

A field guide for building
systems that scale leadership,
culture, and results.

RISING

How Leaders Help Organizations Thrive

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WITH THE LEADERS RISING NETWORK TEAM



THE MANIFESTO

What Great Leaders Get Right About Growth

Culture stays the course when it's designed. Leaders thrive when they're developed. The companies that scale sustainably don't get lucky. They build the system, and live by it.

Our agency operates by these 6 principles:

- 1. Training doesn't build leaders. Systems do.**
- 2. Hope isn't a leadership pipeline. Strategy is.**
- 3. You don't hire culture. You build it. Every day.**
- 4. Heroic effort is not a sustainable growth plan.**
- 5. Your business won't grow faster than your people.**
- 6. Information doesn't create transformation. Execution does.**

This is our Manifesto. This is Leaders Rising Network.

None of the stories in this book actually happened, yet they happen all the time.

The illustrations we present are the aggregate experiences of our team across sectors and organizations, including companies of all sizes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Manifesto: What Great Leaders Get Right About Growth ii

Introduction: The Leadership Gap Most Companies Don't See 1

PART 1 | THE FOUNDATION

1. You Can't Fix What You Can't See 11

A Necessary Pause | Culture Is Revealed, Not Declared 26

2. Why Most Leadership Development Fails 37

PART 2 | THE SYSTEM: HOW TO BUILD LEADERS WORTH FOLLOWING

3. Beyond Leadership: Building an Operating System That Works 51

4. Tools That Stick (Language That Spreads) 71

5. The Growth Pathway: From Overwhelm to Multiplier 83

6. World-Class Development = Process, Not Accident 101

PART 3 | THE EXECUTION

7. Your First 100 Days: Start Small, Start Now 119

8. Leaders Who Rise Lift Everyone Else 129

Last Word 139

INTRODUCTION

The Leadership Gap Most Companies Don't See

The CEO looked exhausted. Not the kind of tiredness that comes from working hard, but the kind that comes from working hard on the wrong things.

"We're growing," he told us. "Revenue is up. We're hiring. New markets. New opportunities. Everything looks great on paper."

He paused. Rubbed his eyes. Continued.

"But I can't shake this feeling that we're one or two key departures away from serious trouble. Our best people are burned out. We keep promoting our high performers, but our new leaders are drowning. Culture feels... fragile. Like we're holding it together with willpower and hope."

Another pause. Then the question we hear constantly:

"How do I grow this business without breaking our people?"

You Can't Outgrow Your Leadership Capacity

Your business can only grow so far without developing your people.

You can have the best strategy. The best product. The best market opportunity. But if you're not developing your people at every level, the organization will eventually stall.

Growth exposes every gap in your leadership pipeline: every weakness in your culture, every person you over-promoted or under-developed.

You often don't realize you have a people problem until it's a crisis.

The early warning signs are subtle.

Key leaders mention they're "overwhelmed"

- you assume they'll adjust

Team performance plateaus

- you assume it's the market conditions

Turnover creeps up

- you assume it's compensation or remote work trends

Culture starts feeling "different"

- but you can't quite name what changed

Then one day you wake up and realize: You've been managing symptoms while missing the disease.

The disease?

- Lack of clarity.
- Lack of system.
- Lack of intentional leadership development.

And by the time you see it clearly, you're in firefighting mode. Reactive. Desperate. Hoping the next hire or the next initiative will fix it.

The 6 pain points we hear constantly:

- "Our culture isn't what it used to be, and I'm not sure how to get it back"
- "We've tried training...but nothing sticks"
- "It's harder to recruit people who want to stay"
- "I'm still the decision bottleneck"
- "We're losing top talent faster than we can develop replacements"
- "Some people are quietly disengaged, withholding effort, or working around the system instead of with it."

This Book Is Your Way Out

We wrote this book because we've seen too many good organizations struggle with preventable problems.

They're not lazy. They're not unintelligent. They're not avoiding the issue.

They have programs. Initiatives and events. They are all well-intentioned, but they lack the infrastructure to translate those good intentions into sustained results.

They don't have a system. This book outlines how to build a system that sustains your people and your organization.

Not theory. Not aspiration. A replicable system for developing leaders and building a culture that compounds year after year.

We've seen it work in startups and manufacturing companies, in main street small businesses, and Fortune 100 companies. In healthcare and financial services. In nonprofits, government, and multi-generational family businesses.

The system works. The question is: will you build it?

Who This Book Is For

This book is for builders, not bystanders.

You might be:

- a CEO who knows your people are your greatest asset and your greatest liability if not developed well
- a VP of People tasked with building leadership capacity
- a business owner who's hit the ceiling and realized you're the bottleneck
- a senior leader who wants to multiply your impact by developing others.

You care deeply about your people. You want a bigger future for your organization. You're willing to build systems, not just run programs. In the AI World, you understand that your culture and your people are your competitive advantages.

And you're ready to do the work, not just read about it.

What You'll Walk Away With

By the end of this book, you will understand what's really broken. And, you'll have:

1. A common language to talk about leadership development
2. Frameworks to assess where your leaders are and what they need
3. A pathway to move people from being overwhelmed to multiplication
4. Tools that spread throughout your organization
5. A plan for your first 100 days and beyond.

Most importantly: you will know exactly what to do next.

Not someday. Not when conditions are perfect. Not after the next big initiative. Now.

One More Thing Before We Start

This won't be easy. Building systems never is. You might need to unlearn a few things.

You'll face resistance. Competing priorities. Budget constraints. Skeptics. The tyranny of the urgent.

Every organization that's built this system tells us the same thing. "I wish we'd started sooner."

Not because it was easy. Because it was worth it.

Let's see what's really holding your organization back. Let's help your leaders rise so they can lift everyone else.

Because that's what great leaders do. They architect bigger futures and build thriving cultures.

That's exactly what you're about to do.

Let's rise.

PART 1

THE FOUNDATION

CHAPTER

1

You Can't Fix What You Can't See

The culture wasn't broken.

It just... drifted.

Deadlines were still being met. Strategy still looked sharp.

The metrics didn't scream crisis. But underneath it all, something was off.

Collaboration felt harder. Decisions took longer. The leaders who used to light up the room now avoided eye contact.

No one could quite name it.

But everyone could feel it.

That's how it starts. Not with a blow-up, but with a slow leak.

Most leadership teams stay in this fog for months (and sometimes years) because the symptoms feel fixable. More training. Better tech. A reorg. A pep talk. Another offsite.

But none of it works.

The COO of a 300-person manufacturing company sat across from us, visibly frustrated. “We’ve tried everything,” she said.

“Communication workshops. Team-building retreats. New ERP system. Nothing sticks.”

She paused.

“People don’t talk to each other. Information doesn’t flow. Teams work against each other instead of together.”

Why?

Because you can’t fix what you can’t see.

And most leaders can’t see the real problem: the system underneath the surface that’s quietly multiplying stress and the silos.

This chapter will give you a new lens.

The Clarity Crisis

That manufacturing company didn’t have a communication problem. They had a clarity problem. Their leaders couldn’t see how their own behaviors — avoiding conflict, hoarding information, protecting territory — were creating the very patterns they complained about.

They were solving for symptoms while missing the root cause. How do you address the root cause?

This is one of the hardest truths for leaders to face:

Most organizational problems wear disguises. What you feel on the surface is rarely what's true underneath.

- Communication issues are often trust issues.
- Execution issues are often priority issues.
- Culture issues are often clarity issues.

Until you are willing to slow down and see yourself clearly, you tend to stay trapped in the same repeating loops.

It's the invisible force multiplying every other problem you have.

What's the real cost of the blind spots in your organization? Here are a few common examples:

- **Turnover** you can't explain: people don't leave jobs, they leave leaders who can't see their impact
- **Bottlenecks** that shouldn't exist: decisions pile up because leaders don't realize they're micromanaging
- **Cultural atrophy** that happens slowly, then suddenly: nobody notices the drift until it's a crisis
- **Lost innovation** from teams who've learned not to speak up, because leaders don't realize they're defensive

Clarity is essential to your leadership infrastructure. It's a set of lenses that help you see reality with more precision, starting with

yourself. Most leaders have been trained to focus on organizational structure, KPIs, strategy, and market conditions. Those are tangible. You can count them and measure them.

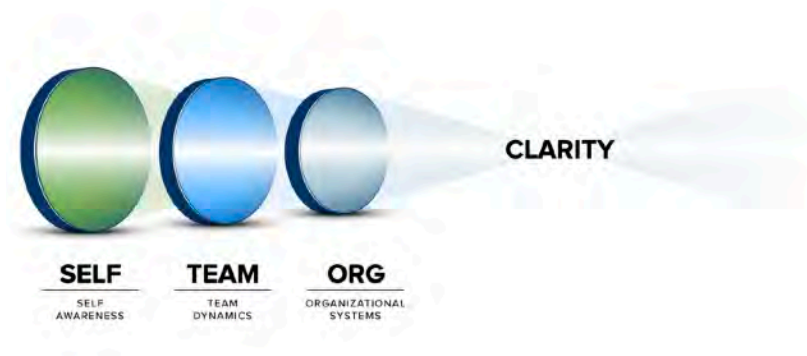
Most industries do not teach or train leaders and employees in the dynamics of leadership and clarity for building culture.

That makes clarity a power skill. It's the foundation of every hard result you want.

The Three Lenses of Clarity

Clarity aligns three lenses, allowing us to see every step ahead more clearly. If one lens is distorted, everything is distorted.

Clarity is a leader's best asset. With it, you have the ability to see what's really happening and respond accordingly.



Let's take a closer look at each clarity lens.

ORG: Clarity of People, Goals, Systems, and Culture

This is the system behind your work. Organizational clarity connects individual growth and team performance to strategic outcomes.

A strong organizational system requires clarity on vision, values, and strategic direction. But it goes beyond posting the vision and values on the wall.

Does your organization understand how structures enable or constrain performance? Can you identify patterns across teams and departments?

You need to build systems that sustain culture, which requires a level of cohesion often overlooked in traditional business systems.

TEAM: Shared Trust, Communication, and Collaboration

This is the multiplier. When teams develop clarity together, capability compounds.

Team clarity means understanding how different personalities and work styles interact.

- Build psychological safety for honest conversations
- Create shared language and frameworks
- Maximize communication channels for efficiency and efficacy

Navigating conflict isn't "if" but "when." Navigating conflict productively builds a new level of strength in your team, making you a leader people want to follow.

The intersection of these three is where clarity happens. This is where momentum and culture shift come alive, and your organization stops managing problems and starts building solutions.

SELF: Personal Growth + Healthy Leadership Identity

Self-clarity is the foundation of the lenses. Leaders who don't know themselves can't lead others well.

Self-clarity encompasses understanding your communication style and how others perceive it.

- Do you recognize your patterns under stress?
- Do you know your strengths and your kryptonite?

At the core of self-clarity is recognizing that our way isn't the only way or the right way. We need to regulate ourselves to bring our best to our work, our families, and our communities every day.

When all three dimensions align, behaviors begin to match values.

Leadership becomes integrated.

Integrated leaders create integrated cultures.

Clarity Is The #1 Leadership Multiplier

Most leaders try to scale strategy before they grow self-clarity. It never works.

You cannot outrun your patterns. Wherever you go, you lead from who you are.

Organizations rise or fall to the level of a leader's self-clarity long before they rise or fall to the level of their strategy.

Clarity is the foundation beneath every other leadership capability.

- **Strategic thinking** and alignment require clarity around context and constraints
- **Effective communication** requires clarity about how others process information
- **Building trust** requires clarity related to how you show up relationally
- **Driving execution** requires clarity of what's actually blocking progress
- **Developing others** requires clearly seeing where they are and what they need

Without clarity, you're flying blind. You might work incredibly hard and wonder why you're not getting results.

With clarity, everything can change faster.

The manufacturing company mentioned earlier focused on vision and values and experienced a temporary surge. Everyone returned from the kickoff event excited, but most of the excitement centered on the new corporate swag.

At the next week's leadership meeting, the COO launched into a tirade at the marketing director for overspending on the corporate swag. The marketing director shot right back, "Did you want to make a splash with this campaign or not?"

And for the next 6 months, they were right back where they started. With limited self-clarity, every person in the company operated as a team of 1. With limited opportunity to build Team Clarity, the company could never develop Organizational Clarity.

Thankfully, that's not what happened.

