



# Navigating uncertainty: the resilient leader's field guide

A practical leadership resource for when  
things feel impossible

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## How to use this guide



### Everything's on fire?

Jump straight to the Emergency Quick Reference below.



### Need direction but have a minute?

Start with Chapter 1 to get your bearings.



### Ready to build lasting capability?

Work through all six chapters systematically.

This isn't another leadership book you'll read once and forget. It's a field guide designed for leaders who need answers now, tested frameworks that actually work, and practical approaches you can implement while everything around you feels chaotic.

## How everything in this guide works together

### Your 90-day implementation path

DAYS 1-30	>>>	DAYS 31-60	>>>	DAYS 61-90
<b>Foundation &amp; Assessment</b>		<b>Communication &amp; Change</b>		<b>Engagement &amp; Integration</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete Strategic Assessment (Chapter 1) to understand priorities</li><li>• Establish Personal Foundation routines (Chapter 2)</li><li>• Implement Authentic Leadership practices (Chapter 3) during daily interactions</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deploy Crisis Communication protocols (Chapter 4)</li><li>• Apply BEST Model (Chapter 5) for any major organizational changes</li><li>• Begin individual motivation assessments for your team</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Execute Team Re-engagement process (Chapter 6)</li><li>• Integrate all practices into regular operations</li><li>• Conduct progress assessment and plan for sustainability</li></ul>

## The multiplier effect

When these frameworks work together:

**Personal Foundation + Authentic Leadership** = Sustainable crisis response

**Crisis Communications + Team Re-engagement** = Accelerated trust rebuilding

**Strategic Assessment + BEST Model** = More effective organizational transformation

# Emergency quick reference

Use this chart to get immediate support.

What's happening to you	Jump to chapter	First thing to try	How long until relief
Everything feels chaotic and you don't know where to focus.	1	5-minute organizational triage	Immediate clarity
You're scattered, reactive, and your brain feels like it's full of bees.	2	Put phone away + 90-minute focus block	2 hours
Your team is losing trust in you or you feel like you're failing them.	3	"Get on the balcony" + team check-in	Same day
There's an information vacuum, rumors are flying, and everyone's anxious.	4	Share what you know + commit to check back	24 hours
You're going through major restructuring and don't know how to navigate it well.	5	BEST Model assessment	2-8 weeks
Your team is disengaged, has low morale, and people are phoning it in.	6	Four drivers assessment + individual check-ins	1-4 weeks



# Chapter 1: Strategic assessment

Know where you stand in the field

## Why start here?

When everything feels chaotic, your first move isn't action, it's assessment. You can't fix what you don't understand, and you can't lead effectively when you don't know what's broken versus what just feels overwhelming.

## 30-Second insight

Your organization has ten interconnected components that determine survival or failure. If you treat organizational challenges as just moving boxes on an org chart, you'll only move current problems to different boxes. Understanding all ten components is what separates leaders who thrive from those who just survive chaos.

## 5-Minute triage: Figure out what's really going on

Right now, rate how each area is working (1 = worst and 10 = best):

Component	What this really means	Your score
Vision	Do people know where you're headed and believe you can get there?	___ /10
Mission	Is your core purpose clear, even when everything else changes?	___ /10
Products & Services	Are you delivering what people actually need right now?	___ /10
Strategy	Do you have a realistic plan that works with current constraints?	___ /10
Goals	Are you measuring things that actually matter?	___ /10
Structure	Does who-reports-to-whom actually help the work get done?	___ /10
Skills & Roles	Do people have what they need to succeed in their jobs?	___ /10
Processes	Do your workflows help or hurt productivity?	___ /10
Tools	Can people count on the technology and resources they need?	___ /10
Incentives	Are you rewarding the right behaviors for tough times?	___ /10

## Immediate triage



### Items with a score of 1-4

These areas are failing—address them today



### Items with a score of 5-7

These areas are stressed—monitor them closely



### Items with a score of 8-10

These areas are working—leverage them now

### Today (10 minutes):

- Complete the 5-minute triage above
- Circle your 3 lowest scores
- Pick ONE action you can take this week to work on your biggest gap

### This week:

Ask 3 key people to rate the same components from their perspective. Compare their scores to yours because disconnects show you where communication needs work.

## Next chapter

Now that you know where your organization stands, Chapter 2 will help you build the personal foundation you need to lead through what you've discovered.

# Chapter 2: Personal foundation

*You can't lead others if you're falling apart*

## Why this matters

You can't guide others through chaos if you're drowning in it yourself. When you're grounded and focused, you help your whole team stay calm and make better decisions under pressure. Your personal foundation becomes the platform from which you lead others through uncertainty.

