

# 01

THE BOOK  
CLUB GUIDE

— FOR READING GROUPS & BOOK CLUBS

# The Discussion *Guide*

*Everything your group needs to read, discuss, and put  
the ideas of *Certain About Uncertainty* to work.*

A COMPANION TO  
*Certain About Uncertainty*  
BY JOHN AUSTIN, PHD

A FREE READING GUIDE  
*For any book club*

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# What's *inside*.

*A short tour of this guide—use whatever serves your group, skip the rest. Nothing here is required reading.*

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## § 01

# A letter to the *group*.

*First, thank you for picking this book. Here's what to expect and how to make the most of it together.*

**C**ertain About Uncertainty is built around the idea that uncertainty is a fundamental part of life. Learning to read it well is a practice. That makes it well-suited to a group because practices need company.

This guide is meant to be viewed as help rather than a homework assignment. Take what's useful and ignore what isn't. The chapter summaries on the next pages let any member catch up if they fall behind. The question bank is sorted by the book's three pillars (**anticipatory awareness**, **adaptability**, and **learning agility**) so you can pick what fits the group you're in. There are three exercises included as full walkthroughs, designed to be run live in a meeting with no preparation.

If your group meets once for this book, jump to the Single Session structure. If you'd like to go deeper, the Three-Meeting Arc gives you a session per pillar. And if you want this to become something more than a book club, the final structure is a six-week cohort, a UQ Circle, with a separate starter pack available on the website.

Two last things. First, the best discussions happen when members bring in their own uncertainty. Challenge members to bring something that is not just an abstract uncertainty, but an actual decision they're avoiding, an assumption they're making, a future they can't picture.

Second, I genuinely want to hear how it goes. If your group is reading the book, I'd be happy to drop in on a meeting for twenty minutes. Details on the last page.

## § 02

# The book, in *brief*.

*Eleven chapters. Short summaries for members who missed a chapter or want a refresher before discussion.*

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CH.

1

THE FRAME

## Uncertainty Is Life

Why uncertainty triggers fear in adults that didn't exist in childhood. Loss aversion, normalcy bias, and ambiguity aversion are protective instincts which can limit us more than they protect us.

| *"We were not born with a fear of uncertainty; we learned it."*

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CH.

2

THE FRAME

## Uncertainty Intelligence

Introduces the three-part framework: anticipatory awareness, adaptability, and learning agility. Includes a self-assessment across all three.

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3

SEEING  
THROUGH  
THE FOG

## Bridging the Future Gap

The six-month-to-three-year blind spot: why we plan for next quarter and dream about retirement but neglect the middle distance. Strategies for connecting today's decisions to tomorrow's consequences without falling into either short-term comfort or long-term abstraction.

---

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4

SEEING  
THROUGH  
THE FOG

## Perceiving Large-Scale System Shifts

The bigger the change, the harder it is to see coming. We spot medium-sized trends but miss when the entire system is changing. Weak signals, cognitive blind spots, and the Shift Perception Curve.

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## 5

SEEING  
THROUGH  
THE FOG

## Uncertainty Vectoring

A tool for mapping multiple uncertainties and their interconnections so you can prepare for several possibilities at once. Sarah and Jake use it to navigate a career decision, working through ambiguity to create a workable strategy.

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CH.

## 6

SEEING  
THROUGH  
THE FOG

## Prospective Sensemaking

From individual perception to collective understanding. How groups can make sense of ambiguous futures together through dialogue and by doing so generate energy and alignment.

*"When teams develop shared anticipatory awareness, they don't just see more; they see differently."*

---

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## 7

CROSSING  
THE CREEK

## Adaptive Action

Why good ideas die in execution when the ground keeps shifting. Three translation moments (mindset, behavior, context) move an insight from understanding to embedded practice. Translation as a learnable capability.

---

CH.

## 8

CROSSING  
THE CREEK

## Future-Proofing Your Team

Uncertainty intelligence at the team level. The Situated Expertise Map, the four quadrants of situated expertise, and a culture of help-seeking that allows a team to harness individual knowledge.

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## 9

INTO DAILY  
PRACTICE

## Future You in Everyday Decisions

The daily negotiation between who you are now and who you'll be later. Temporal discounting sabotages our best intentions; reconnecting with your future self is a small mindset shift with outsized effects.

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CH.  
10INTO DAILY  
PRACTICE

## Building Career Resilience

Why linear career planning has stopped working and what to do instead. The professionals who thrive aren't better predictors, they prepare for multiple futures more systematically.

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CH.  
11INTO DAILY  
PRACTICE

## The Fog as Friend

The closing chapter. From fear to fascination: the power hidden in not knowing is the freedom to imagine, create, and grow in ways that certainty hinders. Uncertainty remains but you become more capable of working with it.

