Leadership IN Practice

A LEADERSHIP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

THE ONE-ON-ONE FIELD GUIDE

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A 12-Session Leadership Development Experience

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WELCOME

Welcome to Leadership in Practice

The One-on-One Field Guide helps leaders turn one-on-one meetings into meaningful conversations that strengthen relationships and develop people. This guide extends that purpose into a facilitated conversation for book clubs, study clubs, and leadership teams.

The sessions follow the book's journey: why one-on-ones matter, the conversation framework, the rhythm of regular, quarterly, and annual conversations, and the leader's own reflection. The guide is industry-neutral and uses composite situations rather than real cases.

> **A COMPLETE, INDEPENDENT RESOURCE**
>
> This guide can be used by professional book clubs, workplace leadership teams, study clubs, peer circles, or individuals. Participants should have their own copy of The One-on-One Field Guide. Its sister guide, Faith in Practice, follows the same twelve session titles for groups who would also like to explore each theme through Scripture. The two guides are written to complement one another, and neither is required to use the other.

A Suggested 55 to 60 Minute Gathering

- Opening Reflection and facilitator prompt: 5 minutes
- Part One, Conversation Starters: 10 minutes
- Part Two, Go Deeper: 20 minutes
- Part Three, Group Exercise: 15 minutes
- Part Four, From Insight to Action: 5 to 10 minutes

Facilitator Notes

- Invite voluntary participation. Never require anyone to share private employee information, health concerns, or identifiable performance details.
- Use situations as composites for learning, not as evidence about a real person. Follow your organization's confidentiality and escalation policies.
- Do not attempt every question. Choose the ones most relevant to your group.
- Close by naming a small, observable action and revisit it at the next gathering.

TWELVE SESSIONS

Session Map

#	SESSION	STAGE	READING	GROUP EXERCISE	OUR DATE
01	The Conversation Is the Investment	Why	pp. 10–24	Map Your Team's Conversations	
02	Know the Person, Not Just the Position	Why	pp. 25–39, 123	Person Before Position Profile	
03	Prepare Before You Speak	Prepare	pp. 40–48, 82–84	The Three-Minute Preparation Pause	
04	Listen First, and Listen Again	Listen	pp. 25–39, 82–92	The Two-Round Listening Exchange	
05	Affirm What Is Real	Affirm	pp. 25–39, 82–92	From Vague to Specific	
06	Address the Growth Edge With Grace	Address	pp. 49–65, 82–92	The Growth-Edge Conversation	
07	Strengths, Strain, and Role Fit	Whole Person	pp. 25–48, 123	The Strengths and Strain Map	
08	When the Conversation Cannot Wait	Flex	pp. 112–121	The Flex Conversation Path	
09	Reflect Honestly After the Meeting	Reflect	pp. 66–92	The Post-Conversation Debrief	
10	Turn Quarterly Check-Ins Into Development	Quarterly	pp. 107–110, 124–128	The Quarterly Evidence Timeline	
11	Evaluate the Whole Year, Not Just the Score	Annual	pp. 111, 123–128	The Balanced Annual Conversation	
12	The Leader You Are Becoming	Leader	pp. 94–106, 130–131	My Leadership Covenant	

> *Reading pages refer to the print edition of The One-on-One Field Guide. Bring your copy of the field guide and a pen to every session.*

LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

A Leadership Discussion Guide for Book Clubs and Study Clubs Reading The One-on-One Field Guide: Meaningful Conversations, Stronger Relationships & Intentional Leadership

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SESSION 01 / WHY ONE-ON-ONES MATTER

The Conversation Is the Investment

FROM THE BOOK

Welcome, pp. 10–12, and Chapter One, "The Conversation You Didn't Know You Needed," pp. 15–24.

SESSION PURPOSE

Examine how leaders allocate conversation time, recognize which kinds of conversations are missing, and protect one recurring conversation focused on a person's growth.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

Why do our calendars protect operational meetings more fiercely than conversations that develop people?

Opening Reflection

Most teams receive plenty of conversation. They hear updates, instructions, reminders, and corrections every week. What many people rarely receive is a protected conversation about their own growth, goals, and experience at work. That gap is easy to miss because the team keeps functioning. Work gets done. But over time, people begin to wonder whether anyone notices them beyond their output. A one-on-one is not one more meeting. It is the place where a person learns that their development matters enough to earn a spot on the calendar.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Think of a leader who invested regular time in your growth. What did those conversations make possible for you?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite brief responses from several participants; avoid requiring anyone to disclose a private situation.

- What was the most meaningful one-on-one conversation you ever had with a leader?
- How often do you currently meet one-on-one with the people you lead?
- Which meetings on your calendar are the hardest to move, and why?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A manager has weekly status updates but cannot remember the last time a team member spoke about growth. The team performs adequately, yet turnover surprises the manager.

