



Serve to Lead

A Leadership Guide for New Zealand's Emerging Uniformed Leaders

A practical guide to leading with integrity, courage, and purpose across uniformed roles in Aotearoa.

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.
My strength is not that of a single warrior, but that of many.*

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We'd love to hear how *Serve to Lead* landed for you - what resonated, what challenged you, and what could be improved. Whether you read one section or the whole guide, your feedback helps us shape future resources that are grounded, inclusive, and genuinely useful for emerging leaders across Aotearoa.

It takes just a few minutes, and your insights will help us serve better - and lead better.



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About the author

Chris Collins is a strategic technology leader, mental health advocate, and former soldier whose career spans more than two decades across commercial sectors including finance, aviation, education, and public service.

As Chief Executive of a charitable trust supporting Defence Forces and Emergency Services personnel, Chris combines lived experience with visionary leadership to deliver programs that transform lives. These include crisis intervention, psychological first aid, career mentoring, and physical resilience initiatives.

Known for embedding ethical data practices and inclusive governance frameworks into complex organisations, Chris has led enterprise-wide transformations that balance regulatory rigour with human-centred design.

His work often sits at the intersection of compliance, innovation, and culture. Whether shaping data literacy programs, mentoring neurodiverse teams, or guiding organisations through agile and cloud transitions, he brings clarity and compassion to every challenge.

Chris's leadership is grounded in action. He is trained in disaster response, suicide prevention, and strategic data management, and has received national recognition for his contributions to mental health and lived experience leadership. His focus remains on empowering others, especially those navigating the transition between military and civilian life.

A storyteller at heart, Chris brings humour, empathy, and precision to every conversation. His writing bridges worlds, challenges assumptions, and invites readers to lead with both courage and care. This guide reflects the lessons he has learned from the front lines of leadership, where data meets humanity and strategy meets soul.



Section 1 - Leading with Purpose



By Scott L from Los Angeles, United States of America

Leadership is not about having a title or command. It begins long before you hold rank or lead a team. It starts with intention, with heart, and with a steady commitment to the people beside you.

Whether you're a cadet trying on the uniform for the first time, a recruit heading into your early shifts, or an emerging leader navigating the demands of frontline service - this guide is for you. It was written to support those in their first five years of military or emergency service roles in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is a practical, grounded companion for those learning to lead in moments that matter.

In uniformed service, leadership draws its strength not from authority, but from values. From the way you carry yourself during quiet moments as much as in crisis. From the way you listen when others speak. From the trust you build - slowly, honestly, and through action.

To lead is to serve. To steady a team when the plan unravels. To offer calm in a storm. To uphold dignity in the face of chaos. It is about being ready when others hesitate and standing with courage when it is easier to stand back.

In New Zealand, service carries a special weight. You don't just wear a uniform - you represent your whānau, your community, your whenua. You stand as part of a legacy rooted in protection, compassion, and shared strength. And in doing so, you inherit more than a role; you inherit a responsibility.

Leadership can be quiet. It can be small acts of care or accountability - owning a mistake, helping a teammate, staying composed when tensions rise. These choices shape your influence far more than titles ever could.

You are not expected to be perfect. You are expected to be present, to learn, and to lead with authenticity. The most effective leaders are those who remain grounded, humble, and human - even when the stakes are high.

So wherever you are in your journey - welcome. This guide invites you to lead with clarity, with integrity, and with purpose. The chapters ahead will walk alongside you as you grow your skills, face pressure, build resilience, and find your own leadership voice.

How to Apply This Guide

- Reflect on what leadership means to you personally, beyond rank or command.
- Consider moments in your life where someone's calm or kindness shaped you - what qualities did they show?
- Keep a written record of why you chose this path. In difficult moments, return to it.
- Begin building your leadership by showing up consistently and supporting others, even in small ways.

Understanding the Environment

Leadership in military or emergency service environments rarely happens under perfect conditions. In fact, it often begins exactly where things fall apart - amid the noise, the silence, the flashing lights, or the stillness that follows a crisis. You might find yourself leading on a flooded rural road, inside a burnt-out building, or beside a wrecked vehicle down a gravel track. Every step you take could be under the watchful eye of the public, the media, and your own team.

This is the landscape in which you'll lead. It is dynamic, unpredictable, and sometimes emotionally charged. But it is also rich with opportunity - to make a difference, to steady others, and to shape your own character under pressure.

Leadership here doesn't always look like control or command. Sometimes it means knowing when to speak plainly, when to listen, and when to stand firm. At other times, it means adapting on the fly, accepting what you cannot control, and focusing on what you can influence.

You won't always be the most senior person in the room. That doesn't mean you can't be the most stabilising. Leadership is often about presence - about being someone others can rely on when things feel uncertain.

You'll be asked to make decisions without full information. You'll be expected to balance speed with care, and efficiency with compassion. You may have too few resources, unclear instructions, or conflicting expectations. These are not failures of the system; they are realities of the work. Strong leaders learn to operate within them, drawing on values rather than waiting for perfect clarity.

One of the most important truths to hold onto is that no single style of leadership fits every situation. In some cases, a collaborative and empathetic approach will help calm and connect your team. In others, you'll need to be clear and directive - particularly when lives are at risk. The more flexible you are, the more effective you become.

To serve well in this environment, there are a few personal qualities you must continue to grow.

Adaptability

Environments will shift around you - sudden weather changes, changing policies, stretched resources, new operational protocols. Adaptability is not about reacting without thought; it's about staying open to change and calm in uncertainty. Adaptable leaders do not panic - they pivot, drawing strength from preparedness and reflection.

Emotional Intelligence

Leadership is not just about decisions; it's also about presence. Your team will notice how you speak, move, and carry emotion. Leaders who read emotional signals - fatigue, frustration, fear - early and respond with empathy are more likely to earn long-term trust.

Shared Commitment

You will lead alongside people from a wide range of roles - volunteers, professionals, iwi liaison officers, logistics crews, community partners. Respect and cooperation across these different backgrounds is not optional; it's essential. Unified teams don't happen by accident - they are built through deliberate trust, clear communication, and consistent respect.

Leadership in this space isn't about being faultless. It's about being trustworthy, grounded, and ready to act when others hesitate. You won't always have the answers, but you can be the person who helps others find their footing when it matters most.

How to Apply This

- When situations feel unclear or stressful, pause, breathe, and ask: what does my team need most right now - clarity, calm, or direction?
- Practise reading the room: observe how others carry stress or energy before you speak or act.
- Reflect after incidents - how did you respond, and what helped (or hindered) your team?
- Stay curious about your environment. Read widely, engage in debriefs, and learn from those around you, regardless of their title.

The Leader Within

Values, Character, and Responsibility

Before leadership becomes something you do, it is something you are. Uniformed leadership is built from the inside out. It begins not with your authority over others, but with your integrity, consistency, and the way you choose to act - even when no one is watching.

When you step into uniform, your decisions carry greater visibility. Every word, gesture, and choice reflects on more than just yourself - it speaks to your team, your service, and the public trust you uphold. This isn't about pressure. It's about purpose. It's about understanding that who you are shapes the legacy you leave behind.

Your Core Values

Your leadership will be tested in moments of complexity. It is your values that will guide you through. They are not abstract ideals; they are the compass you return to when the path forward isn't clear.

- Courage is not just about facing danger. It's also the bravery to speak up for what's right, to admit when you're wrong, and to lead ethically even under pressure.
- Respect is shown through every interaction - how you regard your team, how you uphold process, how you honour whakapapa and place.
- Integrity is the alignment between what you say and what you do. It is visible in private moments, not just in public ones.
- Service is your anchor. You exist not for status or reward, but to uplift others and safeguard your community.
- Discipline reflects in your reliability, punctuality, and commitment to protocols.
- Selflessness means placing the needs of others above personal convenience, especially when no recognition follows.



Whakapapa as Compass

Your whakapapa is not just heritage - it's a living guide. It shapes how you lead, how you relate, and how you serve. When leadership feels uncertain, return to your roots. Your values, your lived experience, and your cultural identity are not separate from leadership - they are its foundation.

You won't be perfect in all of these. That's not the point. What matters is striving to live them daily, to return to them when things go wrong, and to use them as your moral framework in every decision.

Leading by Example

Leadership is not a badge. It is a pattern of behaviour. It is visible in small, often unseen choices:

- Staying calm when others lose control
- Owning mistakes instead of deflecting blame
- Giving quiet encouragement, even when no one's watching
- Holding the line when shortcuts would be easier

Reputation isn't built in heroic moments. It's built in the way you show up, again and again, with consistency and care.

Responsibility Without Excuses

Leaders are not expected to get everything right - but they are expected to be accountable. Responsibility means owning the consequences of your actions and your leadership presence. It also includes how you:

- Show emotional awareness and stability under pressure
- Model safe practice and attention to standards
- Influence the tone and culture of your team

When something falls short, the best leaders don't hide - they face it, learn from it, and adjust forward.

Vulnerability and Strength

There is enormous strength in admitting when you're unsure or overwhelmed. When you model this kind of openness, you create a culture where it's safe for others to be real, to learn, and to speak up. Vulnerability isn't about oversharing. It's about authenticity and humility - two things your team will value far more than bravado.

Caring for Yourself

Sustainable leadership begins with self-care. If you are consistently exhausted, your ability to lead with clarity, empathy, and patience diminishes. Rest, nutrition, movement, and reflective practices aren't indulgences - they are your professional responsibilities. Taking care of yourself is how you show up fully for others.

Your Leadership Philosophy

It helps to define your personal leadership philosophy. Ask yourself:

- Why do I lead?
- What do I stand for?
- How will I act when I am under pressure?

Write it down. Keep it close. Let it guide your decisions - especially when emotions run high or outcomes are uncertain.

Your Legacy Begins Now

The way you lead today sets the tone for the career you build. Think about what you want others to say about you when you're not in the room. That's your real leadership brand.

Empathy. Consistency. Self-awareness. These are the things that build long-term respect and trust. If you focus on who you are - not just what you do - you'll leave behind something far more lasting than any position ever could.

How to Apply This

- Write a short leadership statement that includes your 'why', your values, and the kind of leader you want to be.
- Reflect weekly: where did you lead with integrity, and where could you have done better?
- Ask a trusted colleague or mentor to describe how they experience your leadership - then listen without defensiveness.
- Start each week by setting one intentional behaviour (e.g., "I'll show patience during pressure" or "I'll ask for feedback from a junior team member").

Building Capability

Knowledge, Tools, and Growth



By Derek Qiinn - Own work

Leadership within uniformed service is grounded not only in values and intent but in professional competence. In high-stakes situations, your confidence and capability become a source of calm for others. A strong leader knows the systems they work in, the people they lead, and the tools they depend on. This chapter focuses on how to build that foundation - through self-awareness, technical knowledge, and a mindset of continuous growth.

Know Your Role

Understanding your specific responsibilities is vital. You need to be clear on what is expected of you during a shift, an incident response, or a community engagement. This includes knowing which Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) apply to your tasks, understanding how your legal authority operates, and recognising when to assert yourself

and when to step back. Clarity in your role reduces uncertainty and helps your team operate with greater precision and safety.

Know Your People

Good leaders take time to understand the strengths, needs, and motivations of those they serve alongside. Some teammates remain composed under stress; others might need additional reassurance. One person might offer deep cultural insight or unique technical ability. Another may be driven by opportunities for growth, recognition, or a sense of service. By noticing these nuances and adapting your leadership approach accordingly, you help each person feel seen and supported.

