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Leading Change

Deciding, communicating, and staying steady when certainty is unavailable



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THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

The weather forecast

- | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------|
| 01 | Healthcare uncertainty
Costs, coverage, and policy shift faster than any benefits strategy can adapt. | HUMAN |
| 02 | Economic whiplash
Inflation, layoffs, rate swings. The planning cycle cannot keep up. | FINANCIAL |
| 03 | Cultural change
Five generations at work, new expectations, and a widening trust gap. | SOCIAL |
| 04 | Technological acceleration
AI is rewriting roles faster than job descriptions can keep up. | TECHNICAL |
| 05 | Global instability
Conflict, supply shocks, political whiplash. The noise never quiets. | EXTERNAL |

Any one of these would be manageable. People are living all five at once.

01

PART ONE · THE DIAGNOSIS

Why uncertainty breaks leaders

What sustained pressure does to smart, capable decision-makers

The instinct is **Self-protection**.

THE DIAGNOSIS

What pressure does to decision-makers

Under sustained uncertainty, smart leaders reach for instincts that make everything worse. **Most of us have done every item on the left.**

WHAT WE REACH FOR

WHAT IT COSTS US

Waiting for complete information before deciding	→ Decisions delayed until events make them for us
Tightening control and pulling decisions upward	→ Teams that stop thinking and start waiting
Projecting confidence we do not actually feel	→ Trust that collapses when reality leaks through
Adding more meetings, more data, more consensus	→ Motion replacing progress. Busy, but moving nowhere
Working harder to outrun the anxiety	→ Exhaustion wearing the costume of commitment

The instinct is self-protection. The cost is paid by the people who follow us.

THE OLD PLAYBOOK

Why the old playbooks no longer work

Most of us were trained to lead in a world that no longer exists.

THE OLD WORLD

Predict. Plan. Execute.

- The plan was the strategy. Follow it.
- Stability was the norm.
- Information was scarce.
- Authority held the answers.

A good plan survived the whole year.

THE NEW WORLD

Sense. Decide. Adjust.

- Strategy is a rhythm.
- Disruption and constant change are the norm.
- Information is infinite and easily accessible.
- Judgment and attention are scarce.

Plans expire in weeks. Principles do not.

THE RE-DEFINITION

Leadership is not about having the right answers.

It is making clear, principled decisions when certainty is unavailable and pressure is unavoidable.

HOW DOES YOUR TEAM FUNCTION UNDER PRESSURE?

How elite teams win in times of uncertainty

The difference between surviving and thriving comes down to how your team functions under pressure.

01

Communication cadence

Information flow patterns that accelerate decision-making in uncertain environments.

02

Cognitive diversity

Teams that think differently under pressure and bring multiple perspectives to complex problems.

03

Psychological safety

Environments where bad news travels fast and people feel secure sharing concerns.

04

Adaptive capacity

Teams that pivot without losing momentum when market conditions change suddenly.

SIXTY SECONDS, RIGHT NOW

Your team readiness check-up

Score each area from 1 (not ready) to 10 (fully ready). Circle your lowest number. **That is your biggest gap.**

01

Cognitive diversity

Does your team think differently under pressure? Can they see problems from multiple angles?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

02

Psychological safety

Does bad news travel fast in your organization? Can people speak up without fear?

1

2

3

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03

Adaptive capacity

How quickly can your team pivot when circumstances change? Can they keep their momentum?

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04

Communication cadence

Does information flow speed up decisions? Are your communication channels efficient?

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Then ask: which area is our greatest strength, and what one action would most improve our readiness?

02

PART TWO · THE PATH

Charting your leadership path

Vision, clarity, decisions, and alignment when you cannot be sure

It demands **Courage**.

VISION CASTING IN UNCERTAINTY

Cast a lighthouse. There is no map.

In a storm, maps fail. People need a **north star that never moves**, and a route that is allowed to.

THE FIXED POINT

Never moves

- **The mission:** who we serve and why the work matters.
- The values we will not trade for short-term relief.
- How we treat people, especially under stress.
- **Candor:** what we always tell each other.
- The definition of winning that outlasts this quarter.
- Our personal promise: what stays true over time.

