

EARNING CONVICTION

THE PRACTICE THAT REDIRECTS LEADERS
FROM EXHAUSTED TO UNSHAKEABLE

Introduction & Chapter 1
Self-Awareness

GLENN LLOPIS
yō-pēs

The Unshakable Power of Conviction

The Day I Chose Conviction Over Career

As told by Jeff Blue, A&R executive and executive producer of Linkin Park's Hybrid Theory, the best-selling debut album of the 21st century

There's a moment I think about often. I'm standing on the Sunset Strip, having just been physically thrown out of a record label executive's office. Axl Rose is in the lobby. Security is staring at me. And I'm 19 years old, a law student with no music industry experience, who walked into that office by accident, the result of a case of mistaken identity.

I could have left. Most people would have left.

But something inside me wouldn't move.

That thing, that immovable, unreasonable, almost irrational force—it's what Glenn Llopis calls conviction. And that day on Sunset Boulevard wasn't the last time I would need it. It was just the first time I recognized it.

When Everyone Said No, Conviction Said Otherwise

Years later, I walked from my office at Zomba Music to a tiny club on the Sunset Strip to see a young band called Xero perform their first

show at the Whisky a Go Go. The room was nearly empty. Nobody cared. The band was raw, unfinished, and unsigned.

But I heard something. Not just in the music, but in the conviction behind the music. These kids believed in something that didn't yet have proof.

I signed them to a publishing development deal on the spot.

What followed was one of the longest, hardest, most humbling roads I have ever walked in my career. We went through three name changes, two bass players, two vocalists, and 44 showcases. We lived on a steady diet of rejection.

My own manager called it career suicide.

Artists I had already made successful, Limp Bizkit and Korn, told me the band's music wasn't good enough.

Every signal from the outside world said: Let it go.

But conviction doesn't operate on outside signals. That's the whole point. Conviction is what you carry when the evidence hasn't arrived yet. It's biological, primal, when our brain hits our gut. It tells us to stay while others run. It may not always be right, but it's what separates the forever from the forgotten.

The Phone Call That Changed Everything

One of the most pivotal moments in the Linkin Park story happened on a birthday: March 20, 1999. I called a young singer named Chester Bennington at his home in Phoenix. It happened to be his 23rd birthday. He was in the middle of a surprise party when he picked up the phone.

I told him: I'm going to give you your big break. I have a great band for you.

I didn't say maybe. I didn't say I think this might work out. I said it as a statement of fact because, in my heart, I already knew.

I sent Chester the band's demo tracks and told him I wanted his interpretation of the songs. Two days later, he was in Los Angeles,

walking into a rehearsal space to audition for a band he had never met.

That's what conviction does. It moves people. It calls people forward before the proof is there to justify it. Chester heard something in my voice that day. Not hype. Not salesmanship. Conviction. It moved him to act.

The Night My Boss Tried to Drop the Band

After I moved to Warner Bros. and finally signed the band, now called Hybrid Theory, I thought the hardest part was over.

It wasn't.

Even after we finished recording and mixing the album, the label wanted to drop them. We had done everything right. The music was extraordinary. The energy was undeniable. And still, the institutional forces around us were pushing against us.

I decided in that moment to do what Glenn's book calls out with precision: I chose conviction over comfort. I put my career on the line. I fought internally for the album in a way that my peers thought was reckless. I told my boss, with everything I had, that this record was going to change the world.

On October 24, 2000, *Hybrid Theory* was released.

It became the best-selling debut album of the 21st century.

Over 30 million copies sold. Multiple Grammy Awards. A generation of people who found their voice in those songs. A band that became one of the most important in the history of rock music, because it was authentic, real, and based on conviction.

What Authenticity Actually Costs

Here's what I want you to understand. What I wish someone had put in a book and handed to me at 19 years old, standing on that sidewalk on Sunset Boulevard:

Authenticity is not free. It costs something. It costs the approval of people who aren't ready to see what you see. It costs the comfort of consensus. It costs the safety of the expected path. Glenn Llopis calls it “earning” conviction, and that word matters. You don't stumble into conviction. You don't inherit it. You earn it through the decisions you make when no one is affirming you, when the evidence hasn't caught up with your belief, when every rational signal is telling you to stop.

Every great artist I have ever worked with, every great leader I have ever encountered, shares one thing: They had something they would not abandon, even when everything around them said to.

That is conviction.

Four Things I Learned From the *Hybrid Theory* Journey

1. Conviction sees what credentials cannot.

I wasn't supposed to be in that office on the Sunset Strip. I had no music industry experience. But conviction got me through that door and kept me there when they tried to throw me out. Your position in a room matters less than what you carry into it.

2. The right voice changes everything.

Chester Bennington wasn't just a singer. He was the authentic human truth; the outlier that cut through the barrage of conventionalism. Leadership works the same way. The right voice, the authentic one, unlocks what strategy alone never could.

