







When pressure rises, what happens to **YOU**?

CHOOSE THE ONE YOU RECOGNIZE MOST:

 I move faster and take over.

 I become more direct/blunt.

 I shut down or avoid.

 I try to make everyone happy.

 I absorb everyone else's stress.

— respond to the poll —

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Leadership isn't only what you do.

It's what happens in the room because of how you show up.

Tone • Pace • Facial expression • Energy • Availability
Reactions • Decisions

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The Ripple Effect

LEADERSHIP IS A SYSTEM.
EVERY MOVE CREATES A RIPPLE.

 Leader state

 Staff state

 Classroom climate

 Child experience

Your nervous system is
part of your *leadership practice*.

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3 Leadership Pillars Framework

When we lead from regulation, with clarity, and within capacity, we create the conditions for people and systems to thrive.

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01 | REGULATION

*You cannot remove emotion from leadership.
You can learn to lead without being run by it.*

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Leadership Is *Nervous-System* Work

Under pressure, leaders may move toward:

	FIGHT	→	controlling, sharp, impatient
	FLIGHT	→	rushing, over-functioning, fixing
	FREEZE	→	avoiding, postponing, disengaging
	FAWN	→	appeasing, rescuing, saying yes

These aren't character flaws. They're *stress responses*.

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Same Leader. *Different State.*

REGULATED

- ✓ curious
- ✓ flexible
- ✓ able to prioritize
- ✓ can tolerate discomfort
- ✓ listens before responding

DYSREGULATED

- ✗ reactive
- ✗ rigid
- ✗ urgency-driven
- ✗ defensive
- ✗ more likely to personalize behavior

The problem isn't experiencing stress.
The problem is letting stress make the decisions.

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What *Staff Experience*

When leaders are chronically dysregulated, *staff* may experience:

- | unpredictability
- | walking on eggshells
- | unclear priorities
- | fear of making mistakes
- | emotional contagion
- | dependence on the leader

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Reflection

What version of you tends to show up when you're *overloaded*?

WHAT CHANGES ABOUT YOUR:

- voice?
- patience?
- communication?
- decision-making?
- expectations of others?

Share in the chat

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The 10-Second

Leadership Pause

A PRACTICE YOU CAN USE ANYWHERE, ANYTIME.

1

NOTICE

What's happening inside me?

2

REGULATE

What do I need before I respond?

3

CHOOSE

What response serves this situation?

A pause is not avoidance. It is leadership.

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Leadership is

a Practice,

Not a Personality.

You don't have to be perfect to lead well.

You just have to be willing to practice.

Leadership isn't a trait.

It's a way of being.

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GROWTH,

Leadership is built in small, intentional moments.

CHOICE,

You can lead yourself and others in any situation.

REPETITION,

The more you practice, the more natural it becomes.

14 | REGULATION

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Try It: High-Stakes Leadership Moment

“

A teacher walks into your office visibly angry and says, “I cannot work with her anymore. Either you move her out of my classroom or I’m done.”

”

What would NOTICE → REGULATE → CHOOSE look like in this moment?

What's your first internal reaction?

What would NOTICE → REGULATE → CHOOSE look like in this moment?

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15 | REGULATION

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What Regulation *Might Sound Like*

RATHER THAN IMMEDIATELY FIXING:

“I can see that you’re at your limit right now. I want to understand what’s happening before we decide what needs to change.”



Validation without agreement.
You don’t have to agree with someone to validate their feelings.



Connection without rescuing.
You can stay present with someone without taking the problem off their plate.



Pause without avoidance.
A pause creates space for clarity, not delay.

01 | REGULATION

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The Leadership Question

Before asking:
“How do I fix this?”

Ask:
“What does this moment need from me?”



02 | CLARITY

Emotional responsiveness does not mean emotional accommodation.



02 | CLARITY

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Responsive ≠ Permissive

EMOTIONALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP IS

NOT:	IS:
✗ keeping everyone happy	✓ listening
✗ avoiding <i>difficult</i> conversations	✓ understanding <i>context</i>
✗ lowering <i>expectations</i>	✓ communicating <i>clearly</i>
✗ fixing every problem	✓ holding appropriate <i>boundaries</i>
✗ protecting staff from <i>discomfort</i>	✓ responding <i>intentionally</i>

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02 | CLARITY

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EMPATHY + EXPECTATIONS = RESPONSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

EXAMPLES:

"I understand why this has been difficult."

AND

"This expectation still needs to be met."

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02 | CLARITY

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Why Leaders Lose Clarity

When emotion gets loud, expectations often get blurry.

- Fear of conflict
- Staff shortages
- Wanting to be liked
- Exhaustion
- History with the employee
- Relationships
- Urgency
- Guilt

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02 | CLARITY

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The Clarity Filter



Before responding, ask:

- 1 What is actually happening?
- 2 What is mine to address?
- 3 What belongs to the other person?
- 4 What expectation or boundary needs to be clear?
- 5 What is the next reasonable step?

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02 | CLARITY

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What Would You Say?



Scenario:
A teacher has been arriving 10-15 minutes late several times each week. You know she's going through a difficult situation at home.



Poll: Which response feels most like you?

A

Let it go for now—she has a lot happening.

B

Remind everyone about punctuality at the next staff meeting.

C

Speak with her directly and compassionately.

D

Immediately issue a formal warning.