We didn't start by fixing their communication problem. We started by growing clarity in their leadership team. We helped each leader understand their own tendencies:

- how they showed up under pressure
- what triggered defensiveness
- and how their communication style affected others.

Within 30 days, something shifted. Leaders started noticing patterns. The COO and marketing director gained a better understanding of their own perspectives and how each approached situations.

“I realize I talk over people when I’m stressed.”

“I didn’t know my team was afraid to bring me problems.”

“I thought I was being efficient, but I was actually creating silos.”

Within 60 days, the team dynamics transformed. Not because we taught them communication techniques, but we framed their dynamics so they could finally see what was actually happening. They developed shared language and began having real conversations rather than carefully managed ones.

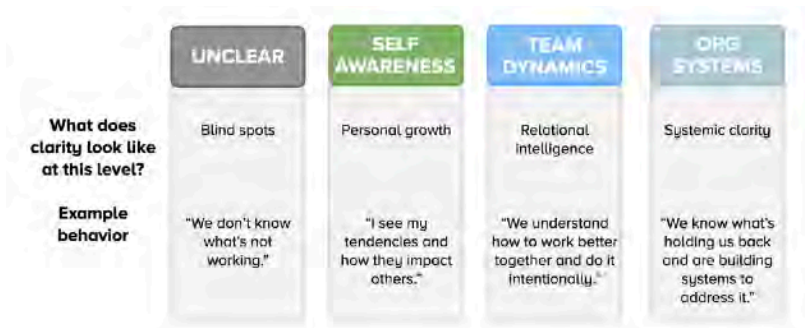
Within 90 days, the ripple effects were undeniable. Cross-functional collaboration improved. Decision-making sped up. Employee engagement scores climbed. Turnover dropped.

The CFO called us with an update: “I don’t know how to say this, but... I think we just had our best quarter in three years. And everyone’s working less, not more.”

That’s the power of clarity.

The 4 Levels of Clarity

Every leader, every team, every organization exists somewhere on a spectrum of clarity.



Clarity does not begin with systems.

It begins with yourself.

When leaders can't see their own blind spots, teams absorb the distortion. When teams normalize that distortion, it becomes culture. And when culture reinforces it, the system locks it in.

Unclear and unexamined patterns scale.

Clarity builds in layers:

1. First, you see yourself clearly.
2. Then, you understand how your behavior shapes team dynamics.
3. Then, you design systems that reinforce what's healthy instead of multiplying what's hidden.

Most organizations try to jump straight to systems.

But you cannot architect clarity at the organizational level if it doesn't exist at the self and team levels first.

Most organizations never achieve Organizational Clarity because reaching it requires humility, starting with the leaders.

You have to stop looking for a villain and start examining the architecture.

Systems produce exactly what they are designed to produce, whether we meant to design them that way or not.

Sometimes an entire system gets built around one leader's blind spot:

- If a leader avoids conflict, the organization creates extra meetings to soften hard conversations.
- If a leader is unpredictable, teams build layers of approval to reduce surprise.
- If a leader hoards decisions, the system compensates with bottlenecks and escalation paths.

Over time, what began as a personal pattern becomes organizational design. Instead of designing a system that promotes health, the organization designs one that manages dysfunction.

And once it's embedded in process and structure, it no longer looks like a blind spot.

It looks like “the way we do things here.”

If self-clarity is missing, teams absorb the distortion.

If team clarity is missing, systems reinforce it.

And then leaders wonder why nothing changes.

The tension showed up in every meeting.

Engineering said they couldn't ship because priorities kept changing.

Product said priorities had to change because timelines kept slipping.

Everyone was working hard. Everyone was frustrated.

When they slowed down long enough to look at the pattern, it became obvious: no one was clear on who actually made the final call. Priorities shifted without explanation. Teams were rewarded for protecting their own work, not finishing together.

So they reset the structure. Clear decision ownership. Fewer active projects. Shared goals.

Within a few months, releases steadied. The pressure didn't vanish, but it stopped turning into conflict.

They corrected the distortion they had normalized.

From Reaction to Clarity

A regional leadership team kept losing strong mid-level leaders.

Exit interviews pointed everywhere and nowhere at once: workload, unclear priorities, burnout, lack of growth. Each explanation felt reasonable. None of them stuck.

The first instinct was to fix the people problem: better hiring, higher expectations, and more training. But instead of reacting, the team paused and mapped the experience leaders were actually having. Not the org chart. Not the strategy deck. The lived reality.

What they saw was uncomfortable: promotions without support, and conflicting priorities reinforced by incentives. Feedback loops

only flowed upward when something broke. No villain, just a system doing exactly what it had been built to do.

So they redesigned the architecture with clear decision rights and shared language for leadership expectations. Regular forums where leaders reflected on pressure, tradeoffs, and patterns, not just performance. Over time, leaders didn't just solve problems faster. They started seeing them earlier.

Nothing dramatic changed overnight. But the culture did.

Clarity stopped living only at the top and began spreading through the system: one conversation, one decision, one redesigned rhythm at a time.

That's what Clarity looks like.



Learn more about this tool at
LeadersRisingNetwork.com/rising-book

Chapter Takeaway

“You can't fix what you can't see.”

Most leadership problems aren't solved by working harder. They're solved by seeing more clearly.

Seeing clearly is the most courageous act a leader can choose.

It requires humility, honesty, and the willingness to face the parts of your leadership that no one has named out loud.

Clarity is not punishment. It is liberation.

Clarity is:

- Measurable (you can assess it)
- Trainable (you can develop it)
- Scalable (you can spread it across your organization)
- The root of all sustainable change

The question isn't whether clarity matters. The question is:

What level of clarity has your organization achieved?

Wherever you are, the next level is possible. But you can't get there without first seeing where you stand today.

However you approach the solution, your clarity may still hold you back.

Knowing you need clarity is one thing.

Actually building a system that grows clarity across your entire organization? That's where most companies get stuck.

Let's fix that.

Reflection Questions

Before moving to Chapter 2, take 5 minutes to reflect on these questions. Consider each level of clarity described in this chapter (Self, Team, Organization):

1. Where is your leadership team strong, and where is clarity thin or inconsistent?
2. Which level of clarity, if strengthened, would most improve how your organization functions right now?
3. What's one blind spot you suspect exists in your organization that rarely gets named?

Before you move on, take a breath. Clarity comes when you start aiming for it.

Don't rush past these questions. The answers matter more than you think.

A
NECESSARY
PAUSE

Before you continue, we want to clarify one thing.
There's a direct link between culture and leadership.
Leaders define culture. Let's briefly unpack that.

Culture Is Revealed, Not Declared

Most organizations talk about culture as if it's something you define.

You name your values.

You write the statements.

You put them on the wall.

And then you hope they take root.

But culture doesn't live in what you say.

It lives in what actually happens.

Culture is revealed when behavior collides with values.

Not in the offsite.

Not in the onboarding slides.

Not in the employee handbook or the leadership retreat.

Culture lives in the collision.

When someone acts in a way that violates your stated values (and everyone watches what happens next), that moment is your culture.

We say we value integrity... but look who just got promoted.
We say we prioritize well-being... but notice who keeps getting rewarded for burnout.
We say we believe in development... unless we're too busy.
Those moments matter because they teach people what really counts.
Culture isn't what you say.
It's what you allow.
Especially when it's uncomfortable.
Especially when there's something to lose.
If your values come with caveats, they aren't values — they're marketing.

When Behavior Collides With Values

This is where many leaders get stuck.
They assume culture needs to be perfected.
Polished.
Rolled out cleanly.
But culture doesn't need to be perfect.
It needs to be practiced.
Daily.
 Messy.
 Intentional practice.

When values aren't practiced, they don't disappear; they get replaced.

By convenience. By habit. By whatever gets rewarded or tolerated in the moment.

The healthiest cultures we've seen weren't impressive because they were flawless. They were strong because leaders consistently practiced what they said they believed, especially under pressure.

No culture drifts into excellence.

It's practiced into existence.

By people.

Every day.

Especially leaders.

Pressure has a way of clarifying culture.

When the stakes are low, almost everyone agrees with the values.

When pressure rises, habits take over.

Patterns get louder.

Blind spots surface.

That's when culture is revealed.

The Intent / Experience Gap

Here's the uncomfortable truth most leaders miss:

Leaders often judge culture by their intentions.

Employees judge the culture by their experience.

That gap — between what you intend and what people actually experience — is where trust begins to erode.

You may intend to empower.

They may experience micromanagement.

You may intend clarity.

They may experience confusion.

You may intend approachability.

They may experience distance.

And if you don't check for that gap, your blind spot quickly becomes your team's reality.

Imagine asking your team to finish this sentence anonymously:

“I know my leader intends to ____.

What it feels like instead is ____.”

This is how good leaders (leaders who care deeply, who work hard, who genuinely want the best for their people) still end up with cultures that drift.

Not because they don't care.

But because they don't see themselves clearly.

Clarity Under Pressure

This is why clarity matters.

Not as a personality trait.

Not as a buzzword.

But as a leadership capacity.

One of the most important questions a leader can ask is also one of the simplest:

What is it like to be on the other side of me?

That question changes everything.

It forces leaders to move beyond intention and into clarity.

Not just how you lead, but how it lands.

Not just what you say, but what people feel, absorb, and experience.

Because what makes a leader dangerous isn't their weakness.

It's their lack of clarity.

Unclear leaders don't mean to create fear, but people walk on eggshells.

They don't mean to create confusion, but priorities keep shifting.

They don't mean to create dependency, but everything bottlenecks around them.

Until leaders are willing to see themselves clearly, every system they build will quietly reflect their blind spots.

There was a blindspot I carried early on.

Earlier in my leadership journey, I led with a lot of energy and conviction.

I cared deeply about the work and the people. I prepared hard. I showed up. I wanted the team to win.

What I didn't realize at the time was how much my pace was setting the tone.

I changed direction quickly when I saw a better option.

I pushed for progress when momentum felt fragile.

I assumed clarity was obvious because it was clear to me.

From my side, it felt like responsiveness.

From the team's side, it felt like whiplash.

People stopped asking questions.

They waited longer to act.

They learned to stay flexible rather than be fully committed.

No one ever called it out.

And I wouldn't have named it a problem. I was doing what leaders do: pushing forward.

It wasn't until someone asked me a simple question, "Do you realize how unpredictable this feels?" that the gap came into focus.

That moment didn't change my intent.

It changed my self-awareness.

I began to see that leadership isn't just about where you're going.

It's about what it's like to follow you there.

And that was the beginning of better leadership: for me, and for the people around me.

Stepping Into the Gap

The gap itself isn't the problem.

Ignoring it is.

Every team has a gap between:

- what they say they value and what actually happens
- what they hope culture feels like and how it's truly experienced

Excellent leaders don't just name the gap.

They step into it.

They bridge the distance between belief and behavior.

They model the value they expect from others before they expect it from others.

They practice the culture they want long before they require it.

Because culture doesn't shift through statements.

It shifts through someone going first.

That's the work.

And it's not theoretical.

Culture is shaped less by what leaders **say** in moments of calm and far more by how they **show up** when pressure is high, the stakes are real, and something is on the line.

Clarity enables leaders to notice those moments.

Implementation is what allows culture to change.

And that's why seeing clearly is only the beginning.

CHAPTER

2

Why Most Leadership Development Fails

The VP of HR at a regional bank called us after a particularly frustrating quarter. They had invested heavily in leadership development: brought in a nationally recognized speaker, sent their top 20 leaders to a three-day offsite, and rolled out a new leadership competency model with great fanfare.

Six months later? Nothing had changed.

"People loved the offsite," she told us. "The speaker was incredible. Everyone was fired up. We got great feedback on the evaluations. But on Monday, the marketing meeting went off the rails, and the same challenges popped back up... it was like it never happened."

She paused. "Why do we keep doing this to ourselves?"

Most leadership development efforts fail. Not because the content is bad. Not because your team doesn't care.

They fail because companies treat leadership like an event instead of a system.

The Event vs. System Problem

Think about the last leadership training your organization invested in.

Maybe it was a workshop. A conference. A certification program. A book study. A retreat with trust falls and team-building exercises.

And think about this: **What changed six months later?**

If you're honest, probably not much.

Think about how change actually works in other domains:

Learning a language: You don't take a three-day Spanish workshop and become fluent. You practice daily, get feedback from native speakers, immerse yourself in the language, make mistakes, and gradually build competence.

Getting healthy: You don't attend a weekend wellness retreat and suddenly have a six-pack. You change your daily habits, track your progress, adjust when things aren't working, and stay consistent over months and years.

