

THE INTENTIONAL LEADER



12 Practical Tools to Lead
with Clarity, Consistency
and Courage

“Leadership
is a *practice*,
not a personality.”



AS FEATURED ON THE PODCAST
DIAGNOSING
THE WORKPLACE



A leadership workbook
from Roman3 Solutions Inc.

A workbook for practising leadership - not performing it

The Intentional Leader is built from the Leadership Tips conversations on Diagnosing The Workplace. Those podcast episodes were designed around practical ideas: small shifts in language, judgment, communication and behaviour that leaders can actually use in the middle of real work. This workbook takes those same ideas and turns them into a guided development experience.

The goal is not to give you a single leadership style to copy. Effective leaders can be quiet or outgoing, formal or casual, analytical or highly relational. What matters is whether your behaviour is intentional, whether people can understand what to expect from you, and whether you use your authority in a way that earns trust.

The workbook therefore follows a deliberate sequence. You begin with yourself, move outward into communication and relationships, practise leading through messy problems, and finish with the harder questions of fairness, power and courage. Each tool includes written explanation, structured self-reflection and a practical action you can test in your own workplace.

THE THROUGH-LINE

Manage yourself. Understand others. Work through complexity. Use your authority responsibly.

Read it with a real situation in mind

This workbook will be more useful if you do not treat it as abstract leadership theory. Choose a team, relationship, decision or challenge that is active in your work right now. Let that situation become the thread you carry through the exercises.

Do not rush to produce polished answers. The reflective questions are meant to surface patterns you may not normally stop to examine. A useful answer is often specific, slightly uncomfortable and connected to an actual example.

The practical activities are intentionally small. You are not being asked to transform your leadership style overnight. You are being asked to test a different behaviour, observe the response and decide what to keep, change or practise again.

READ Use the explanation to understand the leadership principle and the problem it is trying to solve.	REFLECT Connect the principle to your own patterns, relationships and decisions.
PRACTISE Use one concrete action in a real workplace situation.	REVIEW Notice what changed - in you, in the other person and in the outcome.

THE LEARNING JOURNEY

Four stages of intentional leadership

The twelve tools are organized as a progression rather than a collection of disconnected tips. Each stage asks a different leadership question and builds capability needed for the next.

01 LEAD YOURSELF FIRST What am I bringing into this situation? Boundaries, emotional load and intentional response.	02 CREATE CLARITY WITH OTHERS What does this person actually need from me? Communication, listening and accessibility.
03 LEAD THROUGH COMPLEXITY How do I help people think and make good decisions when there is no simple answer?	04 EARN AND PROTECT TRUST Can people trust how I use the authority I have? Emotion, fairness and moral courage.

Self-awareness → Intentional response → Effective interaction → Sound judgment → Trustworthy leadership

Choose the leadership situation you will carry through the workbook

Name the situation

What leadership situation is taking the most energy, attention or judgment from you right now?

Who is affected by it, and what is your responsibility in the situation?

What would a noticeably better outcome look like three months from now?

What do you suspect you may need to do differently for that outcome to become possible?

A USEFUL RULE

Choose something real enough to matter but contained enough that you can experiment with your own behaviour. The workbook is designed for application, not hypothetical perfection.

Lead Yourself First

Leadership starts before the conversation. It starts with what you bring into it.

Leaders do not enter situations as neutral observers. We bring relationships, stress, assumptions, loyalties, fears and a desire to be liked or respected. The first stage is about building enough awareness that those forces inform your leadership without quietly controlling it.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL QUESTION
What am I bringing into this situation?

1. Friendly, Not Friends Stay authentic and relational without creating friendship privileges or blurred accountability.	2. Understand Your Emotional Load Notice the invisible weight that changes your patience, judgment and capacity.
3. Respond Instead of React Create enough space between the trigger and the action to choose your behaviour.	

The sequence matters.

Before you can reliably lead other people, you need enough awareness to recognize what you are bringing into the room. This part moves from role boundaries, to internal load, to the choice between reacting and responding.

