

EMERGING LEADER DEVELOPMENT SERIES

The Emerging Leader Development Guide

MODULE I · FOUNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

PART ONE OF THREE PRACTICES 1-3

*Leadership is not an identity you claim.
It is a responsibility you demonstrate.*

No book or title required. Claim something real.



THIS VOLUME · PRACTICES 1-3

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THE ARC

Ten practices · Four movements · Three checkpoints

PART ONE · MOVEMENT I · SEE

Calibrate. Claim. Diagnose. Hold.

1 Leadership Is Demonstrated

Claim a live responsibility.

2 See Reality Clearly

Map the system before you fix it.

3 Lead Yourself Under Pressure

Catch the story in the pause.

CHECKPOINT 1 — Take the read outside your head.

PART TWO · MOVEMENTS II–III · OWN / MOVE

Responsibility. Judgment. Direction. Motion.

4 Take Responsibility

Fault, ownership, and control.

5 Exercise Judgment

Sort the decision. Place it.

6 Create Direction & Alignment

Make the destination transferable.

7 Make It Move

Find the blockage. Unstick it.

CHECKPOINT 2 — Same lab. Harder evidence.

PART THREE · MOVEMENT IV · LEAVE

People. Standards. Capacity.

8 Lead Through People

Ask to find out, not persuade.

9 Trust & Standards

Expectations that can be kept.

10 Build Capacity Around You

Leave them stronger.

CHECKPOINT 3 — Rewrite your definition.

One live responsibility runs through all ten weeks. When it ends, pick the next real thing.

EMERGING LEADER DEVELOPMENT SERIES

MODULE I · THREE PARTS

In this volume

Part One of three.

Practice 1 · Leadership Is Demonstrated *Claim a live responsibility.*

Practice 2 · See Reality Clearly *Map the system before you fix it.*

Practice 3 · Lead Yourself Under Pressure *Catch the story in the pause.*

Checkpoint 1 *Take the read outside your head.*

Before you start

You do not need to wait for someone to call you a leader.

This practicum is built for people who want to practice leadership in the real world, not collect leadership language. You do not need a title, and you do not need anyone to hand you anything. In Practice 1 you will go claim something real to be responsible for, and every practice after that runs against it.

Books can give you language, history, and other people's hard-won judgment. That is extremely useful. I want you to get out there and lead first, because all the knowledge sits better on a foundation you have already tested in your own work. Lead deliberately first, then refine. Start with a real responsibility. Let future reading sharpen what you are already practicing. Do not use a bookshelf as a substitute for evidence.

Minimum viable responsibility

People + something that matters + a constraint + someone who will notice if you disappear.

Hold this

If you already carry something like that, good. If you do not, find a real responsibility to take on. What you cannot do is run this on a hypothetical. Do not turn it into a personality workbook.

Who this is for

- First-time leaders and new supervisors.
- Students and early-career professionals carrying real responsibility.
- Project, shift, club, volunteer, family, community, or team leaders.
- People genuinely asking: What is leadership, and how do I practice it?

Who this is not for

- People collecting frameworks with no live responsibility to test them against.
- People who want leadership to mean status, personality, or being the person with all the answers.

- People unwilling to let evidence challenge their self-image.

No book required to start

The practicum stands on its own. Several concepts from The Operator’s Edge appear where they directly strengthen the work, but you do not need the book to understand or complete any practice. The relevant concept is explained here. Use the reference only if you want the deeper treatment. Get your free digital copy of The Operator’s Edge at jeremywalker.us/emerging-leaders/edge-copy with the code STAYSHARP.

Where to keep your work

Duplicate the workbook in Notion, download the Word version, or use any notebook you already keep. Pick one and stay with it — answers spread across three places are the same as no answers.

Both workbooks are free at jeremywalker.us/emerging-leaders. Whichever you use, the standard does not move: your evidence has to exist somewhere other than the page you wrote it on.

Start here

Leadership

An age-old question: What is a leader?

