

# The Leadership Friction *Field Guide*

---

A practical guide for HR and executive leaders to explore hidden responsibility overload, decision friction, and leadership consistency.

---

FOR

HR, COO, and CHRO leaders

USE IT IN

A 20-minute team conversation

FRAMEWORKS

Root Cause Code · Decisive Protocol · The Integrated Standard

---

Charisa Munroe-Wilborn

LEADERSHIP STRATEGIST

*Everything is negotiable.  
Your soul is not.*

**01 Burnout is often the symptom**

Why capable leaders go quiet first

**02 The Root Cause Code**

Identify patterns, not people

**03 A 20-minute team conversation**

Facilitation script and next steps

**04 The Decisive Leadership Protocol**

See it. Stop it. Step into it.

**05 The Integration Standard**

Plus a focused 90-day pilot

**06 Measure movement, not perfection**

What to review monthly and quarterly

---

## Important Use Notice

The Leadership Friction Field Guide is an educational leadership-development resource. It is designed to support reflection, facilitated discussion, and organizational inquiry regarding role clarity, decision ownership, leadership consistency, and workplace practices.

It is not a clinical, psychological, medical, legal, or employment assessment; it is not a validated survey or selection instrument; and it should not be used as the sole basis for hiring, promotion, discipline, termination, compensation, performance ratings, or any other employment decision.

Use the material in a manner that protects participant privacy and confidentiality. When gathering team input, focus on aggregate patterns rather than identifying or evaluating individual employees. Organizations remain responsible for determining whether and how to apply this material in accordance with their own policies, legal obligations, and professional guidance.

No outcome is promised or guaranteed. Results will depend on the organization, leadership practices, implementation, and other factors.

The Root Cause Code, Decisive Leadership Protocol, Integration Standard, and Leadership Friction Field Guide are proprietary frameworks of Boardroom and Soul and may not be reproduced, distributed, or used for commercial training without written permission.

# Burnout is often the symptom.

Your strongest leaders are often the least likely to say they are overwhelmed.

They are the ones who handle the difficult conversation before it becomes a crisis. They rewrite the work that should have been done correctly the first time. They make the decision nobody else will make. They absorb conflict so the room can keep moving. They carry the emotional weight of a team, a function, or an executive relationship because they are capable, and because they are faster than the alternative.

Eventually, the organization begins to experience the cost. Not always as a visible collapse.

## SOMETIMES IT APPEARS AS

- Delayed decisions
- A leadership bench that cannot develop
- High performers who quietly stop volunteering
- Employees who describe a leader as inconsistent or hard to read
- A resignation that arrives as a surprise only because nobody looked closely enough before it happened

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help HR and executive leaders explore the organizational friction beneath those patterns. It is a practical leadership pattern-mapping guide. One that can help you ask better questions before your strongest people decide they have carried enough.

# The Root Cause Code

A facilitated leadership reflection and pattern-mapping framework. Use it to identify patterns, not people.

| FRAMEWORK      | CORE QUESTION                                                        | WHAT IT MAY SURFACE                                                                                               |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Identity       | <i>Who are you when nobody needs anything from you?</i>              | Value tied to usefulness, competence, availability, or being indispensable.                                       |
| Assignment     | <i>What work gives you back more than it costs you?</i>              | Work-fit concerns, capability misalignment, and sustained depletion.                                              |
| Responsibility | <i>What are you carrying at work right now that was never yours?</i> | Misassigned decisions, unfinished work, conflict avoidance, emotional labor, or accountability without authority. |

## When a pattern dominates, investigate the system

### IDENTITY

Role clarity, recognition norms, performance expectations, leader modeling, and development pathways.

### ASSIGNMENT

Work design, capability deployment, succession, internal mobility, development opportunities, and workload allocation.

### RESPONSIBILITY

Decision rights, escalation rules, manager accountability, role boundaries, conflict practices, and workload distribution.

When Responsibility lights up repeatedly across a team, you may not have an individual resilience problem. You may have an *operating-model* problem.

# A 20-minute team conversation

Use the Root Cause Code with one intact leadership team, leadership bench, or management cohort. The purpose is to identify recurring leadership friction—not to collect personal disclosures.

1–3

MINUTES

**Set the frame.** “We are not using this exercise to decide who is resilient enough. We are using it to identify where our systems may be asking capable people to absorb work, decisions, and pressure that should be owned somewhere else.”

