CEO TOOLKIT · FILLABLE WORKBOOK

Leader Lens – The Seven Traps of Power

Leadership is not a set of skills you acquire. It is a set of temptations you survive. That is the argument of my book, The Seven Traps of Power. I sat down, in imagined conversations grounded in the historical record, with thirty-eight of history's greatest leaders. Every one of them fell into at least one of seven traps. The ones we still admire climbed out, or built a discipline that kept them out.

This tool turns that lens on you. First, take the Seven Traps self-assessment from the companion workbook. Then put a real decision under the Lens: write it down, mark the traps you think are in play, and see which leaders faced the same trap, what they did, and what they would ask you. Finish with a one-page action plan.

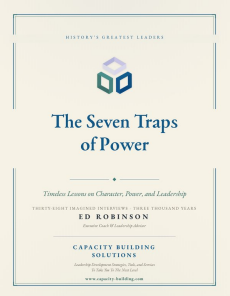
About 20 minutes. The assessment takes five. A completed example is in the appendix.

What you get

- The Seven Traps self-assessment from the workbook, scored the workbook's way, with your closest trap and a chart
- The Lens: your decision checked against the seven traps, with the leaders from the book who faced each one and the questions they would ask you
- Each trap's warning signs and the discipline that keeps leaders out of it
- A one-page action plan: one discipline, one truth-teller, one check-in date, one thing to watch for
- The leader-by-trap map for all 38 chapters of the book

How to use this form

Fill in every field right in this PDF using Adobe Acrobat Reader (free), then save. Scores calculate automatically in Acrobat Reader. Apple Preview and most browsers let you type and check boxes, but they do not run the calculations. For a fully automatic version with a live report, use the online tool: https://claude.ai/artifact/DudXSLGGepDKNxRSyNRNXJ



From The Seven Traps of Power by Ed Robinson.

The conversations in the book are imagined, grounded in the historical record. This tool gives short paraphrases. The full conversations, and the notes on which lines are the leaders' own words, are in the book.

The Seven Traps of Power by Ed Robinson. Available in paperback, hardcover and eBook.

The companion Leadership Workbook holds the full Seven Traps self-assessment used here, plus an Eight Threads baseline, six module self-assessments and a leader's dilemma for each part of the book.

Online version: https://claude.ai/artifact/DudXSLGGepDKNxRSyNRNXJ

This PDF does its own math. Open it in the free Adobe Acrobat Reader. Mac Preview and most web browsers show the form but won't calculate the totals.

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PART 1 · THE SEVEN TRAPS SELF-ASSESSMENT

How exposed am I to each trap right now?

My name | Company | Date

The Seven Traps of Power
Every leader in this book was tested by the same recurring traps — the ways people in power come undone in any century. Rate how exposed you are to each one right now, honestly rather than aspirationally. Score each from 1 (not a risk for me) to 5 (a real and present risk). These are the workbook's own statements.

		1	2	3	4	5
1	The Mirror Trap — I begin to trust the story told about me more than the facts in front of me.	●				
		not me				that's me
	In the book: You start to believe your own story.					
2	The Echo Chamber — the people around me have learned it is easier to agree than to tell me the truth.					
		not me				that's me
	In the book: The people around you stop telling you the truth.					
3	The Fear Trap — I get compliance because people are wary of me, not because they believe in the work.					
		not me				that's me
	In the book: You lead to protect what you have instead of building what comes next. This trap also covers playing not to lose: protecting what you have instead of building what comes next.					
4	The Applause Trap — I lean toward the decision that will be praised over the one I know is right.					
		not me				that's me
	In the book: You make decisions for the crowd rather than for the mission.					
5	The Overreach Trap — I keep expanding past the point where I can sustain, or even see, what I have taken on.					
		not me				that's me
	In the book: Success convinces you that your limits no longer apply.					
6	The Succession Trap — little of what I have built could outlast my leaving; I have not grown the bench.					
		not me				that's me
	In the book: You cannot imagine the work without you, so you never prepare for it.					
7	The Abstraction Trap — the people my decisions affect have become numbers, kept at a distance from me.					
		not me				that's me
	In the book: You lose touch with the people and the details that made you effective.					

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PART 1 · RESULTS

My results

These fill in automatically in Adobe Acrobat Reader. Add your seven scores (7–35). The total matters less than the one or two traps that scored highest — those are where your guardrails belong.

The Mirror	
The Echo Chamber	
Fear	
Applause	
Overreach	
Succession	
Abstraction	
Total (7 to 35)	
Traps rated	
Band (from the workbook)	
Closest trap	
Top three	
What the workbook says to do	

Shade your bars

Shade one box for each point of your rating. Your longest bar is your closest trap.

	1	2	3	4	5
The Mirror					
The Echo Chamber					
Fear					
Applause					
Overreach					
Succession					
Abstraction					

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PART 2 · THE LENS WORKSHEET

Put a real decision under the Lens

Write the decision or situation in front of you, in plain words. Then look for the words below in what you wrote, and mark the traps you think are in play. You decide; the words are only a prompt.

The decision or situation I'm facing

The word lists

The Lens reads what you wrote and looks for the words listed under each trap. A word ending in * matches any word that starts that way (promot* matches promote, promotion, promoted). Other entries match only the whole word or phrase. Two or more matches = likely. One = possible. It is a prompt, not a verdict. You decide which traps are in play.

Trap	Words that point to it (* = any word starting this way)
The Mirror	i know best · my gut · my instinct* · always been right · never been wrong · proven me right · track record · my legacy · my reputation · my vision · i built this · i'm sure · im sure · certain* · obvious* · ego · pride · proud · credit
The Echo Chamber	loyal* · everyone agrees · all agree* · nobody pushes back · no one pushes back · push back · pushes back · pushback · yes men · inner circle · consensus · disagree* · dissent* · critic* · flatter* · bad news · blindsided · surprised · nobody told me · no one told me · want to hear · my team says · trusted few
Fear	protect* · play it safe · playing it safe · safe · safer · lose · losing · not to lose · hold on to · hang on to · keep what · downside · risk* · cautious · defend* · wait and see · hold off · hold back · holding back · not yet · status quo · rock the boat · comfort zone · sit tight · hunker down · paralyz* · hesitat* · what if · afraid · fear* · scared · worr* · nervous · wary · intimidat* · comply · complian* · punish* · threat*
Applause	popular* · unpopular · praise* · applau* · liked · like me · likes me · look good · looks good · look bad · looks bad · optics · image · press · headline* · what people will think · what will people think · approval · announce* · celebrat* · disappoint* · upset* · everyone expects · expect* · board · investors · social media · recognition · award*
Overreach	expand* · growth · grow · growing · acquir* · acquisition* · new market* · new location* · second location · another location · new office · new division · bigger · double · doubling · scale · scaling · stretch* · overextend* · too much · all at once · at the same time · aggressive* · bet the · all in · opportunit* · momentum · record year · capacity · can't say no · cant say no · next big
Succession	promot* · successor* · succession · replace me · without me · step back · step away · stepping back · retire* · exit · sell the company · sell the business · next generation · my son · my daughter · family business · heir · bench · number two · second in command · coo · president · general manager · hand off · handoff · hand over · delegat* · only i · only one who · bottleneck · indispensable · runs through me · run through me · key person · vp · vice president · take over · takes over
Abstraction	headcount · layoff* · lay off · laid off · cut · cuts · cutting · restructur* · fte · ftes · numbers · spreadsheet* · dashboard* · on paper · metric* · margin* · efficien* · redundan* · consolidat* · offshor* · outsourc* · automat* · haven't talked · havent talked · haven't been · havent been · haven't visited · the field · front line · frontline · shop floor · job site · jobsite · from my office · reports say · the report

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Traps I think are in play

Tick the traps in play. Note the words you found. Then read each ticked trap's reference pages that follow.

