insights®

Five Steps to **Transform into a Visionary Leader**

Five practical steps for burnt-out leaders to change their leadership style from issue-centric and reactive to people-centric and visionary



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The situation

We live in interesting times

In recent years, the working world has careened from crisis to crisis – too many to list, yet the pressure for organisations to deliver accelerates at an ever-higher rate.

Managers at all levels often rely on reactive leadership, more akin to fire-fighting than managing, to carry the day.

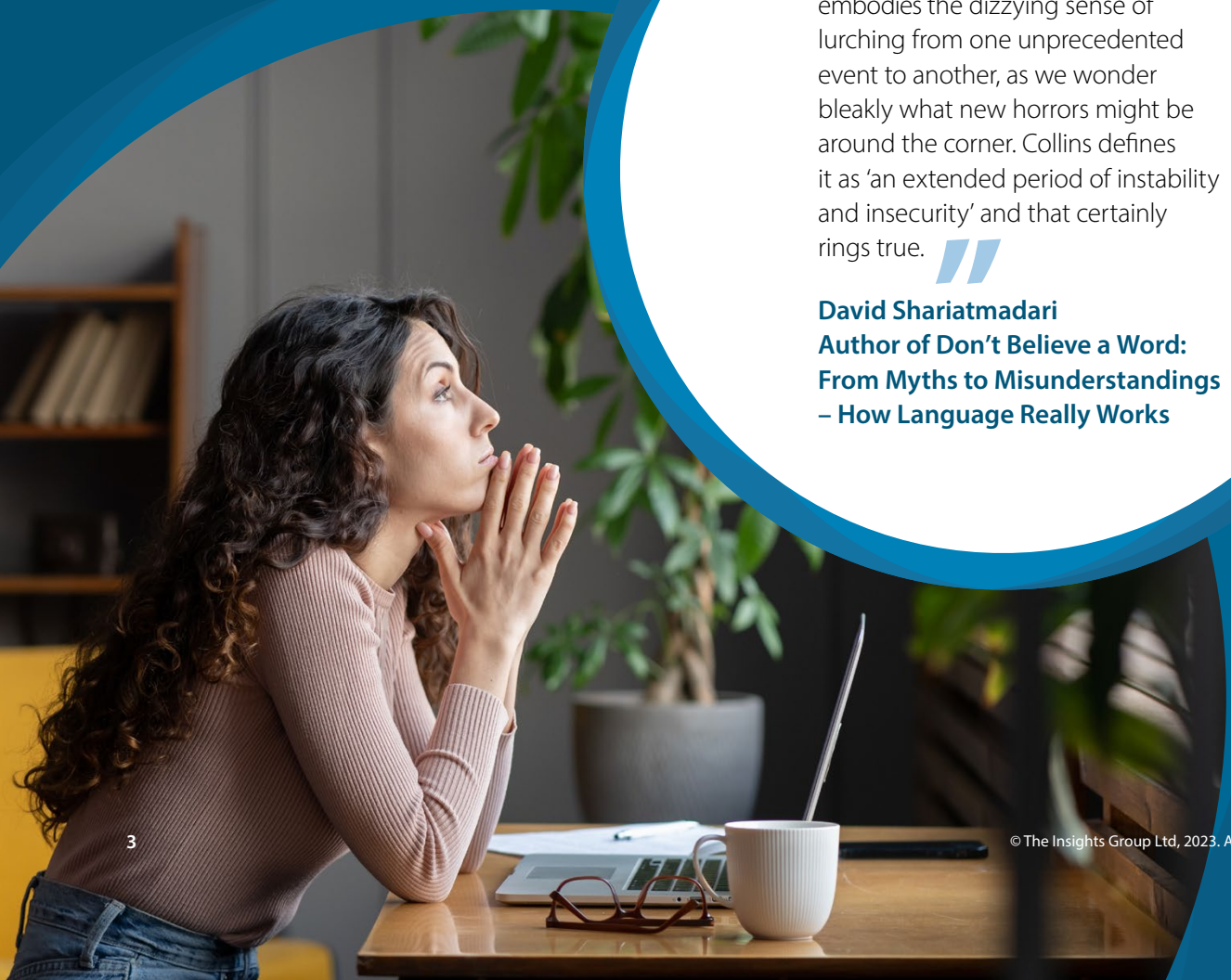
There's little stability. It's easy to see why 47.8M employees quit their jobs in 2021[i] yet, paradoxically, 2022 and 2023 saw hundreds of thousands of layoffs[ii], particularly in the IT sector.

What does this mean for today's leaders?

Amid the upheaval, leaders are still expected to strategically lead their people. Furthermore, they ***want*** to lead their people; for many, it's why they accepted their role.