Know Your Tools

Leadership also means mastering the tools of your trade - radios, vehicles, rescue kits, communication platforms, or digital mapping systems. You need to be confident using the equipment and technologies at your disposal, and you must stay calm when something fails or goes offline. This includes preparing backup plans and communicating clearly when standard systems aren't available. Competency in tools isn't just a technical requirement - it's a leadership signal that tells others they can trust you under pressure.

Manage Communication and Information Flow

Effective communication is a cornerstone of capable leadership. You must know how to deliver information simply and clearly, especially during moments of tension. Avoid jargon unless it's commonly understood within your team, and always confirm that key messages have been received and understood. Knowing who needs to be informed, when, and how ensures smooth coordination and builds mutual trust between you and your peers, supervisors, or community partners.

Gather Intelligence Before Acting

Decision-making improves with context. Before rushing into action, pause to observe what's happening - look for obvious risks, available resources, bystanders, or environmental clues. Talk to others already at the scene. Ask pointed, respectful questions. This kind of deliberate observation ensures your decisions are well-informed, timely, and safe. It also signals to others that you are methodical and thoughtful in how you lead.

Understand the Bigger Picture

Uniformed roles never operate in isolation. Your decisions and actions sit within a much larger system - local agencies, iwi partnerships, national policies, political pressures, and

community expectations. Good leaders understand how all these elements connect. This means knowing who your stakeholders are, recognising how upstream decisions affect frontline work, and participating in briefings or inter-agency conversations when possible. Broad awareness helps you lead more strategically and collaborate more effectively.

Embrace Lifelong Learning

No matter how experienced you become, leadership demands humility and a readiness to keep learning. It's important to admit when you don't know something and to actively seek answers. This might mean reading updated protocols, asking a more experienced colleague for help, or treating each debrief as a genuine learning opportunity. Growth happens in the margins - during reflection, in honest conversations, or while reviewing a moment that didn't go as planned.

How to Apply This

Set aside time regularly to build your capability. Review a section of your SOPs, familiarise yourself with an unfamiliar tool, or ask a teammate to explain a system you don't fully understand. During team briefings, clarify not only what needs to happen but why it matters. After each shift or event, reflect on what you learned - not just what went well, but what you could do better next time. Leadership grows where curiosity meets consistency.

Trust – The Quiet Force Behind

Effective Leadership

Trust is not a soft skill. It is a structural force that underpins every successful leadership relationship. Whether you're leading a small team, stepping into your first supervisory role, or guiding others through high-stakes environments, trust is the currency that determines your influence, credibility, and long-term impact.

Trust Is Earned, But It Starts With You

Many new leaders approach trust as something to be earned from others. While this is true, it's equally important to recognize that leadership begins by extending trust first. In military settings, trust is often implicit - forged through shared training, uniformity, and a common mission. In civilian environments, however, trust must be built deliberately and often from scratch.

Start by trusting your team to try, to learn, and to make mistakes. This doesn't mean blind faith. It means creating a space where people feel safe to grow, knowing that accountability and support go hand in hand.

The Five Levels of Trust

A useful framework for understanding how trust develops over time is the Five Levels of Trust. This model helps leaders assess where their team members are and how to support their growth.

1. **Task Execution** – Can they follow instructions and complete assigned tasks reliably?
2. **Autonomy** – Can they work independently without constant oversight?
3. **Initiative** – Do they take proactive steps beyond what's asked?
4. **Improvement** – Are they actively improving systems, processes, or outcomes?
5. **Teaching Others** – Can they pass on knowledge and elevate others?

This progression isn't linear for everyone, but it offers a practical way to evaluate trustworthiness and leadership potential.

Competence and Integrity: The Twin Pillars

Trust is built on two primary pillars: competence and integrity. If you are not competent in your role, trust will erode quickly. If you lack integrity, it will collapse entirely.

Competence means knowing your craft, being willing to learn, and acknowledging your limitations. Integrity means doing what you say you will do, owning mistakes, and being consistent in your values and actions.

As a leader, your credibility is shaped not just by what you know, but by how you behave when things go wrong. Owning a mistake and showing accountability builds more trust than pretending to have all the answers.

Discretion and Transparency

Leadership often involves holding information that cannot be shared. This tension between discretion and transparency can create mistrust if not handled carefully.

The solution is clarity. Be honest about what you can and cannot share. Set boundaries respectfully. Let your team know when updates will be available and why certain decisions are made at higher levels. Transparency isn't about telling everything - it's about being clear and consistent in how you communicate.

Rebuilding Trust

Trust will be broken. Sometimes through honest mistakes. Sometimes through betrayal. When it happens, the path to rebuilding is through action, not apology alone.

Rebuilding trust requires:

- Acknowledging the breach
- Demonstrating change through consistent behavior
- Creating opportunities for others to see your growth

Leaders must also be willing to offer second chances when appropriate. As one story from the podcast illustrated, a team member who had been sidelined after a failed task was given another opportunity - and proved himself. Sometimes, trust is not lost. It's just waiting to be re-earned.

Cultural and Contextual Sensitivity

Trust is not universal. It is shaped by culture, age, experience, and context. What builds trust in one environment may not translate in another. For example, a young leader may need to demonstrate maturity and decision-making before being trusted with authority. In cross-cultural teams, understanding communication styles and values is essential.

The key is connection. Build rapport. Listen actively. Celebrate small wins. Trust grows in the soil of shared experience and mutual respect.

How To Apply This

To move from understanding trust to embodying it, here are five practical tasks you can undertake. These are designed to help you reflect, build, and strengthen trust within your team and leadership style.

1. Map Your Trust Relationships

- List 3–5 people you work with regularly.
- For each person, identify which level of trust they currently sit at (using the Five Levels of Trust model).
- Reflect on what support or opportunities you could offer to help them move to the next level.

2. Conduct a Trust Audit

- Ask yourself: Where have I demonstrated integrity and competence this month?
- Where might I have unintentionally eroded trust (for example, missed deadlines or unclear communication)?
- Choose one area to improve and set a specific goal for the next two weeks.

3. Practice Transparent Communication

- Identify a situation where you need to withhold information due to confidentiality or discretion.
- Draft a short message or talking point that explains the boundary clearly and respectfully.
- Use it in your next team meeting or one-on-one conversation.

4. Celebrate a Small Win

- Choose one team member who has shown initiative or growth recently.
- Acknowledge their contribution publicly or privately with a specific compliment.
- Note how this recognition affects their engagement and your relationship.

5. Reflect on a Trust Breach

- Think of a time when trust was broken - either by you or someone else.

- Write down what happened, how it was handled, and what could have been done differently.
- If appropriate, consider reaching out to that person to rebuild the relationship or clarify expectations.

These tasks are not one-offs. They are part of a leadership rhythm that builds trust over time. As you complete them, you'll begin to notice how trust shifts from an abstract concept to a tangible force in your leadership journey.

In the next chapter, we'll explore how to influence others when you don't have formal authority - a skill that relies heavily on the trust you've earned and the relationships you've nurtured.

Leading Others

Mentorship, Teams, and Delegation



By New Zealand Defence Force from Wellington, New Zealand

Leadership is not about standing above others; it's about lifting them up. Your influence is measured not by how much control you have, but by how effectively you help people grow, feel valued, and contribute with purpose. Whether you are mentoring a junior colleague, building a cohesive team, or guiding someone through a new task, your ability to lead others is one of the clearest expressions of your own maturity as a leader.

This chapter focuses on three core areas: developing yourself, developing others, and achieving results through collaboration.

Developing Yourself First

Before you can lead others well, you must first commit to your own development. Great leaders remain students of the work, constantly learning, reflecting, and adjusting. That growth often happens in quiet moments - after a tough call-out, in the stillness of a long drive home, or during honest conversations with a peer or mentor.

You don't need to have all the answers. But you do need to be open to feedback and willing to examine how your behaviour influences others. Personal growth can come from reviewing decisions, asking thoughtful questions, or journaling about what challenged you and why. It's not weakness to seek insight - it's wisdom.

As you grow, you model that learning mindset for others. And in doing so, you create an environment where development is normal, not shameful.

Developing Others

Leadership is ultimately about building capacity in others. This means being intentional about coaching, mentoring, and delegation. When you support someone's growth, you not only strengthen the team - you also honour their potential.

Effective delegation begins with trust. Before handing off a task, make sure the person understands why the work matters, what success looks like, and how you'll support them along the way. Be clear about outcomes, timelines, and when you'll check in. Then step back. Let them lead, learn, and bring their own approach.

Mentorship is equally powerful. Sometimes it happens formally, through a structured programme. Other times, it's informal - small conversations, quiet encouragement, or offering insight based on your own experiences. Both approaches matter. As you mentor others, you're also reminded of what you've learned and how far you've come.

The key is to create relationships where questions are welcomed, mistakes are learning opportunities, and growth is celebrated. Don't wait to be assigned a mentee - if you see potential in someone, let them know. One sentence of belief can change a person's path.

Building Strong Teams

A team is not simply a collection of people - it's a shared culture, a network of trust, and a place where people feel they belong. Strong teams are built on mutual respect, honest communication, and shared hardship. They are places where everyone knows their role, and where everyone is willing to support each other when the pressure builds.

You foster team culture through small, deliberate actions: beginning shifts with check-ins, recognising good work out loud, encouraging inclusion during difficult decisions, and listening carefully when someone speaks up. These seemingly minor efforts help build cohesion, loyalty, and pride.

When conflict arises, address it early and with respect. Don't wait for tensions to escalate. A quiet word, a private conversation, or a respectful check-in can often prevent small disagreements from turning into deeper rifts. Pay attention to patterns - who is feeling excluded, who is stepping up without recognition, and which values are being practised or neglected. Culture isn't what's written on the wall; it's what happens every day in how people treat each other.



Bottom-Up Leadership in Action

The best insights often come from those closest to the work. Invite frontline voices into decision-making. Challenge rigid hierarchies by asking: "Who knows this problem best?" Leadership is not about knowing more - it's about listening better.

Achieving Outcomes Through Leadership

Ultimately, leadership is not about being busy - it's about making things happen. Whether your goal is a safe operation, a resolved call-out, or a strengthened team, your actions should lead to meaningful outcomes. This requires a combination of integrity, grit, and humility.

Integrity ensures that your decisions align with the values of your service and the law. Grit allows you to keep going when the work becomes exhausting or complex. And humility

reminds you that others have valuable insights too - often from experiences you haven't had.

When you combine these traits with clear communication and purposeful action, you not only meet deadlines - you meet the moment. You serve others by showing up, staying steady, and making things better than you found them.

Managing Upward

Leadership doesn't just extend outward - it also travels upward. Managing up means maintaining a strong, respectful relationship with your supervisors or commanders. It involves providing timely updates, raising concerns early, and offering potential solutions rather than simply highlighting problems.

Being proactive in your communication ensures that the people above you understand what your team needs, what's working, and where challenges lie. This strengthens your team's position, improves resource support, and demonstrates your readiness for greater responsibility.

Creating Space for Others to Lead

One of the most generous things a leader can do is make space for others to step forward. Leadership doesn't belong to one person - it should be shared. Look for moments where others can lead, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds or those early in their journey but full of promise.

Encourage emerging voices. Hand over responsibility where appropriate. Celebrate different styles of leadership, and show that real strength lies in empowering others.

By letting others lead, you build a legacy of shared growth, shared trust, and shared purpose. Leadership is not a spotlight - it's a torch passed from hand to hand.