Almost everyone wonders, at some point, and you have almost certainly been asked to be some version of leader. In a job interview. In a class. In the moment someone put you in charge of something and you were not sure you were the right person to be holding it.

A title can give you authority. Expertise can make you valuable. Charisma can make people pay attention. None of those, by themselves, make you a leader.

A leader accepts responsibility for creating clarity, movement, and ownership around something that matters when other people are involved.

A good leader does that work in a way that builds trust, holds the standard, develops other people, and can be defended when the pressure is on.

Those lines are demanding on purpose. Leadership is not about looking important. It is about what becomes clearer, stronger, more capable, or more accountable because you chose to lead.

Leadership is also situational. You can lead in one moment and follow in the next. Someone with no title can name the issue the room is avoiding, create direction when a group is stuck, or take responsibility for a result nobody has owned.

None of this is permission to overstep legitimate authority. Leadership without a title still requires judgment.

The Operator’s Edge lens

The Operator’s Edge treats drift as the gap between what you say matters and what your actual behavior shows. Leadership works the same way. A title, value statement, or good intention is weak evidence. The operating pattern is the evidence.

Do not confuse these

Role	What it gives you
Authority	The legitimate right to make certain decisions or set boundaries.
Management	The coordination of work, resources, commitments, and execution.
Expertise	Knowledge or skill that makes your judgment useful in a particular domain.
Influence	The ability to affect how other people think, choose, or act.

Show the evidence

If you say you are leading, point to what changed. Is the situation clearer? Are people moving? Is ownership increasing? Are standards more explicit? Is capability growing? If nothing changes except your title or self-image, the evidence is weak.

The practicum

Ten practices. Ten weeks. One standard.

Practice 1 calibrates how you see leadership and ends with you claiming something to be responsible for. Every practice after it gives you a principle, a real-world exercise, and an evidence test, and all of them run against that same responsibility. Work no more than one practice a week.

Part One takes you through the first three practices and the first checkpoint. Parts Two and Three carry the rest.

- Understand the principle.
- Find where it is showing up in real life.
- Run the field practice.
- Produce evidence outside the booklet, from Practice 2 on.
- Debrief the gap between your intent and your effect.

Use a mentor or peer if you have one

A good thinking partner should challenge your interpretation, not hand you answers or let you off the hook. Bring evidence: what happened, what you chose, what changed, and what you would do differently. If you do not have someone you can work with, reach out at jeremywalker.us/connect. I'll help you find a thinking partner.

Program map

#	Practice	Primary work
1	Leadership Is Demonstrated	Test leadership against observable behavior, then claim something real.
2	See Reality Clearly	Diagnose the system before you rush to fix it.
3	Lead Yourself Under Pressure	Catch the story between the trigger and your reaction.
4	Take Responsibility	Separate fault, ownership, and control. Then move.
5	Exercise Judgment	Sort the decision, test it against failure, and place it with its owner.
6	Create Direction & Alignment	Make the destination transferable without you in the room.
7	Make It Move	Find the blockage and get something that matters unstuck.
8	Lead Through People	Ask to find out, not to persuade. Build ownership, not dependence.
9	Build Trust, Standards & Accountability	Make expectations real and address gaps cleanly.
10	Build Capacity Around You	Leave people clearer, stronger, and more capable than you found them.

Accountability

Pick a person who will not let you off.

This works on your own. It works better with someone who will hold you accountable, challenge your perspective, and tell you when what you are saying does not match what you are actually doing.

Find that person before Practice 1. Not an audience. One person.

They need to be able to:

- hear what you actually did without you managing their impression of it,
- tell you when your evidence is thin, and
- say the uncomfortable version out loud rather than the encouraging one.

Seniority is optional. Honesty is not. A peer who will push back is worth more than a mentor who is impressed with you. A manager, a professor, a coach, a teammate, a friend who works in a different field entirely — any of them can do this.

There is no schedule to negotiate. Talk to them when a practice turns something up, which may be more often than you expect. The three checkpoints in this program are where that conversation matters most, and they are the ones worth putting on a calendar.

