THE SEVEN HUMAN SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK™

The Seven Human Systems for Leaders

Understand your patterns and strengthen your interpersonal skills

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You can know your work well and still leave a conversation wishing you had listened longer, responded differently, or asked a better question. Interpersonal skills begin partly with noticing what you bring into the interaction.

I created The Seven Human Systems Framework™ as a way to explore how identity, beliefs, protection, responsibility, emotions, relationships, and capacity influence everyday life. These systems interact. They are lenses for reflection, rather than separate boxes to put yourself in.

How to use this guide

Read the seven short sections, then choose one situation to revisit as you reflect. Try the practice that fits it best. You do not need to work on all seven systems at once. Allow about fifteen minutes for a first read.

For example, a question about your decision might touch your identity, activate a protective response, and change the tone of a conversation.

This is an introductory educational guide for self-reflection. It is not a diagnostic tool or a clinical assessment, and it does not replace individualized professional care.

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SYSTEM 1 OF 7

Identity

How you understand who you are.

When being right becomes personal

Someone questions your proposal in a meeting. Before they finish, you explain why your approach will work. You hear a challenge to your competence where they may have intended a useful question.

What this system helps you notice

If your sense of who you are rests heavily on being knowledgeable, decisive, or indispensable, ordinary disagreement can feel personal. Your strengths still matter. The question is whether you have room to be a capable leader who also listens, learns, and changes direction.

A question to consider

What do I believe a good leader must always be? What happens in my conversations when I cannot live up to that image?

One small practice

In your next discussion, ask one sincere question before defending your view: “What are you seeing that I may be missing?” Listen to the whole answer.

Notice whether curiosity changes what you learn, even if your final decision stays the same.

My observation

SYSTEM 2 OF 7

Belief

What you have learned to accept as true.

The rule you never examined

You tell people to bring you problems early, but your first response is, “Why didn’t you solve this yourself?” Your invitation and your reaction are sending different messages.

What this system helps you notice

Beliefs are the assumptions you bring into a conversation. You may have learned that strong employees need little support, that disagreement signals disloyalty, or that kindness weakens accountability. An assumption can feel obvious simply because you have carried it for years. It still deserves examination.

A question to consider

What am I assuming about this person’s intent or ability? What evidence supports that assumption, and what else could explain the situation?

One small practice

Separate what you observed from what you concluded. Replace “You don’t care about deadlines” with “The report arrived two days after we agreed. What got in the way?”

Curiosity gives you better information. You can still address the missed commitment directly.

My observation

SYSTEM 3 OF 7

Protection

How you seek safety and avoid harm.

Your response to feeling exposed

A colleague raises a concern in front of others. You interrupt, become overly formal, or go quiet. Later, you realize you were focused on regaining control rather than understanding the concern.

What this system helps you notice

Protection can show up as defensiveness, avoidance, overexplaining, pleasing, or trying to control every detail. These responses may help you feel less exposed in the moment. They can also make it harder for others to speak honestly. A protective response is worth noticing without turning it into a verdict about your character.

A question to consider

What felt at risk for me: respect, authority, belonging, or something else? What did I do next, and how might that have landed?

One small practice

When you feel the urge to react quickly, put both feet on the floor and take one comfortable breath. Say, “Let me make sure I understand your concern.”

If you dismissed someone, return to the conversation: “I cut you off earlier. I want to hear the rest.”

My observation

SYSTEM 4 OF 7

Responsibility

What you carry and why.

Helping that takes ownership away

A team member struggles with an assignment. You take it back because doing it yourself seems faster. The work gets finished, and the next difficult assignment comes back to you too.

What this system helps you notice

Responsibility shapes what you take on and what you expect others to own. When you routinely rescue, people may lose chances to build judgment or may become unsure of their authority. At the other extreme, delegating without support can leave them stranded. Effective delegation makes ownership, support, and decision limits explicit.

