The AI Leadership Edge

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AI-POWERED INSIGHTS FOR INVESTORS, BUSINESS LEADERS & BOARD DIRECTORS

THE PREMIUM SYSTEM

THE AI BOARDROOM & LEADERSHIP TOOLKIT.

The full system for senior leaders who run their week in meetings. The recurring conversations, the keystone rituals, and the high-stakes meetings where the script matters most.

16 PROMPTS

4 SECTIONS

1 SYSTEM

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FROM

The AI Leadership Edge

WHY THIS SYSTEM EXISTS

The leaders who get sharper every week share one habit. They treat the space between meetings as the actual job.

Most senior leaders spend 60–80% of their week in meetings. The work itself happens in the prep, the debrief, and the rhythm of carrying forward what you learned. Treat that work as overhead and you stay the same. Treat it as the job and you compound. Start with Section 02 if you have a week. Start with Section 03 if you have a fire.

What's inside

01

SECTION ONE

EXECUTIVE REGULARS.

The recurring conversations that build or break leadership over time. Run them well for two years and you build something no board can replicate. Run them badly and you slowly break something no board can fix.

1.1 The One-on-One Prep

USE WHEN *before a weekly one-on-one with any direct report.*

One-on-ones are the highest-leverage recurring meeting you run. Most default to status updates with two people. The leverage is in turning them into structured reflection on the work, the relationship, and what's being avoided.

```
You are my executive coach. I'm preparing for a weekly one-on-one with [role: my CTO / CFO / Head
of Sales / etc.]. Below is context: what's happened since our last 1:1, what's on my mind, what's
on theirs (as far as I know).

Walk through this in order:

1. Identify the three things this 1:1 most needs to accomplish this week. Rank them.

2. For each, identify whether it's better as a question I ask, an update I give, or a
conversation we have together.

3. Identify what they're probably bringing to this 1:1 that I don't yet know. What patterns from
prior 1:1s suggest what's on their mind?

4. Identify what I've been avoiding bringing up with them. (There's usually one thing.) Should it
come up this week?

5. Suggest the one question I should open with that will reveal more than "how are things going?"

CONTEXT:
- Person: [role and a few words on style]
- Since last 1:1: [what's happened]
- My priorities right now: [what's on my mind for this person]
- Their priorities (as I understand them): [what's on their plate]
- What I've been avoiding: [if anything]
```

1.2 The Leadership Team Review

USE WHEN *before your monthly leadership team review or all-leaders meeting.*

The leadership team review is where strategy meets the actual humans who will execute it. Most CEOs over-index on agenda completion and under-index on dynamics. The dynamics are the meeting.

```
You are an experienced executive coach. I'm preparing for our monthly leadership team review.
Below is context: who's on the team, what's happening in the business, what I've noticed about
team dynamics.

Walk through this in order:

1. Identify the three highest-leverage agenda items for this meeting. Not the urgent items — the
leverage ones. (Often different.)

2. Identify the one team member whose silence in recent meetings is the most important thing to
notice. Why might they be quiet, and what should I do about it?

3. Identify the one tension between team members that's leaking into the team's effectiveness.
Don't avoid naming it.

4. Suggest the one decision I should drive in this meeting, and the one decision I should
explicitly NOT drive (leaving it to a team member to make).

5. Give me the opening line for the meeting that sets the right tone for what I need from them.

CONTEXT:
- The team: [names and roles]
- Recent dynamics: [what you've noticed across the past month]
- Business context: [what's happening this month]
- Carryover from last review: [decisions made, commitments tracked]
```

1.3 The Performance Conversation Prep

USE WHEN *you need to deliver hard performance feedback — honestly, without being destructive.*

Performance conversations fail in one of two ways: too soft (the person doesn't hear it) or too harsh (the person can't act on it). The goal is honest enough to be heard, structured enough to be acted on, and humane enough to preserve the relationship if the person rises to it.

```
You are an experienced executive coach who has prepared founders for hundreds of difficult
performance conversations. I need to have one. Below is context: who, what's not working, what
I've tried, what I want from this conversation.

Walk through this in order:

1. Restate the actual problem in one sentence, stripped of frustration. (If I can't state it
cleanly, I'm not ready to deliver it cleanly.)

2. Identify what part of this is on me. What signals did I miss, what context did I fail to give,
what direction did I hold back on? Performance gaps are rarely 100% the other person.

3. Draft the opening — the first 90 seconds, word for word. Lead with the specific behavior or
pattern, not the character judgment.

4. Identify the three most likely defensive responses and how I should handle each without
escalating.

5. Be explicit about what success looks like for them in 30 days. Behavioral, not aspirational.
Observable, not felt.

6. Identify what I might do wrong: where I'll be tempted to soften so much that the message gets
lost, or harden so much that they can't recover.

End with one sentence I can say at the close that makes clear this is about the work, not the
person.

CONTEXT:
- Person and role: [who, how long, what they do well]
- What's not working: [specific behaviors or patterns, not character traits]
- What I've tried: [prior feedback, coaching, role adjustments]
- What I want from this conversation: [behavior change / role change / clear last warning / exit]
```