3. Forty-four rejections is not a signal to quit.

It's a signal to refine. Every “no” we got forced us to sharpen what was already great. Conviction doesn't fear rejection. It uses it.

4. The moment you stop protecting your conviction is the moment your career becomes ordinary.

The day I put my career on the line to save that album was the most important leadership decision I ever made. Playing it safe would have cost the world one of its greatest bands. Safe is a slow death. Safe is the first thing we need to kill if we're going to succeed.

The Force That Cannot Be Replicated

I have been in this industry for more than three decades. I have worked at six major labels. I have been part of over 170 million albums sold. I have seen talent come and go, trends rise and collapse, entire business models get erased overnight.

The one thing that has never been replaceable, in an artist, in an executive, in a leader of any kind, is the authentic, unshakable conviction behind their decisions.

You can automate strategy. You can outsource execution. You can replicate almost anything.

You cannot replicate conviction.

Glenn Llopis spent his career asking the question that most leaders are afraid to answer honestly: *What do you actually believe in, and are you willing to pay the price to prove it?*

Earning Conviction is the book that finally answers that question. Not as a theory. As a roadmap.

I only wish I had it at 19, standing on a sidewalk on Sunset Boulevard, choosing not to walk away.

Jeff Blue is a multi-platinum A&R executive, record producer, award-winning songwriter, screenwriter, lawyer, and best-selling author of One Step Closer: From Xero to #1—Becoming Linkin Park (Simon & Schuster). He has served as senior VP of A&R at Warner Bros., Interscope, Atlantic, RCA, Virgin, and Sony, and has been involved in the sale of over 170 million albums worldwide.

Dedication

To the exhausted leaders.

To those of you who have poured so much of yourself into your career and your roles that you've forgotten where the job ends and where you begin.

This is for the ones who have spent years carrying the weight of other people's expectations, solving problems you didn't create, and putting out fires while your own spark slowly faded. I see you. I know the quiet toll of the late nights, the silent sacrifices, and the pressure to have all the answers when you feel like you're running on empty.

You have spent so much time fueling the engine of your organization that you have neglected the engine of your own spirit. You have mastered the art of resilience, but perhaps at the cost of your own joy.

This book is dedicated to your redirection from the exhausting performance of what's expected to the sustainable power of who you actually are.

You are not a machine built for endless output. You are a leader capable of transformation, one practice at a time, through years of committed work.

This won't be easy. But it will be worth it.

The work starts now.

Preface

THE JOURNEY TO CONVICTION

My father left everything behind.

In 1959, he walked away from his life in Cuba with an unshakable belief that he could build something better for his family in America. He didn't lack credentials: he graduated from Cornell University in 1940. He didn't lack confidence: he'd already revolutionized Cuban music with his quartet, Los Llopis, being the first to integrate American rock 'n' roll into Cuban rhythms and sounds, creating what we now call crossover music. He didn't lack capability: he was both a trained chemist and an accomplished musician.

What he had, beyond all of that, was conviction: the earned capability to reinvent himself whenever circumstances demanded it, to act when outcomes were uncertain, and to build something new rather than cling to what was familiar.

My father reinvented himself not once, but many times throughout his life. From chemist to pioneering musician with Los Llopis. From music innovator to one of the three chemists who formulated Miller Lite. From corporate chemist back to musician, rebooting his musical career after retiring from the Miller Brewing Company. And even decades later, he returned to chemistry to help me formulate products for my own first venture, Luna Rossa Gourmet Foods.

Each reinvention required the same fundamental capability:

the conviction to act rather than remain comfortable with what he already knew.

Throughout my own ups and downs in life, when I faced setbacks or questioned my path, my father would say the same thing: “Keep going, son. Keep going.”

Little did I know at the time what he was really teaching me: to have the conviction to keep believing in myself and what I stood for, even when circumstances made it easier to quit or revert to what was comfortable.

Why You’re Exhausted

If you’re reading this, you’re likely exhausted. Not from lack of skill—I know you’re talented. Not from lack of trying—I bet you’ve implemented countless strategies, attended programs, read the books, built strong teams, and delivered results.

You’re exhausted because you’re fighting a constant battle.

You’re trying to maintain your own transformation against organizational systems designed to prevent it. Those systems are designed to protect and perpetuate themselves, and they don’t leave much room for people who grow beyond them. You’ve learned new things and expanded your own boundaries, but our organizational cultures reward conformity, not individuality.

You’ve succeeded by every external measure: promotions, compensation, recognition. But that success came at a cost: the exhausting performance of maintaining change against the constant gravitational pull toward the status quo.

That exhaustion isn’t weakness; it’s your system telling you something critical: You’re missing something foundational.

You don’t need another framework. You’ve implemented frameworks that work. You don’t need more strategies. You know what to do. What you need is the capability to sustain transformation when every organizational force pulls you back. You need conviction.

The 16-Year Discovery

For 16 years and through five books, I built frameworks that worked. Each one solved a real problem. Each one created genuine transformation.

