

 Director Zen

COMPANION WORKBOOK & JOURNAL

The Director Pivot



21 days to a high performance, low-stress center

One pivot a day. Small, deliberate shifts that move you from reacting to leading — with the space to think, and a team that rises to meet you.

— START HERE

How This Workbook Works

Each day follows the same rhythm. You'll read one pivot, adjust it to your own leadership style, complete a short exercise, and close the loop by writing down what you noticed. Ten minutes a day is enough.

01

The Pivot

The one shift for the day.

02

The Practice

Tuned to your stress persona.

03

The Exercise

A real action, today.

04

The Journal

What you noticed, in writing.

The Three Stress Personas

When a decision lands on you and you're already stretched thin, you tend to drift one of three ways. Most directors lean on one, and plenty carry a mix of two. Neither is a flaw — it's just a pattern. Once you can name yours, you can lead around it. Every day's practice is written all three ways, so read your column first.

FIREFIGHTER

Rushes in and fixes it personally. Needs **space**.

PEACEKEEPER

Avoids the hard conversation. Needs **candor**.

PERFECTIONIST

Leads with the hammer, not the heart. Needs **connection**.

You don't have a time problem. You have a reflex problem — and reflexes can be retrained.



This course won't hand you another binder of procedures. Over 21 days it rewires the small, automatic moves you make under pressure — the pause before you answer, the conversation you'd rather skip, the task you grab back — so your center runs calmer because *you* do.

The Director's Drift Quiz

Below are five common scenarios you likely face each week. Don't choose the answer you think a "good leader" should give — choose the one that matches your gut instinct, when you're tired, caffeinated, and five minutes behind schedule.

If none feel perfect, pick the closest to your natural reflex. This shows you how you tend to drift under stress.

1 A lead teacher calls out 10 minutes before their shift. Your first thought is:

- ☐ A. "Fine, I'll just do it myself. It's faster than calling a sub."
- ☐ B. "I hope the other teachers don't get mad when I ask them to cover."
- ☐ C. "This is a violation of the handbook. I need to write them up immediately."

2 You walk past a classroom and see a teacher on their phone while kids are playing. You:

- ☐ A. Sigh and walk past — you've got 10 other things to do and can't deal with the drama right now.
- ☐ B. Make a mental note to bring it up later (but probably won't).
- ☐ C. Walk in and abruptly tell them to put it away, feeling a surge of irritation.

3 A parent approaches you with a complaint about a tuition increase. You feel:

- ☐ A. Exhausted. You empathize, then explain the rising costs, while mentally juggling 99 other things.
- ☐ B. Guilty. You agree with the parent to avoid conflict and say it's out of your control.
- ☐ C. Defensive. You explain the facts — it's a business decision, and not up for long discussion.

4 Your desk is currently:

- ☐ A. Cluttered — covered in "to-do" lists and sticky notes.
- ☐ B. Mostly clear — but only because you're constantly in classrooms helping others.
- ☐ C. Organized — but you're the only one who knows where anything is.

5 When a staff member makes a recurring mistake, you typically:

- ☐ A. Fix it for them while grumbling under your breath.
- ☐ B. Mention it gently and thank them for listening.
- ☐ C. Point it out immediately — no matter who is around.

MY A's

MY B's

MY C's

— YOUR RESULTS

Your Stress Persona

The quiz reveals how your leadership tends to drift when you're overwhelmed. Whichever letter you chose most often is your primary persona.

A The Firefighter

Fear response • You're afraid of losing control — or being seen as “unhelpful.”

The drift • You prioritize doing over leading, which trains your team to rely on you instead of thinking for themselves.

The fix • **Space.** Stop rushing in. When you create space, your team has room to develop their own problem-solving muscles.

B The Peacekeeper

Fear response • You're afraid of conflict or being disliked.

The drift • You avoid hard conversations, which allows gossip and low standards to quietly take root.

The fix • **Candor.** Clear is kind. Avoiding the truth doesn't reduce stress — it multiplies it.

C The Perfectionist

Fear response • You're afraid of failure — or the center looking unprofessional.

