BECOMING A LEADER: TRAINING AIDS

A Practical Blueprint for Safety, Credibility, and Influence in the First 90 Days

Appendix A — The Laws (Field Reference)

These are meant to be used as teaching or field aides and are summarized learnings.

Law 1: The Answers Are in the Field

The people doing the work understand the risks, realities, and solutions better than anyone removed from the work ever will.

Why This Law Exists:
Many serious failures I've investigated shared a similar condition: leaders made decisions about the work without truly understanding the work.

Not because they didn't care.
Because they stopped listening.

Distance creates assumptions. Titles create filters. Dashboards create false confidence. The field cuts through all of that.

The work never lies — but leaders must be willing to go where the truth lives.

The best solutions are sustainable — not just a flash in the pan.

Sustainability requires engagement, and engagement requires respect.

This law is about honoring the experience, judgment, and informal knowledge that existed in the operation long before you arrived — and using it, not replacing it.

What This Looks Like When It's Working:

- √   Leaders spend time where the work actually happens.
- √   Questions are asked before conclusions are drawn.
- √   Team members speak freely without fear of being "corrected."
- √   Near-misses surface early instead of being buried.
- √   Solutions feel practical, not theoretical.

When this law is alive, problems are smaller when they're found — because they're found early.

Common Failure Modes:

1. Leaders rely solely on reports, metrics, or secondhand summaries.
2. Field conversations are rushed, performative, or agenda driven.
3. "We already know" replaces curiosity.
4. Feedback is filtered through multiple layers before it reaches decision-makers.
5. People stop offering insights because they don't believe anything will change.

When this law is violated, the organization becomes blind — slowly at first, then suddenly.

Quick Self-Check:

- When was the last time I observed the work without trying to fix it?
- Do people speak differently when I'm present?
- Have I dismissed field feedback because it didn't match my expectations?
- Am I more comfortable with summaries than firsthand experience?

If the answers feel uncomfortable, that's the signal — not the problem.

Field Reminder
You don't need to have the answers.
You need to know where to find them.

Law 2: Master the Message

If leaders cannot clearly articulate what matters, the organization will fill in the gaps — usually incorrectly.

Why This Law Exists:
Confusion is rarely caused by a lack of communication. It is caused by inconsistent communication.

Most organizations do not suffer from silence — they suffer from noise. Too many priorities. Too many slogans. Too many messages competing for attention.

When leaders fail to master the message, people default to what feels safest: old habits, local priorities, and personal interpretations.

Clarity does not come from saying more.
It comes from saying the right things — repeatedly, consistently, and without contradiction.

What This Looks Like When It's Working

- √ Leaders can explain priorities in plain language without notes.
- √ Messages remain consistent across meetings, shifts, and locations.
- √ People understand not just what to do, but why it matters.
- √ Frontline supervisors can repeat the message without reinterpreting it.
- √ Decisions align naturally with stated priorities.

When the message is mastered, alignment happens with less effort — because people are not guessing.

Common Failure Modes

1. Leaders change the message when pressure increases.
2. Different leaders emphasize different priorities.
3. New initiatives are layered on without retiring old ones.
4. Slogans replace explanations.
5. People nod in meetings but act differently in the field.

When this law is violated, effort increases while results stagnate.

Quick Self-Check
Ask yourself:

- Can I state our top priorities in one or two sentences?
- Would supervisors describe the message the same way I do?
- Have I added new direction without removing old noise?
- Do my decisions reinforce the message — or contradict it?

If clarity requires constant correction, the message is not yet mastered.

Field Reminder
People don't resist clarity.
They resist confusion.

Law 3: Plan on Drift

If leaders do not actively manage standards, performance will drift — not because people are careless, but because drift is human.

Why This Law Exists:
Drift does not announce itself.

It happens slowly. Inconspicuously. One small compromise at a time. Rarely from bad intent — usually from convenience, time constraint, or familiarity.

People adapt to what works today, especially when it gets results without immediate consequences. Over time, those adaptations become the new normal.

Leaders who assume yesterday's standards will hold tomorrow misunderstand how work evolves.

Drift is not a failure of character.
It is a failure of anticipation.

What This Looks Like When It's Working

- √ Leaders routinely revisit standards, even when nothing appears wrong.
- √ "The way we've always done it" is examined, not defended.
- √ Small deviations are addressed early, before they become habits.
- √ Supervisors feel supported when they hold the line.
- √ Standards feel alive — not theoretical or outdated.