┆ *"Uncertainty isn't the enemy of a life well-lived. It's the essence of it."*

§ 03

# Forty-two *questions.*

*Six openers, twelve per pillar, and three closers. Pick what fits the interests of your group. Five great questions beat twenty mediocre ones.*

## TO OPEN — PICK TWO

### Warm-Up Questions

- i*      What's an uncertainty you have right now: personal or professional?

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- ii*     Before reading this book, how would you have described your relationship with uncertainty?

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- iii*    What's a passage from the book that stands out to you?

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- iv*     If a friend asked what this book is really about, what would you tell them?

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- v*      Where in your life are you treating uncertainty as a problem to eliminate?

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- vi*     What did the book get right? What did it get wrong, or miss?

## PILLAR ONE

# 01 Anticipatory Awareness

- 01*     When you think about ten years from now, whose future are you actually picturing? Yours, or someone else's?

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- 
- 02 What signals are you ignoring that you suspect you shouldn't be?
- 
- 03 Think back ten years. What did you assume about the future that turned out to be wrong?
- 
- 04 Where in your work do you scan for what's coming? Where do you only react?
- 
- 05 What's a weak signal in your industry that most people are dismissing?
- 
- 06 Who in your life has the longest time horizon? What do they see that you don't?
- 
- 07 If you had to name three forces most likely to reshape your work in the next decade, what would they be?
- 
- 08 What future are you secretly hoping won't arrive?
- 
- 09 When did you last change your mind about where things are headed? What changed it?
- 
- 10 What does your weekly information diet consist of? Is it widening your view or narrowing it?
- 
- 11 If you ran the Time Telescope right now (ten years back, ten years forward) what's the biggest gap?
- 
- 12 Where are you spending your attention versus where the signals are loudest?

## PILLAR TWO

## 02 Adaptability

- 
- 01 What's a belief you held strongly five years ago that you no longer hold? What broke it?
- 
- 02 Which of your current assumptions would be most painful to discover were wrong?
- 
- 03 Where in your life are you choosing a known bad situation over an unknown better one?
-

- 
- 04 When was the last time reality forced you to rebuild a plan from the ground up?
- 
- 05 What's a story you tell about yourself that may no longer be true?
- 
- 06 If you ran the Backward-Forward Flip on a current decision, what would change?
- 
- 07 How do you behave when something disrupts your routine? What does that reveal?
- 
- 08 Where are you over-prepared, and where are you under-prepared?
- 
- 09 What's a small "what if I'm wrong" experiment you could run this month?
- 
- 10 What do you cling to even after evidence suggests you shouldn't?
- 
- 11 Who in your life is most adaptable? What do they do differently?
- 
- 12 What does flexibility look like for you versus instability? Where's the line?

## PILLAR THREE

## 03 Learning Agility

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- 01 What have you been learning recently that has nothing to do with your job?
- 
- 02 Where do you actively seek to be wrong? Where do you avoid it?
- 
- 03 What's the last thing you learned that genuinely surprised you?
- 
- 04 If you applied Uncertainty Vectoring to a current decision, which direction would you choose?
- 
- 05 How long does it usually take you to update a belief in light of new information?
- 
- 06 Where are you mistaking experience for expertise?
- 
- 07 What's something you used to be good at that you've stopped practicing?
-

- 08 Who challenges you in ways that make you better rather than just defensive?
- 09 When you're stuck, what's your default move...double down, or step back?
- 10 What's a skill you keep telling yourself you'll develop later?
- 11 If you had to start your career from scratch tomorrow, what would you do differently?
- 12 Where could you afford to be a beginner again?

## TO CLOSE — PICK ONE

## Commitment Questions

- i* What's one small experiment you're committing to before the next meeting?
- ii* If you took one idea from this book seriously, what would change in the next thirty days?
- iii* Which pillar do you most want to develop and what's the first step?

## § 04

# Three *exercises.*

*Each of these can be run live in a meeting with no prep. Pick one per gathering, or spread them across a three-meeting arc.*

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## EXERCISE ONE

## Stretching Your *Horizon.*

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## PILLAR

Anticipatory Awareness

## TIME

25 minutes

## MATERIALS

Paper and pen per member

**THE IDEA**

Most people look either backwards or forwards. This exercise stretches the view in both directions and lets the past inform the future.

**THE STEPS**

1. Each member draws a horizontal line. Midpoint is today. Left end is ten years ago. Right end is ten years from today.
2. On the left half, mark five inflection points (decisions, surprises, losses, gains) that shaped the last decade.
3. On the right half, imagine five things that might shape the next decade. Don't filter for plausibility yet.
4. Share. The prompt: *What pattern do you see when you look at both halves together?*

**THE DEBRIEF**

What surprised members about their own back-half? What forces or themes appear on both sides of the line?