People are busy. If you genuinely cannot find anybody

Then you do it alone, and the only thing that makes it work is being honest in the place where nobody would know if you were not. Answer the checkpoint questions in writing. Write what you can actually show, not what you meant to do. Reading a thin answer in your own handwriting is harder to argue with than you would think.

Hold this

Do not skip this and tell yourself you will find someone later. Later is week eleven.

Baseline

Score yourself before you start.

Answer these now, before you have done anything, and be unflattering about it. This is not a test you can fail. It is the only way you will be able to tell, ten weeks from now, whether anything actually changed.

I recommend creating a simple document to track your work as you move through the practicum. Use it to capture your notes, decisions, evidence, and reflections from each practice.

Score each one from 1 to 5. One means you rarely do this. Five means someone who works with you would say it about you without prompting.

#	Test	The question	Score 1-5
1	Reality	I see what is actually happening, not what protects my ego.	
2	Responsibility	I own what is mine without trying to own everything.	
3	Judgment	I separate facts, assumptions, and tradeoffs before I act.	
4	Direction	People around me understand where we are going and what success looks like.	
5	Movement	Something that matters is actually moving.	
6	Ownership	People are thinking and acting, not waiting for me.	
7	Trust & Standards	My behavior, expectations, and accountability tell the same story.	
8	Integrity	I pursue the result in a way I am willing to defend.	
9	Capacity	My involvement is making other people stronger and more capable.	

Hold this

If everything you wrote is a four or a five, you most likely scored the person you intend to be. Go back and score the person your last month of behavior would describe.

Keep this page. You score the same nine items again at the end of Part Three, and the comparison is the point.

Leadership Is Demonstrated

The principle

Too many people wait to be told they are leaders. They wait for the title, the promotion, the invitation. Meanwhile, things that matter sit unclaimed: the confusing situation nobody will name, the decision nobody will make, the standard nobody will hold. Leadership becomes available long before permission does.

Leadership is something you do, not a permanent rank. You may exercise it for ten minutes in a meeting, for six months on a project, or for years in a formal role. The common element is not status. It is accepting responsibility for a situation that matters and helping other people move through it.

That does not mean charging past boundaries because you think you see the answer. Mature leadership understands decision rights. Sometimes your job is to decide. Sometimes it is to recommend. Sometimes it is to influence, surface the issue, or create a better conversation for the person who actually owns the call.

When other people begin counting on you, your choices gain weight. What you clarify, reinforce, tolerate, avoid, and model becomes part of the environment around you. That is why the standard in this guide is external: the question is not whether you felt like a leader. It is whether your presence changed the quality of the work, the thinking, or the ownership around you.

When it is weak	When it is strong
You call yourself a leader and cannot name what changed.	You can point to a situation that got clearer because of you.
You wait for the title before you act.	You act on what is in front of you without waiting for permission.
You measure yourself by how busy, needed, or visible you feel.	You measure yourself by what moved and who grew.
Being liked matters more to you than being useful.	You will take a hit in order to be useful.

Field calibration

Use the Leadership Spotting worksheet at the back of this guide. Choose three people you know or have observed:

- one with formal authority,
- one with influence but little formal authority,
- one you consider a genuine leader.

For each person, look past title, personality, reputation, and confidence. Focus on observable behavior.

- What do they actually do?
- What happens around them?
- What becomes clearer?
- What moves?
- Who takes ownership?
- Who becomes more capable?

Then turn the same lens on yourself.

Identify one behavior in yourself that you believe reflects leadership and one behavior you may have been confusing with leadership because it makes you feel useful, important, capable, needed, liked, or in control.

Based on what you observed, write your working definition of leadership.

You are going to test it against the rest of this practicum and rewrite it after Practice 10, at the end of Part Three.

Debrief

- What made me call someone a leader?
- Where did I initially confuse authority, expertise, charisma, confidence, or visibility with leadership?
- What leadership behavior do I recognize in myself?
- What have I been treating as leadership that may actually be something else?
- What changed in how I think about leadership after looking at observable behavior?