## 30-Second insight

When everything external feels chaotic, what you can control becomes your leadership superpower. Personal foundation isn't self-care—it's organizational strategy. Your routine, attention quality, and mental discipline become the steady platform from which you lead others through uncertainty.

## 5-Minute reset: Clear your head

### Try right now:

1. Set timer for 5 minutes
2. Notice what's going through your mind
3. Ask: "Is this thinking helping me right now?"
4. Focus on the most important thing you need to do today

### Try tomorrow:

1. Put your phone away for the first 90 minutes of work
2. Pick one important task that requires thinking
3. Work on it for 90 minutes without interruption
4. Notice how much better your thinking becomes

## Three foundation practices that actually work

# 1

Create stability when everything's unstable

**Start with these non-negotiables:**

- **Morning routine:** Same wake time + 5 minutes planning before checking phone
- **Work shutdown ritual:** Write tomorrow's priorities, then declare "work is done for today"
- **Basic health:** Adequate sleep, daily movement, limit alcohol when stressed

# 2

Manage your attention like a strategic asset

**Deep work:** Complex thinking needs 90-120 minute blocks without interruption

**Shallow work:** Email and calls in small bursts at day's periphery

**Build progressively:**

- **Week 1:** 45-minute blocks
- **Week 2:** 60-minute blocks
- **Week 3+:** 90-120 minute blocks

# 3

Create phone-free zones

Your phone distracts you even when silent and nearby. Use escalating boundaries:

- **Level 1:** Phone on silent during focused work
- **Level 2:** Phone in different room
- **Level 3:** Designated phone-free workspace

## When foundation practices hit reality

*"I don't have time for routines during crisis."*

Start with 10-minute morning planning and one phone-free hour. Crisis makes foundation more important, not less.

*"My attention span is shot from constant interruptions."*

Begin with 25-minute focus blocks. Use attention checks: "What am I paying attention to right now?"

## Next chapter

With your personal foundation building, Chapter 3 will show you how to stay authentic and present when leading others through crisis.

# Chapter 3: Authentic leadership in crisis

*You're not made in a crisis—you're revealed*

## Why this matters

When crisis hits, your reactions get magnified and you're in the spotlight whether you want to be or not. Your team doesn't need you to be perfect—they need you to be consistently authentic, empathetic, and present. You can't control the crisis, but you can control how you show up.

## 30-Second insight

The temptation is to put your head in the sand until the dust settles, but this creates a missed opportunity and makes organizational recovery much harder. Your team needs you to step up, not step away.

## 5-Minute reset: Get on the balcony

### Emergency perspective shift (2 minutes):

1. Stop whatever you're doing and literally pause
2. Take three deep breaths
3. Imagine stepping onto a balcony and looking down at the situation
4. Ask: "What does this situation need from me as a leader?"
5. Respond from that calmer, more strategic place

### Immediate team check (3 minutes):

1. Reach out to 2-3 key team members right now
2. Ask: "How are you handling all this?"
3. Listen without trying to fix everything immediately
4. Commit to checking back within 24 hours



# The four pillars of crisis leadership

1

*Communicate often and honestly*

If there's a lack of information, employees will fill in the gap assuming the worst.

- Use communication channels your team already trusts
- Share what's happening behind the scenes
- Be clear about what you know AND what you don't know
- Open every meeting to questions and respond to all of them even if you don't have all the answers

2

*Show up as yourself (not your alter-ego)*

- Don't try to become someone else under pressure
- Keep your commitments and maintain your standards
- Be predictable in your core approach; your team needs to recognize you

3

*Be real about what's happening*

- Acknowledge the crisis directly
- Admit when you don't have all the answers, it's okay and honest
- Don't mislead or withhold crucial information

4

*Model empathy without losing your leadership role*

- Be visible and available
- Listen intensively, you may not solve everything, but you can listen
- Follow up within 24-48 hours to show you remember and care

## The Stockdale Paradox

Have faith that you will prevail, while also confronting the reality and harshness of the current situation.

**Avoid:** "Everything is fine" or "This will be over soon"

**Try:** "This is difficult AND we'll figure it out together"

## Next chapter

Your authentic presence creates the trust needed for effective crisis communication, which we'll explore in Chapter 4.

# Chapter 4: Crisis communications

*Information is the most valuable currency*

## Why this matters

Normal communication strategies fail under pressure. What worked in stable times creates chaos in uncertainty. In crisis, information isn't just communication—it's leadership oxygen that keeps organizations alive.

## 30-Second insight

In crisis, information becomes currency and hoarding it creates panic. The shift required: from monthly updates to daily connections, from “need to know” to “need to feel included,” from email announcements to live dialogue. Organizations that democratize information survive uncertainty.

