

The Field Guide

A workbook for readers of *The Luxury of Attention*

Rahim B. Kanani

Fourteen lessons, one for each chapter of the book. Each lesson has four questions to think through and one exercise to run in your own hotel, restaurant or team. Write in it. The full lessons, with the self check quizzes, are free at theluxuryofattention.com/field-guide.

Week one: Becoming, lessons 1 to 5. Week two: Mastering the Craft, lessons 6 to 11.

Week three: What Comes Next, lessons 12 to 14.

The Calling

After this lesson you will be able to tell, in yourself and in the people you lead, the difference between liking the idea of this work and being suited to it.

The people who last in hospitality and in serious kitchens did not choose the work the way the outside world imagines. They were already inside a task, often a menial one, when they noticed that the attention it demanded came easily to them and did not run out. That noticing is the calling. It is a recognition of fit, made in the present tense, and it is a far more reliable guide to a career than any sense of destiny.

Think it through

1. Which task in your week do you find yourself still thinking about after the shift ends, and which one do you simply get through?

2. Who on your team noticed a guest's or a colleague's need this week before anyone asked, and what were they doing at the time?

3. When a new person joins your team, how much of the real work do they see in the first month, and how much is dressed up or kept from them?

4. If you are working toward a bigger role, which parts of it already come to you without strain, and which parts would you be performing?

The exercise

Keep a fit log for five shifts: a single page that records, for yourself and for two junior people on your team, the moments when attention came easily and the moments when it ran out.

1. Choose two people who have been on the team for less than a year and tell no one what you are watching for.
2. At the end of each shift, write one line for each of them and one for yourself: the moment in the shift when the person was most absorbed in a guest, a dish or a colleague, and the moment when they were plainly running on duty alone.
3. Record what each person was doing at the absorbed moment. Note the task rather than the mood.
4. On the fifth day, ask each of the two what part of the week they thought about after they went home, and write the answer beside your own observation.
5. Read the page in one sitting and mark where your observation and their answer match.

Look for the task that keeps appearing in the absorbed column for each person, because that is where their fit lives, and it is rarely the task their job title names.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 1, The Calling, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

The Apprenticeship

After this lesson you will be able to give and receive correction the way the best apprenticeships deliver it, and recognize what a shortcut past those years costs.

No one in the book taught themselves. Every master in it was shaped by another master, by a senior person who decided, without telling anyone, to spend part of their attention on someone several rungs below. The apprenticeship is that transmission. It gives the apprentice structure, correction and patience, and in return it asks for acceptance of the sequence, patience across years, and faith that the master is building toward something the apprentice cannot yet see.

Think it through

1. Who corrected your work most usefully in the last year, and how did you respond in the moment?

2. Which section of your operation have you never worked a full shift in, and what do the people there know that you do not?

3. When you last told a junior person their work was not good enough, where did it happen, what tone did you use, and did a corrected version come back?

4. Is there someone on your team you are tempted to move up early, and what would they miss by going now?

The exercise

Give five corrections in five shifts and keep a record of what came back: a single sheet with one line per correction and one line per result.

1. Each shift, choose one piece of work from one person that falls short of the standard you hold, and say so to that person directly, calmly and in private before the shift ends.
2. State what the standard is and show it where you can, with your own hands on the mise, the table setting or the report.
3. Write down, in one line, what you said and how it was received, including any defending or explaining.
4. On the next shift, look for the corrected version before you do anything else, and record whether it came back and how close it was.
5. On the fifth day, read the sheet and mark which corrections produced a changed result and which did not.

Look for the pattern in the ones that did not come back; in most cases the correction was given in front of others, given in irritation, or given without showing the standard, and the sheet will tell you which.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 2, The Apprenticeship, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

Leading by Example

After this lesson you will be able to see your own daily gestures the way your team sees them, and use that visibility to set the standard instead of describing it.

The standard in any hotel, restaurant or service team is what the leader does in front of the people who work there. It is set by gesture: the cup lifted from a lobby chair, the mise rearranged at the pass without a word, the problem noticed and fixed or noticed and walked past. The team reads every one of these within a week and copies what it sees. Manuals and ratings sit downstream of that example.