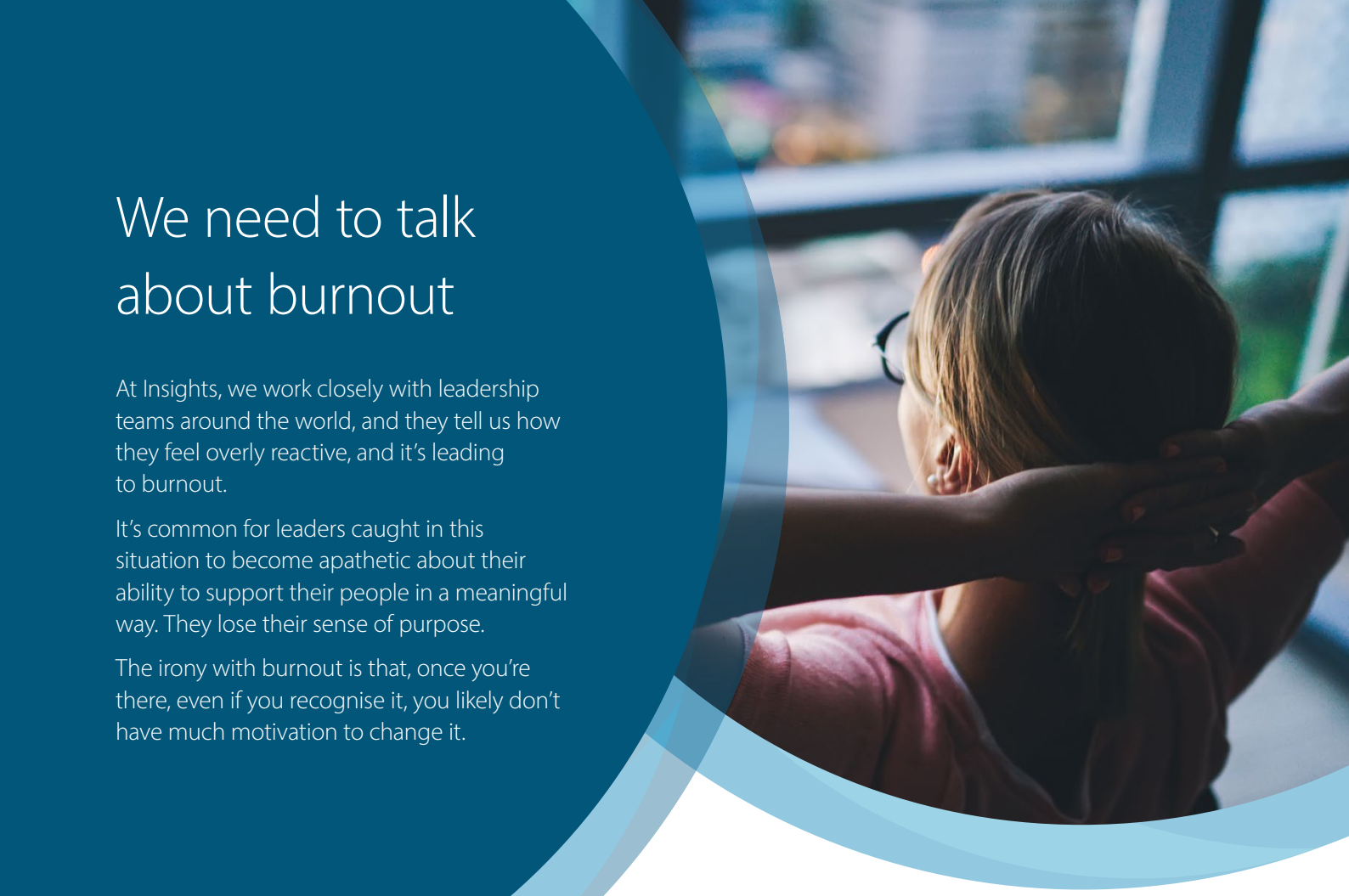
But the reality of today's workplace is one of pressure and speed, and **the gap between the leader they want to be, and the leader they are in practice, is wider than ever.**

> "Permacrisis, a term that perfectly embodies the dizzying sense of lurching from one unprecedented event to another, as we wonder bleakly what new horrors might be around the corner. Collins defines it as 'an extended period of instability and insecurity' and that certainly rings true."
>
> **David Shariatmadari**
> **Author of Don't Believe a Word: From Myths to Misunderstandings – How Language Really Works**



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We need to talk about burnout

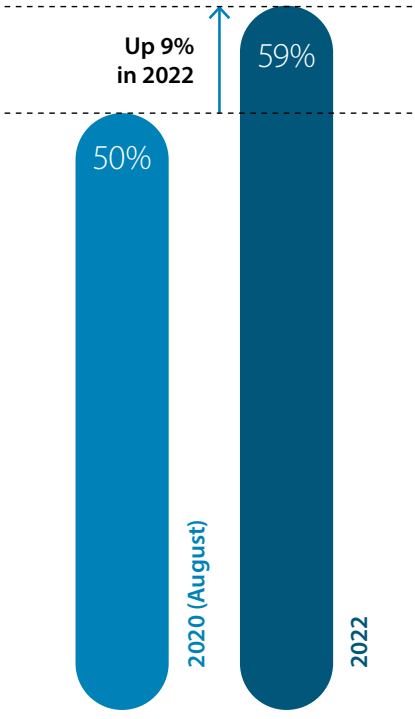


At Insights, we work closely with leadership teams around the world, and they tell us how they feel overly reactive, and it's leading to burnout.

It's common for leaders caught in this situation to become apathetic about their ability to support their people in a meaningful way. They lose their sense of purpose.

The irony with burnout is that, once you're there, even if you recognise it, you likely don't have much motivation to change it.