Friendly, Not Friends

You can be warm, casual and authentic without making friendship the condition of good leadership.

Being friendly with employees and being their friend are not the same leadership choice. A leader can joke with people, know what matters to them, build genuine relationships and create a relaxed environment. None of those things require distance or artificial formality. The problem begins when a personal relationship creates privileges, exceptions or hesitation that would not exist for someone else.

Friendship normally carries partiality. We make allowances for friends, protect them, give them the benefit of the doubt and sometimes place the relationship ahead of other considerations. A leadership role creates a different obligation. You may care about someone deeply and still need to hold a standard, make a decision they dislike or put the needs of the organization ahead of what they personally want.

This is especially difficult when you have been promoted over former co-workers or when an existing friendship follows you into a leadership role. One useful approach is to name the role you are speaking from. You can acknowledge that the human relationship matters while also being explicit that the decision belongs to the manager, director or executive role you now hold.

The goal is not to become less human. It is to become more consistent. Your personality can remain your personality; the standard cannot change depending on who is sitting across from you.

THE POINT

Friendly is a style. Fairness is a standard. Strong boundaries make room for both.

Where do your relationships make leadership harder?

Reflect on your own leadership

Which employee, colleague or former peer would be hardest for you to disappoint? Why?

Where might someone reasonably perceive that a relationship creates extra access, flexibility or protection?

What difficult conversation have you delayed because you wanted to preserve the relationship?

NAME THE HAT

In one conversation where personal care and leadership responsibility overlap, make the distinction explicit.

- Say which role you are speaking from: manager, executive, colleague, mentor or friend.
- Acknowledge the human side without using it to soften or avoid the organizational responsibility.
- Ask yourself afterward whether you would have handled the same issue similarly with someone you were less close to.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

Friendly is a style. Fairness is a standard. Strong boundaries make room for both.

Understand Your Emotional Load

Workload fills the calendar. Emotional load consumes the capacity behind it.

Leaders often track workload because it is visible: meetings, deadlines, reports, decisions and tasks. Emotional load is less visible. It can come from conflict, uncertainty, responsibility for other people, unresolved decisions, organizational instability or the feeling that you must absorb pressure so the rest of the team does not have to.

The danger is that emotional load can remain high while performance still looks acceptable. Capable people can keep producing for a long time while becoming less patient, less curious, more defensive or more likely to interpret ordinary problems as personal threats. Productivity is therefore not proof that the load is sustainable.

You do not need to eliminate emotion or pressure to lead well. You do need enough awareness to notice what is consuming capacity and whether you are exporting that load to other people through tone, avoidance, urgency or inconsistency.

A useful distinction is between what you control, what you can influence and what you simply have to accept. Emotional energy spent trying to control the uncontrollable rarely improves the situation. Clarity about where your agency actually exists can return some capacity.

THE POINT

You cannot manage what you never notice. Awareness turns emotional load from a background force into something you can respond to.

Map the load you are carrying

Reflect on your own leadership

What is taking emotional energy even though it does not appear on your task list?

Which items are within your control, within your influence, or outside both?

How does your behaviour change when your emotional load is high?

What part of the load could be reduced by clarity, delegation, support or a boundary?

TRACK THE PATTERN FOR FIVE WORKDAYS

For one week, treat emotional load as something you can observe rather than something you simply endure.

- At three points each day, rate your emotional load from 1-10.
- Note what happened immediately before the number moved up or down.
- At the end of the week, identify one repeatable trigger and one reliable recovery action.
- Choose one preventable source of load and take a concrete step to reduce it.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

You cannot manage what you never notice. Awareness turns emotional load from a background force into something you can respond to.

Respond Instead of React

A reaction is driven by the moment. A response is guided by intention.

Reactions are not inherently bad. They are fast, human and sometimes useful. The leadership problem occurs when the first emotional or intuitive reaction becomes the final decision without enough space to clarify what happened, what principle matters and what consequences the action may create.