How to Apply This

Each week, look for one person you can support more intentionally - through feedback, encouragement, or opportunity. Reflect on how you're building trust in your team, and where you might be able to let go of control to help someone else grow. Ask yourself not only what you accomplished, but who you helped develop. That's how leadership multiplies.

Leadership Under Pressure

Crisis, Fatigue, and Change



By ISAF Headquarters Public Affairs Office from Kabul, Afghanistan

Leadership matters most not in the easy moments, but in the difficult ones. Anyone can appear calm during a quiet shift or a well-planned training day. True leadership reveals itself when conditions are unclear, when emotions run high, and when you're called to act with strength and clarity despite discomfort.

In the military and emergency services, pressure is not an occasional inconvenience - it is part of the job. You'll face long hours, complex situations, critical decisions, and the weight of community expectation. The way you respond in these moments will not only define your effectiveness but also shape the culture around you.

This chapter explores how to lead during crisis, manage fatigue, support your team, and stay steady when everything around you shifts.

Leading Through Crisis

Crises come in many forms. You might be the first on scene after a major incident, or the leader coordinating a team through a high-risk, emotionally charged operation. In those moments, people don't expect you to have all the answers - they look to you for steadiness.

The first priority in crisis is always safety: your own, your team's, and the public's. From there, leadership means communicating clearly, making decisions based on values and protocols, and supporting those around you with composure.

If you feel fear or doubt, that's normal. What matters is how you manage those emotions. Speak in a calm tone, regulate your breathing, and focus on immediate priorities. You don't need to pretend to be unshakeable - you need to be present, honest, and willing to act.

Managing Uncertainty

Often, you'll face situations where information is incomplete or guidance is evolving. A new policy might be introduced during a shift. Public expectations might shift without warning. Team members may ask questions for which there are no clear answers.

In these moments, your job is to hold the line - not through false certainty, but through transparency. Clarify what you do know. Acknowledge what remains unclear. Invite discussion where it's safe to do so, and avoid rushing to fill silences with assumptions. Reassure people by focusing on shared values, even if plans must change.

A leader who can remain steady in uncertainty builds trust that extends well beyond any single operation.

Recognising and Responding to Fatigue

Fatigue is one of the most common - and most dangerous - pressures you will face. Long shifts, disrupted sleep, emotional labour, and accumulated trauma take their toll over time. Fatigue reduces your capacity for empathy, decision-making, and self-regulation.

As a leader, you have a duty to protect not only your own wellbeing, but also your team's. This means encouraging rest without guilt, rotating responsibilities when needed, and noticing early signs of burnout - withdrawal, irritability, or persistent errors.

Don't wait for someone to ask for help. Check in regularly, listen without judgement, and be open about your own limits. Leadership includes showing that it's acceptable to pause and reset, rather than pushing through until harm occurs.

Normalising recovery makes your team stronger - not weaker.

Maintaining Discipline Under Stress

In high-pressure environments, the temptation to cut corners is real. You may feel pressed for time, resources may be stretched, or urgency may override routine. However, it is precisely in these moments that discipline matters most.

Protocols and SOPs exist to protect life and ensure fairness. When you model commitment to those systems, even under pressure, you reinforce the standards that keep people safe.

Use verbal call-outs or simple checklists to anchor your team's actions. Reinforce why each step matters - not to tick a box, but to protect trust, integrity, and wellbeing. Your example speaks louder than any policy manual.

Supporting Recovery and Reflection

After difficult operations or emotionally taxing incidents, leadership continues. You are responsible for initiating and supporting debriefs - both formal and informal. These conversations give your team a space to reflect, learn, and begin processing what they've experienced.

Create a safe environment where people can speak openly. Discuss what went well, what could improve, and what needs to change next time. Don't forget to acknowledge the emotional impact. Some people may carry more than they show.

Encourage peer support, promote access to wellbeing resources, and remain visible after the event. Debriefing isn't about critique - it's about connection, growth, and recovery.



Kindness as Discipline

Kindness is not softness - it's a deliberate choice. In high-pressure systems, kindness stabilises teams, preserves dignity, and fosters resilience. Practise it consistently, especially when it's hardest.

Responding to Moral Injury

Some situations will challenge your sense of right and wrong. You may witness harm that could not be prevented, make decisions that feel ethically heavy, or face outcomes that leave you questioning yourself. This is known as moral injury.

It's not a sign of failure - it's a sign that your values matter. The key is not to bury these feelings but to process them with trusted support. As a leader, be alert to signs of moral strain in yourself and others - withdrawal, anger, guilt, or emotional numbness.

Make it safe for people to name ethical discomfort. Invite chaplains, mentors, or wellbeing advisors into the conversation. Leadership includes holding space for complexity - and helping people find meaning through it.

Modelling Steadiness

Your team does not need perfection from you. They need consistency. They need someone who stays calm in chaos, communicates honestly, and adapts with courage. You won't always get everything right. What matters is how you show up.

By staying grounded, acknowledging your limits, and asking for help when needed, you give permission for others to do the same. And in doing so, you create the kind of culture where people not only survive pressure - but grow through it.

How to Apply This

After a challenging event, take time to reflect - not just on the operational outcomes, but on how you led. Ask yourself what helped your team feel supported, where you stayed calm, and where you could have shown greater care. Speak to someone you trust about the weight of that moment, and listen for signs of fatigue in others. Leadership under pressure begins long before the moment hits - and continues long after it ends.

Decision-Making Under Fire

Acting with Integrity and Speed

Every leader, regardless of experience or position, will face moments when decisions must be made quickly and under pressure. In uniformed service, these moments often arrive without warning. Information may be incomplete. The consequences may be serious. People may be looking to you for direction when you yourself are uncertain.

This chapter explores how to make decisions that are fast, ethical, and clear - and how to balance instinct with structure, especially when the stakes are high.

The Importance of a Framework

Under pressure, your brain naturally seeks shortcuts. Stress narrows your focus and speeds up your internal clock. That's why it helps to have a decision-making framework - something that gives you structure when emotions run high or the path forward is unclear.

One such model is the OODA Loop: Observe, Orient, Decide, Act.

- Observe: Take in what you can - scene details, verbal reports, cues from others, or visible threats.
- Orient: Make sense of what you're seeing. What's relevant? What's missing? What assumptions are being made?
- Decide: Choose a course of action, guided by your values, training, and available protocols.
- Act: Execute clearly, then return to the first step. Keep assessing and adjusting.

This loop doesn't need to be drawn out. It can happen in seconds. But having a structure prevents panic and allows your values and situational awareness to lead your actions.

A full explanation of OODA, including examples, will be included in the Appendix.

Making Decisions with Limited Information

In real-world situations, you will rarely have all the facts. Sometimes you will face conflicting advice, delayed intel, or emotional pressure from others. In these moments, your job is not to delay until certainty arrives - it is to act responsibly with what you know.

When overwhelmed by input, prioritise verified sources: what you've directly observed, what trusted team members report, and what your protocols confirm. If information is scarce, fall back on your core principles: protect life, ensure safety, uphold your duty of care.

Document assumptions where possible, especially in formal operations, and be ready to adjust your decisions as new information emerges.

Legal vs. Ethical Choices

Sometimes, what is lawful may not feel right. Sometimes, what is kind may sit at odds with regulations. These moments are uncomfortable - but they are also where real leadership lives.

Use your core values - Courage, Respect, Integrity, Service, Discipline, Selflessness - to guide you through the grey areas. Ask yourself:

- Is this decision aligned with our protocols and values?
- Who will be most affected by this action?
- Would I be comfortable explaining this choice to a colleague I respect - or to the public?
- What is the greater good here, and how do I protect dignity as well as safety?

These questions don't provide instant answers - but they give you moral direction when the rules alone are not enough.

Taking Responsibility for Outcomes

Leadership doesn't end once the decision is made. You are also responsible for what follows. That includes communicating clearly with your team and stakeholders, following up with support where it's needed, and addressing both the intended and unintended consequences of your actions.

When things go well, share credit. When things go wrong, own the outcome. Transparency builds trust. So does humility.

Reviewing decisions with your team also helps you all learn. Talk about what worked, what didn't, and how you'll adjust in the future. This practice of reflective learning is one of the most powerful tools a leader can offer.

When Mistakes Happen

Even the best leaders will make errors. What separates a strong leader from a reckless one is not perfection - it's integrity.

When you've made the wrong call, acknowledge it. Explain your reasoning at the time, listen to the feedback, and make amends where needed. Revisit SOPs or adjust processes if they contributed to the problem. Apologise where appropriate - not out of weakness, but because doing so strengthens respect.

Owning a mistake doesn't diminish your authority - it builds it.



Integrity in Leadership

Integrity is the anchor of effective leadership - rooted in honesty, consistency, and dependability. It's not just a personal virtue; it's the foundation upon which trust and respect are built within teams and organisations.

When leaders follow through on their commitments, they signal that their word carries weight. This reliability fosters a culture where accountability thrives and relationships deepen. It's not about perfection - it's about showing up with authenticity and standing by your principles, even when it's inconvenient.

By consistently honouring promises, leaders model the kind of behaviour that invites others to do the same. This creates a ripple effect: trust grows, collaboration strengthens, and the team becomes more resilient and aligned.

In the end, integrity isn't just about what you say - it's about what you prove through action. When your words and deeds match, you earn more than respect - you build a legacy of leadership others want to follow.

How to Apply This

Start practising the OODA Loop in low-pressure environments - during training, debriefs, or planning sessions. Build muscle memory so that it becomes instinctive under pressure. When facing a difficult choice, pause to ask which value matters most right now. After key decisions, make a habit of reviewing the outcome - not just operationally, but ethically. Who did it serve, and what can be improved next time?

Leading Across Difference

Inclusion, Culture, and Belonging



By SGT Brian Gavin - US DoD, Public Domain

In Aotearoa New Zealand, diversity is not an exception - it is a foundational truth. Our communities are shaped by varied cultures, beliefs, generations, languages, neurodiversity, and life experiences. In military and emergency service roles, you will serve alongside people from all walks of life. What makes a team strong is not sameness, but the ability to lead across difference - with care, humility, and respect.

Leadership in this space means creating environments where everyone feels seen, valued, and safe to contribute. This chapter focuses on cultural intelligence, inclusive behaviour, and how to build genuine belonging in your team.

Respect as a Leadership Standard

Respect isn't a soft skill. It is the bedrock of inclusive leadership. People do not follow leaders who belittle, exclude, or ignore difference. They follow those who listen, learn, and act fairly. Respect shows people they belong - and belonging allows people to perform at their best.

As a leader, how you treat others sets the tone. Your example becomes permission for others. If you welcome different perspectives, they will too. If you brush them aside, so will they.

Listening Before Leading

Trust across difference grows slowly. For people who've experienced exclusion - whether based on ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, or background - leadership must be earned through listening, not assumptions.

Be curious, not performative. Listen more than you speak. Let others tell their own stories rather than interpreting for them. Ask what matters, what's missing, and what support looks like from their point of view.

This kind of listening isn't about political correctness - it's about effective leadership. Because when you understand the people you lead, you lead more wisely.

Cultural Intelligence in Practice

In New Zealand, understanding concepts such as *mana*, *tikanga*, and *whakapapa* is not optional - it's essential. These principles shape how Māori and Pacific communities relate, communicate, and make meaning.

Cultural intelligence means recognising that identity affects how people process authority, conflict, feedback, and decision-making. It also means adapting how you lead - your tone, your body language, and your approach to challenge - depending on who you're working with.

