MAKING IT HAPPEN
Bringing Leadership into Focus

WHEN EVERYTHING COMES BACK TO YOU



A resource to support reflection for senior leaders in schools and academy trusts

“I JUST NEED PEOPLE TO STOP BRINGING EVERYTHING TO ME.”



“I’ve got a good team. They work hard. But somehow everything still ends up at my door. I spend all day sorting things out and then start my own work when everyone else has gone home.”

An imagined leadership reflection. Does any of this sound familiar?

You value your team. You want to be available. Yet the questions, decisions and unfinished conversations keep finding their way back to you.

Perhaps you have already encouraged people to take more ownership. Perhaps answering feels quicker than helping someone work it through, particularly when another meeting is about to start.

What keeps bringing it back to you

This short reflection offers space to notice the pattern, explore what might be sustaining it and choose one useful next step. Sometimes the issue needs your judgement. Sometimes people need greater clarity, confidence or permission to act.

Allow around 15 minutes. Begin with the ten prompts, then choose one situation to explore. There is no total score and no expectation that you will change everything at once.

For headteachers, reflect on your school leadership team. For trust CEOs, consider your executive team or the support and authority available to your headteachers. You may notice different patterns in different schools.



NOTICE THE PATTERNS

Where am I making a difference, and where am I becoming the person everything depends on?

Think about the past month in your school or trust. Beside each statement, write C for consistently, S for sometimes or R for rarely. Add a question mark where you need to find out more. Allow around 15 minutes to complete the reflection. .

STRATEGIC FOCUS	Our agreed priorities guide what receives leadership time.
	When we add a priority, we discuss what will stop or change.
DECISION MAKING	Leaders know which decisions they can make without checking with me.
	Decisions stay with the agreed owner unless there is a clear reason to involve me.
TEAM OWNERSHIP	Leaders bring their thinking and possible next steps alongside a problem.
	Agreed actions move forward without repeated prompting from me.
CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT	Leaders can express uncertainty or disagree without losing standing.
	Leaders have access to support beyond my availability.
SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP	I have time to think about what is coming, as well as respond to today.
	I have a trusted space to explore difficult decisions and my own assumptions.

These prompts offer a starting point for reflection, not a score of leadership effectiveness. Look for patterns and examples, rather than a total



BRING ONE PRESSURE POINT INTO FOCUS

What keeps bringing this back to me?

Look back at your responses. Which area feels most significant? A “sometimes” may matter more than a “rarely”, depending on what is happening. If you lead a trust, consider whether your experience differs from that of your headteachers.

Feel free to share it as a starting point for discussion

A STRENGTH TO PROTECT

Where is leadership already shared well? What helps this happen?

A PRESSURE POINT TO UNDERSTAND

Where does work repeatedly come back to you? Choose one recent example.

LOOK THROUGH THE FOLLOWING FIVE LENSES

Stay with that example. You do not need to answer every question. Begin with the one that makes you pause.

1 STRATEGIC FOCUS

Is this receiving my attention because it matters most, or because it is hardest to leave unanswered?

2 DECISION MAKING

What is clear about who makes decisions, how is it communicated and is it consistently applied?

3 TEAM OWNERSHIP

What might be bringing this back to me: experience, confidence, time, unclear expectations or something else?

4 CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT

Can this person ask for help and still retain ownership? What support would make a difference?

5 SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP

What does my involvement make possible? What does it leave less room for?

NOTICE YOUR PART WITH CURIOSITY

When something returns to you, what do you usually do? Answer quickly, take it over, ask a question, clarify a boundary? What might others learn from that response?What do you know, and what are you assuming?

Some matters must come to you, safeguarding concerns, governance arrangements or delegated responsibilities. The aim is to make ownership clear, with support and appropriate escalation.

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CHOOSE ONE USEFUL NEXT STEP

How can I support someone without taking it back?

You do not need to redesign how everyone works. Start with one recurring situation and the person best placed to explore it with you

One conversation

Begin with an observation, then make room for their perspective:

"I've noticed this decision has come back to me a few times. How do you see it? What would help you take it forward, and where would my input be useful?"

Who will you speak with, and when?

*

One responsibility to clarify

Agree who owns the next step, what they can decide, the support available and when they should involve you. Ask what would help them feel confident enough to act.
What needs to be made explicit?

*

One action to try

Choose something small enough to test over the next fortnight. You might ask for a proposed next step before offering an answer, clarify one decision boundary or protect time for a strategic conversation.
What will you do differently?

*

A moment to review

Set a review date. Look for evidence: did the decision move forward with appropriate ownership? Was support available when needed? What changed for the people involved?
Review date and what you will look for



A QUIET SPACE TO THINK IT THROUGH

Leadership can be a lonely place to work things out. A confidential conversation can help you find clarity about what needs your attention, confidence in your next step and connection with the people who can help move it forward.

I'm Lynda Haynes-McCartney, The Quiet Coach. I partner with school and trust leaders to think clearly, explore difficult questions and act with intent.
If this reflection has raised something you would value thinking through, I invite you to book an introductory conversation with me.



BOOK AN INTRODUCTORY CONVERSATION AT

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