The Mirror	Words I found
The Echo Chamber	Words I found
Fear	Words I found
Applause	Words I found
Overreach	Words I found
Succession	Words I found
Abstraction	Words I found

What the leaders' questions tell me about my decision

Trap 1

My answers to the leaders' questions

Trap 2

My answers to the leaders' questions

Trap 3

My answers to the leaders' questions

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THE LENS · REFERENCE · THE MIRROR TRAP

The Mirror: You start to believe your own story.

Believing your own myth. Ego is mistaken for judgment. In the book, Napoleon and Alexander walked all the way in; Marcus Aurelius built his whole inner life to keep it out.

Warning signs

- You trust the story told about you more than the facts in front of you.
- You hear obedience and take it for agreement.
- Your past wins have become proof that you are right this time.
- Rules you hold others to start to feel optional for you.

> **The discipline: Govern yourself first**
> Treat praise as more dangerous than criticism. Attend to your conduct, not your reputation, and keep asking whether a slight hurts your character or only your pride.

Marcus Aurelius · Kept out

Chapter 1 · Part 1: The Foundations of Leadership

The moment. Emperor of Rome on the Danube frontier, with every courtier paid to agree with him.

What they did. He kept a private notebook to argue with himself. He told himself his authority was lent, not owned, and asked of every insult whether it hurt his character or only his pride.

The lesson. Obedience is not agreement. The office does not make you wise; it only clears away the people who would once have corrected you.

"Criticism is a cold wind; it wakes a man. Praise is a warm bath; it puts him to sleep." (imagined dialogue, drawn from his Meditations)

Questions Marcus Aurelius would ask you about your decision:

- Does this decision serve the work, or the story people tell about you?
- Who told you that you were wrong this month, and what did you do with it?
- If your title were taken away tomorrow, would you still believe this is right?

Napoleon Bonaparte · Fell in

Chapter 19 · Part 3: Vision and Its Cost

The moment. In exile on Saint Helena, dictating his memoirs, the shaping of his legend the only empire left to him.

What they did. He crowned himself, came to believe his will could bend a continent and a climate, and marched into Russia. Half a million lives paid for it.

The lesson. Ambition grows quietly and dresses itself up as duty and destiny, until it devours the things it was meant to protect.

"The building was the achievement and the conquering was merely the noise." (imagined dialogue)

Questions Napoleon Bonaparte would ask you about your decision:

- Which part of this decision is necessity, and which part is your legend talking?
- Where is your Tilsit, the point where you already hold enough?
- Who around you would dare to tell you this is a mistake?

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Ramesses the Great · Fell in

Chapter 14 · Part 3: Vision and Its Cost

The moment. Near the end of a sixty-six-year reign, his temples carved with a crushing victory at Kadesh that was really a near-disaster he survived.

What they did. He shaped the memory into a triumph, and came to prize the stone over the people living beneath it.

The lesson. Distrust the polished story, including your own. The leader who believes his own monuments can no longer learn from what actually happened.

"Eternity has no face, and the people in front of him do." (from the book's reflection on him)

Questions Ramesses the Great would ask you about your decision:

- Is the win you are leaning on real, or a close call you have retold as a triumph?
- Do you keep mirrors around you, or echoes?
- Are you building a monument, or serving the people in front of you?

Also in the book: The Prophet Muhammad (ch. 5, kept out); Alfred the Great (ch. 7, kept out); George Washington (ch. 12, kept out); Thomas Jefferson (ch. 13, fell in); Alexander the Great (ch. 15, fell in); Julius Caesar (ch. 17, fell in); Saladin (ch. 22, kept out); Abraham Lincoln (ch. 23, kept out); Golda Meir (ch. 26, kept out); Mahatma Gandhi (ch. 29, kept out); Frederick the Great (ch. 35, kept out); Dwight D. Eisenhower (ch. 38, kept out).

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THE LENS · REFERENCE · THE ECHO CHAMBER

The Echo Chamber: The people around you stop telling you the truth.

Surrounding yourself with agreement. The people around the leader learn that agreeing is safer than telling the truth, and slowly the leader goes blind. The book says it has ended more reigns than any army.

Warning signs

- People agree with you faster than they used to.
- Bad news reaches you late, or from outside the company.
- The people who push back are slowly eased out of the room.
- You are surprised by things your team already knew.

> **The discipline: Seek the mirror, not the echo**
> Name the person who is free to tell you that you are wrong. Bring them into the room, and reward them where everyone can see it.

Emperor Taizong of Tang · Kept out

Chapter 10 · Part 2: The Builders of Order

The moment. He took the throne by bloodshed, then spent twenty-three years building a court that would correct him.

What they did. He made his fiercest critic, the minister Wei Zheng, one of the most honored men in the empire, so everyone could see that candor, not flattery, got you promoted.

The lesson. Near power, truth does not arrive on its own. It has to be hunted, paid for and protected.

"An honest man as a mirror to know one's own faults." (his own words on Wei Zheng's death, from the Tang histories)

Questions Emperor Taizong of Tang would ask you about your decision:

- Who on your team is rewarded for telling you that you are wrong? Can you name them?
- What would your sharpest critic say about this decision, and have you asked?
- Are you treating agreement as loyalty?

Alexander the Great · Fell in

Chapter 15 · Part 3: Vision and Its Cost

The moment. As the victories mounted, the flatterers multiplied. At a drunken banquet his old friend Cleitus told him he had grown too grand.

What they did. He killed Cleitus. Later, when his exhausted army refused to go further, he could not hear it.

The lesson. The certainty that makes you unstoppable is the same certainty that stops you hearing that you are going wrong.

"The very certainty that makes you unstoppable makes you unable to hear that you are going wrong." (imagined dialogue)

Questions Alexander the Great would ask you about your decision:

- Who is your Cleitus, and how did you treat them the last time they pushed back?
- Has your success made the honest voice harder to hear?
- What would you learn if you made it safe to disagree with you this week?

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Abraham Lincoln · Kept out

Chapter 23 · Part 4: Crisis and Endurance

The moment. In the middle of the war, he filled his cabinet with able rivals, men who thought they should have been president.

What they did. He wanted arguments, not echoes, and he passed every hard decision through the quiet of his own conscience before acting.

The lesson. Make people safe enough to speak and seen enough to stay.

"If everyone agrees, someone has stopped thinking." (imagined dialogue, as the book renders him)

Questions Abraham Lincoln would ask you about your decision:

- Who disagrees with you on this, and did you invite them into the room?
- Does bad news reach you early, or late?
- Are you deciding this in the quiet, or in the noise?