Policies, expectations and agreed processes help because they reduce the number of situations a leader has to improvise under pressure. Structure creates a pause. It gives you something more stable than the intensity of the moment to rely on.

Intentional response does not mean delaying everything. Some situations genuinely require speed. It means distinguishing true urgency from the feeling of urgency and making sure that speed does not eliminate judgment.

This is where the first three tools come together. Boundaries clarify your role. Emotional awareness tells you what you are carrying. A response process helps you decide what you will actually do.

THE POINT

The objective is not to become emotionless. It is to keep the moment from making the decision for you.

Identify your reaction pattern

Reflect on your own leadership

What kinds of situations most reliably trigger a fast, defensive or emotional reaction from you?

What does your default reaction look like - withdraw, fix, confront, appease, over-explain or something else?

What fact or perspective do you most often miss when you are in that state?

PAUSE - CLARIFY - CHOOSE

Use this three-step sequence once this week before responding to a difficult situation.

- **PAUSE:** If immediate action is not required, create a small amount of time before deciding.
- **CLARIFY:** What actually happened? What do I know, and what am I assuming?
- **CHOOSE:** What principle or responsibility should guide my response? What action will I still be comfortable defending tomorrow?

CARRY THIS FORWARD

The objective is not to become emotionless. It is to keep the moment from making the decision for you.

How do I show up under pressure?

Part I is about the leadership conditions you create before anyone else has done anything. Bring the three tools together by looking for the pattern between relationships, load and reaction.

Pull the three ideas together

When I am under pressure, what version of me tends to show up?

Which relationship or boundary is most likely to become inconsistent when I am carrying too much?

What early signal tells me I am moving from intentional response into reaction?

What is one boundary, recovery practice or pause I want to make more reliable?

ONE COMMITMENT BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Write one sentence that describes how you want people to experience you when the situation is difficult. Keep it somewhere visible for the next week.

Create Clarity With Others

Leadership is experienced in the gap between what you intended and what other people actually received.

Once you can manage how you enter the situation, the next task is to create shared understanding. Communication is not complete because information left your mouth or your inbox. It is complete when people have enough context to know what is happening, what it means for them and what they should do next.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL QUESTION
What does this person actually need from me?

1. Communicate Early and Often Reduce information vacuums without confusing communication with oversharing.	2. Listen With a Willingness to Change Make feedback meaningful by allowing information to affect your understanding.
3. Make the Open Door Feel Accessible Build access people can actually use, especially when the message is difficult.	

The sequence matters.

Once you can manage how you show up, the next challenge is creating shared understanding. This part moves from communicating information, to receiving information, to building an environment where people continue to bring you what you need to know.

Communicate Early and Often

When leaders leave a vacuum, people fill it with their own explanation.

Leaders often hold information because they want to wait until they have the full picture, avoid causing concern or protect confidentiality. Sometimes those are legitimate considerations. The mistake is treating them as reasons to say nothing. Silence is rarely neutral when employees know that something is happening.

People fill gaps. When payroll is wrong, a key employee leaves, a change is underway or a problem is visible, employees do not suspend interpretation until leadership is ready. They build a story from the information they have. That story can easily become more damaging than the reality.

Communicating early does not mean sharing everything. Over-communicating and over-sharing are different. Confidentiality still matters. A leader can say what is known, identify what cannot yet be shared, explain what happens next and commit to a future update without violating anyone's privacy.

Communicating often also does not mean burying people in information. Effective communication is filtered. It is compelling and concise enough that people can find the point. A single enormous message or one announcement months before something happens is not the same as creating shared understanding.

THE POINT

Communication is not measured by how much information you sent. It is measured by whether people have enough understanding to move forward.

Where are people currently filling in the blanks?

Reflect on your own leadership

What situation in your workplace do employees know something about but not enough to fully understand?

What are they likely assuming because of the gaps?

What can you responsibly communicate now, even if every detail is not available?