What's more concerning is that the AFLAC Workplace Report 2022-2023 (that surveys employee well-being amongst American workers) found that **burnout levels are significantly higher today than they were during the height of the pandemic.**[iii]



Those experiencing at least moderate levels of burnout

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Before we begin, the fine print…

That's why this eBook lays out five practical steps for burnt-out leaders to raise their heads, take a breath, and transform their leadership style from issue-centric and reactive to people-centric and visionary.

We recommend that you work through the five steps in this eBook over a two-week period, taking time to complete each step thoughtfully.

Although these steps are progressive, sections 2-5 contain exercises that can also stand alone.

If you're committed to change, the time to begin is right now. Let's get started…

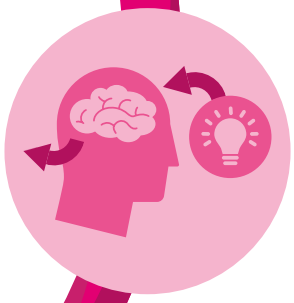
> "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new."
>
> **-Socrates**



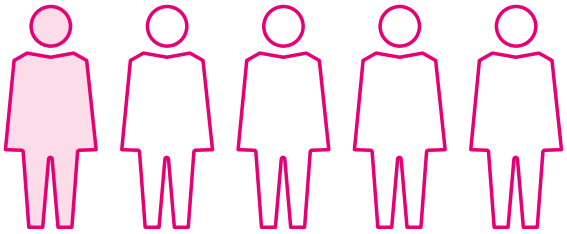
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Step one

Release your expectations of what a leader 'should' be



One leadership style to rule them all? Not anymore…



In 2006, HBR published The Seasoned Executive's Decision-Making Style by Kenneth R. Brousseau, Michael J. Driver, Gary Hourihan, and Rikard Larsson[iv].

The article suggested that the highest-paid 20% C-Suite leaders overwhelmingly **embraced a flexible and integrative decision-making and leadership style.**

The research even pointed to the exact moment in an executive's career when they should adopt these styles. The concept was elegant, simple, and influenced thought leadership for the next decade.



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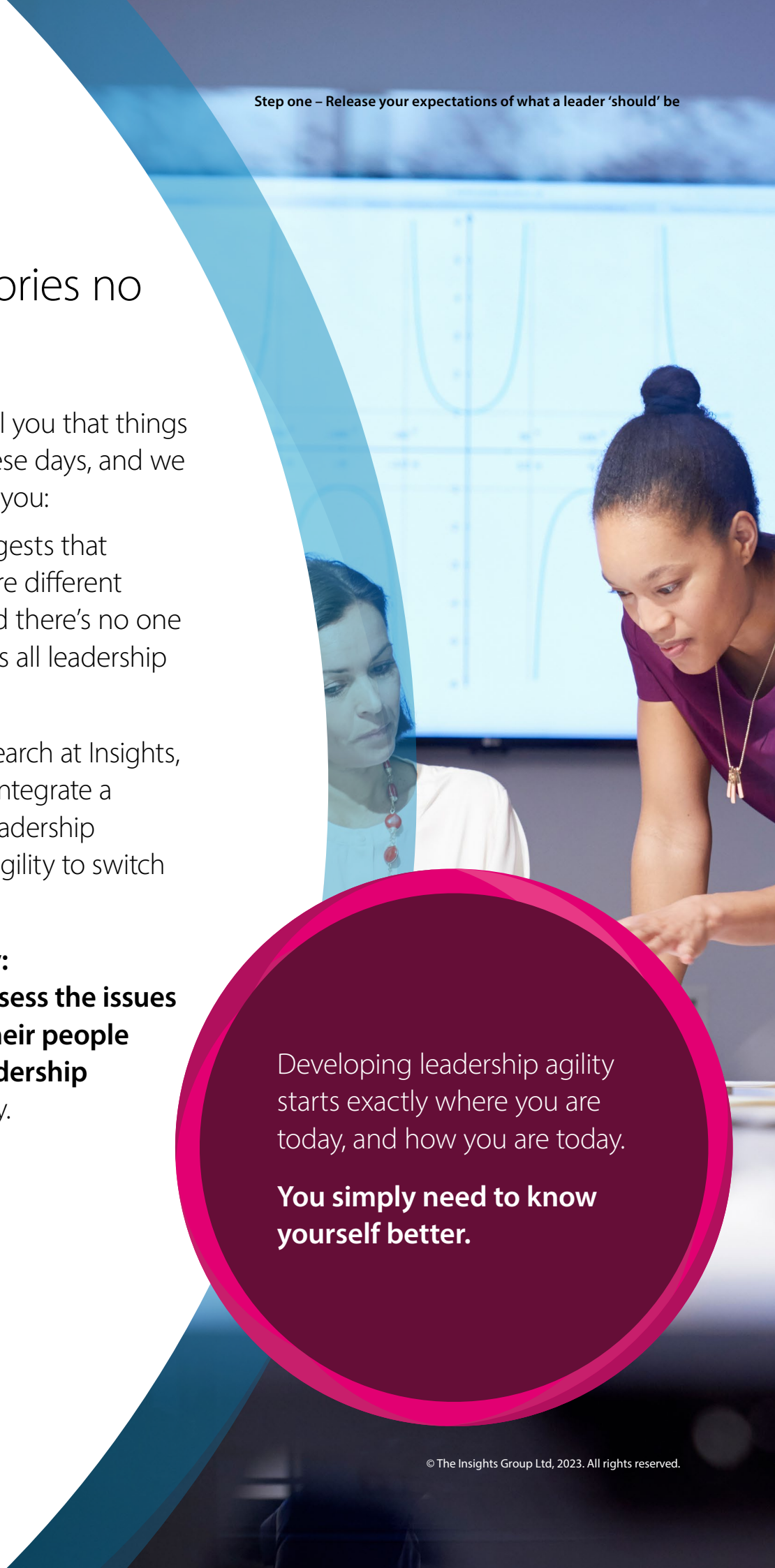
Why old theories no longer work

We don't need to tell you that things are not as simple these days, and we have good news for you:

Recent research suggests that different times require different leadership styles, and there's no one style that will address all leadership challenges[v].