- Why might the manager have been surprised by the turnover?
- What is the difference between a status update and a development conversation?
- What does a person conclude when their growth conversations are the first to be postponed?
- How does Chapter One describe the conversation a team member did not know they needed?
- What makes development conversations feel optional to busy leaders?
- How might regular one-on-ones affect retention, trust, and engagement?
- What would need to change in your schedule to protect these conversations?
- What would you say to the manager in the situation above about the next month?

Part Three | Group Exercise

MAP YOUR TEAM'S CONVERSATIONS · Suggested time: 15 minutes

List the people you lead. For each person, consider the conversations they have received from you in the past month and place them in the columns below. Then identify whose growth has had no protected space.

UPDATES	CORRECTIONS	RECOGNITION	DEVELOPMENT
Information and status	*Feedback on what to change*	*What went well*	*Their growth and goals*

Discussion: Which column was fullest for your team? Which was emptiest? What does that pattern suggest?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Participants may feel discouraged by an empty development column. Normalize the finding; most leaders discover the same pattern the first time they look.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Protect one recurring conversation on the calendar and tell the person why it matters.

THE PERSON WHOSE CONVERSATION I WILL PROTECT:

MY NEXT STEP AND DATE:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice which conversations get postponed first.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Protect 20 minutes of uninterrupted listening.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Return to the Welcome and ask what "worth protecting" means in your context.

CLOSING QUESTION

What would my team say I protect most fiercely on my calendar?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 2: KNOW THE PERSON, NOT JUST THE POSITION

Next time, we will explore how well leaders really know the people they lead. As you move through the week, notice when you substitute assumptions for curiosity.

SESSION 02 / WHY ONE-ON-ONES MATTER

Know the Person, Not Just the Position

FROM THE BOOK

Chapter Two, "Seeing the Person Behind the Performance," pp. 25–39, and "The Deeper Questions," p. 123.

SESSION PURPOSE

Distinguish knowing someone's output from knowing the person, practice curiosity about motivators and preferences, and identify one assumption to verify.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

How much of what we call "knowing our team" is really knowing only their output?

Opening Reflection

Leaders often know a great deal about what their team members produce. We know who is fast, who is thorough, and who needs reminders. But that knowledge can stop at performance. It may tell us little about what motivates someone, how they prefer to communicate, or what they hope to become.

When leaders coach everyone the same way, some people thrive while others quietly disengage. The difference is rarely effort. It is fit between how the leader leads and how the person works best. Knowing the person behind the performance allows leaders to adjust their approach rather than assume one style works for everyone.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *What is one thing about how you work best that most of your leaders never asked about?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Keep this round light; participants can share about themselves rather than their teams.

- Do you prefer quiet preparation or quick collaboration?
- How do you like to receive feedback: in writing, in person, or in the moment?
- What motivates you most at work?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

Two employees hold identical titles. One values autonomy and quiet preparation; the other thrives on frequent collaboration. Their manager gives both identical coaching and wonders why one disengages.

- Why might identical coaching produce such different results?
- What do you know about each person you lead beyond their performance?
- How does "Seeing the Person Behind the Performance" challenge the way you evaluate people?
- What is the difference between knowing someone and making assumptions about them?
- How can a leader learn about people without intruding on their privacy?
- Which of the deeper questions on page 123 would be most valuable to ask your team?
- How might your own preferences shape how you lead others, for better or worse?
- How would you adjust your coaching for each employee in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

PERSON BEFORE POSITION PROFILE · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Choose one person you lead. Using only appropriate, voluntarily shared information, complete the columns below. Then identify one assumption you need to verify.

MOTIVATORS	COMMUNICATION	STRENGTHS	GROWTH HOPES
What energizes them	*How they prefer to connect*	*What you have observed*	*Where they want to go*

Discussion: How many boxes were you able to fill with confidence? Which ones were based on assumption?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Remind participants not to record or share private details. The goal is to notice gaps in understanding, not to build a file on anyone.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Ask one team member what kind of support helps them do their best work.

THE PERSON I WANT TO KNOW BETTER:

THE ASSUMPTION I WILL VERIFY, AND WHEN:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice when you substitute assumptions for curiosity.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Ask one open question and resist filling the silence.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit the profile prompts and update what you actually know.

CLOSING QUESTION

If I had to describe each person on my team without mentioning their job, how much could I say?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 3: PREPARE BEFORE YOU SPEAK

Next time, we will explore how preparation shapes a conversation before it begins. As you move through the week, notice how hurry changes your tone.

SESSION 03 / THE FRAMEWORK: PREPARE

Prepare Before You Speak

FROM THE BOOK

Chapter Three, "When Excellence Becomes Exhaustion," pp. 40–48, and "Prepare," pp. 82–84.