When drift is managed well, corrections are small and unemotional.

Common Failure Modes

1. Leaders wait for an incident before intervening.
2. Informal shortcuts subtly replace formal procedures.
3. Small deviations are tolerated because "nothing bad happened."
4. Supervisors stop enforcing standards to avoid friction.
5. Leaders confuse familiarity with safety.

When this law is ignored, drift compounds — until it shows up as an incident, not a discussion.

Quick Self-Check

- When was the last time we revisited this standard?

- Have small deviations become routine?
- Do supervisors feel backed when they enforce expectations?
- Am I reacting to drift — or expecting it?

If drift surprises you, it hasn't been monitored closely enough.

Field Reminder
Drift is predictable.
Surprises are optional.

Law 4: Walk the Talk

What leaders do (action or inactions) carries more weight than what they say.

Why This Law Exists:
People do not listen to leaders as much as they watch them.

They watch what leaders tolerate when schedules slip. They watch how leaders behave when production demand rises. They watch whether standards hold when it's inconvenient.

Words create expectations.
Behavior confirms — or destroys — them.

When leadership behavior and messaging misalign, people don't get confused.
They get instructed.

What This Looks Like When It's Working

- √ Leaders follow the same rules they expect others to follow.
- √ Safety standards apply equally, regardless of title or urgency.
- √ Leaders model preparation, patience, and discipline.
- √ Inconsistencies are acknowledged, not ignored.
- √ Supervisors feel protected when they enforce standards upward.

When leaders walk the talk, enforcement becomes easier — because credibility is already in place.

Common Failure Modes

1. Leaders bypass controls "just this once."
2. Urgency is used to justify exceptions.
3. Leaders expect grace for themselves but discipline for others.
4. Misalignment is explained away instead of corrected.
5. People stop calling out inconsistencies because it feels unsafe.

When this law is violated, trust erodes faster than any metric can detect.

Quick Self-Check

- Would I accept this behavior from someone on my team?
- Do my actions reinforce — or undermine — stated expectations?

- Have I asked others to do something I wouldn't do myself?
- When I make an exception, do I explain it — or hide it?

If you need to justify behavior privately, others are already noticing it publicly.

Field Reminder
Culture doesn't follow titles.
It follows behavior.

Law 5: Reward What You Want Repeated

What leaders recognize, reinforce, or reward will be repeated — whether they intend it or not.

Why This Law Exists:
People learn faster from consequences than from instructions.

Formal reward systems matter — but informal signals matter more. A comment made in passing.
A story retold in a meeting. A behavior publicly acknowledged — or ignored.

These moments teach people what really counts.

Leaders often believe they are rewarding outcomes, when they are rewarding behaviors that produced those outcomes — including shortcuts, risk-taking, or silence.

What gets repeated is rarely accidental.

What This Looks Like When It's Working

- √   Leaders authentically recognize behaviors, not just results.
- √   Safe decisions are acknowledged, even when they slow progress.
- √   Speaking up is visibly valued.
- √   Effort aligned with standards is noticed.
- √   Supervisors reinforce the same behaviors leaders do.

When this law is applied well, people don't guess what matters — they see it.

Common Failure Modes

1. Only outcomes are rewarded, regardless of how they were achieved.
2. Speed is praised while risk exposure is ignored.
3. Quiet compliance is valued over thoughtful challenge.
4. Recognition is inconsistent or performative.
5. Leaders unintentionally reward workarounds.

When this law is ignored, organizations optimize for the wrong things — efficiently.

Quick Self-Check

- What behaviors get the most recognition here?
- Do rewards align with stated values?
- Have I praised results without understanding how they were achieved?
- Do people feel safe slowing down to do things right?

If the fastest path is always the most celebrated, risk will follow it.

Field Reminder
People repeat what works —
especially when leadership applauds it.

Law 6: How, Not Why

Leaders who focus on how work is done create improvement; leaders who fixate on why mistakes happened often create defensiveness.

Why This Law Exists:
"Why" questions feel logical to leaders — but they often feel accusatory to the people doing the work.

Why did you do it this way?
Why didn't you follow the procedure?
Why didn't you stop?

Even when well-intended, "why" puts people on the defensive. Once that happens, learning shuts down.

"How" keeps the conversation open.

How did the work unfold?
How did conditions influence decisions?
How did the system shape behavior?

"How" invites explanation.
"Why" invites justification.

Leaders who want truth need conversations that feel safe enough to tell it.

