



# Stand STRONG Tips for Session Leaders

By Lockett Davidson and Amari Dryden



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## A Note from the Authors of Tips for Session Leaders

No matter our age or experience, we can build our resilience. The Stand STRONG comic/playbooks contain some of the HOW for students as they navigate the unfamiliar territory of college. The principles apply just as well to life after college or to pursuits other than college. They seek to normalize some of the emotions and instabilities that tend to arise when we stretch ourselves to meet new experiences.

Most of us desire these things: to have meaningful lives, to be loved, to be rewarded fairly for our work, to live in circumstances that satisfy us. Each of us creates a unique journey toward these desires.

The earlier we learn the principles that make us effective leaders, the more likely it becomes that our outcomes will align with our aspirations. This holds true when we are leaders in our own lives as well as when we lead others.

In our journey, we are likely to find that unfamiliar feelings and experiences are unsettling. With practice and experience we learn they are also opportunities for personal growth. As we come to see setbacks as temporary, we can learn from them. As we come to believe in our strength and ability, we recognize we have the capacity to make it through good and bad times. This capacity is widely known as resilience.

We can greatly improve the odds of achieving our dreams when we make lifelong habits of reflecting on our experiences, asking powerful questions and holding ourselves and others accountable. Practice, repetition, and reminders are keys to creating these habits and building our resilience. The stories and practices in the Stand STRONG series are powerful gateways to this important inward focused work.



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## The Stand STRONG Series

### College Survival Guidebooks with Practices for Your Success

*Stand Strong Tips for Session Leaders*, a companion to the series, offers ideas for lightly facilitated conversations that will deepen the learning experience for students.

The Stand STRONG series is written for those who are transitioning from high school to college. Each of the 3 parts of the comic/playbook combination tells the story of a fictional character's experience as they begin college. In each story the character encounters easy-to-learn and easy-to-use practices that strengthen their personal resilience and effectiveness.

In the playbook that follows each story, the student reader is invited to reflect on the comic character's experiences and apply them to their own concerns. There is space for the student reader to write and draw responses to prompts that encourage them to consider their own habits and ways of showing up.

Each of the comic/playbook combinations is a 30+ page soft cover booklet. Each part can stand alone but the three are best experienced in numerical sequence as each also builds on the preceding story and personal practice.

Part One: Coleman Learns to CENTER - the core concept of Stand STRONG; a practice of Presence, of using the mind to direct energy and attention to the center of the body, invoking a sense of inner calm. It teaches focus on the present moment, takes power away from outside concerns and negative thoughts, and increases the ability to respond rather than react, and to remain stable and grounded.

Part Two: Will Learns to Ask POWERFUL QUESTIONS - an essential skill for evoking curiosity and for discovering and understanding one's path and purpose

Part Three: Shayla Learns to Use the ACCOUNTABILITY PATHWAY - a tool for thinking and talking about personal accountability with self and others

#### **WHO is the Series for?**

Church groups, school groups, summer bridge programs, college orientation programs, whether in person or remote, are all ideal situations for students to orient to the Guides. Session leaders of this course can be teachers, peer mentors, counselors, etc.

Though intended for students who are transitioning from high school to college, ***the core practices are for everyone.***

One on one sessions that pair a student with a parent, grandparent, older sibling or friend and use the series as the conversation starter can also be excellent openings for learning. Our observations have shown us that there is usually deep learning for **all** participants in these conversations.

## TIPS FOR THE SESSIONS

### HOW can the series be studied effectively

Students will have a rich experience with the series in groups of 2 - 20. The series' design balances activities between individual (writing, drawing and reflection) and group (comments and sharing). Group interactions contribute greatly to the learning. Originally intended for in-person activities, virtual platforms can also be effective.

In the lightly facilitated workshop the students read each comic story together, stopping for questions, comments, and/or additional resources or research. After the story section, each reader works individually in their playbook, then shares and discusses the responses and goals with others in the group. The sharing may occur every few pages or all at the end of the playbook. In a few weeks time, it's a good practice to reassemble the group to review and reflect on progress in a few weeks time.



