



FIELD GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

The 7 pillars of strategic leadership

Find your starting pillar, learn what each shift looks like on a real team, and leave with a 90-day plan you can start this week.

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HOW TO USE THIS PDF

Type straight into the boxes on screen and save your copy, or print it and write by hand. Rating scales add up on their own in most PDF readers, including Adobe Acrobat and Chrome. Every heading above is a link.



START HERE

See the shift

You are good at the work. The job now is to lead others to do it. That means moving your time from doing and fixing to building and anticipating.

Tactical: doing and fixing

Answering every question, reviewing every detail, and being the one who knows how everything works. It feels productive, and it quietly makes you the bottleneck.

Strategic: building and anticipating

Growing people, shaping decisions, and spending time on what the team will need next quarter. The team moves without waiting for you.

How capability grows: a four-step loop

1 Notice

Use the diagnostic and a weekly reflection to spot patterns in where your time goes.

2 Choose

Pick one behavior shift to practice. Specific beats ambitious.

3 Practice

Apply it in real work this week, and ask someone for feedback.

4 Review

Check the evidence, adjust, and repeat. Monthly for the plan, quarterly for the big picture.

A SCORE WITHOUT AN EXAMPLE IS ONLY A HYPOTHESIS

As you work through this guide, rate yourself on recent, observable examples rather than intentions. Then pair what you see with feedback from your team or your own manager.



FIND YOUR STARTING POINT

Your leadership diagnostic

Rate each pillar from 1 (rarely true today) to 5 (consistently true, with recent examples). Add one example so the score leads to a useful conversation. Your total and reading fill in automatically.

	RATING	EVIDENCE / EXAMPLE
Delegate decision rights Others own decisions within clear boundaries.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐	
Coach, don't cover I ask questions before I give answers.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐	
Plan the workforce and succession I could name who is ready if a critical role opened.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐	
Build systems and anticipate Recurring problems get fixed at the source.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐	
Influence and align My team can explain how their work ties to priorities.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐	
Enable performance and culture Goals are outcome-based, and I coach early.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐	
Protect time for strategic work Strategic and development time is protected every week.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐	

Total (out of 35)

Reading

28–35 Strategic leader: sustain your habits and help other managers build theirs. **20–27** Developing leader: build consistency in one or two priority pillars. **Below 20** Tactical manager: start with a foundational shift that reduces dependency on you, usually pillar 1 or 2.

The pillar I will build first, and why



PILLAR BY PILLAR

The seven pillars

Each pillar is one behavior shift. Read the one you chose first, try its practice this week, and come back for the next.

PILLAR 1 OF 7

Delegate decision rights

FROM

Fixing issues personally



TO

Setting expectations and ownership

ASK YOURSELF

Which decisions did I make this month that someone on my team should have made?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Assigns clear ownership and outcomes.
- Defines decision boundaries, authority and escalation triggers.
- Lets the team deliver without unnecessary takeover.
- Uses check-ins to support progress, not to reclaim control.

RED FLAGS TO NOTICE

- Over-involvement in decisions the team can own.
- Work stalls while everyone waits for you.
- People escalate routine choices or avoid accountability.

How to build it

- Build a decision-rights map for recurring decisions.
- Use a delegation script that names the outcome, guardrails and check-in points.
- Agree ownership out loud: who decides, who advises, who is informed.

Practice this week

- ☐ Choose one recurring decision to transfer. Agree the guardrails and let the owner make the call. (tick when done)

What I will try, and when

What happened, and what I learned



PILLAR 2 OF 7

Coach, don't cover

FROM

Handling work the team could do



TO

Asking questions that build capability

ASK YOURSELF

When someone brings me a problem, do I answer it or ask a question first?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Uses questions to help people frame problems and options.
- Builds problem-solving skill instead of becoming the default solution.
- Encourages autonomy while staying available.
- Agrees a follow-up that checks learning and outcomes.

RED FLAGS TO NOTICE

- Doing the team's work to save time in the moment.
- Protecting people from every challenge instead of developing them.
- Advising before understanding the problem or what support is wanted.

How to build it

- Use a coaching sequence: clarify, explore options, choose a next step, review.
- Ask: What have you tried? What options do you see? What support would help?
- Set a weekly rhythm for your highest-value development conversations.

Practice this week

☐ In your next problem-solving conversation, ask two questions before offering your view. (tick when done)

What I will try, and when

What happened, and what I learned



PILLAR 3 OF 7

Plan the workforce and succession

FROM

Reacting to vacancies



TO

Planning ahead of need

ASK YOURSELF

If a critical role opened tomorrow, who is ready and who am I developing?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Identifies roles and capabilities critical to continuity.
- Builds a broader bench and discusses readiness with evidence.
- Creates mobility and development before vacancies arise.
- Connects workforce choices to future business priorities.

RED FLAGS TO NOTICE

- Vacancies cause repeated surprises or disruption.
- No successor pool or development path for critical work.
- Succession talk relies on reputation rather than evidence.

How to build it

- Map critical roles, continuity risks and potential successors.
- Build development around real experiences, not only training.
- Review mobility options and readiness evidence with your HR partner.

