

# Who Cut My Cheese?

## *Discussion & Leadership Guide — V1*

A free companion for readers, teams, and leaders. Based on the book by Garrett P. Goldwaite.

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Closing Bell Pizza survived the Friday rush. The cheese, the scale, and the four people arguing about both were never really the point — the point is what happened between "who cut the cheese?" and "this time, they're ready." This guide pulls that part out so you can use it somewhere that doesn't sell pizza.

Use Part One on your own or with a team over lunch. Use Part Two if you're the one who has to decide what actually changes afterward.

## Part One — For Readers & Teams

### The Four Responses to Disruption

When conditions change, people often protect something valuable: control, momentum, accumulated knowledge, belonging. Each instinct can help. Each can also become a liability when it operates alone.

| Character | Instinct  | Strength                                           | Risk Under Pressure                                                               |
|-----------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mara      | Measure   | Standards, visibility, follow-through.             | Treating variance as proof of disobedience before testing the system.             |
| Nico      | Act       | Speed, improvisation, practical action.            | Solving the immediate problem privately and borrowing consequences from tomorrow. |
| Doreen    | Notice    | Pattern memory, tacit knowledge, product judgment. | Using experience as veto rather than evidence others can examine.                 |
| Mina      | Integrate | Perspective, translation, shared awareness.        | Mistaking understanding everyone for leading anyone.                              |

No response is the correct personality. The useful move is to make each strength available to the others.

### Which One Are You Under Pressure?

Think of the last time something broke at work and nobody yet knew why. Which useful question did you reach for first?

- **"What can we measure, and what might the measurement be missing?"** — you lean Measure. Watch for treating a number as proof before you've tested what it's counting.
- **"What can we do right now?"** — you lean Act. Watch for fixing it quietly and letting tomorrow inherit the consequence.
- **"What does experience already tell us?"** — you lean Notice. Watch for treating your own read as a verdict instead of evidence.
- **"What needs to be shared, and who has to decide?"** — you lean Integrate. Watch for mistaking "everyone understands" for "someone acted."

### For Discussion

Straight from the book's own back matter — used as written, with one added line of facilitation guidance per question.

1. **At what point did the team stop investigating the problem and begin interpreting one another?** — Ask the group to name the exact line or moment. It usually has a timestamp.
2. **Which character's first explanation felt most reasonable to you? What evidence supported it — and what did it miss?** — There are no wrong answers here; the point is noticing that every theory in the book was reasonable and incomplete.
3. **Which parts of the shortage existed in the physical world, and which existed because of how the system represented the world?** — This is the case-weight question. It travels directly into any conversation about dashboards, metrics, or automation.

4. **Where did a reasonable individual action create a worse collective result?** — Look for the moment each character's strength, used alone, made the shared problem harder.
5. **What information should Mara have shared earlier? What information should Nico have surfaced without being asked?** — Two different failure modes: withholding from above, and not disclosing from below. Don't let the group collapse them into one lesson.
6. **What would a two-minute "facts before motives" reset look like in a workplace you know?** — Push for a specific, nameable version of this, not a general answer. "We'd talk more" is not a reset.

## Try It Yourself

Mina's tool, mid-crisis: draw a line down a page. Left side, **FACT**. Right side, **WHAT WE THINK IT MEANS** — and cover it until the left side is full. Use it on something real, right now, that's still unresolved.

| FACT | WHAT WE THINK IT MEANS (cover until ready) |
|------|--------------------------------------------|
|      |                                            |
|      |                                            |
|      |                                            |
|      |                                            |

## Close: Three Questions

Mina's closing tool from the last chapter — carried over from the shift to whatever you're dealing with now.

- **What changed?**
- **What are we assuming?**
- **What needs to be said out loud?**

Write one answer to each. Pick one to actually say out loud this week.

## Part Two — For Leadership Teams

This part is for the room with budget authority, not the book club. It moves fast from the metaphor to your own operation on purpose — and it deliberately will not land on "communication is important" or "change is good." Both are true. Neither is a decision.

### Reframe: Which Instinct Dominates Your Leadership Team?

Most leadership teams are not evenly distributed across Measure, Act, Notice, and Integrate — most over-index on one or two. A team that is all Measure will over-control before it understands what changed, the way Mara did in the first hour. A team that is all Act will generate invisible workarounds, the way Nico did. Name your team's dominant instinct before you go further — the rest of this guide works differently depending on the answer.

### Twelve Questions for the Leadership Table

7. Where in our operation does a system's unit of measurement (a "case," a ticket, a seat, a call) currently diverge from what it represented when the process was designed — and when did we last check?
8. What decision have we made upstream in the last quarter that we have not fully disclosed to the team living with its consequences, and what did we tell ourselves that made withholding it feel responsible?
9. Which of our current standards or automation rules is being followed correctly while still producing outcomes we'd call wrong — and have we mistaken compliance with the rule for evidence the rule still fits reality?
10. When we last had a visible failure, how much of the post-mortem time was spent establishing what happened versus establishing who was responsible — and which one actually reduced the odds of recurrence?
11. Whose tacit, unwritten knowledge is currently the only thing standing between "normal operations" and a repeat of our last incident?
12. Where has an individual's private workaround kept something running while making the underlying problem invisible to everyone else — and would we know if it were happening right now?
13. If we introduced AI or automation into this process, what assumption would it inherit from today's system without ever being told to re-check it?
14. When was the last time a frontline observation ("this packs different") was overruled by an aggregate number, and was that the right call?
15. Do our people currently believe that raising a "this doesn't look right" signal will be treated as useful information or as an accusation?
16. What is our equivalent of the bell — a signal we treat as meaning "ready" that we know, if we're honest, sometimes just means "someone wants this to be ready"?
17. If we are asking teams to trust a new system or process the way Mara asked the crew to trust the scale, have we told them what changed and why, or only what's now required of them?
18. What would a two-minute "facts before motives" reset actually look like the next time something breaks here — and who in this room is willing to be the one who calls it?

### What This Is Not

This is not an argument that measurement is bad, that speed is bad, that experience should override data, or that talking more solves everything — the book doesn't argue any of that either. Mara's standard survives the story, refined, not discarded. This

discussion has done its job only if it produces one specific, named answer about your own organization to Question 1, 2, or 3 above — not a general nod toward the book's themes.

## About the Book

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Closing Bell Pizza has survived broken equipment, no-show drivers, impossible rushes, and customers who order just before close. But when the cheese starts disappearing and a suspicious odor keeps returning, the crew develops four confident explanations — none of them complete. Mara tightens control. Nico improvises. Doreen trusts what fourteen years of experience tells her. Mina tries to keep everyone working together. As the Friday rush deteriorates, each person's greatest strength begins making the shared problem worse.

**Who Cut My Cheese?** is a short, illustrated workplace parable about change, blame, measurement, tacit knowledge, leadership, and the difference between finding a culprit and understanding what actually happened.

## About the Author

Garrett P. Goldwaite writes about work, decision-making, systems, and the human side of change. His background spans operations, technology, customer service, and analytics, with a particular interest in how capable people make decisions when information is incomplete and pressure is real.