Also in the book: Confucius (ch. 2, kept out); Augustus Caesar (ch. 6, kept out); Cnut the Great (ch. 8, kept out); Qin Shi Huang (ch. 11, fell in); Ramesses the Great (ch. 14, kept out); Elizabeth I (ch. 20, kept out); Catherine the Great (ch. 34, kept out).

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THE LENS · REFERENCE · THE FEAR TRAP

Fear: You lead to protect what you have instead of building what comes next.

Playing not to lose. The leader protects what they have instead of building what comes next, and calls it prudence. In the book, Theodore Roosevelt warns that doing nothing is itself a decision, and often the worst one; Franklin Roosevelt named the fear itself as the enemy, then acted.

It can also show up as leading through fear, so people comply out of wariness.

Warning signs

- You are protecting what you have instead of building what comes next.
- You keep waiting for more certainty before you decide.
- "Not yet" and "too risky" have become your usual answers.
- You weigh a decision by what you could lose, not by what you could build.
- The other face: people comply because they are wary of you, not because they believe in the work.

> **The discipline: Refuse to be ruled by fear**
> Name the fear out loud, then ask what you would build if you weren't protecting what you have. Decide, act and correct as you go; doing nothing is a decision too, and often the worst one. And never make people afraid of you to get compliance.

Franklin D. Roosevelt · Climbed out

Chapter 25 · Part 4: Crisis and Endurance

The moment. 1933. A frozen, frightened country, and a leader who had himself been knocked flat by polio at the height of his powers.

What they did. He named the fear itself as the enemy, spoke to people one family at a time, and tried bold things, admitting frankly what failed.

The lesson. Frightened people cannot carry out any plan, and waiting for certainty only deepens the fear. Master the fear first, then act, and keep acting.

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” (his own words, First Inaugural Address, 1933)

Questions Franklin D. Roosevelt would ask you about your decision:

- Are you protecting what you have, or building what comes next?
- Have you named the fear out loud for your people?
- What would you try if you were willing to admit fast that it failed?

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Theodore Roosevelt · Kept out

Chapter 37 · Part 6: Reform and Reinvention

The moment. The sickly, asthmatic boy who remade himself, then the president who took on the great trusts when the cautious said to leave them alone.

What they did. He decided, acted and corrected as he went, and treated hesitation dressed as prudence as the bigger danger.

The lesson. Inaction is usually the greater risk, though it never looks that way. The credit belongs to the one in the arena, not the critic on the sidelines.

"In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing." (his own formulation, as the book renders it)

Questions Theodore Roosevelt would ask you about your decision:

- What decision are you avoiding by calling it prudence?
- If you made the call today and it proved wrong, how fast could you correct it?
- Are you in the arena on this one, or explaining from the sidelines why it can't be done?

Catherine the Great · Fell in

Chapter 34 · Part 6: Reform and Reinvention

The moment. The Pugachev rebellion, the largest peasant revolt in Russian history, shattered her faith in reform from above.

What they did. She bought the nobility's loyalty by binding millions of serfs more tightly, prevented collapse in her own lifetime, and handed the reckoning to the people who came after her.

The lesson. Protecting stability today can quietly become the reform you refused to make. Keep asking whether "they are not ready" is the truth or an excuse.

"Pass the consequences to those who come after." (from the book's reflection on her bargain)

Questions Catherine the Great would ask you about your decision:

- Is "they are not ready" a true reading, or a comfortable excuse?
- What are you protecting by waiting, and who pays for it later?
- Which problem are you solving now by handing its consequences to whoever comes after you?

Also in the book: Confucius (ch. 2, kept out (ruling through fear)); Cnut the Great (ch. 8, kept out (ruling through fear)); Charlemagne (ch. 9, fell in (ruling through fear)); Emperor Taizong of Tang (ch. 10, kept out (ruling through fear)); Qin Shi Huang (ch. 11, fell in (ruling through fear)); George Washington (ch. 12, fell in (playing not to lose)); Thomas Jefferson (ch. 13, fell in (playing not to lose)); Elizabeth I (ch. 20, kept out (ruling through fear)); Saladin (ch. 22, kept out (ruling through fear)); Winston Churchill (ch. 24, kept out (playing not to lose)); Joan of Arc (ch. 27, climbed out (playing not to lose)); Mahatma Gandhi (ch. 29, kept out (ruling through fear)); Eleanor Roosevelt (ch. 30, kept out (playing not to lose)); Nelson Mandela (ch. 31, kept out (ruling through fear)); Martin Luther King Jr. (ch. 32, climbed out (playing not to lose)); Peter the Great (ch. 33, fell in (ruling through fear)).

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THE LENS · REFERENCE · THE APPLAUSE TRAP

Applause: You make decisions for the crowd rather than for the mission.

Steering by praise. "Praise is wind," Marcus warned. The leaders who steered by it lost the power to do the right unpopular thing. Churchill's wilderness years are the counter-case.

Warning signs

- You check how a decision will look before you ask whether it is right.
- You avoid the right call because it will be unpopular.
- Being liked has quietly become a goal.
- You reach for the visible win over the quiet one that lasts.

> **The discipline: Serve something larger than yourself**
> Decide what is right before you check how it will look. Pass the mirror test: could you look yourself in the eye if no one ever praised you for it?

Winston Churchill · Kept out

Chapter 24 · Part 4: Crisis and Endurance

The moment. He spent the 1930s in the political wilderness, mocked for his warnings. In the summer of 1940 the sensible course was to make terms.

What they did. He refused, and told his people the brutal truth instead of false comfort.

The lesson. Decide what is right before you calculate what is winnable. People can bear almost any truth and almost no false comfort.

"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." (his own words, 13 May 1940)

Questions Winston Churchill would ask you about your decision:

- Would you make this decision if no one ever praised you for it?
- Are you comforting your people, or telling them the truth?
- Is this a matter of principle that you are treating as a popularity contest?

Golda Meir · Kept out

Chapter 26 · Part 4: Crisis and Endurance

The moment. At her kitchen table in 1974, after resigning, carrying the names and faces of the young men lost in the Yom Kippur War.

What they did. She refused to govern to be liked, and carried power like a stone in her coat pocket.

The lesson. A leader who governs to be liked makes the decisions that keep her liked, not the ones that keep her people safe. Pass the mirror test.

"The day it starts to feel good is the day it has begun to corrupt you." (imagined dialogue, in her plain idiom)

Questions Golda Meir would ask you about your decision:

- Are you leading to be liked, or to be needed?
- Can you look yourself in the eye after this decision, whatever people say?
- Are you trying to make your people comfortable, or proud?

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Martin Luther King Jr. · Kept out

Chapter 32 · Part 5: Conscience and Moral Power

The moment. His last night, in Memphis in 1968, after his fights over poverty and the war had cost him allies and approval.

What they did. He kept going past the popular victories into the harder, lonelier ones.

The lesson. Be a thermostat, not a thermometer: set the moral temperature instead of reading it.

"A leader whose conscience stops where his popularity ends is not following his conscience at all." (imagined dialogue)

Questions Martin Luther King Jr. would ask you about your decision:

- Where does your conscience stop at the edge of your popularity?
- Are you setting the temperature here, or just reading it?
- What harder decision are you avoiding because it would cost you approval?