Building a business: You don't go to a startup conference and immediately build a successful company. You test, learn, iterate, fail, adjust, and slowly build something sustainable.

So why do we think leadership development works differently?

It doesn't.

You can't build leaders in a weekend any more than you can build fitness in a weekend. It's a process, not an event. And processes require systems.

Here's why.

Events create inspiration.

Systems create transformation.

Events give people information.

Systems provide people with repetition, accountability, and sustained practice.

Events spark possibility.

Systems build capacity.

Events make people feel motivated.

Systems make people measurably different.

This distinction is not academic. It's the difference between leadership that checks a box and leadership that makes a difference.

Most leaders have been shaped by environments that reward quick answers, decisive action, and a confident appearance.

Very few environments form leaders over time, intentionally, and deeply.

But formation — not information — is what produces leaders worth following.

Leaders intuitively know this. But in the pressure of daily operations, events feel like progress while systems feel like work.

If we're honest, events are easier to buy. They're clean, quick, energizing, and check a box. Systems take time, patience, and the courage to lead.

And deeper still: most leaders have been conditioned to chase inspiration rather than transformation.

Inspiration feels good. It creates energy. It makes us feel momentarily lighter.

But what does inspiration change? Without intentional focus and a growth pathway, it changes nothing.

Transformation, however, requires something far more costly: practice, reflection, truth-telling, repetition, relational honesty, and time.

You want to grow, but few want to endure the process that actually produces growth.

The irony is that the real work of leadership is what makes everything else easier.

Here's what transformation actually requires. Not what we wish it required, but what the evidence shows:

1. **Clarity** - You can't change what you can't see
2. **Repetition** - New behaviors need practice to become habits

3. **Feedback** - You need an external perspective to calibrate progress
4. **Community** - Isolation kills momentum; shared journey sustains it

Events might provide clarity. But they rarely provide repetition, feedback, or a sense of community.

So you invest thousands of dollars, take people away from work, generate enthusiasm... and then wonder why nothing sticks.

You're not missing inspiration. You're missing infrastructure.

Why Workshops Inspire But Don't Stick

Let's be clear: there's nothing wrong with workshops. We facilitate them all the time. They're valuable for introducing concepts, creating shared experiences, and generating momentum.

But workshops alone don't create lasting change for the same reason that going to the gym once doesn't make you fit.

Leadership is a set of relational, emotional, and cognitive habits.

And habits only change through repeated exposure, real-world practice, honest feedback, and the challenge of stretching beyond what feels comfortable.

The Real Cost of Heroic Leadership

Here's a pattern you may recognize: organizations that depend on a few exhausted leaders to carry everything.

You know the type. Maybe you are the type.

The leader who:

- Can't take a vacation without the organization calling them
- Makes 50+ decisions per day that others could make
- Works nights and weekends while their team works 9-5
- Is the only one who knows how to handle key relationships or critical problems
- Is the hidden bottleneck of the company

This isn't dedication. **This is a system failure.**

As our co-founder Tom often says, it's okay to be *whelmed*, but not *overwhelmed*.

Overwhelm is usually a sign that the system isn't performing as intended.

And it's expensive. Not just in burnout and health costs (though those are real). The unspoken cost is what doesn't happen:

When success depends on heroes, the system becomes fragile.

You can't grow faster than your heroes can work.

You can't develop bench strength because nobody else gets the reps.

With heroes in your organization, you can't create a sustainable culture because it's built around individuals, not systems.

And heroes often don't realize they're creating the problem.

You think you're being responsible and hard-working. Reliable. The one who can do it right. But what you're actually doing is creating dependence instead of developing capacity.

We worked with a CEO who was personally involved in every major decision across his 400-person company. Sales deals. Marketing campaigns. Product development. HR policies. Everything.

"I have to be," he told us. "My team isn't ready to make these calls yet."

We asked how long he'd been saying that. Five years.

Five years of "not ready yet."

Here's what we discovered: his team wasn't incapable. They were underdeveloped. They hadn't been given the reps. Every time a difficult decision came up, it went to him. They never developed the judgment he was waiting for.

He was solving today's problems while creating tomorrow's bottleneck.

Three months into our work together, something clicked. He began delegating decision-making to his team. He coached them but

didn't rescue them. He built feedback loops to enable learning from outcomes. He created frameworks they could use to think through problems.

Within six months, his team was making decisions he used to make. Better yet, they were making them faster because they were closer to the work.

A year later, he told us:

"I used to think I had to be involved in everything for the company to succeed. Now I realize my involvement was the thing holding us back."

This isn't theory. This is how every organization we've worked with has created lasting transformation.

Not through one-time events, but through systems that compound over time.

In other words, if success depends on a few exhausted leaders, you're one burnout away from a breakdown.

What Changed at the Bank

Remember that VP of HR at the regional bank?

We didn't start with a big program rollout. We started with 12 mid-level leaders, the kind of employees with high potential who were hungry to grow.

We put them through a 100-day development journey. Not a one-time event. They needed to learn a new approach, starting with self-clarity.

Each week, they followed a prescribed learning path (30 minutes, self-paced). Then they met with the group to debrief, process, and apply their insights in their specific roles.

With 1:1 coaching support, each leader received personalized coaching to turn clarity into action.

Every week, these leaders applied real-time insights to their leadership challenges.

Ninety days later, the results were undeniable.

Other leaders started asking, "What are they doing? I want that."

That's when the VP called us back.

"This is different," she said. "Usually, training is a sugar high that wears off. This... this is actually changing how people lead."

A year later, they'd expanded the system to 50 leaders. Two years later, it was part of their onboarding process for every new manager. There was a new common language and clear expectations for how leaders operate.

It wasn't a program anymore. It was part of the system, and systems compound. They simply become "how we do things around here." They are how an organization works.

Chapter Takeaway

Leadership development fails when we treat it as an event rather than a system.

The goal is not to deliver only inspiration or information. The goal is to create environments where leaders consistently grow, teams get healthier, and results improve — without depending on heroics.

The truth:

- Training doesn't build leaders. Systems do.
- Inspiration doesn't create transformation. Infrastructure does.
- Hope isn't a strategy. Process is.

The question isn't whether you should invest in leadership development. The question is: **are you building a system that compounds, or are you stuck in the cycle of event-based inspiration that never sticks?**

Reflection Questions:

- Where do you see "heroic leadership" in your organization?
Who are the bottlenecks?
- Who on your team is stuck in Overwhelm, and what would help them move forward?
- Think about your last major leadership development investment. What changed six months later? What didn't?
- If you replaced events with a simple weekly leadership rhythm, what would improve first?

PART 2

**THE SYSTEM: HOW TO BUILD
LEADERS WORTH FOLLOWING**

CHAPTER

3

Beyond Leadership: Building an Operating System That Works

The executive team was frustrated. Again.

"We just spent \$50,000 on leadership development," the COO said. "Our people loved it. They came back motivated. But six months later? It's like it never happened."

The CEO leaned back. "We've got great leaders. We've got clear goals. We even have decent meetings. But nothing connects. Finance is doing its thing. Sales is doing theirs. HR is trying to develop people, but it's disconnected from what operations actually need."

He paused, then asked the question we hear constantly:

"How do we get all of this to work together?"

The Missing Link

Many organizations can get stuck here.

**Leadership development without organizational alignment
brings inspiration without infrastructure.**

You can develop incredible leaders. You can cast a compelling vision. You can set ambitious goals. But if you do not tie it together, your organizational systems won't reinforce what you're building, and you won't get the traction you need.

Think about it this way. You develop leaders through an emerging leaders program or a team communication workshop. They grow in self-awareness and clarity about their teams. They learn the tools.

Then they return to meetings that don't reinforce the vision and goals, and that aren't connected to anyone's roles.

The system rewards the wrong behaviors, and departments continue to operate in silos.

The leadership development was good. The problem is the operating system.

This is why most leadership development fails. Not because the content is bad. But, because clarity about the Self is not connected to clarity about the Org (how the organization actually runs).

What Is an Operating System?

When we talk about an organizational operating system, we're not talking about software. We're talking about the integrated framework that connects your organization's identity with everyday activities.

We refer to this as your [ORG] ID. The icon is visualized as a compass to represent the direction your organization is heading.



At the center of your organizational identity is who you are, where you're ultimately going, and how you operate. This is represented by your:

Vision - What is the ideal world you envision when you are successful as a business?

Mission - What is the core work you complete as an organization?

Values - What core behaviors are expected from internal stakeholders?

Around the center core, three elements must work together:

GOALS - In pursuit of your Vision, where are you headed with long-range goals, your annual outlook, and quarterly/100-day sprints?

PEOPLE - Who's going with you? This encompasses team dynamics, Role ID, skill development pathways, and leadership capacity.

RHYTHMS - How do you reinforce your Goals with your People? Your Rhythms of Team and 1:1 Meetings, check-ins, reviews, and celebrations ensure smooth operations.

The final layer: the ID you develop around Goals, People, and Rhythms needs to integrate with every System in your organization.

SYSTEMS - Systems leverage specific skill sets, uniquely implemented based on sector or business model. The Systems make your operation sustainable across finance, legal, sales, HR, marketing, IT, operations, service, or other specialties.

Most organizations have strengths in one or two of these areas and wonder why nothing holds together. Systems like EOS (Entrepreneurial Operating System) lean heavily on structure and process. Other frameworks emphasize vision and goals. Some approaches focus purely on people development.

We believe your identity should be integrated with Goals, People, and Rhythms, leveraging the Systems to reinforce it.

Without this integration, leadership development fizzles because the organization does not reinforce the development journey. You

could also have consultants (or team leaders) in IT, Sales, and Finance who struggle to communicate effectively, which only complicates the work you do every day.

Maintaining an entire operating system can be complex, but viewing it as a comprehensive, integrated system can help.



The Four Elements Working Together

Your organization has a goal. This visual helps us see the goal and recognize the journey we need to take to get there.

The four elements of [ORG] ID can be integrated to create an effective operating system.

Element 1: GOALS (The Direction)

Goals provide the compass heading for everyday activities. When you stand at the base of the mountain, you know you want to climb

to the top. Many organizations have ambitious goals, but this often creates challenges: too many goals, goals that don't connect, or goals that change with every leadership transition.

Your stated goals will take you to the summit peak, where you can see a world beyond the mountain. This **Vision** of the ideal world you're pursuing does not change.¹

In order to reach clarity with your goals and bring them to your **People** within the regular **Rhythms** of your organization, your goals should cascade and connect:

Long-range Strategic Goals (3-5 years)

These long-term goals should be specific enough to guide strategy, ambitious enough to require real growth. These are the few strategic areas you want to move forward.

Is 3-5 years really long-range? Given the fast pace of change, looking beyond 3-5 years is often difficult due to rapid innovation and growth. The aim here is to be realistic.

What one major goal do you have in mind for your organization? The point isn't to list all of your aspirations, but to name with integrity the few key priorities that move your organization forward in this time-frame.

¹ If you're changing your vision every few years, you don't have a vision. You have a wish list.

Annual Outlook (1 year)

One clear goal for the year keeps you focused. Not five goals or ten. One.

What must be true 12 months from now for you to be on track toward your long-range goals? This must move you toward the long-range goals.

When you define one clear reality, the focus becomes relentless. Every decision can run through the filter of this annual goal, which clarifies where attention should focus and builds momentum.

If we identify too many competing priorities, it can be difficult to complete any of them. If you truly have that many priorities, consider this: which priorities could actually be accomplished in the next 100 days? How many of those projects can you stack up and complete in one year?

Rather than focusing on all of them at the same time, stretch your annual outlook and knock them out one-by-one.

100-Day Sprints²

The 100-Day Sprint is the path you're walking in the next season. The calendar provides three 100-day periods per year, with built-in space to recalibrate. Plus, a short-term sprint to bring an all-hands project to life.

² Our team has always focused on 100 day rhythms. Does your company work in 60- or 90-day rhythms? Excellent! The point is that we need a goal-oriented timeline shorter than a full year.

The 100-day period is short enough to maintain intensity but long enough to make real progress. These are clear areas of action, focus, and growth. And each 100-day period should make measurable progress toward the one-year goal.

Here’s what this looks like in practice for a client in the construction industry.

