

Widen the Frame

**A way to make sense of difficult situations
and relationships**

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Use this as a thinking tool, not a test. You can read it once, then come back to the four questions when a particular situation feels stuck.

You've probably already tried to sort this out.

You've thought about it, talked it through, adjusted your approach. And yet something still doesn't make sense.

You may be carrying a workplace situation that follows you home, a relationship that has you second-guessing your judgement, or a decision you can't seem to land on.

The issue isn't that you're incapable. It's that you're standing inside the problem.

Before deciding what to do, make sure you're solving the right problem

Many capable people spend months trying to fix the wrong thing:

- Becoming more assertive when the other person has very little capacity to meet them differently.
- Planning an exit when the real issue is one specific dynamic.
- Assuming they are the problem when the wider environment is playing a much bigger role.

You can come up with a perfectly sensible solution to the wrong problem. That's why it helps to widen the frame before you decide what to do.

Widen the Frame: four questions to ask

When a situation feels stuck, widen the frame before you decide what to do. Ask:

You

What's happening for me—reactions, assumptions, needs, habitual responses?

The other person (or the other side of the dilemma)

What can I reasonably understand about them or it—style, role, capacity, limitations, or

each option realistically offers and demands? If your situation is mostly internal, "the other" might be the decision itself, a future you're imagining, or a part of you that sees things differently.

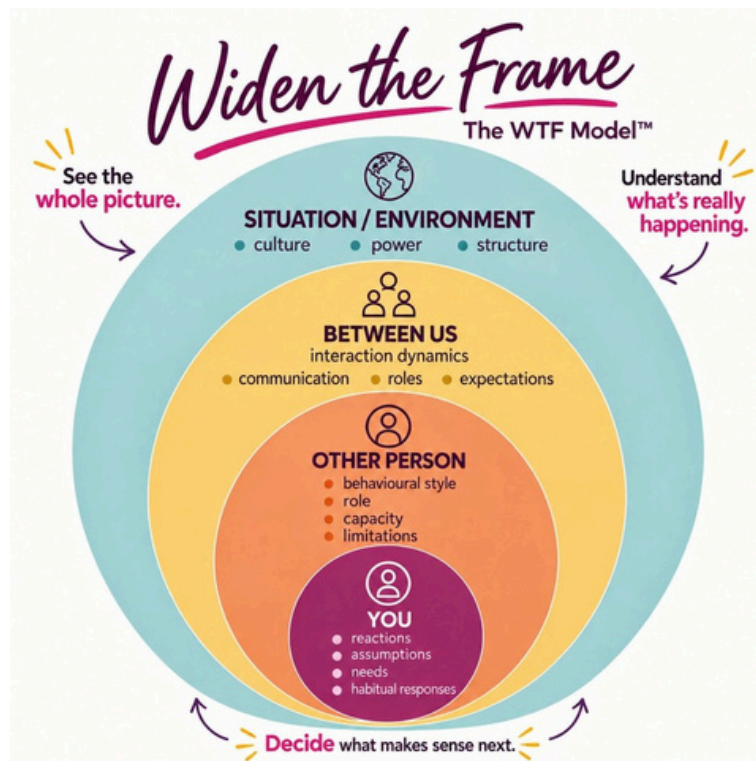
Between us

What happens when we interact—or when you engage with this decision or dilemma—communication patterns, roles, expectations, and the dynamic that's created?

The situation / environment

What else is shaping this—workplace or family system, culture, power, structure, life stage, financial realities?

You don't need a perfect answer to each question. You just need enough clarity to stop circling the same information.



Sometimes the answer is much more ordinary than expected:

- Someone has limited capacity.
- Expectations aren't aligned.
- A workplace has changed.
- An old response isn't useful anymore.
- Two reasonable people bring out something unhelpful in each other.
- You've been carrying something that isn't actually yours to carry.
- The situation simply isn't sustainable.

The point isn't to force a particular answer. It's to understand the situation clearly enough to decide what makes sense next.

What coaching adds

You can try to widen the frame on your own, but it's hard to do when you're emotionally involved.

Coaching gives you:

- A structured way to look at the situation without oversimplifying it.
- Someone who can notice patterns you're too close to see.
- Help separating what is yours to change from what belongs to the other person (or the other side of the dilemma) or the wider context.
- Space to test different interpretations before you commit to a decision.

In practice, we might:

- Map one difficult conversation, recurring pattern, or paralysing decision using the four parts of the frame.
- Identify which assumptions are solid and which are guesses.
- Distinguish between "I don't like this" and "This is not workable."
- Explore a small set of realistic next steps and what each would cost you.

The goal isn't to tell you what you should do. It's to help you see the situation clearly enough that you can make decisions you trust.

A quick example - a workplace relationship

A client came to me convinced she needed to leave her job. She was exhausted, resentful, and sure the role was wrong for her.

When we widened the frame, we saw:

- **Her:** a pattern of taking on extra work to avoid conflict, and a belief that saying no would make her look difficult.
- **The other person:** a manager with very limited capacity and little awareness of her workload.
- **Between them:** a dynamic where her reliability was quietly rewarded with more work, and resentment built on both sides.
- **Situation/environment:** a team restructuring that had shifted expectations without anyone saying so.

She didn't instantly decide to stay or leave. But for the first time in months, she could see the situation clearly. From there, we could work out which parts were hers to change, which belonged to her manager, and whether the role itself was still workable.

Another example - an internal stuckness

A different client wasn't in conflict with anyone. She was paralysed by a decision: stay in a secure role or move to something more aligned but riskier.

Widening the frame, we looked at:

- **Her:** fear of regret, a strong need for security, and a belief that "getting it wrong" would be catastrophic.
- **The "other" (in this case, the options themselves):** what each path realistically offered and demanded.
- **Between:** how her anxiety spiked whenever she imagined choosing one and losing the other.
- **Situation/environment:** financial responsibilities, life stage, and a workplace culture that punished any misstep.

She didn't instantly know the "right" answer. But she could see that the problem wasn't just "which job?" It was also how her own history with risk was shaping the choice. That clarity made a decision possible.

Is this the right kind of support for you?

This work tends to fit people who:

- Are used to handling things themselves but are stuck in a situation they can't seem to resolve.
- Want more than scripts, pep talks, or generic advice.
- Are willing to look at their own part without assuming everything is their fault.
- Want to make decisions they can stand behind, even if the situation doesn't become perfect.

If you're thinking, "I know something isn't working, but I can't quite figure out what's going on," that is a perfectly good place to begin.

Next Step

Book a conversation to explore whether this kind of coaching would be useful for you.

You don't need to arrive with a clear question or a plan. We can begin with what is happening, what you have already tried, and what still does not make sense. Many people book a conversation just to test whether this way of looking at things makes sense for their situation.

That's enough.

Book a conversation



Sherry Waddingham

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I help professional women who are stuck in difficult situations or relationships. Together we look at what's really going on, underneath the obvious and in the wider context, and work through what to do next.