For example, direct confrontation may work in some settings, while quiet conversation or *hui* may be more effective elsewhere. Some team members may appreciate public recognition; others may find it uncomfortable or inappropriate.

Inclusive leadership means adjusting - not diluting - your standards, so that everyone can succeed with dignity.

Leading Neurodiverse and Marginalised Voices

Some team members may think, process, or communicate differently. Neurodiverse colleagues, for instance, may need clear structure or sensory accommodations. Migrant or multilingual teammates may face additional emotional and logistical strain. LGBTQ+ personnel may feel hyper-aware in environments that have not always been inclusive.

As a leader, your role is not to have all the answers - but to make room for everyone to thrive. Ask what works best. Offer flexibility when possible. Pay attention to who gets heard, and who gets overlooked. Make equity part of your daily leadership, not just an occasional topic.

Equity vs. Equality

Treating people fairly does not mean treating everyone the same. It means understanding individual context and adjusting accordingly. That may mean offering extra support, delivering feedback differently, or varying your expectations based on what someone is facing outside of work.

Equity is leadership in action. It removes unnecessary barriers and creates a level field for performance - not by lowering standards, but by supporting people to reach them.

Dealing with Bias

Every leader carries assumptions. That's human. What matters is your willingness to confront them. Notice who you tend to trust, interrupt, rely on, or avoid. Ask for feedback on how you come across. Question your gut feelings - are they grounded in truth, or in bias?

Unconscious bias affects decisions about performance, potential, and credibility. By slowing down and reflecting, you reduce the risk of unfairness, even when under pressure.

Creating Inclusive Team Culture

Belonging doesn't happen by chance. It is created through daily actions - like starting a shift with *karakia* or shared *kai*, checking in on people's wellbeing, and encouraging different communication styles. It's built when people feel free to speak in their own words, show up fully, and know they'll be treated with mana.

If disrespect surfaces - whether through humour, silence, or exclusion - address it early. Not harshly, but directly. Your silence signals acceptance, so your voice must be clear.

Ask your team regularly what inclusion looks and feels like to them. Then be prepared to adjust. That's not compromise - it's leadership.

How to Apply This

Make it a habit to ask your team, "Is there anything I can do to help you feel more included here?" Reflect on your own biases and ask a trusted colleague to share where they've seen you grow - or where you still need to. Learn from cultural advisors or community leaders in your region, and attend cross-cultural training not as a tick-box, but as part of your craft. Leadership across difference is not a side skill - it's central to your impact in Aotearoa.

Communication as Leadership

Listening, Language, and Presence



By Celticwarrior3551

At its core, leadership is a conversation. It is not only about giving orders or making announcements. It is about how you speak, how you listen, and how you carry yourself in every interaction. Communication is how your team experiences your leadership - not just through what you say, but how you make people feel when you say it.

In high-tempo environments, poor communication leads to confusion, frustration, and mistakes. But strong, empathetic communication builds trust, clarity, and momentum. This chapter explores how to lead through language - spoken, written, digital, and non-verbal.

Listening as a Leadership Act

The best leaders listen first. In moments of pressure or change, people want to feel heard before they're willing to be led. That means giving your full attention, suspending assumptions, and listening for both the words and the meaning beneath them.

Being fully present means putting aside distractions - phones, screens, or background noise - and focusing on the speaker. Make eye contact if appropriate, nod to show engagement, and avoid formulating your reply while they're still speaking.

Listening also includes silence. Some people need more time to articulate their thoughts. Don't rush to fill the gaps. Let the conversation breathe.

Reading Non-Verbal Cues

Much of what people communicate doesn't come out in words. Watch for posture, gestures, tone, and pacing. A tight jaw, crossed arms, restless hands, or averted eyes can tell you more about someone's state than anything they say.

When you notice tension or discomfort, acknowledge it gently: "It seems like something's weighing on you - can we talk about it?" This simple recognition often defuses stress and invites honesty.

Your own body language matters, too. Open hands, relaxed shoulders, and calm movements show confidence without aggression. Your physical presence can either steady a room or unsettle it. Use it consciously.

Clarifying and Confirming

Effective communication doesn't rely on good intention alone - it requires confirmation. After listening, reflect back what you heard: "So you're saying that..." or "Just to make sure I've understood - this is what you need from me?"

These moments build clarity and prevent missteps. They also show that you care enough to get it right, not just move on quickly.

When delivering complex information, break it into clear steps. Avoid jargon unless it's commonly understood in the group, and invite questions to check comprehension. The goal isn't to sound impressive - it's to ensure everyone understands and feels confident to act.

Balancing Empathy with Clarity

Empathetic communication means meeting people where they are emotionally, without losing direction. Acknowledge people's feelings: "I can see this has been frustrating," or "That must have been tough to hear."

You don't need to fix every feeling. Just showing that you notice and respect it creates space for people to re-engage. From there, lead the conversation toward shared understanding and action.

Clarity is not coldness. It's how you help others feel safe in uncertain moments.

Communicating Across Cultures

Different cultural backgrounds influence how people express themselves, how they interpret silence, and what kind of language feels respectful. Some may favour direct statements, while others communicate through story, metaphor, or gentle suggestion.

If someone doesn't speak up in a group setting, it doesn't mean they lack confidence - it may be cultural practice or learned caution. Make room for one-on-one conversations. Mirror someone's communication style where appropriate. And be mindful of how your tone, volume, and pace affect others.

The more attuned you are to cultural cues, the more effective your leadership becomes.

Digital Communication and Presence

Much of today's communication happens through messages, emails, or radio. The absence of facial expressions or tone means you must be even more intentional with your words.

Write clearly. Keep messages concise. In digital environments, even punctuation can affect tone. A message written in haste or all caps may be interpreted as aggressive. A thoughtful pause - "Let's talk this through properly when you're free" - can reset a tense exchange.

Also, respect timing. Avoid sending difficult messages after hours unless it's urgent. If needed, flag that a conversation will continue face to face.

Remember, digital communication still carries emotional weight. Use it as a tool for connection, not just instruction.

Communication in Conflict

When tensions rise, people need leaders who can de-escalate, not inflame. That begins with listening deeply, acknowledging emotion, and avoiding blame-based language. Use "I" statements where possible - "I'm concerned about how that came across" rather than "You always...".

Stay calm, even when others aren't. Lowering your voice, softening your posture, and pausing before responding are powerful tools in keeping conversations constructive.

Conflict doesn't mean failure. It's an opportunity for growth, but only if it's handled with emotional discipline and respect.

How to Apply This

At the end of each day, reflect on one conversation that went well and one that didn't. Ask yourself: Did I listen fully? Did I make space for understanding? Did I lead with empathy, or did I rush to solve? In your next team meeting, practise clarifying feedback before responding. Try paraphrasing someone's point and confirming agreement before moving on. Strong communication is not instinct - it's a skill, and like any skill, it grows with use.

Peaceful Authority

De-escalation and Presence Under Fire

Conflict is an inevitable part of uniformed service - whether it unfolds between teammates under pressure, with members of the public in distress, or across agencies working under strain. But leadership in these moments isn't about dominance. It's about presence. When others escalate, you de-escalate. When people are afraid, you become the anchor.

De-escalation is not a passive skill. It requires emotional regulation, situational awareness, and quiet authority. It's how you preserve safety, protect dignity, and guide resolution when emotions run high.

This chapter will help you recognise early signs of tension, regulate your own responses, and lead with calm in moments where others may not.

Safety First

Before anything else, assess your own safety and the safety of those nearby. If the situation becomes physically threatening - if there's a weapon, if aggression escalates beyond verbal cues - withdraw, call for backup, and do not engage unnecessarily. No decision, ego, or appearance is worth the risk to life.

De-escalation only works when you can engage without undue risk. Your first duty is to return home safely - and ensure others do too.

Spotting Early Warning Signs

Most conflict does not explode suddenly. It builds. Learning to read the cues allows you to step in early - before a raised voice becomes a physical threat.

Verbal warning signs might include sarcasm, rapid questioning, repetitive statements, or challenges to authority. Non-verbal signs could be clenched fists, pacing, foot stamping, or a sudden shift in eye contact or tone.

Some people may appear calm on the surface but show micro-signals of agitation. A forced smile, a long pause before answering, or a tightening jaw may signal underlying distress or resistance.

Your ability to read these moments without judgement - and respond early - makes all the difference.

Regulating Your Own State

You cannot calm others if you cannot calm yourself. Your body language, tone, and facial expression are more powerful than any words.

Take a breath before you respond. Lower your voice by a few decibels. Relax your shoulders. Keep your hands open and visible. Adopt a grounded, non-threatening posture.

This kind of calm is contagious. When you regulate your own nervous system, you help others regulate theirs. It shows you are not afraid - but also that you are not here to escalate.

In high-conflict moments, presence is your most valuable tool.

Language That Soothes, Not Stirs

What you say, and how you say it, can either pour water or fuel onto a tense situation. Use phrases that invite cooperation, avoid threats, and show care for the person's perspective - even if you must hold boundaries.

Try:

- "Help me understand what's going on for you."
- "Our priority is everyone's safety, including yours."
- "Let's take a breath and figure this out together."

Avoid sarcasm, criticism, or ultimatums unless necessary. When boundaries must be drawn, do so with steady authority: "I need you to step back now, for everyone's safety."

Assertiveness doesn't require aggression. It requires clarity, control, and respect.

Cross-Cultural Sensitivity in Conflict

People from different cultural backgrounds express emotion and disagreement differently. Some cultures may use indirect language or rely on collective voice rather than individual expression. Others may express anger openly or use strong physical gestures.

Learn local customs, and when possible, adapt your style to match the person's communication norms. For example, in Māori or Pacific contexts, respect may be shown through silence, storytelling, or gentle challenge rather than direct debate.

If you misstep, acknowledge it and reset. Humility builds bridges quickly.

Managing Digital or Remote Conflict

Not all conflict happens face-to-face. Radio miscommunication, terse texts, or emotionally charged emails can escalate quickly when tone is unclear.

In digital settings:

- Use neutral, clear language. Avoid capital letters or excessive punctuation.
- Acknowledge emotions: "I can hear this is frustrating - let's find a time to talk."
- Where possible, move tense conversations to a phone call or in-person meeting.

Written communication carries emotional weight. Treat it with the same care you would an in-person conversation.

After the Incident

De-escalation doesn't end when things go quiet. Afterwards, check in with those involved - including your team and bystanders. Ask how they're feeling. Provide space to debrief. Document the incident carefully and without bias, noting what occurred, who was involved, and what action was taken.

Then, reflect. What worked? What didn't? How might you respond differently next time?

De-escalation is a skill that improves with practice. Every incident is a learning opportunity - not just about others, but about yourself.

How to Apply This

In your next shift or call-out, observe how people respond to tension. Practise keeping your tone low and your posture calm. If you notice a colleague escalate, don't mirror them - mirror the steadiness you wish to see. After a moment of tension, talk it through: What triggered it? How did you respond? What helped? Every time you choose calm over control, you build the kind of authority that earns trust - not just compliance.



By New Zealand Defence Force from Wellington, New Zealand - Corporal Doug Grant carried to the Papakura Cenotaph

Strength in Challenge

Resilience and Mental Toughness

Resilience is not about being immune to hardship. It's about meeting adversity with honesty, and choosing to keep going - even when you feel tired, uncertain, or overwhelmed. In uniformed service, you will face challenges that test your body, mind, and spirit. The question is not whether these moments will come - they will. The real question is how you meet them, move through them, and grow stronger on the other side.