The drift • You lead with “the hammer” instead of “the heart.” Your staff follows rules, but they're afraid to make mistakes.

The fix • **Connection.** People rise to your standards when they feel you're on their side, not on their backs.

MY PRIMARY PERSONA IS

— IF YOU ANSWERED WITH A MIX

Hybrid Personas

Most directors carry more than one drift pattern. If your answers were split, find your combination below.

A + B

The Exhausted Martyr

The drift · You do everyone's work because you're afraid they won't like you if you hold them accountable.

The fix · **Boundaries.** Your time is your center's most valuable resource. Stop spending it on tasks that belong to others.

A + C

The Micro-Manager

The drift · You do everyone's work because you don't trust them to do it "the right way."

The fix · **Delegation.** You're not scaling your center — you're bottlenecking it. Trust the process, not just your own hands.

B + C

The Resentful Observer

The drift · You see every mistake but stay quiet to avoid conflict — and your frustration simmers.

The fix · **Voice.** Silence is permission. When you don't speak up, you're choosing resentment over resolution.

— Before You Begin Day 1

Write your persona down where you'll see it, then set the quiz aside. From here on, the work is daily and small: one pivot, one exercise, one honest note about what you noticed. Don't try to fix everything at once — tomorrow only asks for the first five seconds.

Your persona isn't a weakness to fix — it's a strength to sharpen. Strengthen it, and your team feels the difference.

DAY

1

The Power of the Pause

THE PIVOT

Reclaim the first five seconds. Respond, don't react.

Most leaders live in constant reactivity — solving problems, putting out fires, and making rapid decisions without space to think. Day 1 teaches the importance of taking a conscious pause before reacting. That brief moment allows you to regulate emotions, make intentional decisions, and model calm leadership for your staff and children.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Pause before reacting to disruptions. Let calm lead your decisions.

PEACEKEEPER

Use the pause to gather your thoughts before saying “yes” too quickly.

PERFECTIONIST

Take a breath before correcting. Let go of perfection in the moment.

EXERCISE

The Trigger Map

THE TRIGGER — top 3 moments today that made your heart race

THE FEAR — the fear or emotion it triggered

Reflection • Look at the right side. Was your emotion really about the moment — or was it about your fear?

— Director's Journal

“Today, I noticed that I am most likely to lose my pause when... Tomorrow, I will be ready for it.”

DAY
2

Auditing the Firefighting

THE PIVOT

Most fires aren't emergencies — they're just unsolved systems.

It's easy to feel like your whole day is spent putting out fires. But when you slow down and track the interruptions, you'll often find they come from broken or missing systems. Day 2 challenges you to look at your day like a scientist — not to change anything yet, but to observe what needs fixing.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Notice how many fires you invited by being too available. Do you get a rush from saving the day?

PEACEKEEPER

Track how often you said yes to something you didn't have to do — just to avoid “not right now.”

PERFECTIONIST

Count how many times you caused a fire by interrupting someone to correct how they were doing it.

EXERCISE

The System Tally

At the end of your day, take five minutes to tally your interrupt log.

WHO INTERRUPTED	WHAT WAS THE ISSUE	EMERGENCY OR SYSTEM LEAK?

Don't get mad at the teacher. Get curious about the system. Count how many times you were interrupted for something a label, a checklist, or better training would have solved. Ask: how could I make this clearer without needing to be involved?

— Director's Journal

“Today, I was pulled away from my leadership work ____ times. The biggest system leak in my center right now is... If I fixed this system, I would gain back ____ every week.”

DAY

3

The Power of “Not Yet”

THE PIVOT

You're not saying no — you're saying “not yet.”

You cannot focus on big-picture leadership if you're constantly available for every small thing. Today's lesson introduces a simple way to create protected time while still being respectful and responsive. It models to your team that your time matters — and theirs does too.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Fight the urge to be needed. If you feel guilty behind a closed door, remember: thinking is working.

PEACEKEEPER

Don't apologize. Your time is valuable. Use a calm, clear tone — no guilt needed.

PERFECTIONIST

Let go of the how. If a team member solves it without you, it's still a win. Celebrate the effort.

EXERCISE

Implement the “Not Yet”

Choose a 60-minute Focused Growth Window today.