In 2009, *Earning Serendipity* showed how to create opportunities through systematic practice. Leaders applied it. Lives changed. Careers transformed.

In 2017, *The Innovation Mentality* provided strategies for optimal deployment. Organizations innovated in ways they hadn’t before.

In 2019, *Leadership in the Age of Personalization* introduced five shifts to help leaders balance standardization with personalization. I watched leaders unleash capacities that had been hidden. Teams came alive. Innovation accelerated.

That same year, I launched the Age of Personalization Movement—bringing together executives from Starbucks, General Mills, Target, Mars, and dozens of other Fortune 500 companies. We held summits across healthcare, corporate America, and higher education. We proved the case comprehensively.

Everyone agreed. The evidence was overwhelming. Transformation began in pockets.

Then I watched something happen: Standardization pulled people back. Not immediately. Not obviously. But gradually, persistently, and powerfully.

In 2022, *Unleashing Individuality* showed how to unleash individual and collective capacity through inclusive practices. Again, the work resonated. Initial transformation. Visible results. Then gradual reversion.

By 2024, *Make Reinvention Your Superpower* provided a complete methodology for continuous transformation. People applied it. Transformations accelerated.

And yet, again, I heard the same refrain: “This is too hard to sustain.”

The work was right. The frameworks were sound. Every methodology created real transformation.

But sustaining transformation against relentless standardization required something I hadn't yet addressed: the foundational capability my father had been teaching me all along.

Conviction.

The Conviction Crisis

This pattern isn't unique to my clients. It's widespread.

Transformation initiatives fail at unprecedented rates—not because the strategies are wrong, but because leaders can't sustain them against organizational inertia. It's why talented leaders burn out despite being more educated and skilled than ever—not because they're working too hard, but because they're fighting constantly to maintain change against systems designed to prevent it.

Conviction is the earned capability to reinvent when circumstances demand it, to act when outcomes are uncertain, and to build something new rather than cling to what's familiar.

It's the capability my father had, which enabled him to reinvent repeatedly and sustain those reinventions over decades. The capability that let him say "keep going" from deep belief, not desperate hope.

And it's the missing foundational capability that, once earned, makes everything else sustainable.

What Makes This Book Different

This book is built on a simple premise: Your exhaustion isn't weakness, it's wisdom. Your body, mind, and spirit are trying to tell you that you need something deeper than methodologies. You need the conviction to sustain this work over time.

This book helps you build conviction by progressing through five parts, each one tackling a big theme: who you are, how you grow, how

you lead, what you create, and leading with conviction. Each theme is broken down into chapters that offer a handful of ways you can redirect something you're already doing to turn the corner toward something that is more authentic to you.

These are concrete ways to build conviction through deliberative practice.

The sections describing each redirect are purposely short and to the point. Each redirect follows the same pattern: Name the exhaustion you're experiencing. Offer the redirect that replaces exhausting resistance with conviction-building practice. Then practice until you earn conviction strong enough to sustain your transformation.

Coming Full Circle

Transformation requires not just the right frameworks, but the conviction to sustain those frameworks against the constant gravitational pull of standardization.

This book is that missing piece. Think of conviction as the force that keeps you going.

The conviction you're seeking isn't somewhere out there to be found. It's already within you, waiting to be earned through the daily practice of sustaining who you are and what you know is right, even when every organizational force pulls you back toward what's comfortable and familiar.

My father taught me that across a lifetime of sustained reinvention, and he distilled it into five simple words that carried everything: "Keep going, son. Keep going."

Now it's yours.

Glenn Llopis

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Foreword

I first met Glenn Llopis in 2013 at the University of Minnesota, during a tour where he was sharing insights from his first book, *Earning Serendipity*. Glenn was grieving the recent loss of his father, and he chose to share that grief openly with the audience through stories of what his father had taught him about dignity, work, and becoming whole as a human being. Those stories moved me deeply. They weren't performative or polished; they were human. And they stayed with me long after the talk ended.

When I later read *Earning Serendipity*, one concept changed how I thought about leadership: his emphasis on “sharing the harvest.” Having lived in the United States for four years at the time, it was the first time I had encountered a leadership principle rooted in collectivist cultures in a business book. It felt familiar—and long overdue. Reciprocity is one of the oldest principles societies have learned: when we invest in one another, we create more value for everyone.

Shortly after that experience, I asked my employer to enroll me in Glenn's Hispanic Leadership Training, an online program focused on leadership traits rooted in my heritage. This was well before online learning became mainstream, and Glenn was already leveraging interactive platforms to create connection and engagement at scale. Even then, he was operating ahead of the curve.

Life, as it does, took me down unexpected paths. I planted my own entrepreneurial seeds and, years later, after discovering my passion for consumer-packaged goods, I joined General Mills in 2019.

To my surprise and delight, I learned that Glenn had been working with the company for nearly a decade.

