

 Director Zen

COMPANION WORKBOOK

The Leader's Stance



Foundational Tools for Childcare Leaders

A self-paced companion to the course — built to help you slow down, notice patterns, and make small, meaningful shifts in how you lead.

Workbook Introduction

This workbook is designed to support your learning—not add more to your plate. You won't find long assignments or complicated exercises here. Instead, each reflection is meant to help you pause, notice patterns, and make small, meaningful shifts in how you lead.

Leadership development doesn't happen all at once. It happens through awareness, intention, and practice. This workbook will help you:

01

**Slow down your
thinking**

02

**Put language to what
you're already
feeling**

03

**Connect lessons to
your everyday
leadership**



You don't need to have perfect answers. You don't need to complete everything at once. What matters most is honesty.

Return to these pages as often as you need. Leadership growth isn't linear—and neither is this work.

As you move through these reflections...

Pay attention to where leadership is quietly asking you to grow:

- Where you feel stretched or reactive
- Where you're holding on out of habit or comfort
- The beliefs guiding your leadership decisions
- How those beliefs show up in your actions

You won't be asked to change everything at once. Instead, you'll make small, intentional adjustments that support long-term growth—for you and your team.

Course Roadmap

The workbook follows the same three-part format as the course. Check off each lesson as you complete it.

1 From Managing to Leading

- ☐ **Lesson 1** The Teacher-to-Leader Identity Shift
- ☐ **Lesson 2** Leadership vs. Management
- ☐ **Lesson 3** The Most Common Mistakes Leaders Make
- ☐ **Lesson 4** From Surviving to Thriving
- ☐ **Lesson 5** Leading With Purpose — Start With Why

2 What Strong Leaders Believe & Do

- ☐ **Lesson 6** Presence Over Illusion
- ☐ **Lesson 7** People Over Tasks
- ☐ **Lesson 8** The Circle of Competence
- ☐ **Lesson 9** Confidence & Credibility

3 Communicate, Grow, Sustain

- ☐ **Lesson 10** Communicate with Clarity
- ☐ **Lesson 11** Leading Through Hard Conversations
- ☐ **Lesson 12** Delegate & Empower
- ☐ **Lesson 13** Invest in Yourself — Grow the Leader First
- ☐ **Finish** Course Conclusion & Your Next 30 Days



SECTION 1 • LESSON 1

The Teacher-to-Leader Identity Shift



What got you here won't get you there.

— Marshall Goldsmith

LESSON SUMMARY

Becoming a leader is more than a promotion—it's a full identity shift. This lesson introduced the foundational change from doing the work yourself to leading others to do it well. Leadership growth begins when you let go of classroom habits that no longer serve your role and step fully into developing people, systems, and culture.

The Identity Shift Matrix

Let go of the teacher habit — step into the leader habit.

Teacher Habits — Let Go		Leader Habits — Step Into
Doing it all	→	Developing others
Micromanaging	→	Mentoring
Being the hero	→	Building a strong team

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Leadership requires shifting focus from your classroom to your team.
- ✓ The most important leadership move is the shift from **doing** to **developing**.
- ✓ Empowering others creates stronger staff and reduces burnout over time.

Reflection & Commitment

Reflection

In what ways are you still operating like a teacher in your role as director?

Commitment — from the matrix above

One teacher habit I will begin letting go of:

One leader focus I will begin practicing instead:

Small, intentional shifts create lasting leadership growth.



SECTION 1 • LESSON 2

Leadership vs. Management

“Leadership without management is chaos. Management without leadership is control.”

LESSON SUMMARY

Leadership and management are both essential—but they are not the same. This lesson explored the difference between managing systems and leading people, and why relying on management alone often leads to overwhelm and reactivity. Strong leaders learn how to balance structure and heart, knowing when to manage details and when to lead with vision, presence, and clarity.

Two Modes, One Leader

Both matter. The question is which one you default to under pressure.

Management

Systems, schedules, compliance, tasks. Keeps the day running. Answers “how” and “when.”

Leadership

Vision, people, culture, growth. Sets the direction. Answers “why” and “where to.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Management keeps daily operations running; leadership sets direction and builds people.
- ✓ Leading through management alone can create control, stress, and disconnection.
- ✓ The most effective directors intentionally balance structure with trust, clarity, and support.

— Reflection & Commitment

Where do you naturally lean most of the time?