### Workshop Flow

1. Greet participants
2. Go over agenda
3. Centering Exercise
4. Icebreaker
5. Establish ground rules
6. Read the story together
7. Centering Exercise
8. Individual work in the playbook
9. Sharing
10. Recap learned objectives
11. Centering Exercise
12. Last word



### Most important to share:

- Goals set by the student in the workbook
- Steps to reach the goals
- Emotions and observations
- Sensations (where emotions show up in the body)

### Materials participants will need

#### in person

- Writing utensils (to draw/write throughout the book)
- Comic/Playbook

#### for a virtual workshop

- Computer
- Wi-Fi
- Virtual Meeting platform (such as Zoom)
- Idea mapping Software (such as Miro)



## Virtual

At Touchstone we piloted a virtual workshop for Part One of the series using Zoom as the meeting platform. We paired it with Miro, a web-based idea mapping software. The combination allowed our facilitator to interact with participants, and the participants with one another, as they read, wrote, drew and shared their responses, all online. We are in the process of developing detailed workshop manuals for all three parts of the series.

*Watch our website for more information in early 2021.*



## ICEBREAKERS - Getting to Know One Another

Icebreakers can help to establish understanding among the group. They also serve to get the participants talking even if they are already a close-knit group.

A few suggested Icebreakers (IP: In Person, V: Virtual)

- o New and Good: Everyone in turn says one thing that's new in their life and one thing that's good (IP, V)
- o Map Dreaming: If you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be? What do you see there? What drew you there? (IP, V)
- o Tour Guide (V): each participant gives a virtual tour of the room they're sitting in
- o 5 Things in Common (IP, V): As a group, come up with a list of 5 things that everyone has in common — we are all wearing shoes, own a MacBook, etc. If everyone is working from home, find 5 items that everyone has in their immediate area — we all are sitting on a chair, we all have a notepad, etc.



## GROUND RULES/COVENANT

At the beginning of the workshop, it's important to establish some ground rules. A few are suggested below but it's important that first, the group comes up with a list. If there are things that the group hasn't mentioned, you may bring attention to them. It's advisable to give the participants a final opportunity to change or add to the list.

Creating trust with and among the cohort will be easier if you all agree to protocols, such as:

- o We RESPECT one another and the process.
- o Be PRESENT: don't use your phone or other technology that will distract you while in the workshop.
- o Confidentiality - What is said in the group stays in the group.
  - We do NOT share stories with names or details that would make it possible to identify someone in the group.
  - We do NOT gossip with other group members about something that was said in the group.
- o When your partner is sharing, hold back on offering advice, suggestions, or your own experiences. Just listen without interrupting. You will have a chance to ask questions. You'll get your turn to talk about you.
- o Virtually, if using an idea mapping software, don't alter or look at anyone else's work.

### Keep in Mind

As you lead the group, consider sharing some of your own story. Your candor may prompt your students to disclose their stories and help them feel more comfortable as they reflect on them. This sharing is particularly powerful in showing similar experiences among people perceived to be unlike in race, gender, class, religion, or economic class. It also demonstrates that there are many different experiences and values among people of the same race or gender or community. Sharing among the leader and students can also be a powerful builder for continuing support and conversation. Be respectful of each story and remind the participants (and yourself) that their role is to listen, not to fix or advise.

You may assure the readers that they will practice key ways to:

- o acknowledge personal experiences and values
- o learn about experiences and values different from one's own
- o see how the skills and practices that succeed at college can help one thrive in LIFE

- o recognize that one's habits may no longer serve and may need to change
- And
  - o Silence is okay; let the participants have time to digest the question and come up with their responses
  - o Don't rush. Make sure you and the group have enough time to go through and complete the playbook
  - o Don't be afraid to call on people to get the conversation started
  - o Let conversations move freely but if it goes too off track, bring the group back together to focus on the task at hand

You may want to alter your approach to the session based on your audience size. Here are some things to think about that may be helpful:

- Small groups with 2 - 6 need everyone to participate so that no one dominates the conversation. It's up to you, the facilitator, to make sure the group understands that everyone needs a chance to be heard.
- In larger groups (7-20) people may hang back assuming others will step up to speak. People can get lost in the crowd or try to hide.
- For either size group, breakouts of 2 or 3 can give those who don't like talking in big groups a chance for their voices to be heard.