- 1 **Inform & define the emergency.** “I'm working on improving the program from [start] to [end]. Please only interrupt me for a safety or medical emergency, a licensing issue, or an active parent crisis.”
- 2 **Train the filter — the “Three-Before-Me” rule.** Ask a co-worker · check whether the answer is posted · look in the handbook.
- 3 **Put up a sign and close your door for 60 minutes.** If interrupted: “I want to give you my full attention, but I'm working on something right now. Can we meet at [time]?”

— Director's Journal

“Today, I felt ____ when I closed my door. I successfully redirected ____ people. What was the one thing I was able to focus on because I wasn't interrupted?”

Decision Hygiene

THE PIVOT

Bad decisions aren't usually caused by a lack of intelligence — they're caused by a lack of oxygen.

When we rush decisions just to get them off our plate, we often cause more problems than we solve. Today's key shift is about giving yourself permission to pause, reflect, and respond with clarity. You are not avoiding leadership by waiting — you are modeling thoughtful decision-making. A delayed decision can be a stronger one when it aligns with your standards and systems.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Fight the urge to clear the deck. A fast decision feels productive, but often becomes tomorrow's fire.

PEACEKEEPER

Check your guilt meter. Are you saying yes just to make someone stop being upset?

PERFECTIONIST

Use the pause to ask why. Don't just fix the surface — look at the system underneath.

EXERCISE

The Decision Log

At the end of your day, reflect on 3 decisions you made — even small ones.

WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?	WHAT DID I DECIDE?	ROOT CAUSE OR SYMPTOM?

This reflection helps you recognize patterns in how you respond — and teaches you to lead with intention.

Director's Journal

“Today, I felt the most pressure to rush a decision when... By waiting to decide, I realized that... I am paid to think, and today, I did my job.”

The Blind Spot Audit

THE PIVOT

Every leader has a shadow — the parts of our leadership we can't see, but our staff feels every day.

Today's shift requires courage. We're not just observing ourselves — we're asking for honest feedback. Blind spots are leadership habits that hurt our culture but go unnoticed by us. When we identify them, we gain the power to rebuild trust and strengthen our influence. Feedback is not a threat — it's a mirror. And seeing clearly is the beginning of change.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Don't rush to fix it. Sit with how your urgency affects others.

PEACEKEEPER

Resist apologizing. You'll want to smooth things over — stay present and receive the information.

PERFECTIONIST

Drop the shield. Their perception is their reality. Listen to understand — not to win.

EXERCISE

The Shadow Reflection

After you receive feedback from a trusted staff member, revisit your stress persona from the quiz and complete the reflection below.

1. The link — how does the feedback connect to your stress persona?

2. The impact — how might this blind spot contribute to your team's stress or burnout?

3. The respect reset — how did the staff member respond to being asked for feedback?

Reminder: you're not fixing anything yet. Today is about awareness, not action.

— Director's Journal

"The hardest thing I heard today was... It was difficult to hear because... However, by seeing this clearly, I can now begin to change the culture of my center."

DAY
6

Radical Ownership

THE PIVOT

Own the problem, own the solution.

It's easy to blame others for stress in your center — but when you do, you give away your power. Radical Ownership means looking in the mirror, not out the window. Instead of asking what others are doing wrong, ask how your systems, clarity, or silence may have allowed it. Ownership isn't about blame. It's about reclaiming your ability to lead change from the inside out.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Stop the quick save. Every fix owns the task but disowns the leadership. Own the training, not the task.

PEACEKEEPER

Own the silence. Avoiding conflict allows toxic behavior to grow. Speak clearly and calmly.

PERFECTIONIST

Own the atmosphere. Your delivery might be creating tension. Set the tone, not the fear.

EXERCISE

The Public Reset

Respect comes from honesty. Today, find a moment to reset the standard with your team using this script:

SAY THIS

"I've been reflecting on [the problem], and I realized I haven't been as clear with the expectations and systems as I should be. That's on me. Moving forward, I want to make sure you have what you need to succeed. Let's reset the standard together."

Watch their shoulders drop. When you take the blame, they stop being defensive and start being helpful.