Also in the book: Marcus Aurelius (ch. 1, kept out); The Buddha (ch. 3, kept out); Jesus of Nazareth (ch. 4, kept out); Ashoka the Great (ch. 16, climbed out); Cleopatra VII (ch. 18, kept out); Joan of Arc (ch. 27, kept out); Eleanor Roosevelt (ch. 30, kept out); Dwight D. Eisenhower (ch. 38, kept out).

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THE LENS · REFERENCE · THE OVERREACH TRAP

Overreach: Success convinces you that your limits no longer apply.

Never knowing enough. The strength that made the leader effective, pushed past its limit, becomes the thing that destroys them. Ambition without a limit is a fuse already lit.

Warning signs

- Each win only sharpens the hunger for the next one.
- You cannot say what "enough" looks like.
- Your people are worn out, and you read it as weakness.
- You are adding before you have absorbed what you already took on.

> **The discipline: Know when you have enough**
> Say what "enough" looks like before you start. Consolidate what you have won before you reach for more, and read your people's limit honestly.

Alexander the Great · Fell in

Chapter 15 · Part 3: Vision and Its Cost

The moment. At the Hyphasis River his exhausted army refused to march further east.

What they did. He could not accept it. The march home through the Gedrosian desert killed more of his people than any battle.

The lesson. Know what "enough" looks like before you start. Read your people's real limit instead of marching them into the desert to prove a point.

"A vision your people will not follow is not leadership; it is a leader walking alone and calling it a march." (imagined dialogue, as the book sums him up)

Questions Alexander the Great would ask you about your decision:

- What does "enough" look like here, in a number?
- Have your people reached their limit, and are you reading it or overriding it?
- Can you hold what you already have before you reach for more?

Ashoka the Great · Climbed out

Chapter 16 · Part 3: Vision and Its Cost

The moment. After the conquest of Kalinga, he looked at the cost: by his own count, a hundred thousand killed.

What they did. He stopped conquering, changed what he measured, and carved his remorse into stone so he could not quietly slide back.

The lesson. You become what you measure, and it is never too late to change the measure.

"I stopped counting what made me feel great and started counting what actually made my people well." (imagined dialogue)

Questions Ashoka the Great would ask you about your decision:

- What are you counting as success: what makes you feel great, or what makes your people well?
- Who pays the cost of this next conquest?
- Would you commit to the limit in public, where you could not quietly back out?

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Dwight D. Eisenhower · Kept out

Chapter 38 · Part 6: Reform and Reinvention

The moment. As president, a career soldier pressed again and again to send forces into one Cold War crisis after another.

What they did. He ended the war in Korea, kept the peace, and used his farewell to warn the country about the excesses of its own strength.

The lesson. Refusing the tempting fight often takes more courage than starting it, and the disasters you prevent are real wins.

"It takes more courage to refuse to fight than to fight." (imagined dialogue)

Questions Dwight D. Eisenhower would ask you about your decision:

- Is this bold move courage, or a failure of the courage to say no?
- What disaster would you quietly prevent by not doing this?
- Are your own strengths running past their limit?

Also in the book: Julius Caesar (ch. 17, fell in); Napoleon Bonaparte (ch. 19, fell in); Richard the Lionheart (ch. 21, fell in); Frederick the Great (ch. 35, fell in); Tokugawa Ieyasu (ch. 36, kept out).

From The Seven Traps of Power by Ed Robinson. The conversations are imagined, grounded in the historical record.

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THE LENS · REFERENCE · THE SUCCESSION TRAP

Succession: You cannot imagine the work without you, so you never prepare for it.

Building everything on yourself. The leader becomes indispensable, and so builds nothing that survives them. Marcus and Catherine could not prepare an heir; Washington's greatness was that he made himself unnecessary.

Warning signs

- Every important decision still runs through you.
- No one could run the business for 90 days without you.
- You are choosing a successor for loyalty or comfort, not readiness.
- You feel flattered when someone says it would fall apart without you.

> **The discipline: Build to outlast yourself**
> Treat being indispensable as a risk, not a compliment. Hand off real decisions now, grow the bench, and pick successors for readiness and character, not comfort.

George Washington · Kept out

Chapter 12 · Part 2: The Builders of Order

The moment. At the height of his power after winning the war, with many who would have kept him on as something close to a king.

What they did. He handed back command and went home. As president he did it again, declining a third term.

The lesson. Treat the belief that it cannot go on without you as a danger, not a compliment. Build for your own departure.

"Example, whether it be good or bad, has a powerful influence." (his own words, from his letters)

Questions George Washington would ask you about your decision:

- Could what you lead survive you walking away next year?
- Are you mistaking loyalty or talent for character in the person you are backing?
- What would it take to open your hand while the choice is still yours?

Cnut the Great · Fell in

Chapter 8 · Part 2: The Builders of Order

The moment. He ruled England, Denmark and Norway so well that the English claimed him as their own.

What they did. But the whole North Sea empire rested on his person. Within seven years of his death his line was gone and the empire with it.

The lesson. Build it all on yourself and it is one funeral from ruin. The hardest work is building a thing that no longer needs you.

"A realm that depends upon one extraordinary man is only ever one funeral from ruin." (imagined dialogue)

Questions Cnut the Great would ask you about your decision:

- What have you built that is one funeral from ruin?
- Who could run this tomorrow, and have you let them practice?
- Are you ruling well, or building something that lasts?

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Tokugawa Ieyasu · Kept out

Chapter 36 · Part 6: Reform and Reinvention

The moment. After a lifetime of waiting, he finally held a unified Japan, and he could not guarantee able heirs.

What they did. He passed the title to his son while alive and designed an order meant to hold even in the hands of mediocre successors. It held for two and a half centuries.

The lesson. Winning and holding are opposite arts. Build a system that does not depend on your own brilliance.

"It is very difficult to be vain about a thing whose whole purpose lies beyond your own death." (imagined dialogue)

Questions Tokugawa Ieyasu would ask you about your decision:

- Would this hold in the hands of an ordinary successor?
- You have just won something. Have you switched from winning to building?
- Are you acting because the conditions are right, or because your patience ran out?

Also in the book: Marcus Aurelius (ch. 1, fell in); The Buddha (ch. 3, kept out); Augustus Caesar (ch. 6, fell in); Alfred the Great (ch. 7, kept out); Charlemagne (ch. 9, fell in); Qin Shi Huang (ch. 11, fell in); Ashoka the Great (ch. 16, fell in); Nelson Mandela (ch. 31, kept out); Peter the Great (ch. 33, fell in); Catherine the Great (ch. 34, fell in).

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THE LENS · REFERENCE · THE ABSTRACTION TRAP

Abstraction: You lose touch with the people and the details that made you effective.

Losing the human. The people a leader's decisions land on become numbers on a page, and the leader loses the one thing that keeps power honest. It is the quietest trap, and at scale the easiest to fall into.

Warning signs

- The people your decisions affect show up mostly as numbers.
- You decide from reports more than from conversations.
- You have not been to the front line lately.
- The cost to people has become "the price of doing business."