<p>VISION & MISSION Where we’re going: Saving the Planet through Commercial Real Estate Development. How we’re doing it: Build net-zero commercial spaces that perform.</p>		
<p>3 YEAR STRATEGIC GOALS</p>		
<p>Twenty net-zero projects across three regions.</p>	<p>Develop best-in-class team training for net-zero project leadership</p>	
<p>ANNUAL OUTLOOK (Key milestone) Seven projects in two regions with a scalable process</p>		
<p>100 DAY ACTIONS</p>		
<p>Pilot one project</p>	<p>Document learnings</p>	<p>Train team on new methods.</p>

Every goal cascaded, from 100-day to annual to 3-year strategic goals. Every person in the organization could map their work to see how it connected to collective goals. The finance department knew what to budget for, and sales knew which initiatives to pursue. Operations knew where to build capacity, and HR knew what skills to develop.

That’s what goals look like as part of a system.

Element 2: PEOPLE (The Capacity)

This is where leadership development lives, but it can't live in isolation.

People development must connect to:

[Role] ID - Every person needs to know specific details about their role:

- What is my ultimate responsibility?
- What does success look like?
- What do I solve for other team members? Why would they need to reach out to me?
- What are my personal 100-day goals?
- What skills do I need to develop next?
- Where can this role take me in the organization?

This is more than a job description. It's a personal dashboard that connects individual contributions to organizational success.

Leadership Development - This is where the clarity, growth pathway, and tools from *Rising* come to life. But now they're not floating in abstract space. They're anchored to actual roles, responsibilities, and goals through the **[Role] ID**.

Career Pathways - People need to see where they can grow. Not vague promises, but clear pathways: "If you develop these capabilities and deliver these results, here's what's next."

After completing the company’s emerging leader training, a mid-level manager gains greater self-clarity and identifies her communication styles and unique ways of contributing to the team. When this pathway is integrated with the operating system, her [Role] ID clarifies how she succeeds in her current position. Her 100-day goals align with the company’s annual outlook, and her Development Plan identifies the skills she needs for her next role. The company can then forecast promotions as growth occurs positions become available.

Her 1:1 meetings with her supervisor reinforce all of this. The quarterly performance reviews assess her progress on the pathway. Her team’s performance is measured against clear metrics that contribute to the organization’s overall success. We all rise and win together.

That’s people development working within a system.

Element 3: RHYTHMS (The Reinforcement)

Rhythms are the heartbeat of your operating system. This is where most organizations completely fail.³

They have meetings. Lots and lots of meetings. But the meetings don’t reinforce anything and aren’t connected to goals. They’re not developing people or driving progress.

³ Yes. We mean that. We see it frequently.

Here's how rhythms can work in an integrated system:

Team Kickoff - Start the day or week aligned. Celebrate last week and focus on your upcoming priorities. This is a great setting to reinforce one core value and cast vision, reminding the team who we are and what we are doing here. We aim for concise and motivating: 30 minutes, not 60.

Stand-ups - Focused on immediate priorities and any issues. Quick check-ins. We want to identify blockers and provide support before small issues become big problems. Stand-ups should connect to 100-day goals.

Some teams do this at the end of each day, others at the beginning. Sometimes every other day. Call it a “regular check-in” if “stand-up” doesn’t work for you. The point is to identify what works to reinforce what matters most to your people and your organization’s success.

1:1s - Look back, look up, and look forward. How did last week’s goals go? How are you doing...really? What do you need to succeed this week? These meetings develop people while driving execution.

1:1s should allow for real-time feedback. Don’t save up feedback for later if it could change behaviors and outcomes today. Because an “annual review” is not the time for “new” news. Take care of it in the moment and course correct.



Download our Guide to 1:1 Meetings at
LeadersRisingNetwork.com/rising-book

Leadership Meetings - These meetings should allow decision-makers to check the pulse of your team/organization regarding your annual outlook and 100-day progress. This is **not** reporting (you should have dashboards for that). This meeting is for strategic calibration.

- What's working?
- What's not working?
- What needs to be adjusted?

100-Day Reviews - At the end of each 100-day period, assess progress on your sprint goals. Then set the next 100-day priorities. Evaluate each individual's performance against [Role] ID expectations.

This is where the advancement of growth pathways is discussed. Who's exceeding expectations? Who needs a new challenge? Who needs additional support? Keep the list short and provide regular and helpful feedback.

Annual Meetings - Each year, leaders should cast a new annual outlook and connect long-range goals and vision. Based on this discussion, leaders then update their teams on the overall direction for the next year.

This is a time to celebrate big wins. Realign everyone around where you're headed. Provide clarity so each person knows what winning looks like for the coming year.

We recently guided a company through updating its **Rhythms**. When meeting descriptions feel generic or prescriptive, recognize the goal and the flexibility to make them your own. The importance is the outcome, not the script.

Notice what happens with your **Rhythms**: every rhythm reinforces the **Goals**, develops the **People**, and keeps the organization pointed toward the ultimate goal. Nothing is random, and nothing is disconnected.

Element 4: SYSTEMS (The Infrastructure)

This is where the rubber meets the road. All the functional areas of your business — finance, legal, sales, HR, marketing, IT, operations, service — need to work in concert, not in competition.

The outer ring of the [ORG] ID compass shows these functional systems. Each has its own domain, but all must align with the center. A sales consultant recently described two realities: either developing a common language across different Systems expertise or developing a unique language within each silo. Integrating your systems with the common **Goals**, **People**, and **Rhythms** language makes everyone more effective.

Finance aligns the budget to the goals. You're not just tracking expenses; you're resourcing the annual outlook and 100-day sprints. When departments make budget requests, the question is: "How does this advance our annual outlook?"

HR aligns hiring, onboarding, and development to the growth you need. You're not just filling positions, you're building capacity. Every new hire is shown the vision, their role in it, and their development pathway from day one. HR focuses just as much on strategy as it does on compliance.

Sales aligns prospecting and closing with the mission. You're not just chasing revenue; you're pursuing the right customers who align with your strategy. Sales quotas connect to the annual outlook. Sales enablement reinforces the value proposition tied to your mission. We know who our ideal clients/customers are and how they enable our vision for the future.

Marketing aligns messaging to vision and mission. Every campaign, every piece of content, every social post reinforces who you are and where you're going. Marketing isn't making stuff up; they're amplifying the organizational identity.

Operations align processes to deliver on your mission efficiently. You're not just getting work done, you're building systems that scale with your growth. Process improvement connects to 100-day sprint goals.

Information Technology aligns tools and platforms to enable the work. Technology choices support the operating system, don't dictate it. Every system purchase asks: "Does this help us execute our annual outlook?" If a new tool would maximize a team's ability to achieve its goals, it should be considered.

When your systems align, magic happens. When they don't, you get organizational whiplash — everyone working hard in different directions. And that does not help the GPS calibrate toward its destination.

Why Integration Matters More Than Excellence in Any One Area

You can have the best leadership development program in the world. But if your meetings don't reinforce the development, the program will fizzle.

You can have crystal-clear goals. If your people systems don't develop the capacity to achieve these goals, your leaders will stall out.

You can have incredible people. If your operational systems don't support them, they burn out and move on.

You can have efficient operations. If they're disconnected from the vision, you're going nowhere efficiently.

Integration is what separates organizations that transform from organizations that try hard and stay stuck.

Here's an example: A financial services firm spent six figures on leadership development over three years. Good content and excellent facilitators. Luxurious events. Leaders loved it and came back energized. But nothing changed organizationally.

Why? Because their meetings were still status reports and their goals were still siloed by department. Their HR systems were still processing paperwork and mitigating risk, not developing people.

Leadership development was happening in a vacuum.

Then they built their integrated operating system:

- Goals cascaded from vision to 100-day sprints to individual actions
- Roles clarified with ownership and simple personal dashboards for every leader
- Meeting rhythms reinforced development and goals (and got shorter in the process!)
- Systems aligned to resources and clearly enabled the goals

Same leadership development content. Different results.

Why? Integration.

Building Your Operating System

You don't have to build this all at once. In fact, you shouldn't.

Start with clarity:

- Do you have clear, cascading **Goals**? For example, will accomplishing your 100-day goals get you closer to your **Vision**?
- Does each person have clarity connected to those **Goals**?
- Do your meetings reinforce goals and empower **People**?

- Do your **Systems** align to enable execution?

Most organizations will answer “partially” to each of these questions, and that’s perfectly normal.

The question isn’t “Are we perfect?” The question is, “Are we consistently and intentionally building the integration?”

Chapter Takeaway

Leadership development doesn’t fail because the content is bad. It fails because it’s disconnected from how the organization operates.

You need an operating system that integrates:

- **Goals** that cascade and connect
- **People** who are developed intentionally
- **Rhythms** that reinforce both
- **Systems** that enable execution

When these four elements work together, leadership development compounds. Culture becomes sustainable. Results multiply.

This is what separates organizations that aspire to transformation from those that systematically deliver it.

There is a predictable pathway every leader travels. Understanding the pathway is one thing. Having a system that develops people? That’s where transformation becomes inevitable.

Reflection Questions:

1. Is your leadership development connected to actual roles and organizational goals, or is it floating in abstract space?
2. Do your meetings reinforce what you're building, or are they random status updates?
3. Are your functional systems (finance, HR, sales, operations) aligned around common goals, or operating independently?
4. If you're honest, what's the weakest element: Goals, People, Rhythms, or Systems?

Here's a simple diagnostic:

Goals: Can a mid-level employee explain the annual outlook and how their work contributes? If not, goals aren't cascading.

People: Does every leader have a development plan aligned to the Growth Pathway and organizational needs? If not, development is random.

Rhythms: Do meetings reinforce priorities and develop people, or default to status and firefighting? If the latter, rhythms are failing.

Systems: Do leaders consistently ask, "How does this align with our annual outlook?" If not, systems are misaligned.

CHAPTER

4

Tools That Stick (Language That Spreads)

The executive team had been working together for three months. On the surface-level, they seemed fine. Meetings were professional. Decisions got made. Nobody yelled.

But the CEO knew something was wrong. “We’re polite,” he told us, “but we’re not honest. Important things don’t get said. We talk around problems instead of through them.”

We introduced them to one simple tool: The 5 Voices.

It’s a framework that helps people understand their communication style and how others perceive it. Not complicated. Just clear language for something everyone experiences but few can articulate.

Three months after learning the framework, the CEO called us. “I can’t explain it, but everything changed. We now refer to our Voices in every meeting.

“I’m about to Pioneer this. Hear me out.”

“That’s my Guardian Voice speaking. I’m seeing the risks.”

“Can I ask a Nurturer question here?”

“It’s like we suddenly have permission to be ourselves and understand each other.”

That’s the power of a tool that sticks. Not more information. Not another framework to memorize. But a shared language that spreads organically because it improves life.

Why Visual Tools Win in an AI World

We live in information overload. Your leaders are drowning in content. LinkedIn articles. Podcasts. Books. Webinars. Newsletters. The problem isn’t access to information, it’s making sense of it all.

This is why visual tools matter. They create instant clarity. They function as mirrors, lenses, and language:

- Mirrors to reflect back what you can’t see about yourself
- Lenses to help you see situations from new perspectives
- Language to give you words for experiences you couldn’t articulate

The organizations we work with don’t need more frameworks. They need frameworks that their people will actually use. Not just in training sessions, but in real meetings, real decisions, real conflicts.

The test of a great tool:

Six months after you introduce it, are people teaching it to new team members? Does it show up in how they talk about problems and navigate challenges?

If it shows up without your prompting, you have a tool that sticks. If not, you have a tool that was interesting for a moment and forgotten by next quarter.

The Power of Shared Language

Here's what most leaders underestimate: Culture isn't a vibe. It's vocabulary.

Words create worlds.

When everyone in your organization speaks the same leadership language, everything accelerates. Communication becomes more efficient. "I need you to bring your Connector Voice to this client meeting," says what used to take five minutes of explanation in five seconds.

Feedback becomes more precise. "You're in the Gap" is clearer and less threatening than "You're being really negative."

Collaboration becomes more intentional. "We need someone at Stage 4 to coach this Stage 2 leader" creates instant clarity.

"We're at 'plan', not 'promise'" aligns expectations.⁴

Culture becomes portable. New people can learn the language and quickly integrate into how things work.

⁴ This is a great example from another tool in our toolkit. There's more to discover!

Think about the best teams you've been part of. They likely used insider language — words, phrases, and references that meant something specific to the group. That shared vocabulary created cohesion.

Now imagine doing that intentionally across your entire organization. That's what tools do. They install a common operating system. They create the language that defines and strengthens your culture.