— Director's Journal

"The one thing I have been blaming others for is... Today, I realized my part in it was... By owning this, I now feel ____ because I have the power to change it."

DAY
7

Communicate Before You Speak

THE PIVOT

Lead before you open your mouth.

Most leaders think communication starts when they begin talking. But by the time you've walked from the front door to your office, you've already told your team how the day will go. Your appearance, posture, and punctuality are non-verbal broadcasts. Today is about aligning your signal with the calm leader you are becoming — not with perfection, but with intention.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Stop the scurry. Walk with presence. Show your team you're the master of the clock.

PEACEKEEPER

Own the space. Stand tall and make eye contact. Use your presence to anchor the energy in the building.

PERFECTIONIST

Soften the brow. Let go of the critical gaze. Your team needs to see a partner — not a judge.

EXERCISE

The Mirror & Clock Check

THE ACTION

Stop at a mirror before you start your day.

THE QUESTION

"If I were a parent walking in right now, would I feel like my child is in the hands of a calm, confident professional?"

THE ADJUSTMENT

Fix one thing — posture, tone, pace, or uniform — before stepping into the day.

— Director's Journal

"Today, I intentionally changed [arrival time / appearance / body language]. I noticed that by being on time and dressed with purpose, I felt... I don't need to say a word to set the standard for discipline and respect."

DAY
8

The Balanced Leader

THE PIVOT

Lead with calm authority and quiet support.

True leadership is a balance of confidence and contribution. If you're all confidence without helping, you become unapproachable. If you're all helpful without authority, you become a doormat. Today is about finding the calm middle — the ability to lead with a firm hand and a servant's heart.

All authority, no help
Unapproachable

THE CALM MIDDLE
Firm hand, servant's heart

All help, no authority
A doormat

THE PRACTICE — KEEP THIS, LET GO OF THAT

FIREFIGHTER

Keep your ability to act in real emergencies. **Let go** of the panic that turns minor issues into major fires.

PEACEKEEPER

Keep your empathy for how staff feel. **Let go** of the avoidance that keeps you from hard truths.

PERFECTIONIST

Keep your standards for quality and safety. **Let go** of the judgment that assumes different means wrong.

EXERCISE

The Power of “I’ve Got You”

Identify a teacher you've had tension with earlier in this challenge. Approach them during a high-stress moment — drop-off or lunch transition — and communicate warmly how you intend to help.

SAY THIS

“I can see it's a busy morning. I'm going to jump in and [task] for 5 minutes so you can get organized. I've got your back.”

Watch how your calm confidence and willingness to serve creates instant trust.

— Director's Journal

“Today, I balanced my authority with my willingness to serve. When I help from a place of confidence rather than desperation, the staff feels... I am no longer a doer because I'm scared; I am a helper because I am a leader.”

Commander's Intent

THE PIVOT

Cast a clear vision — especially when the plan falls apart.

Most leadership issues arise not from bad intentions, but from a lack of clarity. Commander's Intent is the practice of defining what success looks like — even when plans break down. Instead of simply handing out tasks, you explain the deeper purpose behind the work. This empowers your team to make thoughtful decisions in real time. When people understand the why, they don't freeze — they lead.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Don't default to barking orders. Take 10 extra seconds to explain the outcome. Clarity now means fewer fires later.

PEACEKEEPER

Be specific. Clarity is kindness. Don't hint — paint a clear picture of what good looks like.

PERFECTIONIST

Focus on outcomes, not methods. Leave space for others to get there differently.

EXERCISE

The Clarity Check

STEP 1 — ADD THE INTENT

After giving a directive, include the phrase **"so that..."** to clarify the intent.

STEP 2 — TEST IT

Ask: "If I wasn't here and [obstacle] came up, how would you handle it?"

This reveals whether the staff understands your vision — or just memorized the task.

— Director's Journal

"Today, when I explained the why behind a task, the staff responded by... Leadership isn't about being everywhere — it's about casting a vision they can follow when I'm not in the room."

DAY
10

The Relationship Bank Account

THE PIVOT

Build trust before you lead change.