> **The discipline: Keep people human, and go first**
> Go and see, in person, the people who will carry this decision. Share the cost you ask of them, and count it before you move, not after.

Eleanor Roosevelt · Kept out

Chapter 30 · Part 5: Conscience and Moral Power

The moment. She held no office, yet she went in person to the mines, slums and wards that officials only read about in reports.

What they did. She insisted on seeing the people the powerful ignored, and on making grand ideals real at street level.

The lesson. Proximity is the enemy of indifference. It is easy to be careless with an abstraction and impossible to be careless with a face.

"Small places, close to home." (her own words, 1958 speech at the United Nations)

Questions Eleanor Roosevelt would ask you about your decision:

- When did you last go and see, in person, the people this decision lands on?
- Who here has become a number on a page to you?
- What would change if you made this decision standing where they work?

Peter the Great · Fell in

Chapter 33 · Part 6: Reform and Reinvention

The moment. He built St. Petersburg on a marsh at a cost in workmen's lives that no one counted, and drove his reforms over every objection, his own son's included.

What they did. The results were magnificent and the cost was monstrous, and the two were bound together.

The lesson. Count the human cost before you move, not after.

"Count the human cost before you move, not after." (imagined dialogue, in his blunt idiom)

Questions Peter the Great would ask you about your decision:

- Have you counted, by name, who pays for this change?
- Is this a necessary break, or are you just impatient?
- Are you doing the hard new work yourself, or commanding it from a distance?

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Chief Joseph · Kept out

Chapter 28 · Part 5: Conscience and Moral Power

The moment. Exiled on the Colville Reservation, the promise made at his surrender never kept by the government that defeated him.

What they did. He kept faith with his people, chose surrender to save the freezing children, and spoke without hatred to the nation that ruined him.

The lesson. Every wrong done to his people began when those in power stopped seeing them as people. Keep your word to those who cannot make you keep it.

"Good words do not last long unless they amount to something." (his own words, 1879)

Questions Chief Joseph would ask you about your decision:

- Is there anyone affected by this whom you have stopped seeing as fully a person?
- Are you keeping your word to someone who has no power to hold you to it?
- Will you stay and carry your people through this, or stand apart?

Also in the book: Marcus Aurelius (ch. 1, kept out); Jesus of Nazareth (ch. 4, kept out); The Prophet Muhammad (ch. 5, kept out); Thomas Jefferson (ch. 13, fell in); Ramesses the Great (ch. 14, fell in); Cleopatra VII (ch. 18, kept out); Richard the Lionheart (ch. 21, fell in); Abraham Lincoln (ch. 23, kept out); Franklin D. Roosevelt (ch. 25, kept out); Catherine the Great (ch. 34, fell in).

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PART 3 · MY ACTION PLAN

One discipline, one truth-teller, one date

Reflection changes nothing until it becomes a commitment with a date on it. Keep this small enough to actually do.

The discipline I will practice

What practicing it looks like for me, this month

One person who will tell me the truth

Check-in date

What I'll watch for: my earliest warning sign

The seven disciplines

- Govern yourself first (The Mirror): Treat praise as more dangerous than criticism. Attend to your conduct, not your reputation, and keep asking whether a slight hurts your character or only your pride.
- Seek the mirror, not the echo (The Echo Chamber): Name the person who is free to tell you that you are wrong. Bring them into the room, and reward them where everyone can see it.
- Refuse to be ruled by fear (Fear): Name the fear out loud, then ask what you would build if you weren't protecting what you have. Decide, act and correct as you go; doing nothing is a decision too, and often the worst one. And never make people afraid of you to get compliance.
- Serve something larger than yourself (Applause): Decide what is right before you check how it will look. Pass the mirror test: could you look yourself in the eye if no one ever praised you for it?
- Know when you have enough (Overreach): Say what "enough" looks like before you start. Consolidate what you have won before you reach for more, and read your people's limit honestly.
- Build to outlast yourself (Succession): Treat being indispensable as a risk, not a compliment. Hand off real decisions now, grow the bench, and pick successors for readiness and character, not comfort.
- Keep people human, and go first (Abstraction): Go and see, in person, the people who will carry this decision. Share the cost you ask of them, and count it before you move, not after.

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PART 4 · SIT WITH IT

Questions from the book and the workbook

1. Which single trap is most dangerous to you right now — and what will be your earliest warning sign that you are falling into it?

2. Of the seven traps, which one is closest to you right now — not in general, but this quarter, in the decisions actually in front of you?

3. Which discipline have you let slip?

Bring this to your peer group or coach

The decision I'm facing is ___. The trap I'm most at risk of is ___, because ___. I'd like the group to help me see ___.

My issue statement

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REFERENCE · THE BOOK

The leader-by-trap map: all 38 chapters

Fell in = walked into the trap and paid for it. Climbed out = fell in, saw it, and got out. Kept out = built a discipline that kept them out. These readings are mine, drawn from each chapter; where the book's closing guide names a leader for a trap, the map says so. Each Fear tag also says which face applies: playing not to lose (the lead definition) or ruling through fear. * = named for that trap in the book's closing guide.

