SURVIVAL MODE™
STYLE ASSESSMENT



LEADERSHIP IS HARD

Pressure comes with the job.

Expectations stack up. Decisions carry consequences. People need answers. And sometimes responsibility sits squarely on you. When that happens, capable leaders reach for what they know.

Strategies that have worked before. Ways of thinking, acting, and leading that help us protect the outcome and keep things moving.

Like a default. A reflex. Those defaults aren't failures. They're human.

But when pressure becomes the operating system, our range narrows. We can keep producing results while quietly limiting something harder to see:

human capacity.

That's what this assessment is designed to help you notice.

HOW TO USE THIS ASSESSMENT

The statements on the next page reflect some of the ways leaders think, act, and respond when the pressure is on.

- Answer quickly. Don't overthink it.
- Check anything that sounds like you—even if it's only sometimes.
- Answer based on what you actually do when things get hard, not what you think you should do.
- When you're finished, total each section and keep going to explore what those patterns may reveal.

This isn't about finding what's wrong with your leadership. It's about recognizing what you reach for under pressure—and expanding the choices available to you.

You don't need to agree with everything. You do need to be honest.

Ready? Let's see what shows up when the pressure is on.

© 2026 My Coach Next Door, LLC | CULTURATE ADVISORY

WHEN THE PRESSURE IS ON

- ☐ 1. It's usually faster if I just do it myself.
- ☐ 2. I consider "good enough" to be fighting words.
- ☐ 3. I've fixed something that probably didn't need fixing.
- ☐ 4. I've redone someone else's work without telling them.
- ☐ 5. If you're going to do something, do it right the first time.
- ☐ 6. The process is the process. That's why we have a process.
- ☐ 7. I've said "That's how we've always done it" and actually meant it.
- ☐ 8. If there's a better way to do something, I'm probably going to tell you.
- ☐ 9. I can let people do it their way. As long as their way works like my way.
- ☐ 10. I've said "Let me show you" when nobody actually asked me to show them.
- ☐ 11. I don't micromanage. I just like to know exactly what's happening. At all times.
- ☐ 12. Sometimes I take something back because explaining it again feels like more work.

SECTION 1 TOTAL ☐ /12

- ☐ 1. Ask for forgiveness, not permission.
- ☐ 2. "Just checking in" is my catch-phrase.
- ☐ 3. When Plan A doesn't work, try Plan A again.
- ☐ 4. "Whenever you get a chance" means "right now."
- ☐ 5. My idea of patience is counting to three… quickly.
- ☐ 6. I've followed up on something I just followed up on.
- ☐ 7. I've said "I've got it" because I always do. I've got it.
- ☐ 8. I'm really good at taking breaks. I took one just last year.
- ☐ 9. If I burn the candle at both ends, I just light more candles.
- ☐ 10. If I'm not juggling at least three things at once, am I even working?
- ☐ 11. If someone pushes back, it probably means I didn't push hard enough.
- ☐ 12. I know everything can't be a priority. But this is a priority. And so is that. And that too.

SECTION 2 TOTAL ☐ /12

- ☐ 1. "Because I said so" is a complete sentence.
- ☐ 2. My approval process has an approval process.
- ☐ 3. I trust but verify. And then verify what I trusted.
- ☐ 4. Sure, I delegate. But terms and conditions apply.
- ☐ 5. We can agree to disagree after you agree with me.
- ☐ 6. I like to give people choices. Usually two: yes or yes.
- ☐ 7. I like to get input, as long as your input agrees with me.
- ☐ 8. I don't assume the worst. I just plan for it. Every single time.
- ☐ 9. I don't need to give them feedback. They know what they did.
- ☐ 10. "Optional" is the name of a magical unicorn that flies with pigs.
- ☐ 11. I don't need to be in control. I just need to know who is. Preferably me.
- ☐ 12. I wait for the meeting after the meeting to say what I should have said in the meeting.

SECTION 3 TOTAL ☐ /12

© 2026 My Coach Next Door, LLC | CULTURATE ADVISORY

SURVIVAL MODE

Survival Mode:
A work state of self-protection, just showing up, and just pushing through that takes hold when the pressure is on and the stakes are high.

Survival Mode is a **natural response to pressure.**

It isn't a failure.
It's human.

Under pressure, capable leaders tend to reach for familiar strategies—ways of working that create certainty, drive outcomes, or regain control.

- **Fix** — stepping in to solve, correct, perfect, or take over
- **Force** — pushing for movement through pressure, urgency, or demands
- **Fear** — relying on power, consequence, compliance, or control

These strategies aren't wrong. Each can deliver results.
The problem is when we stop choosing them and start defaulting to them.