MANAGEMENT

LEADERSHIP

Mark where you sit today ↓

- Do you spend more time on paperwork or people?
- Do you fix problems—or teach others to solve them?

One moment where I can step back from fixing and step into leading:

One leadership behavior I will practice instead:

Small shifts in how you lead create meaningful changes in how your program runs.



SECTION 1 • LESSON 3

The Most Common Mistakes Leaders Make

“Failure is not the opposite of success—it's part of success.”
— Arianna Huffington

LESSON SUMMARY

Leadership mistakes are not a sign that you're failing—they're a sign that you're learning. This lesson explored common leadership traps that often appear when leaders feel overwhelmed or unsure. By recognizing these patterns early, you can step out of survival mode faster and lead with greater clarity, confidence, and intention.

The Five Leadership Traps

Circle the one that feels most familiar right now.

The Trap	The Problem	The Shift
The Fixer Trap	You solve problems faster than your team can, making them dependent on you.	Ask guiding questions instead of giving instant answers.
The People-Pleaser Trap	You avoid hard conversations and stretch boundaries because you want to be liked.	Respect is built by clarity and consistency, not pleasing.
The Control Trap	"If I just do it myself, it'll be faster and better."	Delegate with coaching, not dumping. Speed now creates bottlenecks later.
The Perfection Trap	You feel you're not allowed to mess up, leading to over-control.	Progress beats perfection. Avoiding growth—not mistakes—hurts credibility.
The Isolation Trap	You keep the stress to yourself, thinking you shouldn't burden others.	Find your people. A trusted peer or mentor reminds you: you're not alone.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Leadership traps burn you out and turn leadership into fixing instead of guiding.
- ✓ The Danger Zone is the space between what you know and what you think you know.
- ✓ The best leaders pause, ask, and learn—before they act.

— Reflection & Commitment

Which trap feels most familiar right now? What's one specific shift you'll make this week to step out of it?

My shift this week:



SECTION 1 • LESSON 4

From Surviving to Thriving

“ Strong leaders understand that struggle is part of the process —but they don't stay stuck there.

LESSON SUMMARY

Every director moves through seasons of leadership. This lesson introduced the four phases—Surviving, Growing, Guiding, and Thriving—and normalized the reality that survival is often part of the journey. Burnout isn't a personal failure; it's often a signal that leadership support, clarity, or systems are still developing. Growth begins by knowing where you are so you can move forward with intention.

The Four Phases of Leadership

Not rigid stages — a roadmap for intentional growth. Each phase has a trap to watch for and a shift to make.

01 Surviving	02 Growing	03 Guiding	04 Thriving
Constant response mode. Every day feels like firefighting. TRAP Believing this is how leadership always feels. SHIFT Keep moving—don't settle for survival.	You find rhythm, build systems, and gain confidence. TRAP Perfectionism—thinking you can't afford mistakes. SHIFT Embrace the mess. Mistakes are part of momentum.	You shift from doing to leading—mentoring staff, shaping culture. TRAP Control—trying to do everything yourself. SHIFT Trust others. Let them lead, too.	Leading with clarity, consistency, and confidence. TRAP Complacency—thinking you've "arrived." SHIFT Keep learning. Keep growing.

Survival Audit

Check every statement that feels true for you right now, then total your checks below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ I spend most of my time reacting to problems | ☐ I often feel like I'm the only one who can fix things |
| ☐ I jump in to cover classrooms or fix tasks more than I'd like | ☐ I don't have time to train or coach staff the way I should |
| ☐ I say yes to things I don't really have capacity for | ☐ I avoid tough conversations to keep the peace |
| ☐ Most of my decisions are made in the moment | ☐ My energy feels drained at the end of most days |
| ☐ I'm constantly patching problems instead of solving them | ☐ I've recently tried setting clearer expectations or routines |
| ☐ I'm starting to delegate—but still feel the urge to take over | ☐ I've had small wins recently that made me feel I'm growing |

Score your checks →

My total: / 12

9–12

Surviving

Focus on shortening this phase.

6–8

Growing

Momentum is building.

4–5

Guiding

Shaping systems & people.

0–3

Thriving

Leading with clarity & trust.

Personal Action Planner

Moving out of survival mode — one small, intentional step.

HABIT TO SHIFT

MICRO-GOAL

CHECK-IN DATE

To shift out of survival, you need a plan, tools, and space to grow.