This chapter explores how to build mental toughness, care for yourself and your team, and cultivate habits that help you stay grounded when the work is heavy.

Redefining Resilience

Too often, resilience is misunderstood as emotional suppression or relentless toughness. In reality, resilience means remaining human. It is about returning after difficulty - not by pretending you're fine, but by seeking support, resting when needed, and choosing courage over avoidance.

A resilient leader doesn't ignore pain. They acknowledge it, learn from it, and make space for others to do the same.

You build this strength not all at once, but day by day - through the habits you form, the people you trust, and the way you speak to yourself when no one else is listening.

Learning From Mistakes Without Shame

Mistakes are inevitable. In high-pressure environments, you will get things wrong. What matters most is how you respond.

Rather than spiralling into self-criticism, approach errors with curiosity. What did you learn? What will you do differently next time? Talk it through with a mentor or trusted peer. Share your insights with the team - not to dwell on failure, but to normalise growth.

When leaders model this kind of reflection, they make it safer for others to do the same. Mistakes stop being secrets - and start being stepping stones.

Creating Habits That Support You

Resilience isn't built on adrenaline. It's built on routine. The quiet, consistent habits that keep your body strong and your emotions regulated are the real foundation of leadership under pressure.

These habits might include:

- Eating nutritious meals that fuel you through long shifts.
- Maintaining regular sleep routines - even if disrupted, returning to rhythm where possible.
- Moving your body daily, whether through training, stretching, or walking.
- Pausing for short periods of stillness - breathing, mindfulness, or prayer.
- Journaling thoughts after intense days to gain perspective and let go of stress.

These actions are not indulgent. They are necessary. They are how you sustain the energy and presence your team needs from you.

Debriefing and Peer Support

After critical incidents, debriefing matters. Not just the operational review, but the emotional check-in.

Formal frameworks like After Action Reviews (AARs) or Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) offer structure, but informal conversations can be just as important. A coffee chat, a quiet walk, or a phone call later in the week might create the space someone needs to talk.

Be the person who starts those conversations. Ask, "How are you really?" Then listen - with care, not solutions. These small acts of connection are what keep teams together when the job becomes tough.

Choosing Your Circle Wisely

The people you surround yourself with matter. Leadership is not meant to be lonely - but it can become so if you isolate or carry too much alone.

Choose teammates who challenge you with kindness. Stay close to those who affirm your values, call out your blind spots, and help you return to yourself when you feel adrift. And be that person for others.

In a team culture shaped by trust and honesty, resilience becomes a shared resource - not a burden carried alone.

Asking for Help

This cannot be said enough: seeking support is not weakness. It is strength.

There are many avenues available - peer mentors, chaplains, mental health professionals, employee assistance programmes, or welfare teams within your service. Use them early. Use them often. You don't need to be in crisis to ask for guidance. Prevention is part of resilience.

And when someone else reaches out, respond without judgement. Listen. Walk with them. Encourage professional support if needed. But most of all, remind them they're not alone.

The Strength to Stay Soft

Mental toughness includes empathy. It means holding space for grief, exhaustion, and complexity - without letting those emotions consume you or define you.

Being soft does not mean being weak. It means being connected. To yourself. To your values. To others. It's what stops you becoming hardened, withdrawn, or detached.

In this work, there will be moments that bring tears, laughter, anger, and awe. Allow them all. The goal is not to feel less - it's to lead well while feeling deeply.

How to Apply This

Choose one habit this week to support your wellbeing. Schedule it like any operational priority. Check in with a peer - not just about tasks, but about how they're holding up. After your next tough day, take ten minutes to reflect and write: What hit me hardest? What helped? What will I do differently next time? Resilience isn't built in emergencies - it's built in preparation, reflection, and community.

Leading Through Change

Flexibility Without Compromise

Change is constant in military and emergency service environments. Whether it's a new policy, a leadership restructure, shifts in public expectation, or the rapid evolution of technology, the ability to navigate change effectively is no longer optional - it's essential. Leaders must remain adaptable without losing clarity. They must guide others through uncertainty without abandoning core values.

This chapter focuses on how to lead through transition - staying flexible while preserving what matters, supporting others to adapt, and turning disruption into opportunity.

Understanding the Human Side of Change

Every change, no matter how strategic or necessary, creates disruption. People may experience loss - of familiar routines, clear roles, or a sense of control. Even positive changes can trigger anxiety.

Recognising this emotional response is critical. As a leader, your job is not only to implement change - but to walk with people through it. This means listening to concerns, validating feelings, and acknowledging the effort it takes to adjust.

Change leadership begins with empathy. Before people can commit to a new way of working, they need to feel heard, respected, and supported.

Introducing the ADKAR Model

A helpful tool for understanding how individuals move through change is the ADKAR model. It identifies five key stages:

1. Awareness - understanding why the change is necessary.
2. Desire - wanting to be part of the change.
3. Knowledge - knowing how to change.
4. Ability - having the skills and support to implement the change.
5. Reinforcement - sustaining the change over time.

This model reminds leaders that change isn't just a series of tasks - it's a process people go through at different speeds. Ignoring one of these stages can stall progress, cause resistance, or create burnout.

A full explanation of ADKAR, with uniformed service examples, is included in the Appendix.

Communicating Through Uncertainty

During periods of change, silence breeds anxiety. People want to know what's happening, what it means for them, and what comes next.

As a leader, you won't always have all the answers. But you can still communicate regularly, honestly, and clearly. Share what you do know. Acknowledge what's still unknown. Be transparent about timelines and the reasons behind decisions.

Avoid spin. Speak plainly and with heart. When you lead with honesty, you build trust - even when the news is difficult.

Supporting People to Adjust

People respond to change differently. Some embrace it quickly. Others move more slowly - or resist altogether.

Rather than forcing compliance, start with understanding. What's holding them back? Is it fear, confusion, fatigue, or disagreement? Once you know, you can tailor your support.

This might mean:

- Providing more training or coaching.
- Allowing time to adjust expectations.
- Creating peer learning groups to explore new systems together.
- Acknowledging discomfort as part of the journey.

Don't assume resistance is laziness. It's often loyalty to what worked before. Show people how the new approach honours the same values - and where it offers new possibilities.

Leading Yourself First

Before you can lead others through change, you must centre yourself. Change affects leaders too. You may feel stretched, uncertain, or overwhelmed. That's normal.

Take time to reflect on your own response. What are you excited about? What concerns you? What support do you need?

Speak to a mentor, read widely, and remain curious. The more you grow your own flexibility, the more you'll be able to offer reassurance to those you lead.

Leadership during change isn't about pretending to be unaffected. It's about modelling steadiness in the middle of flux.

Protecting What Matters Most

Being adaptable does not mean compromising your values. In fact, change often puts those values to the test. When processes shift, when teams evolve, or when external pressures mount, your integrity becomes the compass.

Clarify your non-negotiables: safety, fairness, transparency, and dignity. Hold fast to these principles. Let everything else flex around them.

By doing so, you show that while methods may evolve, your commitment to service never wavers.

How to Apply This

The next time you lead a change - big or small - map your team's journey through the ADKAR stages. Who needs more awareness? Who's still building ability? Who needs their effort recognised? Schedule regular check-ins. Ask how people are feeling about the

change, not just how they're performing. When you feel frustrated, pause and revisit your own values. Leadership during change is not about getting through - it's about guiding others to grow through.

Legacy in Action

Purpose Beyond Position



By derivative work: René Kieselmann

Leadership is not defined by rank, title, or the number of people who report to you. It is defined by the impact you leave behind. Long after the uniform is hung up and the role has shifted, what will people remember? What will endure?

Legacy is not built at the end of your career - it's built every day, in every conversation, through every choice. Whether you are just beginning your leadership journey or already mentoring others, you are shaping a legacy through your presence, your integrity, and your influence.

This final chapter encourages you to reflect on your purpose, lead with intention, and make your leadership count - both for today and for those who will follow.

Leadership as Service

Leadership in uniform is not about authority - it is about service. It is the decision to place others first: to protect, to guide, and to carry responsibility with humility. That service often involves sacrifice - time, comfort, personal recognition - but it also brings profound meaning.

When you understand leadership as service, you stop chasing power and start cultivating impact. You stop asking "What do I get?" and start asking "What do I give?"

This mindset changes everything. It elevates small acts - staying late to help a peer, correcting misinformation with grace, standing up for someone without power - into moments of real leadership.

Moments That Define You

It won't always be the grand achievements that define your leadership. Often, it will be a quiet word after a hard shift. A decision made in private that reflects your values. The way you spoke to someone when you were tired, or the way you owned a mistake when you could have blamed someone else.

These moments accumulate. They become your reputation. And over time, they become your legacy.

Never underestimate the power of small, consistent leadership. The way you make people feel will echo longer than any single outcome.

Mentoring as Legacy

One of the most powerful ways to extend your leadership is to mentor others. Share your experiences - not as definitive truth, but as lived learning. Help others avoid the pitfalls you encountered. Speak belief into those who doubt themselves. Challenge those with potential. Stand beside those who feel invisible.

You do not need to be senior to mentor. You only need to care, to listen, and to walk alongside someone else in good faith.

The people you invest in will carry your influence long after they move on. That is legacy in motion.

Honouring the Profession

Every time you wear your uniform, you represent something larger than yourself - your service, your community, your whakapapa. Your actions reflect not only your own values, but the shared trust placed in the profession.

Honour that trust. Be honest when no one is watching. Speak up when something is wrong. Protect the dignity of your team and those you serve. Uphold the standards not because you must - but because you choose to.

This doesn't mean being perfect. It means being intentional. Every day, ask yourself: "What kind of leader do I want to be remembered as?"

Then act accordingly.

Letting Others Rise

Legacy also means knowing when to step aside. Sometimes, leadership means letting others step forward. It means creating space for new voices, new energy, and new perspectives.

When you support others to rise, you expand your impact. You show that leadership is not about holding on - it's about lifting up. Your success is measured not by how indispensable you are, but by how many others flourish in your wake.

True leaders build more leaders. They leave systems stronger, people wiser, and teams more resilient than when they arrived.

How to Apply This

Think about a leader who shaped your path. What did they do that mattered most? Now reflect on someone you could mentor, encourage, or support this week. Consider your leadership footprint - what do you want it to say? Start each shift with that intention. Because leadership isn't a moment. It's a legacy.

Section 2 - Voices of Leadership

In this section, we share reflections from leaders across diverse backgrounds - military, business, and community - who speak candidly about the principles that shape real leadership. These are lived experiences, not theories: grounded in trust, tested in challenge, and driven by a commitment to serve others.

Trust as a component of leadership

When people trust you, your word, your actions, your intentions, you don't need to raise your voice or throw your weight around. You lead by example. Whether it's on a military operation or running a business, trust is what gets people to follow you, to keep going when it's tough, and to genuinely care about the outcome.

For example, in a start-up or business setting, when your team works late nights or pushes through big challenges outside of 9 to 5, it's not going to be because you've simply told them to.

It's because they believe in what you're trying to achieve. Sure, there might be financial incentives or equity involved, but even then, it's trust that keeps things moving. That's why I don't see trust as a personality trait or soft skill. It should form a crucial part of your leadership strategy.

As a veteran, I see it this way trust isn't optional. It's not just something that's good to have, it's the thing that makes leadership work. Real leadership means putting your people first. Without trust, you're not truly leading, you're just giving orders.