There is no evidence test in this practice. You probably haven't been deliberate with your leadership yet. What you produce here is a working definition, and that is the artifact.

Carry it through the next nine practices. You will rewrite it in Practice 10 and explain what changed.

Use this in the real world. That is the only rule.

Name one live responsibility this practicum will run against. A shift, a project, a team, a class, a family role, a volunteer effort — anything where people are involved, something is at stake, and your behavior has a cost.

It does not have to last ten weeks. Things end. People rotate. The assignment closes. When that happens, pick the next real thing and keep going. What you cannot do is switch to a hypothetical because the real one got messy, finished, or boring.

Write it down:

What I am responsible for right now
Who else is involved
What outcome I am accountable for
Who would notice if I disappeared

Hold this

If you cannot name those, you do not have a lab yet. Go get one before Practice 2. Do not invent a case study so the pages have something to talk about.

What makes it real
People are involved. Something that matters is at stake. Real constraints exist. And someone would notice if you disappeared. If you cannot name all four, it is too small — keep looking. The assignment does not need to be large, but it can't be imaginary.

MODULE 1 · PRACTICE 2

See Reality Clearly

Map the system before you fix it.

The principle

You cannot effectively lead a situation you refuse to see accurately. Your experience may be real, but that is only a part of the bigger picture. Clarity requires curiosity, listening, and enough distance to notice patterns, incentives, relationships, resistance, and what nobody is saying.

If you are inside the situation you are trying to read, that can be a problem. Your seat gives you a real view and a potentially incomplete one. It’s where bad decisions get made confidently.

Every diagnosis requires a frame: assumptions about what the problem is, who is causing it, what people care about, what is possible, and what the risk means. Those assumptions can be reasonable and still be wrong. The dangerous ones are usually reasonable. They are the ones that feel like common sense.

Experience usually helps, but it can also narrow you. Pattern recognition allows you to move faster, but that speed can come at a price: unquestioned certainty. You stop asking because the situation looks familiar and you feel you already know. You listen for confirmation instead of information. You solve the problem you recognize instead of the problem that is actually in front of you.

Seeing clearly requires active disconfirmation. Ask who sees it differently. Separate what you observed from what you concluded. Look at incentives, loyalties, friction, resistance, and what people may be protecting. If your read cannot survive honest challenge, it is not yet strong enough to effectively lead from.

From The Operator’s Edge: Question the Frame + Certainty Shrinks Range

Beliefs can feel like facts, and experience can make familiar answers arrive too quickly. The point is not to distrust your experience. It is to keep it updateable. Name the frame, seek input that could disconfirm it, and let better evidence change your read.

When it is weak	When it is strong
You diagnose from your own seat and call it objective.	You map the system before you propose anything.
You reach for a solution in the first conversation.	You go looking for the person who sees it differently.
You treat resistance as an obstacle to push through.	You treat resistance as information about what is being protected.
The people closest to the problem are the last ones you ask.	You test your read against the people closest to it before you act.

Field practice

Choose one group or situation you are part of and complete the System Map at the back of this guide. Do not propose a solution until the map is finished.

Then talk with at least one person who sees the situation differently from you.

Your job is not to convince them. Your job is to understand their perspective well enough that you could explain it fairly to someone else, even if you still disagree.

Ask questions until you understand:

- What are they seeing that you may not be seeing?
- What matters to them in this situation?
- What are they trying to protect, preserve, avoid, or accomplish?
- What experiences or information are shaping their view?
- What would have to be true for their interpretation to be more accurate than yours?

Actively try to disprove your own diagnosis

Take one important conclusion from your System Map and ask why until you reach the assumption underneath it.

Why ...	Why ...	Why ...
Why do I think this person is resisting the change?	Why do I interpret the pushback as resistance?	Why might they be challenging it?

Continue until you reach the belief, assumption, incentive, or missing information underneath your original conclusion.

Hold this

Don't use this exercise to defend your first answer "more intelligently." Find out where your answer might be wrong.

Before you act, identify:

- one thing the other person helped you see,
- one assumption in your original diagnosis that became weaker,
- one part of your diagnosis that survived the challenge, and
- what you now believe is actually happening.

