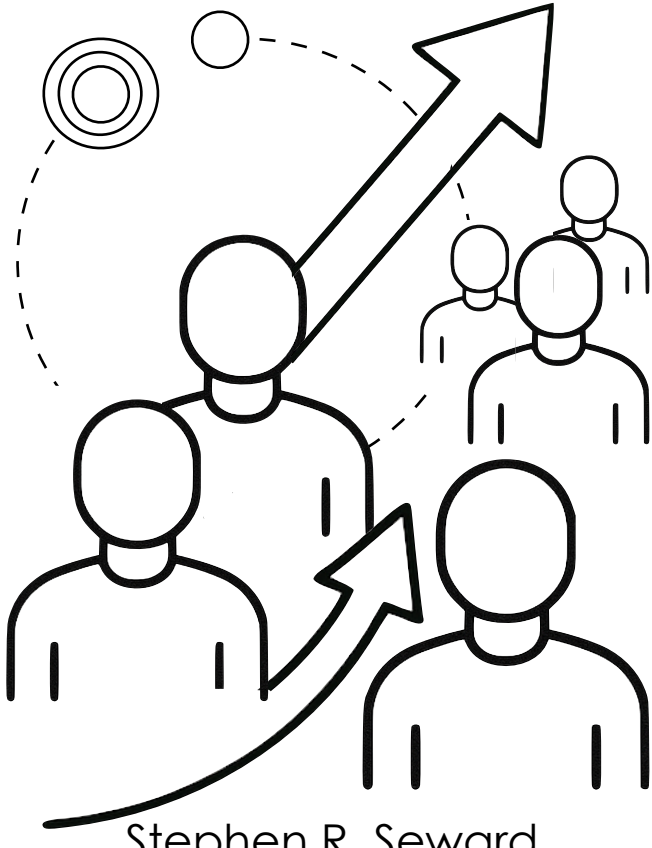
# INTENTIONAL INTERACTIONS

leveraging coaching & mentoring
to align people, processes, & practices



Stephen R. Seward

A Leadership Guidebook

# **INTENTIONAL** INTERACTIONS

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# INTRODUCTION

## SUMMARY

The guidebook explores leadership as an evolving mindset and intentional practice, not a title or position. There is an emphasis on self-awareness, trust-building, accountability, and clarity of vision. There are four key leadership pillars—Leadership Identity, Shared Accountability, Clear Vision, and Embracing Conflict

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Leadership is about responsibility, not authority.
- Leadership is a journey of continuous evolution, not a destination.
- Leadership requires listening intentionally, not just give directions.
- Leadership depends on visibility and trust, not titles.

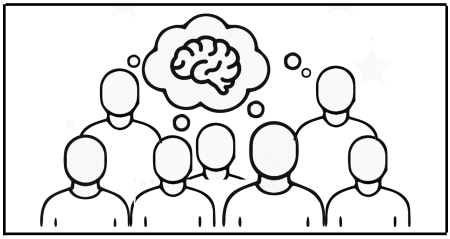
## KEY POINTS

1. Leadership Identity
   - Leadership is shaped through actions, relationships, choices, and integrity.
   - It's an ongoing process grounded in self-awareness, purpose, and authenticity.
   - Effective leaders are vulnerable, reflective, and trustworthy, balancing strength with humility.
2. Shared Ownership & Accountability
   - Success stems from shared accountability, not top-down command.
   - Create safe yet challenging environments that foster open dialogue and encourage risk-taking.
   - Leaders must model accountability, embrace feedback, and support collaborative growth.
3. Clear Vision
   - A compelling vision answers:
     - Where are we going?
     - Why does it matter?
     - How will we get there?
     - What are the possible barriers?
   - Vision should be co-created with teams to boost ownership and alignment.
   - A clear vision inspires commitment, not just compliance.
4. Embrace & Talk About Conflict
   - False harmony masks real issues; it appears to be an agreement, but actually breeds tension.
   - Psychological safety is essential for surfacing and resolving disagreements constructively.
   - Leaders must encourage cognitive conflict, allowing diverse viewpoints and healthy tension.

