

# THE LEADERSHIP LOAD RESET

*Less emotional load.  
More time for influence.*

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# Introduction

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*A practical reset for  
leaders who want to lead  
differently, without  
carrying everything.*

# Hello!



**I'm Brooke.**

I work with managers and leaders who care about their people and often carry more than they realise.

Over the years, I've noticed a pattern. Capable leaders are doing their best, quietly holding things together, and wondering why leadership feels heavier than they expected.

Most people aren't taught how to lead and support people. They're taught how to manage tasks, hit targets, and keep things moving. So when the people side gets complex, leaders improvise. They become more available, they hold more, and they carry the emotional load.

I created this resource because I kept hearing and seeing the same thing play out. Leaders are trying harder to do and be more, when what actually helped was clearer, simpler leadership. This guide brings together a few of the micro-skills I teach most often. They're practical, behaviour-first, and designed to work in real moments at work.

This isn't relational 'soft skills'; It's leadership capacity.

If leadership has started to feel heavier than it should, this is for you.

*Brooke Baxter*

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# Mindset Quiz

Before you start, take a moment to answer these questions honestly. There are no right answers. This isn't a test.

I often step in to keep things moving, even when others could handle it.

I notice issues early, but sometimes hold back from naming them.

I spend time thinking about work problems that aren't mine to solve.

I check in more than I'd like because I don't want things to fall apart.

I feel responsible for how others are feeling at work.

I sometimes soften messages to avoid tension or pushback.

When things feel unclear, I tend to take more on rather than less.

I care deeply about doing a good job as a leader.

Leadership feels heavier than I expected it to.



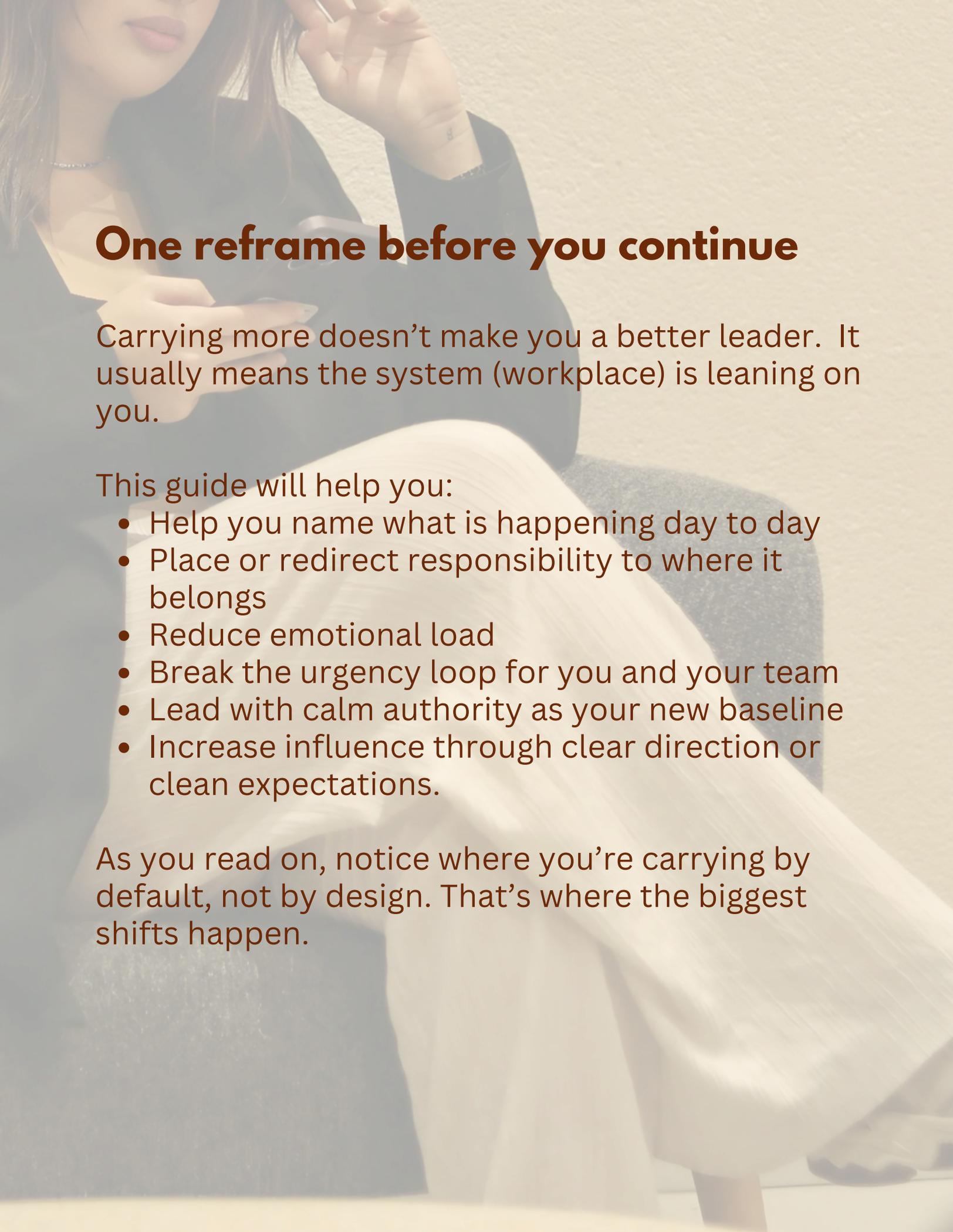
## What to notice

If you ticked:

- **0–2 statements** (You're likely holding boundaries and clarity reasonably well).
- **3–5 statements** (You may be carrying more emotional load than you realise).
- **6 or more statements** (You're probably over-functioning to keep things steady).

The above results don't indicate your leadership is a problem to fix. It is information about your leadership approach and how you're showing up with your people.

Leadership load builds quietly, especially in capable, caring leaders.



## One reframe before you continue

Carrying more doesn't make you a better leader. It usually means the system (workplace) is leaning on you.

This guide will help you:

- Help you name what is happening day to day
- Place or redirect responsibility to where it belongs
- Reduce emotional load
- Break the urgency loop for you and your team
- Lead with calm authority as your new baseline
- Increase influence through clear direction or clean expectations.

As you read on, notice where you're carrying by default, not by design. That's where the biggest shifts happen.



# Influence is not effort

Influence is at the heart of good leadership. Not control, not authority, and not being the loudest voice in the room.

Influence is the ability to bring people with you, towards a shared outcome or desired state, especially when things are uncertain or uncomfortable.

Effective leaders influence others to:

- Take responsibility
- Stretch and grow
- Make decisions
- Contribute their best work
- Move through change together.

When leadership starts to feel heavy, most people respond by doing more. They push harder, hover closer, check in more often, hold decisions longer, and absorb tension so work keeps moving. It looks committed and responsible, and in the short term, it can steady things. But over time, it quietly erodes influence.

Research across organisational psychology and systems thinking shows this clearly. When leaders over-function, influence doesn't grow; it shrinks. Teams become more dependent and less capable, decisions slow, and responsibility drifts upward. The leader carries more, while the system learns less. Real influence isn't built through effort alone. It grows through clear direction, consistency, boundaries, and follow-through.

Overloaded leadership keeps things afloat for a while. Clear, grounded leadership changes how work actually moves and builds capability over time. This guide focuses on helping you reduce unnecessary emotional load, so your influence can do the work it's meant to do.

*Calm is strength*

# Why this guide exists

Leadership isn't harder because people leaders are too invested and over-committed. It's harder because the role now absorbs work, emotion, and responsibility it was never designed to carry.

Modern leadership asks people to:

- Manage constant change
- Hold emotional complexity
- Lead without certainty
- Influence without always having authority.

Often, all at once, and before you've had a chance to eat lunch.

Most people are never actually trained to lead people, and even when leadership training is offered, it tends to focus on tasks, targets, and outputs, rather than what leadership requires when pressure rises and things get tense.

Very few leaders are taught how to hold boundaries without guilt, stay grounded under pressure, or influence behaviour without absorbing everyone else's stress. So, leaders cope. They steady things quietly, carry more than the role should hold, and work harder when systems are unclear.

That's not a lack of commitment or capability. It's a gap in how leadership is taught, and a big reason leadership load builds over time. So, leaders learn by coping. They steady things quietly, carry more than the role should hold, and work harder when systems are unclear.

This guide exists to name that gap and correct it. Reducing emotional load isn't about disengaging or becoming less supportive. It's about understanding what's actually happening and leading with enough steadiness for influence to land.

**Stop managing people and start shaping and influencing behaviour.**



# Leadership load is not workload. It's the invisible emotional and cognitive weight leaders carry.

It shows up when leaders:

- Manage feelings instead of expectations
- Hold responsibility without authority
- Compensate for unclear roles or systems
- Stay vague to avoid conflict
- Carry uncertainty alone.

From a systems perspective, this is predictable. When clarity is missing, pressure moves upward. Leadership load is a systems issue, not a personal failure. When systems don't distribute clarity and responsibility well, pressure moves upward.

Leaders absorb it by default. That's not a weakness; it's how systems behave.

**Stop managing people. Start shaping  
behaviour.**



# Nervous system literacy as a leadership capability

Every workplace operates within a nervous system, both individual and collective.

*Leaders*

## UNDER PRESSURE

- thinking narrows
- reactivity increases
- people seek certainty and safety.

## WITHOUT NERVOUS SYSTEM LITERACY

- over-explain
- over-accommodate
- over-control
- or avoid clarity altogether.

## WHO ARE REGULATED

- communicate more clearly
- tolerate discomfort
- hold boundaries calmly
- influence behaviour without escalation or coercion.

This is consistent with research on stress, regulation, and decision-making under pressure.