Think it through

1. What did you walk past this week that you noticed and did not fix, and who on your team saw you do it?

2. How many hours did you spend on the floor or at the pass in your last five shifts, and how many in an office or on a screen?

3. Which people on your team could you name along with something about their lives right now, and which could you not?

4. When did you last tell your team that you got something wrong, and what did you do next?

The exercise

Carry a walked past card for five shifts: a pocket card that records every fault you noticed, what you did about it, and who saw.

1. Each shift, carry a card or a notes page and make a mark every time you notice something below standard, such as a smudged glass, a guest waiting, a station set up wrong or a colleague struggling.
2. Beside each mark, write one of three words: fixed, delegated or passed. Then add whether anyone on the team was watching.
3. Once during the week, in front of at least two people on your team, name something you got wrong, say what you should have done and say what happens now.
4. On the fifth day, count the marks in each column and count how many times you were watched passing.
5. Pick the one fault you passed most often and fix it yourself, visibly, on each of the next five shifts.

Look for the ratio of passed to fixed on the occasions when you knew someone was watching, because the team has already done that count and it is the standard they are working to.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 3, Leading by Example, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

First the Team

After this lesson you will be able to hire for character over credentials, run a first week that forms a new colleague rather than processing them, and name the moments when your team needs you to stand in front of it.

The team is the work. A guest never meets the linens or the architecture on their own; they meet a person who brings those things to life, and the quality of that person was decided long before the guest arrived, at the hire, in the first weeks of induction, and in the daily protection the leader did or did not provide. Across eighty interviews the team came up more often than any other subject, and the practices the leaders described run from the hire to the goodbye.

Think it through

1. Think of the last person you hired or recommended for hire: what did you actually test for in the interview, and what did you assume could be fixed later?

2. Describe the first three days of the most recent colleague to join your team, hour by hour, and note who they would have gone to with a question on day two.

3. Name the last occasion a member of your team absorbed pressure from a guest, an owner or an inspector, and write down where you were standing at that moment.

4. List what your team knows about how the operation is doing financially, and what they would do differently if they knew more.

The exercise

Interview three colleagues who joined in the last year about their first week, and produce a one page note on what your induction actually delivers.

1. Choose three people who joined your team or department within the last twelve months, ideally in different roles, and ask each for fifteen minutes.
2. Ask the same four questions of each: what do you remember from your first day, who did you go to with questions in the first month, when did you first understand what this place expects of you, and what would you have wanted on day one that you did not get.
3. Write down what they say in their own words, without defending the current process.
4. Alongside their answers, write what the operation believes its induction delivers, from the handbook or from your own assumptions.
5. On the last day, list the three largest gaps between the two columns and pick one you can close yourself for the next person who joins, without budget or sign off.

Look for how long it took each person to find a go to colleague, because that interval is the period in which a good hire decides whether they are inside something that takes them seriously.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 4, First the Team, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

Giving the Keys

After this lesson you will be able to hand a specific decision to a member of your team with the boundaries, training and recovery plan that make the transfer real, and recognize when empowerment in your operation is a slogan.

Empowerment is a discipline. It is a deliberate transfer of authority, paired with the training, the boundaries and the recovery practice that make the transfer hold. The version most often delivered in the field is a manager asking the team to own an outcome they have no authority to shape, then reversing in the office any decision the manager would have made differently.

Think it through

1. Write down the last five decisions your team brought to you for approval, and mark which ones you could have handed over with a clear boundary.

2. Recall the last time a member of your team made a call you would have made differently, and note exactly what you said to them and who else heard it.

3. For your own area, name the spending limit, the room move, or the comped item a colleague can authorize without you, and if you cannot name one, note what that tells the team.

4. Think of the last time someone junior interrupted a senior person in your operation to flag a problem, and describe how the senior person responded.

The exercise

Transfer one decision to one person using the chapter's checklist, and produce a written authority statement plus a log of the decisions they made without you.