SESSION PURPOSE

Expand preparation beyond the agenda to include the leader's emotional state and motives, and practice a short preparation pause before one-on-ones.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What changes when preparation includes our motives and emotional state, not merely our agenda?

Opening Reflection

Most leaders prepare for a one-on-one by reviewing notes or an agenda. That matters. But what we carry into the room often shapes the conversation more than what we planned to say. A frustrating meeting, a tight deadline, or lingering irritation can change our tone before we realize it. The people we lead notice. They may share less, defend more, or leave without raising what they came to discuss. A brief pause before the conversation can help a leader set aside what does not belong in the room and arrive ready to listen.

Facilitator opening prompt: *What do you usually do in the five minutes before a one-on-one?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to describe their real habits, not their ideal ones.

- How much time do you typically have between meetings?
- Have you ever walked into a conversation still frustrated from the last one?
- What helps you reset between demanding moments?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A supervisor enters a one-on-one irritated by an earlier meeting. The employee begins to share a concern, but the supervisor rushes into correction.

- What might the employee have learned from that interaction about future conversations?
- How does a leader's emotional state affect what others are willing to share?
- What does the "Prepare" stage on pages 82–84 add to your current preparation?
- How does Chapter Three's warning about excellence becoming exhaustion relate to how leaders show up?
- What is the difference between preparing an agenda and preparing yourself?
- What could the supervisor have done in the two minutes before the meeting?
- How might you repair a conversation that started poorly?
- What one question could you bring to every one-on-one?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE THREE-MINUTE PREPARATION PAUSE · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Think of an upcoming one-on-one. Complete the three columns below. Then write one opening question and one follow-up commitment you will honor.

WHAT I KNOW	WHAT I NEED TO LEARN	WHAT I MUST SET ASIDE
Facts and recent context	*Questions to ask*	*Emotions or assumptions*

Discussion: Which column was hardest to complete honestly? What did you discover in the third column?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Encourage participants to keep the pause short and repeatable. Three honest minutes are more useful than an elaborate routine that never happens.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Before your next meeting, identify the feeling you must not carry into the room.

THE CONVERSATION I WILL PREPARE FOR:

MY OPENING QUESTION:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice how hurry changes your tone.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Arrive with one question instead of a speech.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit the Prepare stage and the reflection questions in Chapter Three.

CLOSING QUESTION

What am I bringing into the room that the other person did not ask for?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 4: LISTEN FIRST, AND LISTEN AGAIN

Next time, we will explore the two kinds of listening that make one-on-ones meaningful. As you move through the week, notice the moment you begin rehearsing your reply.

SESSION 04 / THE FRAMEWORK: LISTEN

Listen First, and Listen Again

FROM THE BOOK

Chapter Two, pp. 25–39, and "Listen First" and "Listen Again," pp. 82–92.

SESSION PURPOSE

Practice listening for both facts and feelings before responding, and learn to listen a second time after feedback to understand how it landed.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

Can a person be technically heard while still feeling that the outcome was decided before they entered?

Opening Reflection

Many leaders believe they listen well. They let people talk, nod, and wait their turn. But listening is more than waiting. Real listening means holding back our first interpretation long enough to understand the other person's full account.

The book describes two kinds of listening. Listening first helps a leader understand before responding. Listening again, especially after difficult feedback, helps a leader learn how their words were received. Both are easy to skip. Both change the quality of the conversation.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *When was the last time you realized, after a conversation, that you had misunderstood what someone meant?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite honest, even humorous, examples.

- Who is the best listener you know, and what do they do differently?
- What is your biggest listening habit to break?
- How can you tell when someone is really listening to you?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

An employee explains a missed deadline. The leader interrupts to prescribe a fix. Later, the leader learns that a broken approval process affected the whole team.

- What did the leader miss by interrupting?
- Why is it so tempting to move quickly to solutions?
- What is the difference between listening for facts and listening for feelings?
- How does "Listen Again" change the way a leader follows up after feedback?
- What signals tell you someone does not feel heard, even if they stopped talking?
- How can a leader listen without giving up the responsibility to decide?
- What role does summarizing play in showing someone they were heard?
- How might the leader in the situation above repair the conversation?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE TWO-ROUND LISTENING EXCHANGE · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Practice in pairs. One person shares a current work challenge. The listener first listens for facts and feelings, then offers one piece of feedback, then listens again for how it landed. Switch roles and debrief.

ROUND ONE	FEEDBACK	ROUND TWO
Listen for facts and feelings	*Offer one observation*	*Listen for how it landed*

Discussion: What did you learn in round two that you would have missed if the conversation had ended after the feedback?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Encourage listeners to summarize before responding. Remind pairs to keep shared details confidential.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: In your next one-on-one, summarize what you heard before offering advice.

