

FRAMEWORK I

GROWTH-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

A Developmental Pathway

From Leader Presence to Independent Capability to Developmental Reproduction

PRESENCE	CAPABILITY	OWNERSHIP	INDEPENDENCE	REPRODUCTION
----------	------------	-----------	--------------	--------------

THE CENTRAL PRINCIPLE

The strongest leader is not the leader whose team cannot operate without them, but the leader whose presence progressively increases the team’s capacity to operate without them.

Growth-Centered Leadership is organized around one developmental aim:

DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT DEPENDENCY

Care without permissiveness. Standards without domination. Freedom without abandonment. Influence that produces capability.

01 — THE PATHWAY

The Developmental Pathway

Growth-Centered Leadership is not a fixed leadership style. The leader's role changes as capability and ownership increase.

THE MOVEMENT

Observe → Clarify → Coach → Preserve Productive Struggle → Release → Observe → Hold Accountable → Expand Ownership → Develop the Developer

The pathway is developmental rather than chronological. A leader may move backward or forward depending on risk, readiness, experience, and demonstrated judgment.

0	Leader Orientation	Shift the goal from being indispensable to creating capability. Evidence: Leader can name what the person should eventually own without unnecessary intervention.
1	Observe & Diagnose	Understand the actual performance gap before acting. Evidence: Leader distinguishes skill, clarity, confidence, resource, motivation, and accountability gaps.
2	Clarify Purpose & Standard	Make the outcome, standard, and developmental target explicit. Evidence: Person can explain what success looks like and why it matters.
3	Coach & Support	Provide the structure needed for learning without taking ownership away. Evidence: Person attempts, reflects, corrects, and asks increasingly better questions.
4	Preserve Productive Struggle	Allow tolerable difficulty to generate learning and confidence. Evidence: Leader resists rescuing when risk is acceptable; person remains responsible.
5	Release Ownership	Transfer decisions and execution as capability is demonstrated. Evidence: More work is completed without leader prompting or approval.
6	Observe & Hold Accountable	Use truth, feedback, and consequences to protect standards and learning. Evidence: Performance gaps are addressed directly without degrading dignity.
7	Expand Decision Rights	Increase the radius within which the person can exercise judgment. Evidence: Person handles more complex, ambiguous, and cross-functional decisions.
8	Develop the Developer	Move from individual competence to developmental reproduction. Evidence: Person can teach and develop others.

02 — FORMATION

Stages 0–4: Creating the Conditions for Growth

The first half of the pathway changes how the leader sees struggle, performance gaps, and intervention.

0. LEADER ORIENTATION

Core shift: from “How do I solve this?” to “What capability should exist after this?”

Primary danger: Hero Leadership — the leader’s identity becomes tied to being needed.

Practice: Before intervening, identify whether the moment requires protection of the business, development of the person, or both.

1. OBSERVE & DIAGNOSE

Presence comes before correction. The leader gathers observable evidence instead of reacting to irritation, speed, or assumption.

Diagnostic question: Is the gap caused by knowledge, skill, practice, clarity, confidence, resources, motivation, capacity, or accountability?

Practice: Name the gap before naming the solution.

2. CLARIFY PURPOSE & STANDARD

Development requires a clear target. People cannot own standards that remain implicit in the leader’s head.

Purpose gives direction; standards make success observable.

Practice: Ask the person to explain the expected result, the reason it matters, and what “good” looks like.

3. COACH & SUPPORT

Support should increase competence rather than substitute for competence.

The leader provides explanation, demonstration, questions, resources, or feedback while preserving the learner’s responsibility.

Practice: Help enough to restore movement, but not enough to erase ownership.

4. PRESERVE PRODUCTIVE STRUGGLE

Some struggle is the mechanism of learning. Removing every difficulty can produce immediate efficiency while preventing future capability.

The developmental question is not “Can I do this faster?” but “Can they safely learn this by doing it?”

Practice: Stay available without taking over when risk is reversible and the person has a reasonable chance to learn.

THE INTERVENTION RULE

Use the least intervention necessary to protect the standard while preserving the greatest reasonable opportunity for learning.

03 — RELEASE

Stages 5–8: From Ownership to Reproduction

The second half of the pathway measures whether leadership has actually transferred capability rather than merely delegated tasks.