1. Pick a single decision class that lands on your desk several times a week and that one trained colleague could handle, such as a small service recovery, a plate pulled from the pass, or a late checkout.
2. Write the authority in one sentence and the boundary in a second: what they can now do, and the point past which they should come and find you.
3. Sit down with the colleague, read them both sentences, and tell them in plain terms what will happen if a call goes wrong: a private conversation, no public reversal, the authority still theirs.
4. Ask them to note each decision they make under the new authority, with a line on what they decided and why.
5. At the end of the week, read the log together, say what you would have weighed on any call you would have made differently, and confirm the authority for the following week.
6. If one of the calls produced a good outcome, name the colleague to the wider team for what they did.

Look for whether the log fills up or stays empty, because an empty log means the colleague has correctly judged that the authority is not yet real.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 5, Giving the Keys, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

The Creative Act

After this lesson you will be able to build a small creative pipeline for your own kitchen, floor or team, with deliberate inputs, a low pressure place to test ideas, and a failure rate you can live with.

Creativity in a great kitchen or hotel is a pipeline, and the leader either builds it or does not. The chefs and hoteliers described as creative treat originality as a rehearsal rather than a gift. Three disciplines run through their accounts: range, meaning deliberate time gathering inputs outside the operation; a documented process with a cadence the leader protects; and a comfort with failure that keeps experiments in the development kitchen and away from the guest.

Think it through

1. Note the last three new things your team introduced, whether a dish, an amenity, a greeting or a turndown touch, and trace each one back to where the idea actually came from.

2. Write down where in your operation an idea can be tested without the full cost of a failure in front of a guest, and if there is no such place, name the nearest candidate.

3. Count the deliberate hours you spent in the last month outside your own operation gathering inputs, in markets, other properties, museums or books unrelated to the trade.

4. Recall the last experiment that failed in your team and describe what happened to the person who proposed it.

The exercise

Start an input notebook and run one idea through to a low pressure test, producing a notebook with at least five entries and one tested idea by the end of the week.

1. On day one, choose a notebook or a notes file and write the first entry: one thing you noticed in the last twenty four hours that might feed the work, however small.
2. Take one deliberate outing of at least an hour during the week, to a market, a competitor's lobby, a museum, a bookshop or a neighborhood you do not know, with no output required, and record what caught your attention.
3. Add at least one entry a day, in whatever form suits you, whether a sentence, a sketch or a photograph.
4. By midweek, pick one entry and shape it into a single small idea that could reach a guest: a garnish, a staff meal dish, a line in a welcome card, a change to how a table is cleared.
5. Test it once in the lowest pressure venue you have, on a colleague, at staff meal, or on a regular who will tell you the truth, and write down what happened.
6. On the last day, note whether the idea goes forward, changes or is dropped, and put the date of the next review in the notebook.

Look for whether the idea changed between the first sketch and the test, because that gap is where the pipeline does its work, and a dropped idea with a clear reason is a successful week.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 6, The Creative Act, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

In Pursuit of Perfection

After this lesson you will be able to set your section's standard above the audit it is measured against, act as the last set of eyes before the work reaches the guest, and hold a perfectionist bar without wearing out the people who deliver it.

Perfection in a kitchen or a hotel is a direction, and the best operators have stopped expecting to arrive. They aim well above the published standard every day, they inspect the work themselves before it reaches the guest, and they accept that the pursuit will never close. The skill the chapter teaches is holding that posture without wearing out the people who deliver it.

Think it through

1. Which external standard does your operation answer to, and where does your own section's bar sit relative to it?

2. Who was the last person to look at your section's work before the guest saw it on your most recent shift, and was it you?

3. What small lapse have you walked past this month that has quietly become normal?

4. Over the last month, which of consistency, creativity or care did you invest in most, and which did you postpone?

The exercise

Stand at your section's threshold for five shifts and keep a log of what you caught before it reached the guest.

1. Pick the one point where your section's work leaves your hands and meets the guest: the pass, the front desk, the door of a room after housekeeping, the drinks station.
2. For five shifts, spend the busiest twenty minutes standing at that point, look at every item as it crosses, and correct what falls short before it goes.
3. Write down each catch in a notebook: what it was, who produced it, and whether a checklist would have caught it.
4. At the end of each shift, mark which catches repeated from the day before.
5. On the fifth day, read the log, pick the single fault that recurred most, and fix its cause with the person who produced it, in a conversation that names the work and protects the person.