# SETTING THE FOUNDATION
## Knowing Yourself & Your People

### SUMMARY
This section provides a guide for leaders seeking to build a strong foundation within their teams or organizations. There is an emphasis on the importance of self-awareness and understanding one's leadership identity and style, outlining different approaches and their characteristics. The guidebook explores the need for shared ownership and accountability and provides strategies for balancing support and responsibility within a team; also addressing the inevitable presence of resistance to change, Finally, the section explores the role influencers within teams and provides a framework for leaders to identify and strategically engage with them to align with a shared vision.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Leadership requires self-awareness.
- Leadership is built on fostering relational trust, communicating a clear vision, and aligning resources.
- Leadership is a delicate balance of empowerment and expectations.
- Leadership requires listening with intention and knowing when to address resistance and how to avoid false harmony.



### KEY POINTS
1. Knowing Yourself as a Leader:
   - Leaders must know and understand their core values and the values of the team(s)
   - Effective leadership requires knowing your leadership style while remaining adaptable.
2. Setting a Clear Vision:
   - Define a clear picture of where the team or organization is going.
   - Communicate this vision and their part in achieving it.
   - Create a sense of "urgency"
3. Accountability & Support:
   - A strong team needs both people owning their responsibilities (accountability) and feeling supported (support).
   - Be clear about roles and expectations, communicate openly, check in regularly, celebrate wins, address problems, and provide resources.
4. Change & Resistance
   - Change can be Technical (straightforward) or Adaptive (dependent on the people).
   - People resist change openly (refusing) or subtly (procrastinating).
   - False harmony happens when people agree outwardly but hide their true feelings to avoid conflict.
5. Identifying Influencers:
   - People have a big impact on others' opinions and actions.
   - Leaders should identify overt and covert influences because they significantly shape team dynamics.

# RELATIONAL TRUST

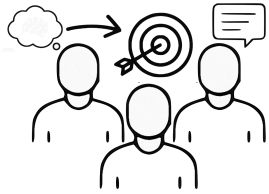
## Listening & Responding with Intention

### SUMMARY

This section explores the importance of relational trust in fostering effective teamwork and organizational culture. It distinguishes between cooperation and collaboration, highlighting the intentional behaviors and processes needed for a collaborative environment. At its heart, Relational Trust is about how adults interact within an organization. These interactions create the culture, influencing whether people feel trust, connection, and a shared identity. The guidebook outlines five pillars of leadership, emphasizing self-assessment and feedback, and addresses the need to create a sense of urgency for change while managing productive conflict within teams.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Leadership requires defining success criteria for what the desired peak performance looks, sounds, and feels like.
- Leadership focuses on intentional and purposeful interactions.
- Leadership requires listening to how people are feeling and responding with empathy, respect, and clarity.



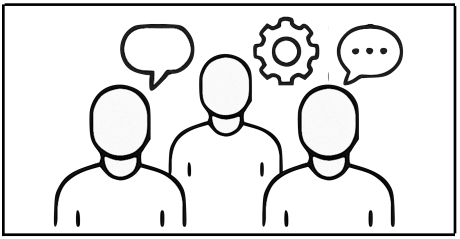
### KEY POINTS

1. Cooperating & Collaborating:
   - Moving from cooperating to collaborating requires cultural shifts.
     - Fixing weaknesses to building on strengths.
     - Working alone to learning together.
     - Having isolated values to having a shared identity.
     - Saying "this is my job" to realizing roles depend on each other.
     - Egos and "I" to trust and "we".
     - Avoiding conflict to directly resolving it.
     - Rushing to solutions to having intentional dialogue and decision-making.
     - Listening just to reply to listening to understand.
2. Three C's:
   - Connection- People need to feel like they belong and are linked to others
   - Competency- People need to feel they can do things successfully and build skills
   - Control- People need to feel they have some influence or power over their work and outcomes
3. Productive Conflict
   - Affective Conflict- based on personal feelings and often targets people, leading to poor decisions and decreased trust.
   - Cognitive Conflict is about discussing ideas, perspectives, values, and assumptions to reach a shared understanding.