What This Looks Like When It's Working

- √   Leaders ask how decisions were made, not why they were wrong.
- √   Conversations focus on conditions, not character.
- √   People describe real work, not ideal work.
- √   System gaps surface without blame.
- √   Improvements target processes, not people.

When "how" leads the conversation, learning accelerates.

Common Failure Modes

1. Leaders default to "why" under pressure.
2. Conversations turn into interrogations.
3. People give rehearsed answers instead of real ones.

4. Root causes are oversimplified.
5. Blame is mistaken for accountability.

When this law is violated, people protect themselves instead of improving the work.

Quick Self-Check

- Do my questions invite explanation or defense?
- Am I learning about the system — or judging the individual?
- Would I answer my own questions honestly in their position?

- Do people share details freely, or cautiously?

If answers feel guarded, the questions may be the problem.

Field Reminder
If you want better answers,
ask better questions.

Law 7: Tight Tolerances

Leaders must be clear and consistent about what is acceptable — because wide tolerances create unpredictable risk.

Why This Law Exists:
People operate within the space leadership allows.

When tolerances are unclear, individuals fill the gaps with personal judgment. Some will be conservative. Others will push limits. Over time, variation increases — and with it, exposure.

Most serious incidents don't occur because standards didn't exist.
They occur because standards were flexible, inconsistently enforced, or the tolerance for risk was negotiated.

Tight tolerances don't remove judgment.
They define where judgment is allowed — and where it isn't.

What This Looks Like When It's Working

- √   Expectations are clear, specific, and repeatable.
- √   Non-negotiables are explicitly stated.
- √   Supervisors enforce standards consistently.
- √   Exceptions are rare, intentional, and explained.
- √   People don't guess where the line is.

When tolerances are tight, decision-making becomes easier — not harder.

Common Failure Modes

1. Leaders avoid clarity to prevent conflict.
2. Standards vary by shift, supervisor, or urgency.
3. "Use your best judgment" replaces clear limits.
4. Exceptions become routine.
5. Leaders confuse flexibility with control.

When this law is ignored, variability becomes normalized — and risk follows it.

Quick Self-Check

- Can people clearly describe what is non-negotiable?
- Are standards enforced consistently under pressure?
- Do supervisors feel supported when they hold the line?

- Have exceptions slowly become expectations?

If people debate where the line is, it hasn't been drawn clearly enough.

Field Reminder
Clarity reduces risk.
Ambiguity multiplies it.

Law 8: Don't Let a Metric Drive the Culture

Metrics should inform leadership decisions — not define what the organization values.

Why This Law Exists:
Metrics are powerful tools.

They reveal trends.
They highlight gaps.
They help leaders prioritize.

But metrics are also blunt instruments.

Metrics are often like a rearview mirror.

They tell you where you've been. They help you confirm trends. They can warn you about patterns worth paying attention to.

But you don't navigate by staring into the rearview mirror. You glance at it — then you look forward.

Leaders who try to steer an organization by metrics alone are driving while looking backward.

When numbers become the goal instead of the signal, behavior shifts. People optimize what is measured — not what matters. Over time, this creates blind spots that dashboards cannot detect.

Leaders don't lose control because they track metrics. They lose control when metrics start driving behavior instead of guiding judgment.

What This Looks Like When It's Working

- √   Metrics are used as conversation starters, not scorecards.
- √   Leaders ask what the numbers mean, not just what they show.
- √   Lagging indicators are balanced with leading behaviors.
- √   Field insight is used to validate data — or challenge it.
- √   Leaders remain skeptical of "perfect" numbers.

When metrics are used well, they sharpen thinking instead of narrowing it.

Common Failure Modes

1.   Numbers become proxies for leadership effectiveness.
2.   Targets are hit while risk increases.

3. People manage the metric instead of the work.
4. Data integrity is assumed instead of verified.
5. Leaders stop asking uncomfortable questions.

When this law is ignored, success can look good — right up until it doesn't.

Quick Self-Check

- Do metrics inform decisions — or replace them?
- Would I trust this number without field context?
- Are people rewarded for hitting targets, regardless of how?
- Have "good numbers" ever delayed uncomfortable action?

If the numbers look flawless, curiosity should increase — not decrease.

Field Reminder
Metrics tell you what happened —
leadership decides what matters next.

Appendix B — Tools for the First 90 Days

These are summarized tools, to be used as teaching or field aides.