SECTION 1 • LESSON 5

Leading With Purpose — Start With Why



Purpose isn't fluff. It's fuel.

LESSON SUMMARY

Purpose is what anchors leadership during demanding seasons. This lesson explored why leadership becomes unsustainable when your why is buried—and how reconnecting to purpose brings clarity, resilience, and steadiness. When your purpose is clear, decisions feel lighter, leadership feels more intentional, and hard days become more manageable.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Purpose anchors leadership when pressure is high.
- ✓ Leadership without purpose often leads to survival mode and burnout.
- ✓ A clear why brings clarity, consistency, and resilience.

— Your Leadership Purpose Statement

What originally drew you to leadership in early childhood—and what keeps you here today? Purpose doesn't remove challenges. It helps you lead through them.

I lead because...

Commitment: stay connected to your why

Choose one simple way you'll stay connected to your why on hard days.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Post my purpose where I'll see it daily | ☐ Choose a grounding word or phrase |
| ☐ Take a short reset break during the day | ☐ Share my purpose with someone I trust |



SECTION 2 • LESSON 6

Presence Over Illusion

“ *Your presence is your power. If they can't feel you, they won't follow you.* ”

LESSON SUMMARY

Leadership presence isn't about being everywhere—it's about being felt where it matters most. This lesson explored the difference between real leadership presence and the illusion of leadership, and how consistent visibility builds trust. When trust is strong, accountability becomes easier, culture stabilizes, and people feel supported instead of managed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Presence builds trust, and trust enables accountability.
- ✓ Leadership influence grows through consistency, not constant access.
- ✓ Strategic visibility matters more than being busy or available all the time.

Presence Check

Check any statements that feel true right now. This is not a judgment—just information.

- ☐ I'm often physically present but mentally distracted
- ☐ Staff tend to approach me only when something is wrong
- ☐ I spend most of my day behind a desk or in my office
- ☐ I'm visible during crises, but not consistently otherwise
- ☐ I feel rushed when people need my attention

Commitment: One Visibility Shift

Choose one small, realistic action to increase your leadership presence this week.

☐

Greet staff and families at arrival or pick-up

☐

Walk classrooms daily with intention

☐

Block protected time for staff connection

☐

Be visibly available during one high-stress moment

My chosen presence habit:

You don't need to be everywhere. You just need to be felt when and where it matters most.



SECTION 2 • LESSON 7

People Over Tasks



Take care of your employees and they'll take care of your business. It's as simple as that.

— Richard Branson

LESSON SUMMARY

Strong leadership puts people first—without neglecting responsibility. This lesson focused on the balance between managing tasks and leading people, and how culture begins to erode when tasks consistently take priority over connection. When leaders are visible, present, and intentional with their time, trust grows, morale improves, and systems function more smoothly.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ People are the foundation of culture, consistency, and trust.
- ✓ Tasks matter, but they should support people—not replace connection.
- ✓ Small, intentional shifts toward presence can transform leadership impact.

— Reflection & Commitment

Where did your time and energy go most often this week—toward tasks or toward people? How visible were you to staff, children, and families?

Choose one habit to put people first this week:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Greet staff, children, and families intentionally | ☐ Spend 15 minutes daily in classrooms |
| ☐ Schedule one meaningful staff check-in | ☐ Delegate one task to create space for connection |

You don't need to eliminate tasks to lead well. Just make sure people are never an afterthought.



SECTION 2 • LESSON 8

The Circle of Competence

“*Doing right is more important than being right.*”

LESSON SUMMARY

Strong leadership doesn't require having all the answers—it requires knowing when to pause, ask, and learn. This lesson introduced the Circle of Competence as a tool for self-awareness, helping leaders recognize where their knowledge is solid, where risk lives, and where curiosity leads to better decisions. Shrinking the danger zone builds trust, credibility, and confidence over time.

Where Are You Operating Most?

The danger zone lives between what you know and what you only think you know.



- **What I Know**
Areas I can confidently lead.
- **What I Think I Know**
The danger zone, where I tend to assume.
- **What I Don't Know**
Areas where I need to ask, check, or learn.

Shrinking the danger zone builds trust, credibility, and confidence over time.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Most leadership mistakes happen in the “danger zone”—what we think we know.
- ✓ Saying “I don't know yet” is a strength, not a weakness.
- ✓ Pausing to ask or check builds trust and protects your program.