# COACHING & MENTORING
## Skills & Dispositions

### SUMMARY
This section provides a guide to effective coaching and mentoring, emphasizing the importance of understanding individual and team dispositions and behaviors. The guidebook highlights the significance of awareness in oneself and others, including various listening habits and the impact of non-verbal communication. The section introduces a coaching continuum with four levels—Reflective Coaching, Responsive Coaching, Restorative Coaching, and Redirective Coaching—as a framework for fostering self-directed learning and shared ownership.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Leadership requires knowing the people, being present, engaging in authentic conversations, and understanding the patterns of behavior, unique interests, and current capabilities of each team member.
- Leadership requires the utilization of varied conversational stances and aligning them to the intended situation.



### KEY POINTS
1. Vision, Interests, & Habits
   - Involves being present and having authentic conversations.
   - Understanding the behavioral patterns, unique interests, and current capabilities of each team member.
   - Intentionally align team members' diverse talents during collaborative processes.
2. Raising awareness through four dispositions:
   - This dynamic process blends mindfulness, self-reflection, active listening, and intentional action.
   - Dispositions significantly shape individual and team performance and cohesion.
3. Listening & Responding:
   - Setting aside personal biases.
   - Recognizing unproductive listening and responding habits.
   - Entering conversations with a goal and awareness of personal and team habits.
4. The 4 R's: Coaching Continuum
   - Level 1: REFLECTIVE COACHING: Focuses on Choice & Autonomy.
   - Level 2: RESPONSIVE COACHING: Focuses on Fostering Self-Directedness.
   - Level 3: RESTORATIVE COACHING: Focuses on Support & Accountability.
   - Level 4: REDIRECTIVE COACHING: Focuses on Explicit Expectations. Strategies.

In **Intentional Interactions**, Steve Seward explores Leadership as a mindset and a way of interacting with others. It's about the leadership identity we build through conversations, interactions, conscious choices, relationships, and follow-through on our commitments. Throughout the guidebook, Steve will equip leaders with the tools to listen with intention, respond with purpose, and lead with clarity.

*Steve has been a trusted thought partner to the MAISA Early Math team for many years. His gift for asking just the right questions, truly listening, grounding advice in research, and thoughtfully co-constructing next steps has shaped the way we lead and learn. This guidebook is like getting a window into his mind—and it's a must-read for anyone navigating the challenges of leadership.*
*-Rusty Anderson and Trish Dunn, MAISA Early Math*

*Steve is an exceptional trainer, coach, and communicator. His deep understanding of how people interact—and how those interactions can be intentionally improved—sets him apart as a leader in the field of communication and professional development. Steve has an extraordinary ability to break down complex human behaviors into practical, actionable strategies that empower individuals and teams to grow in self-awareness, trust, and collaboration.*
*-Aaron VanderGalien, CEO | Senior Partner DEKSIA*

*Intentional Interactions is more than a guidebook—it's a complete toolkit for any leader committed to intentional growth and lasting impact. It shares practical tools and powerful protocols for navigating the complexities of people and change. These pages provide a roadmap for turning resistance into relational trust, and skepticism into shared commitment. For any leader committed to positive leadership, this book is not only timely—it's essential.*
*-Sue Spahr, MASSP Coach, Sr Implementation Specialist, Curriculum Works*

*Steve's continued influence on me as a leader and coach cannot be overstated. Attending a coaching training with Steve Seward, it was immediately clear that his expertise was off the charts—but what truly sets him apart is his ability to make complex ideas simple, actionable, and deeply human. This guidebook captures that exact magic. It's like being in the room with Steve—learning how to lead with intention, clarity, and care. If you're serious about building strong leadership, culture, and clarity through intentional conversations, this is the resource you've been waiting for.*
*-Ben Berger, Proud Principal, Traverse City Central High School | Educational Leadership Coach, Principal Partnership Group*

*If you're a leader striving to articulate a compelling vision, shape a dynamic culture, and cultivate a focused, high-performing team through intentional interactions, this guidebook is an indispensable resource. Steve offers transformative strategies, practical insights, and real-world examples that will elevate your leadership approach. Engaging with Steve and this guidebook will enrich your leadership journey, providing invaluable perspectives to inspire and empower your team.*
*-Rob Longstreet | Longstreet Elder Law & Estate Planning, PC*

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