### **Relationship Qualities**

As a mentor/leader, consider holding these relationship qualities: resonance, compassion, spaciousness, neutrality, unconditional positive regard.<sup>\*</sup> Each of us is Creative, Resourceful, and Whole in your own way.

<sup>\*</sup>See Definitions for clarification

## THE SESSION



### Part One, the Comic Story

**Read the character's story together, pausing for comments and questions.** The session leader may share some of their own experiences and feelings from when they were beginning as a college student or in some other major transition. It can be an invitation for all participants to think about their own transitions and share both positive and negative experiences.



### Part Two, the Workbook

**(Reflect, Write & Draw in the Playbook, Share Responses)**

**Move through the playbook slowly**, spending 2-3 minutes on each page as the participants individually read, write and draw, then discuss their responses. Pages can be grouped together or worked on one page at a time. Depending on the group size, participants may break out into smaller groups to share. If in person, participants can form their own groups with whoever is sitting near them or by counting off in the large group and have all of one number join and share. Most virtual platforms create random groups of a size designated by the session leader.

### The Practice of Centering - CENTER aka Stand STRONG

Widely regarded as a stress relieving and calming practice, CENTERING is simple to learn and important to adopt as a habit. It is a gateway to meditation and mindfulness. *The calming sequence of breathing and connecting to inner strength is the foundational concept of Stand STRONG.*

#### Centering Directions:

First, stand up and exaggerate slouching with weight shifted to one leg. Now do what Coleman said: straighten your spine with chin parallel to the floor, plant your feet hip-width apart with weight in your heels but balanced. Look straight ahead. Take a couple of breaths. Feel calm and relaxed. Say, "I can do it." Say it a few times to get the feel of what centering feels like to you. *Be patient when doing centering as you need to make sure everyone is ready to begin.*

#### Gathering Feedback

Gather feedback on the workshop either right after the workshop, or within a few days but no more than a week after because you want the workshop to still be fresh in the participants' minds. It is also a good idea for a follow-up session after 4-6 weeks to check in about their big goals. What have they achieved? Which of the small steps have they taken? How has their thinking evolved as result of the workshop?

## Definitions

**Resilience:** recovering our inherent capacity to be resourceful, energetic, and creatively engaged no matter what's going on around us. Doug Silsbee & Bev Watts

**Centering:** the foundational concept of Stand STRONG. It is a calming sequence of breathing and connecting to inner strength, a gateway to meditation and mindfulness.

**Powerful Questions:** Open-ended questions that begin with who, what, how, when, or where; cannot be answered by yes or no; evoke creativity, learning, and action.

**Accountability Pathway:** A continuum of the steps which one may take in moving from inaction to a commitment to effective action. Jolie Bain Pillsbury

**Confidentiality:** Respect for the willingness to be honest and vulnerable. It is also a commitment to telling one's own story and keeping others' stories private.

**Resonance:** A felt sense of mutual understanding. It is the quality of feeling connection with the common humanity in another person and commitment to seeing them with understanding, even though their experiences and point of view may be different from your own.

**Compassion:** The recognition that we create our own difficulties and the realization of the universality of these difficulties and the desire to relieve them.

**Spaciousness:** Orienting to a larger reality, holding a larger perspective beyond our narrow experience and day-to-day existence.

**Neutrality:** We are free from, or attachment to, or investment in a particular result for another person and we support them in their choices and their journey.