THE FLEXIBLE ROUTE

Allowed to move

- Tactics, timelines, and this quarter's plan.
- Org charts, reporting lines, and role definitions.
- Budgets, forecasts, and headcount.
- Tools, systems, and technology choices.
- Vendors, partners, and channels.
- The route we take between here and the mission.

When your team can see the lighthouse, they can survive almost any change of route.

When they cannot, every course correction feels like a betrayal.

FINDING STRATEGIC CLARITY

Three questions that cut through the fog

Clarity rarely arrives as an answer. It arrives as a better question.

1 What is true in every scenario?

Strip the plan down to the moves that work in every version of the future. Do those first, without debate.

WHAT TO DO

- List your top three scenarios.
- Identify the common actions.
- Fund and start those actions today.

2 What breaks first if we are wrong?

Every strategy has a key assumption. Name it, watch it, and decide in advance what its failure triggers.

WHAT TO DO

- Share assumptions with your team.
- Assign someone to watch it weekly.
- Pre-agree on trigger and response.

3 What would we do if we were unafraid?

Fear clouds judgment. This question separates real risk from imagined risk and reveals the best answer.

WHAT TO DO

- Say it, not just in your head.
- Write both answers side by side.
- Ask what the fear protects.

THE FRAMEWORK

Deciding well when you cannot be sure

Five disciplines for high-quality decisions under pressure. None require certainty. **All of them require courage.**

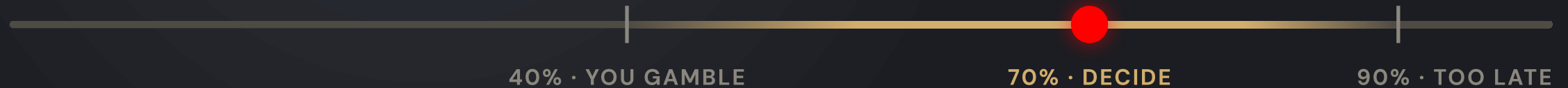
- | | | |
|-----------|---|----------|
| 01 | Define the real decision
Most hard decisions are three tangled ones. Name the real choice. | CLARITY |
| 02 | Sort reversible from irreversible
Two-way doors deserve speed. One-way doors deserve rigor. | RISK |
| 03 | Decide at seventy percent
Act at forty and you gamble. Wait for ninety and you are late. | SPEED |
| 04 | Say the why out loud
People can accept a decision they disagree with, not one they cannot understand. | TRUST |
| 05 | Set the review point before you act
Decide today, then name the date you will examine the evidence. | LEARNING |

THE SPEED OF GOOD DECISIONS

70%

Act when you have about seventy percent of the information you wish you had.

If you wait for ninety, the decision moment has passed.



STAKEHOLDER ALIGNMENT

Not everyone will embrace the decision

Map the room before you try to move it. **You do not need to convert opponents into champions.**

WANTS CHANGE

DEFENDS THE STATUS QUO

THE SPECTRUM

Every team has both ends

Some stakeholders are comfortable with change and want it. Others fear it and will defend the status quo.

THE TIMING

Who, when, and how

Successful leaders know when and how to engage which stakeholders at the right strategic time.