# This approach isn't personal therapy; it is leadership capacity.

This work is often misunderstood as personal development or individual therapy, but it isn't. This is about leadership capacity, the practical, often overlooked skills managers need to lead well in real workplaces.

Understanding emotional load, behaviour, and nervous system responses is not about fixing feelings or unpacking work situations.

These are leadership skills. They sit alongside decision-making, delegation, and accountability.

For many leaders, this is the missing ingredient. It's not about your motivation or the need for resilience training.

It's about the skills required to lead people and teams in complex, emotionally charged environments.

# The Leadership Load Map

The gap for many leaders isn't commitment. It's having the right skills to lead human behaviour in complex systems.

Rate each area between **1 (light)** to **5 (heavy)**:

- **Emotional absorption** – how much you take on from others.
- **Role clarity** – how clear expectations and authority are.
- **Decision ownership** – how often decisions sit with you alone.
- **Boundaries** – how protected your time and energy feel.
- **Behaviour follow-through** – how consistently expectations are held.

These domains reflect patterns seen in leadership coaching, relational and behavioural leadership practice, and organisational design.

**How to interpret your scores:**

**Mostly 1–2 (light)** - These areas are likely well-contained. Clarity and responsibility are in the right place.

**Mostly 3 (moderate)** - These areas may be costing you energy over time. They're worth paying attention to.

**Mostly 4–5 (heavy)** - These are likely where leadership load is accumulating. Not because you're failing, but because you're holding more than you should.

High scores indicate where clarity, boundaries, or responsibility haven't been fully established yet.

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# Where influence loses its way

Influence loses its way most commonly when leaders:

- Rescue instead of clarify
- Soften messages to manage reactions
- Delay decisions to preserve harmony
- Compensate for others' avoidance.

Behavioural research consistently shows that short-term comfort often creates long-term dysfunction.

Influence is not lost through care. It's lost through inconsistency and blurred responsibility.

Clarity, delivered respectfully and steadily, restores trust.



# Introducing micro-skills – why they matter

Big leadership ideas don't fail because they're wrong. They fail because they're too far removed from the moments where leadership actually happens.

Most leadership pressure doesn't show up in strategy sessions or performance reviews. It shows up in small, ordinary moments. A conversation you keep delaying. A task you should delegate, but don't. Behaviour you notice but don't name. A decision you keep holding because letting it go feels risky.

These moments don't need another framework. They need micro-skills.

In a leadership context, micro-skills are small, repeatable actions leaders can use in everyday work. They're designed for moments of pressure, not ideal conditions. Used well, they reduce emotional load, support clearer decision-making, and increase influence without requiring leaders to push harder or carry more.

The micro-skills in this guide are deliberately simple. They're easy to learn, practical to use straight away, and effective even when things feel tense. They're not personality traits or mindset work. They're concrete leadership behaviours that shape how conversations unfold, how responsibility moves, and how teams respond under pressure.

collabbWAY focuses on micro-skills because leadership impact doesn't come from reflection alone. It comes from small, consistent shifts in how leaders communicate, decide, and respond, especially in the moments that are easiest to avoid and hardest to get right.

That's where leadership load either builds or starts to reduce.

*Human. Clear. Steady.*

# Micro-skill 1: Place responsibility clearly

## The 3 Ps – Purpose, Parameters, Picture

Many leaders think they've delegated, but still find themselves carrying the task.

They check in constantly.

They step in late.

They redo the work.

They carry quiet frustration.

That's usually not because delegation didn't happen. It's because responsibility was placed vaguely. The 3 Ps in this sequence are micro-skills that help leaders clearly assign responsibility without micromanaging. It keeps leadership calm, contained, and influential.

### Purpose

Start with why this matters.

Purpose answers: *'Why does this matter beyond just getting it done?'*

This means naming the meaning or impact of the work.

Examples:

- How it affects the team
- What it enables next for the team or work
- Why it matters now.

Conversation Example:

*'This matters because it affects how confident the team feels going into next week on project x.'*

Purpose increases understanding and ownership.

People are more likely to take responsibility when they understand the reason, not just the request.

# The 3 Ps – Purpose, Parameters, Picture

<b>Parameters</b>	<p>Set the task edges. Parameters clarify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Timeframes</li><li>• Decision authority</li><li>• Non-negotiables</li><li>• What’s in and what’s out.</li></ul> <p>Conversation Example: <i>‘You’ve got flexibility in how you approach this. I need a draft by Thursday that meets X standard’</i></p> <p>Clear parameters reduce uncertainty. They prevent over-checking, second-guessing, and late escalation. From a leadership perspective, edges create safety, not control.</p>
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<b>Picture</b>	<p>Paint a shared picture of what ‘good’ or ‘finished’ looks like.</p> <p>Picture answers: <i>‘How will we both know this is done well?’</i></p> <p>Conversation Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ‘When it’s done, I should be able to share it without adding context.’</li><li>• ‘It should answer the key questions without follow-up.’</li></ul> <p>A shared picture prevents rework and misalignment. It allows responsibility to move entirely to the other person.</p>
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**TIP:** If you want to add an extra layer of leadership support, ask: ‘How will I know if you need help?’

