

EMERGING LEADER DEVELOPMENT SERIES

The Emerging Leader Development Guide

MODULE I · FOUNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

PART TWO OF THREE PRACTICES 4-7

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

No book required. Claim something real. Show the evidence.



THIS VOLUME · PRACTICES 4-7

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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 Two of three.

Practice 4 · Take Responsibility *Fault, ownership, and control.*

Practice 5 · Exercise Judgment *Sort the decision. Place it.*

Practice 6 · Create Direction & Alignment *Make the destination transferable.*

Practice 7 · Make It Move *Find the blockage. Unstick it.*

Checkpoint 2 *Same lab. Harder evidence.*

Where you are

Where this part sits.

Part One was about seeing. You tested leadership against observable behavior, named a live responsibility to run this against, mapped the system around it, and started catching the story you tell yourself in the half second before you react.

Part Two is about acting. Four practices on owning your part, making a real call, setting direction someone else can carry, and getting something that matters unstuck. This is where the practicum stops being about how you see and starts being about what you do.

Before you start Part Two

You should have a live responsibility you are carrying, someone who has already heard your first report, and one thing you believe differently because someone outside your head pushed on it. If you are missing the first one, go back — everything here runs against it.

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.

Hold this

If your responsibility ended, closed, or changed since Part One, that is normal. Pick the next real one and keep going. Do not substitute a hypothetical.

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 Two is Movement II and the first half of Movement III — Own, then Move.

MODULE I · PRACTICE 4

Take Responsibility

*Fault, ownership, and control.***The principle**

Agency starts with owning your part. Leadership does not mean everything is your fault or that you must fix everything. It means being precise about what you own, what you can influence, what belongs to someone else, and what is outside your control.

Ownership has two failure modes and most people only fear one. Owning too little shows up as blame, excuses, and waiting. Owning too much looks like heroism, and it costs just as much: you absorb what belongs to other people, become the bottleneck, and quietly condition the people around you that they do not have to carry anything.

Responsibility is not the same as fault. You can inherit a mess you did not create and still be responsible for what you do next. A constraint can be real. Another person's behavior can genuinely make the work harder. The question is not whether the explanation is valid. The question is whether you have given the explanation authority over your next move.

Capable people also over-own for identity reasons. The fixer fixes. The grinder carries more. The expert steps in because it is faster. Those behaviors can build reputation, but a strength can become a limiter when the situation now requires other people to think, decide, and grow.

Own what is yours. Influence what you can. Return responsibility that belongs somewhere else. Release what you cannot control. Then act on the slice that remains instead of spending your energy building a better case for why the situation is difficult.

Fault, responsibility, and control are three different things.

It doesn't have to be your fault to be your problem.

Most arguments about ownership are actually three questions collapsed into one. Whose fault is this? Who is responsible for it now? What can I actually control? They have different answers, and the first one is the least useful.

Waiting for the fault question to resolve in your favor before you move is one of the most common ways capable people stall for months and call it fairness.

From The Operator's Edge: Excuses Are Permission + Win the Hidden Game

A reason can be valid and still become permission to stay stuck. The same is true of identity. If you have built your value around being the fixer, grinder, or person who always carries more, ownership can quietly turn into over-ownership. Use the explanation; do not surrender authority to it. Get your free digital copy of The Operator's Edge at jeremywalker.us/emerging-leaders/edge-copy with the code STAYSHARP.

When it is weak	When it is strong
Your explanation of the problem keeps improving while nothing moves.	You can name what is yours, what you influence, and what is not yours.
You blame circumstances you could actually influence.	You take one action instead of building a better case.
You carry other people’s work because it is faster than handing it over.	You hand back what belongs to someone else, out loud.
You are the only one who seems to care, and you make sure people know it.	You stop carrying things without resenting the people who own them.

Field practice

Take one live problem you are actually carrying. Sort every piece of it into four columns: what I own, what I influence, what belongs to someone else, and what is outside anyone’s control here.

Do not negotiate with yourself while you sort. Write where things actually sit, not where it would be more comfortable or more flattering for them to sit.

Then check the sort:

- Which items did I call outside my control without ever testing whether I could influence them?
- Which items did I claim because owning them makes me feel necessary?
- Which items belong to someone who does not know that yet?
- Where am I carrying something because handing it back means a conversation I am avoiding?

Now make it cost you something.

Choose one item you own or influence and take a real action on it this week. Then choose one item from the other two columns and stop carrying it — out loud, to the person it belongs to.

Hold this

Handing something back silently is not handing it back. If nobody else knows the boundary moved, all you changed is how you feel about it.

Before you act, identify:

- the action you will take because it is genuinely yours,
- the thing you will stop carrying,
- who needs to be told, and
- what you expect to happen when you tell them.

Sort it before you argue it.

Whose fault	Who owns it now	What I control
Not mine — the handoff was late	Mine, because the outcome is mine	The ask, the deadline I set, whether I escalate

Run your live problem through those three columns. If the second and third columns are empty, you are not carrying a problem. You are carrying a grievance.