02 | CLARITY

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Compassionate Clarity



POSSIBLE RESPONSE:

“I know you have a lot happening right now, and I want to support you where we realistically can. I also need to address the repeated late arrivals because they affect classroom coverage and the rest of the team.”



Care and accountability can exist in the *same* conversation.

02 | CLARITY

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Stop Carrying What Isn't Yours

MINE

- ✓ My tone
- ✓ My communication
- ✓ My decisions
- ✓ My boundaries

OURS

- ✓ Problem-solving
- ✓ Plans
- ✓ Shared expectations

THEIRS

- ✓ Their feelings
- ✓ Their choices
- ✓ Their follow-through
- ✓ Their reaction to a boundary

♥ Lead your part. Let go of the rest.

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02 | CLARITY

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Leadership Clarity Sounds Like...

"I want to understand."

"Here's what I can do."

"Here's what I can't do."

"This part is still your responsibility."

"Let's identify the next step."

"I can support you without taking this over for you."

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PART III —

CAPACITY

03 | CAPACITY

Sometimes the problem isn't motivation.
The system is asking for more than people can hold.

03 | CAPACITY

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What Is *Capacity*?

Capacity = the resources available to meet the demands being placed on us.

RESOURCES INCLUDE:

Time • Staffing • Skill • Knowledge • Emotional bandwidth • Physical energy • Support • Systems

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The *Capacity* Equation

DEMANDS > RESOURCES = STRAIN

Chronic strain changes behavior.

People may become:

irritable • disengaged • forgetful • rigid • resistant • reactive

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Behavior Is *Data*

We already understand this about children.

When a child is struggling, we ask:
“What is *this behavior* communicating?”

What if we asked the same question about adults?

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The Reframe



INSTEAD OF:
"Why won't she just...?"

TRY:
"What is getting in the way?"



INSTEAD OF:
"They don't care."

TRY:
"What might this behavior be telling me about capacity?"



Understanding the barrier does not remove accountability.
It helps us respond more effectively.

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Early Signs of Capacity Strain



INDIVIDUAL

- irritability
- emotional reactivity
- withdrawal
- mistakes
- reduced flexibility
- increased conflict
- calling out
- "I can't do this anymore"



ORGANIZATIONAL

- chronic coverage problems
- constant emergencies
- turnover
- unclear responsibilities
- unfinished initiatives
- communication breakdowns
- leaders constantly rescuing

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The Capacity Audit



PEOPLE

Do they have the emotional/skill capacity?



TIME

Is there actually time to do this well?



SYSTEMS

Do our structures make this easier or harder?



PRIORITIES

Are we asking people to carry too many "important" things simultaneously?

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A Leadership Trap

When systems don't work, leaders often compensate by *working harder*.

Leader fills gap → System remains unchanged → Leader becomes depleted → More gaps appear → Leader works harder

! Over-functioning can hide organizational problems.

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Support *Without* Absorbing

SUPPORTING

- listening
- coaching
- clarifying
- providing resources
- removing legitimate barriers
- helping prioritize

ABSORBING

- taking over
- carrying their emotions home
- repeatedly rescuing
- avoiding accountability
- solving problems they can solve
- becoming indispensable

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Coaching *Instead of* Rescuing

Shift from: "I'll handle it." →

to questions such as:

- ? "What have you tried?"
- ? "What do you think needs to happen next?"
- ? "What part feels hardest?"
- ? "What support would help you move forward?"
- ? "What can you take ownership of?"
- ? "What do you need from me—and what don't you need from me?"

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PART IV — DESIGNING AN EMOTIONALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL

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Regulation *Isn't Enough*

You cannot self-regulate your way out of a *poorly designed system*.

Emotionally responsive leadership requires both:

 PERSONAL PRACTICE
 +
 ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN
 

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STOP ASKING PEOPLE TO BE MORE RESILIENT...

...without asking what they are being required to be resilient *TO*.

Are there unnecessary stressors we have normalized?

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Design for *Stability*

 Predictability Do people know what to expect?	 Communication Do people know what they need to know?	 Role clarity Do people know what belongs to them?	 Support Do people know where to go when they're struggling?	 Capacity alignment Do expectations match available resources?
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Small *Structural* Shifts



	Instead of constantly reacting to coverage crises	→	Create a coverage protocol
	Instead of answering the same questions repeatedly	→	Create communication systems
	Instead of vague performance concerns	→	Clarify observable expectations
	Instead of leaders solving everything	→	Build decision-making ownership
	Instead of adding initiative after initiative	→	Identify what you will stop doing

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CLOSING: PUTTING IT TOGETHER

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The Emotionally Responsive *Leadership Framework*




REGULATION
What is happening in me?

↓


CLARITY
What does this moment require?

↓


CAPACITY
What can this person/system realistically hold?

↓


RESPOND INTENTIONALLY

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Final *Message*



Your *regulation* becomes their *stability*.

Your *clarity* becomes their *security*.

Your *attention to capacity* becomes a *healthier culture*.

Emotionally responsive leadership isn't about carrying everyone.
It's about creating the conditions in which people can function, grow, and lead well.

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Ready to go deeper?

Let's continue the journey.

Responsive Leadership: A 3-Part Series

Walk away with practical tools to:

- Lead through conflict and staff challenges
- Balance empathy with accountability
- Support your team without overextending
- Build systems to reduce overwhelm

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