

EMERGING LEADER DEVELOPMENT SERIES

The Emerging Leader Development Guide

MODULE I · FOUNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

PART THREE OF THREE PRACTICES 8-10

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

Finish the arc. Leave people stronger than you found them.



THIS VOLUME · PRACTICES 8-10

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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

Part Three of three.

Practice 8 · Lead Through People *Ask to find out, not persuade.*

Practice 9 · Build Trust, Standards & Accountability *Expectations that can be kept.*

Practice 10 · Build Capacity Around You *Leave them stronger.*

Checkpoint 3 *Rewrite your definition.*

Where you are

Where this part sits.

Part One was about seeing. Part Two was about acting — you owned your part, made a call, wrote direction someone else could carry, and got something unstuck.

Part Three is about other people. Three practices on building ownership instead of dependence, making standards real and addressing gaps cleanly, and leaving people more capable than you found them. Then you rewrite your definition of leadership, re-score the baseline you set in Part One, and review the whole ten weeks.

Before you start Part Three

You should be able to name something that measurably moved and the specific action that moved it. If nobody could point to anything real at the second checkpoint, go make something move before you continue. The last three practices are about your effect on other people, and they do not work in the abstract.

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.

Keep your baseline scores from Part One where you can find them. You score the same nine items again at the end of this part, and the comparison is the point.

Program map

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

Part Three is the rest of Movement III and all of Movement IV — through people, then leave them stronger.

MODULE I · PRACTICE 8

Lead Through People

Ask to find out, not persuade.

The principle

Leadership is relational. You do not create durable movement only by being the smartest person in the room. Listening improves information. Influence earns commitment. Development increases ownership. The goal is not to become the answer; it is to make better thinking possible around you.

Leadership is relational. You can personally execute a task, but leadership begins to matter when the outcome depends on other people’s understanding, judgment, commitment, and action. That changes the job. Being right is no longer enough.

Instruction is sometimes necessary. If there is an emergency, a legal boundary, or a decision that clearly belongs to you, make the call. But if every problem ends with your answer, people learn the operating system quickly: bring the problem upward and wait. You get short-term speed and long-term dependence.

Listening improves the quality of your information. Questions expose how another person is reasoning. Influence creates commitment where authority cannot. Development means resisting the satisfaction of being the person with the answer long enough for someone else to build the capability to carry more.

The goal is not to disappear from the work. It is to use your involvement deliberately. Add context where it is missing. Challenge weak thinking. Make the decision when it is yours. Coach when the other person owns the problem. The measure is whether the conversation leaves better thinking behind, not whether you looked smart in it.

Most questions are answers wearing a question mark.

There is a difference between asking to find out and asking to lead someone somewhere. “Don’t you think we should just do it the other way?” is not a question. The other person knows it, answers the argument instead of the question, and the exchange costs more than simply telling them would have.

Real inquiry means you are willing to be changed by the answer. If there is no answer they could give that would move you, do not ask. Advocate honestly instead.

When it is weak	When it is strong
You answer before you understand.	You listen long enough to learn something you did not know.
People bring you problems instead of recommendations.	You ask what they see and what they recommend, first.
You win the point and lose the commitment.	People leave with a next move they own.
Conversations end with your solution and their silence.	People who do not have to follow you choose to move with you.

Debrief

- What did I learn only because I stopped talking?
- When did I feel the urge to take over?
- Did the other person leave clearer or simply more dependent on me?
- What did I have to influence rather than command?

Evidence

The other person leaves with a next move they chose, or you leave with information you did not have. Ideally both. If the only outcome is that they now know what you think, the conversation was a delivery, not leadership.

Developing people

Every time you answer too quickly, you may solve today's problem while weakening tomorrow's capability.

MODULE I · PRACTICE 9

Build Trust, Standards & Accountability

Expectations that can be kept.

The principle

Trust is an operating asset. Standards tell people what good looks like. Accountability makes the standard real. Strong leadership does not confuse accountability with anger or confrontation; it names the expectation, the gap, the consequence, and the next move cleanly.