To paint a picture, think about the state of leadership across many organisations and institutions today, maybe ones you've worked at? Too often, people feel disconnected from those in charge, not because they don't care, but because they don't feel genuinely seen, heard, or understood. That, in my view, is a sign that real leadership is missing.

When leaders rely on authority, hierarchy, or polished messaging instead of building trust through action and integrity, the cracks begin to show: teams become divided, morale drops, and long-term direction is lost. These aren't abstract issues, they affect how people work, collaborate, and show up each day. When trust breaks down, so does progress. That's why trust isn't just a 'nice to have' in leadership it's what holds everything together.

Guy Phillips, British Army and Afghanistan Veteran

Wrapped in a Tarp: Adaptive Leadership in the Wild

On our final night in the wilderness, we were challenged to fend for ourselves - make our own fire, cook our own food, pitch our own tent, etc. Around 5pm, Brandon took the group, and staged each of us 100 or so yards apart (the trees and the brush were thick so we couldn't see the person on either side of us. When he dropped us at our spot, he said "I'll be back to get you tomorrow morning.

I made a fire, I made some food, and around 8pm, it started raining. I hadn't set up my tent yet, and I didn't want to get wet (mainly because it was already cold, and wet clothes with cold weather didn't sound ideal. So, I jumped in my sleeping bag, took my tarp, and wrapped myself cocoon style.

I was exhausted, and the next morning, Brandon woke me up by poking me with a stick. He said he didn't what that thing was - "I just saw a big white cocoon on the ground." When I unraveled, he started laughing."

The lesson I got from that is: "maybe you didn't do the job the way I would've done it, but you got the job done."

I've carried that lesson, applied it, and shared it through the years (i.e. this is the job, this is what the end result should look-like, this is the way I do it, but as long as you get to the finish line, do what works for you) - some people do A, B, and then C. Some people start with B, go back to A, then do C. Some people do A and B at the same time. I've noticed that a lot of "managers" and "people in charge" tend to assume that everyone's running at the same pace, or their mind processes information in the same way. And I think that's flawed thinking.

Cole Grisham, Veterans Advocate

Baptism by Rain: My First Witnessing of Real Leadership

It was supposed to be a routine night exercise - just another tactical advance to battle (TAB) with the British Army. Our vehicles had dropped us well short of our ambush point, but that was par for the course. The forecast promised overcast skies, but dry conditions. We were prepared for discomfort, not disaster.

We reached our ambush site and settled in, weapons ready, senses sharp. Then the weather turned. First came the wind, slicing through our layers. Then the rain - relentless, bouncing off the ground like it was trying to claw its way back up. Not a drizzle. Not a downpour. This was the kind of rain that makes you question your choices.

We had no wet weather gear. No backup plan. Just the old military adage: hurry up and wait. And so we waited. But the cold crept in fast. People began to shiver uncontrollably. Speech slurred. Fingers stiffened around rifle grips. Hypothermia wasn't a threat - it was happening. One of the directing staff (DS) made the call to abort the exercise. He radioed in a sitrep, requesting vehicle support for the worst affected. The reply was blunt: no vehicles nearby. We'd have to exfil ourselves.

That's when leadership showed up - not in rank, but in action.

Torches flicked on. Maps unfurled. The DS spotted a farm on the grid - a cluster of buildings that might offer shelter. The plan was simple: get there, reassess, survive.

"Form a line! Hold onto the webbing of the guy in front! By the front, double time!"

We moved. The lead man pulled the one behind, pushed the one ahead. When someone faltered, they dropped to the rear, caught their breath, and rejoined the chain. It was a human conveyor belt of grit and desperation. We ran through sideways rain, thunder, and howling wind. Every step was agony. Every breath, a battle. But we kept moving.

Eventually, we reached the farm. It was derelict - no windows, no doors - but it was shelter. We huddled inside, tending to the worst off. Slowly, warmth returned. Eventually, so did the vehicles.

Back at camp, I couldn't even take a hot shower. My skin was too raw. Luke warm was all I could handle. Later, in the canteen, I overheard the DS talking. One had clearly taken charge. The others praised his decisiveness, his clarity. It was obvious: if he hadn't acted when he did, things could've gone very differently. That night, I saw leadership not as a title, but as a lifeline. It wasn't about barking orders - it was about reading the moment, making the call, and pulling people through the storm.

Chris Collins, British Army Veteran

Section 3 - What You May Face

in Your Leadership Journey

Stepping into leadership is rarely a single moment of arrival. It is a series of thresholds - some clear, others subtle - each inviting you to grow, stretch, and redefine what it means to lead. For many, the early stages of leadership are marked not only by excitement and ambition, but also by uncertainty, discomfort, and internal questioning. These experiences are not signs of weakness or failure. They are evidence that you are evolving.

This chapter explores the common challenges that new and emerging leaders often encounter. These are not anomalies. They are part of the terrain. By naming them openly, we remove the stigma that so often surrounds them. By understanding them, we equip ourselves to navigate with greater clarity and compassion. And by preparing for them, we begin to lead not just with skill, but with wisdom.

One of the most pervasive internal experiences for new leaders is imposter syndrome - the quiet, persistent feeling that you are not truly qualified, that you have somehow fooled others into believing you are capable. It can manifest as self-doubt, hesitation, or a reluctance to fully inhabit your role. This feeling is more common than most people admit, and it often arises precisely because you care deeply about doing well. The presence of imposter syndrome does not mean you are failing; it means you are stretching beyond your comfort zone. The key is not to eliminate the feeling, but to recognize it for what it is - a signal that you are growing - and to respond with self-compassion and perspective.

Closely tied to this is the fear of failure. Leadership brings visibility, and with it, the pressure to perform. You may find yourself second-guessing decisions, avoiding risks, or striving for perfection in ways that are unsustainable. It's important to remember that failure is not the opposite of success - it is part of the process. Mistakes offer data. They reveal gaps, prompt reflection, and create opportunities for learning. The most resilient leaders are not those who avoid failure, but those who learn to move through it with grace and insight.

Another internal shift that often accompanies early leadership is a sense of identity dissonance. You may feel caught between who you were and who you are becoming. This is especially true when transitioning from peer to leader within the same team or organization. The dynamics change, and so does the way others relate to you. You might wonder how to maintain authenticity while also stepping into authority. This tension is natural. Leadership is not a mask - it is an extension of your values, expressed with purpose. The goal is not to become someone else, but to bring more of your true self to the role in a way that serves others.

As responsibilities increase, so too does the cognitive load. Decision fatigue is a real and often underestimated challenge. The sheer volume of choices - some minor, others consequential - can lead to mental exhaustion and reduced clarity. You may find yourself stuck in indecision or defaulting to reactive patterns. Developing the ability to prioritize, delegate, and create space for strategic thinking becomes essential. Not every decision requires your full bandwidth, and learning to discern which ones do is a mark of mature leadership.

Many new leaders also grapple with a sense of over-responsibility - the belief that they must carry everything alone. This can stem from a desire to prove oneself, to protect the team, or to avoid burdening others. While noble in intent, it is unsustainable in practice. Leadership is not about solitary heroism. It is about shared responsibility, collective wisdom, and trust. Learning to distribute the load, to empower others, and to ask for support is not a weakness - it is a strength.

Beyond the internal landscape, leadership is deeply relational. One of the most delicate transitions occurs when you begin leading former peers. The shift in power dynamics can be uncomfortable, and it requires intentional communication, empathy, and clarity. It is possible to honor past relationships while establishing new boundaries. The key is to lead with respect - for yourself, for others, and for the role you now inhabit.

Conflict is another relational challenge that many new leaders struggle with. There can be a strong temptation to avoid difficult conversations, especially when they involve performance issues, interpersonal tension, or unmet expectations. Yet avoidance rarely serves anyone in the long run. Conflict, when approached with skill and integrity, is a doorway to clarity, alignment, and growth. Developing the capacity to engage in honest dialogue, to offer constructive feedback, and to hold space for discomfort is essential to effective leadership.

Earning trust is a gradual process, and it cannot be rushed. You may feel pressure to prove yourself quickly, especially in environments where credibility is hard-won. Trust is built through consistency, transparency, and humility. It is not about having all the answers - it is about showing up with integrity, listening deeply, and following through on your commitments.

Navigating upward - communicating with senior leaders, command structures, or executive teams - can also be daunting. The stakes feel higher, the language more formal, the expectations less clear. Learning to influence upward requires strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, and the ability to align your message with broader organizational goals. It is a skill that develops over time, and one that becomes increasingly important as your leadership scope expands.

Finally, there are cultural and structural challenges that shape the leadership experience. You may enter a role with unclear expectations, inherited systems, or resistance to change.

You may find yourself in environments where mentorship is lacking, or where your personal values feel out of sync with organizational norms. These challenges are complex, and they often require a combination of adaptability, courage, and strategic patience. The goal is not to conform blindly, but to lead with integrity - to find ways to honor your values while navigating the realities of the system.

Throughout your leadership journey, you will face moments of doubt, discomfort, and disorientation. These are not detours. They are part of the path. Each challenge offers an invitation - to reflect, to recalibrate, and to grow. Leadership is not a destination. It is a practice. And like any meaningful practice, it is shaped by both triumph and trial.

As you move forward, remember this: you are not alone. The experiences described in this chapter are shared by leaders across industries, cultures, and generations. They do not make you less of a leader. They make you more of one. Embrace them. Learn from them. And let them shape you into the kind of leader who leads not just with authority, but with authenticity, wisdom, and heart.

Navigating Six Common Leadership Traps

Leadership isn't just about strategy and execution - it's about navigating the internal terrain that shapes how we show up, make decisions, and relate to others. In high-stakes, service-driven, or transitional environments, certain patterns can quietly take root. They're not always visible, but they're deeply felt.

This section explores six common leadership traps:

- **Fear of Failure**
- **Over-identification with Role**
- **Emotional Suppression**
- **Comparison Trap**
- **Resource Scarcity**
- **Overdependence on Authority**

Each of these traps can limit growth, erode confidence, and disconnect leaders from their values and voice. They often emerge in environments that reward control, compliance, or self-sacrifice - and they're reinforced by culture, trauma, or transition.

But here's the good news: these traps are navigable. With self-awareness, coaching, and intentional practice, leaders can move from hesitation to ownership, from rigidity to resilience.

In the articles that follow, you'll find:

- Clear definitions and real-world manifestations
- Practical strategies for self-reflection and recovery
- Coaching tools to support others through each challenge

Whether you're leading teams, mentoring transitioning personnel, or supporting learners with unique needs, this section offers a roadmap for unlocking authentic, empowered leadership - one trap at a time.

Imposter Syndrome

The Quiet Doubt Behind the Role

Leadership often begins with a paradox. You've been chosen, trusted, or promoted into a role of influence - and yet, a quiet voice inside whispers, "Do I really belong here?" This internal tension is known as *imposter syndrome*, and it is one of the most common yet least discussed experiences among new and emerging leaders.

Bottom Line Up Front

Imposter syndrome is not a barrier to leadership - it is part of the journey. It arises when you care deeply, when you're growing quickly, and when you're stepping into something meaningful. The goal is not to eliminate it, but to learn how to lead through it. With awareness, support, and courage, you can transform imposter syndrome from a source of fear into a catalyst for growth.

What It Is

Imposter syndrome is the persistent belief that you are not truly qualified for your role, despite evidence of your competence. It's the feeling that you've somehow fooled others into thinking you're capable, and that at any moment, you'll be exposed as a fraud. This experience is not limited to insecure individuals - in fact, it often affects high-achievers, perfectionists, and those who care deeply about doing well.