THE CONVERSATION WHERE I WILL PRACTICE LISTENING TWICE:

MY NEXT STEP AND DATE:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice the moment you begin rehearsing your reply.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Ask, "What have I not understood yet?"

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit Listen First and Listen Again in the framework section of the book.

CLOSING QUESTION

How often do the people I lead walk away believing the outcome was decided before they spoke?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 5: AFFIRM WHAT IS REAL

Next time, we will explore the difference between generic praise and meaningful recognition. As you move through the week, notice contributions that are quiet rather than visible.

SESSION 05 / THE FRAMEWORK: AFFIRM

Affirm What Is Real

FROM THE BOOK

Chapter Two, pp. 25–39, and "Affirm Genuinely," pp. 82–92.

SESSION PURPOSE

Distinguish generic praise from specific recognition, and practice affirmation that helps people understand their strengths and see a path to growth.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What is the difference between praise that feels pleasant and recognition that helps someone understand their gifts?

Opening Reflection

Many leaders offer praise regularly. "Great job." "Thanks for all you do." These words are kind, but they rarely tell a person what they did well or why it mattered. Over time, generic praise can begin to sound automatic. Genuine affirmation is specific. It names an action, the strength it revealed, and the difference it made. That kind of recognition helps people see their own gifts more clearly, and it often points toward where they could grow next.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *What is the most meaningful recognition you ever received at work? What made it stick?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to share examples from their own careers.

- How do you prefer to be recognized: publicly, privately, or in writing?
- What is one compliment you received years ago that you still remember?
- Do you find it easier to give praise or to receive it?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A high-performing employee receives generic praise every month but never hears which contribution is distinctive or how it could open a path to growth.

- What might this employee be missing despite regular praise?
- Why do leaders default to general compliments?
- What makes recognition feel sincere rather than routine?
- How does "Affirm Genuinely" describe the difference between flattery and affirmation?
- Which contributions on your team tend to go unnoticed because they are quiet?
- How can recognition point toward a development opportunity?
- What is the risk of praising personality rather than behavior?
- What specific recognition would help the employee in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

FROM VAGUE TO SPECIFIC · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Write down three vague compliments you have given recently. Rewrite each one using the columns below.

ACTION	STRENGTH REVEALED	IMPACT	OPPORTUNITY
What they did	*The gift behind it*	*Who or what it helped*	*Where it could lead*

Discussion: How did the rewritten version change the meaning of the compliment?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Encourage participants to focus on observable behavior rather than personality labels such as "you're so organized."

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Name one observed strength to a colleague with a concrete example.

THE PERSON I WILL RECOGNIZE:

THE SPECIFIC STRENGTH AND EXAMPLE I WILL NAME:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice contributions that are quiet rather than visible.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Offer recognition linked to an observed behavior, not a personality label.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit Affirm Genuinely and Chapter Two's examples of recognizing the person.

CLOSING QUESTION

Does my recognition help people understand their gifts, or does it simply make the moment pleasant?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 6: ADDRESS THE GROWTH EDGE WITH GRACE

Next time, we will explore how to address growth areas with clarity and respect. As you move through the week, notice whether you confuse discomfort with harm.

SESSION 06 / THE FRAMEWORK: ADDRESS WITH GRACE

Address the Growth Edge With Grace

FROM THE BOOK

Chapter Four, "Grace Is Not the Absence of Accountability," pp. 49–65, and "Address With Grace," pp. 82–92.

SESSION PURPOSE

Recognize how avoiding feedback harms both the person and the team, and practice a growth-edge conversation that is clear, respectful, and focused on a path forward.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

When does our desire to be kind become avoidance that leaves someone without the clarity they deserve?

Opening Reflection

Many leaders avoid difficult feedback because they care about the person. They worry about morale, the relationship, or how the conversation will feel. But silence is not neutral. When a problem goes unaddressed, the person loses the chance to improve, and the rest of the team often absorbs the cost. Addressing a growth edge with grace means naming what is happening clearly while protecting the person's dignity. It is not harshness, and it is not avoidance. It is a respectful conversation that creates a path toward improvement.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Think of feedback you wish someone had given you sooner. What would it have changed?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to reflect on both giving and receiving feedback.

- Do you tend to address issues quickly or wait?
- What makes feedback easier for you to hear?
- What is one piece of feedback that genuinely helped your career?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A valued team member repeatedly misses a critical handoff. The manager says nothing to preserve morale. Frustration grows among coworkers.