According to our research at Insights, today's best leaders integrate a myriad of different leadership styles and have the agility to switch between them.

That last part is key:
Successful leaders **assess the issues and the needs of their people** and **adapt their leadership** approach accordingly.



Developing leadership agility starts exactly where you are today, and how you are today.

You simply need to know yourself better.

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Step two

Get real about YOU

Awareness is a critical component of change

Reality check: A study by IO psychologist Tasha Eurich revealed that 95% of people ***think*** they are self-aware, but only 10-15% actually are[vi]. Why does this matter?

A 2021 University of Queensland study showed that "For leaders to be seen as authentic and garner support, they need to be seen to be aware not only of who they are as individuals but also of who they are as members of the collective they seek to lead."[vii]

Acquiring awareness isn't easy, but it's critical.

> "You can't fix what you don't acknowledge, and you can only be as honest as your level of self-awareness. Without self-awareness, you'll always think the problem is the other person or the situation…"
>
> **-Marlene Chism, Author of From Conflict to Courage: How to Stop Avoiding and Start Learning**



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The self-awareness advantage

When you are a self-aware leader, you have a big advantage when it comes to transitioning from reactive to visionary leadership:

1. You can incorporate self-knowledge into your development plans, empowering you to reach your goals
2. You can identify what you need to change about your approach to influence the success of the team and the organisation
3. You have a greater sense of purpose about why and how you're leading your team or organisation

Awareness will empower you to adapt your approach, so you can be responsive to those around you, and provide the right leadership at the right time.

Along with self-awareness, organisational psychologist Dr Tanya Boyd (Insights Discovery Learning Architect), refers to a second important type of awareness for leaders:

Other-awareness will empower you to be aware of the strengths, challenges, hopes, fears, and dreams of those around you.



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How do you increase your awareness?

Self awareness

Internal
Understanding yourself, your values, patterns, biases and impact on others.

External
How others see you, including blind spots.

Other awareness

Awareness of others
people's strengths, weaknesses, values, hopes and dreams.

Self-awareness is developed through tools like **Insights Discovery**; external awareness is gained through feedback from others, and 360° tools like **Insights Discovery Full Circle.**

This is key, as leaders must be aware of what each person on their team brings to the table and how to best interact with them.

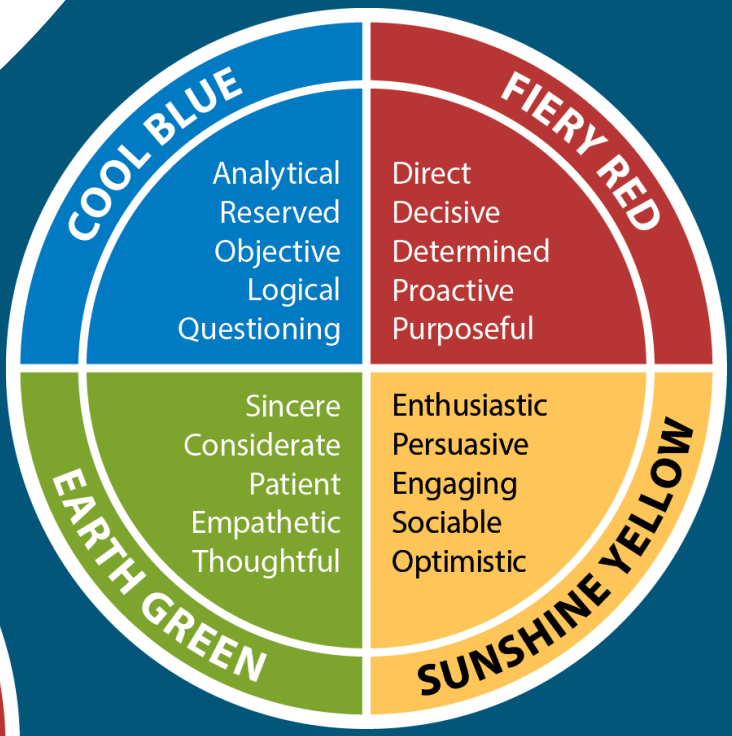
Other-awareness requires **active listening** – taking the time to ask questions and listening to answers carefully, without expectation or judgement.

