

SKILLS. DECISIONS. DISCIPLINES.

LEADERSHIP IS TOUGH

WHAT GREAT LEADERS DO DIFFERENTLY



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Facilitator's Guide

Create candor. Protect trust. Turn insight into action.

COURAGE • CLARITY • CONSISTENCY • CAPACITY

The Facilitator's Role

Your job is not to lecture on the book or produce uniform agreement. Your job is to help participants examine leadership honestly, learn from one another, and translate insight into behavior. The best discussion balances psychological safety with productive discomfort.

Facilitator principle Do not rescue the group from every silence. Thoughtful silence often precedes the most useful answer.

Recommended Group Design

- 6–12 participants is ideal; larger groups should use pairs or triads.
- Schedule 75 minutes per session. A 60-minute adaptation is provided below.
- Ask participants to read and annotate assigned chapters in advance.
- Use the companion Book Club Guide for individual preparation and written reflection.
- If the group includes direct reporting relationships, explicitly protect the right to pass on personal disclosure.

Before the First Meeting

1. Clarify the sponsor's purpose and any desired organizational outcomes.
2. Send the reading schedule, discussion covenant, and preparation expectation.
3. Decide how commitments will be recorded and revisited.
4. Choose a room or virtual format that supports eye contact and equal participation.
5. Prepare one honest example of your own; model reflection without dominating the discussion.

Opening Script

Suggested language “This is a leadership-development conversation, not a performance evaluation. We will challenge ideas and examine our own choices. Share what is useful, protect confidential details, and allow others to speak from their own experience.”

Discussion Covenant

- Confidentiality
- Candor with care
- Curiosity before certainty
- Equal airtime
- Specific examples without confidential details
- The right to pass
- Commitments are invited, not coerced

Handling Common Dynamics

If this happens	Try this response
One person dominates	"Let's pause there and hear from two people who have not spoken yet."
The group stays abstract	"What would that look like in an actual Tuesday-afternoon leadership moment?"
Participants diagnose absent colleagues	"Bring the lens back to your own choices. What is within your leadership responsibility?"
A disclosure becomes highly personal	Thank the person, do not interrogate, and offer a pause or private follow-up. Keep the group within its developmental purpose.
Conflict rises	Name the disagreement neutrally, restate the shared question, and ask each side what evidence or value drives its view.
Everyone agrees too quickly	"What is the strongest reasonable argument against our conclusion?"

The Eight-Session Roadmap

Session	Theme	Chapters	Outcome
1	The Reality of Leadership	1	Replace leadership myths with an honest definition of responsible leadership.
2	Change and Decisions Under Uncertainty	2, 3	Lead people through disruption while making timely, principled decisions.
3	Relationships and Trust	4, 5	Examine how everyday behavior and communication create or drain trust.
4	Empathy, Values, and Accountability	6, 7, 8	Hold humane standards and align what the organization says with what it does.
5	Sustainable Self-Leadership	9, 10, 11	Reduce isolation, build resilience, and allocate time and energy intentionally.
6	Building Leadership Capacity	12, 13	Strengthen the bench through succession planning and purposeful development.
7	Governance and Transformation	14, 15	Lead governance relationships well and build a legacy that outlasts the leader.
8	Integration and the 90-Day Leadership Plan	All	Convert insight into a small set of observable leadership commitments.

Standard 75-Minute Agenda

Time	Purpose	Facilitator move
0–10	Check-in and prior commitment	Invite concise reports: tried, learned, next.
10–20	Key passage or idea	Ask each person to name what challenged or affirmed them.
20–45	Core discussion	Use two or three primary questions and probing follow-ups.
45–60	Application activity	Move from interpretation to a current leadership situation.
60–70	Peer consultation	Pairs or triads test assumptions and sharpen next steps.

Time	Purpose	Facilitator move
70–75	Commitment and close	Each participant names one observable action.

60-Minute Adaptation

Limit the opening round to one sentence per person, select two discussion questions, use a five-minute individual application instead of a full activity, and preserve the final commitment round. Never save time by eliminating application.

Session 1 | The Reality of Leadership

Chapters: 1

Outcome Replace leadership myths with an honest definition of responsible leadership.

Prepare

- Read the assigned chapter(s) and review the related Book Club Guide pages.
- Choose one question below as the primary discussion and one as a reserve.
- Prepare a brief example that illustrates the theme without positioning your answer as the model answer.