Tool 1: The First 90 Days <u>Listening</u> Tips

Purpose
The first 90 days are not for proving competence. They are for earning context.

<u>Listening</u> is not passive. It is active information gathering.

Actions speak louder than words — and early actions tell people exactly what kind of leader you are.

This tool exists to slow leaders down just enough to prevent well-intended mistakes that damage trust, credibility, and long-term influence.

What to Listen For
Listen for patterns, not one-off comments.

Pay attention to:
- Where work actually deviates from procedure
- Which rules are treated as optional — and why
- Where people feel pressure to cut corners
- What problems are routinely worked around instead of fixed
- Which risks people talk about behind the scenes, not publicly

Who to Listen to First
Sequence matters.

Start with:
- Frontline workers doing the work daily
- First-line supervisors closest to decision points
- Informal leaders people seek out for advice

This reflects a fundamental safety principle reinforced throughout this book:
The answers are in the field.

Delay:
- High-level opinions removed from day-to-day work
- People eager to "brief" you immediately
- Polished narratives without operational proximity

What Not to Overreact To
Do not rush to fix:
- Long-standing complaints without context
- One person's version of a conflict
- Isolated incidents without pattern
- Metrics without field validation

Signals That Trust Is Forming
You'll know listening is working when:
- Stories include uncertainty
- People admit what doesn't work
- Conversations continue after meetings
- Silence is replaced by detail

Signals That Silence Is Masking Risk
Be cautious if:
- Everyone agrees too quickly
- Answers feel rehearsed
- Language sounds scripted
- Field conversations change with hierarchy present

Leader Guardrails
- Ask before directing
- Take notes more than you speak
- Validate experience without validating conclusions
- Avoid public commitments to fixes
- Be transparent about why you're listening

Field Reminder
The fastest way to lose credibility is to act before you understand.

Tool 2: The Signal vs. Noise Filter

Purpose

Early leadership failure rarely comes from inaction. It comes from reacting to the wrong things.

This tool exists to help leaders separate what feels urgent from what is important.

What Is a Signal?

A signal is information that:
- Repeats across people, shifts, or locations
- Appears in both data and informal conversation
- Persists over time
- Influences decision-making in the field
- Increases exposure if left unaddressed

Signals point to system conditions, not isolated behavior.

What Is Noise?

Noise is information that:
- Is emotionally charged but isolated
- Comes from a single source
- Appears suddenly without context
- Disappears quickly
- Demands urgency without evidence

Common Noise Traps
- The loudest voice in the room
- Issues framed as emergencies
- Metrics without context
- Ready-made solutions
- "*This has always been a problem*" claims

Important Exception

Some issues should <u>never</u> be filtered out as noise.

If information suggests serious safety risk, fraud, ethical breaches, or legal exposure, treat it as a priority — even if it comes from a single source.

In those cases:
- Pause judgment
- Engage appropriate leadership, safety, or HR support
- Verify quickly and discreetly

Questions That Separate Signal from Noise
- Have I heard this more than once?
- Does it show up in multiple places?

- Can the field describe it independently?
- What happens if I don't act immediately?

Leader Guardrails
- Do not reward urgency alone
- Avoid solving unstable problems
- Resist premature signaling
- Use time as a filter

Field Reminder
Not every problem is your problem — and not every problem is a priority.

Tool 3: See It / Solve It / Fix It

Purpose
Most leadership mistakes don't come from bad intent. They come from skipping steps.

This tool exists to slow the sequence, not the work.

Step 1: See It
"See It" means observing work as it is actually done — not as it is described in procedures, presentations, or reports.

This step focuses on:
- How work truly flows
- Where people adapt
- What decisions are made under pressure
- Which safeguards are relied on — and which are bypassed

At this stage:
- Ask questions
- Take notes
- Resist interpretation
- Avoid proposing fixes

Step 2: Solve It
"Solve It" is about:
- Identifying system contributors
- Understanding trade-offs people are making
- Separating symptoms from root conditions
- Exploring options without committing prematurely

This step requires collaboration — especially with the people closest to the work.

Step 3: Fix It
Effective fixes:
- Are realistic under actual operating conditions

- Reduce exposure, not just paperwork
- Are understood by the people who must use them
- Are checked after implementation to confirm they worked

Common Failure Modes
- Skipping "See It"
- Treating the first idea as the best idea
- Implementing without testing assumptions
- Declaring success without verification

Leader Guardrails
- Never fix what you don't fully understand
- Don't confuse urgency with clarity
- Involve the field early
- Verify fixes in real conditions

Field Reminder
If you fix the wrong problem, the right problem doesn't disappear.