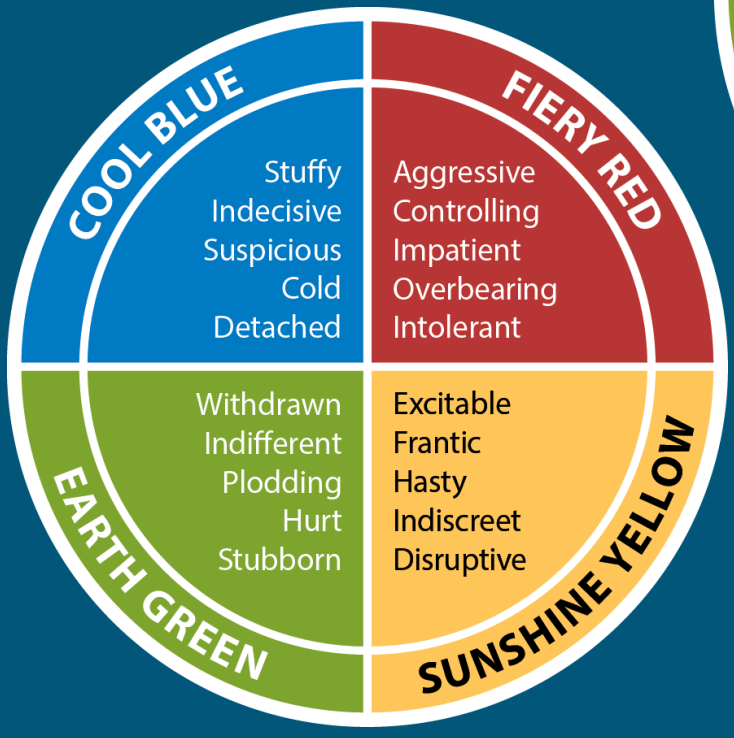


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At Insights, we use a **four-colour model** to help you understand yourself and others.

Good day colour energies





Bad day colour energies

The four colour energies have distinct characteristics that represent your most natural ways of behaving. Everyone has a unique mix of all four colour energies within them. This mix influences how you react to certain people, situations and challenges.

The four colour energies give you a simple language to describe your behaviour, and this helps you and your colleagues understand why you do the things you do.

In the case of a reactive workplace, for example, consider how it feels to jump from fire to fire throughout the day.

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Those who lead with Fiery Red energy may feel exhilarated by the constant challenge, while those with strong Cool Blue energy may feel drained.

Once you understand this, you can begin to adapt your behaviour.

For example, a manager who prefers Cool Blue energy, in understanding her need to act cautiously and with precision, may ask for extra time before-hand to study the data thoroughly before making a decision.

Then, when in-the-moment questions are asked, she's better prepared to make quick decisions (though this may not feel as natural for her and therefore require more mental effort).

As a leader, it's important to understand how you show up to those you lead, and, as we said before, the language of colour provides an effective starting point.



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Take the example of Shane Murphy Goldsmith, President and CEO of Liberty Hill Foundation in Los Angeles.

Shane engaged Insights to deliver Insights Discovery (our flagship programme) to the team at Liberty Hill, starting with herself.

The Insights Discovery personal profile uncovers which colour energies you prefer to use and how your behavioural preferences come across to those around you.

Shane's initial reaction to her profile was defensive: it revealed that, with her strong preference for Fiery Red energy, there were times when Shane came across to others as harsh, overbearing and cold, and with high expectations.

Obviously not how she was intending to show up to her team, and far from how she thought she was showing up.

> "The most revelatory moment was when I did an exercise with my team, and we all put a post-it on each other's back and indicated what colour we thought people led with. Most people gave me Fiery Red, and I couldn't believe they knew this about me and I didn't. These people work with me every day, and they know me. Having this perspective, I took it more seriously and, once I looked at it with more open-mindedness, I could see the whole picture about how I was showing up."

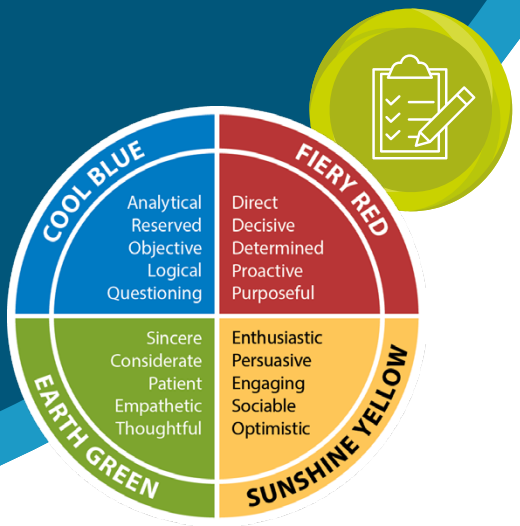
Shane's experience is not unique, and it was because she had the courage to embrace the reality of how her behaviour was impacting her environment, that she was able to change herself and her environment for the better.

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Exercise

Your colour energy preferences

Take a look at the colour energy wheel and the bullet points below. Which colour energies do you relate to most strongly?