THE COST

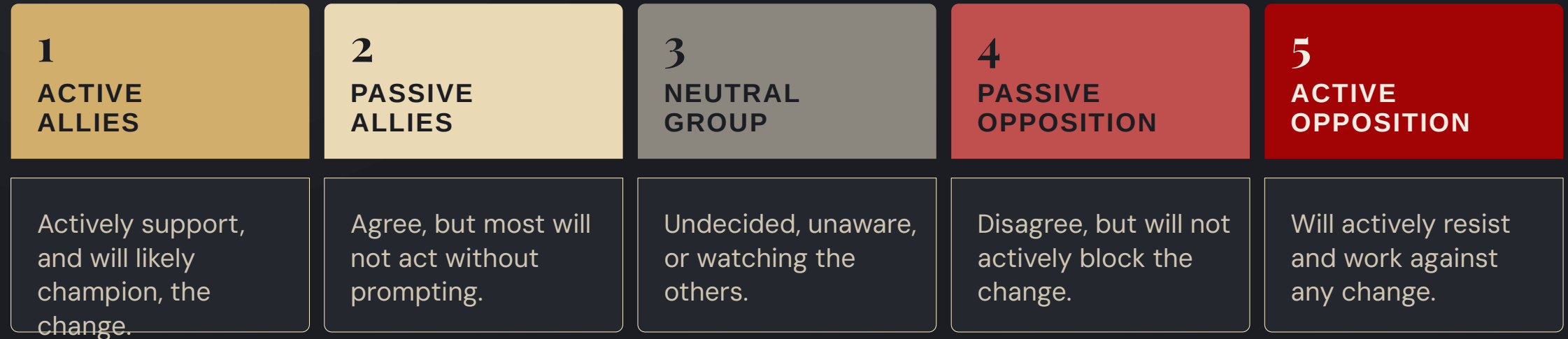
Resistance sets the price

The investment required, and the change achieved, relate directly to the level of resistance in your organization.

STAKEHOLDER ALIGNMENT

The spectrum of allies

A tool to identify, understand, and prioritize your stakeholders as you lead change.



The goal: help each group move one position to the left.

THE CHANGE FORMULA

D

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V

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P

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R

DISSATISFACTION

VISION

PLAN

RESISTANCE

*The likelihood of change rises as each factor grows stronger.
Neglect any one, and it goes to zero.*

03

PART THREE · THE PEOPLE

Engaging others in times of change

Candor, credibility, and systems that bend without breaking

It runs on **Trust**.

The cadence of candor

In an information vacuum, people do not assume the best. **They invent the worst.**

1 Say what you know.

Share facts early, even when incomplete. Partial truth delivered now beats perfect truth delivered late.

WHAT TO DO

- Lead with what changed and why it matters.
- Use plain words. Jargon sounds like evasion.
- Repeat it more often than feels natural.

2 Say what you do not know.

Naming the unknowns is not weakness. It is what makes the things you are sure of believable.

WHAT TO DO

- Keep a public list of the open questions.
- Never bluff. One bluff costs a year of trust.
- Ask the team to help close real gaps.

3 Timeframe for next update.

Anxiety lives in silence. A named date, even with nothing new to report, keeps people steady.

WHAT TO DO

- Set the time for the next update.
- Keep the date even when nothing changed.
- No news, delivered as promised, is still news.

LEADERSHIP IN MOTION

Your team is watching your behavior

Trust is built, or eroded, in small moments. These are the contrasts that compound.

WHAT BUILDS TRUST

Being honest about what you don't know

Making decisions and explaining the why

Showing up consistently, especially when it's hard

Asking questions before giving directives

Following through on small commitments

WHAT ERODES TRUST

Projecting false certainty

Changing direction without acknowledging the pivot

Saying "people are our best asset" without investing

Asking for input after the decision is made

Being inaccessible when the news is bad

Trust is the operating currency of leadership in disruption. Spend it on candor and consistency, and it compounds. Spend it on spin, and it disappears.

CREATING RESILIENT SYSTEMS

Build decision rights and processes

Resilient teams are ordinary people working inside systems designed to bend without breaking.

1 Decision rights everyone can name.

Disruption should never become paralysis.

2 Rhythms that surface problems early.

Bad news must travel fast.

3 Redundancy in mission critical roles.

One exit should never stall the mission.

4 Keep a flexible schedule for JIT meetings.

A team at full capacity cannot absorb surprise.

5 Real psychological safety for the team.

Saying "this is not working" must be career-safe.

6 Recovery built in, not bolted on.

Rest is part of the performance system.

CREATING RESILIENT SYSTEMS

The FOCUS decision method

A structured process for high-stakes decisions when time is short. **It turns chaos into clarity.**

F

Frame the situation

Framing avoids scope creep. It identifies the constraints on the decision.

O

Organize the data you have

What do you know? What are the unknowns? What are the assumptions?

C

Clarify what you know

Use the 40 to 70 percent rule when perfect data is not available.