- What is the real cost of the manager's silence?
- How does avoiding feedback affect the rest of the team?
- Why are leaders sometimes more reluctant to correct high performers?
- How does Chapter Four describe the relationship between grace and accountability?
- What is the difference between discomfort and harm in a feedback conversation?
- How can a leader open a growth conversation without labels or assumptions?
- What support should accompany a request for change?
- How would you open the conversation with the team member in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE GROWTH-EDGE CONVERSATION · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Draft a growth-edge conversation for a real or hypothetical situation using the structure below. Then rehearse it with a partner, avoiding labels and assumptions.

OBSERVED FACT	IMPACT	INVITATION	NEXT STEP
What happened	*Why it matters*	*Ask for their view*	*Shared plan and support*

Discussion: What did your partner notice about your tone? Where did you slip into labels or assumptions?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Encourage hypothetical examples when real situations involve confidential personnel matters. The goal is practicing the structure, not resolving a specific case.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Name one postponed conversation and prepare a clear opening sentence.

ONE CONVERSATION I HAVE POSTPONED:

MY CLEAR OPENING SENTENCE:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice whether you confuse discomfort with harm.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Give one piece of specific feedback with respect and clarity.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit Address With Grace and the accountability examples in Chapter Four.

CLOSING QUESTION

Who on my team is waiting for clarity I have been too comfortable to give?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 7: STRENGTHS, STRAIN, AND ROLE FIT

Next time, we will explore how strengths and role design affect performance. As you move through the week, notice where a performance issue may also be a design issue.

SESSION 07 / SEEING THE WHOLE PERSON

Strengths, Strain, and Role Fit

FROM THE BOOK

Chapter Two, pp. 25–39; Chapter Three, pp. 40–48; and "The Deeper Questions," p. 123.

SESSION PURPOSE

Distinguish skill gaps from structural mismatches, map the tasks that energize and drain people, and test one reasonable adjustment without lowering essential standards.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

Are we coaching a person to grow, or asking them to succeed by constantly working against how they naturally operate?

Opening Reflection

When performance drops, leaders often look first at effort or motivation. Sometimes that is the issue. But sometimes the problem is fit. A person whose strengths lie in focus and structure may struggle in a role full of constant interruptions, no matter how hard they try. Understanding strengths and strain does not mean excusing poor performance or abandoning essential duties. It means looking honestly at both the person and the role. Small adjustments can sometimes unlock significant improvement, and clear conversations can reveal when a different fit is needed.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Have you ever been in a role that worked against your natural strengths? How did it affect your performance?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to share about their own work preferences.

- What kind of work gives you energy?
- What kind of work drains you, even when you do it well?
- Have you ever seen someone flourish after a change in role?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

An organized, steady employee is moved into a high-interruption role. Results fall. The manager assumes the employee lacks motivation without examining the role design.

- What evidence would help the manager distinguish motivation from fit?
- How can strain show up in performance before anyone names it?
- What warning signs of strain does Chapter Three describe?
- Which role requirements are truly essential, and which could be adjusted?
- How do you avoid treating preferences as excuses for essential duties?
- What questions from page 123 could uncover a role-fit issue?
- What is the risk of making premature conclusions about fit?
- What adjustment might the manager in the situation above test first?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE STRENGTHS AND STRAIN MAP · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Choose one person you lead, or yourself. Complete the columns below. Then identify what evidence you still need before drawing conclusions.

ENERGIZING	DRAINING	ESSENTIAL	ADJUSTMENTS
Tasks that bring out their best	*Demands that wear them down*	*Non-negotiable role requirements*	*Reasonable changes to test*

Discussion: What did the map reveal that a performance rating alone would miss?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Remind participants that this exercise is for reflection, not for making personnel decisions in the room. Any real role change should follow organizational processes.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Ask a team member which task gives energy and which drains it.

THE PERSON I WILL ASK ABOUT ENERGY AND STRAIN:

ONE ADJUSTMENT OR SUPPORT I MIGHT TEST:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice where a performance issue may also be a design issue.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Test one reasonable role adjustment or support.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit Chapter Two's discussion of strengths and Chapter Three's warning signs of strain.

CLOSING QUESTION

Is this person struggling to grow, or struggling against a role that was never designed for how they work?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 8: WHEN THE CONVERSATION CANNOT WAIT

Next time, we will explore when a leader should step outside the regular meeting rhythm. As you move through the week, notice changes in the people around you without turning observation into diagnosis.

SESSION 08 / THE RHYTHM: FLEX CONVERSATIONS

When the Conversation Cannot Wait

FROM THE BOOK

"Flex Conversations," p. 112; "Knowing When to Bring In Others," p. 114; and "When a Conversation Becomes a Crisis," pp. 115–121.

SESSION PURPOSE

Recognize when a timely conversation matters more than the scheduled one, practice respectful check-ins, and understand when to involve additional support.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What should prompt a leader to make space outside the planned meeting cadence?