Leaders with a preference for Cool Blue energy:

- ◯ May be thoughtful and deliberate
- ◯ Often thinks things through before committing to action
- ◯ May value logical arguments and principles when planning
- ◯ Often like information and input to be accurate
- ◯ Process information in a systematic and literal way
- ◯ May maintain a detached and objective standpoint
- ◯ Will give people time to think things through before coming to a conclusion
- ◯ Can indicate precisely the 'what' and 'why' of an action plan

Leaders with a preference for Earth Green energy:

- ◯ Are often helpful, supportive and operate with integrity
- ◯ May appeal to the personal values of others
- ◯ Often try to create the ideal working environment
- ◯ Frequently start from personal and subjective criteria
- ◯ Prefer to secure mutual consensus before moving forward
- ◯ May ensure all individual perspectives are heard and considered in decision-making

Leaders with a preference for Sunshine Yellow energy:

- ◯ Are often engaging, positive, and enthusiastic
- ◯ Will make an effort to involve others
- ◯ Frequently approach others in a persuasive and inviting manner
- ◯ Often act as a catalyst for growth and change
- ◯ May enjoy lively group discussion
- ◯ Generally switch easily between today's reality and tomorrow's possibilities
- ◯ Often encourage participation and seek the company of others in social situations

Leaders with a preference for Fiery Red energy:

- ◯ Are often direct and straightforward
- ◯ Generally take a pragmatic approach to decision-making
- ◯ May be quick to state the pros and cons of a certain course of action
- ◯ Frequently have strong determination that influences those with whom they interact
- ◯ Will focus on actions and deliverables
- ◯ Often act swiftly and decisively
- ◯ Frequently seek an outcome that is specific and tangible

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Accepting how you show up in the workplace will help you consider how others are showing up too, so you can adapt your responses.

Viewing your workplace through the lens of the colour energies

The issue	If your colleague leads with:	A new perspective. Think:
Why are their emails always so long?	Cool Blue	They value providing me with the right information
Why are they moving this meeting along so quickly?	Fiery Red	They value speed and precision
Why do they always need to invite me to lunches?	Sunshine Yellow	They value making connections
Why are they asking so many personal questions?	Earth Green	They value getting to know me on a deeper level

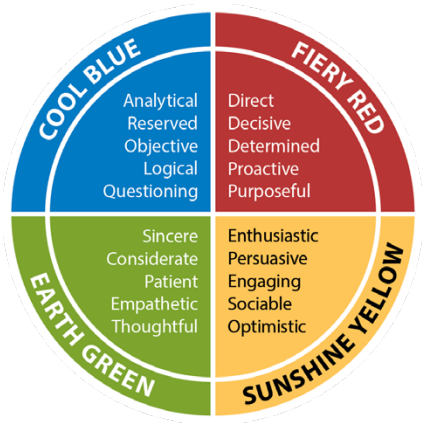
We can't always change issues that arise in the office, but we can reduce the amount of chaos, stress and miscommunication that occurs between people.

This level of awareness, and the mutual understanding it generates, is what fuels breakthroughs when you're fighting those fires we mentioned earlier.

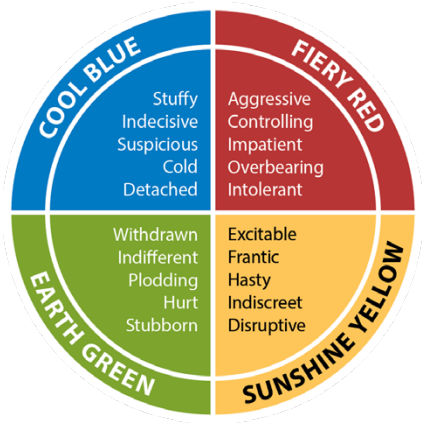
This is why self-awareness is the most important factor in becoming the leader you want to be.



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Good day wheel



Bad day wheel

Exercise

Which colour energy best reflects how you act on a good day and on a bad day?

Review the colour energy wheels and the bullet points on the previous page. Which colour energies do you relate to most?

1 **Looking at the Insights Discovery colour energy wheel, which primary and secondary behaviours best describe how you are on a good day and on a bad day?**	2 **Now show the diagram to your colleagues. Ask them which primary and secondary behaviours best describe you on a good day and on a bad day.**

We recommend you rest for at least 24 hours before continuing to step three. This is a lot of information to take in!

Exercise: Schedule time in your calendar for step three.



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Step three

Integrate your self-awareness into a leadership model



Transitioning from a reactive leadership style to a strategic and person-focused one means bringing the four manifestations of leadership into balance. Now that you're aware of your colour energies, let's look at how these colour energies interact with different leadership styles.

The four leadership manifestations

The Insights leadership model builds on the Insights Discovery four-colour model. When the different preferences are brought to leadership, they show up in a variety of ways. Understanding how our unique combination of colour energies influences how we lead provides a deeper understanding of our style and approach.



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The four manifestations are:



Results leadership is about making decisions based on what needs to get done, when and how, and focusing on deliverables.

(Those who lead with a combination of Fiery Red and Cool Blue energies may find themselves gravitating towards this manifestation, although all leaders are capable of delivering results in their own way).



Visionary leadership brings people along on the journey by painting a picture of the future that they can buy into.

(Those who lead with a combination of Fiery Red and Sunshine Yellow energies may find themselves gravitating towards this leadership manifestation, although all colours can deliver vision in their own way).



Relationship leadership is people focused and prioritises creating supportive and harmonious team environments.

(Those who lead with a combination of Sunshine Yellow and Earth Green energies may find themselves gravitating towards this leadership style, although all leaders are capable of delivering relationship leadership in their own way).



Centred leadership is grounded in what's right for the people and how priorities are affected by decisions.

(Those who lead with a combination of Cool Blue and Earth Green energies may find themselves gravitating towards this leadership style, although all leaders are capable of delivering centred leadership in their own way).

