

ON SECOND THOUGHT — EPISODE 4

When Everyone Heard Something Different

Communication, Cognition, and the Illusion of Understanding

WHAT REALLY HAPPENS WHEN WE 'HEAR'

The Core Truth

We don't hear what was said. We hear what our brain expected to hear.

The Psychological Engine Behind Miscommunication

1. Expectation Is a Filter

Your brain is predictive. It fills in gaps before the signal is complete.

- You hear patterns, not raw audio
- Familiar routes increase risk
- Expectation simplifies—but distorts

2. Meaning Happens Before Verification

Interpretation is instantaneous and unconscious. Errors feel like certainty.

3. The Brain Under Load

As workload rises, communication accuracy falls. Attention narrows, memory fragments.

4. Information Density Overloads Cognition

3 items = manageable. 4+ items = accuracy drops significantly.

5. Same Words, Different Realities

Shared language does not equal shared understanding.

Bottom Line: Miscommunication is about how the brain constructs reality under pressure.

HOW TO BREAK THE TRAP

The Human Moment

Something feels off—that moment is where accidents are prevented.

From Reaction to Response

Pause. Check. Second Thought.

Three Moves for Pilots

1. Break it up (chunk information)
2. Active readback (verify meaning)
3. Trust your gut (verify when uncertain)

Three Moves for AMTs

1. Write for the stranger
2. Treat handoffs like briefings
3. Eliminate informal sign-offs

Three Moves for ATC

1. Limit to three items
2. Use pauses
3. Standard phraseology only