Trust is not the absence of conflict. In operating terms, trust is the confidence that your words, standards, decisions, and behavior are coherent enough that people do not have to constantly guess where they stand.

Standards have to become observable. “Do good work” is not a standard. Neither is “communicate better.” People need to know what good looks like, what is non-negotiable, where judgment is allowed, and what happens when the standard is missed. If the expectation only becomes clear after someone disappoints you, the system was weak before the person was.

Accountability is the mechanism that keeps standards from becoming decoration. It is not anger and it is not public correction. It is a clean comparison between what was expected and what happened, followed by the next move: clarify, support, correct, accept, or change the consequence.

Your tolerance matters as much as your language. Whatever you repeatedly walk past becomes part of the real standard. If you say one thing matters and consistently allow the opposite because addressing it would create friction, the tolerated behavior has more authority than the stated value.

Behavior, not character.

Almost every accountability conversation that goes badly does so because it stopped being about what someone did and became about who they are. “You were careless” is a verdict on a person. “The numbers went out without a check and the client caught it” is a description of an event. One starts a defense. The other starts a fix.

The other half is that people cannot argue with impact. They can argue endlessly about intent and about whether they are the kind of person who does that. Stay on what happened and what it cost, and the conversation stays usable.

From The Operator’s Edge: Alignment Must Hold

The real standard is not only what you announce. It is what you continue to allow. Repeated tolerance teaches the group what has actual authority. If you choose not to correct something, make that choice consciously instead of pretending the standard still holds unchanged.

When it is weak	When it is strong
The expectation lived in your head until someone missed it.	The expectation is stated before the behavior is judged.
You wait until you are frustrated to say anything.	You address the gap early, while it is still small.
The conversation is about your emotion rather than the gap.	You name the expectation, the gap, and the next move, cleanly.
You enforce inconsistently depending on who it is.	What you tolerate matches what you say.

Field practice

Find one expectation in a group you are part of that is vague, assumed, or enforced inconsistently. Here is the test: could two people in that group state it the same way? If not, it is not a standard yet.

Write it in one sentence a person could actually meet. Then say it out loud to the people it applies to, before anyone has broken it.

If a gap already exists, have the conversation, and keep it in this order:

- what was expected,
- what happened,
- why it matters,
- what changes now,
- what happens if it does not.

Say it while it is still small.

Most accountability conversations go badly because they happen weeks late, carrying interest. The early version is boring and quick. The late version is about you.

Hold this

Do not confuse discomfort with courage. Delivering a hard message harshly is easy. Delivering it early, precisely, and without heat is the skill.

Before you act, identify:

- the expectation in one sentence,
- who needs to hear it,
- what you have been tolerating that contradicts it, and
- what you will do the next time it is not met.

Situation, behavior, impact.

Say it in that order and it stays precise. Skip the middle column and it becomes character. Skip the last and it sounds like a preference.

Situation	Behavior	Impact
In yesterday's handoff	the updated file was not attached	two people rebuilt work that already existed

Hold this

If you cannot state the behavior without an adjective about the person, you are not ready to have the conversation yet.

Debrief

- Was the expectation actually clear before I judged the behavior?
- Did I address the issue early or wait until I was frustrated?
- Did emotion make the conversation less precise?
- What does my behavior teach people I actually tolerate?

Evidence

A standard another person can state back clearly, and a next step that does not depend on reading your mood. The second is the harder proof. If people can only predict the consequence by gauging how annoyed you seem, you have moods, not standards.

Courage

Conflict avoidance is not peace. It is deferred cost. Social courage means naming the issue before resentment does it for you.

Know your lines.

Leadership will eventually put you in situations where the easiest, fastest, or most advantageous choice is not the one you would be comfortable defending. Ethics is partly about deciding what you are and are not willing to do before the decision gets expensive.

Laws, policies, professional standards, and organizational values establish boundaries, but they will not answer every gray decision for you. Some lines are personal. Decide them deliberately, then notice when loyalty, ambition, money, approval, fear, or pressure tempts you to move them.

Work through these

- What am I unwilling to do, even if it would help me get the result?
- What would I be uncomfortable explaining openly to the people affected?
- Where am I most likely to rationalize something because it benefits or protects me?
- What standard do I want people to expect from me when the decision is difficult?