What message have you delivered once but not reinforced?

USE A FOUR-PART UPDATE

Choose one active issue and communicate it in a format people can quickly understand.

- WHAT WE KNOW: State the relevant facts without unnecessary detail.
- WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW YET: Name uncertainty rather than pretending it does not exist.
- WHAT HAPPENS NEXT: Explain the next action, decision or process.
- WHEN YOU WILL HEAR FROM US AGAIN: Create a clear expectation for the next update.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

Communication is not measured by how much information you sent. It is measured by whether people have enough understanding to move forward.

Listen With a Willingness to Change

Hearing collects information. Listening allows information to matter.

Leaders often say they want feedback. The harder question is whether there is any realistic possibility that the feedback could change their understanding, their approach or the final decision. If the answer is no, the conversation may be information-gathering or explanation, but it is not genuine consultation.

Listening does not require agreement. Employees can misunderstand a situation, lack context or recommend something that cannot be implemented. The requirement is openness: a willingness to consider whether the information changes what you know, reveals an impact you had not considered or exposes a flaw in your original assumption.

People also notice when a leader appears to listen but is really waiting for their turn to defend the existing position. Reflecting back what you heard before responding forces a small but useful discipline: understand first, then decide what to do with the information.

Trust is strengthened when the loop closes. If feedback changes something, say so. If it does not, explain why. People do not need every suggestion accepted; they do need evidence that their effort was not performative.

THE POINT

Listening is not agreement. It is the willingness to let new information have a legitimate chance to affect your thinking.

How open are you when someone challenges you?

Reflect on your own leadership

Think of the last time someone challenged one of your decisions. At what point did you stop listening and start preparing your response?

What kind of feedback do you find easiest to dismiss because of who delivers it or how it is delivered?

What evidence or information could genuinely cause you to reconsider a current decision?

Where have you asked for input after the real decision was already made?

CLOSE THE LOOP VISIBLY

Use one feedback conversation this week to demonstrate that listening has an outcome.

- Begin by asking a question you do not already know the answer to.
- Reflect back the core concern before explaining your view.
- End with: Here is what I heard. Here is what I need to consider. Here is what happens next.
- Follow up when you said you would - even if the final answer does not change.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

Listening is not agreement. It is the willingness to let new information have a legitimate chance to affect your thinking.

Make the Open Door Feel Accessible

An open door is an employee experience, not an architectural feature.

Many leaders describe themselves as having an open-door policy. The door itself tells us almost nothing. Employees decide whether a leader is accessible based on what happens when they actually bring something forward.

A leader can be physically available and still be difficult to approach. If people are interrupted, rushed, dismissed, punished for bad news or left without follow-up, they learn that access is costly. Eventually the information that most needs to reach leadership arrives late - or not at all.

Accessibility also does not require permanent availability. Leaders need focused work time and boundaries. What matters is that employees know how to reach you, what kind of response to expect, what to do when something is urgent and whether raising a difficult issue will be treated respectfully.

Silence can therefore be useful data. If certain people never bring concerns, or particular kinds of information always seem to arrive through side channels, the question is not simply whether your door was open. The question is what people have learned about using it.

THE POINT

Accessibility is not what you offer. It is what other people can reliably use.

Audit the experience of access

Reflect on your own leadership

Who comes to you readily, and who rarely does?

What kind of information reaches you quickly? What tends to reach you late?

How do you behave when someone brings bad news, disagreement or a problem you cannot immediately solve?

If an employee needed five minutes of your attention this week, would they know how to get it?

MAKE ONE ACCESS PROMISE YOU CAN ACTUALLY KEEP

Replace a vague open-door message with a specific and reliable access practice.

- Choose one mechanism: regular check-ins, office hours, a response-time commitment, a confidential path or a clear urgent-escalation process.
- Tell people how and when to use it.
- Protect the time or process so the promise remains credible.
- After two weeks, ask whether it is actually making access easier.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

Accessibility is not what you offer. It is what other people can reliably use.