What I own
What I influence
What belongs to someone else
What is outside anyone's control here

Debrief

- Where was I blaming circumstances for something I actually could influence?
- Where was I carrying responsibility that was not mine?
- What changed when I named the boundary clearly?
- Did I take action, or just improve my explanation of the problem?

Evidence

One action taken on something that was yours, and one responsibility that visibly moved off you and onto its actual owner. The second is the harder proof. Naming a boundary privately does not count. Someone else has to know the line moved and be able to say what they now hold.

MODULE I · PRACTICE 5

Exercise Judgment

*Sort the decision. Place it.***The principle**

Judgment is the bridge between seeing and acting. Good judgment separates facts from assumptions, weighs consequences and tradeoffs, understands who should decide, and clarifies the call without pretending uncertainty has disappeared.

Judgment is what happens between seeing and acting, and it is where most new leaders either freeze or lunge. Freezing can look thoughtful. Lunging can look decisive. Both can skip the real work: separating facts from assumptions, understanding the tradeoffs, and being honest about whose call it actually is.

Good judgment is not certainty. Most meaningful decisions arrive with missing information, competing interests, and consequences you cannot fully predict. Your job is to get clear enough to choose a responsible next move without pretending the uncertainty has disappeared.

Two distortions matter here. The first is the frame: a belief or assumption that quietly defines the options before you even begin. The second is fear: a legitimate emotional signal that can start masquerading as analysis. Fear may identify real risk, but it can also exaggerate the downside, make delay feel strategic, or convince you that one more round of information is required when you already know enough.

A strong decision diagnosis names what you know, what you are assuming, what matters most, the cost of acting, the cost of waiting, and the real decision owner. Sometimes the correct output is a decision. Sometimes it is a recommendation or escalation. Judgment includes knowing the difference.

Some doors close behind you. Most do not.

A reversible decision can be undone at modest cost. An irreversible one cannot. Emerging leaders reliably get this backwards: they deliberate for weeks over decisions they could reverse in an afternoon, and make the genuinely irreversible ones fast, because those usually arrive disguised as opportunities with deadlines.

Sort the decision first. If it is reversible, the cost of deciding slowly is almost always higher than the cost of deciding wrong — so decide, and watch. If it is irreversible, slow down and go find the people who will have to live with it.

From The Operator's Edge: Question the Frame + Fact Check Fear

Before you call something strategy, name the belief underneath it and the fear sitting beside it. Ask what evidence supports the threat, what evidence cuts against it, and whether delay is buying information or simply buying comfort. Fear gets input. It does not get the decision by default.

Debrief

- What assumption was I treating as a fact?
- What did I overweight because it was emotionally loud?
- What is the cost of waiting?
- What would a credible person who disagrees with me say?
- Was this actually my decision to make?

Evidence

A completed diagnostic that separates what you know from what you assume, plus a named decision move and the reason for it. Needing more information only counts if you can name the specific fact, say why it changes the call, and say when you will have it. Anything else is delay dressed as diligence.

Judgment vs. execution

Module I is about seeing the decision clearly and placing it with the right owner. Module II later focuses on execution: action, ownership, communication, follow-through, and review.

MODULE I · PRACTICE 6

Create Direction & Alignment

Make the destination transferable.

The principle

People cannot align around a destination they do not understand. Leadership creates direction by making the objective, why it matters, boundaries, and definition of success clear enough for other people to make good decisions without constant translation.

Direction is more than a task list. People need to understand where the work is going, why it matters, what success looks like, what is constrained, and what they are trusted to decide. Without that context, even capable people make reasonable decisions that pull in different directions.

Purpose helps because it acts as governance, not decoration. A purpose, objective, or mission earns its value when it filters choices. It tells the group what deserves attention, what should be protected, what can wait, and what does not belong. If the stated direction never changes a priority or refuses anything, it is probably just language.

Alignment is not universal agreement. People can disagree about methods, risks, or preferences and still align around the same objective and standard. Forced agreement often hides information. Real alignment is enough shared understanding that people can make coherent local decisions without constant translation from the leader.

The harder test comes under cost. Alignment is easy when there is no tradeoff. It becomes real when clarity creates friction: a project has to stop, a standard has to be enforced, a relationship gets uncomfortable, or an attractive option has to be declined because it does not serve the direction. What holds under that pressure is the actual alignment.

You cannot un-know what you know.

Once you understand something, you lose the ability to imagine not understanding it. Your explanation will always sound clearer to you than it is to anyone else, because you are hearing it with all the context you never said out loud.

This is why direction fails quietly. Nobody looks confused. They nod, because what you said made sense — it just did not contain enough for them to act on without you. The only reliable test is making them say it back.

From The Operator’s Edge: Purpose as Governance + Alignment Must Hold

Direction gets sharper when the objective actually governs choices. Alignment becomes visible when words, priorities, standards, and tolerances match, especially when matching them costs comfort. A direction that never forces a tradeoff is probably not governing much.