1.4 The Departure Conversation Prep

USE WHEN *someone is leaving — voluntary resignation, mutual exit, or your decision.*

Departures are read by the rest of the company more carefully than any other leadership moment. How you handle the person who's leaving signals what you'd do with anyone else in the same seat. Get this wrong and trust erodes for everyone watching.

```
You are an experienced executive coach. Someone on my team is leaving. Below is context: who, the
nature of the departure, what's already been said, what I need from this conversation.

Walk through this in order:

1. Restate the actual situation clearly. Is this voluntary, mutual, or my decision being framed
as something else? Name it honestly so I can act with integrity.

2. Identify the three audiences for this conversation: the person leaving, the team that stays,
and (sometimes) the external market. What does each need to hear and not hear?

3. Draft the opening for the conversation. The first 60 seconds set the tone for how the rest of
the company will read the departure six months from now.

4. Identify the one thing I should say that I'm tempted to hold back, and the one thing I'm
tempted to say that I should hold back. Departure conversations are where leaders most often add
gratuitous context.

5. Identify what I owe the person beyond the legal minimum: a useful reference, a clean handover
window, a real explanation, an honest signal about their next move. Be specific.

6. Identify the message to the team after the departure. Same person, same facts, different
audience.

End by surfacing what I should NOT do in the 72 hours after the conversation. (Most damage in
departures happens between the conversation and the public announcement.)

CONTEXT:
- Person and role: [who, tenure, performance history]
- Nature of the departure: [their decision / my decision / mutual]
- What's already been said: [prior conversations, written communications]
- What I want from this conversation: [clean exit / dignity preserved / specific outcomes]
```

02

SECTION TWO

THE WEEKLY REVIEW.

The keystone ritual, expanded across four time horizons. Friday reveals the week. Monday's compound reveals the trajectory. The quarterly reveals where you drifted. The annual reveals who you've become.

2.1 The Friday Review

USE WHEN *Friday afternoon, before you close the laptop. Bring your week's debriefs.*

The keystone ritual. Three parts: look back at the week, look across at the patterns, look forward at next week. Thirty minutes that turn a week of disconnected meetings into a coherent narrative you can actually learn from.

```
You are my executive coach. It's Friday afternoon. I'm going to give you (a) my brain-dump of the
week, (b) my debrief notes from the week's key meetings, (c) what's on my calendar for next week.

Walk through this in three sections:

SECTION 1 — LOOK BACK
1. What did I actually accomplish this week vs. what I told myself I'd accomplish on Monday?
2. Where did I spend time that didn't serve the priorities I set?
3. What did I learn this week that updates how I see the business?

SECTION 2 — PATTERNS
4. What recurring tension, decision, or topic is showing up across multiple conversations this
week?
5. What am I avoiding that I was also avoiding last week?
6. Is there a class of decision I keep making the same way? Is it serving me?

SECTION 3 — LOOK FORWARD
7. What is the single most important outcome I need from next week? (Not the most items on the
to-do list — the one outcome.)
8. Where on my calendar is that outcome most likely to be made or lost? What's the prep that
single moment deserves?
9. What conversation am I going to have next week that I've been postponing?

End with one sentence: the headline for next week. What is this week going to be about, in 12
words or fewer?

Be specific throughout. Don't soften. I'd rather have a hard truth than a polite one.

THE WEEK:
- Brain dump: [paste]
- Key meeting debriefs: [paste 3-5 from the week]
- Next week's calendar: [paste]
```

2.2 The Monthly Compound

USE WHEN *first Monday of a new month, with your last four Friday Reviews in hand.*