What is it like to be led by me?

Part II moves from sending information, to receiving it, to creating an environment where information continues to move. Use this page to think about the communication climate you create.

Pull the three ideas together

Where does my team have the greatest information gap right now?

What do people learn from the way I respond when they disagree with me?

Who may experience me as less accessible than I believe I am?

What one change would make communication with me easier, safer or more useful?

ONE COMMITMENT BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Ask one trusted employee or colleague a simple question: What is one thing I could do that would make it easier to bring me difficult information? Listen without defending your current approach.

Lead Through Complexity

Good leadership rarely lives inside a clean yes-or-no decision.

By this stage the focus shifts from communication to shared problem-solving. Strong leaders do not need to personally solve every problem, but they also do not outsource judgment. They build other people's thinking, diagnose what is really driving the issue and create boundaries that make a workable path visible.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL QUESTION
How do I help people think and make good decisions when there is no simple answer?

1. Ask for a Plan, Not a Perfect Solution Develop ownership without teaching people to hide problems until they have solved everything.	2. Transform the Thinking Behind Behaviour Diagnose the assumptions and conditions that make repeated behaviour seem reasonable.
3. Use Yes, If and No, But Create conditional paths forward instead of collapsing complexity into approval or rejection.	

The sequence matters.

Leadership becomes more difficult when there is no clean answer. This part develops the reader from inviting other people into problem-solving, to diagnosing what sits underneath behaviour, to making nuanced decisions without abandoning boundaries.

Ask for a Plan, Not a Perfect Solution

Shared problem-solving is more useful than outsourced accountability.

“Do not bring me problems; bring me solutions” is usually intended to encourage initiative. In practice, it can teach people to hold back problems until they believe they have solved every dimension. That is risky when early warning matters.

It can also confuse ownership. Employees should develop their judgment, think through options and make recommendations appropriate to their role. But leaders remain responsible for context, trade-offs, resources and consequences that the employee may not be able to see.

Asking for a plan creates a better middle ground. A plan can be incomplete. It can contain assumptions, options and unresolved questions. It gives the employee something to own while keeping the conversation open enough for the leader to contribute context and judgment.

The quality of the conversation matters more than whether the employee arrives with the perfect answer. The objective is to make people better at thinking through problems, not better at hiding them until they look solved.

THE POINT

Develop people by asking them to think. Support them by staying in the problem with them.

What happens when someone brings you a problem?

Reflect on your own leadership

Do you tend to solve it for them, become frustrated, or expect them to have everything figured out?

What kinds of problems might people currently delay bringing to you?

What level of preparation is reasonable for the person's role and experience?

Where could you ask for more ownership without withdrawing your own responsibility?

USE THE FOUR-QUESTION PROBLEM CONVERSATION

The next time someone brings you a problem, resist the urge either to solve it immediately or send them away to return with a perfect answer.

- What are you seeing?
- What have you considered?
- What do you recommend as a next step?
- What do you need from me?

CARRY THIS FORWARD

Develop people by asking them to think. Support them by staying in the problem with them.

Transform the Thinking Behind Behaviour

Lasting behaviour change usually starts upstream.

When a behaviour creates a problem, the obvious response is to tell the person to stop doing it or to describe the behaviour you want instead. That can create compliance, especially when the expectation is clear and the consequence matters. It does not always create understanding.

Repeated behaviour usually makes sense from inside the person's current assumptions, incentives, habits or skills. If you only correct the visible behaviour, the same underlying thinking may produce the same problem again in a slightly different form.

This is where leadership becomes diagnostic. Instead of immediately asking, “How do I stop this behaviour?” ask, “What makes this behaviour reasonable from their perspective?” The answer may be a mistaken assumption, conflicting incentives, unclear expectations, missing skill, fear of a consequence or a workplace norm that quietly rewards the wrong thing.

Transformation does not mean endless analysis or avoiding accountability. Sometimes the expectation simply needs to be reinforced. The point is to know whether you are correcting a one-time action or trying to change a pattern. Patterns deserve diagnosis.