Opening Question

When did leadership first become tougher than you expected?

Core Discussion

6. Which leadership myth has been most costly in your own experience?
7. Where are you currently expected to balance two legitimate but competing demands?

Probing Follow-Ups

- What makes that difficult in practice?
- What assumption are we making?
- Who experiences this situation differently?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?
- What would responsible leadership require next?

Application Activity

Leadership Reality Check: Name one situation you have been avoiding. Write what is true, what is uncertain, who is affected, and what responsible leadership requires next.

Give participants 7–10 minutes to write individually, then use pairs to test the action for clarity, realism, and organizational impact.

Listen For

- Idealized definitions of leadership that omit tradeoffs or consequences.
- A tendency to equate toughness with harshness rather than responsibility.

Close

Complete this sentence: “Before our next meeting, the leadership behavior I will practice is...”

Session 2 | Change and Decisions Under Uncertainty

Chapters: 2, 3

Outcome Lead people through disruption while making timely, principled decisions.

Prepare

- Read the assigned chapter(s) and review the related Book Club Guide pages.
- Choose one question below as the primary discussion and one as a reserve.
- Prepare a brief example that illustrates the theme without positioning your answer as the model answer.

Opening Question

Where is uncertainty currently testing your leadership?

Core Discussion

8. What loss or identity threat may be hiding beneath resistance in your organization?
9. Where has change fatigue become visible?
10. What decision is becoming more expensive while you wait?
11. Which of the four common traps—more data, more consensus, more time, or protection of the status quo—most often catches you?

Probing Follow-Ups

- What makes that difficult in practice?
- What assumption are we making?
- Who experiences this situation differently?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?
- What would responsible leadership require next?

Application Activity

Option A: Change Map: Identify what is ending, what remains stable, what is beginning, and what support people need at each stage.

Option B: Decision Brief: Define the decision, deadline, known facts, material unknowns, options, consequences, counsel needed, and the principle that should govern the call.

Give participants 7–10 minutes to write individually, then use pairs to test the action for clarity, realism, and organizational impact.

Listen For

- Waiting for certainty, universal agreement, or perfect data.
- Labeling people resistant without investigating loss, identity, or capacity.

Close

Complete this sentence: “Before our next meeting, the leadership behavior I will practice is...”

Session 3 | Relationships and Trust

Chapters: 4, 5

Outcome Examine how everyday behavior and communication create or drain trust.

Prepare

- Read the assigned chapter(s) and review the related Book Club Guide pages.
- Choose one question below as the primary discussion and one as a reserve.
- Prepare a brief example that illustrates the theme without positioning your answer as the model answer.

Opening Question

What everyday behavior most strongly affects trust?

Core Discussion

12. How do people experience you when you are rushed or certain you are right?
13. Whose contribution have you failed to acknowledge?
14. Where might your team see a trust gap that you do not?
15. Which small behavior could be quietly eroding credibility?

Probing Follow-Ups

- What makes that difficult in practice?
- What assumption are we making?
- Who experiences this situation differently?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?
- What would responsible leadership require next?

Application Activity

Option A: Relationship Reset: Choose one strained relationship. Describe the pattern, your contribution, the conversation needed, and one behavior you will change.

Option B: Trust Ledger: List three deposits you make, three withdrawals you may be making, and one overdue repair.

Give participants 7–10 minutes to write individually, then use pairs to test the action for clarity, realism, and organizational impact.

Listen For

- Trust treated as a feeling instead of the result of repeated behavior.
- Discussion of courtesy that ignores damaged relationships or hard truths.

Close

Complete this sentence: “Before our next meeting, the leadership behavior I will practice is...”

Session 4 | Empathy, Values, and Accountability

Chapters: 6, 7, 8

Outcome Hold humane standards and align what the organization says with what it does.

Prepare

- Read the assigned chapter(s) and review the related Book Club Guide pages.
- Choose one question below as the primary discussion and one as a reserve.
- Prepare a brief example that illustrates the theme without positioning your answer as the model answer.

Opening Question

Where is it hardest to combine care with standards?

Core Discussion

16. Where have you mistaken empathy for lowering standards?
17. Whose perspective have you interpreted without genuinely investigating?
18. What do your calendar and budget say you value?
19. Which stated value is contradicted by a current system or incentive?
20. Where are expectations too vague to support fair accountability?
21. Who receives exceptions because they produce results?