A single Friday Review shows you a week. Four of them show you a trajectory. The Monthly Compound is where you stop reacting to individual incidents and start seeing the shape of what's actually happening to you, your team, and your business.

```
You are my coach. Below are my last four Friday Reviews. I want to see what a single week can't
show me.

Walk through this in order:

1. What's the consistent theme across all four weeks? (There usually is one, and it's usually not
what I think.)

2. What problem keeps appearing? Has it gotten better, worse, or stayed the same?

3. What did I commit to in week 1 that I haven't followed through on?

4. What patterns in my time use should I be alarmed about?

5. If I were my own board member reading these four weeks, what would worry me most?

6. Suggest the one focus area for next month — not a goal, a focus. The thing that, if I get it
right, makes everything else easier.

7. Identify the one ritual or habit I should add for next month, and the one I should drop.

FOUR FRIDAY REVIEWS:
[paste]
```

2.3 The Quarterly Operating Review

USE WHEN *end of a calendar quarter, before writing the board update or quarterly all-hands.*

Quarters are the smallest unit where strategic drift becomes visible. Run this before you write the public narrative. The gap between what you committed to 90 days ago and what you're claiming today is where leaders quietly lose themselves.

```
You are a senior strategy advisor. Below are (a) the goals I set at the start of this quarter,
(b) my three Monthly Compounds from the past 90 days, (c) my draft summary of the quarter.

Walk through this in order:

1. Compare what I committed to 90 days ago against what I'm now claiming. Where are the gaps?
Where am I quietly redefining success?

2. Identify the one or two things I'm doing now that don't fit the strategy I articulated 90 days
ago. Either the strategy has quietly changed, or I've drifted. Which is it?

3. Where did I hold the line that I'm proud of? Where did I cave under pressure I should have
held against? Be specific about the moments.

4. Where am I confusing motion with progress? Specifically: which metrics are up but not coupled
to revenue, retention, or the actual thesis of the business?

5. If a smart, skeptical board director read all of this in one sitting, what would worry them
most? What would they want me to address head-on in the board update?

6. Suggest the one strategic question I should sit with before the next quarter starts.

Don't soften. I'd rather have a partial honest read than a complete diplomatic one.

THE QUARTER:
- Goals set 90 days ago: [paste]
- Three Monthly Compounds: [paste]
- My draft quarterly summary: [paste]
```

2.4 The Annual Reset

USE WHEN *late December or end of fiscal year, before the holidays.*

A year is long enough that you can no longer pretend you haven't changed. The Annual Reset is not a year-in-review — it's a year-in-reality. What worked, what broke, what you became. Then a clean four-quadrant decision about the next twelve months: keep, kill, start, restructure.

```
You are a thoughtful executive coach. Below are (a) the goals I set at the start of the year, (b)
my four Quarterly Operating Reviews, (c) my honest private notes on the year, (d) the public
narrative I've been telling investors and team.

Walk through this in order:

1. Compare the goals I set at the start of the year against what I actually achieved. Flag every
goal where the public narrative is more optimistic than the private reality.

2. Identify the three decisions I made this year that look right in hindsight, and the three that
look wrong. For each, name the information I had at the time vs. what I have now.

3. Identify what I learned this year that I couldn't have learned any other way. (Not generic
lessons — specific things that update my model of the world or this business.)

4. Identify how I changed as a leader this year. Be specific. Did I get sharper, harder, kinder,
more avoidant, more decisive? Where's the evidence?

5. Produce a four-quadrant decision for next year:
   - KEEP: rituals, relationships, commitments worth preserving
   - KILL: things I've been doing out of habit that don't serve the business
   - START: capabilities, conversations, or rituals I've been postponing
   - RESTRUCTURE: things that work in shape but not in form

6. End with the one question I should sit with over the holidays — the question whose answer
would most change next year.

Don't write me a year-in-review. Write me a year-in-reality.

THE YEAR:
- Goals at year start: [paste]
- Four Quarterly Reviews: [paste]
- Private notes: [paste]
- Public narrative: [paste]
```

03

SECTION THREE

HIGH-STAKES PLAYBOOKS.

The meetings where the script matters most. Fundraises, firings, board crises, co-founder conflict. These are the meetings every senior leader will face and that no business school teaches. Each playbook is a single sharp prompt — built to be run once, when the stakes are real.