At its core, imposter syndrome is a disconnect between external validation and internal belief. You may receive praise, promotions, or recognition, but still feel undeserving. The gap between how others see you and how you see yourself can create emotional strain, hesitation, and self-sabotage.

How It May Manifest

Imposter syndrome rarely announces itself directly. Instead, it shows up in subtle and varied ways:

- **Over-preparation:** Spending excessive time trying to perfect every detail, driven by fear of being "found out."
- **Avoidance of visibility:** Hesitating to speak up, share ideas, or take credit, even when it's warranted.
- **Discounting success:** Attributing achievements to luck, timing, or external factors rather than skill or effort.
- **Fear of feedback:** Interpreting constructive criticism as confirmation of inadequacy.

- **Chronic self-doubt:** Questioning your decisions, second-guessing your instincts, and feeling like you're "not enough."

These patterns can erode confidence, limit growth, and create unnecessary stress. Left unaddressed, imposter syndrome can lead to burnout, disengagement, or missed opportunities.

What You Can Do If You're Experiencing It

The first step in addressing imposter syndrome is to name it. Awareness creates space for change. Once you recognize the pattern, you can begin to shift your relationship with it.

1. Reframe the Narrative

Imposter syndrome often arises in moments of growth. Instead of seeing it as a flaw, view it as a signal that you're stretching beyond your comfort zone. You're not failing - you're evolving.

2. Anchor in Evidence

Keep a record of your achievements, feedback, and moments of impact. When doubt creeps in, revisit this evidence. Let it remind you that your role is earned, not accidental.

3. Speak It Aloud

Talk to trusted peers, mentors, or coaches. You'll often find that they've felt the same. Naming the experience reduces its power and normalizes the journey.

4. Practice Self-Compassion

Leadership is not about perfection. It's about presence, learning, and integrity. Treat yourself with the same kindness you would offer a colleague in doubt.

5. Take Action Anyway

Confidence often follows action. Don't wait to feel "ready." Step forward, contribute, and lead - even when you feel unsure. The act of showing up builds belief.

How to Coach Others Through It

As a leader or coach, you will inevitably encounter others who are grappling with imposter syndrome. Your role is not to fix them, but to walk alongside them with empathy, insight, and encouragement.

1. Normalize the Experience

Let them know that imposter syndrome is common, especially in transitions. Share your own experiences if appropriate. This builds trust and reduces shame.

2. Ask Reflective Questions

Invite them to explore the gap between their internal narrative and external reality. Questions like “What evidence do you have that you’re not capable?” or “What would you say to a peer in your position?” can prompt powerful shifts.

3. Affirm Their Strengths

Offer specific, sincere feedback about their impact, skills, and growth. Avoid vague praise - be concrete and grounded in observation.

4. Encourage Action

Support them in taking small, meaningful steps that build confidence. Whether it's leading a meeting, sharing an idea, or mentoring someone else, action reinforces capability.

5. Create Safe Spaces

Foster environments where vulnerability is welcomed, not punished. When people feel safe to express doubt, they are more likely to move through it.

Perfectionism

Paralysis or burnout from unrealistic standards

Perfectionism often masquerades as high standards, diligence, or professionalism. But beneath the polish lies a deeper fear - of being judged, of losing control, or of not being "enough." For leaders, especially those in service or high-accountability roles, perfectionism can feel like a badge of honor. In reality, it's a heavy burden that stifles creativity, delays progress, and erodes wellbeing.

Bottom Line Up Front

Perfectionism isn't about excellence - it's about fear. It leads to overwork, indecision, and self-criticism. True leadership requires progress, not perfection.

What It Is

Perfectionism is the compulsive striving to meet unrealistically high standards, often accompanied by harsh self-evaluation and fear of failure. It's not the same as healthy ambition. Perfectionism is rigid, unforgiving, and often rooted in a desire to avoid shame or maintain control.

How It May Manifest

- Procrastination due to fear of not doing it "right"
- Reluctance to delegate or trust others' work
- Excessive editing, revising, or planning
- Avoiding feedback or taking it as personal criticism
- Feeling anxious or dissatisfied even after success
- Holding others to unrealistic standards

What You Can Do If You're Experiencing It

- **Redefine success:** Focus on impact, learning, and momentum - not flawlessness.
- **Set "good enough" goals:** Ask, "What's the minimum viable version of this?"
- **Practice self-compassion:** Speak to yourself as you would to a valued team member.
- **Time-box tasks:** Limit how long you spend refining - then move forward.
- **Celebrate imperfection:** Share stories of messy wins and lessons learned.

How to Coach Others Through It

- **Normalize imperfection:** Share examples of imperfect leadership that led to growth.
- **Challenge binary thinking:** "Does it have to be perfect to be valuable?"
- **Encourage iteration:** Frame work as evolving, not final.
- **Reinforce effort and courage:** Praise the act of trying, not just the polished result.
- **Create psychological safety:** Make it okay to fail, revise, and learn publicly.

Fear of Failure

Avoidance of risk or innovation due to fear of being wrong

Fear of failure is one of the most common yet least acknowledged disruptors to leadership. It doesn't always show up as panic or paralysis - it can wear the mask of caution, perfectionism, or even overplanning. For leaders, this fear can quietly shape decisions, stifle innovation, and erode confidence in themselves and their teams.

Bottom Line Up Front

Fear of failure limits growth. It leads to risk-avoidant behavior, missed opportunities, and a culture of hesitation. Left unchecked, it can stall progress and undermine trust.

What It Is

Fear of failure is the internal belief that making a mistake will result in shame, rejection, or loss of credibility. It's not just about the outcome - it's about what failure *means* to the individual. For leaders, this fear can be amplified by visibility, responsibility, and the pressure to "get it right."

How It May Manifest

- Avoiding bold decisions or new initiatives
- Over-reliance on data or consensus to delay action
- Micromanaging to control outcomes
- Deflecting responsibility or blaming external factors
- Hesitating to give or receive honest feedback
- Creating overly rigid plans to avoid uncertainty

What You Can Do If You're Experiencing It

- **Reframe failure:** View it as feedback, not finality.
- **Practice small risks:** Build tolerance by taking low-stakes risks regularly.
- **Reflect on past resilience:** Recall times you failed and recovered - what did you learn?
- **Use "what if" positively:** Instead of "what if I fail?" ask "what if I grow?"

- **Talk it out:** Share your fear with a trusted peer or mentor - it often loses power when spoken.

How to Coach Others Through It

- **Normalize it:** Share your own experiences with failure to build psychological safety.
- **Ask reflective questions:** "What's the worst that could happen?" "What would you learn?"
- **Celebrate effort, not just outcomes:** Reinforce the value of trying, even when results aren't perfect.
- **Model recovery:** When you fail, show how you process and move forward.
- **Create space for experimentation:** Encourage pilots, prototypes, and learning loops.

Over-identification with Role

When identity is tied too tightly to leadership status, making feedback or change feel threatening

Leadership roles often come with titles, responsibilities, and expectations that shape how others see us - and how we see ourselves. But when someone begins to equate their entire identity with their professional role, it can create emotional rigidity, burnout, and difficulty transitioning or adapting. This is especially common in high-stakes, service-oriented environments.

Bottom Line Up Front

Over-identification with a role limits personal growth and resilience. It makes change feel like loss, and feedback feel like threat. Leaders must learn to separate who they are from what they do.

What It Is

Over-identification occurs when someone's sense of self-worth, purpose, and identity becomes fused with their professional role. They may feel valuable only when performing that role, and lost or diminished when outside it. This can be reinforced by external praise, cultural norms, or long-term immersion in a single identity (e.g., military, healthcare, education).

How It May Manifest

- Difficulty transitioning out of a role or organisation
- Resistance to feedback that challenges role-based behaviors
- Neglecting personal needs or relationships outside work
- Feeling purposeless during leave, retirement, or career change
- Overworking to maintain a sense of relevance
- Taking criticism personally, as an attack on identity

What You Can Do If You're Experiencing It

- **Explore other identities:** What roles do you play outside work - parent, friend, artist, learner?

- **Practice detachment:** Remind yourself "I am not my job. I bring value beyond my title."
- **Build non-work routines:** Invest in hobbies, relationships, and spaces where your role isn't central.
- **Seek feedback on your character, not just your performance:** What do people value about *you*?
- **Prepare for transitions:** If change is coming, start visualising who you'll be beyond the role.

How to Coach Others Through It

- **Validate their contribution:** Acknowledge the meaning they've found in their role.
- **Ask identity-expanding questions:** "What else brings you purpose?" "Who are you outside of work?"
- **Support transition planning:** Help them explore new roles, skills, or communities.
- **Model multidimensionality:** Share your own interests and identities beyond work.
- **Encourage reflection:** Journaling, storytelling, or mentoring can help them reconnect with their broader self.

Emotional Suppression

Avoiding vulnerability or empathy, which can erode trust and authenticity

In many leadership environments - especially those shaped by service, duty, or high performance - emotions are often seen as distractions or liabilities. Leaders may feel pressure to “stay strong,” “keep it together,” or “leave feelings at the door.” But suppressing emotions doesn’t make them disappear - it just buries them deeper, where they can quietly erode wellbeing and connection.

Bottom Line Up Front

Suppressing emotions leads to disconnection, burnout, and reduced empathy. Leaders who acknowledge and process emotions build trust, resilience, and healthier teams.

What It Is

Emotional suppression is the conscious or unconscious avoidance of expressing or acknowledging feelings. It's not the same as emotional regulation - where feelings are managed constructively. Suppression often stems from fear of vulnerability, cultural conditioning, or a belief that emotions undermine authority.

How It May Manifest

- Flat or distant communication style
- Difficulty connecting with others' emotions
- Sudden emotional outbursts after prolonged restraint
- Physical symptoms like tension, fatigue, or insomnia
- Avoidance of conflict or emotionally charged conversations
- Over-reliance on logic or procedure to solve interpersonal issues

What You Can Do If You're Experiencing It

- **Name the emotion:** Use simple language - “I feel frustrated,” “I’m anxious,” “I’m sad.”
- **Create safe outlets:** Journaling, talking to a peer, or engaging in expressive activities.
- **Practice emotional literacy:** Learn to distinguish between anger, disappointment, fear, etc.
- **Challenge the narrative:** Ask, “What would happen if I shared this feeling?”

- **Use micro-reflections:** Pause during the day to ask, "What am I feeling right now?"

How to Coach Others Through It

- **Model emotional openness:** Share your own feelings in appropriate, grounded ways.
- **Validate their experience:** "It's okay to feel that way." "That sounds really tough."
- **Use emotion-based questions:** "How did that make you feel?" "What's sitting with you right now?"
- **Avoid rushing to fix:** Let them sit with the emotion before jumping to solutions.
- **Create rituals of reflection:** End meetings with emotional check-ins or use storytelling to surface feelings.

Comparison Trap

Measuring success against others, rather than values or impact

In leadership, comparison can be a double-edged sword. It can inspire growth - or quietly breed insecurity. Whether it's benchmarking against peers, predecessors, or idealised standards, the comparison trap can distort self-worth and decision-making. For transitioning personnel or those in high-performance cultures, this trap is especially potent.

Bottom Line Up Front

Constant comparison undermines confidence and clarity. It shifts focus from purpose to performance, and from progress to perfection.