This keeps ownership with the person doing the work, while making support available without hovering or rescuing.

# The 3 Ps – Purpose, Parameters, Picture

## Why the 3 Ps increase influence

When leaders use the 3 Ps:

- Responsibility sits where it belongs
- Leaders stop carrying unfinished thinking
- Follow-through improves
- Trust increases through safety and follow-through.

Influence grows because expectations are visible and consistent. This is not about better instructions. It's about clearer leadership.

## Common traps to avoid

- Assuming the purpose is obvious
- Setting parameters too late
- Describing the task but not the outcome
- Taking responsibility back under pressure.



# Micro-skill 2: Lead behaviour in real time

## Notice, Name, Ask - The Behaviour Check

Many leaders avoid addressing behaviour because they don't want to escalate emotion. Ironically, avoiding behaviour creates more emotion later, and more importantly, a bigger performance issue.

Notice, Name, Ask is a micro-skill that allows leaders to address what's happening without blaming, rescuing, or over-explaining.

It keeps leadership grounded, direct, and influential.

### Notice

Notice what is actually happening, not the story about it. This means paying attention to observable behaviour, patterns and impact on the work.

Examples:

- Deadlines being missed
- Meetings starting late
- Decisions being avoided
- Tension going unspoken.

Noticing is about information and data, not judgment.

This aligns with relational and behaviour leadership practice, where observation comes before interpretation.

# Notice, Name, Ask

<p><b>Name</b></p>	<p>Name the behaviour clearly and neutrally. This answers: <i>'What am I seeing, without attaching motive or emotion?'</i></p> <p>Conversation Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>'I've noticed the report has been late the last two week'</i></li><li>• <i>'I'm seeing decisions get pushed back in meetings.'</i></li><li>• <i>'I've noticed interruptions are happening more often.'</i></li></ul> <p>Naming behaviour creates clarity. Clarity reduces emotional escalation.</p> <p>From a nervous system perspective, neutral naming lowers threat and keeps people in a thinking state rather than a defensive one.</p>
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<p><b>Ask</b></p>	<p>Ask a forward-moving question that invites ownership. This answers: <i>'What needs to happen next?'</i></p> <p>Conversation Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>'What's getting in the way of this being on time?'</i></li><li>• <i>'What do you need to make a decision today?'</i></li><li>• <i>'How do we handle interruptions going forward?'</i></li></ul> <p>Asking shifts responsibility without blame. It moves the conversation from reaction to resolution.</p>
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# Notice, Name, Ask

## Why Notice, Name, Ask increases influence

When leaders use this micro-skill:

- Behaviour is addressed early
- Emotion doesn't build silently
- Expectations stay visible
- Safety is prioritised as conversations are had respectfully
- Leaders stop carrying unresolved tension.

Influence grows because leaders are consistent, not reactive. This is not conflict management. It's behaviour leadership.

## Common traps to avoid

- Skipping the steps and going straight to advice
- Naming emotion instead of behaviour
- Softening the message until it disappears
- Asking questions that rescue rather than invite ownership.



# Micro-skill 3: Getting started when avoidance is driving delay and stress

## The First Move (The 10% Shift)

The First Move is a micro-action tool for moments when a task feels heavy, unclear, or emotionally loaded for your employee, and the task keeps getting pushed aside.

It's not about doing the whole task for the employee. It's about understanding the blockage for the individual and starting in a way their nervous system can tolerate, so they can get started.

Task avoidance is rarely laziness or intentional underperformance.

It's usually uncertainty, fear of getting it wrong, or feeling overwhelmed.

### Name the stuck moment

Before you fix anything, acknowledge what's happening with the individual in their 1:1 meeting or at a set time (not in passing).

This tells the person and their nervous system it's seen, not judged.

What to say:

- *'It looks like this task feels heavy to start.'*
- *'I'm noticing you might be feeling a bit stuck here. What's your take on this?'*

This step reduces shame and opens the door to problem-solving together.

## The First Move (The 10% Shift)

<p><b>Shrink the task to 10%</b></p>	<p>Help the person find the smallest possible next step. Not the plan. Not the outcome. Just the entry point to open their thinking</p> <p>What to ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“If we only aimed for 10% progress, what would that be? Let’s start there”</i></li><li>• <i>“What’s the easiest place to begin, not the perfect one?”</i></li></ul> <p>At this point, you’re lowering the emotional load so momentum can begin.</p>
<p><b>Lock in the first move</b></p>	<p>Make the 10% step concrete and immediate so the employee can get started. This helps turn relief into action.</p> <p>What to confirm:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>“So, the first step is opening the document and outlining three headings.”</i></li><li>• <i>“Great. When will you take that step, and what do you need from me?”</i></li></ul> <p>Clarity here prevents the person from slipping back into overwhelm. At this point, opening up this conversation and starting this small task are enough to get their thinking going and move the overall task forward.</p>