3.1 The Adversarial Meeting Prep

USE WHEN *walking into a negotiation, hard pushback, or contested decision where the other side is hostile or unaligned.*

In adversarial meetings, most leaders prepare arguments. Sharp leaders prepare for the other side's strongest moves. The asymmetric advantage is in knowing what they're walking in with before they say it.

```
You are a senior negotiation advisor. I'm walking into a meeting where the other side is
unaligned, hostile, or actively working against my interests. Below is context: who, what they
want, what I want, what's been said so far.

Walk through this in order:

1. Restate what each side actually wants, separating positions (what they're saying) from
interests (what they actually need). The negotiation usually lives in the gap.

2. Identify the three strongest moves the other side could make to box me in. For each, prepare
my counter — not a reaction, a prepared move.

3. Identify what I'm willing to concede that they don't yet know I'm willing to concede.
Concessions are most valuable when traded, not given.

4. Identify the line I will not cross. If the meeting goes past it, what's my exit move?

5. Draft the opening line that anchors the conversation in my framing without being aggressive.
The first 90 seconds set the negotiation's center of gravity.

6. Identify what I might do wrong: where I'll be tempted to over-explain, concede early to ease
tension, or get drawn into their narrative.

End by surfacing my BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement). If I don't have one, tell
me directly so I know I'm negotiating from weakness.

CONTEXT:
- Meeting type: [negotiation / dispute / contested decision]
- Who's across the table: [names, roles, prior history]
- What they want: [stated and inferred]
- What I want: [ranked, with the deal-breakers flagged]
- What's been said so far: [paste prior emails, prior meeting notes]
```

3.2 The Fundraise Meeting Playbook

USE WHEN *preparing for a fundraise pitch — first meeting, partner meeting, or final IC pitch.*

Fundraise meetings are pattern-matched in the first ten minutes and decided in the partner meeting two weeks later. Win the first by being clear; win the second by giving your champion enough ammunition to win without you in the room.

```
You are a partner at a top-decile fund with a sharp eye for what kills a deal. I have a fundraise
meeting coming up. Below is context: who I'm pitching, what stage, what's in my deck, what I've
heard about how they decide.

Walk through this in order:

1. Identify the three things this specific investor most needs to believe by the end of the
meeting. Not generic — based on their portfolio, thesis, and recent investments.

2. Identify the single weakest claim in my pitch that they will probe. What's my answer, and is
my answer good enough? If not, what do I need to fix before the meeting?

3. Draft the 90-second opening. Investors decide whether to lean in or lean back in the first 90
seconds. What's the version that earns lean-in for this specific investor?

4. Identify the three questions I should be most prepared for. For each, draft a 30-second answer
that doesn't dodge.

5. Identify the one question I should ASK them that signals I'm fundraise-ready, not desperate.
Investors notice founders who ask sharp questions about them.

6. Identify the follow-up strategy: what I send after the meeting that gives my champion the
artifact they need to sell internally. (Most deals die in the gap between first meeting and
partner meeting.)

End by identifying what I should NOT do in this meeting: where I'll be tempted to over-explain,
defend, or chase enthusiasm that isn't real.

CONTEXT:
- Investor: [fund, partner, stage focus, recent investments]
- My stage and ask: [round, amount, lead vs participant]
- The pitch: [paste deck or key slides]
- Prior context: [intro path, prior conversations, what I know about their decision style]
```

3.3 The Exec Team / Co-Founder Conflict Playbook

USE WHEN *there's a real conflict with a co-founder, co-CEO, or senior executive that's been simmering and now needs a direct conversation.*

Co-founder and exec conflicts kill more companies than market failure does. They're usually structural and operational, not personal — but they get personal when they're avoided. This playbook prepares you for the conversation that finally names what's been unspoken.

```
You are a senior advisor who has mediated dozens of co-founder and executive team conflicts. I need to have a direct conversation with [person] about [tension]. Below is context.

Walk through this in order:

1. Restate the actual conflict, separating the operational issue (what's not working in the business) from the relational issue (what's broken between us). Most "co-founder conflicts" are 70% operational and 30% relational, but get treated as if they're reversed.

2. Identify what I'm doing that's contributing to the conflict. Not as a peacekeeping gesture — as honest diagnosis. If I can't name my contribution, I'm not ready for the conversation.

3. Identify what's likely on their side that I don't see. What's their honest read of me and the situation, if I had to guess?

4. Draft the opening of the conversation. The first three minutes determine whether this becomes a productive conversation or a defensive one. Lead with shared stakes, not grievance.

5. Identify the three structural decisions that need to come out of this conversation. Specific decisions, not "better communication" — who decides what, who owns which domain, what we'll do when we disagree.

6. Identify the line: what would have to happen in this conversation for me to conclude this partnership is not workable? Knowing the line clarifies the conversation.

End with the question I should ask near the close that surfaces whether they're in or out: a yes/no question, not a feeling question.

CONTEXT:
- Person: [role, history, prior conflicts]
- The tension: [operational issue and relational issue, separately]
- What I've tried: [prior conversations, what's been avoided]
- What I want: [resolution / structural change / clarity on whether this works]
```