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## EXERCISE TWO

## The Assumption *Flip.*

## PILLAR

Adaptability

## TIME

30 minutes

## MATERIALS

Paper, pen, willingness to be wrong

## THE IDEA

We make most decisions on a base of unexamined assumptions. The Flip surfaces them, inverts them, and asks: *if the opposite were true, what would I do differently?*

## THE STEPS

1. Each member writes a current decision they're sitting with. One sentence.
2. List three assumptions baked into how they're thinking about it.
3. For each assumption, write the opposite as if it were true.
4. For each opposite, answer: *what would I do if I believed this?*
5. Share one flip per person with the group, and the action it suggested.

## THE DEBRIEF

Which flip felt most uncomfortable? Where did the inverted version actually feel truer than the original?

## EXERCISE THREE

## Uncertainty *Action.*

## PILLAR

Learning Agility

## TIME

30 minutes

## MATERIALS

Large paper or whiteboard

## THE IDEA

When the destination is unclear, the instinct is often to wait. Uncertainty Action asks you to pick a direction with high information value. This is a step that teaches you something regardless of how it turns out.

## THE STEPS

1. Each member names one decision where they feel stuck.
2. List three to five possible directions, however small or partial.
3. Score each direction on two axes: *how much I'd learn* and *how reversible it is*.
4. The best move is usually high-learning and high-reversibility. Pick one and define what to do this week.

## § 05

# Three ways to *structure* your read.

*Pick the format that fits your group's rhythm. The right one is the one your members will actually finish.*

**FORMAT A**

## The Single Session

*Two hours · One meeting · Whole book*

**BEST FOR** Groups that meet monthly and want one focused conversation on the whole book.

**STRUCTURE** Twenty minutes of warm-up. Sixty minutes on the three pillars (two or three questions each). Twenty minutes on one exercise. Twenty minutes on closing commitments.

**PRE-WORK** The One-Page Summary, distributed a week before, for any member who couldn't finish.

**FORMAT B**

## The Three-Meeting Arc

*Ninety minutes each · One per pillar*

**BEST FOR** Groups that want to go deep, try the exercises, and reflect on what works between meetings.

**STRUCTURE** Meeting one focuses on Pillar One and runs the Stretching Your Horizon exercise. Meeting two focuses on Pillar Two and runs the Assumption Flip. Meeting three focuses on Pillar Three, runs Uncertainty Action, and closes with commitments.

**PRE-WORK** A "between-session" prompt sent to the group chat before each meeting.

## FORMAT C

## The Six-Week Cohort

*More than a book club*

**BEST FOR** Groups who want this to become more of a group led course: leadership teams, peer cohorts, friend groups looking for structure.

**STRUCTURE** I've tentatively called this a UQ Circle. Six weekly sessions of ninety minutes, each with its own focus, exercise, and between-session experiment. See the UQ Circle starter pack on the website for the full curriculum.

**THE DIFFERENCE** Members make a real commitment and run experiments between meetings. The closing session is a 90-day plan.

# Eight notes for the *facilitator*.

*You don't need to be an expert in this material to lead a great discussion. You just need to keep the conversation going.*

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***i*** **Open with one real uncertainty**  
Start by sharing one of your own. The conversation goes quickly once one person starts.

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***ii*** **Don't ask twenty questions**  
Pick three to five ones you like and give each one some time. Silence after a question can be good. Don't feel a need to fill all pauses.

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***iii*** **Move from abstract to concrete**  
"What does the book say about adaptability?" is fine. "Where in your life are you stuck?" is better.

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***iv*** **Watch the quiet members**  
Some people process slowly. After the second talker, look at someone quiet and ask what they're thinking.

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***v*** **Let people disagree with the book**  
The best discussions surface where the book overreaches or misses. Encourage pushback; don't defend.

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***vi*** **Run an exercise, don't just discuss**  
Twenty minutes spent doing one of the suggested exercises beats sixty minutes spent talking about one of the exercises in the book.

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***vii*** **End with a commitment**  
Skip the recap. Ask each member to name one experiment they'll run in the next thirty days.

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***viii*** **Follow up the next week**  
A short message asking how members' experiments went might keep the conversation going past the meeting.

## — AN OPEN INVITATION

# I'll join your meeting for *twenty minutes.*

*If your book club is reading Certain About Uncertainty, I'd be glad to drop in at the end of your discussion for a Q&A. No charge.*

- Twenty minutes by Zoom, scheduled around your meeting.
- Open Q&A and your group sets the agenda.
- Two slots per month, first-come basis.
- Groups of five or more, anywhere in the world.

**REQUEST A VISIT →**

[certain-about-uncertainty.com/book-clubs](https://certain-about-uncertainty.com/book-clubs)