I eventually joined his training on Leadership in the Age of Personalization. What stood out most wasn't only the content, but the people it shaped. The cohort included individuals leading from every seat in the organization. The difference this training made was unmistakable. The leaders who completed it didn't merely comply with expectations or hide behind standardization. They acted with intention. They cared for one another. They understood their personal brands and led with clarity about who they were and how they showed up.

I saw firsthand how Glenn's work gave people confidence—not the loud kind, but the grounded kind—to make meaningful contributions to the business.

The impact became even more personal when I invited Glenn to work with the 14 team members of Carbe Diem, the brand I had co-founded at General Mills' internal venture studio. What he facilitated for us went far beyond training. It was a true before-and-after moment.

Glenn helped us see one another fully—not as roles or titles, but as individuals with values, histories, and lives beyond the brand. That work sparked something unexpected: We started holding monthly employee highlight meetings, where one team member would share their personal story. Many of those meetings ended with me in tears, witnessing the raw beauty of people opening their hearts to one another.

From that point forward, it became clear that we were building the brand from individual purpose. We took the time to understand each team member's life purpose—their interests, values, and principles—and to connect their life purpose to the way they contributed to the brand's purpose. But we were still just a team within a larger organization with its own priorities.

Through this and other engagements, Glenn noticed a pattern

among high-potential individuals, including people on my team. Many were stuck in what he later called career quicksand: successful on paper but exhausted from trying to apply what they'd learned about purposeful leadership within organizational systems designed to protect the standardized status quo. I watched several people move from asking "How do I get ahead?" to asking "What actually matters to me?" That shift became the foundation for another book from Glenn: *Make Reinvention Your Superpower*.

My journey with Glenn didn't stop there. I later hired him to help me clarify my own personal brand. Out of that work emerged a phrase that finally articulated the value I bring into professional spaces: I am a Resilience Architect. It was an ikigai moment—the intersection of passion, purpose, profession, and vocare (the Latin word for what we're called to do).

Glenn has been a mentor to me for over a decade. And like all real mentors, he didn't only guide me in moments of strength, but also in moments of profound challenge.

In 2025, I experienced a mental health crisis after learning that an organization I deeply loved—one I had poured my heart into—was questioning my integrity behind closed doors. I was trying to build something it had never built before: a brand with a soul. Standardization fought back hard, and in that moment, it won. What I took from that experience is the same thing this book teaches: Conviction cannot be borrowed from an organization. It must be earned from within.

Every step of this journey—from that university auditorium in 2013, to building a brand from individual purpose, to finding language for my own value, to navigating my hardest professional moment—has been shaped by the same question this book asks of you: Have you earned your own conviction?

That is why this book matters to me, and why I believe it will matter to you.

I've spent much of my life learning how to reflect, how to turn

experience into insight and insight into growth. In many ways, this book is a guide for doing exactly that. It takes you on a journey of discovery about who you are, how you grow, how you lead, what you create, and how you can lead with conviction. Notice the common thread: you.

We had it upside down when we focused on playing roles for organizations or mimicking leadership behaviors. True transformation requires personal transformation. And if this is the beginning of your journey toward earned conviction, I hope these pages help you take your first step honestly, courageously, and fully.

Santi Strasser

The Resilience Architect

Scan the QR code to read Santi's story that proves why conviction matters:



WHY THIS BOOK & WHAT IT OFFERS

You can handle demanding work. You've always handled it. You're good at solving complex problems, navigating organizational politics, delivering results under pressure. That's not what's draining you.

There's a paradox of high performance: The armor that protected you early in your career is now limiting you. The professional persona that helped you advance is now depleting you. The performance that got you here is preventing you from going further.

You're not failing. You're succeeding in a way that's unsustainable and not fulfilling.

The Shift That Changes Everything

I know this exhaustion intimately because I lived it for the first 15 years of my career. I performed the successful executive. I projected the competent consultant. I maintained the polished professional image. I succeeded by every measure that mattered to my organization.

And I was depleting myself in the process.

The shift came when I stopped asking "How do I become better at performing this role?" and started asking "How do I redirect this considerable energy I'm spending on performance toward something that's actually sustainable?"

That question, that redirect, changed everything.

It didn't happen immediately. It wasn't a dramatic moment. But the change was fundamental. Through years of practicing authenticity instead of performing perfection, I built something I'd never had before: conviction.

I learned that being myself works better than performing someone else's version of success.

In this book I offer specific ways to redirect your energy from exhausting performance to sustainable conviction. From depleting yourself trying to be what's expected to earning the evidence that being yourself is more powerful.

From Exhaustion to Conviction Through Redirects

Every chapter in this book follows a simple pattern:

1. **Name the conviction**—The specific way you're depleting yourself by performing instead of being authentic, and the conviction that will turn things around.
2. **Offer the redirects**—Stop doing this exhausting thing. Start doing this conviction-building thing.
3. **Practice until you earn conviction**—Repeat the redirect until you have your own evidence that it works.