3.4 The Executive Firing Playbook

USE WHEN *you've decided to let go of an executive — or you're 80% there and need to test the decision.*

Most CEOs fire executives six months later than they should. The cost isn't just the bad executive; it's the signal you send to everyone watching about the standard you'll tolerate. Run this before the meeting and after the decision is final.

```
You are an experienced executive coach. I have decided to let go of an executive (or I'm close to
deciding). Below is context: who, what's not working, what I've tried, what I want from the
conversation and the aftermath.

Walk through this in order:

1. Pressure-test the decision. What's the steelman case for keeping them? Is there a structural
change (role redefinition, manager change, scope reduction) that would actually work, or am I
avoiding the conversation by considering it?

2. Identify when I should have made this decision. (It's almost always earlier than today.) What
was I waiting for? Knowing this prevents me from waiting next time.

3. Draft the firing conversation itself. The opening must be clear in the first 30 seconds — no
preamble, no soft scaffolding, no "we need to talk." Specific words.

4. Identify what to offer: severance, transition window, references, narrative for their next
role. The terms of departure are read by the rest of the company as a signal of how I treat
people.

5. Draft the message to the team. Same person, same facts, different audience. What I say (and
don't say) will be remembered longer than the firing itself.

6. Identify the three things I must do in the 72 hours after the conversation: with the team,
with their direct reports, and with the work that needs to keep moving.

End by surfacing what I should NOT do: justify, over-explain, share more than the person agreed
to share, or treat the firing as something to be processed publicly.

CONTEXT:
- Executive and role: [who, tenure, scope]
- What's not working: [performance, fit, behavior — be specific]
- What I've tried: [feedback, coaching, role changes]
- The team and business impact of their departure: [who reports to them, what work is at risk]
```

3.5 The Investor Pushback Playbook

USE WHEN *an existing investor is pushing back on strategy, hiring, spend, or direction — and you need to hold your line, change your mind, or distinguish between the two.*

The trap is treating every investor pushback as either a threat to defend against or a signal to follow. It's almost always neither. The job is to separate the substance from the dynamics — what they're right about, what they're missing, and what they want that has nothing to do with the business.

```
You are a senior advisor who has sat on both sides of the investor-founder table. An investor on
my cap table is pushing back hard on [decision/direction]. Below is context: who, what they said,
what I'm currently thinking.

Walk through this in order:

1. Restate the pushback in their own words first, as steelmanned as possible. If I can't make
their case better than they did, I'm not ready to respond to it.

2. Identify what they're right about. Most investor pushbacks have a real signal underneath even
if the delivery is off. What's the signal here?

3. Identify what they're missing. Information they don't have, context they don't see, or a
pattern from their portfolio that doesn't apply here.

4. Identify what's investor-dynamics rather than business: are they posturing for the
partnership, defending a prior thesis, fighting for board influence, anxious about their fund's
performance? Name it specifically.

5. Draft the response. Three things must be true: I acknowledge what they're right about
specifically, I disagree with what they're wrong about specifically, and I make clear what (if
anything) will change in my decision.

6. Identify the line: at what point would their pushback warrant a real strategic reconsideration
vs. respectfully holding my position?

End with a question I should ask them that reframes the conversation from "convince me" to "let's
both look at the same data." Investors respect founders who push back well more than founders who
fold.

CONTEXT:
- Investor: [fund, partner, board seat or observer, fund stage]
- The pushback: [what they said, in what setting, with what tone]
- The decision they're pushing on: [the actual business question]
- My current thinking: [where I stand and why]
```

3.6 The Crisis Comms Meeting Playbook

USE WHEN *something has gone publicly wrong (a breach, a layoff leak, a press story, a customer incident) and you need to brief the team or speak externally.*