Look for whether the number of catches falls across the week, because if it does not, the standard is still living in your eyes and has not yet moved into the team's hands.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 7, In Pursuit of Perfection, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

The Human Touch

After this lesson you will be able to tell specific noticing from generic warmth, interview for the one quality that cannot be taught, and protect the conditions that keep it alive in the people you already have.

The human touch is the discipline of noticing the particular guest in front of you, registering what they need at that moment, and acting on it so the guest feels seen as a person. It is the one quality in this book that cannot be taught, so the leader's work is to hire for it and then protect the conditions that let it survive. Every person I interviewed named it, without being asked, as the difference between good and great.

Think it through

1. Think of the last moment on your team that a guest will still be talking about in a year, and write down what the team member noticed that made it possible.

2. In your last three hiring conversations, how much weight did the resume carry against your read of whether the person spoke from the heart?

3. Which member of your team has been running on too many doubles or short staffed shifts, and what would it cost you to give them a real rest this week?

4. Walk to the station where your team spends the most hours and list what about it, physically, would wear you down by hour six.

The exercise

Keep a noticing log for five shifts, recording one specific thing a team member noticed about a guest and what was done with it, and act on the best of them.

1. At the start of each shift, tell your team you want to hear one thing they noticed about a particular guest that day: a mood, a habit, a mention in passing.
2. At the end of each shift, collect the observations in a notebook, one line each, with the team member's name and what, if anything, was done with it.
3. Each day, pick one observation that has not yet been acted on and act on it yourself, or with the person who noticed it, in a way that fits that guest and your place rather than a template.
4. During the week, fix one physical thing at your busiest station: a light, a stool, a piece of equipment moved within reach.
5. On the fifth day, read the log aloud with the team and name who noticed what.

Look for whether the observations get more specific as the week goes on and whether more of them have already been acted on before they reach your notebook.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 8, The Human Touch, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

Knowing Your Guest

After this lesson you will be able to place your team's service on the four rungs of anticipation, build a guest profile that is checked against the person in front of you, and tell recognition from surveillance.

Anticipation is attention applied to a specific guest across hours, days and sometimes years, with the patience to know who they are before they ask. Luc Delafosse, then at Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills, calls hospitality the craft of knowing in advance what guests need and want. The chapter teaches how that knowing is built, how it is kept current, and where it tips over from recognition into surveillance.

Think it through

1. Where does what your team learns about a guest during a shift go, and would the next shift find it?

2. Which rung of the ladder did your last three memorable guest moments sit on, and what would the next rung up have looked like?

3. What does your operation currently hold about a returning guest that may no longer be true, and who checks?

4. Think of a time your team revealed too much of what it knew about a guest, and write down how the guest reacted.

The exercise

Keep a handover sheet for five shifts that captures one observation per guest interaction and passes it forward so the next shift can act on it.

1. Start a single page, on paper or in a shared note, with three columns: the guest, what was noticed, and the specific moment of service the note is meant to enable.
2. During each shift, add one line for every guest you or your team learned something about: a drink, a pace, a reason for the visit, a mention of a family member.
3. At handover, read the page to the incoming shift and ask them to act on at least one line before that guest leaves.
4. For any returning guest, check the line in person before acting on it, with a question rather than an assumption.
5. On the fifth day, count how many lines were acted on and, where you can, ask the guests whether the gesture felt right.

Look for whether the share of lines acted on rises across the week, and treat any gesture a guest found unsettling as the marker of where the restraint line sits in your operation.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 9, Knowing Your Guest, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

The Recovery

After this lesson you will be able to run the first ten minutes of a complaint in the right order, fix what you have authority to fix, and close the loop on the cause.

When an experience breaks, the property has one job: turn toward the guest at the moment most operations turn away. Recovery means correcting the failure in person, quickly and completely, then fixing the cause so the next guest never meets it. It is the same attention the rest of the book describes, applied at the hardest possible moment.

Think it through

1. When a guest complained to you most recently, how many seconds passed before you offered an explanation or a solution, and what did the guest say in the gap?

