

UNFILTERED LEADERSHIP prepared by Sarah Ciavarri

Real Conversations in Unreal Times

A practical companion for supervisors navigating limited resources, rising expectations, burnout, and constant change.

Awareness	Notice the hidden cost of leadership before it chooses your response.
Regulation	Return to enough steadiness to see the situation clearly.
Reinvention	Change the question, context, or constraint to uncover possibilities.
Connection	Pair empathy with clear expectations and meaningful follow-through.

The hidden cost

Leadership asks something of you. It should not ask for everything.

The leadership tax can show up in your energy, health, relationships, creativity, hope, joy, and eventually your ability to lead. Awareness lets you respond before overextension becomes your normal.

A quick energy scan

Body	What physical signal tells me I have been carrying too much?
Attention	Where is my mind spending energy without changing anything?
Relationships	Who receives the least-resourced version of me?
Leadership	What decision, boundary, or conversation am I postponing?

Catch It to Switch It

Name the signal without judging it: I notice I am _____, and the story I am telling myself is _____.

- What is the hardest part of leading right now that other people may not see?
- What is leadership costing me right now, personally or professionally?
- What would sustainable leadership ask me to change?

What pressure does

Under pressure, attention narrows. A narrow field can make the first interpretation feel like the only interpretation.

Live wire	Urgency spreads. The body braces. The leader reacts to the loudest signal.
Grounded leader	Energy has somewhere to go. The leader can stay present, widen the frame, and choose the next useful move.

Complete the circuit

- Make contact. Put both feet on the floor, press your palms together, or hold a solid object.
- Move the energy. Walk, stretch, shake out your hands, or change rooms.
- Widen the frame. Look toward the edges of the room and notice what else is present.
- Borrow perspective. Ask a steady person what they see that you may be missing.

Research grounding: acute or uncontrollable stress can impair prefrontal and executive functioning (Arnsten, 2009; Shields et al., 2016).

Reinvention begins with a different question

The first answer is rarely the only answer.

Context changes meaning. IRS can mean Internal Revenue Service or Independent Rear Suspension. AMA can mean Ask Me Anything, Against Medical Advice, American Medical Association, or Advanced Maternal Age.

A fast reinvention exercise

- 1 Choose one ordinary item. Backpack, water bottle, umbrella, office chair, lunch container, name badge, grocery cart, or phone charger.
- 2 Quantity first. In three minutes, generate at least ten improvements. Strange ideas count.
- 3 Change the context. Shift the user or add a constraint: a child, an older adult, limited mobility, half the cost, two purposes, or repair without special tools.
- 4 Choose one. Circle an idea with enough promise for a small test.

Reinvention framework: Nadya Zhexembayeva, The Chief Reinvention Officer Handbook (2020).

The three buckets

Put the issue in the right bucket before deciding what it deserves from you.

CONTROL	INFLUENCE	NO CONTROL
My choices, preparation, tone, boundaries, and follow-through	Relationships, recommendations, expectations, requests, and feedback	Other people's reactions, past events, and final decisions owned elsewhere
What will I do?	Who can I involve?	What do I need to release or accept?

Sort one current issue

Issue: _____

The part I control: _____

The part I can influence: _____

The part I cannot control: _____

My next useful move: _____

Some of us have a fourth bucket: things we cannot control but would still like to supervise personally.

Empathy and accountability

Empathy improves the information leaders receive. Accountability turns that information into a clear path forward.

HIGHLY EMPATHIC LEADERS	LESS EMPATHIC LEADERS
76% reported engagement	32% reported engagement
61% reported innovation	13% reported innovation

These percentages compare two separate groups; they are not parts of one 100% total. Source: Catalyst (2021).

Clear	Name the observable behavior, expectation, and impact without exaggerating.
Curious	Ask what is happening and listen for information that changes your understanding.
Committed	Agree on the next step, support, ownership, and follow-up date.

Your bring it back to the office plan

Choose one leadership moment where you want to respond with greater clarity and intention.

The situation _____	What I notice in myself _____
What will bring me back online _____	The bucket this belongs in _____
The question that could widen the possibilities _____	The conversation or decision I need to make _____
My next step and when I will take it _____	When I will follow up _____

A conversation starter

I know you have been carrying a lot, and I care about how you are doing. The deadline was Friday, and the work arrived Tuesday. That delay affected _____. Help me understand what happened. Then let's agree on what needs to change and what support will help.

Empathy diagnoses. Accountability decides.

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ARRC™, Spark Your ARRC™, and the practical applications in this guide are Sarah Ciavarri's teaching frameworks.

Sources and further reading

Stress and executive functioning

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Catalyst. (2021). Empathic leaders drive employee engagement and innovation. Study of nearly 900 employees in the United States. [Source link](#)

Psychological safety and team learning

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350-383. [Source link](#)

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Trust and leadership conversations

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This companion is educational and does not provide medical or mental health advice.