## 5-Minute action: Communication channel audit

### **For the next 3 days, track every team-wide communication:**

1. Label each as “Push” (one-way) vs “Dialogue” (two-way)
2. Calculate your push/dialogue ratio
3. If above 70% push, shift immediately

### **Today's shift:**

1. Choose your most important weekly communication
2. Replace next email/memo with live team call
3. Share information + ask: “What questions do you have?”
4. End with: “I'll check back [specific day] whether or not I have updates”

# Your crisis communication system

1

*Recalibrate frequency*

Double or triple communication frequency. Daily/weekly meetings replace monthly/quarterly ones.

2

*Type less; talk more*

Share information “live” through discussion first, then email for recap.

3

*Share with everyone simultaneously*

Avoid “previews” for certain groups—this creates “in the dark” feelings.

4

*Explain the why*

Share criteria behind decisions, not just decisions. If layoffs are performance-based, share those metrics.

5

*Talk even if there's no news*

Pre-schedule regular updates. Share what you know and commit to checking back by specific day, whether or not you have new information.

## Your go-to crisis message framework

- **Opening:** “I want to share important information about [situation] and what it means for us.”
- **What we know:** “Here’s what we know for certain: [specific facts and timeline]”
- **What we’re working on:** “Here’s what we’re working to understand: [specific unknowns and when you expect clarity]”
- **The why:** “Here’s the reasoning: [criteria, constraints, priorities]”
- **What about you:** “Here’s how this affects your role: [specific implications]”
- **Next steps:** “Here’s what happens next: [clear timeline]”
- **Follow-up:** “I’ll update you by [specific date] whether or not I have new information.”

## Next chapter

Clear communication builds the trust necessary for major organizational changes, which Chapter 5’s BEST Model will help you navigate systematically.

# Chapter 5: The Cadmus BEST Model for organizational design

*Your chance to do what you've known needs doing*

## Why this framework matters

When your organization faces staffing cuts, it can feel like there's no good way forward. But this is actually your chance to redesign your organization to be stronger, more resilient, and more responsive to what your customers actually need. The BEST Model provides a systematic approach that builds organizational capability rather than just cutting costs randomly.

## 30-Second insight

Most leaders treat budget cuts as pure loss—just removing people and hoping to survive. But this is your redesign opportunity. The BEST Model helps you build the organization you've probably known you needed for years.

## The BEST framework overview



### BEGIN

Start with the end in mind—imagine your organization stronger



### EXAMINE

Look at all 10 components from Chapter 1 systematically



### SELECT

Choose the right people with the right skills



### TELL

Communicate the story effectively using Chapter 4's principles



## B – BEGIN: Start with your future vision

### Key questions:

- If I could wave a magic wand, what would I make possible for this organization?
- What have I known for years needs to change but haven't had the chance to address?
- How could we emerge from this stronger rather than just smaller?

**Create design criteria:** Reduce headcount by X%, automate Y process, attract top talent, etc. This becomes your decision-making guide.

## E – EXAMINE: Look at all 10 components honestly

Use your Chapter 1 assessment results. Ask:

- Is your strategy clear and doable with available resources?
- Do people have the skills and tools they need to succeed?
- Are your processes efficient or just “how we’ve always done it”?

## S – SELECT: Choose the right people for the future

### Three-Step Process:

1. **Create pools** of people qualified for each role
2. **Evaluate fit** based on performance, experience, and salary range
3. **Fill gaps** with strong performers who can learn quickly

**The discipline required:** Remove emotional bias and focus on capability and fit for future state.

## T – TELL: Communicate the story

Using your Chapter 4 communication principles, ensure people understand:

- The “why” behind changes and how it connects to mission
- Their roles and responsibilities in the new structure
- What training and support is available
- How to get help when they need it

## Next chapter

*After major organizational changes, Chapter 6 will help you re-engage your team and rebuild the motivation needed for success.*

# Chapter 6: Team re-engagement

Rebuilding trust when the dust settles

## Why this matters

You know your mission and who's on your team to accomplish it, but you can't just announce new goals and expect engagement. Following a restructuring or reduction in force, re-engaging remaining employees requires intentional work to rebuild trust, reenergize people, and give them clarity about moving forward.

## 30-Second insight

After major organizational change, your team is dealing with emotional as well as practical challenges. Don't pretend nothing happened. Successful re-engagement starts with acknowledging the reality of what people have been through, then systematically building clarity, trust, and forward momentum.