Over time, that can create a gap between what people are capable of and what the environment allows them to contribute.

That's where human capacity gets locked away or remains undiscovered.

Your assessment gives you a glimpse of the patterns you may reach for under pressure.

Section 1 is most closely associated with FIX, Section 2 with FORCE, and Section 3 with FEAR—but human behavior is rarely that tidy. These patterns can overlap, and most of us have access to all three.

On the next page, explore how FIX, FORCE, and FEAR show up in leadership—where they can help, and where they can become limiting when we default to them.



© 2026 My Coach Next Door, LLC | CULTURATE ADVISORY

HOW WE LEAD UNDER PRESSURE

When pressure becomes the operating system, leaders often default to three familiar strategies designed to create certainty, drive outcomes, or regain control.

DEFAULTS	FIX	FORCE	FEAR
DRIVEN BY	*Perfection* *rescuing, correcting, optimizing, and a fixation on getting things right*	*Pressure* *urgency, intensity, activity, and a need for constant motion*	*Power* *control, compliance, consequence, and a need to avoid losing*
HELPS WHEN	• *Mistakes are risky* • *Precision matters* • *Consistency is critical*	• *Direction is unclear* • *Resistance is building* • *Quick decisions are a must*	• *Safety is at risk* • *Chaos is in control* • *Boundaries need enforcing*
BENEFITS	• *Raises the standard* • *Solves problems quickly* • *Creates consistency*	• *Gets things moving* • *Drives results* • *Builds momentum*	• *Creates clear boundaries* • *Protects what matters* • *Restores order*
SOUNDS LIKE	• *"I'll just do it."* • *"Do it right or not at all."* • *"Perfect practice makes perfect."*	• *"Do more with less."* • *"I need this yesterday."* • *"Pressure is a privilege."*	• *"This is not optional."* • *"My way or the highway."* • *"We have policies for a reason."*
SHOWS UP AS	• *Solving every problem.* • *A 3rd (or 4th) round of edits.* • *Over-promising solutions.*	• *Daily progress checks.* • *Filling every open spot on the calendar.* • *Assigning just one more thing.*	• *Sending the policy as a reminder.* • *CC'ing everyone's boss* • *Requiring additional approval.*
SIDE-EFFECTS	• *Stagnation* • *Dependency* • *Imitation*	• *Burnout* • *Resistance* • *Apathy*	• *Silence* • *Compliance* • *Self-protection*
CONSIDER THIS	*They say practice makes perfect* ***But chasing perfection can also be a toxic practice***	*They say pressure creates diamonds* ***But pressure also cracks diamonds***	*With great power comes great responsibility* ***But the greatest power is knowing when to turn it off***

These moves aren't good or bad.
Until they work or don't work.
The problem is when we default without intention.

© 2026 My Coach Next Door, LLC | CULTURATE ADVISORY

WHAT NOW?

You've identified the patterns. Now comes the choice.

FIX. FORCE. FEAR.

They're available when you need them.
But they don't have to be the only moves available when the pressure is on.

The goal isn't to eliminate your defaults.

It's to expand your range.

You've identified the patterns. Now comes the choice.

That starts by noticing when a familiar response is serving the moment—and when it's time to choose something different.

THERE IS ANOTHER MODE.

Grace Mode is what becomes possible when leaders stop reacting and start choosing.

- It doesn't remove pressure. It changes how leaders respond inside it.
- Where Survival Mode manages risk, Grace Mode builds capacity—in people, in teams, and in the work itself.

That opens three intentional shifts:

- **Fix → Forge** – choose progress; building, experimenting, growing
- **Force → Flow** – choose presence; shifting, adjusting, adapting
- **Fear → Free** – choose purpose; sharing, trusting, empowering

These aren't replacements for FIX, FORCE, and FEAR.
They're additional choices.

Because leadership isn't about finding one right way to respond.
It's about developing the range to recognize what the moment needs—and choosing intentionally.

READY TO EXPLORE WHAT ALL THIS COULD LOOK LIKE?

I work with leaders and teams to turn these ideas into practice through:

- Leadership coaching
- Team and culture work
- Keynotes and workshops

If you're ready to move beyond recognizing the pattern and start expanding what's possible, let's connect.

Alan Derek Utley
Founder & Chief Advisor
Culturate Advisory

alan@alanderekutley.com
alanderekutley.com
210-880-5520

ACTIVATE GRACE MODE™

© 2026 My Coach Next Door, LLC | CULTURATE ADVISORY

Alan Derek Utley
Founder & Chief Advisor
CULTURATE ADVISORY
Operated under My Coach Next Door, LLC
(DBA CULTURATE ADVISORY)

210-880-5520
alan@alanderekutley.com
alanderekutley.com