Opening Reflection

A regular meeting rhythm is valuable. But life does not always wait for the next scheduled conversation. When someone's energy, engagement, or behavior changes noticeably, waiting weeks to check in may send the message that no one noticed. Flex conversations require judgment. Leaders need to care without intruding, notice without diagnosing, and know when a situation requires support beyond their role. The book offers guidance on when to reach out, how to bring in others, and what to do when a conversation becomes a crisis.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *Has a leader ever checked in with you at exactly the right moment? What did they do?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Encourage participants to avoid sharing private details about others.

- How do you usually notice when someone on your team is struggling?
- What makes you hesitate to check in outside a scheduled meeting?
- What makes a check-in feel caring rather than intrusive?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A usually engaged employee becomes withdrawn after a personal setback. The next quarterly meeting is weeks away. Their leader notices but hesitates to intrude.

- What are the risks of waiting until the next scheduled meeting?
- What are the risks of reaching out too forcefully?
- How can a leader ask permission before offering support?
- According to "Knowing When to Bring In Others," when should a leader involve additional help?
- What resources and protocols exist in your organization for supporting employees?
- How do you notice change without assuming you know its cause?
- What should and should not be documented after a flex conversation?
- What might a respectful first sentence sound like for the leader in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE FLEX CONVERSATION PATH · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Design a simple decision path for timely check-ins using the steps below. Then discuss what your organization's protocols require at each stage.

OBSERVE	ASK PERMISSION	LISTEN	CONNECT
Notice the change	*"Would it help to talk?"*	*Without diagnosing*	*Appropriate support and protocols*

Discussion: Which step feels most natural to you? Which feels most uncertain?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Leaders are not counselors. Emphasize appropriate boundaries, privacy, and referral to professional or organizational resources when needed. Follow applicable confidentiality and escalation policies.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Initiate a timely, respectful check-in where a change in behavior warrants care.

ONE RESOURCE OR PROTOCOL I NEED TO KNOW BETTER:

MY NEXT STEP AND DATE:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice changes without turning observation into diagnosis.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Ask, "Would it help to talk, or would another kind of support be better?"

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit Flex Conversations and Knowing When to Bring In Others.

CLOSING QUESTION

Would the people I lead expect me to notice if something changed?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 9: REFLECT HONESTLY AFTER THE MEETING

Next time, we will explore what leaders learn when they review a conversation afterward. As you move through the week, notice whether you remember your promises as clearly as theirs.

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SESSION 09 / THE FRAMEWORK: REFLECT HONESTLY

Reflect Honestly After the Meeting

FROM THE BOOK

Chapter Five, "The Conversation Doesn't End When the Meeting Does," pp. 66–81, and "Reflect Honestly," pp. 82–92.

SESSION PURPOSE

Build the habit of a brief debrief after important conversations, separate facts from interpretations, and track the leader's own follow-through.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

If the meeting felt productive, what important learning might still be missed afterward?

Opening Reflection

A conversation can feel successful in the moment and still leave important work undone. The leader may remember the employee's commitments clearly but forget the support they promised. A concern may have been raised but never fully explored. Honest reflection after a meeting helps close that gap. A few minutes spent reviewing what happened, what surprised you, and what you committed to can turn a good conversation into a lasting one. Reflection is not self-criticism. It is a practical habit that improves follow-through and builds trust.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *After your last important conversation, how much time did you spend reflecting on it?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to share their current habits honestly.

- Do you take notes during or after one-on-ones?
- What happens to those notes afterward?
- Have you ever forgotten a promise you made in a meeting?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A manager feels satisfied after a difficult one-on-one. Reviewing notes later reveals the employee agreed to a goal but received no promised support.

- What might the employee conclude if the promised support never arrives?
- Why do leaders often remember others' commitments more clearly than their own?
- How does Chapter Five describe what happens after the meeting ends?
- What is the difference between a fact and an interpretation in your notes?
- How can a brief debrief improve the next conversation?
- What gets in the way of reflecting after meetings?
- How could you build reflection into your schedule without adding significant time?
- What should the manager in the situation above do now?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE POST-CONVERSATION DEBRIEF · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Think of a recent one-on-one. Complete the debrief below, separating facts from interpretations as you go.

SURPRISE	STRENGTH OBSERVED	MY FOLLOW-THROUGH	WHAT I WOULD CHANGE
What I did not expect	*What they did well*	*What I promised, and when*	*My next adjustment*

Discussion: What did your debrief reveal that you had not noticed during the conversation?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Encourage participants to be as specific about their own commitments as they are about the other person's.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Reserve five minutes after one conversation for honest reflection.

THE CONVERSATION I WILL DEBRIEF THIS WEEK:

ONE FOLLOW-THROUGH ACTION AND DATE:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice whether you remember your promises as clearly as theirs.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Write one specific follow-through action and date.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit Chapter Five and the Reflect Honestly stage.