Tool 4: Credibility — Deposits vs. Withdrawals

Purpose
Credibility is not granted by title. It functions more like a bank account.

Every interaction makes either a deposit or a withdrawal. Early leadership failure often happens when leaders overdraft credibility before realizing it was finite.

This tool exists to help leaders build balance first and spend credibility intentionally when it matters.

What Builds Credibility (Deposits)
Credibility deposits are made when leaders:
- Listen before acting
- Follow through on commitments
- Admit uncertainty honestly
- Apply standards consistently
- Protect people who speak up

Deposits compound without much fanfare. People rarely announce when trust is growing — they demonstrate it.

What Spends Credibility (Withdrawals)
Credibility withdrawals occur when leaders:
- Overreact early
- Announce fixes before understanding the problem
- Reverse decisions without explanation
- Apply standards inconsistently
- Use authority to win instead of influence

Some withdrawals are necessary — but unplanned withdrawals add up fast.

Early Overdraft Traps
New leaders often overdraft credibility by:
- Making visible changes too quickly
- "Sending messages" to establish authority
- Fixing problems that aren't fully understood
- Aligning publicly before listening privately
- Trying to prove value instead of earning trust

Early restraint can feel uncomfortable — but overdrafts are harder to recover from.

When Withdrawals Are Worth It
There are moments when withdrawing credibility is the right move:
- When safety is immediately at risk

- When ethics or integrity are compromised
- When tolerances must be enforced to prevent drift
- When inaction would signal acceptance

In these moments, leaders should spend decisively, then rebuild deliberately.

Leader Guardrails
- Treat credibility as finite
- Make deposits before major withdrawals
- Never spend what you haven't earned
- Rebuild balance after difficult decisions

Field Reminder

You can recover from a bad decision.
You don't recover easily from a credibility overdraft.

Tool 5: Choosing the Right Early Wins

Purpose
Early wins matter — but the wrong early wins cost more than they give.

This tool exists to help leaders choose early wins that build trust, reduce exposure, reinforce culture, and don't require credibility overdrafts to sustain.

What Makes an Early Win the Right Win
The best early wins:
- Reduce risk without increasing complexity
- Improve clarity or consistency
- Remove friction people have learned to work around
- Align with existing values
- Can be sustained without constant oversight

Where to Look for the Best Early Wins
Strong early wins are often found in:
- Known irritants everyone tolerates
- Redundant work that adds effort without adding value
- Informal workarounds people rely on
- Handoff points between roles or departments
- Small fixes people have softly requested

Example: Redundant Work as an Early Win
A Risk Manager on my team showed me three monthly reports required by three different corporate entities. Each contained the same information, just formatted differently.

I had him pick his preferred format and send that version to all three entities the next month. I proactively contacted each group's leader to explain the intent and invited feedback.

No one objected. The Risk Manager gained hours back every month — and trust was built.

Early Wins to Avoid
Avoid wins that:
- Exist mainly for visibility
- Require authority to maintain
- Disrupt routines before trust forms
- Solve leadership discomfort instead of field problems

Leader Guardrails
- Choose substance over visibility
- Favor stability over novelty

- Let early wins support culture
- Remember restraint is noticed

Field Reminder
The best early wins don't feel like wins — they feel like relief.

Appendix C – Leadership Field Guide

(Visit www.positivesafetycoaching.com for additional printable resources)

Fundamentals of Safety
• The answers are in the field
• Master the message
• Plan on drift
• Walk the talk
• Reward what you want repeated
• How, not why
• Tight tolerances
• Don't let a metric drive the culture

First 90 Days Anchors
• Listen before acting
• Earn context before credibility
• Observe real work
• Resist early overreaction
• Build deposits before withdrawals

Decision Filters
• Signal or noise?
• Safety, ethics, or legal risk? (never ignore)
• Do I understand the system?
• Will this hold up in six months?
• Is restraint the better move right now?

How to Act
• See It: observe real work
• Solve It: identify system causes
• Fix It: implement and verify
• Don't skip steps

Credibility Reminder
• Every action is a deposit or withdrawal
• Spend credibility where it protects people
• Avoid overdrafts
• Rebuild deliberately after hard calls

Early Wins Check

• Reduces risk
• Removes friction
• Sustainable without authority
• Respects existing culture
• Feels obvious in hindsight

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