THE POINT

Do not diagnose attitude when the real cause may be an assumption, incentive, skill gap or unclear expectation.

Diagnose one repeated behaviour

Reflect on your own leadership

What repeated behaviour are you currently trying to change?

What might the person believe that makes the behaviour reasonable to them?

What condition, incentive, unclear expectation or missing skill could be reinforcing it?

What would the person need to understand differently for a better behaviour to make sense?

ASK BEFORE YOU DIRECT

In your next coaching conversation about a repeated behaviour, ask one diagnostic question before you give advice or direction.

- Describe the behaviour and its impact without assigning motive.
- Ask: What is leading you to approach it this way?
- Listen for the assumption, incentive, fear or knowledge gap underneath the action.
- Then connect the expected behaviour to the principle or outcome that makes the change meaningful.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

Do not diagnose attitude when the real cause may be an assumption, incentive, skill gap or unclear expectation.

Use “Yes, If” and “No, But”

Conditional language keeps the door open without abandoning the guardrails.

Many leadership requests are not really yes-or-no questions. A flat yes can create commitments the organization cannot sustain. A flat no can shut down initiative, leave people feeling unheard and end a conversation that might have produced a workable option.

“Yes, if” is an agreement in principle with boundaries. It says that you support the underlying idea if specific conditions can be met. Those conditions might involve budget, capacity, timing, risk or another legitimate requirement. The structure also returns appropriate ownership to the person making the request: if they can improve the plan, the answer may become yes.

“No, but” works from the other direction. It rejects the specific option while preserving the underlying need or goal. No, we cannot do this version, but we can explore another route. That keeps the conversation solution-focused without pretending that an unacceptable option is acceptable.

This is different from “yes, but,” which often functions as an appeasing no. The first word sounds supportive, but everything after “but” negates it. Intentional conditional language is clearer because it names what is possible and what would have to be true.

THE POINT

Good boundaries do not only close doors. They show people where a responsible path forward still exists.

Where are you defaulting to yes or no?

Reflect on your own leadership

Where are you tempted to say yes mainly to avoid disappointing someone?

Where has a flat no ended a conversation that deserved more exploration?

What conditions would turn a current maybe into a responsible yes?

What underlying need could still be met even if the requested option is not workable?

REFRAME ONE LIVE REQUEST

Take one pending request and answer it using conditional language rather than a binary response.

- If the concept is supportable, use: Yes, if... and name the conditions.
- If the specific option is not workable, use: No, but... and identify a legitimate alternative path.
- Make the conditions concrete and relevant rather than vague hurdles.
- Invite the requester to help improve the plan instead of solving every condition for them.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

Good boundaries do not only close doors. They show people where a responsible path forward still exists.

How do I help other people think?

Part III is about developing judgment rather than collecting dependency. Bring the tools together around one current problem that does not have an obvious answer.

Pull the three ideas together

Where am I solving problems that someone else could learn to think through?

What behaviour am I correcting without fully understanding what drives it?

Where could a conditional answer preserve both boundaries and initiative?

What would better thinking look like in the people I lead six months from now?

ONE COMMITMENT BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Choose one problem this week and make your goal the quality of the other person's thinking, not the speed with which you can provide the answer.

Earn and Protect Trust

Authority becomes leadership when people can trust how you use it.

The final stage returns to themes introduced earlier, but at a higher level of consequence. Emotional awareness now affects decisions that impact others. Fairness must be visible enough to survive scrutiny. And judgment ultimately has to become action, even when the responsible decision is uncomfortable.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL QUESTION

Can people trust how I use the authority I have?

1. Respect Emotion Without Being Ruled by It Treat emotion as meaningful information without automatically making it the decision-maker.	2. Make Sensitive Decisions Defensible Use transparency and safeguards when relationships or conflicts could call fairness into question.
3. Balance Self-Preservation With Moral Courage Recognize legitimate risk without allowing personal comfort to become the primary decision criterion.	