Using Tools To Transform

Our toolbox is full of simple visual tools that consistently stick and spread. They are built on the real-life challenges every leader and team faces. Tools create a common language that intentionally builds culture. Here are a few strong examples.

The 5 Voices - Understanding How You Communicate

Remember that executive team that was polite but not honest? The 5 Voices gave them permission to be themselves.⁵

When each person discovered their primary communication voice, the natural way they process information and share ideas. The Pioneer who sees possibilities and wants to charge ahead. The Connector who focuses on relationships and collaboration. The Guardian who sees risks and asks hard questions. The Creative who

⁵ The 5 Voices, developed by our friends at GiANT Worldwide, is a central element of our work.

thinks differently and challenges assumptions. The Nurturer who cares and protects.

The breakthrough came when they realized most of their conflict wasn't about the issue; it was about a style mismatch. The Pioneer wasn't being reckless; that's how Pioneers blaze new trails. The Guardian wasn't being negative; that's how Guardians protect value.

"Oh, she's not criticizing the idea. That's her Guardian Voice seeing the risks we need to address."

"I'm not ignoring the concerns. My Pioneer Voice is just focused on the opportunity."

Within weeks, the language traveled. Team members started identifying their Voices in email signatures. Meetings opened with "Who needs to speak their Voice on this topic?" Hiring conversations included "What Voice does this team need?"

Most importantly, people stopped taking communication styles personally. They could collaborate across differences because they understood differences.

That's a tool that sticks. And here's why: it names something everyone experiences but couldn't articulate before.



Discover more about the power of 5 Voices at
LeadersRisingNetwork.com/rising-book



Dial It In

Look at the world around you, and you are constantly bombarded with “either-or” decisions. Polarities exist all around, from the most benign (Coke or Pepsi?) to belief-centric or philosophical (Democrat or Republican, conservative or liberal?).

These decisions also show up at the office.

- “My idea or your idea?”
- “Possibilities or realities?”
- “The company’s needs or the people in the company?”

Dial It In serves as a constant reminder about the nuances of polarities. When your team faces an “either-or” decision at the table, the analysis typically requires a more nuanced approach.

Think about the feedback you offer to a team member. What you say needs to incorporate two elements: the relational, encouraging side of being human, and the fact-based, logical side of what happened and what needs to happen next time.

What you say to that team member should also be nuanced based on their demeanor and the current situation. A hard-charging team member who is ready and motivated to take on the world likely needs to be reined in with clearer boundaries and facts.

But if their mother is in the hospital after a nasty fall, the team member likely needs far more encouragement and assistance to see the concrete next steps. That team member needs you to be human first.

One-size, fits all is not your best tactic as a leader. That's why the best leaders have learned how to dial it in. This isn't simply being reactive to whatever is in front of you. It's about being clear and intentional in how you respond. The more you practice this, the more natural it will become.

Why Some Tools Stick and Others Don't

We have noticed patterns in our work with organizations. Tools that stick share these characteristics:

They name something people already experience. The tools are not introducing entirely new concepts but rather providing language for existing realities. The first time someone hears about their Voice or sees the Dial It In gauge, the response is usually "Yes! That's exactly what I've experienced but couldn't describe."

They're visual and simple. They can be drawn on a whiteboard or a napkin, explained in 60 seconds, and remembered without notes. If you need a manual to use it, it won't travel.

They're immediately applicable. The best tools aren't just interesting, but are useful today in real situations. The moment you learn the 5 Voices, you can apply them in your next conversation. (Like at home tonight.)

They create compassion, not judgment. They help people understand differences rather than criticize them. "I'm hearing your Guardian Voice" creates understanding. "You're so negative" creates defensiveness.

They improve life, not just work. The best tools help at home, in friendships, in all relationships. When people's spouses say, "We should learn this 5 Voices thing," you know it's resonating beyond work. And when parents start to *Dial It In* with their kids, conversations become more productive.

The Danger: Tool Collection

Here's a trap organizations fall into: tool collection. They attend a conference and become excited about a new framework. They read a book and want to implement the system. They hire a consultant who introduces their proprietary model.

Before long, they have seventeen different frameworks, none of which connect, and all competing for mindshare. This creates confusion, not clarity.

Our recommendation is to focus on fewer, integrated tools. Install a few tools deeply in your organization's vocabulary, and let them become your everyday language.

It's better to have five tools everyone knows than fifty tools nobody uses.

Chapter Takeaway

Tools become language. Language becomes culture.

The characteristics of tools that stick:

- Visual and simple.
- Name existing experiences.
- Immediately applicable.
- Travel without the trainer.
- Create compassion and clarity.

The transformation: When your organization speaks the same leadership language, communication becomes more efficient, collaboration becomes more intentional, culture becomes more portable, and development becomes systematic rather than random.

Reflection Questions:

1. What tools does your organization currently use? Can everyone explain them in 60 seconds?
2. Is there shared language across your organization, or does every department speak a different dialect?
3. Think about the last tool or framework you introduced. Did it stick? Why or why not?
4. What would change if everyone in your organization spoke the same leadership language?

CHAPTER

5

The Growth Pathway: From Overwhelm to Multiplier

Kate's supervisor promoted her to Director of Operations six months ago. She was smart, driven, and had been crushing it as a manager. Everyone expected her to thrive in the new role.

But when Kate's supervisor called us, Kate was drowning. Kate's supervisor asked one of our team members to meet with Kate and determine what went wrong.

"I feel like a fraud," she told us in our first coaching session. "I got promoted because I was good at my old job. But this? I have no idea what I'm doing. Every day I'm making it up as I go, hoping nobody notices."

She paused, then said the quiet part out loud: "I think they made a mistake promoting me."

Kate wasn't failing. She was in Stage 2.

If you've ever stepped into a new role and felt like the job suddenly expanded beyond your grasp, you've been here, too. The Growth Pathway tool helps you see how this happens.

Leadership Development Is Predictable

Every leader travels a common pathway. The stages are consistent, and the needs and challenges at each stage are similar.

The problem? Most organizations don't know the pathway exists (or pretend it doesn't exist).

Supervisors promote high performers and assume they will figure it out. They send struggling leaders to workshops and wonder why nothing changes. They watch high-potential talent quit and can't understand why.

When you understand the pathway, you can identify where someone is and provide the right support at the right time. You can intentionally develop people rather than hoping they survive.

The Growth Pathway Tool



Kate's Journey: The Five Stages

Let's show you what happened to Kate over the next eighteen months. Her story will help you see the pathway clearly and recognize where your own developing leaders might be stuck.

Stage 1: START | "I don't know what I don't know"

Six months before we met Kate, she was diving in, excited about the promotion. Her supervisor had called up her potential, which energized Kate. She was full of ideas and ready to make an impact. But she was completely unaware of how much she didn't know.

This is where every leader begins in a new role or when they start tackling unfamiliar skills: high enthusiasm, but low skill. Kate was confident without competence.

Kate spent her first month shadowing her predecessor, taking notes, and asking questions. She was building a mental map of what this role actually required. At this stage, she needed models to observe and clear expectations about what success looked like.

The danger at **Stage 1** is that organizations assume leadership competence based on someone's performance in their last role. They throw rising stars into the deep end to "see if they can swim." They believe in this person and hope they'll figure things out. (This is often disguised as wishful thinking.)

Stage 1 isn't a problem. It's a starting point. The question is: do you have a system to move your people through it?

Stage 2: OVERWHELM | “I know what I don’t know”

Month two hit Kate like a freight train. All of a sudden, she wondered how she would ever learn it all. She wasn’t shadowing anymore; she was deciding. And every decision exposed another gap in her knowledge. This is where most leaders either break through or break down.

Projects she thought she understood became complicated. People she thought would follow her leadership pushed back. Problems she didn’t even know existed started landing on her desk.

And Kate’s supervisor had stepped back because the training period was over. Kate’s supervisor had other priorities that needed attention.

“I realize now that watching someone do this job and actually doing it are completely different things,” she told us. “Every day I discover something else I don’t know. It’s exhausting.”

In Stage 2, people suddenly see how much they don’t know. They may feel exposed, vulnerable, or feel like they are failing. Without support, this feeling can be taken as evidence that they’re not cut out for leadership.

Here’s what Kate needed at Stage 2:

1. Someone to normalize the struggle: “This is part of the process, not evidence you’re failing”
2. Frequent feedback and coaching: instead of stepping out, Kate needed her supervisor to lean in and provide

consistent input and course correction, not waiting for the annual review to provide feedback

3. Safe practice environments (Kate needed room to test her knowledge without catastrophic consequences)
4. Encouragement: Kate needed to know she was getting something right and making progress, even when it didn't feel like it

The Breakthrough or the Trap Door

Without a support system, imagine where Kate could have fallen? No one enjoys that kind of pressure over an extended period of time.

Many new leaders quit here. They retreat to what's comfortable, stop taking risks, become defensive, or numb out and go through the motions.

But with the right support, this becomes the crucible where real leaders are formed.

We worked with Kate to bypass the trap door. This included regular coaching support where her coach shared an applicable tool to help her think through common situations. And, most importantly, her coach (and her supervisor) started extending permission to struggle without shame.

Three months in, something shifted.

"I had a situation yesterday that would have paralyzed me two months ago," Kate told her coach. "A supplier issue could have

delayed a major project. Six weeks ago, I would have panicked and immediately escalated to my CEO. Yesterday, I knew what to do. I called the supplier, presented three options, and negotiated a solution. It didn't even occur to me to escalate until after I'd handled it."

If the trap door had opened, Kate may have retreated to escalating to the CEO. She may have even abandoned her promotion and returned to her previous role, or left the organization entirely. Instead, she experienced a breakthrough and reached Stage 3.

Stage 3: CONFIDENCE | "I know what I know"

Kate had made it past the trap door.

She still had to think about what she was doing, but she was doing it well. She anticipated challenges and relied on frameworks she trusted. She was developing her own leadership voice. But she wasn't out of the woods yet.

At Stage 3, new leaders are ready to lead with more autonomy. They have experienced the bulk of the scenarios they may face in the new role. They still need coaching, but now it's refinement rather than survival. They can handle more complexity and may start to develop others. But there may be moments where doubt creeps back in, or a new scenario they haven't faced in this role.

At this stage, Kate needed more autonomy ("let me run with this") and projects that pushed beyond her current comfort zone.

She still needed feedback on blind spots, because she couldn't see where she was still limited. These situations became less frequent but were often more nuanced or unique.

The danger at Stage 3 is that confidence without humility can become arrogance. Some leaders plateau here. They're good enough to succeed but not hungry enough to keep growing.

Not Kate. She stayed coachable and kept learning. And that's what moved her forward.

Stage 4: MATURITY | "I don't know what I know"

Eighteen months after that first conversation where she felt like a fraud, Kate had become the leader everyone came to for advice.

She wasn't *thinking* about leading anymore. She was just leading. The frameworks she'd learned were now instincts. She could navigate complexity without being rattled, and her pattern recognition came from experience.

One of her peers described her as a "natural." But Kate knew better. Nothing about this experience had come naturally or easily. It was hundreds of hours of practice that now felt effortless.

At Stage 4, leaders become the models for others. They're the leaders people want to shadow.

In this phase, Kate needed strategic challenges and problems worthy of her newfound capacity. She also needed continued reflection, speaking the unspoken parts aloud.

And, perhaps most importantly, Kate needed an invitation to multiply her newfound experience into a new generation of leaders.

The danger here is that unconscious competence can lead to disconnection. Leaders often forget what it was like to struggle at Stage 2, which makes it difficult to guide someone else through that same valley. Leaders get impatient with people who don't "get it" as quickly.

Once a leader reaches Stage 4, they may rely on instinct without questioning whether it still serves them.

The natural reaction at Stage 4 is to disconnect when you hand off or delegate to someone else. Resist that temptation.

Stage 5: MULTIPLIER | "I can coach what I know"

This is where Kate is today. She's moved from leading well to developing leaders who lead well. She can deconstruct what she does and explain it to someone else, even though it feels automatic when she completes the task.

When the company promoted two new directors last quarter, Kate volunteered to coach them. Not because she was told to, but because she had reflected deeply enough to remember what it felt like to drown in Stage 2 with no support.

"I can take someone where I've been," she told us. "I can see when they're hitting the trap door. I know what questions to ask. I know what they need to hear."

She's building a leader development systems, not just producing results. Kate's impact is no longer measured by what she personally accomplishes but by what others accomplish because of how she developed them.