Over the past nine days, you've done the internal work. Now we begin the next layer: shifting the culture. But systems and scripts won't work if your team doesn't trust the leader behind them. Today is about building emotional equity — so when it's time to lead, they're willing to follow.

DEPOSITS +

Support, listening, specific praise

WITHDRAWALS -

Correction, extra work, criticism

When the emotional account is full, people receive feedback as guidance. When it's empty, even small requests feel like personal attacks.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Slow down the thanks. Stop, make eye contact, and spend 30 seconds being specific.

PEACEKEEPER

Make it real. Don't just be nice — be genuine. Name the exact behavior you're praising.

PERFECTIONIST

Lower the critique bar. Praise something 80% there. Build the bridge first.

EXERCISE

The Appreciation Audit

Pick one staff member you've found difficult in the past. Find two genuine, work-related things they did well today, and share it privately.

SAY THIS

"I noticed you did [X], and it helped the center because [Y]. Thank you."

Director's Journal

"Today, I made intentional deposits into the accounts of ____ and _____. The energy in the building felt ____ when I prioritized connection over correction. People work for people — not for policies."

The 24-Hour Feedback Loop

THE PIVOT

Speak up before silence becomes resentment.

You've spent the last ten days building trust, showing up with calm authority, and making deposits into your staff's relationship bank accounts. Today, that work pays off. A culture of trust gives you permission to speak the truth. Feedback is no longer a threat — it's a tool. The goal is not to avoid correction, but to make it timely, respectful, and clear.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Stop giving feedback on the fly. Don't shout it as you walk away. Stay present for the conversation.

PEACEKEEPER

Skip the compliment sandwich. Just be clear and kind. Fluff confuses the message.

PERFECTIONIST

Watch your tone. Your body language should say "I'm on your team" even as your words say this needs to change.

EXERCISE

The 24-Hour Challenge

Identify one small drift from standard you've been avoiding. Before the end of the day, use the "I noticed" script:

1

THE OBSERVATION

"I noticed [specific behavior]..."



2

THE STANDARD

"...and our standard here is [the why]..."



3

THE PIVOT

"...how can we make sure that happens next time?"

Then pause. Let them respond. If the culture you've built is strong, they will receive it with professionalism — not defensiveness.

Director's Journal

Today, I gave feedback to

Their reaction

My insight

The Art of the Ask

THE PIVOT

Intent is not enough — you must also clarify the path.

On Day 9 you explored Commander's Intent: giving staff the why so they can act with confidence when things go off-script. But intent alone isn't enough. Staff still need a map. Today is about closing the gap between your vision and their execution — shifting from telling to confirming.

Clear communication isn't about how well you explain — it's about how well they understand. By checking for understanding before walking away, you reduce errors and reinforce your clarity.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Wait for the answer. You tend to walk off before they speak. Stay put. Let them process and respond.

PEACEKEEPER

Don't soften the requirement. Be direct: "I need you to do X. Tell me how you'll begin."

PERFECTIONIST

Listen for the how, not just the what. If they paraphrase but grasp the goal, let it go.

EXERCISE

The Role-Play Reset

THE RECORDING

Record yourself giving a 30-second instruction as if talking to a teacher.

THE CRITIQUE

Listen back. Too fast? Fluff words? Was the task buried in the middle?

THE TWEAK

Try again — start with the action, end with the mirror script.

— Director's Journal

"Today, I used the mirror script with _____. I realized they actually thought I wanted... By checking for understanding, I saved myself _____ of re-doing the work later. Clarity is my superpower."

DAY
13

Catch Them Being Good

THE PIVOT

Stop being a critic. Start being a hunter of excellence.

Most leaders have correction fatigue. Our eyes go straight to what's wrong — the messy cubby, the off-task teacher — and we become blind to what's going right. But culture isn't built by what you punish; it's built by what you celebrate. When you catch someone doing something well, you define the standard and give others something to model.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Don't rush the praise. Stop and make it feel real instead of shouting it on your way to the next fire.

PEACEKEEPER

Praise the hard stuff. Go beyond “you're so sweet” — recognize professionalism and punctuality.

PERFECTIONIST

Praise the expected. If you want a behavior repeated, reinforce it.