Ch.	Leader and the conversation	Traps	Key lesson
1	Marcus Aurelius (Part 1). On the Danube frontier around 175 AD, ten years into a war, with plague in the camps and a trusted general in revolt.	The Mirror: Kept out *; Applause: Kept out; Abstraction: Kept out; Succession: Fell in *	Lead yourself first. Put your energy into what answers to you, make it safe to be told you are wrong, and stay close enough to see what your decisions cost.
2	Confucius (Part 1). A courtyard in Lu late in his life, back home after years of wandering, with no ruler willing to employ him.	Fear: Kept out (ruling through fear); The Echo Chamber: Kept out	You are the root and your people are the branches. Lead by example rather than punishment, and make your words and your deeds agree.
3	The Buddha (Part 1). Jeta's Grove during the rains retreat, an old teacher after forty years of walking the kingdoms of the Ganges.	Applause: Kept out; Succession: Kept out	Watch your own mind before anything else. Craving for praise and fear of loss bend judgment, and the truest test of leading is what stands without you.
4	Jesus of Nazareth (Part 1). Outside Jerusalem in the last week of his public life, choosing to stay when he could still withdraw.	Applause: Kept out; Abstraction: Kept out	Measure your authority by what you give, not what you command. How you treat the people who can do nothing for you is the real record.
5	The Prophet Muhammad (Part 1). The Farewell Pilgrimage on the plain of Arafat in 632, in the last months of his life.	The Mirror: Kept out; Abstraction: Kept out	Build trust long before you need it, and be the most bound, not the least, by the rules you set. The book uses only his documented words; this tool quotes none.
6	Augustus Caesar (Part 2). His villa at Nola in 14 AD, the final weeks of a forty-year reign.	Succession: Fell in; The Echo Chamber: Kept out	If it collapses when you step away, you did not build it; you occupied it. Staff your weaknesses with people better than you, and hasten slowly.
7	Alfred the Great (Part 2). Winchester around 890, rebuilding learning and law after nearly losing his whole kingdom.	The Mirror: Kept out; Succession: Kept out	Invest in the foundation before a crisis exposes it. In the lowest hour, refuse the conclusion that it is over, and bind the powerful by the same rules as everyone else.
8	Cnut the Great (Part 2). Winchester late in his reign, the crown he no longer wears hung on a crucifix.	The Echo Chamber: Kept out; Fear: Kept out (ruling through fear); Succession: Fell in	Winning a position and holding it are different arts. Rule as if you belong to the people you lead, reward the truth-teller, and do not build it all on yourself.
9	Charlemagne (Part 2). His hall at Aachen after the imperial coronation, the tables covered with the records of a straining empire.	Fear: Fell in (ruling through fear); Succession: Fell in	Name the real cost of unity. Compelled compliance lasts only as long as the pressure, and a system that needs you every day is not yet a system.
10	Emperor Taizong of Tang (Part 2). The Daming Palace at Chang'an in 649, near the end of a great reign.	The Echo Chamber: Kept out; Fear: Kept out (ruling through fear)	Build the machinery that tells you that you are wrong, and reward the person who does it where everyone can see. Mercy earns allegiance; fear earns brittle compliance.
11	Qin Shi Huang (Part 2). His austere palace at Xianyang at night, studying a map of the empire like an engineer reading a strained machine.	Fear: Fell in (ruling through fear) *; The Echo Chamber: Fell in; Succession: Fell in	Compliance is not belief. Punish dissent and you destroy your own early warning system, so the failure arrives all at once.
12	George Washington (Part 2). By the fire at Mount Vernon in his last years, home for good after the presidency.	Succession: Kept out *; The Mirror: Kept out; Fear: Fell in (playing not to lose)	Build for your own departure. Treat being indispensable as a danger, not a compliment, and lead by daily example.
13	Thomas Jefferson (Part 2). Monticello in 1824, at eighty-one, among his books and instruments.	The Mirror: Fell in; Abstraction: Fell in; Fear: Fell in (playing not to lose)	A well-made ideal can outlast you. But the gap between your stated values and your conduct becomes the yardstick history uses on you.
14	Ramesses the Great (Part 3). Pi-Ramesses around 1213 BC, past eighty, after sixty-six years on the throne.	The Mirror: Fell in; Abstraction: Fell in; The Echo Chamber: Kept out	Give people something larger to belong to. But distrust your own polished story, and never serve your legacy at the expense of the living.
15	Alexander the Great (Part 3). Babylon in 323 BC, feverish at thirty-two and already planning the next campaign.	Overreach: Fell in; The Mirror: Fell in *; The Echo Chamber: Fell in	Know what "enough" looks like. A vision your people will not follow is a leader walking alone, and success makes the honest voice harder to hear.
16	Ashoka the Great (Part 3). A monastery garden near the Ganges, years after the conquest of Kalinga.	Overreach: Climbed out; Applause: Climbed out; Succession: Fell in	You become what you measure. Count what makes your people well, not what makes you feel great, and commit to the change in public.

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Ch.	Leader and the conversation	Traps	Key lesson
17	Julius Caesar (Part 3). Rome in early 44 BC, dictator for life, days before the Ides of March.	Overreach: Fell in; The Mirror: Fell in	When you outgrow the structure around you, manage it openly. Power's quiet corruption in a capable leader is carelessness with other people's dignity.
18	Cleopatra VII (Part 3). Alexandria in August 30 BC, the final hours, with Antony dead and Octavian at the gates.	Abstraction: Kept out; Applause: Kept out	From the weaker hand, win by intelligence and alliance. Belong to the people you lead, and keep your sovereignty inside yourself.
19	Napoleon Bonaparte (Part 3). Exile on Saint Helena near the end, his only empire left the shaping of how he will be remembered.	The Mirror: Fell in *; Overreach: Fell in	Battles fade; structure endures. Find your Tilsit, the point where you hold enough, and stop there.
20	Elizabeth I (Part 4). Richmond Palace in March 1603, the last days of a forty-four-year reign.	The Echo Chamber: Kept out; Fear: Kept out (ruling through fear)	Be the fixed star. Hold the steady middle in a divided house, and seek windows, not mirrors.
21	Richard the Lionheart (Part 4). The castle of Châlus in 1199, dying of a crossbow wound from a minor siege.	Overreach: Fell in; Abstraction: Fell in	Courage wins battles, but restraint wins nations. Do not let a love of the fight stand in for the patient work of governing.
22	Saladin (Part 4). Damascus in 1193, worn out by war, having given most of his wealth away.	Fear: Kept out (ruling through fear) *; The Mirror: Kept out	How you win determines what you have won. Be just by default, merciful by choice, and guard against what long conflict does to you.
23	Abraham Lincoln (Part 4). The White House late at night in the middle of the war, grieving his son.	The Echo Chamber: Kept out; Abstraction: Kept out; The Mirror: Kept out	Give people an honest reason to endure. Keep rivals in the room, pass hard decisions through your conscience, and make people safe enough to speak.
24	Winston Churchill (Part 4). The rooms near Whitehall in the summer of 1940, the Battle of Britain overhead.	Applause: Kept out *; Fear: Kept out (playing not to lose)	Tell people the hard truth and trust them to rise to it. Decide what is right before you calculate what is winnable.
25	Franklin D. Roosevelt (Part 4). The White House in the first hard years of the New Deal, the Depression still gripping the country.	Fear: Climbed out (playing not to lose); Abstraction: Kept out	In a crisis, master the fear first. Speak to people one at a time, try something, admit what fails, and rebuild trust deed by deed.
26	Golda Meir (Part 4). Her kitchen table in Jerusalem in 1974, after resigning in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War.	Applause: Kept out; The Mirror: Kept out	Lead to be needed, not liked. Carry power as a weight, and if it starts to feel good, worry.
27	Joan of Arc (Part 5). A cell in Rouen in 1431, during the long months of her trial.	Fear: Climbed out (playing not to lose); Applause: Kept out	Real conviction is authority even without a title, but people believe it only when you pay for it.
28	Chief Joseph (Part 5). The Colville Reservation around 1900, exiled from the Wallowa Valley of his birth.	Abstraction: Kept out	Keep your word to people who cannot make you keep it, and never stop seeing the people you have power over as people.
29	Mahatma Gandhi (Part 5). His ashram during the independence struggle, working the spinning wheel as he talks.	Fear: Kept out (ruling through fear); The Mirror: Kept out	Power built on coercion is fragile. The means are the end in the making, and your life is your message.
30	Eleanor Roosevelt (Part 5). Her cottage at Val-Kill late in life, after her work at the United Nations.	Abstraction: Kept out; Applause: Kept out; Fear: Kept out (playing not to lose)	You do not need a title to lead. Go and see the people affected, and be willing to be disliked by your own for what is right.
31	Nelson Mandela (Part 5). His home as an elder statesman, some years after his single term as president.	Fear: Kept out (ruling through fear); Succession: Kept out	Forgiveness is a discipline, not a feeling. Keep your eye on the goal beyond the grievance, and choose the least terrible option with open eyes.
32	Martin Luther King Jr. (Part 5). Room 306 of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis on April 3, 1968, his last night.	Applause: Kept out; Fear: Climbed out (playing not to lose)	Marry power to love, refuse to become what you oppose, and do not let your conscience stop where your popularity ends.
33	Peter the Great (Part 6). St. Petersburg in 1724, near the Admiralty shipyards of the city he willed into existence.	Abstraction: Fell in; Fear: Fell in (ruling through fear); Succession: Fell in	Real reform hurts and you must lead it from the front. But count the human cost before you move, not after.
34	Catherine the Great (Part 6). Her study in the Winter Palace in the winter of 1795, the last year of her long life.	Succession: Fell in *; The Echo Chamber: Kept out; Abstraction: Fell in; Fear: Fell in (playing not to lose)	Reform has to fit the real place. Know when to wait, and ask whether "they are not ready" is the truth or an excuse.
35	Frederick the Great (Part 6). Sanssouci late in his life, with books, a flute and his greyhounds by the fire.	The Mirror: Kept out; Overreach: Fell in	Ask whom your power is for. Marry strength to justice, and keep a saving irony about your own importance.