The Origins: 30 Years in the Trenches

The redirects in this book didn't emerge from theory. They emerged from 30 years of leadership consulting, executive coaching, and organizational transformation work with Fortune 500 companies, family businesses, nonprofits, and startups.

Many of these insights first appeared in various forms: in my *Forbes* articles over 17 years of contributing to their leadership platform, in episodes of my *Personalization Outbreak* podcast, or through my Leadership in the Age of Personalization summits and publications. The insights have been tested and refined by thousands

of my clients over the years and also by millions of readers facing real challenges. What began as individual explorations of specific leadership dynamics evolved through continuous dialogue with leaders who were practicing these ideas in their organizations.

The stories throughout these pages are drawn from real coaching sessions and consulting engagements. I changed the details to protect confidentiality, but I preserved the authenticity of the stories. When you read about a leader facing a specific challenge, you're reading about a pattern I've observed dozens of times across hundreds of clients.

This idea of redirecting from exhausting performance to conviction-building practice emerged from observing what actually works when leaders need to earn conviction for themselves.

How to Use This Book

You can read it straight through from Part I to Part V, letting the practice build progressively.

Or you can skip to what you need most:

- ▶ Drowning right now? Start with Chapter 1.
- ▶ Want systematic transformation? Read Parts I–III in order, then Part V for direction.
- ▶ Mid-career and feeling stuck? Start with Part II, then Part III, then circle back to Part I.
- ▶ Senior leader thinking about legacy? Read Part IV first, then work backward.

However you read it, do this: Pick one redirect, one uncomfortable practice, one specific shift from performance to authenticity. Commit to practicing it daily for seven consecutive days.

You don't have to be perfect, just keep going. Then add another practice. Then another.

That's how conviction is earned: practicing one redirect at a time until it becomes who you are, not just what you know.

What You'll Need for This Journey

Honesty: You'll need to admit what's exhausting you and acknowledge where you're performing instead of being authentic.

Courage: You'll need to practice redirects that make you uncomfortable and drop some armor before you know what will happen.

Persistence: You'll need to keep practicing even when early attempts don't work perfectly and gather evidence through repeated experience.

Patience: You'll need to accept that conviction is earned slowly and trust that repeated practice will compound into transformation.

If you have those four things, you can earn the conviction you're seeking. If you don't have them yet, you can develop them through the work.

Let's begin.

PART I

Who You Are

Early in your career, you probably found yourself adapting to what other people wanted you to be. That's natural, because there was still a lot about yourself you hadn't discovered yet. But those adaptations become an armor, and the armor that protected you early in your career is now the primary source of your exhaustion.

In Part I, I'm not adding more tools to your toolkit. I'm removing the armor weighing you down so you can finally lead from who you are.

You'll find 28 redirects across three chapters through which we will build self-awareness, courage, and individuality. The work begins with the hardest question: Who are you without your armor?





Self-Awareness

Earning the conviction to lead from who you actually are.

Do you project certainty even when you feel uncertain? Do you cloak yourself in a composed exterior that hides the doubt you feel inside? Are you careful with your language to avoid any appearance of weakness? Do you try to make it look like you've got things figured out, even when you don't?

This is the armor we have crafted for ourselves. It's protected you. It's helped you advance. But the armor that protected you early in your career is now limiting you. You're already expending so much effort, why not direct it toward creating a different impact?

Chapter 1 provides eight redirects to help you **earn the conviction to lead from who you actually are**. Self-knowledge is your most strategic leadership asset, and leading authentically is more powerful than performing perfectly.

SELF-AWARENESS REDIRECT No. 1

Cultivate self-awareness as a strategic asset. True leadership begins with knowing yourself well enough to adapt and grow.

You know your team's strengths. You know the market. You know your competitors.

But how well do you know yourself?

I'm not talking about the polished version you present in meetings. I'm talking about the real you. The one with triggers you don't fully understand. You have patterns you repeat without even realizing it. You have blind spots that quietly undermine your best intentions.

So many of us spend hours every week managing situations that wouldn't exist if we understood ourselves better.

The Story:

A marketing director at a midsize consumer goods company kept experiencing the same pattern: He had high-performing teams that eventually imploded. Across three product launches in two years, with three different teams, he experienced the same result.

He was genuinely confused, telling me, "I hire talented people. I give them autonomy. But somehow, they keep clashing."

When we examined his hiring patterns, we found something striking: He consistently hired strong-willed, independent thinkers. In other words, people exactly like himself. He valued that trait so intensely that he'd built teams where everyone needed autonomy and nobody wanted to collaborate.

He had seven soloists, and no ensemble.

Once he recognized this pattern, he could interrupt it. His next hire was Elena, someone collaborative and team-oriented who actually enjoyed coordinating complex projects. The team dynamic shifted within weeks.