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Examples of the four manifestations:

Results Leadership

- Task-oriented with the ability to efficiently set priorities and get the job done
- Approaching challenges objectively and rationally

Visionary Leadership

- Focusing on the environment and envisaging creative ways of responding
- Seeing opportunities that others may miss

Relationship Leadership

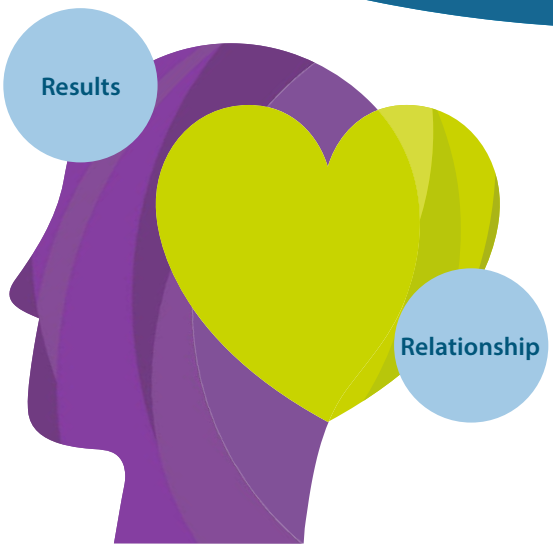
- Putting a strong emphasis on relationships that revolve around mutual respect and collaboration
- Ensuring team interactions are considerate and that all voices are heard and contributions valued

Centred Leadership

- Quietly reflecting on personal convictions, values, and motives that underpin one's leadership approach
- Having a strong sense of the here-and-now; alert to what's going on around them and what needs to be done

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We said earlier that everyone has a unique mix of all four colour energies in them, and the same is true for all four leadership manifestations. Knowing how we prefer to react and show up are useful tools, but the real value, from a day-to-day leadership perspective, is knowing how to **balance opposite styles** when leading. In this way, we become skilled at switching between them as the situation warrants.



Results Leadership and **Relationship Leadership** are related but opposite. They reflect the Thinking (Results) and Feeling (Relationship) ways of making a decision. Both are equally important.



Centred Leadership and **Visionary Leadership** are related but opposite. They reflect a more Introverted style of leadership (Centred) and more Extroverted style (Visionary) of leadership. Both are equally important.

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Exercise

Discover your development opportunities and expand your repertoire

This simple exercise will reveal to which extent you rely on one leadership manifestation over another and focus your development in areas you need to work on.

- In the first row, write the percentage of time you spend in each area. All four areas should add up to 100
- In the second row, write the percentage of time you'd like to spend in each area. All four areas should add up to 100
- Identify the manifestation that has the largest growth opportunity – this is your mission-critical priority

	Results Leadership	Visionary Leadership	Relationship Leadership	Centred Leadership
Time you already spend using that manifestation				
Time that you would like to spend in each manifestation				
Notes				

Priorities

Mission Critical	
Secondary	

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For example, let's imagine that the leader we mentioned earlier (who leads with Cool Blue energy) relies mostly on Results Leadership with little thought given to her opposite style, Relationship Leadership.

This over-reliance on one style may negatively impact some of her team members who don't relate to that style, and it's not going to be helpful in every situation.

The need to develop her Relationship Leadership style becomes obvious, so our leader may create a programme with stretch tasks designed to improve that area.
A secondary plan may focus on improving the other two, Centred Leadership and Visionary Leadership, so that our leader is fully equipped to handle whatever her day throws at her without losing herself or alienating her colleagues.

Looking at your own chart, which leadership styles do you need to develop or tone down?



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We've collected stretch tasks you can practise. Even integrating one or two targeted stretch tasks into your daily life can make a marked difference in how you lead, how you're perceived, and how you perceive others.

Activities to build Results Leadership	Activities to build Visionary Leadership	Activities to build Relationship Leadership	Activities to build Centred Leadership
Make a point of prioritising work daily Set measurable goals and objectives with milestone dates attached and review them regularly Be aware of your own preferences and strengths to identify where you may need to build skills to achieve the required results Initiate daily stand-up meetings to review project progress and identify bottlenecks Identify each team member's strengths and opportunities to demonstrate success. Make a point to formally and informally recognise your team's hard work and achievements.	Schedule uninterruptable time in your calendar to think creatively, read industry papers or even book a call with your mentor. The point is that it must be unstructured so your mind can connect the dots and see the big picture. Encourage others to contribute to the vision. Create a safe environment where all ideas are welcome. Before making decisions, seek insight from different levels and functions within your team. Communicate/illustrate what success will look like Consider how to motivate others to follow your vision. How do their preferences shape their motivation? Share your vision, even before it's complete, to engage others in the journey, and communicate how they can be involved.	Provide sincere and personalised feedback to team members. Frame your feedback positively, make sure it's authentic, well-considered, and specific. Initiate a conversation with team members about what they really care about in their role – you are bound to discover values you have in common. Ask them for tangible ways you can support them in being true to those shared values. No matter how busy you and your team are, make time for team-building moments. They don't have to be full day outings, but moments to connect and understand each other, to be able to work more effectively together.	Learn from your past. Write down a situation at work that caused you to be upset at someone. Run through the interaction from the other person's perspective to identify where that person probably had good intent. Now list the ways you may have acted or felt differently if you'd assumed that good intent from the start. Know your team. Allow each member of your team to structure one-to-one meetings as they feel will best support them. After each meeting, write down positive things you learnt about this person that you can refer to when you're feeling reactive. When you find yourself resisting an idea, take a moment and write down WHY you're resisting. Over time you will recognise patterns and how to anticipate these reactions.