EXERCISE

The Shout-Out Board

Find three specific examples of a staff member upholding a center standard before noon. Be specific, be timely, and connect it to the vision. Post them publicly in the breakroom.

SHOUT-OUT 1

SHOUT-OUT 2

SHOUT-OUT 3

— Director's Journal

“Today, I intentionally looked for the good. I was surprised to see... By celebrating it, I noticed ____'s attitude changed by... It is much more energizing to lead through praise than through pressure.”

DAY
14

The Difficult Conversation

THE PIVOT

Stop avoiding. Start protecting.

Every center has a toxic leak — someone who gossips, rolls their eyes, or misses the standard. When you avoid addressing it, you give silent permission for it to continue. Meanwhile, your best staff carry the weight. This day is about shifting from Peacekeeper to Protector of the Culture. A difficult conversation isn't punishment — it's a reset.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Don't rush the ending. Stay present. Give them a moment to process.

PEACEKEEPER

Don't minimize the issue. It is a big deal. Be kind and firm at the same time.

PERFECTIONIST

Ask for context. Don't lecture. Burnout or lack of tools is often behind the behavior.

EXERCISE

The Clean-Up Script — B.I.F.

B — Behavior

State what you saw. Avoid "always" or "never."

I — Impact

How it affects the team, the children, or the center.

F — Future

Set the new standard and ask how you can support them.

SAY THIS

"I noticed [behavior]. The impact of this is [effect]. Moving forward, the standard is [standard]. What do you need from me to make sure this happens every time?"

Director's Journal

"Today, I addressed... The hardest part was _____, but the outcome was... By protecting the standard, I am protecting my team."

DAY
15

The Weekly Reset

THE PIVOT

Stop reacting. Start leading.

Most leaders start the week in reaction mode, which leads to burnout. The Weekly Reset is about proactive planning — focusing on the right things, not everything. By choosing your Big 3 priorities, you align your energy and give your brain a clear path forward, even when the day gets chaotic.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Avoid the busy trap. Don't pick easy wins — tackle the hard thing that prevents the next fire.

PEACEKEEPER

Prioritize the hard ask. Let one of your Big 3 be a courageous conversation you've been avoiding.

PERFECTIONIST

Schedule buffer time. Leave breathing room so chaos doesn't knock you off center.

EXERCISE

The Monday Morning Huddle (Solo)

Before interacting with staff Monday morning, stand in your lobby or office and say this mantra to yourself:

"I am the leader of this center and of this culture. I will lead with a pause, I will protect my time, and I will focus on my Big 3."

Then visualize yourself handling a challenge — an upset parent, a staff callout — with composure and clarity. Imagine succeeding before the week even begins.

My Big 3 Goals This Week

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

This week, I own my schedule; my schedule does not own me.

DAY
16

The No-Gossip Standard

THE PIVOT

A leader who allows gossip is just as responsible as one who starts it.

Gossip is the ultimate toxic leak — it erodes trust, creates cliques, and causes your best teachers to look for the exit. Today's goal is to implement the No-Gossip standard by creating a culture of direct, honest communication. By eliminating triangle communication, you remove ambiguity and prevent the whisper culture that undermines strong teams.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Don't just handle it. Pause and guide them to solve it themselves.

PEACEKEEPER

Fight the urge to nod and agree. Staying neutral protects both people. Don't pick sides.

PERFECTIONIST

Ask about the system. Is this gossip covering a real issue — unclear duties or schedules?

EXERCISE

The Professionalism Reset

At your next morning huddle or via your staff app, announce the new Direct Communication standard:

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

"To protect our team culture and ensure we are all treated with respect, we are moving to a Direct Communication standard. If you have a frustration with a teammate, I expect you to speak to them first. If you need me to facilitate that conversation, my door is open to both of you at the same time."

The commitment • Model it yourself. When frustrated, go directly to the teacher instead of venting to others.

— Director's Journal

"Today, ____ tried to bring me gossip. I used the facilitation script, and the reaction was... By refusing to be part of the triangle, I felt... I am building a culture where respect is the baseline."