In a crisis, leaders default to one of two failure modes: too much corporate language (which signals you don't grasp what happened) or too much emotion (which signals you don't know what to do). The job is to be specific, accountable, and forward-leaning — in that order.

```
You are a senior crisis communications advisor. Something has gone wrong and I need to
communicate about it. Below is context: what happened, who knows, what I know vs. what I'm still
finding out, what the next 48 hours need to look like.

Walk through this in order:

1. Restate the facts cleanly, stripped of framing. What actually happened, what's known, what's
still unclear. If I can't state it cleanly, I'm not ready to communicate it.

2. Identify the three audiences I'm communicating to: internal team, external stakeholders, and
(sometimes) the public. What does each need to hear and not hear?

3. Identify the three temptations: where I'll want to hedge, blame, over-explain, or promise more
than I can deliver in the next 48 hours. Crisis comms fail at all three points.

4. Draft the opening for the most important communication (usually internal team first). Lead
with what happened, what I'm doing about it, and what I don't yet know. Honest gaps build more
trust than false certainty.

5. Identify the one specific commitment I should make about next steps. Specific, time-bound, and
within my actual control. Not "we're committed to learning from this."

6. Identify what I should NOT communicate: the speculation, the partial information that will
change, the blame attribution that might be wrong, and the legal language that signals I don't
actually care.

End with the question I should be ready to answer that I currently can't: the question a sharp
journalist or skeptical employee would ask first.

CONTEXT:
- What happened: [facts, stripped of framing]
- Who knows so far: [internal, external, public]
- What I know vs. don't know: [facts vs. unverified]
- The audiences I need to communicate to: [team, board, investors, customers, public]
- Constraints: [legal, contractual, timing]
```

3.7 The Negotiation Debrief

USE WHEN *after any meaningful negotiation — deal terms, partnership, exit, employment, vendor contract.*

Outcomes lag, processes don't. The negotiation just concluded will be more informative as a process review than as an outcome review — especially if you won. Wins hide more lessons than losses do, and the next negotiation is already on the calendar.

```
You are a senior negotiation advisor. I just finished a negotiation. Below is context: what was
at stake, what I wanted, what I got, what I conceded, what they got.

Walk through this in order:

1. Restate what each side actually walked away with vs. what each side wanted. The gap between
want and result is where the lesson lives.

2. Identify the three concessions I made. For each: was it traded for something specific, or did
I give it away to ease tension? Concessions that aren't traded are the most common source of
value leak.

3. Identify the moment in the negotiation where the center of gravity shifted. Who shifted it,
and was I prepared for that moment or caught flat-footed?

4. Identify the information they had that I didn't. Was it findable in advance? What would I need
to do differently in prep next time?

5. Identify what I could have asked for that I didn't. Often there's a meaningful concession the
other side would have given that we never asked about.

6. Identify the pattern. Have I made similar negotiation mistakes before? Is there a class of
move I keep getting wrong?

End with the one specific rule to follow in the next negotiation, drawn from this one. Not a
generic principle — a behavioral rule.

THE NEGOTIATION:
- What was at stake: [deal, terms, context]
- What I wanted: [ranked, with deal-breakers flagged]
- What I got: [specific terms]
- What I conceded: [specific terms]
- What they got vs. what they wanted: [as best I can read it]
- Key moments and turning points: [raw notes]
```

3.8 The Crisis Board Meeting Prep

USE WHEN *preparing for a board meeting where something has gone meaningfully wrong — missed plan, executive crisis, regulatory issue, public incident.*