# The First Move (The 10% Shift)

## The First Move increases influence.

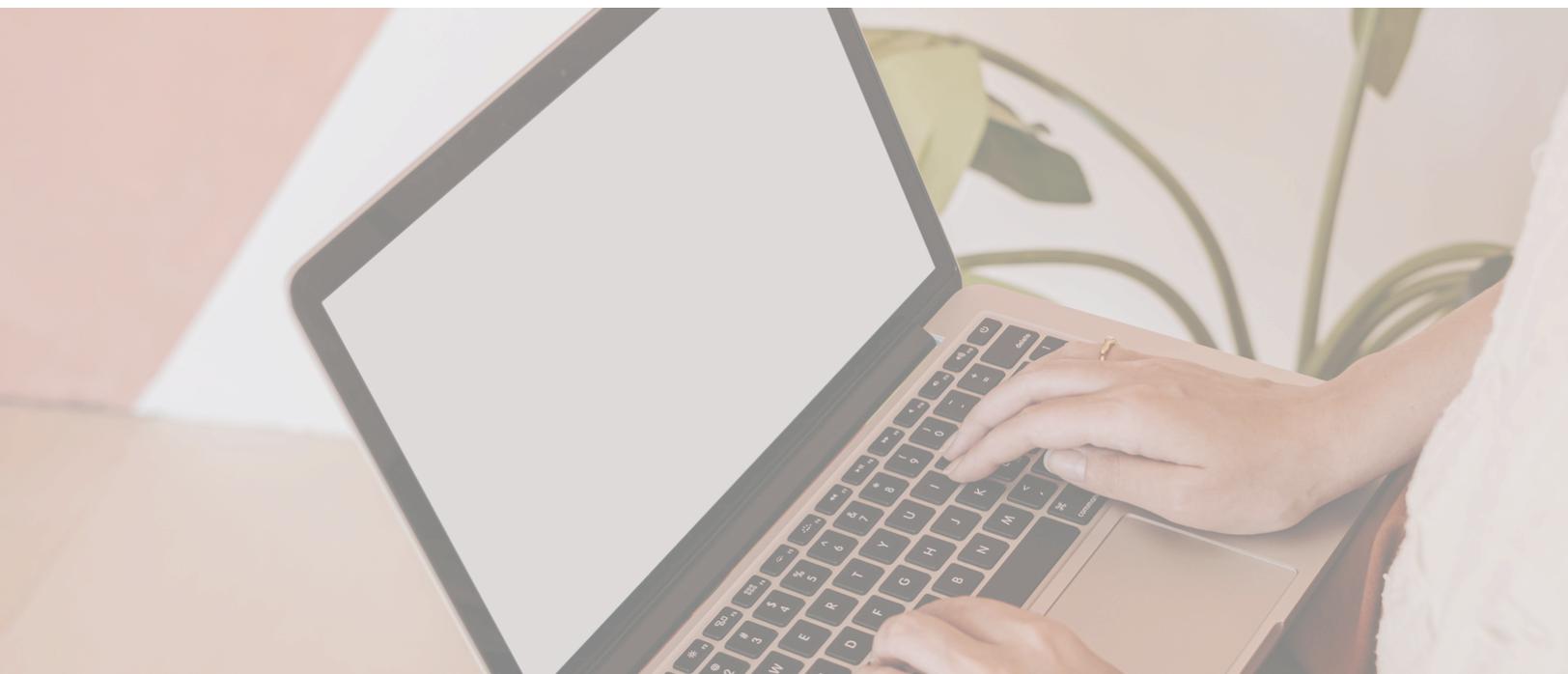
When leaders use this micro-skill, they:

Help employees by reducing pressure and restoring clarity when work feels stuck. For the employee, breaking a task into a safe, manageable first step lowers the emotional load, calms the nervous system and makes it easier to think, ask questions and begin. For the leader, responding with curiosity instead of pressure builds trust and positions them as a steady, supportive presence rather than a source of stress.

Over time, this shared experience strengthens the relationship. Employees feel understood and capable instead of judged, while leaders gain influence through consistency, clarity and support. Momentum increases not because expectations drop, but because people feel safe enough to start and supported enough to follow through.

## Common traps to avoid

- Jumping straight into fixing instead of first naming that someone feels stuck
- Making the “10%” step too big or too complex
- Using the tool to push speed rather than create safety
- Skipping the follow-through on what the first step actually is
- Treating it like a one-off trick instead of a consistent way of leading
- Ignoring your own stress or impatience when using it.



# How the three micro-skills work together

Each micro-skill supports a different moment in everyday leadership

**The 3 Ps** are used at the point of handover and delegation. They help leaders clarify purpose, boundaries, and what good looks like, so responsibility is shared clearly from the start. When the 3 Ps are in place, leaders stop carrying unfinished thinking, and teams know what they're accountable for.