Stage 5 leaders are critical organizational assets. They can explain not just what to do but why it works and how to adapt it. They can diagnose where someone is stuck and provide exactly what they need.

They are culture builders, not just team managers.

Understanding the Pathway Changes Organizational Culture

Remember Kate's first conversation with us? "I think they made a mistake promoting me."

If her organization hadn't understood the Growth Pathway, they may have seen her struggling and questioned the promotion. Kate would have felt isolated and ashamed, and without support, she likely would have quit or been quietly moved back to her old role.

Subconsciously, the organization would have "learned" not to promote from within and other high-potential leaders would have stopped raising their hands for growth opportunities

Instead, Kate's coach helped her see she wasn't failing. She was in Stage 2, and she needed to get past the trap door.

She broke through to Stage 3, then 4, and Stage 5. Now, she's developing a new generation of leaders and the organization has a proven pathway for growing internal talent.

This is why the pathway matters.

Where Are Your Leaders?

Right now, you have leaders at every stage of this pathway. Some are starting new roles (Stage 1). Some are drowning and overwhelmed (Stage 2). Some are hitting their stride (Stage 3). Some are mature and capable (Stage 4). Hopefully, some are multiplying by developing others (Stage 5).

The question isn't whether the pathway exists, because it does. The question is: do you have a system to move people through it intentionally?

Here's what that system requires:

For Stage 1 leaders: Give them models to observe, clear expectations, and basic frameworks to understand the territory.

For Stage 2 leaders: Normalize the struggle, increase coaching frequency (don't back away now), create safe practice environments, and connect them with peers. This is where you'll lose people if you don't support them.

For Stage 3 leaders: Give them autonomy, stretch assignments, feedback on blind spots, and exposure to higher-level thinking.

For Stage 4 leaders: Provide peer community, strategic challenges, reflection practices, and invitations to multiply.

For Stage 5 leaders: Equip them to coach others, give them system-building opportunities, and let them shape organizational development strategy.

Different stages need different resources. The tragedy occurs when organizations set Stage 4 expectations for Stage 2 leaders or give Stage 2 support to Stage 4 leaders.

Make the Growth Pathway Personal

Kate's story shows the power of an intentional leader investing in a rising star within the organization. But what about the growth potential within each of us?

As easy as it would be to only use this framework on those you lead, it's important you apply this to yourself as well.

What skills are you currently developing that cause you frustration or a lack of confidence? That might point to where you are in Stage 2, and you need support to get past the Trap Door.

You may also have another skill where you have reached Maturity (Stage 4), but you need to grow to become a Multiplier and coach your expertise in the lives of the people you lead.

Most of **Rising** focuses on building your organization's People System. But remember, everything begins with Self-Clarity.... start with you!

Kate's Invitation

At the end of her most recent coaching session, Kate said something that captures why this work matters:

“Two years ago, I was ready to quit. I thought I wasn’t cut out for leadership. Now I’m coaching two directors through the same journey I took. And you know what? I can see them transforming just like I did. That’s the most rewarding part of this role — not what I accomplish, but who I help become the next leader.”

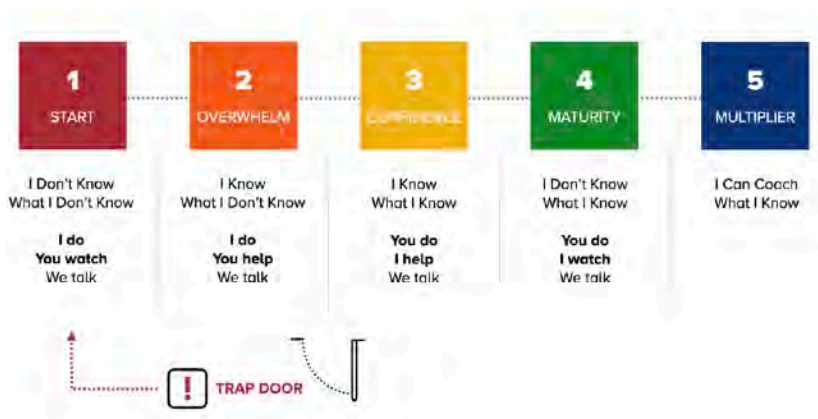
That’s what happens when organizations understand the pathway and build systems around it.

Kate’s organization now has 3 high-capacity, growing leaders, up from none. All because they stayed intentional.

Leaders survive Stage 2 because they have support. High-potential talent pushes through Stage 3 because there’s a clear path forward. Mature Stage 4 leaders multiply knowledge because they’re invited to invest in their team. And Stage 5 multipliers create a pipeline that never runs dry.

Chapter Takeaway

Leadership development follows a predictable pathway. There are stages and common sticking points.



The trap door at Stage 2 is real. Without support, people quit: on growth, on the role, or on themselves. With support, they break through and become your strongest leaders.

In the next chapter, we'll explore what world-class development actually looks like. Because understanding the pathway is one thing. Building a system around it? That's what separates organizations that hope for great leaders from organizations that systematically produce them.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: Where Are You on the Pathway?

Let's make this personal. Take 3 minutes and honestly assess where you are: Circle the stage that best describes you right now:

Stage 1 - START:

- I'm new to this level of leadership
- I'm excited but know I have a lot to learn
- I'm observing and asking lots of questions
- I don't know what I don't know yet

Stage 2 - OVERWHELM:

- I'm constantly questioning whether I'm cut out for this
- Every day feels like I'm barely keeping my head above water
- I know my gaps and inadequacies
- I'm working harder than ever, but feeling like I'm falling behind

Stage 3 - CONFIDENCE:

- I'm finding my rhythm and developing my style
- I can execute well with intentionality
- I still have things to learn, but I'm no longer drowning
- I'm growing in my role and feeling more capable

Stage 4 - MATURITY:

- Leadership feels natural to me now
- I can read situations and adapt without overthinking
- People describe me as a "natural leader"
- I have wisdom that comes from experience

Stage 5 - MULTIPLIER:

- I regularly develop other leaders
- I can explain not just what to do but how to adapt it
- My impact extends beyond what I personally accomplish
- I'm building systems that create more leaders

Now answer these questions:

1. How long have you been at this stage?
2. What would it take to move to the next stage?
3. What support do you need that you're not currently getting?
4. Who in your organization could benefit from understanding this pathway?

Reflection Questions:

1. Think about the last time you were promoted or entered a new role. Can you identify which stage you were at in each phase of your career? What helped you move forward?
2. Who on your team is stuck in Stage 2 right now? What support do they need that they're not getting?
3. If you mapped your entire leadership team on this pathway, what would you discover about your organizational capacity?
4. Do you have any Stage 5 multipliers? If not, what's preventing your Stage 4 leaders from becoming developers of others?
5. What would change if everyone in your organization understood this pathway?

CHAPTER

6

World-Class Development = Process, Not Accident

“We keep hiring really talented people, but they’re not developing into the leaders we need. I don’t understand it. These are smart, capable people. Why aren’t they becoming great leaders?”

- CEO of a fast-growing tech startup

We asked this CEO to describe the company’s leadership development system.

Long pause.

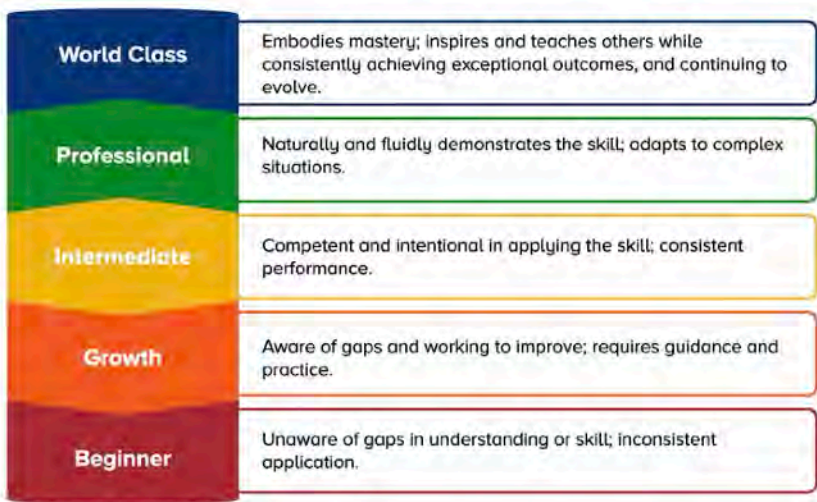
“We send people to conferences. We have a book club. Our VP of People does some training. And everyone has access to our training platform subscription. Is that what you mean?”

Here’s what he was missing: Leadership isn’t one skill. It’s dozens of skills. And every person on his team is at a different level of mastery across all of them.

His top performer might be world-class at strategic thinking, but a beginner at giving feedback. His most personable leader might be professional at building relationships but intermediate at driving accountability. His most organized manager might be world-class at execution but growth-level at developing others.

The World-Class Scale: How Individuals Actually Develop

Every skill (whether it's communication, delegation, strategic thinking, or conflict navigation) develops through the same progression. We all start as beginners and grow from there.



This isn't just theory. This is how skill development works. As with the Growth Pathway, our development can — and should — move beyond the 4th level.

Here is an example of the World Class Scale in practice.

Meet Marcus: One Leader, Multiple Levels

Marcus was promoted to VP of Operations after crushing it as a director. Six months in, he was struggling in some areas and thriving in others.

The Executive Team assessed him across key leadership capabilities. Here's what they found:

Operational Excellence: World Class

Marcus naturally saw systems, optimized processes, and delivered results. This was his superpower. He intuitively knew how to multiply these insights into others. This was the skillet that propelled him into his VP role.

Strategic Thinking: Professional

He could think strategically at any time, but it required conscious effort to extend this beyond himself to others. As a people leader, though, Marcus now needed to develop this skill in others. And that was a struggle.

Developing Others: Growth

Marcus knew he should be developing his team, but he didn't know how. He was often overwhelmed by the breadth of his tasks, and he completed them himself because it was faster than training someone else.

Navigating Conflict: Beginner

Marcus avoided difficult conversations at all costs. When conflict arose, he either ignored it, escalated it to HR, or informed a peer about issues with their team members. He didn't realize how much this was hurting him, his team, and his relationships across departments.

Building Influence: Intermediate

He could influence his own team effectively but struggled to build influence across departments.

Same person. Five different skill levels.

How To Assess Yourself on the World Class Scale

Ask yourself:

1. What outcomes do I consistently achieve?
2. What feedback have I received?
3. What observable evidence would others point to?

Be honest. The scale is descriptive, not aspirational.

The breakthrough for Marcus came when he could see this clearly. He wasn't "failing as a VP." He was world-class in some areas, intermediate in others, and a beginner in a few critical areas.

Remember: you can't fix what you can't see. So raising his awareness on this scale was a turning point. Once he could see it, he could develop a plan that worked.

What Each Level Actually Looks Like

How does Marcus grow in Navigating Conflict?

Let's walk through what these levels look like in practice, using Marcus's growth journey as an example.

Level 1: BEGINNER - Unaware and Inconsistent

Marcus didn't realize he was avoiding conflict. In his mind, he was "letting people handle their responsibilities."

Marcus would occasionally reply when someone asked for his opinion, but he shied away from directly confronting a problem.

What should you be clear about with Beginner leaders is that they are unaware of the gap, and they don't realize what they're not doing. These leaders often have:

- Inconsistent application (sometimes they have mentors or coaches, but usually don't)

- No framework or approach
- Can be defensive when gaps are pointed out
- Doesn't know what good looks like

"I thought I was being kind," he told us later. "I didn't realize I was creating a void."

That's Beginner. You're doing something, but you don't know what you don't know.⁶

Level 2: GROWTH - Aware but Needs Guidance

Once Marcus saw the gap, everything changed. He moved to the Growth level.

Marcus started working with a coach. He learned the 5 Voices framework to better understand his team (and himself). He worked on asking questions to explore differences, which didn't feel as confrontational. His team also learned to ask him, and he got more comfortable telling the truth.

Marcus became clear on what was missing and articulated the gap. He began actively improving, seeking coaching support and trying new approaches.

This stage:

⁶ See the tie to the Growth Pathway? This is what happens when tools work together. A leader who knows their Voice is also likely more self-aware!

- Requires guidance and practice: needs coaching and feedback
- Experiences Inconsistent success: sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't

It was messy. He'd ask a great coaching question, then immediately jump in with his answer. He'd delegate something, then micromanage the execution. He'd create space for someone to grow, then get impatient and take it back.