Self-awareness isn't therapy; it's strategy. When you're aware of

your patterns, you can interrupt them. When you understand your triggers, you can manage them. When you see your blind spots, you can compensate for them.

The Redirect: You're already spending energy managing the outcomes of not knowing yourself. Redirect that effort toward understanding what drives you.

Reflective Question: Where might your habits or blind spots be guiding your decisions more than your conscious intent?

Redirect Practice: From Autopilot to Awareness

Pick one decision you made this week. Journal: What motivated it? What assumptions influenced you? What pattern does it fit? Do this daily for one week. You're not working more; you're redirecting effort from managing problems to preventing them.

SELF-AWARENESS REDIRECT No. 2

What makes you uncomfortable in a conversation? What are your triggers?

Leadership development programs can be incredibly helpful, but in my experience, they often skip one of the most powerful lessons you can learn about yourself: How to recognize and understand your defensive reactions.

The Story:

During a 360 review early in my career, multiple people noted that I became dismissive when questioned. Specifically, when someone challenged my thinking, I'd immediately shift to finding flaws in their argument instead of considering whether they might be right.

I didn't even realize I was doing it. In fact, I thought I just enjoyed

healthy debate. But over time I learned it was actually a defensive pattern that prevented me from learning.

Once I recognized the pattern, I started noticing the feeling that preceded it: a specific tension in my chest when someone questioned my judgment. I started seeing that tension as a valuable signal. It meant I was about to get defensive. I had to train myself to pause in the moment, listen to the questions and the feedback, and consider that this person might see something I didn't.

That awareness transformed my effectiveness. Don't get me wrong, I still feel defensive. But because I learned to recognize the feeling, I now have the tools to choose a different response.

Your triggers are information. When you get angry in meetings, that's information. When you feel the need to prove someone wrong, that's information. When you shut down instead of engaging, that's information.

The patterns reveal what you're protecting, what you're afraid of, what matters so much to you that challenges feel personal.

The Redirect: Stop reacting automatically to your triggers. Start understanding what they're protecting.

Reflective Question: Think about the last time you had a strong negative reaction in a professional situation. What specifically triggered it, and what does that reveal about what you're protecting or afraid of?

Redirect Practice: Trigger Tracking

For the next week, notice when you feel defensive, feel angry, or shut down in conversations. Don't try to stop the feeling, just notice it. Write down what preceded it. After a week, look for patterns. Your triggers are showing you exactly where you need to grow.

SELF-AWARENESS REDIRECT No. 3

True leaders confront uncomfortable truths and have the courage to continuously examine and adapt processes for the good of the team.

I bet there's a process within your team right now that isn't working. I also bet that everyone knows it, but nobody's saying it.

Maybe it's how you run meetings. It could be your approval workflow. Maybe it's an unspoken rule about who gets to speak up and who doesn't.

Often we keep these processes going because we inherited them and we never examined them to see if they fit our team or if they fit our own individual leadership style.

The Story:

A vice president at a financial services firm inherited a weekly status update meeting that consumed three hours every Monday morning. Everyone hated it. It had become a ritual of reading PowerPoint slides that could have been emails.

But when I asked why they kept doing it, the answer was always: "That's how we've always done it."

Finally, she admitted in a meeting: "This isn't working. We're spending three hours sharing information that could be read in 10 minutes. Let's redesign this."

The relief in the room was palpable. People had been quietly frustrated for 18 months but assumed the format was nonnegotiable because it had been implemented by the previous VP.

Rather than a meeting, they created a dashboard where they could share updates. They reclaimed those hours and were able to redirect that time to strategic discussions and problem-solving.

Courage isn't just about big, dramatic stands. Most of the time, it's about naming what everyone's thinking but nobody's saying.

The Redirect: Stop defending processes that aren't serving your team. Start examining them with fresh eyes.

Reflective Question: What truths about your team or processes might be uncomfortable to address, but acknowledging them could create space for positive change?

Redirect Practice: Name What's Not Working

Choose one process that frustrates your team. Initiate a conversation: "I know this isn't working well. Let's talk about why and how we could do it better." Invite honest feedback. Make one change based on what you hear.

SELF-AWARENESS REDIRECT No. 4

If you're not embarrassed by what you find when you examine yourself, you're not looking closely enough. Embrace a mindset of continuous improvement.

Most leaders are protecting themselves from seeing their own failures. We're not always conscious that we're doing it—it can be a natural self-protection mechanism. But unless we're able to truly see ourselves, we won't be able to reach our fullest capacity.

The Story:

I started a practice I call "embarrassment audits."

Once a quarter, I deliberately look for things I should be embarrassed about. Sometimes it's a decision I made that isn't working. It can be systems I designed that people are working around. Maybe it's an initiative I championed that failed, or a promise I made that I haven't kept.

The first time I did this, I found so many failures I almost

stopped. It was genuinely uncomfortable to catalog all the ways my leadership had fallen short.

But here's what I discovered: Once I acknowledged these failures, I could fix them. The things I was avoiding seeing were the exact things preventing my teams from being more effective.

