to smooth them over. However, if the vibe gets too heavy and unproductive, it's part of your job as facilitator to call for a break, to give people a chance to cool down and reset.

THE EMOTIONAL JOURNEY
OF THE BONFIRE MOMENT

BLOCK 1	BLOCK 2	BLOCK 3	BLOCK 4
FACE HARD TRUTHS	NOTICE HIDDEN DYNAMICS	DROP THE MASKS	RESOLVE UNSPOKEN ISSUES

Curious, hopeful

Validated, solution-focused

Confused, frustrated, relieved

Seen, appreciative

Energized, optimistic, united

Disheartened, disappointed

Uncomfortable, overwhelmed

Tense, anxious, assertive

Here are some of the most powerful tactics, explored across chapters 6 through 12, to help you build and safeguard the psychological safety of the group, encourage their best possible responses, and nail your Bonfire Moment:

> Meet with each participant before the workshop to understand their current experience of the team and their expectations of the workshop, and reinforce the seriousness of what's at stake.

> Continually acknowledge that these topics are difficult to work on, but that doing so is essential to helping the team find common ground. Model curiosity by asking a lot of questions.

> Be careful not to use the "parent voice."

> Find an appropriate location that pulls the team away from day-to-day distractions. If you run your Bonfire Moment virtually, be ready to set clear ground rules and follow through on them.

> Start the day with just enough of an overview to manage people's anxieties about blocking off the time, but withhold details so participants can go through the psychological journey without worrying about the difficulty of some activities.

> Watch out for these behaviors in participants: vacationing, absenteeism, hypercriticism. Prepare yourself to manage big egos in the room.

> Keep revisiting the ground rules—no screens, no bullshit, no bragging, no spilling—especially when you observe them being violated.

> Keep an eye on the clock, and don't hesitate to pause conversations that go off topic or over time. There's a lot to cover in just one day, and tangents can easily derail the schedule.

> Help participants understand where they are in the process, especially at the start of each block. Signpost what's coming, and always let the group know how much time is allocated for each segment.

> Invest in your own personal growth as a facilitator. After the day is over, you can ask the team for feedback. You can also ask a seasoned facilitator to shadow you and provide input, or ask permission to observe more experienced facilitators at work.

Tweaks for Larger Groups

When you are facilitating for multiple startup teams at the same time in the same room, or for several teams within a larger company, there are a few important variations to consider:

> **Facilitators:** We recommend having an experienced facilitator run the workshop for any group larger than ten people. For workshops that exceed twenty participants, consider adding an extra facilitator for every twenty additional people. With enough facilitators, we've been able to scale the workshop to as many as eighty people simultaneously.

> **Room setup:** The larger the group gets, the longer it takes to move them from one location to another. So we recommend designing the space so there is minimal travel between the workshop, break, and meal areas.

> **Time:** The time blocks in this playbook work well for smaller groups. With larger groups, assume there will be more interruptions, more participant questions, and more logistical instructions to handle. So be ready to expand the time if necessary, and be more precise with the time limits you give the group.

> Changes by block:

> > **Block 1:** During the peer coaching sessions, consider grouping similar functions (e.g., CEOs together, sales managers together). This is optional, but we've found the relatability of having similar role-related challenges adds depth to the conversation.

> > **Block 2:** During the User Guide team huddle, keep startup teams intact. If some solo participants have come to attend the workshop without their teams, put them into a group and have them share their personal realizations and how they intend to invite their teams to write up their own User Guides. You can expect them to finish much sooner and enjoy a longer break than the intact teams.

Block 3: For the Bullshit Circle, break up a large group into a maximum of ten per circle, and cap the sharing time for each person to two minutes (this won't feel rushed, and it will allow you to get through as many people without dragging into the night). It's optional to have members of different startups circle up together, or else keep the teams intact.

Block 4: Keep startup teams intact.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Most startups fail not because of a bad product, poor timing, or mismanaged cash, but because of people problems: conflicts over strategy, decision-making, and team culture. Even the smartest entrepreneurs have been derailed by these soft problems: How do you fire a loyal friend who's not up to par? How do you motivate your team to give their all? What happens when egos and emotions overpower facts and reason? The soft stuff can be shockingly hard.

Martin Gonzalez and Josh Yellin outline the common traps startup teams fall into, and share their powerful one-day workshop that helps teams escape those traps. The unique process of The Bonfire Moment brings colleagues together for a full day of facing hard truths, noticing hidden dynamics, and gearing up for the intense challenges of startup life. When the constant hustle feels overwhelming, a team's Bonfire Moment pulls them out of the day-to-day intensity to reflect and reboot.

The Bonfire Moment has proven effective with hundreds of teams of all sizes around the world—from the smallest startups to large organizations—significantly improving their cohesion, focus and effectiveness. Now this book will teach leaders the principles behind The Bonfire Moment and how to run the workshop on their own. It's ideal for anyone who needs to build an extraordinary team to achieve big goals.