

FREE RESOURCE | LEAD WITH HEART SERIES

10 Heart-Led *Leadership Strategies*

for Building Resilient Teams in Social Care

Practical tools from the HEART Leadership Model™
to help you lead with compassion, clarity, and confidence

Dr Karen May

CEO · Mentor · Educator · Author of Lead with Heart

Aspired Learning & Lifestyle Ltd | Abilities Development Ltd

A message from Karen

If you're reading this, it's because something about heart-led leadership resonated with you. Perhaps you're feeling the weight of leading in social care right now — the pressure, the pace, the people. Perhaps you're searching for a better way.

These 10 strategies are drawn directly from the principles in my book, *Lead with Heart: Building Resilient, Impactful Teams in the Social Care Revolution*. They are not theory. They are what I have lived, observed, taught, and refined over 30 years of leading in education, disability support, and social care.

You don't need to implement all 10 at once. Read through them, find the one that speaks to where you are right now, and start there. Small, consistent shifts in leadership practice create profound long-term change.

Lead with heart — always.

Dr Karen May

STRATEGY 1 OF 10

H — Hold space before you manage

Before addressing a performance issue or conflict, pause and ask: 'What might this person be carrying right now?' This single shift moves you from reactive to responsive. It doesn't excuse poor performance — it means you approach it with the full picture, not just what's visible on the surface.

TRY THIS

Ask one question this week before giving any piece of difficult feedback: 'Is there anything I should know before we talk about this?'

STRATEGY 2 OF 10

E — Name the emotion in the room

Emotionally intelligent leaders don't ignore the atmosphere — they acknowledge it. When a team feels anxious, defeated, or overwhelmed, naming it creates permission to process it. Unspoken emotions don't disappear; they go underground and affect performance, communication, and culture.

TRY THIS

In your next team meeting, open with: 'I want to check in. How is everyone feeling coming into this week?' Then listen without fixing.

STRATEGY 3 OF 10

A — Accountability with grace

High standards and compassion are not opposites. The most resilient teams have both. Accountability without grace breeds fear. Grace without accountability breeds mediocrity. The HEART leader holds the line while honouring the person — addressing the behaviour, never attacking the identity.

TRY THIS

Replace 'You didn't do X' with 'The standard we agreed is X — let's talk about what got in the way and what support you need.'

STRATEGY 4 OF 10

R — Reflect before you react

Leaders under pressure often respond from their nervous system, not their values. Building a personal 'pause practice' — even two deep breaths before a difficult conversation — begins to shift this pattern. Your regulation is the team's regulation. When you're grounded, your team feels it.

TRY THIS

Identify your personal trigger signals (tight chest, raised voice, short answers). Write them down. That awareness is the start of regulation.

STRATEGY 5 OF 10

T — Tell the truth about culture

Most care teams know exactly what the culture problems are. Leaders are often the last to hear. Creating regular, safe channels for honest feedback — anonymous or otherwise — gives you the information you need to lead well. Pretending things are fine when they aren't erodes trust faster than any mistake.

TRY THIS

Ask your team one anonymous question this month: 'What's one thing I could do differently that would make your working life better?'

STRATEGY 6 OF 10

Build psychological safety intentionally

Psychological safety — the belief that you won't be punished for speaking up — is the single most important factor in high-performing teams (Google's Project Aristotle, 2016). It doesn't happen by accident. It's built through consistent behaviour: how you respond when someone makes a mistake, when someone disagrees, when someone brings bad news.

TRY THIS

The next time someone admits a mistake to you, respond with curiosity before consequence. 'What happened, and what did you learn?' builds safety. 'How could you let this happen?' destroys it.

STRATEGY 7 OF 10

Create a weekly leadership rhythm

Inconsistency is one of the most damaging leadership behaviours in care. Teams in high-pressure environments need predictability from their leaders. A simple weekly rhythm — a brief check-in, a visible presence, a consistent one-to-one schedule — signals stability even when the environment is chaotic.

TRY THIS

Block 30 minutes every Monday morning to walk the floor, check in informally, and set your own leadership intention for the week.

STRATEGY 8 OF 10

Separate the person from the problem

In social care, people bring their whole selves to work — and so do their struggles. When a team member is underperforming, ask whether you're dealing with a capability issue, a willingness issue, or a circumstance issue. Each requires a completely different response. Treating them all the same will consistently produce the wrong outcome.

TRY THIS

Before your next supervision, decide: is this a 'can't do', 'won't do', or 'hasn't been supported to do' situation? Your approach should change depending on the answer.

STRATEGY 9 OF 10

Model the culture you want to build

You cannot build a compassionate, resilient team while running on empty yourself. Leaders who don't model wellbeing — who work every hour, never say no, and show up depleted — send a powerful message: this is what dedication looks like here. Heart-led leadership starts with how you treat yourself.

TRY THIS

Identify one boundary you've been avoiding. This week, put it in place. Your team is watching — and often waiting for permission to do the same.

STRATEGY 10 OF 10

Lead with a longer lens

The pressure in social care to solve today's problem today is immense. But the most impactful leadership decisions are often the slow ones — investing in a struggling team member rather than managing them out, rebuilding culture rather than patching symptoms. Heart-led leadership asks: what does this person, this team, this organisation need to thrive — not just survive?

TRY THIS

Ask yourself this question once a month: 'Am I leading for this week, or for the next year?' If the answer is only this week — that's your signal to zoom out.

What's next?

These 10 strategies give you a foundation. But transformation in leadership doesn't happen through reading alone — it happens through practice, reflection, and sometimes, the right support alongside you.

Read the full book. *Lead with Heart* takes you deeper into the HEART Leadership Model™ with frameworks, case studies, and tools for every leadership challenge in social care.

Join the Lead with Heart Mentorship Programme. Work directly with Karen to transform your leadership practice and your care culture. Limited places available.

Share this resource. If this guide has been useful, pass it on to a colleague who leads in social care. Heart-led leadership grows through community.

aspiredlearningandlifestyle.com

karen.may@aspiredlearningandlifestyle.com