**Notice, Name, Ask** is used once work is underway and often when a leader notices a dip in performance or behaviour. It helps leaders keep behaviour visible as things unfold, without escalating or stepping in too early. By noticing what's happening, naming it neutrally, and asking grounded questions, leaders address issues while they're still small and keep responsibility where it belongs.

**The First Move** (The 10% Shift) is used when progress stalls. Instead of rescuing or taking the work back, leaders help people identify a small, safe entry point that reopens thinking and builds momentum. Over time, this builds capability and confidence, rather than dependence.

Used together, these micro-skills help leaders clearly assign responsibility, respond early without over-carrying, and build capability through everyday moments. That's how leadership load reduces, and influence grows.

**People-first leadership. Behaviour-first.**

# When discomfort shows up



Reducing emotional load often feels uncomfortable at first.

Leaders may feel guilt, fear of being seen as 'too hard', or anxious about pushback. Research on leadership and change shows people often resist clarity before they respect it.

Discomfort is not a sign you're doing it wrong.  
It's often a sign you've stopped over-functioning.

When discomfort shows up, pause and check:

- Am I holding a clear expectation?  
or
- Am I trying to manage a reaction?

Leadership influence grows when leaders stay steady long enough for clarity to land.

## **A leadership reset: 3R = Insight (Reflect, Reframe, Refocus)**

When pressure rises, pause and ask yourself:

- **Reflect:** What's happening right now?
- **Reframe:** How else can I understand this?
- **Refocus:** Where will I place my attention next?

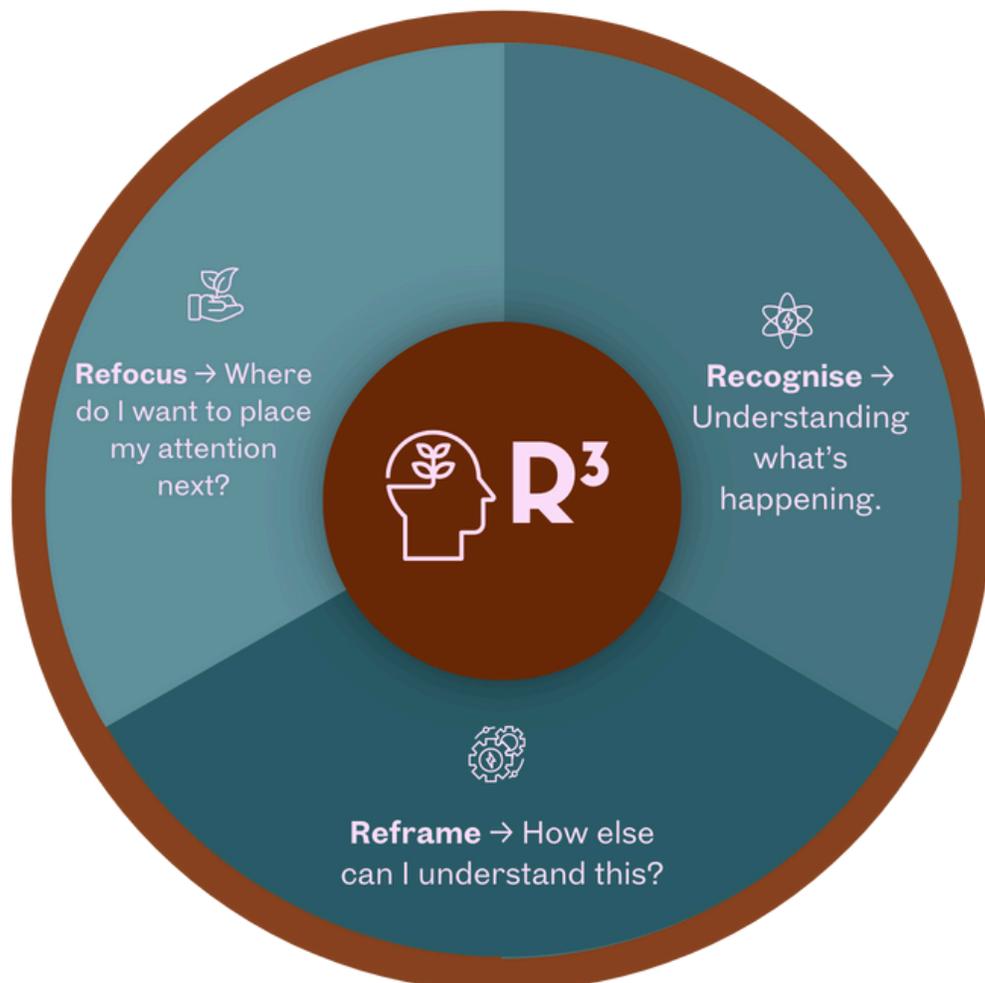
You don't need to calm everyone. You need to stay regulated enough to lead. That is nervous system literacy in action.

# How to reset your load and thinking using R3 = Insight

The R<sup>3</sup> model, developed by collabbWAY, is a reflective thinking tool that can be used during a reset or when leaders feel stuck.