**Unconditional Positive Regard:** Unshakeable support and acceptance of a person, but not necessarily their behavior or actions

**Mindfulness:** Being fully present and alive and attentive in the moment

**Soma:** Our entire being - body, heart, mind

**Somatics:** The body experienced from within, where we experience mind/body integration; the seat of all habits, action, emotion, sensation and thought.

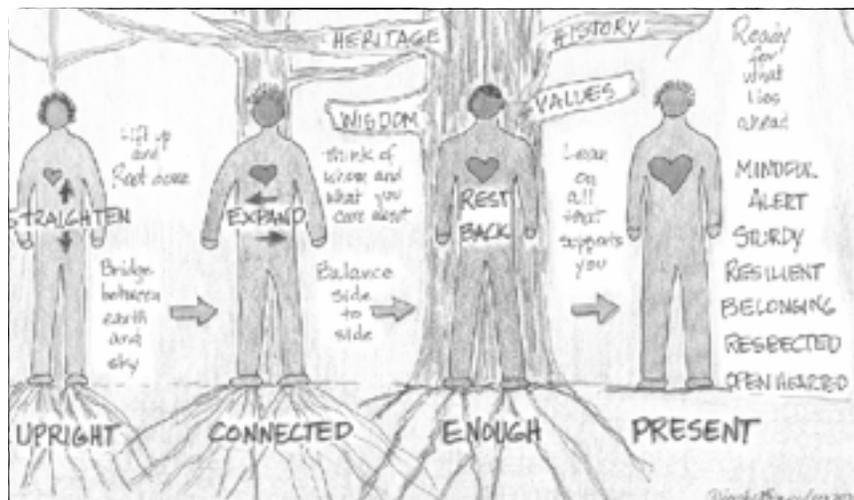
**Sensation:** We experience our aliveness through our senses: touch, sight, taste, sound; and smell. We also can sense these qualities inside our bodies: temperature, heart rate, movement, tightness, pain, softness, heaviness, length, width, and depth.

# CENTER

## Stand STRONG

We can think of centering as the process of settling into our most calm and effective sense of ourselves. The benefit comes from repetition. We can create a personal practice of several physical moves that allow us to settle and come into the present moment, to feel alert and ready but not tense. If we think of it as we would a muscle or a skill, we know that it will become stronger, more reliable and more automatic with practice.

When we stand upright and rooted in dignity we support our feelings of security and safety. When we balance our weight side to side we boost our felt sense of our connection to others, to the whole of humanity. By resting into our values, our wisdom, our history and our heritage, we see ourselves more clearly as enough, as sufficient and deserving of respect.



### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

<https://www.ted.com/talks/>

[amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_may\\_shape\\_who\\_you\\_are](https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_may_shape_who_you_are)

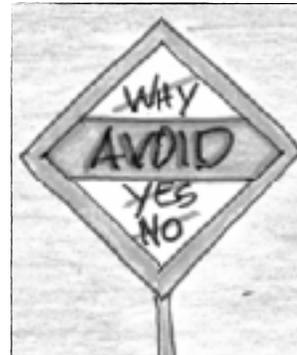
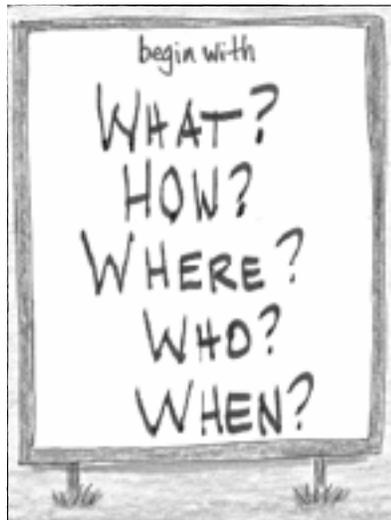
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2015/02/09/7-ways-meditation-can-actually-change-the-brain/#66bdd1911465>

<https://embright.org/resources/>

<https://presencebasedcoaching.com/books/presence-based-leadership>

# POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Powerful Questions are an essential tool for self-reflection and personal growth, for seeking personal accountability and for making progress toward goals. These questions are grounded in finding value in what already is working and building on it, rather than seeing the situation (or person) as a problem to be fixed.