CLOSING QUESTION

What would my team say about how reliably I follow through on what I promise in our conversations?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 10: TURN QUARTERLY CHECK-INS INTO DEVELOPMENT

Next time, we will explore what becomes visible when conversations happen over time. As you move through the week, notice patterns instead of isolated incidents.

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SESSION 10 / THE RHYTHM: QUARTERLY CHECK-INS

Turn Quarterly Check-Ins Into Development

FROM THE BOOK

"How to Use This Field Guide," p. 107; "A Year of Intentional Leadership," pp. 108–110; and "Sample Conversation Pages," pp. 124–128.

SESSION PURPOSE

Use quarterly conversations to see patterns over time, recognize steady progress, and agree on one development goal with clear leader support.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

What becomes visible over ninety days that is invisible in a single meeting?

Opening Reflection

In any single conversation, it is easy to focus on whatever happened most recently. A recent mistake can overshadow months of steady growth. A recent success can hide a recurring barrier. Quarterly check-ins offer a wider view.

When leaders look across ninety days, patterns emerge. Progress becomes visible. Barriers that keep returning become clear. And the leader's own reliability becomes part of the picture. A quarterly conversation is not just a review of the employee. It is a review of the partnership.

Facilitator opening prompt: *Think of someone you lead. How have they grown over the past three months?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to think about long-term growth they have witnessed.

- What is the most significant growth you have seen in someone you lead?
- How long did that growth take?
- What helped you notice it?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A team member has improved steadily, but their leader focuses only on the most recent mistake at quarterly review. The person leaves discouraged and unclear about progress.

- Why do recent events often overshadow long-term progress?
- What evidence would give the leader a fuller picture of the quarter?
- How does "A Year of Intentional Leadership" structure conversations over time?
- What should a leader review about their own commitments during a quarterly check-in?
- How can a quarterly conversation feel developmental rather than evaluative?
- What makes a development goal measurable and meaningful?
- How can the sample conversation pages help a leader prepare?
- How could the leader in the situation above have structured the review differently?

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Part Three | Group Exercise

THE QUARTERLY EVIDENCE TIMELINE · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Choose one person you lead. Look back over the past quarter and complete the columns below. Include your own obligations as a leader.

WINS	BARRIERS	COMMITMENTS	NEXT QUARTER
Progress and successes	*What keeps returning*	*Kept and missed, theirs and mine*	*One experiment to try*

Discussion: What did the timeline show that your memory of the most recent weeks did not?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Encourage participants to list their own missed commitments honestly. A quarterly review is a shared accountability conversation.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Review one person's progress using evidence from more than the last two weeks.

THE PERSON WHOSE QUARTER I WILL REVIEW:

ONE DEVELOPMENT GOAL AND THE SUPPORT I WILL OFFER:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice patterns instead of isolated incidents.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Agree on one measurable development goal and the support you will provide.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit A Year of Intentional Leadership and the sample conversation pages.

CLOSING QUESTION

When I review someone's quarter, am I seeing the whole picture or only the last two weeks?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 11: EVALUATE THE WHOLE YEAR, NOT JUST THE SCORE

Next time, we will explore how to honor results without reducing people to ratings. As you move through the week, notice the story your metrics do not tell.

SESSION 11 / THE RHYTHM: ANNUAL EVALUATION

Evaluate the Whole Year, Not Just the Score

FROM THE BOOK

"The Annual Evaluation," p. 111; "The Deeper Questions," p. 123; and "Sample Conversation Pages," pp. 124–128.

SESSION PURPOSE

Design an annual conversation that honors outcomes while also considering growth, role fit, unmet needs, and mutual accountability.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

How do we honor results without reducing a person to a performance rating?

Opening Reflection

Annual evaluations matter. Organizations need to measure results, and people deserve clear feedback about their performance. But a rating alone can flatten a year of work into a single number. It may miss significant growth, hidden strain, or contributions that no metric captures. A balanced annual conversation holds standards while looking at the whole picture. It considers outcomes and growth, strengths and role fit, unmet needs and mutual accountability. When done well, it becomes not only a review of the past year but a plan for the next one.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *What is one thing about your work last year that a numerical rating would never capture?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite participants to share their own experiences with annual reviews.

- What was your best annual review experience? Your worst?
- What made the difference between the two?
- What do you wish leaders asked during annual evaluations?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

An employee meets targets but reports chronic strain. Another shows marked growth despite a difficult quarter. A numerical review alone misses both stories.

- What would a numbers-only review conclude about each employee?
- What would a balanced conversation reveal instead?
- How does "The Annual Evaluation" on page 111 broaden the purpose of the review?
- Which deeper questions on page 123 belong in an annual conversation?
- How can a leader acknowledge strain without lowering expectations?
- What does mutual accountability look like in an annual review?
- How should the employee's own perspective shape development goals?
- How would you approach each employee in the situation above?