Probing Follow-Ups

- What makes that difficult in practice?
- What assumption are we making?
- Who experiences this situation differently?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?
- What would responsible leadership require next?

Application Activity

Option A: Empathy Interview: Before solving, ask what the person sees, fears, needs, and believes is getting in the way. Record what changed in your understanding.

Option B: Alignment Audit: Choose one stated value and trace it through hiring, meetings, budget, recognition, promotion, and accountability.

Option C: Accountability Conversation Plan: State the agreed expectation, observed gap, impact, the other person's perspective, required reset, support, deadline, and consequence.

Give participants 7–10 minutes to write individually, then use pairs to test the action for clarity, realism, and organizational impact.

Listen For

- Empathy used to avoid standards—or accountability used without understanding.
- Stated values that are not reinforced through systems and consequences.

Close

Complete this sentence: “Before our next meeting, the leadership behavior I will practice is...”

Session 5 | Sustainable Self-Leadership

Chapters: 9, 10, 11

Outcome Reduce isolation, build resilience, and allocate time and energy intentionally.

Prepare

- Read the assigned chapter(s) and review the related Book Club Guide pages.
- Choose one question below as the primary discussion and one as a reserve.
- Prepare a brief example that illustrates the theme without positioning your answer as the model answer.

Opening Question

What does sustainable leadership require that heroic leadership ignores?

Core Discussion

22. Where has necessary privacy become unhealthy isolation?
23. Who can challenge your thinking without organizational politics?
24. What pressure is accumulating without recovery?
25. Which early warning sign do you tend to ignore?
26. Where does your time allocation contradict your stated priorities?
27. What are you doing that should be delegated, developed, or deleted?

Probing Follow-Ups

- What makes that difficult in practice?
- What assumption are we making?
- Who experiences this situation differently?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?
- What would responsible leadership require next?

Application Activity

Option A: Leadership Support Map: Identify a truth-teller, peer, mentor, expert advisor, and personal supporter. Note the relationship that needs strengthening.

Option B: Capacity Plan: Name your largest demand, current warning signs, nonnegotiable recovery practice, boundary, and person who will help you remain honest.

Option C: 168-Hour Audit: Track one representative week, then classify major activities using Decide, Do, Delegate, Develop, or Delete.

Give participants 7–10 minutes to write individually, then use pairs to test the action for clarity, realism, and organizational impact.

Listen For

- Pride in indispensability, exhaustion, or constant availability.
- Time-management tactics that ignore priorities, energy, or delegation.

Close

Complete this sentence: “Before our next meeting, the leadership behavior I will practice is...”

Session 6 | Building Leadership Capacity

Chapters: 12, 13

Outcome Strengthen the bench through succession planning and purposeful development.

Prepare

- Read the assigned chapter(s) and review the related Book Club Guide pages.
- Choose one question below as the primary discussion and one as a reserve.
- Prepare a brief example that illustrates the theme without positioning your answer as the model answer.

Opening Question

What capability must exist beyond the current leader?

Core Discussion

28. Which role represents the greatest single point of failure?
29. What knowledge or relationship is trapped in one person?
30. Where has informal mentorship produced uneven access?
31. Which leadership skill do high performers need before their next role?

Probing Follow-Ups

- What makes that difficult in practice?
- What assumption are we making?
- Who experiences this situation differently?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?
- What would responsible leadership require next?

Application Activity

Option A: Bench Snapshot: Select five critical roles. For each, name emergency coverage, possible successors, readiness gaps, and one development action this quarter.

Option B: Development Contract: Define one capability, a real assignment to practice it, feedback sources, meeting cadence, evidence of growth, and an end date.

Give participants 7–10 minutes to write individually, then use pairs to test the action for clarity, realism, and organizational impact.

Listen For

- Succession framed as naming one replacement rather than building readiness.
- Mentorship framed as advice rather than deliberate practice and feedback.

Close

Complete this sentence: “Before our next meeting, the leadership behavior I will practice is...”

Session 7 | Governance and Transformation

Chapters: 14, 15

Outcome Lead governance relationships well and build a legacy that outlasts the leader.

Prepare

- Read the assigned chapter(s) and review the related Book Club Guide pages.
- Choose one question below as the primary discussion and one as a reserve.
- Prepare a brief example that illustrates the theme without positioning your answer as the model answer.