A hospital administrator I worked with ran her first embarrassment audit and identified a policy she'd implemented three years earlier, which required all patient complaint letters to be routed through her office before responses were sent.

Her intention had been quality control. What she discovered was that her office had become a bottleneck: Response times had stretched from three days to sometimes six weeks. Patients who'd written in frustration were waiting nearly two months for acknowledgment. Her team had adapted by sending generic holding responses, which made things worse. Nobody had told her about the problems because the policy was hers and the culture made it difficult to push back.

When she saw the data that included complaint response times, patient satisfaction scores, and staff work-arounds, she was genuinely embarrassed. She eliminated the requirement immediately and delegated response authority to department heads. Response times dropped to four days. Patient satisfaction scores in that category improved 31% within a quarter.

The policy had felt like leadership. The audit revealed it had been an obstacle.

The discomfort of seeing your failures is temporary. The cost of not seeing them is permanent.

This isn't just about finding failures; it's about embracing continuous improvement as a mindset. The moment you believe your systems are as good as they need to be, they start degrading.

The Redirect: Stop protecting yourself from seeing failure. Start deliberately looking for what needs to improve.

Reflective Question: What is one decision you made in the past year that didn't work out the way you hoped, and what have you learned by examining why it failed? What system is "working fine" but hasn't been questioned in over a year?

Redirect Practice: Embarrassment Audit + Continuous Improvement

Block one hour this month for an honest audit. Write down: (1) one initiative you championed that failed, (2) one decision you'd change now, (3) one promise you haven't kept, and (4) one pattern in your team that reflects your leadership gaps. Don't justify, just acknowledge. Then pick one to address this quarter. And pick one "working fine" process to question and improve.

SELF-AWARENESS REDIRECT No. 5

Sharing personal stories can humanize you and open the door to greater empathy within your teams.

There's a story you're not telling. You shield it behind your armor, thinking that by doing that you're protecting yourself.

Maybe it's about a time you failed and what you learned. It could be about why you care so much about this particular project. Maybe it's about a challenge you're facing right now that's harder than it looks from the outside.

There are many reasons we hold back, and some are certainly valid. You might think it's unprofessional to share something personal, and prefer to keep some distance. Or you might think the truth would make you appear weak. But I would challenge you to rethink that and to be brave enough to be open.

The Story:

A team was struggling with a difficult client situation: a Fortune 500 account threatening to walk over a missed milestone. Everyone was

frustrated, but the mood in the room was tense and careful. Nobody wanted to admit they were struggling or afraid of losing the account.

Their manager started the meeting in a surprising way, saying: "Before we jump into problem-solving, let me tell you about the worst client situation I ever faced. I was leading a major implementation project at my previous company. The client was threatening to pull a \$2 million contract. I'd made decisions that, in hindsight, had made things worse. I'd overpromised on the timeline to keep them happy, which just set us up for bigger failure. I was terrified I'd lose us the account and maybe my job."

The room shifted. People leaned in.

He continued: "Here's what I learned from that disaster: Transparency with the client earlier would have prevented most of the problems. And asking my team for help instead of trying to fix it alone could have saved us weeks of scrambling."

The team relaxed. One person said: "Okay, I need to admit something about our current situation that I've been avoiding." The real conversation finally began.

That untold story might be exactly what your team needs to hear. It reminds them you're human. And when you're human first, you give them permission to be human, too.

The Redirect: You already have experiences worth sharing. Redirect them from private learning to team connection.

Reflective Question: What is a small, personal experience you could share that might help your team understand your motivations or leadership style better?

Redirect Practice: Share the Story

In your next one-on-one or team meeting, find a natural moment to share a brief story about a time you faced a similar challenge. Make



it real, including what you struggled with. Notice how it changes the conversation.

SELF-AWARENESS REDIRECT No. 6

A leader’s true strength lies not in having all the answers, but in their ability to admit they don’t.

“I don’t know.”

Those three words can be the hardest words to say. They can also be the most powerful.

The Story:

For most of my career, I avoided those words. I thought admitting I didn’t know something would undermine my authority, make me look unprepared, or signal weakness.

So I would deflect or try to fake it.

Then I watched a senior leader in a high-stakes board meeting respond to a tough question about competitive threats by saying this: “That’s a great question about the Asian market dynamics. I honestly don’t know enough about that regional landscape to give you a confident answer. Let me think about who on our team has the deepest expertise there and get back to you by end of week with solid intelligence.”

The room didn’t lose respect. They gained it, because she was the first person all day who didn’t pretend to know everything.

I started practicing this myself. In a board meeting, when asked about a technical detail of our security infrastructure, I was able to say: “I don’t know the specifics of our encryption protocols off the top of my head. Sarah, our CTO, can you speak to this?”

Nobody looked at me like I was incompetent. They appreciated that I knew who had the answer and brought them in.

