



# Choosing Your Puzzle

Questions and prompts to guide your choice for optimal impact



# WELCOME TO PALLADIUM!

Congratulations on your decision to strengthen your leadership with Palladium! We are so glad you are here and we can't wait to learn alongside you.

The Palladium model engages a unique approach we've dubbed "real-case" learning. Unlike traditional case studies that can be somewhat abstract, or "case-in-point" learning that leverages live activity within a team or group, our unique approach prioritizes the real-time issues and challenges that are most pressing for you.

## **Okay. So how does it work?**

Every step of your learning and engagement is oriented around a central "puzzle" (our term for a meta-level challenge) that is significant to you and meaningful for performance and impact. After working through this deck, you'll be ready to present your own unique puzzle using our companion template titled "My Puzzle". Grab a notebook or other paper to use for notes and ideas.

If you get stuck at any point don't hesitate to reach out to [team@palladiumforum.com](mailto:team@palladiumforum.com).

# WHY THE RIGHT PUZZLE MATTERS

A good puzzle is one of the things that sets Palladium apart from other leadership development programs. A good puzzle will:

- Expedite your ability to move concept into practice by keeping a hands-on, real-time challenge in front of you as you learn, grow, and engage with others around new ideas;
- Amplify insights and clarify where more learning, resources, or counsel is needed;
- Strengthen your connection to, and investment in, other leaders in your cohort;
- Ensure your investment in Palladium returns optimal value and impact for you and your company.

**In Palladium's two beta cohorts, participants who put in the work to identify and refine a strong, well-scoped puzzle to orient their learning reported 70% higher impact ratings than participants who struggled to define or stick with a clear challenge from the start.**

This deck is designed to walk you through the process of choosing a good puzzle.

Ready? Let's get started...



# STEP 1: BRAINSTORM

**What is something imminent on your leadership horizon that is taking up a lot of your mental and emotional real estate?**

You might have several ideas or one clear, obvious challenge. Either is great. A good puzzle should feel a little (or maybe even a lot) out of reach from where you are today.

Stretch your imagination beyond this quarter or next quarter. What is something you are facing - or could take on - that has the potential for significant impact?

Even if you have one clear puzzle in mind, try and brainstorm at least 3 meta-challenges or quandaries that feel important for the months/years ahead.

**Note them on a separate piece of paper.**

Remember this preparatory work is just for you. You will not be asked to share or present it. It is only intended to help guide your thinking to identify a strong puzzle.

# WHAT MAKES FOR A GOOD PUZZLE?

The Palladium Forum's ethos was cast - literally (!) - from the model of leadership, imagination, and collaboration practiced for generations at the Lankford family's East Birmingham Bronze Foundry in Alabama.

At any foundry, success lies in having a good pattern-maker who can build light and durable wood molds to precise specifications so metal alloys can be reliably cast to serve their larger purpose. A pattern is complex in itself, yet often only a piece of a much larger project or purpose.

For this reason, we've chosen PATTERN as an acronym to outline the key features of a strong puzzle. Like a good pattern, a good puzzle will be:

**P – Purposeful**

It holds meaning or significance for you and your company

**A – Accessible**

Others can easily understand the crux of the issue

**T – Timebound**

You are accountable to address it within a certain timeframe

**T – Trackable**

Progress can be measured and assessed

**E – Extensive**

It will require new skills or resources; Divisible into subparts

**R – Reachable**

It is attainable within the time allowed

**N – Necessary**

Not addressing it will be costly

# STEP 2: FILTER FOR VISION

CRITERIA: P - Purposeful; N - Necessary

Think about the puzzles you brainstormed in Step 1. Now, consider how you might answer the following questions:

## IS IT PURPOSEFUL?

1. How does solving this puzzle align to my company's mission and vision?
2. Who will be impacted or well-served if we succeed? Who will lose if we fail?
3. Do I feel personally invested in seeing this puzzle succeed?

## IS IT NECESSARY?

1. What is at stake for my company/division if we fail to address this challenge?
2. What is at stake for me personally as a leader if this challenge is not adequately addressed?
3. What core function(s) or deliverable(s) is/are impeded if this fails to be addressed?



