

The Invisible Handshake: What You Leave Behind Is How You Really Led

Exercise for Leadership Growth

Part 1: Introduction & Line of Thought

In Chapter 8 of *When You Are Not in the Room*, we explored what happens during leadership transitions—and more specifically, what **doesn't** get passed on.

Most handovers are transactional. The system is explained, the reports reviewed, the processes described. But the **leadership of the team**—the dynamics, the potential, the tensions, the long-term ambitions—those are almost never part of the conversation. As a result, leadership continuity becomes a gamble. Success relies on the incoming leader to **rediscover what was already known but never shared**.

This isn't always intentional. It's often because even experienced leaders haven't been taught to think this way. Handover protocols prioritize efficiency. But leadership is about people, systems, memory, and meaning—not just operations.

If you weren't given this level of insight when stepping into your role, you're not alone. But that's exactly why this matters. Because just as you may have felt the cost of receiving an incomplete handover, you now have the chance to make sure no one else does.

And here's the real insight: **Even if you're not preparing to leave**, going through this exercise will reveal how much of your leadership is actually built to last.

Use this tool to prepare for a future handover—but also to test your own clarity, legacy, and readiness. You'll be surprised by what it shows you.

Alternative uses:

- Ask your team members – if they have people reporting into them, to fill the exercise, and then review it with them.
- After finishing it, ask yourself: Even if I am not leaving soon, how can I get the missing pieces so that it signals I am getting better at it? Make a plan, and get to work.
- Review it with your Coach, Mentor or with someone who knows you and your team.



Part 2: The Exercise – Preparing the Invisible Handshake

The Two Handovers: What Usually Happens vs. What Should

What Gets Transferred	What Rarely Does (but Should)
Org chart and roles	Team dynamics and emotional history
Budget and KPIs	Unfinished initiatives and tensions
Key processes	Promising ideas not yet realized
Systems and tools	Trust dynamics and informal influence
Performance reviews	Talent potential and readiness gaps

The Handover Readiness Questions

As you go through each, ask: Could I confidently hand this over today?

1. Do I know which team members are ready for more—and who is quietly stuck?
2. Can I describe the informal power dynamics that influence trust or tension?
3. What promising ideas or experiments are in motion but not yet secured?
4. Where is the culture strongest—and where is it silently eroding?
5. Who on my team is most at risk of disengaging? Who is closest to stepping up?
6. Are there cross-functional relationships this team depends on that are fragile?
7. What stories, habits, or patterns should the next leader be aware of to avoid regression?

→ **Optional Exercise:** Write a one-page “handover memo” to your hypothetical successor.

Don’t explain the systems—explain the **story**. What matters most, and what they should protect, repair, or pursue?



Part 3: Reflection – Why This Matters Even If You’re Staying

Preparing a real handover forces you to ask one of the most powerful leadership questions:
If I disappeared tomorrow, what would continue—and what would fall apart?

This is not about stepping away. It’s about stepping up. Great leaders don’t just drive performance; they design continuity. They shape systems that outlast their presence.

Even if you’re not going anywhere, this exercise reveals what still depends too much on you. That’s a signal—not of your competence, but of what still needs enabling, embedding, or letting go.

The invisible handshake is more than a gesture of leadership continuity. It’s a test of what you’ve built—and a prompt to build better now.

What have I learned from this exercise?

“Leaders should be in a constant state of evolution, if you aren’t learning, you are not growing”