Shrinking the Danger Zone

Choose one habit to practice this week to lead with more clarity.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Pause before responding | ☐ Ask a clarifying question |
| ☐ Check policy or documentation | ☐ Say "I don't know yet, but I'll find out" |

One situation where I will intentionally pause or ask:

You don't need to know everything to lead well. You just need to know when to slow down.



SECTION 2 • LESSON 9

Confidence & Credibility



The speed of the boss is the speed of the team.

— Lee Iacocca

LESSON SUMMARY

Confidence in leadership isn't about personality or having all the answers—it's about consistency. This lesson explored how credibility is built through daily actions, visible follow-through, and emotional steadiness. When leaders show up reliably, own mistakes, and lead with clarity, trust grows—and teams follow.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Credibility is built through consistent, visible leadership behaviors.
- ✓ Trust grows when leaders are reliable, fair, and clear.
- ✓ Confidence is a skill that develops through practice, reflection, and learning.

Credibility Check

Check any actions you already practice consistently. For the ones you leave blank, choose one to strengthen this week.

☐

I follow through on what I say I'll do

☐

I'm visible during difficult moments

☐

I apply rules and expectations fairly

☐

I own my mistakes openly

☐

I ask my team for feedback

☐

I communicate clearly and directly

My chosen credibility action this week:



SECTION 3 • LESSON 10

Communicate with Clarity



Say what you mean. Lead what you say.

LESSON SUMMARY

Clear communication is one of the most powerful leadership tools you have. This lesson focused on how vague or inconsistent messaging creates confusion, stress, and breakdowns in accountability. When leaders communicate simply, consistently, and with intention, teams feel safer, expectations are clearer, and leadership feels calm instead of reactive.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Most leadership issues stem from unclear communication, not bad intent.
- ✓ Clarity creates safety, trust, and accountability.
- ✓ Calm, consistent communication is a leadership skill that can be practiced.

Clarity Check

Check any areas that may need refinement right now.

☐

Expectations are often implied instead of stated

☐

Priorities change without being clearly communicated

☐

I assume others understand what I mean

☐

I give feedback after problems arise instead of before

☐

I say things differently each time I explain them

Commitment: One Clarity Reset

Choose one expectation, value, or priority to restate this week with clarity.

COMMANDER'S INTENT

"If nothing else goes as planned, success looks like..."

How will you confirm understanding?

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Ask them to repeat key points | ☐ Ask what their next step will be |
| ☐ Follow up in writing | ☐ Other |



SECTION 3 • LESSON 11

Leading Through Hard Conversations

“Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind.”

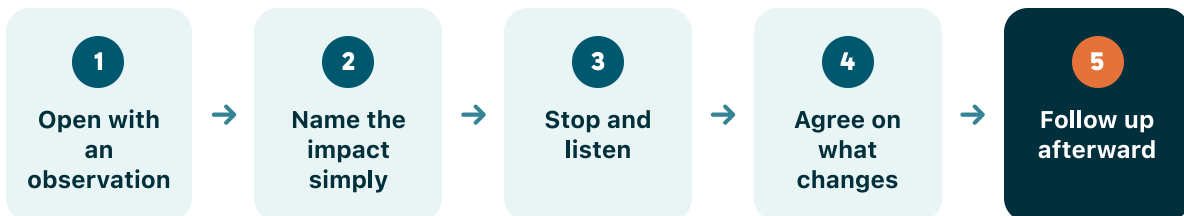
— Brené Brown

LESSON SUMMARY

Accountability is an act of care, not conflict. This lesson explored why avoiding hard conversations quietly erodes trust across your whole team—and why the stance you bring matters more than a perfect script. When you lead a difficult conversation with steadiness, curiosity, and genuine belief in the person, accountability strengthens your culture instead of straining it.

The Hard Conversation, Step by Step

A simple path to keep you steady—lead with care, not dread.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Avoiding a hard conversation is still a decision—and your team feels it.
- ✓ Your stance—calm, curious, caring—matters more than the exact words you use.
- ✓ Lead with an observation, name the impact, then stop and listen—and always follow up.

Reflection & Commitment

Who is the one conversation you've been avoiding? What is it costing your team—and that person—to keep putting it off?

The conversation I've been avoiding:

This week, I'll prepare for and hold one conversation I've been putting off—leading with care, not dread.