DAY
17

The Parent Partner Shift

THE PIVOT

Difficult parents aren't just a nuisance for you — they're one of the biggest drivers of staff turnover.

Difficult parents can drive you crazy, but they can also drive good teachers out the door. Today's shift is about becoming a parent partner — not a pushover. By using the Validate then Redirect technique, you can support your team, defuse conflict, and maintain center standards. This builds a culture where both families and staff know they are safe, supported, and respected.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Don't offer a bribe. Discounts or exceptions to avoid confrontation create more problems later.

PEACEKEEPER

Stand by your staff. Don't apologize for a teacher's tone — reinforce their professionalism.

PERFECTIONIST

Drop the lecturer tone. Be firm without sounding superior. Kindness and confidence can coexist.

EXERCISE

The Staff “Back-Stop”

Your teachers need to know you will back them up during parent conflicts. Reinforce this by announcing the Back-Stop script:

GIVE THEM PERMISSION TO SAY

“I want to help you, but I need to bring my Director into this conversation.”

When they do, model calm authority and restate the center's standard — not the teacher's mistake. This builds trust and sets the tone for parent relationships.

— Director's Journal

“Today, I handled a parent interaction by... By standing firm on the policy, the parent's reaction was... I feel ____ knowing that I am protecting the standards of my program.”

Standardizing the “Small Stuff”

THE PIVOT

Stop reminding. Start systemizing.

We've covered vision, communication, and feedback. But without clear systems, even good people struggle to meet expectations. Commander's Intent tells your team why a standard matters. Feedback tells them when they miss it. Today is about preventing the miss in the first place. By creating simple, visual standards, you build a system that speaks for itself — freeing you from reminders and corrections.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Stop fixing it yourself. Point to the checklist and ask if the standard is met.

PEACEKEEPER

Use the checklist as the authority. Say, “The checklist says we need X.”

PERFECTIONIST

Resist overcomplicating. Keep it to 3 steps. Simplicity drives consistency.

EXERCISE

The Expectation Photo

Visual standards don't always need to be written. Sometimes a photo is the most powerful tool.

THE ACTION

Photograph what “perfect” looks like — the supply closet, a classroom shelf.

THE IMPLEMENTATION

Post it digitally or physically. Label it: “This is the standard.”

THE RESULT

When things drift, don't scold. Just ask, “Can we match the photo?”

— Director's Journal

“Today, I standardized... By making the expectation visual, I noticed that ____ was able to complete it without me saying a word. My nagging was actually just a lack of a clear system.”

Delegating the “Who”

THE PIVOT

Let go of your tasks. Develop your people.

There's a difference between delegating a task and delegating ownership. Tasks stay on your radar. Ownership takes them off. When you assign a staff member as a “Champion,” they aren't just helping you — they're growing professionally. This builds pride, purpose, and long-term engagement, and clears your mental desk so you can focus on the work that defines your role.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Resist jumping in if they do it differently. If the goal is met, their how doesn't matter.

PEACEKEEPER

Believe in them. This is a promotion of trust. A-players leave because they're bored, not busy.

PERFECTIONIST

Don't micromanage. If they do it 80% as well as you would, that's a win.

EXERCISE

The Authority Hand-Off

THE SCRIPT — A 5-MINUTE MEETING

“I've noticed you have a real talent for [area]. I want to give you full ownership of [task] because I trust your judgment. You don't need to ask me about [decisions] anymore — you're the lead on this now. How does that sound?”

Then clarify:

What success looks like

What decisions they can make

When to come to you for support

— Director's Journal

“Today, I handed ownership of ____ to _____. It felt _____ to let go of that control. By delegating the who, I've created space for myself to... I am growing a team of leaders, not just a team of helpers.”

DAY
20

Casting the 90-Day Vision

THE PIVOT

Let go of Friday. Lead toward the future.

Most leaders stay stuck in survival mode — just trying to get through the week. But survival doesn't inspire teams. People want to feel like they're building something that matters. A clear, shared 90-day vision gives your team something to move toward, not just something to avoid. It creates momentum, pride, and purpose.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Look past the smoke. You think you're too busy for vision — but a clear vision prevents future fires.