2. What can you personally correct or compensate right now, without asking anyone, and what would you have to escalate?

3. Where in your service sequence does a guest get a genuine, unhurried chance to tell you something is wrong?

4. Think of the last failure your team fixed well for the guest, and ask whether anyone found the cause and told the rest of the team.

The exercise

The exercise is a recovery log: one page recording every complaint or visible disappointment you meet or hear about this week, and what happened in the minutes after.

1. Set up a page with five columns: what failed, how it reached you (voiced, observed, review), who resolved it and how long it took, whether anyone above the resolver had to be involved, and the root cause.
2. Each shift, record every instance, including the small ones a guest shrugs off, and write down what you did first. Be honest about whether you listened or explained.
3. Add one question to your own routine that invites the complaint, such as asking a guest halfway through the stay or the meal whether anything has fallen short, and record what it surfaces.
4. For each entry, write the cause in one sentence, even if it is provisional. Mark the entries where the cause is still unknown.
5. On the last day, read the log once through and share the causes with the people who can fix them, in person rather than by message.
6. Note how many failures were resolved by the person who first heard them, and how many waited for permission.

Look for the gap between how fast a failure could have been fixed and how fast it was, and for the causes that appear more than once.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 10, The Recovery, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

Staying True

After this lesson you will be able to tell a request that sharpens your operation from one that erodes it, and say no to the second kind without losing the ability to evolve.

A property that bends to every request will eventually lose the character that brought the request to its door. A property that refuses to change will calcify into a museum of its own past. Staying true is the discipline of holding both at once: protecting what the operation is while letting it evolve every day.

Think it through

1. In one paragraph, describe what your hotel, restaurant or team is that a competitor across the street is not, using specifics rather than adjectives.

2. What was the last change you made because a guest, a reviewer or a manager asked for it, and did it sharpen the standard or dilute it?

3. Which element of your operation is already at a standard worth protecting, and who on the team knows it should not be touched?

4. What accolade or past success is your team still leaning on, and what would the first hour of service look like if you set it down?

The exercise

The exercise is an identity test: a half page statement of what your operation is, and a log of every request this week scored against it.

1. On day one, write a half page stating what your operation is and is not, in terms specific enough to decide a case (ingredients, pace, tone, the things you will never do for a guest and the things you will always do).
2. Each day, record every request to change something, whether from a guest, a colleague, a manager or a review, in one line each.
3. Beside each request, mark whether honoring it would sharpen the standard, erode it, or make no difference, and write one sentence on why.
4. Act on at least one request you marked as sharpening, and decline at least one you marked as eroding, politely and without explanation beyond what the person needs.
5. Separately, choose one element you consider already at standard and one that is not, and make one small improvement to the second while leaving the first untouched.
6. At the end of the week, reread the statement from day one and correct anything the week proved wrong.

Look for how often your first instinct was to say yes to a request the test later scored as eroding, and for whether the statement held up under a real week of pressure.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 11, Staying True, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

The Digital Discipline

After this lesson you will be able to sort any technology that touches your guests into adopt, resist or delay, using one test and three questions.

The debate about whether to use the new tools is over. The question that remains is where they belong and how an operator decides. The test is a single one. Adopt the technology that amplifies an attentive person's ability to be present with a guest. Resist the technology that substitutes for that presence. Delay the technology whose effect on the substance has not yet been honestly measured.

Think it through

1. List every piece of technology a guest touches in your area of the operation, and beside each one write whether it helps a team member be present or stands in for one.

2. What does your guest profile or reservation system surface before service, and how much of it did anyone act on in person during your last shift?

3. Which relationships in your work, with suppliers, drivers, other properties or regulars, exist only because you built them, and who else on the team could use them tomorrow?

4. What message or reply went out under your name this week that you did not write, and would the guest be able to tell?

The exercise

The exercise is a sorted inventory: one page listing every technology that touches your guests, each marked adopt, resist or delay, with a reason.