Crisis board meetings test directors more than they test management. The temptation is to perform oversight, distance from the decision, or rescue the CEO. None of those help. The job is to ask the questions that surface what management isn't saying, without enabling avoidance.

```
You are an experienced board chair. There's been a crisis (missed plan / exec departure /
regulatory event / external incident) and a board meeting has been called. Below is context: what
happened, what management is saying, what I'm hearing through informal channels.

Walk through this in order:

1. Restate the actual situation, separating what's confirmed from what's narrative. Crisis boards
run on narrative for the first 48 hours; my job is to find the ground truth.

2. Identify the three questions I should ask in the meeting. Each must surface something
management isn't volunteering, without putting them in a position where defending themselves is
more important than fixing the problem.

3. Identify what I should NOT do: rescue the CEO, distance from prior decisions I supported,
perform sharpness for the other directors, or push for action before the facts are clear.

4. Identify the one structural question that the crisis reveals. Crises are almost always
symptoms of a structural issue the board should have caught earlier. What is it here?

5. Identify what support management actually needs from the board right now: cover,
accountability, resources, time, or a hard conversation. Different crises need different things;
the wrong one makes it worse.

6. Identify what I should say in executive session (board minus management) that wouldn't be
politic with them in the room.

End with the one question I should be ready to answer myself: what did I miss as a director that
contributed to this? Boards that ask only of management fail their job.

CONTEXT:
- What happened: [facts as best known]
- What management is saying: [their framing]
- What I'm hearing informally: [other channels, board peers, ex-employees]
- Board dynamics: [who supports CEO, who's wavering, who's already calling for action]
- My role: [chair / lead director / investor director / independent]
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04

SECTION FOUR

THE OPERATING SYSTEM.

Four rhythms. Run together, they compound. Run apart, they decay. The leaders who run their week on this cadence don't get more done — they get sharper at the work that matters.

THE LEADERSHIP OPERATING SYSTEM

Four rhythms. One operating system.

Any single prompt in this toolkit will sharpen one meeting. The compounding lives in the rhythm. Below is the cadence the prompts were built to support — weekly, monthly, quarterly, annual. Each layer reveals what the layer below can't.

4.1 · WEEKLY RHYTHM · EVERY FRIDAY, 30 MINUTES

Run the Friday Review.

The keystone. Bring your week's meeting debriefs, your brain dump, and next week's calendar. The output is a single-sentence headline for next week. If you only run one ritual from this system, run this one.

What it surfaces: what you accomplished vs. claimed, where time leaked, the conversation you're postponing, the single most important outcome for next week.

4.2 · MONTHLY RHYTHM · FIRST MONDAY OF THE MONTH, 45 MINUTES

Run the Monthly Compound.

Four Friday Reviews stacked together show a trajectory a single week cannot. This is where you stop reacting to incidents and start seeing patterns — in your time, your team, your decisions, your avoidance.

What it surfaces: the consistent theme across four weeks, the problem that keeps appearing, the commitment you've quietly dropped, the focus area for next month.

4.3 · QUARTERLY RHYTHM · END OF EACH QUARTER, 90 MINUTES

Run the Quarterly Operating Review.

Quarters are the smallest unit where strategic drift becomes visible. Run this before you write the board update. The gap between what you committed to 90 days ago and what you're claiming today is where leaders quietly lose themselves — and where sharp boards notice.

What it surfaces: where you held the line, where you caved, what's drifted from strategy, what a skeptical director would notice in the public narrative.

4.4 · ANNUAL RHYTHM · LATE DECEMBER, 2–3 HOURS

Run the Annual Reset.

A year is long enough that you can no longer pretend you haven't changed. This isn't a year-in-review — it's a year-in-reality, followed by a clean four-quadrant decision about the next twelve months: keep, kill, start, restructure.

What it surfaces: the gap between public narrative and private reality, the three decisions that look right and the three that look wrong, how you've changed as a leader, the question to sit with before next year.

THE TAKEAWAY

Meetings are not the work.

They are the place where decisions get made, signals get exchanged, and trust gets built or eroded. The work itself happens in the space between meetings.

Most leaders treat that space as overhead. The conference room is where the action is, the calendar is the priority list, and the gap between meetings is for catching up on email. That model worked when meetings were monthly and decisions had time to settle. It doesn't work now, when the week is a stack of decisions and the only way to stay sharp is to extract the signal from each one before the next one starts.

The leaders who get sharper every week have figured this out. They prepare differently. They debrief differently. They run a Friday review that turns five days of meetings into one coherent signal. They run a monthly compound that turns four Fridays into a trajectory. They run a quarterly review that catches strategic drift before the board does. The tools only compound when you treat the rhythm as the actual job — not the meetings on the calendar, but the discipline of carrying forward what you learned from them.

The compounding effect.

In month one, you'll feel the difference in single meetings. Your prep will be sharper. Your debriefs will surface things you'd have missed. Friday reviews will feel awkward but useful.

In month three, you'll start seeing patterns you couldn't see before. The team member whose silence matters. The decision you keep making the same way. The conversation you've been postponing for nine weeks.

In month six, the prompts will become scaffolding for a kind of thinking that's becoming automatic. You'll catch your own drift before someone else does. You'll walk into hard conversations more prepared than the person you're having them with.

In month twelve, you'll be running a leadership operating system that compounds while everyone else's stays the same. **That is the unfair advantage this system was built to produce.**

RAFFAELA REIN

THE AI LEADERSHIP EDGE