Managers use it when leadership starts to feel heavy, reactive, or crowded in their head. It helps them slow the moment just enough to stop over-carrying and respond more intentionally.

It has three simple steps, and it can be used in 5–10 minutes, often between meetings or before a difficult conversation.



# R3 in Action

## 1. Recognise – What’s actually happening

This step helps leaders separate facts from emotional load.

Instead of reacting on instinct, they pause to notice what’s standing out, what they’re feeling, and what assumptions they’re carrying. Leadership load often builds when leaders absorb responsibility by default, personalise behaviour that’s really about pressure or clarity, or respond to emotion rather than to what’s missing in the system. Recognise helps name what’s happening without blame, including the leader’s own patterns.

## 2. Reframe – How else could this be understood

This step widens perspective.

Leaders consider what expectations or values are being tested, how others might see the situation, and what the real leadership issue is beneath the surface. This is often when they realise they’re compensating for unclear boundaries, holding on to decisions that could be shared, or stepping in early because silence feels risky. Reframe shifts the question from “How do I fix this?” to “What actually needs leadership here?”

## 3. Refocus – Where to act next

This step turns insight into action.

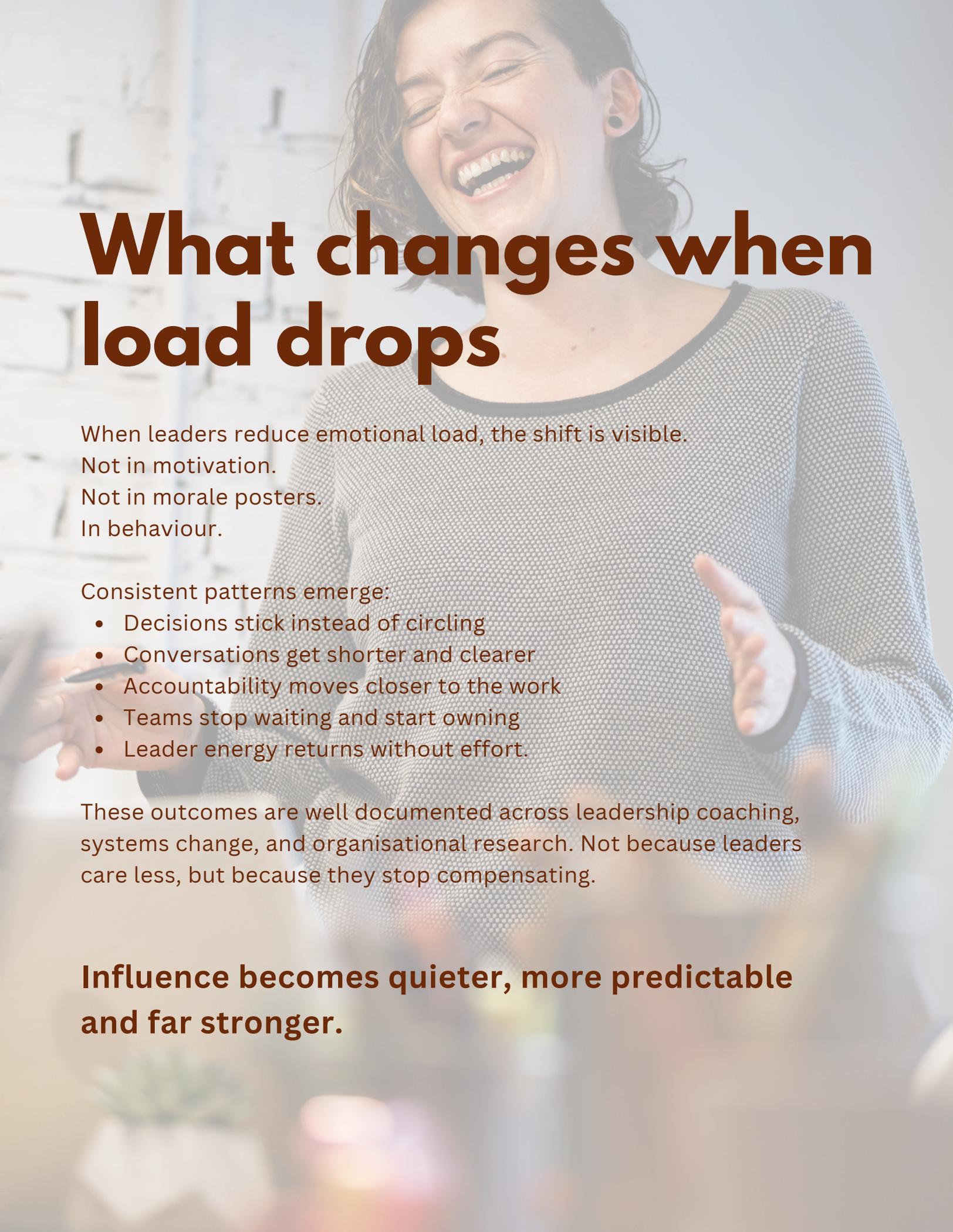
Instead of adding more to their load, leaders decide what truly needs their attention, what can move back to the role, the system, or the other person, and what one clear step they’ll take differently. This often leads directly into the micro-skills, using the 3 Ps to re-place responsibility, Name It Early to address behaviour sooner, or The First Move to reopen someone else’s thinking.