My lines: two or three I won't cross, specific enough to catch me in the moment

Where mine get tested — loyalty, ambition, money, approval, or fear

Hold this

Decide your lines before pressure decides them for you.

MODULE I · PRACTICE 10

Build Capacity Around You

Leave them stronger.

The principle

The strongest evidence of leadership is not that people need you more. It is that people become clearer, more capable, more accountable, and more willing to exercise judgment because you were there. Your behavior also sets cultural cues: what you model, reward, tolerate, and walk past becomes instruction.

The strongest evidence of leadership is not that people need you more. It is that the system can carry more because of what you built: better judgment, clearer context, stronger standards, repeatable processes, and people who can own decisions that once had to route through you.

Handing off a task alone does not create capacity. You can pass the work while keeping every meaningful decision, relationship, piece of context, and quality judgment in your own head. That reduces workload at the edges while leaving you as the center of gravity.

Leverage requires architecture. Transfer the context, not just the task. Define the standard and boundaries. Build competence. Create a review rhythm. Use systems and tools where they remove avoidable dependence. Let another capable person do the work differently from you without treating difference as failure.

As responsibility grows, the leader’s job shifts from being the engine to designing an operation that can move without constant personal force. That costs control and sometimes ego. It also creates the room for people around you to become leaders instead of permanent extensions of your execution.

Notice when the problem changes owners.

Someone brings you a problem. You say “let me look at it and get back to you.” In that sentence the problem quietly moved from their desk to yours, and now they are waiting on you while you are the one doing the work. Do that often enough and you have built a system where everything routes through the person with the least available time.

The test is not whether you helped. It is who is holding the thing when the conversation ends.

From The Operator’s Edge: Leverage Removes Limiters

You do not scale by personally doing more. You scale by increasing what can happen without you at the center. Leverage can be people, systems, tools, documented judgment, or decision rights. The cost is control; the return is capacity.

When it is weak	When it is strong
Things stall when you are unavailable.	Someone else now owns a call you used to make.
You hand off the task and keep all the judgment.	You transferred the context, not just the task.
You take work back at the first sign of friction.	You let someone do it imperfectly and get better.
People try to guess your answer instead of forming their own.	People bring you decisions they already made, and were right.

Field practice

Choose one person or small group you work with regularly. Identify one decision, capability, or responsibility that currently routes through you and should not thirty days from now.

Transferring the task is the easy half. Transfer the judgment.

- The standard: what good actually looks like.
- The context: why it matters and what it connects to.
- The boundaries: what they decide and what they escalate.
- The support: what happens when they get stuck.

Then let them do it a way you would not have.

Ownership that only survives when the work matches your method is not ownership. It is supervision with extra steps.

Hold this

Taking it back at the first sign of friction teaches faster than anything you said while handing it over. If you may need to reclaim it, decide the threshold in advance and tell them what it is.

Before the thirty days end, identify:

- what you had to teach before ownership could move,
- where you were the ceiling,
- what you took back, and why, and
- what they now decide without you.

Transfer the judgment, not just the task.

Handing off work without handing off the thinking creates dependence that looks like delegation. Four things have to move with it.

What transfers	What it sounds like when it did not
The standard — what good actually looks like	“That is not quite what I wanted.”
The context — why it matters, what it connects to	“I did what you asked.”
The boundaries — what they decide, what they escalate	“I did not know if I could.”
The support — what happens when they get stuck	“I have been waiting to hear back from you.”

Debrief

- Did I increase capability or just pass work down?
- What did I have to teach or clarify before ownership could move?
- Where did I become the ceiling?
- What behavior am I modeling that I would not want multiplied?
- Are people more willing to use judgment, or are they still trying to predict my answer?

Evidence

Name one decision or capability another person now owns that used to route through you, and what changed in their behavior because of it. Then rewrite your working definition of leadership from Practice 1 and explain what changed. If it did not change, say what held, and why.

Checkpoint 3

The last report.