Part Three | Group Exercise

THE BALANCED ANNUAL CONVERSATION · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Design an annual conversation for one person using the columns below. Then identify one question you will ask before finalizing any development goals.

OUTCOMES	GROWTH	ROLE FIT AND NEEDS	NEXT YEAR
Results and contributions	*How they developed*	*Strengths, strain, and support*	*Development commitment, theirs and mine*

Discussion: How does this structure change the tone of an annual evaluation?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Remind participants to follow their organization's formal evaluation requirements. This framework supports the conversation; it does not replace required documentation.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Prepare one annual-review question about what the role has demanded from the person.

THE PERSON WHOSE ANNUAL CONVERSATION I WILL PREPARE FOR:

MY QUESTION ABOUT WHAT THE ROLE HAS DEMANDED:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice the story your metrics do not tell.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Ask for the employee's view before finalizing development goals.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit The Annual Evaluation and the deeper questions on page 123.

CLOSING QUESTION

If my evaluation were the only record of this person's year, what important truth would be missing?

LOOKING AHEAD | SESSION 12: THE LEADER YOU ARE BECOMING

Next time, we will turn the reflection toward ourselves. As you move through the week, notice which part of the one-on-one framework you resist most.

SESSION 12 / THE LEADER'S OWN REFLECTION

The Leader You Are Becoming

FROM THE BOOK

"The Evaluation That Evaluated Me," pp. 94–102; "Your Own Reflection," pp. 103–106; and Closing, pp. 130–131.

SESSION PURPOSE

Reflect on what a year of developing others has revealed about your own leadership, and commit to a personal leadership covenant with accountability.

THE LEADERSHIP TENSION

After a year of developing others, what has the process revealed about your own leadership?

Opening Reflection

Leaders often focus on developing others. We track their goals, review their progress, and offer feedback. But the process of leading people also reveals a great deal about us: our patience, our consistency, our blind spots, and our willingness to change. The book describes an evaluation that ended up evaluating the leader. That experience is common. When we invest in others honestly, we eventually discover what we need to change ourselves. The most effective leaders do not just ask for feedback. They act on it.

> **Facilitator opening prompt:** *What is one thing you have learned about yourself through leading others this year?*

Part One | Conversation Starters

Suggested time: 10 minutes. Invite every participant to share at least one response if they are comfortable.

- What is one thing you are doing differently since this group began?
- Which session has stayed with you the most?
- What feedback have you received recently that surprised you?

Part Two | Go Deeper

Suggested time: 20 minutes. Choose four to six questions according to group size and discussion flow.

A SITUATION TO CONSIDER

A leader can list every employee goal but struggles to name one behavior they personally changed in response to feedback.

- Why is it easier to track others' growth than our own?
- What does "The Evaluation That Evaluated Me" suggest about how leaders grow?
- Which part of the framework do you practice most naturally? Which do you resist?
- How do you invite honest feedback from the people you lead?
- What behavior have you changed in response to feedback this year?
- What would make your one-on-ones more useful from the other person's perspective?
- Who could hold you accountable to your own development?
- What would you encourage the leader in the situation above to do first?

Part Three | Group Exercise

MY LEADERSHIP COVENANT · Suggested time: 15 minutes

Write a personal leadership covenant describing how you will practice each part of the framework. Then choose one accountability partner and a date to revisit it.

PREPARE AND LISTEN	AFFIRM AND ADDRESS	FOLLOW THROUGH	REVIEW MY IMPACT
How I will show up	*How I will speak*	*How I will keep my word*	*How I will seek feedback*

Discussion: Read one line of your covenant aloud. What support would help you keep it?

FACILITATOR NOTE

Consider inviting the group to schedule a follow-up gathering in 90 days to revisit covenants and share what has changed.

Part Four | From Insight to Action

Suggested time: 5–10 minutes. Suggested commitment: Schedule your own reflection on the quality of your leadership investment.

MY ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER:

THE DATE I WILL REVISIT MY COVENANT:

A Reflection to Carry Into Your Week

SOMETHING TO NOTICE

Notice which part of the framework you resist most.

SOMETHING TO PRACTICE

Ask someone you lead what would make your one-on-ones more useful.

SOMETHING TO REVISIT

Revisit Your Own Reflection and your commitments from Session 1.

CLOSING QUESTION

What has leading others this year asked me to change in myself, and have I changed it?

The Practice

CONTINUES

Return to your leadership covenant and choose a date to evaluate what has changed in the experience of the people you lead.

Consider gathering again in 90 days to share what has changed and celebrate the progress you have made together.

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