PEACEKEEPER

Ask for their input: "What could we achieve together in 3 months that would make us proud?"

PERFECTIONIST

Don't make it a checklist. Vision should inspire. Focus on how success will feel.

EXERCISE

The Vision Casting Huddle

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

"I've been reflecting on where we are — and where we're going. Over the next 90 days, I want our center to be known for [your goal]. This matters because [why]."

The buy-in • Then ask: "What's one small thing you can do in your classroom this week to help us get there?"

— My 90-Day Vision

My 90-day vision for this center is

I know we have reached it when

I am no longer just keeping the doors open; I am leading a movement.

DAY
21

The “Record to Replace” Method

THE PIVOT

Let your knowledge live beyond you.

The biggest barrier to delegation is the Instruction Tax — the time and energy it takes to teach someone how to do a task. But in the digital age, you only need to teach it once. A digital playbook helps you delegate, train new hires, and prepare for the unexpected — whether that's a vacation or a promotion. It's how you future-proof your center and finally get the breathing room to lead.



While it takes time upfront, building a digital playbook is one of the smartest investments you can make — it's your key to reclaiming time, reducing stress, and breaking free from burnout.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Don't skip the details. You move fast and might forget small steps — slow down and explain clearly.

PEACEKEEPER

Invite a partner. Share the video and ask, “I'm making this so you can help me later. What do you think?”

PERFECTIONIST

Embrace the messy. It doesn't need to be polished — just clear. Done is better than perfect.

EXERCISE

Begin Building Your Digital Manual

1

Choose one recurring task and record yourself doing it.

2

Narrate your steps clearly as you go.

3

Save it in a folder titled “Director Playbook.”

4

Have a staff member do the task from the video only. Note any gaps.

— Director's Journal

“Today, I recorded... By spending an extra 10 minutes recording it, I've potentially saved myself dozens of hours this year. It feels ____ to know this task no longer lives only in my brain.”



BONUS DAY

Reset as a Leadership Skill

THE PIVOT

Rest fuels leadership — it isn't a reward for surviving it.

When you lead on empty, your team feels it — burnout is contagious. But when you model rest as a leadership tool, you set a powerful standard for sustainability. By now, your staff knows you're the hardest working person in the building. You've set the tone for what commitment looks like. But hustle without restoration becomes a liability, not a virtue. Like a battery, you must recharge to lead effectively.

THE PRACTICE — ADJUST YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE

FIREFIGHTER

Resist the urge to stay alert. Notice it, breathe, and stay seated. Fires don't start because you sat down.

PEACEKEEPER

Release the guilt. You're giving them space to lead without you hovering.

PERFECTIONIST

Drop the mental checklist. Don't plan or replay. Let your brain fully unplug.

EXERCISE

Build a Reset Ritual

In addition to your 30-minute uninterrupted meal break, try simple daily or weekly resets. Check the ones you'll commit to:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Step outside for 5 minutes to walk or stretch | ☐ Close your eyes for 2 minutes and focus on your breath |
| ☐ Take a quiet thinking break — no phone, no laptop | ☐ Play music or journal for 10 minutes with the door closed |

You've already proven your work ethic. Now show your team what it looks like to protect it.

— Director's Journal

"Today, I took a 30-minute rest. The hardest part was... By stepping away, I realized that my team... My presence is more valuable when I am rested than when I am simply present."



FINAL THOUGHTS

The Pivot Never Stops

You did it. You showed up — for 21 days — and took ownership of your growth as a leader. That alone sets you apart.

Leadership isn't a finish line. It's a practice.

Some pivots probably came naturally. Others may have felt uncomfortable, even unnatural. That's the point — the hardest days are often where the greatest transformation begins.

This workbook wasn't built to be a one-time sprint. It's a playbook you can return to again and again. When you feel stuck, reactive, or overwhelmed, go back to the days that challenged you most. Recommit to one pivot each week — or work through the whole thing again in 30 days and track how much stronger you've become.

Leadership isn't about being perfect. It's about being present, intentional, and always evolving. Your center doesn't just need someone who shows up — it needs someone willing to grow.

Keep pivoting.

 **Director Zen**