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Ch.	Leader and the conversation	Traps	Key lesson
36	Tokugawa Ieyasu (Part 6). Sunpu around 1615, the retired shogun, after the last of his rivals is gone.	Succession: Kept out; Overreach: Kept out	Patience is a strategy. Winning and holding are opposite arts, so build a system that holds in the hands of an ordinary successor.
37	Theodore Roosevelt (Part 6). Sagamore Hill, his home on Long Island, out of office but never at rest.	Fear: Kept out (playing not to lose)	Get in the arena. Hesitation dressed as prudence is often the bigger risk.
38	Dwight D. Eisenhower (Part 6). His farm at Gettysburg in his later years.	Overreach: Kept out; The Mirror: Kept out; Applause: Kept out	Take more than your share of the blame and less than your share of the credit. The wars not fought are a leader's truest measure.

From The Seven Traps of Power by Ed Robinson. The conversations in the book are imagined, grounded in the historical record. This tool gives short paraphrases. The full conversations, and the notes on which lines are the leaders' own words, are in the book.

REFERENCE

How scoring works

- Each trap is one statement from the workbook. You rate it 1 (not a risk for me) to 5 (a real and present risk). Higher means more exposed.
- Your score for each trap is your rating. I label them 1 Not a risk, 2 Low, 3 Some exposure, 4 High, 5 Real and present risk.
- Total = the sum of your seven ratings, from 7 to 35. The band comes from the workbook: 7–14, you are guarding the gates well; 15–24, the normal exposure of a leader under real pressure; 25–35, several traps are close.
- The band shows once all seven traps are rated. Until then you see your total so far.
- Closest trap = your highest rating. If two or more tie for highest, all of them are listed.
- Top three = your ratings from highest to lowest. Ties go to the trap listed first in the book.
- The workbook's own advice: the total matters less than the one or two traps that scored highest. Those are where your guardrails belong.
- The Lens reads what you wrote and looks for the words listed under each trap. A word ending in * matches any word that starts that way (promot* matches promote, promotion, promoted). Other entries match only the whole word or phrase. Two or more matches = likely. One = possible. It is a prompt, not a verdict. You decide which traps are in play.

My judgment calls, beyond the workbook: the labels for ratings 2 to 4, showing the band only when all seven are rated, the tie rules, the keyword lists, the leader-by-trap readings, and the Fear warning signs and discipline written for the lead definition (playing not to lose). The warning signs are distilled from the book's closing guide and chapters.

Related tools

- Leadership Wheel: Self-Assessment & 360: rate yourself on the seven spokes of leadership, then ask the people around you; it is the best check there is on the Mirror and the Echo Chamber. https://claude.ai/artifact/3sRGa5TXE8CDSg3ethroQv
- Big Decision Workbook: work the decision you put under the Lens through, start to finish. https://claude.ai/artifact/FvduC4oRSEnqveekP6cStY
- Succession Planner: if Succession is your closest trap, build the bench and the plan. https://claude.ai/artifact/MKpmvW42rppEL1XFkuypXR
- CEO Communication Check: if Applause or Fear runs high, check how your words actually land. https://claude.ai/artifact/4du5iHFSv6bn3DjhTJboia

Read the book

The Seven Traps of Power by Ed Robinson. Available in paperback, hardcover and eBook. The companion Leadership Workbook holds the full Seven Traps self-assessment used here, plus an Eight Threads baseline, six module self-assessments and a leader's dilemma for each part of the book.

Online version: https://claude.ai/artifact/DudXSLGGepDKNxRSyNRNXJ

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SCORING BY HAND

Scoring by hand

If you print this form and fill it in by pen, use these steps to work out every total, score and calculated box. A calculator helps. In Adobe Acrobat Reader the blue boxes do this math for you. The completed example at the back shows the same math with real numbers.

Score it by hand

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My scores

Total (add your seven ratings; 7 to 35)	
Band: 7–14, 15–24 or 25–35	
Closest trap (your highest rating; list every tie)	
Top three (ties go to the trap listed first)	

Total	Band (from the workbook)	What to do
7–14	You are guarding the gates well	Watch your single highest item and keep it there.
15–24	The normal exposure of a leader under real pressure	Put your attention on the two or three you scored highest this quarter.
25–35	Several traps are close	Take the single highest and build one concrete guardrail this week: a person who will tell you the truth, a limit you will not cross, or a name on your calendar you will go and see.

How scoring works

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- The workbook's own advice: the total matters less than the one or two traps that scored highest. Those are where your guardrails belong.
- The Lens reads what you wrote and looks for the words listed under each trap. A word ending in * matches any word that starts that way (promot* matches promote, promotion, promoted). Other entries match only the whole word or phrase. Two or more matches = likely. One = possible. It is a prompt, not a verdict. You decide which traps are in play.

My judgment calls, beyond the workbook: the labels for ratings 2 to 4, showing the band only when all seven are rated, the tie rules, the keyword lists, the leader-by-trap readings, and the Fear warning signs and discipline written for the lead definition (playing not to lose). The warning signs are distilled from the book's closing guide and chapters.

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WHAT YOUR RESULTS MEAN

What your results mean

Your score is a starting point for a conversation, not a grade. Leadership is not a set of skills you acquire. It is a set of temptations you survive. So read the result the way the workbook does: the total matters less than the one or two traps that scored highest. Those are where your guardrails belong. A few thresholds are my judgment calls. Move them if your situation says otherwise.

Where you landed

Each trap is rated 1 (not a risk for me) to 5 (a real and present risk). Your total is the sum of the seven, from 7 to 35. Higher means more exposed. The band shows once all seven traps are rated.

You are guarding the gates well: 7 to 14

What it looks like. You have people who tell you the truth, limits you keep and a bench that could carry on without you. **The risk.** The gates are guarded until a big win or a big scare. Then the Mirror and Overreach move in fast. **First move.** Watch your single highest item and keep it there.

The normal exposure of a leader under real pressure: 15 to 24

What it looks like. This is the normal place to be in a hard year. Two or three traps are pulling at the decisions in front of you. **The risk.** Normal exposure feels safe, so you stop watching it. **First move.** Put your attention on the two or three you scored highest this quarter.