SECTION 3 • LESSON 12

Delegate & Empower



If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

— African Proverb

LESSON SUMMARY

Effective delegation is not about offloading work—it's about developing people. This lesson explored how intentional delegation creates trust, builds skills, and frees leaders to focus on vision and culture. When done well, delegation moves responsibility into shared ownership and prepares others to lead with confidence.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Delegation is a leadership tool, not a shortcut.
- ✓ Dumping tasks without clarity or support damages trust.
- ✓ Clear expectations and follow-up turn tasks into growth opportunities.

Your Delegation Plan

Clarify the outcome—not just the steps. This helps others succeed without micromanagement.

The task I will delegate

The desired outcome (what “done well” looks like)

Who could grow from taking this on & timeline / check-in plan

This week, I commit to delegating with clarity, support, and trust:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Explain the why behind the task | ☐ Define success clearly |
| ☐ Check in without micromanaging | ☐ Acknowledge effort and progress |

Delegation isn't about doing less. It's about helping others grow—so leadership can go further.



SECTION 3 • LESSON 13

Invest in Yourself — Grow the Leader First



The best investment you can make is in yourself.

— Warren Buffett

LESSON SUMMARY

Leadership growth doesn't happen by accident—it happens by choice. This lesson focused on the idea that sustainable leadership begins with personal investment. When you intentionally grow your skills, awareness, and capacity, you lead with more clarity, confidence, and calm. Strong programs are built by leaders who continue to learn.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ✓ Leadership development is your responsibility—and your opportunity.
- ✓ Small, consistent learning creates long-term confidence.
- ✓ When you grow, your team and program grow with you.

Choose Your Growth Focus

You don't need to work on everything. Choose one area to focus on next.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Leadership strategy & decision-making | ☐ Communication and feedback |
| ☐ Delegation and accountability | ☐ Emotional regulation & stress management |
| ☐ Coaching and team development | ☐ Child behavior or development |
| ☐ Business or operational skills | ☐ Inclusion, equity, or family engagement |

Commitment: One Investment

Choose one small, realistic investment you'll make in yourself this month.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Read a book or article | ☐ Listen to a podcast or watch a webinar |
| ☐ Attend a training or workshop | ☐ Join a peer group or community |

MY CHOSEN INVESTMENT

WHEN I'LL TAKE THIS STEP

You are not done becoming the leader your program needs. And that's a good thing.

— LOOKING BACK

What This Course Gave You

You didn't just learn concepts. You built a leadership framework you can return to.

Leadership begins with identity, not tasks

Burnout is often a signal—not a failure

Trust is built through presence, clarity, and consistency

Confidence grows from honesty, not having all the answers

Strong leaders invest in themselves—on purpose

— The Black Belt Truth

A black belt in karate doesn't practice different basics than a white belt. They practice the same stances, the same movements, the same forms.

The difference isn't intelligence or talent. It's repetition, awareness, and restraint. **Leadership works the same way—mastery is returning to the basics when things get hard.**

A Note for the Hard Days

There will be days when you feel reactive again, fall back into old habits, or question whether you're cut out for this. That doesn't mean you've lost your stance. It means you're human.

When that happens, don't add more. Return to:

One conversation

One pause

One clear expectation

One moment of presence

Leadership isn't proven by never struggling. It's proven by noticing sooner—and coming back faster.

Your Next 30 Days

Growth doesn't come from intensity. It comes from consistency. This isn't a checklist—it's a guide to build momentum without burnout.

1

Choose Your Leadership Focus

- ☐ Presence & visibility ☐ Delegation & team development
☐ Communication & clarity ☐ Emotional regulation ☐ Confidence & credibility
☐ Personal growth & learning

My 30-day leadership focus:

2

Identify Your Fundamental Practice

What is one fundamental practice you'll intentionally repeat? (e.g. daily classroom walk-throughs, weekly check-ins, pausing before responding.)

My core practice:

3

Set a Simple Rhythm

Consistency beats intensity. Choose a rhythm that fits your reality.

- ☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Bi-weekly

When and how I'll practice this:

4

Define What Progress Looks Like

Progress isn't perfection. It's awareness and adjustment.

In 30 days, I'll know this is working if:

5

Schedule a Check-In With Yourself

5-DAY

15-DAY

30-DAY



**You've built the foundation.
Now comes the practice.**

The strongest leaders aren't the ones who know the most—they're the ones who return to the fundamentals, again and again, with intention.