1. On the first day, walk your area of the operation from the guest's side and list every tool a guest meets or that shapes what the team does for them, from the booking engine to the tablet at the table.
2. For each tool, answer the first question in writing: what does it replace, and is that a task or a person's presence in a moment that matters to the guest?
3. Mark each one adopt, resist or delay, and write one sentence of evidence for the mark, drawn from what you saw this week rather than from what the vendor claims.
4. Pick one tool marked adopt that the team underuses, and for three shifts act on everything it surfaces in person, in front of the guest.
5. Pick one place where a tool is standing in for a person, and for the same three shifts put the person back, even if only for a greeting or a reply written by hand.
6. On the last day, reread the inventory and note which marks you would change and why.

Look for the tools that passed the test on paper and failed it on the floor, and for the moments when putting a person back changed how the guest responded.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 12, The Digital Discipline, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

The Long Game

After this lesson you will be able to name what a long career in this work costs and returns, and start distributing your own standard into other people this week.

A career in this work compounds, and what it compounds is the people you form. The leaders I interviewed who are still at the pass or on the floor in their fifth decade did not get there on stamina. They learned what the work costs, found what it returns, and at some point their reason for doing it changed from ambition to purpose. The long game is played by distributing your standard into other people from the first year, so that what you built survives you.

Think it through

1. Which costs of this work have you already paid, and which have you been paying without noticing, in your body or in your relationships outside work?

2. What is the one thing your team has become capable of over the last year that you are prouder of than any single service or dish?

3. If you were absent for a month, which standards in your section would hold and which would slip, and what does that list tell you about how much of your identity you have distributed?

4. Of the people you have taught so far, who is carrying something of yours into their work now, and what exactly did they take?

The exercise

Hand over one thing you alone hold, and produce a one page handover plus one shift on which someone else held your standard without you stepping in.

1. List everything in your section or on your shift that stops or slips when you are away, and choose the one item that matters most to the guest.
2. Write a single page on how you do it and what good looks like, in plain words a new colleague could follow.
3. Teach it to one person in a single session, then watch them do it once without interrupting, and note every point where you wanted to step in.
4. Let them run it on a shift where you are present but out of the way, and keep your notes going.
5. On the last day, ask them to teach it to a third person while you listen.

Look for whether the standard held when you were not the one holding it, and read your list of interventions as a map of what you have not yet handed over.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 13, The Long Game, for the full argument and the voices behind it.

The Future of Luxury and Craft

After this lesson you will be able to test any new trend, tool or category arriving at your property against the fundamentals that will still matter when it has passed.

Everything around the work is changing, and the work itself is not. Hotels, residences, clubs and fashion houses are merging into categories the trade press is still trying to name, wellness and sustainability have moved to the center of the offer, and AI is redrawing what a person on the floor is for. The closing chapter argues that the fundamentals of the previous thirteen chapters are exactly what will still matter when all of that has run its course, and that the test for any new thing is whether the operating substance behind it has been built.

Think it through

1. Of the moments guests thanked your team for in the last month, how many were things you gave them and how many were things you arranged for them to do or feel?

2. Who are the guests or diners you see most often, and how has your recognition of them changed as the relationship lengthened?

3. Which part of your current role could a system do adequately within five years, and what would you do with the hours it returned?

4. When was the last time you or your team ran a real experiment on the floor or in the kitchen, and what stopped the next one?

The exercise

Run an experience inventory, and produce a one page tally of what guests remembered this week plus one complimentary experience your team has offered three times.

1. For five shifts, note every moment a guest or diner thanked the team or mentioned something they would remember, and mark each as something given (a room, a plate, an amenity, a gift) or something arranged for them to do or feel.
2. At the end of the five shifts, count the two columns and write a sentence on what the balance says about your operation.
3. Choose one experience your team could arrange for a guest at no cost, such as a look inside the kitchen while the bread comes out, or ten minutes with the person who knows the building's history.
4. Offer it to three guests across the week, delivered by a colleague rather than by you on at least one occasion, and record how each one lands.
5. Write down the two or three conditions the offer needs in order to hold consistently without you, and share them with the colleague who delivered it.

Look for how much of what guests remember was arranged rather than given, and whether the offer survives being delivered the third time by someone else.

What I noticed

What I will change

Read Chapter 14, The Future of Luxury and Craft, for the full argument and the voices behind it.