Debrief

- What only became visible when I stopped reading the situation from my own seat?
- Who has influence regardless of title?
- What is being protected by the current system?
- What assumption did another person challenge?

Evidence

Your final diagnosis must survive a genuine attempt to disprove it. Show what changed, what held, and what evidence led you to either conclusion. If your view is exactly the same afterward, be able to explain what you tested and why the original diagnosis survived the challenge.

MODULE I · PRACTICE 3

Lead Yourself Under Pressure

*Catch the story in the pause.***The principle**

A leader is always broadcasting. Your composure, attention, ego, defensiveness, values, and energy become information to the people around you. Leadership starts inside because your blind spots and strengths do not stay yours; they scale through your behavior.

Leadership gets louder under pressure even when you say less. People read pace, tone, hesitation, defensiveness, attention, and what you choose to address. Your internal state becomes external information whether you intend to transmit it or not.

Pressure also pulls old operating modes forward. The fixer wants to fix. The expert wants to prove. The peacekeeper wants the tension to disappear. The new leader may want to sound certain before certainty exists. Those impulses are not automatically wrong, but they should not get to author the response without review.

The pause matters because reaction and response are different forms of action. Reaction releases the first impulse. Response makes room for the outcome, the relationship, the standard, and the consequences to enter the decision. You are not trying to become emotionless. You are trying to keep the emotion from quietly writing the next move.

Presence works the same way. Technique helps, but posture and polish cannot compensate for internal noise forever. When your purpose, standards, state, and intent are reasonably aligned, there is less for the room to decode. You can adapt your delivery without abandoning your core. That is range, not performance.

The story is the leverage point.

You do not react to what happened. You react to the story you told yourself about what happened, in the half second after it happened. Someone cuts you off in a meeting and the event is neutral; the story is “they think I do not know what I am talking about.” The story is what you actually respond to, and most people never notice it is there.

That half second is the only place you have leverage. You cannot control the trigger and you cannot control the feeling. You can catch the story, and once you can see it, it stops being the truth and becomes one available interpretation.

From The Operator’s Edge: Impulse Is Expensive + Practical Presence

Pressure creates a spike before it creates a good answer. Build space between the input and the response. Your state is part of the signal, so calibrate it before the room has to absorb it. The goal is not to manufacture presence. It is to reduce the gap between what you mean and what people receive.

When it is weak	When it is strong
Your mood sets the temperature of the room.	You notice the impulse before you act on it.
You react first and reason afterward.	You can name what you were protecting.
Pressure makes your values negotiable.	Your standards hold when holding them costs you something.
People manage around you instead of talking to you.	People tell you the truth when the pressure is on.

Field practice

Pick one situation this week where pressure is likely: a hard conversation, a deadline, a challenge to your judgment, a moment you may be wrong in front of people.

Before you respond, find the pause. It is shorter than you want and longer than you think.

Inside it, name what you are protecting:

- being right,
- being liked,
- staying in control,
- looking certain,
- moving fast,
- not being seen as junior.

Then choose the response the situation needs, not the one the feeling wants.

The impulse is not the enemy. It is information about what you value or what you fear. You just do not have to obey it.

Hold this

Suppressing the reaction and delivering it politely is not composure. People read tone. If the choice was made in your face before it was made in your head, you reacted with better manners.

Before you act, identify:

- what your first impulse would have done,
- what you were protecting,
- what you chose instead, and
- what changed because of the pause.

Catch the story

For one week, log the moments where your reaction was bigger than the event. Do it afterward, not in the moment. You are building the ability to see the middle column.

What happened	What I told myself	What I did
Feedback on my section in front of the team	They think I am not ready for this	Defended it, talked too long, conceded nothing
Two people went quiet when I proposed the change	They are against me	Pushed harder instead of asking

After a week, look at the middle column alone. Most people find two or three stories running everything — usually some version of not being respected, not being competent, or not being in control.