# CARE-MINDED LEADERSHIP STARTS HERE

**Hooray! You have a vision.**

Purpose speaks to the "Why?" of your puzzle. Necessity speaks to the need for your puzzle. A puzzle that is both purposeful and necessary is what makes it compelling for others to join you in achieving change.

It is what makes your puzzle worth caring about.

This is important because care-minded leadership is not just caring well for others. Fundamentally, it seeks to orient every aspect of your leadership around care-worthy activities. Knowing why you care about your puzzle and what is care-worthy about it is a key building block for winsomely bringing others along.

**Next, you need to check and be sure the puzzle you are thinking about is the right size and scope to get the most out of your learning over the next 9 months.**





# STEP 3: FILTER FOR SCOPE

CRITERIA: T- Time-Bound; E - Extensive; R- Reachable

Revisit all of your puzzle-contenders. Did any pass the purpose and need test? Great! Now, think about the scope of your puzzle.

## IS IT TIME-BOUND?

1. Will it take more than a year but less than 3 to achieve your puzzle?
2. Do you have any immediate benchmarks or check-ins that will shape or define your puzzle?
3. Does your puzzle have at least two phases of key deliverables?

## IS IT EXTENSIVE?

1. Will it require me to access new skills or resources that are outside my current wheelhouse?
2. Does it require some measure of cross-sector/cross-disciplinary collaboration?
3. Is it large enough to be broken into sub-puzzles or components over time?

## IS IT REACHABLE?

1. Is this puzzle attainable within the timeframe allowed?
2. Do you have the necessary authority and/or support internally to advance this puzzle in a meaningful way?
3. Are there any fixed or likely barriers that are standing in the way of you achieving your puzzle?



# RIGHT-SIZING YOUR PUZZLE

**Too small? Too big? Just right.**

A right-sized puzzle will determine how much value you are able to extract from the Palladium Forum experience. Too small puzzles will get boring. Too large puzzles are hard to make actionable. Just right puzzles allow space and accountability to practice the critical skills of adaptive, creative, and care-minded leadership.

In Palladium's two beta cohorts, participants who chose puzzles that were time-bound, large-enough to be divisible into parts, and within their immediate scope of authority had an 85% greater success rate in reaching their goal than participants whose puzzles were too tactical or abstract.

**Finally, you need to check and be sure your puzzle is engaging and motivating for those in your organization who can help bring about change.**



# STEP 4: FILTER FOR ENGAGEMENT

CRITERIA: A - Accessible; T- Trackable

Do you have a front-runner? Something with good vision and good scope? Terrific. Let's see if it meets the criteria for engaging others.

## IS IT ACCESSIBLE?

1. Can others easily understand the crux of the issue?
2. Do you have (or can you create) simple language to define complex or technical concepts?
3. Can your puzzle fit within a felt need or shared context to help justify its importance or is it a bit "in the weeds"?

## IS IT TRACKABLE?

1. Can your puzzle be easily measured or assessed? What metrics might you use to track progress?
2. Do you have baked-in accountability to report on your puzzle's progress? Could you create it?
3. Is your puzzle conducive to giving others visibility into its progress or is it of a confidential nature?



# YOU'RE ON YOUR WAY!

By now you've generated a bunch of ideas, determined which have a clear vision, the right scope, and the potential to engage others. Maybe that was enough to get you a clear puzzle and you feel ready to get going. If so, that's amazing!

Still stumped? That's okay too. Sometimes the best puzzles take a minute to come together. Hopefully this at least got the wheels turning.

If we can be helpful as you weigh and evaluate potential puzzles please don't hesitate to reach out to [team@palladiumforum.com](mailto:team@palladiumforum.com). We've seen a lot of puzzles and know it's a process. We can listen and coach as needed. Let us know.

Once you have your puzzle selected, drop it into the "My Puzzle" presentation deck. A sample presentation deck is available for you to follow if you'd like a template.

**Great Job! We're excited to learn alongside you.**