The sequence matters.

The final stage is about the responsible use of authority. It asks whether you can remain human without becoming ruled by emotion, make decisions that are visibly fair, and act with courage when the responsible choice creates discomfort or risk.

Respect Emotion Without Being Ruled by It

Emotion is information. It is not automatically the decision-maker.

Leadership is emotional because organizations are made of people and the consequences of decisions are real. Anger can signal that a boundary has been crossed. Fear can signal risk. Sympathy can draw attention to human impact. Frustration can tell you that something has remained unresolved for too long.

Problems emerge at either extreme. Leaders who treat emotion as weakness can become detached, dismissive or difficult to trust. Leaders who allow emotion to control the decision can become inconsistent, impulsive or unable to hold necessary standards.

The more useful position is to respect the emotion enough to understand what it is telling you, then decide what influence that information should have. A feeling can be valid without determining the outcome.

This also applies to other people's emotions. Giving someone room to be disappointed, angry or afraid does not require you to remove the expectation or reverse the decision. Emotional respect and accountability can exist at the same time.

THE POINT

Emotion deserves attention. It does not always deserve authority.

What emotions have the most influence on your leadership?

Reflect on your own leadership

Which emotion most often changes your tone, patience or judgment - anger, fear, guilt, sympathy, frustration, protectiveness or something else?

What does that emotion usually tell you is at risk?

When have you dismissed someone's emotion because you were focused only on the decision?

When have you allowed emotion to carry more authority than the facts or responsibility justified?

NAME IT - UNDERSTAND IT - DECIDE ITS INFLUENCE

Use this process during one emotionally charged leadership moment.

- NAME IT: What am I feeling, and what is the other person feeling?
- UNDERSTAND IT: What concern, loss, threat, unfairness or responsibility is the emotion pointing toward?
- DECIDE ITS INFLUENCE: What should this information legitimately change? What should it not change?
- If regulation is needed, delay the response rather than abandoning the issue.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

Emotion deserves attention. It does not always deserve authority.

Make Sensitive Decisions Defensible

Fairness must be real - and visible enough to withstand scrutiny.

Personal relationships, family connections and conflicts of interest are not always avoidable. In small communities, family businesses, closely connected sectors and nonprofit organizations, people may genuinely have overlapping relationships. The existence of a connection is not the same thing as proof of a bad decision.

The risk is that the connection changes the decision - or reasonably appears to have changed it. Favouritism and cronyism are choices. They occur when relationships or loyalty substitute for fair criteria, accountability or merit. Even when the decision itself is sound, a process that cannot be explained can damage trust.

That is why sensitive decisions require more rigour, not less. Disclosure, written criteria, independent review, recusal and documented rationale help separate a legitimate decision from the perception that someone was protected or preferred.

Intent is not enough. Leaders often know that they meant to be fair. Employees and stakeholders cannot see intent. They see the process, the consistency of the standards and whether accountability changes depending on who is involved.

THE POINT

When impartiality could reasonably be questioned, the process needs more transparency - not less.

Run a defensibility test

Reflect on your own leadership

Think of a current or recent decision where a reasonable person could question impartiality. What creates that perception?

Could you clearly explain the criteria that were used?

Was anyone involved in the decision also in a real, potential or perceived conflict?

Would you be comfortable if the process and rationale became public?

ADD ONE SAFEGUARD

Identify one recurring area where relationships or conflicts could undermine confidence and strengthen the process before the next decision occurs.

- Choose the safeguard that fits: disclosure, recusal, written criteria, independent review, documented scoring or another check.
- Make the safeguard part of the process rather than something added only when controversy appears.
- Apply the same accountability after the decision. A relationship should not create immunity from performance expectations.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

When impartiality could reasonably be questioned, the process needs more transparency - not less.

Balance Self-Preservation With Moral Courage

Protect the mission before you protect your comfort.