5. RELEASE OWNERSHIP

Ownership expands when demonstrated capability expands. Release is neither abandonment nor blind trust; it is a calibrated transfer of responsibility.

Leader behavior: move from instructing → consulting → observing.

Evidence: decisions that once required approval become routine independent judgments.

6. OBSERVE & HOLD ACCOUNTABLE

Autonomy without truth becomes drift. Growth-Centered Leadership combines psychological safety with performance clarity.

Leader behavior: address the observable gap, protect dignity, identify responsibility, and define the next standard.

Evidence: mistakes generate correction and learning rather than avoidance, concealment, or repeated rescue.

7. EXPAND DECISION RIGHTS

Growth is visible when the person can handle increasing complexity, ambiguity, and consequences.

Leader behavior: widen the person's decision radius while maintaining clear escalation boundaries.

Evidence: the employee solves new classes of problems instead of repeating one trained procedure.

8. DEVELOP THE DEVELOPER

The highest developmental outcome is not independence alone; it is the ability to create capability in others.

Leader behavior: coach the person on teaching, feedback, delegation, and accountability.

Evidence: standards and judgment reproduce through another person without the original leader's direct involvement.

SCALABILITY PRINCIPLE

Development becomes scalable when the developed become developers.

The pathway therefore does not end when a person “can do the job.” It ends only when capability can be sustained, adapted, and transmitted.

04 — MATURITY

The Capability Ladder

A practical maturity model for tracking what changes in the person and what must change in the leader.

LEVEL	CAPABILITY	WHAT CHANGES	LEADER ROLE	DIRECT DEPENDENCE
1	LEARN	Understands the task, standard, and reason.	Direct / Demonstrate	High
2	PERFORM	Executes correctly with guidance.	Coach / Correct	High–Moderate
3	OWN	Completes reliably without prompting.	Support / Check	Moderate
4	DECIDE	Exercises judgment within clear boundaries.	Consult / Observe	Low–Moderate
5	IMPROVE	Identifies patterns and improves execution or process.	Challenge / Sponsor	Low
6	TEACH	Transfers knowledge and standards to others.	Observe / Calibrate	Low
7	DEVELOP	Builds another person’s independent capability.	Release / Expand	Minimal direct intervention

THE DESIRED PATTERN

As capability and ownership rise, unnecessary leader intervention should fall. Relationship, trust, and care may remain high even as dependency decreases.

A healthy developmental relationship is therefore not measured by how frequently the person needs the leader, but by how effectively the person uses judgment, standards, feedback, and support when the leader is available.

CAPABILITY / OWNERSHIP



UNNECESSARY DIRECT INTERVENTION



05 — CONDITIONS

The Conditions That Produce Development

Growth-Centered Leadership operates between two dangerous extremes: rescue and abandonment.

RESCUE	PRODUCTIVE STRUGGLE	ABANDONMENT
Too much intervention Leader repeatedly substitutes personal competence for learner competence. Immediate efficiency rises; future capability may stall.	Calibrated support + real ownership The person experiences enough challenge to learn, enough safety to stay engaged, and enough ownership to build confidence.	Too little support Responsibility is handed over without the structure, clarity, resources, or availability required for learning.

HIGH CARE + HIGH STANDARDS

	LOW STANDARDS	HIGH STANDARDS
LOW CARE	NEGLECT Neither person nor standard receives enough attention.	COERCIVE PRESSURE Standards are protected without sufficient dignity, learning, or safety.
HIGH CARE	PERMISSIVENESS Care is protected by avoiding necessary truth, challenge, or accountability.	DEVELOPMENTAL ACCOUNTABILITY The person matters, and the standard still matters.

DEVELOPMENTAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability should not merely correct today’s performance. It should increase tomorrow’s capability.

The Growth-Centered Leadership Compass

A repeatable decision discipline for moments involving performance, delegation, feedback, and development.