Debrief

- What signal was I sending before I said anything?
- What tends to make me defensive or impulsive?
- Did I adapt my approach without compromising my core?
- What value became harder to hold when the pressure increased?
- What happened because I chose a response instead of acting on the first impulse?

Evidence

One specific moment where your chosen response differed from your first impulse, and what happened as a result. If you cannot name a moment where the two differed, you did not run the practice. You had a normal week and described it afterward.

Checkpoint 1

Before you go further.

Three practices in. Stop here and take what you have to the person holding you accountable.

You have calibrated what leadership actually is, claimed something real to be responsible for, mapped the system around it, and started catching your own reactions under pressure. All of that has happened inside your own head so far, which is exactly where things can quietly go astray.

Bring three things:

- the responsibility you claimed, and why that one,
- your read on the system around it, and
- one moment where your reaction was bigger than the event.

Ask them:

- What am I misreading here?
- Where does my version sound like the version that makes me look good?
- What would you want to see from me by the end of Part Two?

What you should have

One thing you now believe differently because someone outside your head pushed on it. If nothing changed, be able to say what they challenged and why your original read survived it.

Hold this

If you cannot show it, the checkpoint did its job. Go back and run the practice you moved past too quickly. Nothing is timing you, and everything in Part Two is built on this holding.

Worksheet

Leadership Spotting

Use this in Practice 1. Do not start by deciding who is impressive. Start with observable behavior and what changes around the person.

Person 1 — Formal authority

Who has a title or formal authority? What evidence of leadership exists — or does not?

Person 2 — Influence without much authority

Who moves people without relying on a title? What do they actually do?

Person 3 — Genuine leader

Who do you consider a real leader? What becomes clearer, stronger, more accountable, or more capable around them?

My substitute

Where am I currently relying on title, expertise, confidence, likability, visibility, or busyness instead of leadership?

Working definition

Based on the evidence above, what is leadership in one sentence — for now?

Worksheet

System Map

Use this in Practice 2. Map one group or situation you are actually part of. The point is to stop reading the system only from your seat inside it.

The situation

What group, team, class, family, project, or organization are you mapping?

Formal authority

Who has legitimate decision rights, and over what?

Real influence

Whose opinion changes what people do regardless of title?

Incentives & interests

What does each key person want, need, fear, or protect?

Alliances & tensions

Where are loyalties, friction, or competing agendas shaping behavior?

Resistance

What are people pushing against, and what might that resistance be telling you?

The unspoken issue

What does everyone seem to know but nobody says directly?

My blind spot

What became visible only after I listened to someone who sees it differently?

Appendix

The tools, and where they came from.

The exercises in this part use established thinking tools. They are embedded in the fieldwork rather than named in it, so the work stays on the practice instead of the vocabulary. If any of them landed, the sources below go deeper than a practicum can. Go to the source.

Tool	Used in	What it is, and the source
Five Whys	Practice 2	Asking why repeatedly to reach the assumption under a conclusion. Taiichi Ohno, Toyota Production System.
Trigger, story, response	Practice 3	The interpretive path from what happens, to the story we tell ourselves, to the response that follows. Kerry Patterson et al., Crucial Conversations.

Influences

Selected influences & further reading

No book is required to start or complete this practicum. Its structure, language, exercises, and application sequence are built for this series. These works helped shape the thinking behind the series. They are not required reading.

- Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky — adaptive leadership, leadership versus authority, systemic diagnosis, resistance, and the internal demands of leadership.
- L. David Marquet — intent-based leadership, decision ownership, competence, clarity, and building leaders rather than dependence.
- Peter F. Drucker — effectiveness, contribution, strengths, priorities, and disciplined decision-making.
- J.W. Walker — STRYN and The Operator's Edge: awareness, agency, alignment, execution; signal, presence, multiplier effect, values in action, leverage, and response under pressure.

Using this with someone else

This is free. Use it, share it whole, and run it with anyone — someone you are mentoring, a new supervisor, a team member you are bringing along. Keep the attribution on it and do not sell it. If you are running someone through it and it is working, or it is not, I would love to hear about it.

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