Opening Question

What should remain stronger after a leader leaves?

Core Discussion

32. Where are governance and management responsibilities blurred?
33. What information does the board receive too late?
34. What should be stronger because you led?
35. What must you let go of for other leaders to grow?

Probing Follow-Ups

- What makes that difficult in practice?
- What assumption are we making?
- Who experiences this situation differently?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?
- What would responsible leadership require next?

Application Activity

Option A: Board Partnership Review: Assess role clarity, information flow, strategic focus, chair partnership, member boundaries, and succession oversight.

Option B: Transformation Test: What are you improving now? What will continue without you? Who is becoming more capable because of your leadership?

Give participants 7–10 minutes to write individually, then use pairs to test the action for clarity, realism, and organizational impact.

Listen For

- Confusion between board governance and executive management.
- Legacy defined as personal recognition rather than enduring capability.

Close

Complete this sentence: “Before our next meeting, the leadership behavior I will practice is...”

Session 8 | Integration and the 90-Day Leadership Plan

Chapters: Integration of Chapters 1–15

Outcome Convert insight into a small set of observable leadership commitments.

Prepare

- Ask participants to review all chapter commitments and circle the three with greatest current relevance.
- Bring copies of the 90-Day Leadership Plan from the Book Club Guide.
- Decide how accountability partners will reconnect at Days 30, 60, and 90.

Opening Question

Which chapter created the most meaningful change in how you lead?

Core Discussion

36. Which leadership discipline will create the most leverage in the next 90 days?
37. What pattern must stop for that discipline to become credible?
38. Who will experience the change, and what will they observe?
39. What system must reinforce the behavior so it survives pressure?

Probing Follow-Ups

- What makes that difficult in practice?
- What assumption are we making?
- Who experiences this situation differently?
- What is the cost of doing nothing?
- What would responsible leadership require next?

Application Activity

Participants complete the 90-Day Leadership Plan. In pairs, they test whether each priority is observable, appropriately sized, connected to evidence, and supported by an accountability relationship.

Listen For

- Plans with too many priorities or actions that cannot be observed.
- Commitments dependent entirely on other people changing first.

Close

Complete this sentence: “Before our next meeting, the leadership behavior I will practice is...”

Optional 15-Meeting Format

For a chapter-by-chapter cohort, repeat the standard agenda and use the following facilitator focus. The Book Club Guide supplies the chapter questions and participant activity.

Chapter	Facilitator focus	Evidence of application
1	Why Leadership Is Tough Today	A clearer expectation or named leadership tension
2	Leading Change	Reduced uncertainty and a practical change map
3	Strategic Decision-Making	A decision advanced with an explicit deadline
4	Working Well with Others	A repaired or strengthened working relationship
5	Building Trust	A repeated trust-building behavior
6	Empathy Is a Discipline	Understanding paired with an intact standard
7	Priorities and Values	One system aligned with a stated value
8	Accountability	A timely accountability conversation
9	Leadership Gets Lonely	A strengthened support or connection relationship
10	Resilience Is Earned	A protected recovery practice or boundary
11	Managing Time and Energy	Time redirected through triage
12	Succession Planning	A critical-role readiness action
13	Mentorship Is a Decision	A capability-based development agreement
14	Leading Your Board	Improved board information, boundaries, or chair partnership
15	Becoming a Transformative Leader	A legacy action that builds capacity beyond the leader

Measuring the Cohort's Value

Avoid evaluating success solely by whether participants enjoyed the conversation. Look for changed behavior and healthier leadership systems.

- Participants can name and demonstrate at least one changed leadership behavior.
- Difficult decisions and accountability conversations occur earlier.

- Expectations, roles, and priorities become clearer.
- Trust gaps or relationship issues are addressed directly.
- Delegation, development, succession, or board practices improve.
- Participants maintain an accountability relationship through Day 90.

30/60/90-Day Follow-Up Questions

40. What behavior did you commit to practice?
41. What evidence shows that others experienced a difference?
42. What obstacle or old pattern returned under pressure?
43. What will you adjust for the next 30 days?
44. What system or relationship will help the change endure?

Final Facilitator Debrief

Where did the group demonstrate genuine candor?

Which issue needs additional organizational attention beyond the book club?

Whose voice was missing or underrepresented?

What commitment requires follow-up—and who owns it?