DIRECTION	LEADER QUESTION	FUNCTION
NORTH — PURPOSE	What outcome and capability are we creating?	Prevents coaching activity from becoming detached from performance or development.
EAST — OWNERSHIP	What can I responsibly release?	Tests whether responsibility is being retained because it is necessary or because control feels safer.
SOUTH — TRUTH	What does observable performance actually show?	Separates evidence from assumption, preference, harmony-seeking, and vague impressions.
WEST — COURAGE	What conversation, decision, or productive struggle am I avoiding?	Converts insight into the difficult action required for development.
CENTER — CARE	Can I protect human dignity while protecting the standard?	Disciplines the other directions so truth does not become cruelty and freedom does not become abandonment.
OUTER RING — RESULTS	Did development actually translate into capability and performance?	Prevents the framework from being judged by intention alone.

THE COMPASS SEQUENCE

Purpose identifies the destination. Truth identifies reality. Care protects dignity. Courage enables action. Ownership transfers responsibility. Results test whether development worked.

Eight Questions for the Practicing Leader

These questions turn the framework from an idea into a repeatable leadership discipline. Use them after meaningful interventions and during weekly development review.

DEPENDENCE Does my team perform because I am present, or because I have developed capability?	COURAGE What would holding both the person and the standard require from me?
INTERVENTION Am I protecting the business from unacceptable risk, or protecting myself from the discomfort of watching someone learn?	RESPONSIVENESS Before correcting someone, do I understand why the performance gap exists?
FREEDOM What decisions could someone else make today that I am still making for them?	EXPANSION What can this person do today that they could not do 30 days ago because of our work together?
TRUTH What conversation am I avoiding because I want to preserve harmony?	SUCCESSION Who have I developed who can now develop someone else?

WEEKLY DISCIPLINE

Do not ask only: “Did the person perform?” Also ask: “What capability increased, what ownership shifted, what intervention became less necessary, and who is now able to teach someone else?”

The pathway is functioning when growth leaves evidence: fewer routine escalations, stronger judgment, clearer accountability, broader ownership, and increasing developmental reproduction.

Framework Propositions to Test

The next phase is empirical observation. These propositions give the future case studies something specific to support, refine, or contradict.

P1 — Capability	Growth-Centered Leadership should increase the person's ability to reproduce standards without unnecessary leader intervention.
P2 — Dependency	As demonstrated capability rises, the frequency and intensity of routine leader intervention should decline.
P3 — Productive Struggle	Appropriately supported struggle should produce stronger learning and confidence than repeated rescue in low-risk developmental situations.
P4 — Accountability	High care and high standards should be compatible; clear accountability can strengthen trust when it preserves dignity and learning.
P5 — Ownership	Progressively released ownership should increase judgment and problem-solving when responsibility matches capability and risk.
P6 — Absence Test	A developed team should preserve more of its standards, decisions, and problem-solving capacity when the leader is absent.
P7 — Reproduction	The strongest evidence of development should appear when the developed person can successfully develop another person.
P8 — Results	Developmental activity should ultimately produce observable capability and operational performance, not merely positive feelings about coaching.

Observation Protocol Before the First Case

The framework should enter case study work with a consistent evidence structure so that later examples test the theory instead of merely illustrating it.

EMPIRICAL STANDARD

The framework propositions are not conclusions. They are claims to be tested against behavior, outcomes, time, and competing explanations.

FIELD	EVIDENCE QUESTION
1. Situation	What was happening? What standard, task, decision, or developmental challenge was at stake?
2. Leader Behavior	What did the leader actually say, do, withhold, delegate, observe, or correct?
3. Ownership	Who retained responsibility for the decision and execution after the intervention?
4. Employee Response	What did the person do next? Did confidence, clarity, initiative, or avoidance change?
5. Operational Result	What happened to quality, safety, service, productivity, execution, or another relevant result?
6. Developmental Result	What can the person now do, decide, solve, or teach that was not previously demonstrated?
7. What Happened Next	Did the change persist when the leader stepped away? Did the person reproduce the capability with others?

CASE-STUDY GATE

Do not ask whether a leader “used Growth-Centered Leadership.” Ask what the leader did, what ownership remained with the employee, what happened operationally, what capability changed, and what happened next.

Situation -> Leader Behavior -> Employee Response -> Operational Result -> Developmental Result -> Compass Analysis -> What Happened Next

This keeps the framework falsifiable. Case studies are not illustrations designed to prove the theory; they are observations capable of strengthening, revising, or disproving parts of it.