U

Understand your options

Find at least two. Focus resources on the high-impact actions tied to your objectives.

S

Select a go-forward plan

Execute with clear ownership, timelines, and resource allocation.

Elite leaders don't just respond to disruption. They anticipate it.

MB **FOCUS MODEL** FOR DECISION MAKING

F Frame the opportunity or issue.	Notes:
O Organize the information you have.	Notes:
C Clarify what you know and do not know.	Notes:
U Understand your options (find 2) and the likely outcome of each.	Notes:
S Select your best option. Execute it well.	Notes:



CREATING RESILIENT SYSTEMS

The FOCUS model in action

Teach your team to think the way you would think, and move from guesswork to thoughtful, data-based decisions.

- 1 Work it together**
Use the worksheet as you help a team member work through a decision.
- 2 They draft, you discuss**
After two or three rounds, they complete the worksheet and bring it to you before acting.
- 3 Set boundaries, then let go**
Within agreed boundaries, they decide on their own and simply copy you on the form.

PIVOTING WITHOUT PANIC

Change is an event. Transition is a process.

Change is a collective process, **individually experienced**.

CHANGE

What happens to us.

The external event: a new strategy, a turn of leadership, a merger, a new product.

Change can happen very quickly.

TRANSITION

What happens within us.

The inner, psychological process people go through as they come to terms with the new situation.

Transition takes time.

The starting point is not the outcome. It is the endings people experience as they leave the old situation behind.

Three zones every team moves through

Organizations **announce** change. People move through **transition** on their own timeline.

01 · THE ENDINGS

Managing the loss

Denial, shock, and anger

Before people can embrace what is new, they must let go of what was. **People cannot begin again until they have permission to say goodbye.**

02 · THE NEUTRAL ZONE

Lost between old and new

THE DANGER ZONE

Anxiety rises and productivity dips. Apathy and ambivalence form. **It is also the wilderness where teams do their deepest work.**

03 · NEW BEGINNINGS

New identity and values

Skepticism, then impatience for change

A beginning takes hold when people find their place in the new story. **It cannot be forced. It can only be nurtured.**

Leaders often skip the endings. They celebrate the future while their teams are still grieving the past.

THE MULTIPLIER

Anxiety is contagious.
So is calm.

Your team will catch whichever one you bring into the room.

04

PART FOUR · THE LEADER

Preparing yourself to lead others

Grit, emotional regulation, and the reserve you need to lead

It starts with **You.**

LEADING WITH GRIT

GRIT is a practice

The leaders who endure are not fearless. They practice four things until the practice holds them.

G

Guts

The willingness to decide, and to be seen deciding, when hiding inside analysis would feel safer.

R

Resilience

Recovering fast enough to make the next decision well. Endurance is a rhythm of recovery, not toughness.

I

Integrity

Deciding by your principles when pressure invites shortcuts. It makes your decisions predictable enough to trust.

T

Tenacity

Staying with the mission after the enthusiasm fades. Storms end. The leaders still standing kept deciding.

*Anyone can lead when things are easy.
Grit keeps you moving when the plan falls apart.*

Check yourself. Then read the room.

Emotional intelligence starts inside you, then moves outward to the people watching you.

1 Notice your own weather.

You cannot steady a room while your own storm goes unaddressed. Self-awareness is the first act of leadership.

WHAT TO DO

- Notice your emotion before the meeting, not during it.
- Know how you come across: pace, tone, eye contact.
- Build a ninety-second reset you can do anywhere.

2 Hear under the words.

In uncertainty, most resistance is driven by fear. Respond to the fear. Don't mask it or ignore it.

WHAT TO DO

- Ask one more question before you answer.
- Listen for what is not being said.
- Validate the feeling before debating the fact.

3 Respond with steadiness.

Empathy is not agreement. It is making people feel seen while you still tell them the truth.

WHAT TO DO

- Slow down when stakes are high. Speed breeds misunderstanding.
- Acknowledge, then direct: here is our next step.
- Follow up privately.

THE CHARGE

Calm is a decision.

So is courage.

Deliver both, and your team will follow you through any change.



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