When it is weak	When it is strong
You explain the task and skip why it matters.	Someone else can explain the objective in their own words.
Everyone nods, then produces something different.	Success is observable enough that you would both recognize it.
Success is defined loosely enough that nobody can be wrong.	You name what is not changing, not only what is.
People return for permission on things they could decide.	People know what they can decide without you.

Debrief

- Could the other person explain the objective without repeating my exact language?
- Where did we discover different assumptions about success?
- What was unclear because I had kept it in my head?
- What disagreement needs to remain visible rather than being forced into fake alignment?

Evidence

Someone else can state the objective, what success looks like, and what they are allowed to decide, without you in the room and without using your exact words. A brief that only works while you are there to explain it is not direction. It is a reminder of a conversation you had.

MODULE I · PRACTICE 7

Make It Move

Find the blockage. Unstick it.

The principle

Direction without movement is just a plan. Leadership is judged by whether something that matters actually moved. Most stalls are not effort problems. They are one unmade decision or one unasked question sitting in the middle of the work.

You can work hard for three weeks and have nothing move. This happens to careful people more often than careless ones, because care looks like progress and stalling feels like diligence.

Most stalls have a single point of failure, and it is almost never effort. Something is waiting on a decision nobody made, a question nobody asked, a person nobody followed up with, or a definition of finished nobody agreed on. Find that one thing and the work usually starts again on its own.

The second cause is scope. People wait to start until they can see the whole path, so the size of the first move keeps growing until it is too heavy to lift. Momentum does not come from planning wider. It comes from starting narrow enough that you can actually begin today.

The third is the cost of not deciding, which is invisible. Deciding wrong produces a visible mistake you can point at and correct. Not deciding produces nothing you can see, so it feels safe. It rarely is. The delay just gets charged to someone else, later, without a name on it.

When it is weak	When it is strong
You are busy and cannot name what moved this week.	You can name what moved and what it cost.
You wait to start until you can see the whole path.	You start narrow and let the path appear.
A decision has been open long enough that people stopped asking.	Open decisions get closed, escalated, or explicitly parked.
You do the work yourself instead of removing what blocked it.	You find the blockage and clear it, even when that is less satisfying.

Checkpoint 2

Before you go further.

Seven practices in. Stop and report again.

You have moved from seeing into acting — owning your part, making a real call, setting direction someone else could carry, and getting something unstuck. This is where the gap between what you intended and what actually happened becomes visible to somebody other than you.

Bring three things:

- the decision you diagnosed and what you did with it,
- the direction you wrote and what came back when someone repeated it, and
- the thing that moved, and the specific action that moved it.

Ask them:

- Which of these actually changed something, and which just sound good?
- Where am I still the thing that work waits on?
- What have I been avoiding that you can see and I cannot?

What you should have

Something that measurably moved, and one piece of honest feedback about what has not.

Hold this

If you cannot show it, then that is the most useful thing this part produced, and it is worth more than moving on would be. Go make something move before you start Part Three. The last three practices are about your effect on other people, and they do not work in the abstract.

Worksheet

Judgment Diagnostic

Use this in Practice 5 when the answer is not obvious and a real decision has consequences. This tool diagnoses the call. It is intentionally different from the execution-focused Decision Follow-Through in Module II.

Decision

What actually needs to be decided?

What I know

Facts I can support.

What I am assuming

What I believe but have not verified.

What matters most

Objective, standard, principle, or outcome that should drive the call.

Tradeoffs

What do I gain, give up, delay, or risk with each reasonable option?

Risk of acting

What could go wrong if I move now?

Risk of waiting

What could go wrong if I delay?

Decision owner

Whose call is this actually?

Next decision move

Decide, recommend, escalate, or gather one specific missing fact?

What would change my read

What evidence would materially change the diagnosis?

Worksheet

Direction Brief

Use this in Practice 6. If people cannot explain the destination and boundaries without you in the room, the direction is not yet clear enough.

Where we are going

What are we trying to accomplish?

Why it matters

Why is this worth the effort?

Success looks like

What observable result tells us we got there?

What is not changing

What principle, boundary, or commitment stays fixed?

Decision space

What can people decide or adapt without coming back for permission?

What could derail us

What confusion, resistance, or constraint should we name now?

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
Circle of control	Practice 4	Separating what you control, what you influence, and what you can only worry about. Stephen Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.
Reversible and irreversible decisions	Practice 5	One-way and two-way doors, and matching deliberation to which one you are facing. Jeff Bezos, shareholder letters.
The pre-mortem	Practice 5	Assuming failure has already happened and working backward to find why. Gary Klein, Harvard Business Review.
The curse of knowledge	Practice 6	Once you know something you cannot imagine not knowing it. Chip and Dan Heath, Made to Stick.
Commander’s intent and the back-brief	Practice 6	Stating intent clearly enough that people can act when the plan breaks, then having them say it back. U.S. Army doctrine.

Do not rush the series

Do not start Module II because you finished the pages. Start it when you have owned a real outcome long enough that drift has a cost.

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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Leadership · Judgment · Execution

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