## 5-Minute action: Take the team temperature

### In your next team meeting:

1. **Start:** "We've all been through significant changes recently"
2. **Ask:** "What's one word describing how you feel about work right now?"
3. **Listen** to each response without trying to fix anything
4. **Say:** "Thank you for being honest. Let's talk about moving forward together"
5. **End with:** "I'll check in individually with each of you this week"

## The four motivation drivers

Most people are motivated by some combination of these drivers. Ask each team member to rank them 1-4:

### MONEY

Financial incentives, salary, bonuses, security

### RECOGNITION

Acknowledgment, appreciation, awards, being seen

### GROWTH

Learning, skill development, advancement, new challenges

### PURPOSE

Meaningful work, mission connection, making a difference

## How to recognize each driver type

- **Money-motivated:** Highlight financial impact of their work, emphasize job security
- **Recognition-motivated:** Be specific (“Your analysis saved the project two weeks”), match their public/private preference
- **Growth-motivated:** Provide stretch assignments, learning opportunities, mentoring roles
- **Purpose-motivated:** Share impact stories, connect daily tasks to larger mission

## The four-step re-engagement process

### Step 1

#### **Acknowledge the reality**

“This process has been challenging, and we’re grateful for those who remain. Now we need to focus together on what’s next—and how each of you is essential to where we’re going.”

### Step 2

#### **Clarify roles and responsibilities**

With fewer people, clarity becomes everything. Create simple “who owns what” documents and prioritize work clearly.

### Step 3

#### **Reset goals together**

Ask: “What are the most critical things we must deliver in the next 3-6 months?” and “What obstacles might we face and how can we work through them together?”

### Step 4

#### **Rebuild trust through action**

Set clear expectations, recognize quick wins, and be honest when things don’t go as planned. Consistency, not perfection, builds trust.

## No-cost recognition that actually matters

- Specific, detailed feedback about impact and value
- Handwritten thank you notes highlighting particular contributions
- Public acknowledgment in team meetings (for those who like it)
- Flexibility in work arrangements as recognition
- Peer-to-peer recognition systems

# Your leadership journey

## What you've built

By working through this guide systematically, you've developed a complete leadership operating system:

1. **Clear Vision** (Chapter 1): You can assess organizational reality and focus energy where it matters most
2. **Personal Resilience** (Chapter 2): You have practices that maintain your effectiveness under pressure
3. **Authentic Presence** (Chapter 3): You can stay true to your values while adapting to changing circumstances
4. **Communication Excellence** (Chapter 4): You can build trust and maintain connection during uncertainty
5. **Strategic Capability** (Chapter 5): You can guide systematic organizational transformation
6. **Team Leadership** (Chapter 6): You can motivate and re-engage people through difficult transitions

## Beyond crisis management

These frameworks do more than help you survive uncertainty—they position you to thrive because of it. Organizations that master these capabilities don't just endure change; they use it as a competitive advantage.

## The difference

Six months from now, when you face the next major challenge, you and your team will approach it with greater confidence, clearer thinking, and more effective action than you did before.

## Your continuing practice

Leadership development is ongoing. These frameworks will evolve as you apply them:

- **Monthly:** Review which practices are serving you well and which need adjustment
- **Quarterly:** Assess how the integrated system is performing and make improvements
- **Annually:** Plan your next level of leadership development and organizational capability

Your leadership journey continues. Use the practices in this field guide as your compass.



# Quick reference tools

Rebuilding trust when the dust settles

## Emergency leadership plan

When everything feels overwhelming

1

### Get on the Balcony (2 minutes)

- Stop and breathe
- Imagine looking down at the situation
- Ask: "What does this need from me as a leader?"

2

### Check Team Pulse (5 minutes)

- Reach out to 2-3 key people
- Ask: "How are you handling this?"
- Listen without fixing

3

### Focus Energy (10 minutes)

- Pick ONE most important action for today
- Block time to work on it
- Communicate your priority to team

## Your daily foundation checklist

### Morning (5 minutes):

- ☐ Consistent wake time
- ☐ 5 minutes planning before phone
- ☐ Identify your ONE priority for today

### Work Blocks:

- ☐ 90-120 minutes deep work (complex thinking)
- ☐ Phone-free zones during focused work

### End of Day (5 minutes):

- ☐ Write down everything still on your mind
- ☐ Set top 3 priorities for tomorrow
- ☐ Declare work done for today

# Team motivation quick reference

## Four driver assessment:

Ask team members to rank (1-4):

### **MONEY**

Financial incentives,  
security

### **MONEY**

Highlight financial impact,  
emphasize job security

### **RECOGNITION**

Acknowledgment,  
being seen

### **RECOGNITION**

Be specific, match public/  
private preference

### **GROWTH**

Learning, advancement

### **GROWTH**

Provide stretch  
assignments, learning  
opportunities

### **PURPOSE**

Meaningful work,  
mission connection

### **PURPOSE**

Share impact stories,  
connect to mission

A team of Cadmus experts in organization design, leadership, change management, and communications contributed to this guide. Contributors include Beth McDonald, Sonia Checchia, Laurie Chidlow, Loretta Cooper, Maripat Hinders, Lex Huth, Kathi Scott, and Kelly Stuck.

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