Self-preservation has a legitimate place in leadership. Leaders should think about risk, relationships, reputation, legal consequences and whether an action will leave them able to remain effective. Recklessness is not courage.

The problem begins when protecting yourself becomes the primary criterion. A leader may delay an obvious decision, seek endless consensus, avoid a necessary conversation or choose the least controversial option mainly because it reduces personal exposure. The organization then absorbs the cost of the leader's comfort.

Moral courage is not about acting without fear. It is about doing the necessary homework, understanding the consequences, using appropriate safeguards and then being willing to act when the responsible course is clear enough.

This is the capstone of intentional leadership because every other tool eventually meets this test. You can understand yourself, communicate well, listen genuinely and diagnose the problem. At some point, leadership still requires a decision or action.

THE POINT

Courage is not the absence of self-preservation. It is refusing to let self-preservation become the purpose of the decision.

Name the decision you are avoiding

Reflect on your own leadership

What decision, conversation or action do you already know needs attention?

Why have you not acted yet? Separate missing information from discomfort.

What are you protecting - the organization, another person, your reputation, your relationship or your own comfort?

What is the cost of continuing to avoid the issue?

What evidence, consultation or safeguard do you genuinely still need before acting?

SET THE NEXT RESPONSIBLE ACTION

Do not make the exercise bigger than it needs to be. Identify the next action that moves the issue from avoidance into responsible leadership.

- Write the next action in concrete terms.
- Identify who must be consulted - and who does not need to approve it.
- Set a date for the action or decision.
- Afterward, review whether you acted from evidence and responsibility or from the desire to avoid blowback.

CARRY THIS FORWARD

Courage is not the absence of self-preservation. It is refusing to let self-preservation become the purpose of the decision.

How do I use my authority?

The final stage asks whether people can trust the way you make difficult decisions. Your answer is not found in your intentions alone; it is found in your patterns.

Pull the three ideas together

How does emotion influence the way I use authority?

Where does the fairness of my process need to be more visible?

What difficult issue am I most tempted to avoid because of the personal cost?

If my team described how I use authority in three words, what would I hope they would say - and what evidence would support those words?

ONE COMMITMENT BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

Complete one action from the decision you identified in Tool 12. The workbook should end with movement, not only insight.

Your 30-Day Leadership Practice

Leadership improves through repetition. Choose one behaviour from each developmental stage that would make a meaningful difference in your current situation. The aim is not to practise all twelve tools at once; it is to create a small set of observable behaviours you can actually repeat.

At the end of thirty days, review what changed. Pay attention not only to outcomes but also to the quality of the conversations, the speed at which information reaches you, the independence of the people you lead and your own ability to remain intentional under pressure.

STAGE	BEHAVIOUR I WILL PRACTISE	WHERE I WILL USE IT	EVIDENCE IT IS HELPING
Lead Yourself First			
Create Clarity With Others			
Lead Through Complexity			
Earn and Protect Trust			

At the end of 30 days

What did I do differently often enough that other people could notice?

What changed in the way people responded to me?

Which tool felt most natural? Which required the most discipline?

Intentional leadership compounds

No single phrase, worksheet or conversation makes someone a strong leader. Leadership becomes more reliable through repeated choices: notice what is happening, understand your responsibility, choose a response, observe the effect and adjust.

The twelve tools in this workbook are deliberately practical, but the larger journey is simple. Manage yourself before you try to manage the room. Create enough clarity that people do not have to guess. Help other people think instead of creating dependence on you. And when authority is yours to use, make your decisions fair enough to defend and courageous enough to act on.

You will not get every conversation or decision right. Intentional leadership does not require perfection. It requires enough awareness and consistency to learn from what happens and enough courage to keep practising.

Manage yourself. Understand others. Work through complexity. Use your authority responsibly.

KEEP THE PRACTICE GOING

Return to the workbook when a new leadership challenge appears. The same situation may look different depending on which developmental question you ask.

Based on the Leadership Tips conversations from Diagnosing The Workplace.

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