But he was growing. And growth requires guidance and practice.

"I felt clumsy," Marcus said, "like I was learning to walk again. But at least I could see what I was trying to do."

Level 3: INTERMEDIATE - Competent and Intentional

After about nine months of focused development, Marcus reached the Intermediate level.

Marcus would now bring a conflicting opinion to the table without taking over. He asked even better questions. He leveraged his strengths to ensure his team felt supported during challenging discussions.

Marcus was more consistent. He had to think through each step, but he was intentional and mindful in his work. Now, Marcus:

- Can coach others at Beginner and Growth levels
- Has Consistent performance (people can count on it)
- Has frameworks and approaches that work

It still required conscious effort. Before every 1:1, he'd remind himself: "Tell the truth. Speak up." But it worked, and his team started growing faster.

That's Intermediate. You're good at it. It's not natural yet, but it's effective.

Level 4: PROFESSIONAL - Natural and Fluid

By year two, raising divergent points of view had become natural for Marcus. He didn't have to remind himself to coach his team. He didn't have to consciously choose to speak out. He adapted his approach fluidly based on each person's location.

Marcus could see how to position his statement so others could weigh in.

As he reached the Professional stage, Marcus was natural and automatic, able to fluidly adapt to complex scenarios.

He also began to inspire others by demonstrating the skill, as his new skills had become part of his identity. Marcus was the "gentle truth teller."

"It doesn't feel like work anymore," Marcus said. "It's just who I am as a leader. I don't shy away from telling the truth."

People started asking Marcus to mentor them. Other VPs wanted to learn his approach. That was more of a challenge. "I just learned," he would say.

That's Professional. It's become part of who you are. But you can't yet multiply it to others.

Level 5: WORLD CLASS - Mastery That Multiplies

By year three, Marcus wasn't just speaking up within his own team exceptionally well—he was teaching other leaders how to overcome their own communication style. He had embodied mastery.

Marcus wrote internal training content on Liberating Conversations. He mentored other VPs. He spoke at a leadership conference about building this skillset. Other companies tried to recruit him specifically because of his reputation for having hard conversations.

Here are the characteristics of World Class:

- Teaches and inspires others consistently
- Achieves exceptional outcomes that others can't replicate
- Innovates on the skill (makes it better, adapts it)
- Recognized as a model by others

But here's what made him truly world-class: Three of his former direct reports became VPs themselves. And they worked to pass on what Marcus had developed within them. He hadn't just mastered the skill, he'd multiplied it.

That's World Class. You've become a force multiplier for the skill itself.

Why Organizations Fail to Develop World-Class Leaders

Most organizations fail because they:

1. Don't assess individual capabilities by skill

They say "Marcus needs leadership development" instead of "Marcus is a Professional at operations, Intermediate at strategy, and a Beginner at developing others."

2. Don't provide level-appropriate support

They send everyone to the same training, regardless of their location. A Beginner needs coaching. An Intermediate needs practice with feedback. A Professional needs exposure to World Class models.

3. Don't give people time to move through levels

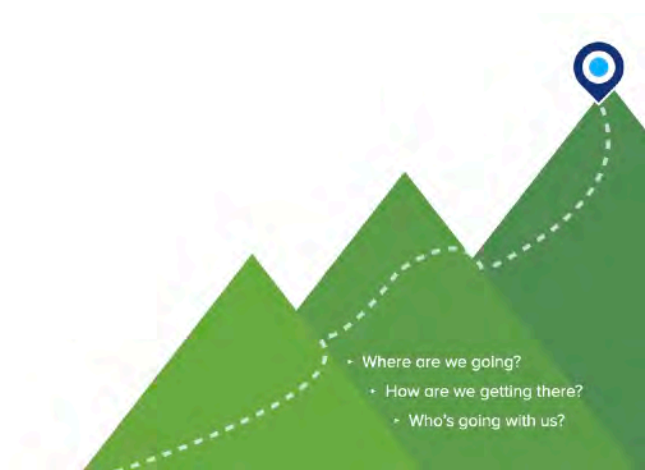
They expect someone to progress from Beginner to Professional in a single workshop. Real development takes 12-24 months per level for complex skills.

4. Don't build systematic progression

They use random development rather than intentional, skill-by-skill progression with clear milestones.

5. Don't build for the long-term

Business moves fast. It feels slow to build over the long term. But what happens if you don't? Your people are underdeveloped, and your capacity shrinks.



The Three Questions for Individual Development

As you explore the leadership landscape in your organization, consider some of your top, rising star leaders. Or you might even look in the mirror at your own leadership.

Whether we're developing organizations, teams, or individuals, we ask three simple clarifying questions along our Next Horizon Pathway:

WHERE are you going?

Which skills are needed to reach the next level? For Marcus to succeed as VP, he needed to reach Professional in developing others, even though he started at Beginner.

HOW are you getting there?

What is the development pathway for each skill? Marcus had a clear 18-24 month plan with specific milestones for moving from Beginner to Professional.

WHO's going with you?

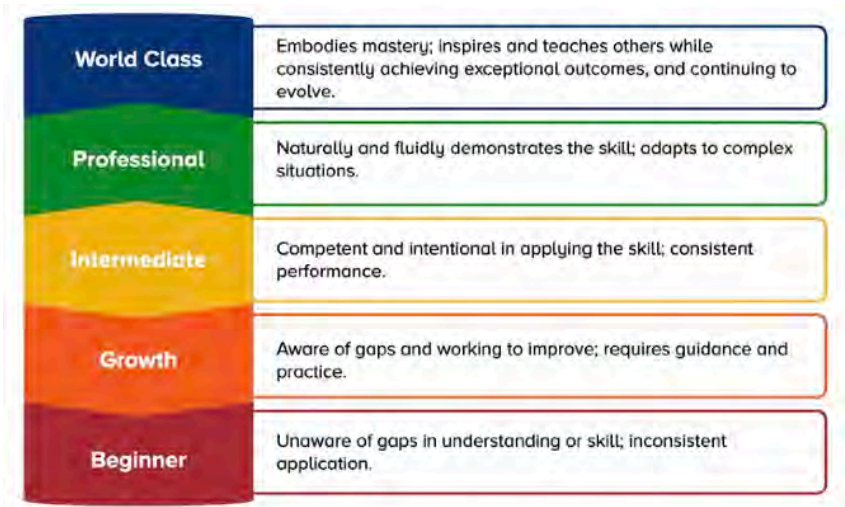
Who is going to coach this leader? Who is modeling world-class? Who are the peers working on the same skills? Marcus had a coach and a peer group, and he observed other VPs who were Professional/World Class.

Chapter Takeaway

World-class development happens one skill at a time, one level at a time.

Every leader exists at different levels across different skills.

Many leaders are world-class at something (their superpower) and beginner at something else (their shadow side). The key is seeing it clearly and building skills step by step.



Organizations that understand this don't try to develop everyone the same way. They assess individuals by skill, provide level-appropriate support, and build systems that intentionally move people through levels.

That's what creates world-class leaders. Not merely hoping they'll get better, but building capability level by level, skill by skill, with clear progression and appropriate support at each stage.

Understanding the levels is one thing. Having tools that move people through them? That's what creates transformation.

Reflection Questions:

1. Pick one critical leadership skill. Where are you on the World-Class scale for that skill right now?
2. What's one skill where you're world-class? How did you get there? Can you replicate that development process for other skills?
3. What's one skill where you're at Beginner or Growth? What would it take to move to the next level?
4. If you assessed your team across 5-6 key leadership skills, what would you discover about where people actually are?
5. Does your organization provide level-appropriate development, or does everyone get the same training regardless of where they are?

PART 3

THE EXECUTION

CHAPTER

7

Your First 100 Days: Start Small, Start Now

You don't have to boil the ocean.

You don't need to transform your entire organization on day one.

You don't need an unlimited budget, nor perfect conditions.

There is one thing you do need: the right first step.

And that first step? It's probably smaller and more achievable than you think.

The Power of Starting Small

Most organizational change initiatives fail because they start too big.

They try to include everyone ("let's be fair!").

They design elaborate rollout plans ("let's be thorough!").

They wait for perfect conditions ("we need to be ready!").

And then they collapse under their own weight.

The organizations that succeed start small, prove the model, and then scale intentionally.

Here's why starting small wins big:

1. You learn faster

With a small group, you can iterate quickly. Discover what works and adjust what doesn't. There is momentum when you build expertise before you scale.

2. You create demand

When 12 people transform visibly, 50 others will ask, "What are they doing? I want that." Pull is more powerful than push.

3. You reduce risk

If something doesn't work, you haven't disrupted the entire organization. You can adjust the course without incurring high costs.

4. You build the system while you go

Small groups let you test facilitation, refine content, develop internal champions, and work out logistics before they're mission-critical.

5. You prove ROI

Measurable transformation in a pilot group makes the case for scaling. Data beats opinions every time.

The principle: Start with a flashlight, not a floodlight.

Build a pilot group that shines so brightly, everyone else wants to know how to get that light.

Identify Your Rising Leaders

If you're starting small, who should you start with?

This is a strategic decision, not a popularity contest.

Don't start with:

- Whoever asks loudest
- Whoever the CEO personally likes
- Your struggling leaders (save them for round two once the system is proven)
- Everyone (that's not starting small)

Do start with:

- **High-potential, high-influence leaders** - People others watch and follow
- **Those hungry to grow** - Self-awareness and teachability matter more than current skill
- **Culture carriers** - People who will spread what they learn organically
- **Diverse representation** - Different departments, levels, perspectives

If you have 6-8 of those leaders? Great, start with them. Is the whole team ready? Run with it.

The process scales large enough to create peer learning and momentum and small enough to coach well and learn quickly, no matter how many people you include.

Two Proven Entry Points

You have options for launching. Both work, and both have different strengths. The decision is yours: choose based on your context and needs.

Option 1: Individual Leader Development for Your Next Level Leaders

Spend 100 days on a prescribed self-clarity growth journey focused on leadership identity. Introduce your leaders to the toolbox from this book, and develop them through a combination of self-paced learning, peer groups, and coaching.

Developing your “next level leaders” is ideal in organizations that need to develop emerging leaders or build a leadership pipeline.

As these leaders spend focused time on development, they will begin to use a common language across diverse roles and build the individual capacity of your organization before addressing team dynamics.

What participants gain in 100 days:

- Clear leadership identity (understand their Voice and all 5 Voices)
- Increased relational trust (with peers in the cohort)
- Shared language they are taking back to their teams
- Immediate, measurable behavior change
- Framework for scalable growth

Option 2: Team Transformation for Teams at the Next Level

With pilot teams focused on transforming team health and performance, these teams begin to build strength, focus, and collaboration as high-performance teams.

The teams collaborate in a cycle of team-based workshops, team application discussions, and self-paced learning. Through this cycle, they learn tools and processes to begin using internally, which improves team dynamics and outcomes within the 100-day process.

Focusing on team transformation works well for executive teams that need to function more effectively, or for key teams critical to organizational success. You may also focus on teams where dynamics are limiting results, but the potential for buy-in and change is high.

What teams gain in 100 days:

- Deeper trust and psychological safety
- Shared language for collaboration
- Ability to navigate conflict productively
- Clear systems for sustained high performance

The Mistake Most Companies Make

We've seen this pattern repeatedly:

Organizations try to go too broad too fast.

Leaders are so excited about the system (or so desperate for change) that they want to include everyone immediately.

"Let's roll this out to all 200 managers at once!"

We get it. The impulse is understandable, but it's a mistake.

Here's why going broad too fast backfires:

1. You overwhelm your infrastructure

You likely have limited facilitation capacity, coaching bandwidth, and logistics. Everything is stretched to the breaking point too early, before leaders and teams can begin to scale.

2. You dilute the experience

When you spread resources thin, no one gets the high-touch support that creates transformation. The growth journey will take time for everyone involved. You can't rush it.

3. You lose the “flashlight” effect

Without a pilot group to showcase the change and transformation, there is no visible proof group that creates demand and demonstrates ROI.

4. You can't iterate

If something needs to be adjusted or isn't working, you've already scaled it across the organization.

5. You create cynicism

Does this become another “initiative of the month” that over-promised and under-delivered? You don't want this!

The better approach: pilot groups that create pull.

Start with a small, pilot group and transform it visibly. Let others see the change and build the desire to want it. Build demand before you build scale.