When you admit you don’t have all the answers, you don’t lose

authority. You create space for the people who do have the answers to step forward.

The Redirect: Stop performing certainty. Start modeling the honest collaboration that solves complex problems.

Reflective Question: How might your team and the work benefit if you were more open about what you don’t know?

Redirect Practice: Three Words

Next time you’re asked a question you can’t answer, resist the urge to deflect. Say: “That’s an important question, and *I don’t know*.” Then turn it collaborative: “Who has thoughts on this, or how can we find the answer together?”

SELF-AWARENESS REDIRECT No. 7

Be transparent about the challenges your organization and teams face.

When things aren’t going well, transparency about the situation doesn’t create panic—silence does. When you hide challenges from your team, you might think you’re protecting them or maintaining confidence, but you’re not. You’re creating a vacuum that fills with speculation, rumors, and anxiety.

The Story:

A 300-person technology services company was facing significant financial pressure during an economic downturn. The leadership team knew they’d need to make difficult decisions, possibly including layoffs, but they kept that information to themselves.

Their reasons might have *seemed* good: “We don’t want people to panic. We’ll tell them when we know more.”

But people already knew something was wrong. A sudden travel ban and hiring freeze is never a good sign. They could see leadership stressed in meetings. They heard rumors from clients and industry contacts.

The silence created more anxiety than the truth would have. People started updating résumés and calling recruiters, not because they knew layoffs were coming, but because they didn't know what was really happening. The company lost three top performers who left preemptively.

Leadership finally shared the situation transparently: "We're facing financial pressure from the market downturn. Here's what we know: revenue is down 18% from projections. Here's what we don't know: whether we can avoid layoffs. Here's how we're addressing it: cost cuts in travel and contractors first, and we'll keep you informed weekly." Armed with some knowledge, people actually became less anxious.

They were still worried, of course. But now they had information instead of speculation. And many offered ideas for cost savings and revenue growth that leadership hadn't considered. The company avoided layoffs entirely through the collective problem-solving that transparency enabled.

Being transparent doesn't mean dumping every worry on your team. It means being honest about what you're facing and inviting them to be part of navigating it.

The Redirect: You're already dealing with challenges. Stop carrying them alone. Start bringing your team into the reality of the situation.

Reflective Question: What is one challenge you are currently keeping from your team that, if shared appropriately, could build more trust and rally their support?

Redirect Practice: Name What's Real

In your next team meeting, identify one significant challenge the team is facing. Be transparent about it: "This is the reality of our situation. I believe that with the talent in this room, we can find a way forward together. What are your initial thoughts?"

SELF-AWARENESS REDIRECT No. 8

The world needs leaders who are bold enough to change and humble enough to listen.

Boldness without humility is arrogance. Humility without boldness is passivity.

You need both.

The Story:

Two executives faced similar challenges: Their companies needed significant strategic shifts, but their leadership teams were divided on the right direction.

Executive A was bold. He made the strategic decision quickly and pushed it through over objections, saying, "We can't let analysis paralysis slow us down. I'm making the call."

His strategy failed within six months because he'd missed critical risks that his team had tried to warn him about, specifically that their largest customer segment wouldn't adopt the new pricing model. His boldness without humility cost the company \$4 million in lost revenue and two major client relationships.

Executive B was humble. She listened extensively to all perspectives, seeking to build consensus. But after six months of listening, she still hadn't made a decision. Her humility without boldness cost the company its competitive window; a competitor launched a similar offering and captured the market opportunity.

There was a third executive who did both. She listened deeply to understand all perspectives and concerns. Then she made a bold

decision informed by what she'd heard. When her CFO raised a valid cash-flow risk she'd underweighted, she adjusted the approach before implementation, phasing the rollout instead of going all at once.

Her strategy succeeded because she was brave enough to move forward into uncertainty and wise enough to bring other perspectives with her.

Bold enough to make difficult decisions. Humble enough to admit when you're wrong. Bold enough to change direction. Humble enough to seek input first. Bold enough to challenge the status quo. Humble enough to listen to why it exists.

The Redirect: Stop choosing between boldness and humility. Start practicing both as complementary strengths.

Reflective Question: When was the last time you actively sought out an opinion that was different from your own, and what did you learn from truly listening to it?

Redirect Practice: Listen First, Decide Bold

Next time you're about to make a significant decision, intentionally seek out someone who sees it differently. Listen fully to their perspective. Then make your bold call, informed by what you heard. That's the balance.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Before moving on to Chapter 2, consider the redirects you've practiced while making your way through this first chapter. Have you learned anything new or surprising about yourself? Have you changed anything about the way you lead others?

You've started **earning the conviction to lead from who you actually are**, with all your questions, triggers, and humanity—instead of performing someone else's version of what a leader should be.

You've built your foundation. You know yourself. You've started showing up authentically.

Now let's move on to Chapter 2 to add the courage to act even while afraid.

Learn more at:
www.theglennllopis.com