A question to consider

Am I taking this on because it belongs to me, because support is genuinely needed, or because I am uncomfortable watching someone learn?

One small practice

Before stepping in, ask: “What have you tried, what do you recommend, and what support do you need?” Agree on the outcome, who decides, and when you will check in.

Keep accountability with the agreed owner. Adjust support when the person’s experience, workload, or the stakes require it.

My observation

SYSTEM 5 OF 7

Emotional Regulation

How you experience and respond to emotion.

What your frustration communicates

After a difficult morning, a small error triggers a sharp reply. You move on quickly. The employee spends the rest of the day wondering whether it is safe to ask you another question.

What this system helps you notice

Emotional regulation involves noticing what you feel and choosing how to respond. It does not require you to be cheerful all day or hide every concern. Your tone, pace, and timing influence whether people can hear your message. You remain responsible for your conduct, including when your frustration is understandable.

A question to consider

What am I feeling, and what happened before this interaction? Is the intensity of my response proportionate to what is happening now?

One small practice

Before a difficult conversation, name the feeling privately and decide what the conversation needs to accomplish. If necessary, request a short pause and set a specific time to return.

If your tone was unfair, acknowledge it without an excuse: “My frustration came out sharply. Let’s address the issue respectfully.”

My observation

SYSTEM 6 OF 7

Relational

How you connect, communicate, trust, and establish boundaries.

The conversation you keep postponing

A colleague repeatedly misses handoffs. You avoid raising it because you want to preserve the relationship. Your irritation grows, and eventually a minor incident receives a major reaction.

What this system helps you notice

Your relational system shows up in how you listen, express needs, handle disagreement, and set boundaries. A relationship can become strained by what remains unsaid. Respectful directness gives another person a fair chance to understand your concern and respond. It also requires listening to their view, including information you did not expect.

A question to consider

What have I been expecting someone to know without telling them? Where am I confusing agreement with a healthy working relationship?

One small practice

Use a specific observation, its impact, and a request: “When the handoff arrives after noon, production has to rework the schedule. Can we agree on a workable delivery time?”

Ask for their perspective, confirm the agreement, and follow through. Trust grows through what happens after the conversation too.

My observation

SYSTEM 7 OF 7

Vitality

How you sustain your physical, mental, and emotional capacity.

Capacity changes how you show up

You move through back-to-back meetings, skip lunch, and answer messages during every break. By afternoon, you interrupt more and have less patience for questions you normally welcome.

What this system helps you notice

Vitality concerns the capacity you bring to work and the conditions that sustain it. When you are stretched thin, listening and thoughtful responses may take more effort. Personal habits matter, and so do workload, staffing, and meeting expectations. A consistently overloaded calendar deserves an operational response as well as a personal one.

A question to consider

When do I become least patient or attentive? What part of my schedule or workload contributes to that pattern?

One small practice

Protect one practical source of capacity this week: a meal away from your screen, a gap before a difficult meeting, or a realistic stop time. Review one recurring demand that could be reduced or redesigned.

Observe how your attention changes. Encourage reasonable working practices for your team as well as for yourself.

My observation

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FROM UNDERSTANDING TO ONE DIFFERENT CHOICE

Start With One Situation

Think of a recent conversation that did not go as you hoped. Several systems may have been involved. You do not need to identify the perfect explanation to make a useful change.

Notice What happened, and what did I actually say or do?

Understand Which system helps me understand my response? What am I assuming about the other person?

Choose What response would support both the work and a respectful relationship?

Practice What specific words or action will I try in the next relevant conversation?

Integrate What happened when I tried it? What will I repeat or adjust?

Keep exploring with me

This guide opens the conversation about the human patterns that shape leadership. Stay connected for further reflections and updates as I develop a program for deeper exploration.

If you received this guide by email, reply to that email and tell me which system stood out to you. Your question can help me understand what readers want to explore next.

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Jackie S. Michaels
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