

Observable Leadership Moves That Shape Thinking Environments



Leadership Skill	What It Looks Like in Practice	How the Skill Is Practiced	Verbal Moves <i>What Leaders Say</i>	Non-Verbal Moves <i>What Leaders Do</i>	What Leaders Must Be Intentional About	Common Drift - Failure
Making Thinking Visible	Reasoning and constraints are explicit	Narrating thought process; naming assumptions	“Here’s how I’m thinking about this.” “The constraint we’re working within is…”	Slows speech; pauses before deciding; points to notes or data	Explaining <i>enough</i> to teach judgment without over-explaining	Decisions delivered with no rationale → staff guess meaning
Regulating Pace Under Pressure	Urgency does not eliminate reflection	Pausing before approvals; separating urgent vs uncomfortable	“What actually has to happen today?” “What can wait?”	Intentional pause; relaxed posture; steady tone	Resisting performative decisiveness	Fast action that teaches urgency overrides thinking
Reading Silence as Data	Silence triggers inquiry, not relief	Inviting missing perspectives; slowing agreement	“We moved through that quickly. What questions remain?”	Looks around the room, waits longer, and makes eye contact with quieter members	Tolerating discomfort and lack of immediate response	Mistaking silence or agreement for buy-in
Using Authority as a Stabilizer	Expectations are clear and predictable	Naming non-negotiables; following through	“This part is not optional.” “Here’s what consistency looks like.”	Calm posture; firm but even tone; no hedging	Clarity without harshness; consistency over likability	Inconsistent enforcement creates uncertainty
Resisting Overfunctioning	The leader does not become the fixer	Coaching instead of solving; delaying intervention	“Walk me through your thinking.” “What options have you considered?”	Leans back; does not grab materials; allows silence	Letting others struggle productively	The leader becomes the thinking center of the system
Designing Routines That Protect Thinking	Routines clarify judgment vs compliance	Naming decision points; explaining purpose	“This step is about consistency.” “Here’s where judgment is expected.”	Uses visual workflows; revisits routines explicitly	Preventing routines from replacing thinking	Mechanical compliance replaces reasoning
Separating Impact from Intent	Feedback addresses behavior, not character	Using observable, system-focused language	“Here’s what happened and why it matters.”	Neutral facial expression; steady volume	Avoiding speculation about motive	Feedback triggers defensiveness
Consistency Over Charisma	Leadership feels steady over time	Repeating the same moves in similar moments	“As we’ve said before…” “This is how we handle this.”	Predictable responses; no emotional swings	Trusting repetition over novelty	One-off strong moments without system change
Naming & Testing Assumptions	Assumptions are surfaced and challenged	Externalizing thinking; inviting correction	“We may be assuming…” “What might we be missing?”	Tilts head; open hands; inquisitive posture	Being willing to be wrong publicly	Acting on untested assumptions
Containing Emotion	Pressure is acknowledged without escalation	Naming reality calmly; regulating tone	“This is high pressure, and we can handle it.”	Slow breathing; grounded stance; measured pace	Managing internal reactions before responding	Emotional leakage increases system anxiety