When 100 days finish and participants ask, “What’s next? Can we keep going?” — you know you built something that works.

Then launch a second cohort, and a third. Scale intentionally, not desperately.

The Real Story: From Skeptical to Sold

A tech startup CEO was skeptical. “We’re too busy to add another thing. We’ve tried leadership development before. It didn’t stick.”

We convinced him to try a small pilot. Eight high-potential leaders. 100 days.

“Fine,” he said. “But if this doesn’t work, we’re done with this stuff.”

Week 3, he emailed: “I don’t know what you’re doing, but I’m seeing changes already. One of my directors asked for feedback on her communication style. She’s never done that before.”

At week 8, he said, “Our leadership team meeting was different yesterday. People were more honest. We discussed the conflict rather than avoiding it. Someone referenced their ‘Voice’ — is that from your program?”

And at day 90: “I need to talk about scaling this. I have twelve other people who want in. And honestly, I want my executive team to go through it.”

One year later, they had run four cohorts, developed 45 leaders, and begun building internal champions to sustain the process’s scaling.

“I was skeptical because we’d tried things that didn’t work,” he told us. “But those were events. This is a system. And systems keep working.”

That’s the power of a pilot: start small and prove the model.

Chapter Takeaway

You don’t need to transform your entire organization tomorrow. You need the right first step today.

The principles:

- Start small: a flashlight, not floodlights
- Choose strategic people: 4-8 rising leaders
- Prove the model: measurable transformation in 100 days
- Build demand: let others see the change and want it
- Scale intentionally: cohort by cohort, not everyone at once

Organizations that transform don’t do it all at once. They do it one intentional step at a time.

Your first 100 days aren’t the whole journey. They’re the beginning of a system that compounds for years to come.

Reflection Questions:

1. If you were starting in the next 30 days, who would you choose for a pilot cohort? Why them?
2. Which entry point makes more sense for your organization: Leaders or Teams?
3. What's your biggest fear about starting? What's the cost of not starting?
4. Who are the decision-makers who need to be part of this conversation?
5. What would measurable success look like 100 days from now?



Use the ROI Calculator to find the true cost of Clarity
LeadersRisingNetwork.com/rising-book

CHAPTER

8

Leaders Who Rise Lift Everyone Else

Let's go back to where we started.

The exhausted CEO who couldn't shake the feeling he was one or two departures away from serious trouble. The VP of Talent whose pilot cohort worked but didn't know how to scale it. The Director who felt like a fraud until she realized she wasn't failing — she was just in Stage 2.

These aren't exceptional stories. They're the norm.

Every organization we've worked with — every single one — started with some version of these struggles. Leaders feeling overwhelmed, and the culture feels fragile. People development is happening, but it's accidental instead of systematic.

And every organization that built the system tells us the same thing now:

“Everything changed when we could finally see what we were building toward.”

The Compounding Effect of Developed Leaders

Leadership development isn't just about individual transformation. It's about multiplication.

When you develop one leader, you impact:

- Their direct reports (typically 5-15 people)
- Their teams' teams (multiply by 5 again)
- Their span of influence (unmeasurable but undeniable)
- The culture they help create (generational impact)

One Multiplier can influence hundreds of people over the course of their career.

Think about that. Every leader you develop doesn't just become more effective themselves. They become a force multiplier across your entire organization.

This is why leadership development isn't a "nice to have."

It's the highest-leverage investment you can make.

Higher than technology. Higher than marketing. Higher than new products.

Because all of those things depend on the capacity of your people to execute them well.

Culture Doesn't Drift When It's Designed

You now have the tools to design culture, not just hope for it.

This isn't theory. This is a blueprint.

Organizations that follow this blueprint don't wonder if their culture is healthy; they can measure it. They don't hope their leaders will develop; they systematically produce them. They don't react to crises; they build ahead of need.

The question isn't whether the system works. The question is: will you build it?

Rising Isn't About Perfection, It's About Progression

Be honest about what you're facing.

You won't get this perfect on the first try. You'll make mistakes. You'll have leaders who don't make it through Stage 2. You'll have cohorts that don't go as smoothly as you hoped. You'll have moments where you wonder if it's working.

That's all normal. That's all part of the process.

The organizations that succeed aren't the ones who execute flawlessly. They're the ones who:

- Start before conditions are perfect
- Learn from what doesn't work
- Adjust without abandoning the system
- Celebrate progress, not just completion
- Stay committed through the messy middle

Progress, not perfection.

You don't need to have it all figured out.

What Will Your Next 100 Days Look Like?

Imagine it's 100 days from today.

Are your overwhelmed leaders still overwhelmed (maybe more so)?

Is your culture drifting? Does your leadership pipeline have gaps you pretend aren't there?

Are you hoping the next hire or the next quarter will fix it?

If you start building:

Consider how your organization would be different with a pilot group of leaders who have experienced visible transformation.

Other leaders are asking to be part of the next cohort, and your executive team is discussing how to scale it.

You have a pathway forward, not just good intentions.

The difference between these two futures will be based on the decision you make in the next 30 days.

Not the decision you make when conditions are perfect. Not the decision you make when you have an unlimited budget. Not the decision you make when you feel ready.

The decision you make now.

The Invitation

This book has laid out everything you need to start:

- The frameworks to build with
- The stories to learn from
- The tools to implement
- The choices to make

Now it's your turn.

Start building the system and transform your leaders. Design your culture.

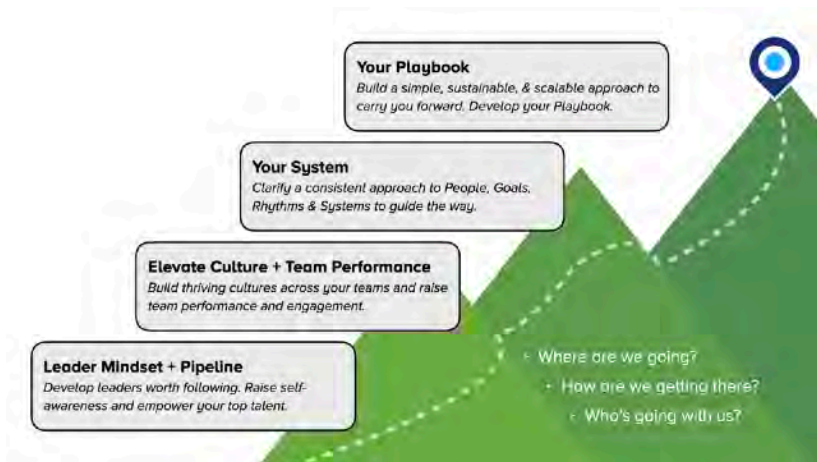
We're fighting for your highest good. We're for you. We believe in what you're building.

Building the System

The next 100 days are not the end of the journey. You're just getting started!

Once you start, your leaders and teams will want to keep rising. In Chapter 6, we looked at Marcus' growth by asking the 3 questions on our **Next Horizon Pathway**. Here is the full version of this framework:

We help leaders envision what's possible with a people development system. Where are you today, and what's the next horizon?



As you move beyond your first 100 days, the goal is to continue to:

1. develop a Leader Mindset within your Next Level Leaders
2. strengthen Team Performance in your Next Level Teams
3. build your [ORG] ID System of People, Goals, and Rhythms
4. document your Culture Playbook

The top of the mountain is your ultimate goal, but you can't climb the mountain without taking the first step. The first step is clarity about where you are today and where you want to go next.

And remember, this isn't about walking the pathway once. It's about making it repeatable and sustainable so that you can continue developing your people, your teams, your system, and your organizational culture.

Leaders Who Rise Lift Everyone Else

This is what it's really about. This is the work of leadership: making it possible for others to climb higher.

Not better org charts or more efficient meetings. Not even better business results, though those come.

This is about your people.

When you develop a leader, you change their trajectory. They gain greater self-clarity and become more capable and confident. They stop managing and start leading. They stop surviving and start thriving.

And that doesn't just change their work. It changes their life.

They go home healthier. Their relationships improve, and they become better spouses, parents, and friends. The self-awareness they gain at work spreads to every area of their life.

And then they lift everyone around them.

Your direct reports finally have a leader worth following. Your peers begin to learn from your example. Your teams start functioning like they always should have, and the culture shifts because healthy leaders multiply health.

This is why the work matters.

You're not just building a business. You're building people. And people build families, communities, and futures.

When leaders rise, everyone rises.

Final Thought

Ten years from now, what will you look back on?

Will you remember the quarter you hit your revenue target? Maybe.

Will you remember the moment your culture became what you always wanted it to be? Definitely.

Will you remember the leaders whose lives changed because you invested in their development? Absolutely.

This is the legacy work.

Not the urgent work that screams for attention every day. The important work that compounds decade after decade.

The system you build now will still be producing leaders ten years from now. The culture you design today will continue to attract and retain talent. The language you install now will continue to shape how people work together.

That's worth building.

That's worth the investment and the commitment. It's worth the hard work of moving from event-based inspiration to systematic transformation.

So here's our final invitation:

Build something that lasts.

Build something that multiplies.

Build something that lifts people up instead of burning them out.

Build something you'll be proud of long after the quarterly targets are forgotten.

Build a system that helps leaders rise.

Because when your leaders rise, they lift everyone else.

And that's how organizations and people transform.

**LAST
WORD**

You've read this far. That tells us something about you.

You're not satisfied with the status quo. You're building something that matters. You know your people are your greatest asset.

Now take the next step.

You don't need to be perfect, because the organizations that transform aren't the ones with perfect conditions.

They're the ones that start.

Let's rise!

We create bigger futures and build thriving cultures by developing leaders worth following.

— **Leaders Rising Network**

Connect With Us

This book is meant to be practiced, not just read.

To support that, we've created a simple home for the tools, resources, and references mentioned throughout these pages:

LeadersRisingNetwork.com/rising-book

There you'll find selected frameworks from the book, along with additional resources to help you apply what you're learning in your leadership, your team, and your organization.

If you'd like to explore more, you can also find:

- **Our Learning Center:**
LeadersRisingNetwork.com/learning-center
- **The Leaders Rising Podcast**, where we explore leadership, culture, and the real tensions leaders face as they grow:
LeadersRisingNetwork.com/podcast

And if you want to reach us directly, you can contact our team at:

hello@LeadersRisingNetwork.com

Thanks for reading and for doing the often unseen work of leading with intention, clarity, and care.

Acknowledgements

This book reflects years of shared work, honest conversations, and lessons learned in real leadership environments.

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We also want to acknowledge the many leaders, mentors, peers, and partners we've had the privilege of working with and learning from over the years. Each, in different ways, shaped how we understand leadership, not as a position to protect, but as a responsibility to steward.

Thank you for walking with us.

This book carries more voices than just our own. We're better because of you.

About the Authors

Aaron Lee is CEO of Leaders Rising Network and is passionate about unlocking the true potential of leaders and teams. With experience in nonprofits and emergency management, Aaron has guided government, healthcare, nonprofit, and higher education organizations to navigate change and develop leaders who fight for each other. He is the author of **The New Generation Leader** and host of the podcast of the same name. Aaron holds a degree from the University of Richmond and a Master of Divinity. He lives in Richmond with his wife and two daughters.

Jeff Lovell is a senior leadership advisor and President of Leaders Rising Network, where he partners with executive teams to align culture with strategy and build healthy leadership pipelines. Known for his clarity and grounded presence, Jeff helps leaders grow in self-awareness, make better decisions under pressure, and build cultures that support both performance and people. Jeff and his wife live in Madison, Wisconsin, and are grateful for this season with their adult daughters. Outside of his work with leaders, he values unhurried mornings with coffee, long walks on Wisconsin trails, and conversations that go beneath the surface.

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Rising is for organizations that are growing but quietly losing clarity along the way.

Revenue may be up. Hiring may be strong. Yet decisions take longer, collaboration feels harder, and leaders are exhausted trying to keep everything aligned. The pressure is to push harder: launch another initiative, implement another tool, demand more output. But intensity cannot compensate for misalignment. And effort cannot fix what leaders cannot clearly see.

In **Rising**, Aaron Lee and Jeff Lovell argue that most growth problems are clarity problems. They expose the hidden collisions between leadership behavior, culture, and operating systems that quietly stall momentum. Rather than offering another leadership program, they provide a practical blueprint for building a people system that develops leaders at every level and restores alignment across the organization.

Through real-world examples and actionable frameworks, **Rising** equips leaders to move from reactive effort to intentional scale so their organizations can grow without breaking their culture or burning out their people.



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