Refocus is where leadership load reduces, and influence begins to do its job.

## How R3=Insight reduces leadership load in practice

Used consistently and as a tool for understanding and reflection, R<sup>3</sup> helps managers slow down their response to pressure and make clearer leadership choices. It supports leaders in noticing when they’re over-functioning, stepping back earlier, and avoiding carrying emotional weight from one situation into the next.

R<sup>3</sup> isn’t about processing everything. It helps leaders decide what actually belongs with them, and what doesn’t. That’s why it fits so naturally inside the Leadership Load Reset. It creates just enough space for leaders to choose clarity over effort, before leadership load builds.



# What changes when load drops

When leaders reduce emotional load, the shift is visible.  
Not in motivation.  
Not in morale posters.  
In behaviour.

Consistent patterns emerge:

- Decisions stick instead of circling
- Conversations get shorter and clearer
- Accountability moves closer to the work
- Teams stop waiting and start owning
- Leader energy returns without effort.

These outcomes are well documented across leadership coaching, systems change, and organisational research. Not because leaders care less, but because they stop compensating.

**Influence becomes quieter, more predictable and far stronger.**

# Final word

You don't need to become tougher to lead well, and you don't need to carry everything to prove you care and can do your job well.

Leadership works best when responsibility sits in the right place.

Less emotional load creates space. Space creates perspective. Perspective creates influence. That's not soft leadership; it is sustainable leadership.

*“Leadership feels heavy when leaders carry what the system should hold.”*

**Brooke Baxter**

collabbWAY Founder



# Evidence and practice behind this guide

This guide is grounded in well-established research and applied leadership practice. The micro-skills and principles shared here draw on evidence from multiple, overlapping domains, all of which point to the same conclusion: clarity, consistency, and behaviour shape influence far more effectively than effort or intention alone.

## **Key evidence bases informing this work include:**

**Behavioural psychology:** Research consistently shows that behaviour change occurs through clear expectations, observable actions, and reinforcement, not through intention, motivation, or personality traits alone.

**Organisational psychology and leadership research:** Studies on leadership effectiveness demonstrate that influence grows when leaders are predictable, bounded, and clear, particularly in complex or high-pressure environments.

**Systems thinking:** Systems theory highlights that when roles, authority, and accountability are unclear, pressure moves upward and leaders absorb the load. Sustainable leadership redistributes clarity rather than increasing effort.

**Self-determination theory:** Decades of research show that autonomy, when paired with clear expectations and standards, increases motivation, accountability, and performance, while reducing dependency and disengagement.

**Nervous system and stress research:** Neuroscience research demonstrates that under pressure, clarity and predictability reduce threat responses and support better decision-making, communication, and regulation at both individual and team levels.

## **Applied leadership and organisational change practice**

The micro-skills in this guide reflect what consistently works in real workplaces, particularly during change, uncertainty, and periods of increased emotional demand.

**A note on evidence and application:** This guide is evidence-informed rather than heavy theory or research. Research is important, but leadership is practised in real conversations, under time pressure, with imperfect information.

Being evidence-informed means the research is there, but it's translated through real-world judgement, context, and human behaviour so it actually works in practice.

The micro-skills in this guide are intentionally simple, so they can be used in those moments.

Your leadership changes when you can apply it, not just understand it.

# Thank you

Thanks for taking the time to work through this guide.

If parts of it felt familiar, or quietly relieving, that matters. It usually means you're already paying attention to how leadership actually works, not just how it's meant to look.

The reflections you've done here, noticing where you carry load, where clarity could help, and where influence might be leaking, are real leadership work. Often unseen, but important.

If nothing else, I hope this guide has helped you trust your clarity a little more and reminded you that you don't need to carry everything to lead well.

## How can we work together?

If this guide was useful, there are a few ways we can continue the work, depending on what you need right now.

**Leadership coaching** - I work 1:1 with managers who want practical support in real leadership moments. Just clear, grounded coaching focused on behaviour, boundaries, and influence. This is especially helpful if leadership feels heavy or isolating, you're leading change or complexity, or you want to reduce emotional load without disengaging.

## Team and organisational work

I work with organisations that want leadership to change in practice, not just on paper. I help embed people-first, behaviour-led leadership through clear expectations, practical micro-skills, and everyday leadership habits that hold during change.

This isn't one-off training. It's leadership behaviour change that works and stays for the long term.

## Learning and resources

If you prefer to work at your own pace, I also create practical leadership resources designed for real workplaces. You can find current and future offerings via our website, or follow along on socials for reflections, tools, and real conversations about leadership.

**Contact**  
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