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Step four

Expand your awareness to others



Now that you understand both your default behaviours and how to achieve balance in your leadership, it's time to integrate this knowledge into your day-to-day.

Dutch psychologist Freek Peters writes extensively about leadership development. In his book, Face the Future: Leadership Skills for the Next Generation (2022)[ix], his views are aligned with Insights' belief that today's leaders must employ different modes of operation than in the past.

There is no right or wrong, he argues. Just because our conditions have changed, doesn't mean that older leadership styles (focused on direction and control) are now wrong; in certain contexts, they are as necessary as they ever were.



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Don't lose who you are when you step into leadership – you can lean into it.

What matters is that leaders understand when to lead with which approach given the situation at hand, and that they have the agility to shift between different approaches with ease.

According to Peters, this requires:

- Understanding the context of what's happening
- A broad repertoire of leadership behaviours
- Insight into your preferred leadership approach and your impact on others

If the exercises in the previous section had you releasing assumptions you had about yourself, imagine how deeply ingrained are your assumptions about others. This is why other awareness is critical in person centred leadership.

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Understanding the language of colour energies is a way for you to understand others.

This means understanding what each team member values, what they're really saying when they speak to you, and how to best communicate with them.

For example:

- If your team member leads with **Cool Blue energy**, you could present them with the data first and give them time to process
- If your team member leads with **Earth Green energy**, you could appeal to their sense of purpose
- If your team member leads with **Sunshine Yellow energy**, you could show genuine interest in their projects and support their enthusiasm
- If your team member leads with **Fiery Red energy**, you could present the info quickly with an action plan



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The adverse is true:

If you lead with **Cool Blue energy** and love data, presenting all the data to a team member who leads with **Sunshine Yellow energy** won't get you the result you need.

Each colour energy preference processes information differently. As a leader, you must shift between different communication styles with different members of your team.



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Practise active listening

Active listening is a critical skill. Most think they are good listeners, but active listening takes practice.

Active listening tips you can use today

When a colleague wants to talk one-on-one, **prioritise them**

STOP TALKING (no platitudes, no questions, no ideas; silence)

Don't anticipate what others are about to say or try to form responses in your head

When there is a natural pause, **let the speaker gather their thoughts** (stay silent), then let them continue

If the silence is too long, simple **echo what you've heard**. Then be silent

Leaders have a responsibility to **understand** their people, **respect** their thoughts and give them time to **share** how they feel **without judgement or reprimand**.

Quietly holding space for someone as they speak will help you understand them better.

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These kinds of conversations can make your team members feel heard.

Even when there is much left unsaid, quietly holding space for someone as they share what's happening for them will help you understand that person on a deeper level.

This creates trust and understanding.

As your awareness of others expands, you will be able to communicate with them in a more meaningful way and address issues in a healthier way.

Exercise

Develop your listening skills with the Active Listening Challenge

For the next 24 hours:

1. Do not interrupt anyone as they speak
2. Do not speak when others seem to be done speaking; instead, give them time to collect their thoughts and possibly say more
3. Do not ask questions, simply reiterate what the speaker has said and how you think they might be feeling

At the end of the 24-hour period, answer the following questions...

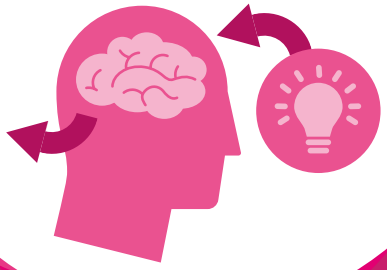
How did holding space for another person as they shared feel for me?	Did the other person share more than usual?	Was I successful in making the other person feel heard?	Did I learn anything new or unexpected about the other person through active listening?

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Review our steps so far...

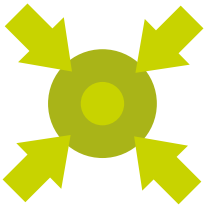
1

Release your expectations of what a leader 'should' be



2

Get real about you



3

Integrate your self-awareness into a leadership model



4

Expand your awareness to others



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Step five

Recap!

Exercise

Record what has resonated with you so far and what you have learned about yourself and others.



I learned this about myself:	I learned this about others:	One step that resonates with me that I can take today:	Why I believe this step will make me a more person-focused and less reactive manager:

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Protecting your vision and building boundaries

If you've been stuck in that reactive mode for a long time, it's going to take time to change. Be kind to yourself and temper your expectations. We haven't forgotten that you're working in a challenging environment, and it's important to balance the needs of your role with the needs of mental, physical and emotional health.

The only way to make the transition is to regularly take stock, and that means maintaining boundaries in your calendar to do so. Creating (and protecting) time for this kind of development will help you transform how you lead and sends a message to those around you that you're committed to change.

With time and practice, you will learn how to adapt your leadership styles to the issue at hand and the people in front of you.

Those stressful days of reactive leadership will fade away as you grow into the person-centred leader you long to be and find yourself leading a more harmonious workplace.

Learn more about Insights leadership programmes >

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