Several traps are close: 25 to 35

What it looks like. Power is shaping your decisions more than you think. People may already be telling you what you want to hear. **The risk.** One trap feeds the next, and the people who could warn you stop trying. **First move.** Take the single highest and build one concrete guardrail this week: a person who will tell you the truth, a limit you will not cross, or a name on your calendar you will go and see.

Red flags

Treat any trap you rate 4 (High) or 5 (Real and present risk) as a red flag, whatever your total. A low total with one 5 is not a safe result. One trap is enough to undo a leader. Every one of the thirty-eight leaders in the book fell into at least one.

- **The Mirror or the Echo Chamber.** Name the person who is free to tell you that you are wrong, and bring them into the room.
- **Fear or Applause.** Decide what is right before you check how it will look.
- **Overreach or Succession.** Say what "enough" looks like, and hand off one real decision now.
- **Abstraction.** Go and see, in person, the people who will carry your next decision.

Patterns worth noticing

- **The traps the Lens finds in your decision are not the ones you scored highest.** Your self-rating and your real decision disagree. Believe the decision.
- **A tie for closest trap.** The tool lists all of them. Pick one to work first, or you will work none.
- **Echo Chamber rated low by you.** That is the one trap you are least able to see from inside. Ask someone else to rate it for you.

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Your next 30 days

1. Fill in the action plan: one discipline, one truth-teller, one check-in date and your earliest warning sign.
2. Put one real decision under the Lens and answer the leaders' questions in writing.
3. Rate the seven traps again before your next big decision.

When to bring it to your peer group or coach

- Your total is 25 or more, or any trap is a 5.
- The decision you put under the Lens shows two or more traps as likely.
- You cannot name one person who will tell you the truth.

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APPENDIX

Appendix: a completed example

A fictional owner-CEO, Pat Reynolds, runs Keystone Ridge Builders, a $24M commercial general contractor (fictional example). Pat is weighing whether to promote a loyal but underperforming VP of Operations to president. Use it to see how the scoring and the Lens work, then do your own with the blank forms.

Trap	Workbook statement	Rating	Level
The Mirror	I begin to trust the story told about me more than the facts in front of me.	3	Some exposure
The Echo Chamber	The people around me have learned it is easier to agree than to tell me the truth.	4	High
Fear	I get compliance because people are wary of me, not because they believe in the work.	3	Some exposure
Applause	I lean toward the decision that will be praised over the one I know is right.	2	Low
Overreach	I keep expanding past the point where I can sustain, or even see, what I have taken on.	2	Low
Succession	Little of what I have built could outlast my leaving; I have not grown the bench.	5	Real and present risk
Abstraction	The people my decisions affect have become numbers, kept at a distance from me.	3	Some exposure

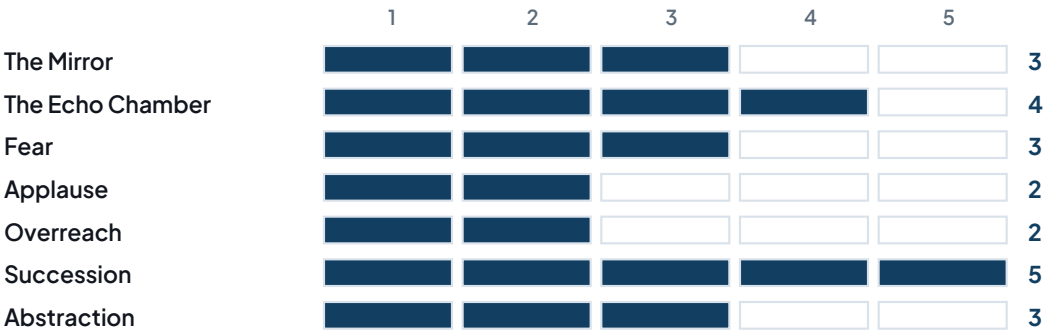
The arithmetic

- Total: 3 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 5 + 3 = 22 of 35.
- Band: 22 falls in 15–24: The normal exposure of a leader under real pressure. The workbook's advice: Put your attention on the two or three you scored highest this quarter.
- Closest trap: the highest rating is 5, held only by Succession.
- From highest to lowest: Succession 5, The Echo Chamber 4, The Mirror 3, Fear 3, Abstraction 3, Applause 2, Overreach 2. Top three: Succession, The Echo Chamber and The Mirror. The Mirror, Fear and Abstraction tie at 3; the Mirror comes first in the book, so it takes the third place.

Result	Example
Total	22 of 35
Band	The normal exposure of a leader under real pressure
Closest trap	Succession (5)
Top three	Succession 5, The Echo Chamber 4, The Mirror 3
Traps rated	7 of 7

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Pat's bars



Pat's Lens

Situation: I want to name Gary, our VP of Operations, as president so I can step back from the day-to-day next year. Gary has been loyal to me for 18 years and the leadership team likes him. But his job margins have slipped two years in a row, and two of our best project managers quit on his watch. Nobody on the team pushes back when I raise it. I'm afraid that if I pass him over he will leave and take key client relationships with him. Honestly, part of me also likes that everything still runs through me.

Trap	Words found	Matches	Suggestion	Marked
The Mirror	–	0	–	
The Echo Chamber	loyal*, pushes back	2	Likely	Yes
Fear	afraid	1	Possible	Yes
Applause	–	0	–	
Overreach	–	0	–	
Succession	step back, president, runs through me, vp	4	Likely	Yes
Abstraction	margin*	1	Possible	

- The Lens suggests Succession (likely, 4 matches); The Echo Chamber (likely, 2 matches); Fear (possible, 1 match); Abstraction (possible, 1 match). Pat marked The Echo Chamber, Fear and Succession as in play: the two likely traps plus Fear, which the words only hinted at. Abstraction matched one word (margins) and Pat left it unmarked.
- The Echo Chamber: Nobody pushes back because I've made it clear Gary is my guy. I need to hear from the two PMs who left.
- Fear: I'm protecting what I have, Gary's relationships and my comfort, instead of building what comes next.
- Succession: This isn't succession if the real reason is that nothing changes and it all still runs through me.

Pat's action plan

- Discipline: Build to outlast yourself (Succession). For the next 90 days every operating decision goes to the leadership team first, not to me. I'll set a clear bar for the president role and assess Gary and one outside candidate against it.
- Who will tell me the truth: Lena Ortiz, our CFO (fictional), who will tell me whether I'm protecting Gary or the company.
- Check-in date: 2026-12-07
- What I'll watch for: Decisions sliding back onto my desk, and people agreeing with me in meetings and disagreeing in the hallway.

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Pat's reflections

- Which single trap is most dangerous to you right now — and what will be your earliest warning sign that you are falling into it? Succession. My earliest warning sign is the leadership team waiting for me before they decide anything.
- Of the seven traps, which one is closest to you right now — not in general, but this quarter, in the decisions actually in front of you? Succession, then the Echo Chamber. It is the Gary decision, this quarter.
- Which discipline have you let slip? Seeking the mirror. I stopped asking people who disagree with me.

Issue statement: The decision I'm facing is whether to make my loyal but underperforming VP of Operations our president. The trap I'm most at risk of is Succession, because part of me likes that everything still runs through me. I'd like the group to help me see what a real succession bar looks like, and whether I'm protecting Gary or the company.

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