This table outlines the difference between the traditional problem solving approach and an appreciative inquiry approach with powerful questions.

PROBLEM SOLVING PERSPECTIVE/ DEFICIT-BASED ANALYSIS	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY/POWERFUL QUESTIONS/ASSET-BASED ANALYSIS
1. Identification of Problem, "Felt Need"	1. Appreciating and Valuing the Best of "WHAT IS"
2. Analysis of Causes	2. Envisioning "WHAT MIGHT BE"
3. Analysis & Possible Solutions	3. Dialoguing "WHAT SHOULD BE"
4. Action Planning (Treatment)	4. Creating action steps toward "WHAT CAN BE"
<b>Basic Assumption: There is a Problem to be Solved</b>	<b>Basic Assumption: A Person and her/his Situation is a Mystery to be Embraced</b>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

<https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/>

[https://www.bus.umich.edu/FacultyResearch/Research/DiscoverYourBestSelf\\_021004.html](https://www.bus.umich.edu/FacultyResearch/Research/DiscoverYourBestSelf_021004.html)

# ACCOUNTABILITY PATHWAY

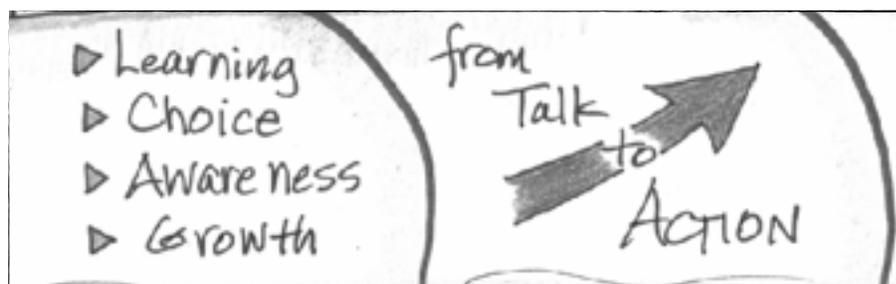
Conceived by Jolie Bain Pillsbury of Sherbrooke Consulting, the accountability continuum intends to relieve some of the sting, shame, blame and punishment often associated with accountability and accountability conversations. Jolie's paper on accountability inspired Lockett Davidson to create the concept as a Pathway. The image and metaphor create an accessible and memorable route to assess one's progress and move toward "Go For It," or in Jolie's words, "Make It Happen." When they are grounded in powerful questions, accountability conversations can be productive, collaborative opportunities for curiosity, creativity, learning, and action.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

<https://www.inc.com/jason-zook/why-you-should-find-an-accountability-partner.html>