4–9

MINUTES

**Private reflection.** Invite participants to respond to the Identity, Assignment, and Responsibility prompts. Do not collect individual worksheets.

10–15

MINUTES

**Discuss patterns.** Where is authority unclear? What work is routinely done by the wrong role? Which decisions keep escalating? Where are reliable people absorbing conflict, rework, or emotional labor?

16–20

MINUTES

**Choose one operating friction to investigate.** Assign an owner and define one next step.

## Possible next steps

- |                                                                               |                                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>01</b> Clarify who has authority to make a recurring decision.</p>      | <p><b>02</b> Redesign an escalation pathway.</p>                                    |
| <p><b>03</b> Stop senior leaders from rewriting work managers should own.</p> | <p><b>04</b> Assign an avoided conflict conversation to the appropriate leader.</p> |
| <p><b>05</b> Rebalance workload concentrated in one “reliable” person.</p>    |                                                                                     |

FRICTION NOTED

OWNER

# The Decisive Leadership Protocol

High-pressure environments reward speed. But speed without clarity can become silent overfunctioning: one capable leader absorbs the problem, makes the decisions alone, and sends the answer after midnight.

---

## MOVE 1

### See it

Name the pattern—not just the feeling.

“I am about to solve a staffing problem by silently making myself the coverage plan.”

---

## MOVE 2

### Stop it

Write the sentence that ends the pattern.

“I will not approve coverage assignments until the operations lead identifies what work can pause, shift, or be redistributed.”

---

## MOVE 3

### Step into it

Write the sentence that replaces the pattern.

“By 10 a.m. tomorrow, I will lead a 20-minute decision huddle using demand, capacity, risk, and ownership as the criteria.”

---

## IN PRACTICE

It is Thursday afternoon. A key employee has resigned. Two vacancies are already open. The executive team wants a coverage plan by Monday. The instinct may be to absorb the work and make every decision alone.

The protocol creates a different response: clear ownership, shared criteria, defined tradeoffs, and a time-bound next move. The manager does not become less accountable. The manager becomes more precise.

Urgency needs an owner,  
criteria, and a next move.

# The Integration Standard + 90-Day Pilot

A leader with a defined standard does not have to renegotiate every decision in the middle of pressure. The Integration Standard is a visible statement of what a leader will not trade away, even for a title, a quarter, an urgent request, or someone's approval.

## THE PROMPT

The standard I hold is \_\_\_\_\_, and it does not move for \_\_\_\_\_.

Visible standards can support decision consistency, boundary clarity, and a more predictable leadership experience. Publish it. Practice it. Measure what changes.

## A focused 90-day pilot

### Month 1

#### BASELINE + PATTERN

Review existing exit-interview, pulse, and leadership-friction themes. Run the Root Cause Code with one leadership bench or business unit.

### Month 2

#### PRACTICE UNDER PRESSURE

Teach the Decisive Leadership Protocol in a 20-minute manager microlearning. Use it in staffing, workload, performance, employee-relations, and escalation conversations.

### Month 3

#### MAKE STANDARDS VISIBLE

Each participating leader defines and shares one Integration Standard. Review what held, what changed, and what returned under pressure.

At the end of 90 days, use the evidence to refine the pilot, expand it, build a manager-development module around the strongest pattern, or redesign the intervention.

# Measure movement, not perfection.

Do not claim that one leadership pilot caused every retention or engagement change. Establish a baseline, look for directional movement, and use what you learn to refine your approach.

---

## REVIEW MONTHLY

Decision escalation volume

Time to decision

Role-clarity and manager-friction themes

Rework, recurring handoffs, and leader follow-through

---

## REVIEW QUARTERLY

Regrettable voluntary turnover

Engagement or pulse items related to manager consistency, clarity, and trust

Absence patterns and internal mobility

Exit-interview themes related to inconsistency, unclear expectations, or leadership friction

### BRING THE FRAMEWORK TO YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

If you are seeing responsibility overload, unclear ownership, slow decisions, recurring escalation, inconsistent leadership behavior, or potential retention risk among high-capacity leaders, a Leadership Friction Scan can help you identify the first pattern worth investigating.

A Leadership Friction Scan is a focused 20-minute working conversation for HR and executive leaders. Together, we will explore where friction may be concentrating and what a focused first intervention could look like.

[REQUEST A LEADERSHIP FRICTION SCAN](#)