

LIFT THE LEADER · LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Integrity & Ethical Stability Toolkit

Integrity is tested when urgency or incentives distort criteria. The pressure is real. The distortion is usually gradual. The cost is always larger than it appears in the moment.

- 1 What value is at stake?
- 2 What minimum process preserves dignity and truth?
- 3 What are we at risk of rationalizing?
- 4 What would we be willing to defend publicly?

45 minutes

Solo or trusted pair

Leadership Practice

Governance that protects without becoming bureaucratic. Transparency that builds trust instead of performing it.

What you leave with

A documented decision with visible criteria. Named tradeoffs. A transparency script for the conversations that matter most.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Part I — Minimum Governance

The non-negotiables that protect legitimacy. Not a compliance checklist — a floor below which integrity cannot survive.

Part II — Guardrails

The patterns that signal criteria drift before it becomes visible. Watch for them. Name them. Respond before they compound.

Part III — Transparency Script

Language for moments when the truth must be held and communicated — clearly, humanely, without obfuscation.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Decision criteria are documented.

Tradeoffs are visible — not rationalized.

Unknowns are acknowledged, not minimized.

Revisit rules are defined before they are needed.

USE IT WHEN

Urgency is making process feel like a luxury.

Incentives are pulling at criteria. Something feels off but hasn't been named.

Ethical Stability
Criteria hold under pressure

Durable Legitimacy
Trust built through transparency

Reduced Distortion
Decisions that can be defended

We do what we say, and we mean what we do. That standard does not bend when urgency rises.

PART I

Minimum Governance

Minimum governance is not about adding process. It is the floor — the minimum set of practices below which a decision cannot be called legitimate.

<p>Written decision statement</p>	<p>What was decided. One sentence. Specific enough to be tested against. <i>Ask: Can someone who wasn't in the room understand what was decided?</i></p>
<p>Documented criteria</p>	<p>What made this the right call. The reasoning — not just the conclusion. <i>Ask: Would these criteria hold if the outcome were different?</i></p>
<p>Named tradeoffs</p>	<p>What was accepted as a consequence. What was deprioritized. <i>Ask: Are we naming what we're giving up — or only what we're gaining?</i></p>
<p>Revisit date and trigger</p>	<p>When and under what condition this decision will be reviewed. <i>Ask: What evidence would change our conclusion?</i></p>

GOVERNANCE WORKSHEET

DECISION STATEMENT:

What was decided. One sentence.

CRITERIA USED:

What made this right — the reasoning, not the outcome.

TRADEOFFS NAMED:

What was accepted. What was deprioritized.

REVISIT DATE AND TRIGGER:

When and under what condition we reopen this.

PART II

Guardrails

Criteria drift is gradual. The signals are visible before the problem is. These are the patterns worth watching for.

Criteria drift Success criteria shift to match outcomes rather than guide them.	<i>Ask: Are we changing what success means because we learned something — or because we're failing?</i>
Selective reporting Information that complicates the narrative stops reaching decision-makers.	<i>Ask: Who in this room knows something that has not been said?</i>
Fear-driven compression Process is shortened because urgency makes it feel like a luxury.	<i>Ask: What minimum process protects the people affected by this decision?</i>
Rationalization The reasoning for a decision is constructed after the conclusion is reached.	<i>Ask: Did we choose the criteria before we knew the answer — or after?</i>

PART III

Transparency Script

Transparency is honesty about what is known, what is not known, and what criteria are being used. Use this when the stakes are high and clarity is a form of respect.

WHEN THE DECISION MUST BE COMMUNICATED:

Hold the truth while protecting dignity.

"Here is what we know."

State it. No hedging.

"Here is what we do not know."

Name it. Owning uncertainty is honest, not weak.

"Here are the criteria we used."

Make them visible. Invite challenge.

"Here is the decision and who owns it."

One person. Clear.

"Here is when and how we revisit."

Revisit conditions signal the decision serves the work, not the other way around.

INTEGRITY CHECK — BEFORE YOU DECIDE

WHAT VALUE IS AT STAKE?

Not the goal — the underlying value.

WHAT ARE WE AT RISK OF RATIONALIZING?

Be honest. The rationalization is usually already forming.

WHAT WOULD WE BE WILLING TO DEFEND PUBLICLY?

If this differs from what you are about to decide, pay attention to that gap.

WHAT MINIMUM PROCESS PRESERVES DIGNITY AND TRUTH?

Name it. Then do that, at minimum.

REFLECTION

After the Work

Use these prompts after the situation has stabilized — not to assign blame, but to understand what the work revealed and what to carry forward.

WHAT VALUE WAS AT STAKE — AND DID WE PROTECT IT?

Not the outcome — the value.

WHAT PRESSURE CAME CLOSEST TO DISTORTING OUR CRITERIA?

This is where the learning lives.

WHAT MINIMUM PROCESS WOULD YOU ALWAYS PROTECT, REGARDLESS OF URGENCY?

Name it. Write it. Hold it.

Integrity is not preserved in the big moments. It is built in the small ones — the decision made carefully, the truth told when it would have been easier not to.

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