<http://www.sherbrookeconsulting.com/products/AccountabilityPathway.pdf>

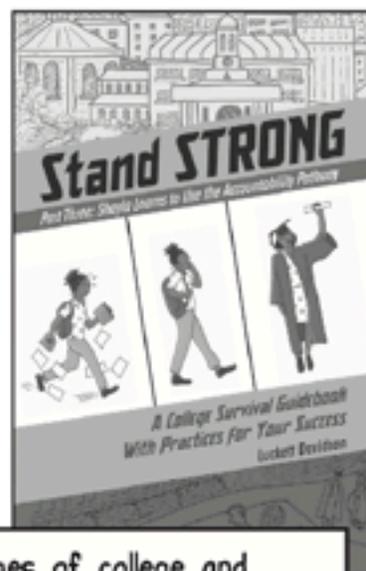
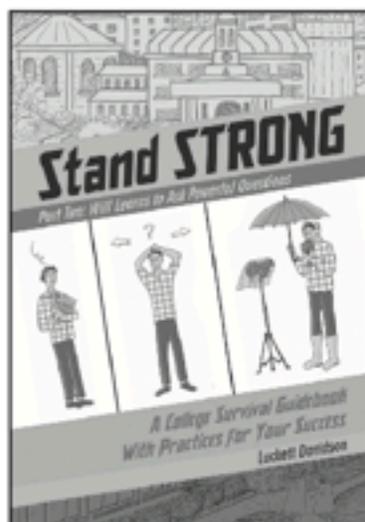
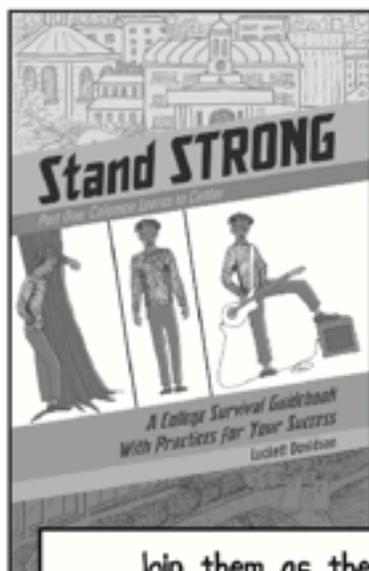


Touchstone Guides presents **Stand STRONG**, a series that supports students through the transition from high school to college. This unique, interactive series allows students to personalize their growth by reflecting and practicing new skills and habits of self-awareness and leadership presence.

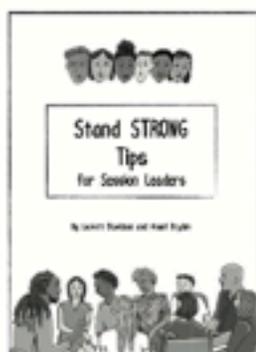
In Part One, Coleman learns to Center and watches his confidence soar.

In Part Two, Will learns to ask Powerful Questions as he considers big and small decisions.

In Part Three, Shayla learns how the Accountability Pathway can help her make progress toward major goals.



Join them as they journey through the challenges of college and learn to build inner strength, seek support and stand strong!



Visit our website [www.touchstoneguides.com](http://www.touchstoneguides.com) to download the Stand Strong Tips for Session Leaders. These handy tips support those wishing to lead a small group! Posters are also available on the website for purchase.

Bulk and nonprofit rates are available. Contact us for more information at [lockett@touchstoneguides.com](mailto:lockett@touchstoneguides.com).

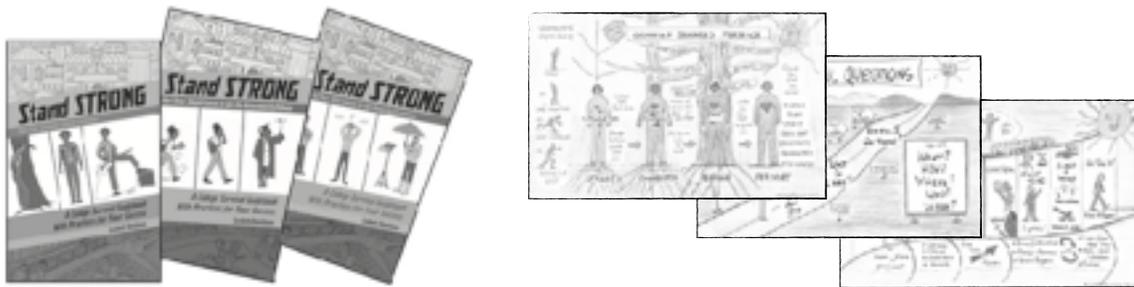


Touchstone Guides explore the intersection of coaching skills, practices and accessible and memorable images. Compassion, resonance, grace and resilience are the touchstones of our work.

# Remind your students and yourself to practice the concepts in the **Stand STRONG** series

Purchase COLOR posters from the series  
see our shop on the website  
[www.touchstoneguides.com](http://www.touchstoneguides.com)

Centering  
Powerful Questions  
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Old Shore/New Shore  
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