Ten practices in. This conversation is different from the first two. You are not asking whether you are on track. You are asking what changed in you, and whether anyone else can see it.

Bring four things:

- the responsibility you claimed in Part One and where it actually ended up,
- your rewritten definition of leadership,
- your baseline scores next to your current ones, and
- one person who is more capable than they were because of how you operated.

Ask them the only question that matters here:

- What is different about how I operate now, and what evidence are you using to say that?

Do not accept that you have grown a lot. Make them name the thing they are using to say it. If they cannot, believe that over your own sense of progress — feeling changed and being changed are not the same, and only one of them is visible from outside.

What this produced

A responsibility carried to an outcome. A definition of leadership you built and then tested. Behavior another person can describe without your help. That is the whole bar.

Hold this

If you cannot show it, then run it again on the next real thing you carry. Ten practices is not a certificate, and nothing here expires. The second pass is where most of this actually lands anyway.

Tool

The Leader Test

Use this when you are tempted to judge your leadership by how busy, important, visible, or needed you feel. The test is external evidence.

Test	Question
1. Reality	Am I seeing what is actually happening, or what protects my ego?
2. Responsibility	Am I owning what is mine without trying to own everything?
3. Judgment	Am I separating facts, assumptions, tradeoffs, and consequences before I act?
4. Direction	Do people understand where we are going, why, and what success looks like?
5. Movement	Is something that matters actually moving?
6. Ownership	Are people thinking and acting, or waiting for me?
7. Trust & Standards	Do my behavior, expectations, and accountability tell the same story?
8. Integrity	Am I pursuing the result in a way I am willing to defend, not just a way that works?
9. Capacity	Is my involvement making other people stronger and more capable?

The standard

Leadership is not an identity you claim. It is a responsibility you demonstrate. Show the evidence.

Baseline

Score yourself again.

Ten weeks in, score the same nine items without looking at your first answers. Then put them side by side.

#	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.	

Then answer three questions

- Where did the number move, and what specific evidence backs the change?
- Where did it not move, and is that because the practice did not land or because you did not run it?
- Which single item, if it moved two points over the next year, would change the most?

Hold this

A number that moved without evidence behind it is not improvement. It is familiarity with the vocabulary.

Review the work, not the story.

Do not grade yourself only on whether the project succeeded. Examine what you saw, what you caused, what you avoided, and what changed in other people.

- Where did my diagnosis turn out to be wrong?
- Where did I own too little? Where did I own too much?
- What decision required the most judgment?
- Where was direction unclear because I had kept context in my head?
- What did I learn by listening instead of answering?
- What hard conversation did I handle early, late, or not at all?
- What happened to my signal and behavior under pressure?
- Who became more capable, more accountable, or more confident using judgment?
- What did I model or tolerate that I would not want multiplied?
- How has my definition of leadership changed?

My rewritten definition of leadership

What changed — or what held, and why

The Operator's Edge review

The field review is where The Operator's Edge can be most useful. Revisit pressure, identity, alignment, overcommitment, leverage, and responding instead of reacting. Get your free digital copy at jeremywalker.us/emerging-leaders/edge-copy with the code STAYSHARP.

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
Advocacy and inquiry	Practice 8	The difference between asking to find out and asking to persuade. Chris Argyris; Edgar Schein, Humble Inquiry.
Ladder of leadership	Practice 8	Language that moves ownership from the leader to the person doing the work. L. David Marquet, Turn the Ship Around!
Situation, behavior, impact	Practice 9	A feedback structure that stays on events instead of character. Center for Creative Leadership.
Who's got the monkey	Practice 10	Noticing the moment a problem quietly transfers from someone else's desk to yours. William Oncken Jr. and Donald Wass, Harvard Business Review.
Task-relevant maturity	Practice 10	Matching how closely you supervise to the person's experience with that specific task. Andrew Grove, High Output Management.

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.

Mentorship with J.W. Walker

If you did the work and do not have a mentor, I work with a small number of emerging leaders, free. I am most interested in people carrying real responsibility, willing to bring evidence, and willing to change how they operate when the evidence says they should. If that kind of relationship would be useful, reach out at jeremywalker.us/connect.

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