What It Is

The comparison trap is the habitual tendency to evaluate one's worth, success, or progress against others. It's often driven by insecurity, social pressure, or unclear personal metrics. While comparison can offer perspective, it becomes harmful when it leads to envy, self-doubt, or paralysis.

How It May Manifest

- Feeling inadequate despite achievements
- Over-focusing on others' titles, salaries, or recognition
- Mimicking others' styles or decisions to "keep up"
- Hesitating to share ideas for fear they're not "good enough"
- Resentment or withdrawal in group settings
- Constantly seeking external validation

What You Can Do If You're Experiencing It

- **Define your own metrics:** What does success look like *for you*?
- **Limit exposure:** Reduce time on platforms or in environments that trigger comparison.
- **Celebrate small wins:** Track progress based on effort and growth, not just outcomes.
- **Practice gratitude:** Focus on what you have and who you are becoming.
- **Shift the lens:** Instead of "Why not me?" ask "What can I learn from them?"

How to Coach Others Through It

- **Reinforce individual value:** Highlight their unique strengths and contributions.
- **Encourage self-defined goals:** Help them set personal benchmarks that reflect their journey.
- **Use storytelling:** Share examples of nonlinear paths and diverse definitions of success.
- **Create a culture of appreciation:** Celebrate diverse wins, not just the loudest ones.
- **Challenge comparison gently:** "What makes their path relevant to yours?" "What's your version of success?"

Resource Scarcity

Limited time, budget, or personnel that forces reactive rather than strategic leadership

In environments shaped by hierarchy, limited funding, or rigid systems, leaders may internalise a sense of scarcity - not just of resources, but of autonomy. This can lead to a learned dependence on authority figures, policies, or external validation before taking action. While structure is important, overdependence can stifle initiative and disempower emerging leaders.

Bottom Line Up Front

Scarcity mindset and overreliance on authority limit innovation and ownership. Leaders must learn to navigate constraints while cultivating agency and resourcefulness.

What It Is

This dynamic combines two forces:

- **Resource Scarcity:** The belief that there's "never enough" - time, money, support, or opportunity.
- **Overdependence on Authority:** The habit of deferring decisions, waiting for approval, or assuming someone else holds the power to act.

Together, they create a leadership culture of hesitation, compliance, and underutilised potential.

How It May Manifest

- Reluctance to make decisions without formal sign-off
- Avoiding risk due to perceived lack of support or resources
- Over-justifying requests or ideas to "prove worth"
- Feeling stuck or powerless in the face of bureaucracy
- Viewing leadership as something granted, not claimed
- Underestimating informal influence or peer collaboration

What You Can Do If You're Experiencing It

- **Challenge scarcity narratives:** Ask, "What do I *have* right now?" "What's possible within these limits?"

- **Claim informal authority:** Influence doesn't always require a title - use relationships, expertise, and initiative.
- **Start small:** Pilot ideas with minimal resources to build momentum and confidence.
- **Seek allies, not just approvers:** Build coalitions that support action, even without formal permission.
- **Reframe constraints:** Treat them as creative boundaries, not barriers.

How to Coach Others Through It

- **Validate their frustration:** Acknowledge the real constraints they face.
- **Ask empowering questions:** "What can you control?" "Who could support you informally?"
- **Model resourcefulness:** Share examples of doing more with less.
- **Encourage micro-leadership:** Help them take ownership of small wins and decisions.
- **Shift the narrative:** From "I need permission" to "I have a responsibility."

You've Got This: Leadership That Lasts

Leadership isn't a finish line - it's a practice. A rhythm. A series of choices made in quiet moments and high-pressure ones alike. If you've made it this far through the guide, you've already shown something important: a willingness to reflect, to grow, and to lead with intention.

That matters more than you know.

You won't always feel ready. You won't always get it right. But readiness isn't perfection - it's presence. And leadership isn't about knowing everything. It's about showing up with integrity, listening deeply, and acting with courage when it counts.

You've already begun.

Whether you're stepping into your first leadership role, mentoring others through transition, or simply trying to be the kind of teammate others can rely on - you're building something real. Something that lasts. Not just in outcomes, but in the way people feel when they work beside you. In the trust you earn. In the legacy you leave.

So when the pressure builds, when the path feels unclear, or when doubt creeps in - pause. Breathe. Return to your values. Remember why you chose this path. And know this:

You are not alone.

You are not expected to be perfect.

You are expected to lead with heart.

Your strength is not that of a single warrior, but that of many.

Your leadership is not defined by rank, but by presence.

And your impact will be felt not just in what you do - but in who you are.

So go forward with clarity. With courage. With purpose.

You've got this.

Appendix: Leadership Models and Tools

This appendix contains practical leadership models designed to support decision-making, communication, team development, and change leadership in the context of uniformed service. Each model is explained with examples that reflect real-life application in military or emergency services across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Included Models:

- OODA Loop
- ADKAR
- GROW
- Situational Leadership
- Johari Window
- SMART Goals

These models are tools, not tick-boxes. Use them to structure your thinking, guide conversations, and sharpen your awareness - but always return to your own judgement, your people, and your values. That's where true leadership lives.

The OODA Loop

OODA stands for:

Observe → **O**rient → **D**ecide → **A**ct

Developed by military strategist Colonel John Boyd, the OODA Loop is a practical tool for fast, informed decision-making in dynamic situations.

1. Observe

Gather information from your environment. This could include visual cues, verbal reports, team updates, weather or terrain conditions, tone of voice, or gut instincts.

Example: You arrive at the scene of a multi-vehicle crash. You scan the area - checking for hazards, injuries, traffic flow, and whether other services are on site.

2. Orient

Make sense of what you've observed. Filter the information through your experience, training, and situational context. This step is critical - it helps prevent snap judgements based on incomplete or biased data.

Example: Based on your orientation, you realise the greatest risk is from oncoming traffic, not the injured patients, because the site hasn't been secured.

3. Decide

Choose a course of action. Make a clear decision based on what you know - without over-delaying or overthinking.

Example: You decide your first action is to call for traffic control assistance and physically block access with your vehicle to prevent further harm.

4. Act

Implement your decision quickly and clearly. Communicate your action to your team and take steps to monitor its impact. Then return to step one - continuously reassessing the environment and adjusting your plan as needed.

Example: After blocking access, you reassess. Another vehicle is approaching too fast. You observe this new threat and return to the top of the loop to respond.

The ADKAR Model

ADKAR is a people-focused framework for managing change. It was developed by Prosci and is widely used across defence, healthcare, and emergency service agencies.

ADKAR represents five sequential stages individuals go through during change:

1. Awareness
2. Desire
3. Knowledge
4. Ability
5. Reinforcement

1. Awareness

People need to understand *why* a change is happening before they can accept or engage with it.

Example: You're introducing a new digital reporting system. Begin by explaining that the old system no longer meets national compliance standards.

2. Desire

Beyond understanding, people must *want* to support the change. This often depends on personal motivation, team culture, or perceived fairness.

Example: You explain how the new system will reduce duplication and free up more time for field work. You involve frontline staff in the planning process.

3. Knowledge

People must know *how* to change. This includes training, access to tools, and clarity around expectations.

Example: You provide in-person demonstrations, user manuals, and peer mentors to help team members learn the new software.

4. Ability

Knowledge is not enough - people must have the *ability* to apply what they've learned under real conditions.

Example: You schedule low-pressure trial runs where team members can practise with support and feedback before full implementation.

5. Reinforcement

Change sticks when it is reinforced over time. This includes recognition, celebration of success, and ongoing monitoring.

Example: You check in regularly with staff, thank them for their adaptation, and respond promptly to any difficulties.

ADKAR is not a one-time checklist - it's a leadership lens. It helps you recognise where people are in their personal journey and how to support them through it.

The GROW Model

GROW stands for:

Goal → Reality → Options → Way Forward

Originally developed by Sir John Whitmore and widely used in coaching and leadership development, the GROW model provides a structured framework for guiding conversations, setting objectives, and helping others find their own solutions. It's especially useful in one-on-one mentoring, supervision, or debrief conversations.

The model helps leaders create clarity, encourage accountability, and support reflective problem-solving.

1. Goal

Start by clarifying what the person wants to achieve - short-term or long-term. Goals should be specific and meaningful to the individual.

Questions to ask:

- What do you want to achieve from this conversation?
- What outcome would make this a success?
- How will you know when you've reached it?

Example: A new team member wants to improve their confidence in leading team briefings.

2. Reality

Explore the current situation honestly. What's happening now? What's working? What's not? This helps uncover limiting beliefs, missing information, or external constraints.

Questions to ask:

- What's happening right now?

- What have you already tried?
- What's getting in the way?

Example: The team member shares that they feel nervous speaking in front of peers and sometimes lose their train of thought.

3. Options

Help them brainstorm possible ways forward. Don't rush to solutions - encourage creative thinking and self-led problem-solving.

Questions to ask:

- What could you do differently?
- What's another approach?
- Who could help you?

Example: They suggest practising their briefings with a peer, watching experienced leaders, and preparing cue cards.

4. Way Forward

Turn ideas into action. Help the person commit to one or more practical next steps. The key here is accountability and follow-through.

Questions to ask:

- What will you do next?
- When will you do it?
- What support do you need?

Example: They agree to practise with a trusted colleague once this week and ask for feedback. You schedule a check-in to review progress.

When to Use the GROW Model

The GROW model is especially useful:

- During coaching or supervision sessions
- When a team member feels stuck or uncertain
- In career development conversations
- When helping others set goals or overcome obstacles

It works best when the leader acts as a guide, not a fixer - resisting the urge to give answers and instead encouraging ownership.

Situational Leadership (Hersey-Blanchard Model)

Situational Leadership helps you adapt your leadership style based on the readiness and competence of the person or team you're leading. One style doesn't fit all. This model encourages flexibility and responsiveness - core traits for any frontline leader.

Leadership Styles:

Style	What It Looks Like	Use When...
Directing	Give clear instructions, monitor closely	Someone is new or inexperienced
Coaching	Explain decisions, encourage dialogue	Some knowledge, but low confidence or skill
Supporting	Share responsibility, offer encouragement	Capable but needs reassurance
Delegating	Trust team to take ownership, step back	High competence and commitment

Example: When leading a junior paramedic, you might start with Directing, but as their confidence grows, shift to Supporting or Delegating.

Johari Window

This self-awareness tool helps leaders build trust, improve communication, and foster psychological safety in teams. It encourages open feedback and appropriate self-disclosure.

The Four Quadrants:

Quadrant	What It Means
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Open	Known to self and others
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Blind	Known to others, not to self
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Hidden	Known to self, not others
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Unknown	Unknown to both self and others
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How to Use It:

- Encourage honest feedback to reduce “Blind” spots.
- Share appropriate information to reduce “Hidden” areas.
- Use regular debriefs, supervision, and peer review to expand the “Open” space.

Example: In a team where a leader invites feedback and shares their own challenges, team trust increases - leading to safer, more effective performance.

SMART Goals

A classic tool for goal setting that increases focus, accountability, and results.

SMART stands for:

- Specific – Clear, unambiguous outcome
- Measurable – Quantifiable or observable progress
- Achievable – Realistic given current resources
- Relevant – Aligned with broader purpose or priorities
- Time-bound – Deadline or time frame attached

Example:

Instead of “Get fitter,” a SMART goal could be:

“Run 5km in under 30 minutes, three times per week, for the next 6 weeks.”

Use It When:

- Coaching team members
- Writing development plans
- Preparing for promotion boards or annual performance reviews