Practice this week

- ☐ Find one responsibility with a single point of failure and define a continuity action. (tick when done)

What I will try, and when

What happened, and what I learned



PILLAR 4 OF 7

Build systems and anticipate

FROM

Responding to incidents



TO

Building processes that prevent repeat problems

ASK YOURSELF

Which issue keeps coming back, and what process would stop it?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Looks for recurring patterns and root causes.
- Creates simple systems that make the right work easy to repeat.
- Defines process owners, handoffs and escalation points.
- Checks whether a change actually reduced rework.

RED FLAGS TO NOTICE

- The same issue returns without a root-cause review.
- Firefighting eats the time that could prevent the fire.
- Processes depend on one person's memory or constant intervention.

How to build it

- Audit one frequent interruption or failure point.
- Map the process, find the root cause, and test a small fix.
- Name an owner, the steps, a measure and a review date.

Practice this week

- ☐ Track one recurring issue for a week: note the trigger, cause, handoff and how to prevent it. (tick when done)

What I will try, and when

What happened, and what I learned



PILLAR 5 OF 7

Influence and align

FROM

Relying on title

**TO**

Communicating vision and earning buy-in

ASK YOURSELF

Can each person explain how their work connects to our priorities?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Explains priorities in language that matters to the team.
- Aligns work and trade-offs to shared outcomes.
- Invites input and addresses concerns before they become resistance.
- Builds buy-in through clarity, listening and follow-through.

RED FLAGS TO NOTICE

- People cannot explain why priorities matter or what comes first.
- Work is misaligned across people or functions.
- Confusion is treated as attitude rather than a signal to clarify.

How to build it

- Write a short alignment message: why, what matters, what changes, what stays.
- Surface concerns directly, then make a specific ask.
- Close the loop on decisions, owners and trade-offs.

Practice this week

- ☐ Ask three team members to explain the current priority in their own words, and look for gaps. (tick when done)

What I will try, and when**What happened, and what I learned**



PILLAR 6 OF 7

Enable performance and culture

FROM

Managing tasks



TO

Building capability, accountability and culture

ASK YOURSELF

Do my team's goals show how their work moves the business forward?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Sets goals tied to business outcomes and role expectations.
- Makes ownership, quality standards and follow-through explicit.
- Coaches performance early and consistently.
- Recognizes behaviors that strengthen the team.

RED FLAGS TO NOTICE

- Tasks are tracked with no clarity on outcomes or impact.
- Accountability is low, uneven, or only raised once a problem grows.
- Feedback is only criticism, or only praise.

How to build it

- Link each goal to an outcome and the evidence that shows it.
- Agree a regular check-in and clear feedback habits.
- Build a team routine that reinforces accountability, learning and inclusion.

Practice this week

- ☐ Rewrite one team task as an outcome-based goal with an owner and a measure you can verify. (tick when done)

What I will try, and when

What happened, and what I learned



PILLAR 7 OF 7

Protect time for strategic work

FROM

Reactive meetings

**TO**

Strategic thinking, stakeholder work and development

ASK YOURSELF

How much of last week was reactive work I could have delegated or dropped?

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Blocks recurring time for strategic thinking and people development.
- Cuts low-value meetings, interruptions and duplicate work.
- Prioritizes by impact and delegates with clear ownership.
- Uses a weekly rhythm to balance delivery, stakeholders, systems and reflection.

RED FLAGS TO NOTICE

- No protected time is left for strategic work.
- You remain the default owner for work others can do.
- Planning and development keep getting postponed.

How to build it

- Run a time audit: remove, delegate, shorten or protect.
- Adopt a weekly leadership rhythm (see the Weekly Rhythm guide).
- Review your calendar against business priorities every week.

Practice this week

☐ Protect one 60-minute block this week, and remove or delegate one lower-value activity. (tick when done)**What I will try, and when****What happened, and what I learned**



MAKE IT STICK

My 90-day capability plan

Choose one to three pillars from your diagnostic. Name the gap, the action, and the evidence that will tell you it is working. Avoid trying to improve everything at once.

Pillar	Growth edge (the gap)	Development action	By when	Success measure

Who will support me (manager, mentor, peer)

Next review date

How I will gather feedback

One thing I will stop doing to make room

YOUR WEEKLY CHECK-IN

Every Friday, spend five minutes on three questions: What did I practice? What evidence did I see? What will I adjust next week? The Weekly Rhythm guide has a full planner.

My commitment

Write it in one sentence, in your own words.



NEXT STEPS

Keep going

Pick the next step that fits where you are. Every path ends in something you can do this week.

Go deeper on your own: the Manager Workbook

The full self-guided version: all seven pillars with scripts for the hard conversations, the weekly rhythm, and worksheets you keep.

Work on a real situation: 1:1 coaching

Bring a real team, a real situation or your own promotion. Every session ends with a plan and a next move.

[Ask about the workbook](#)[Book a conversation](#)

More free guides for managers

- [Words to use: delegation and coaching scripts](#)
- [A weekly habit beats an annual goal: the leadership rhythm planner](#)
- [Take the leadership diagnostic online](#)

Follow [@nextlvluptalent](#) on Instagram for more tools you can put to work this week. Questions? info@nextleveluptalent.com