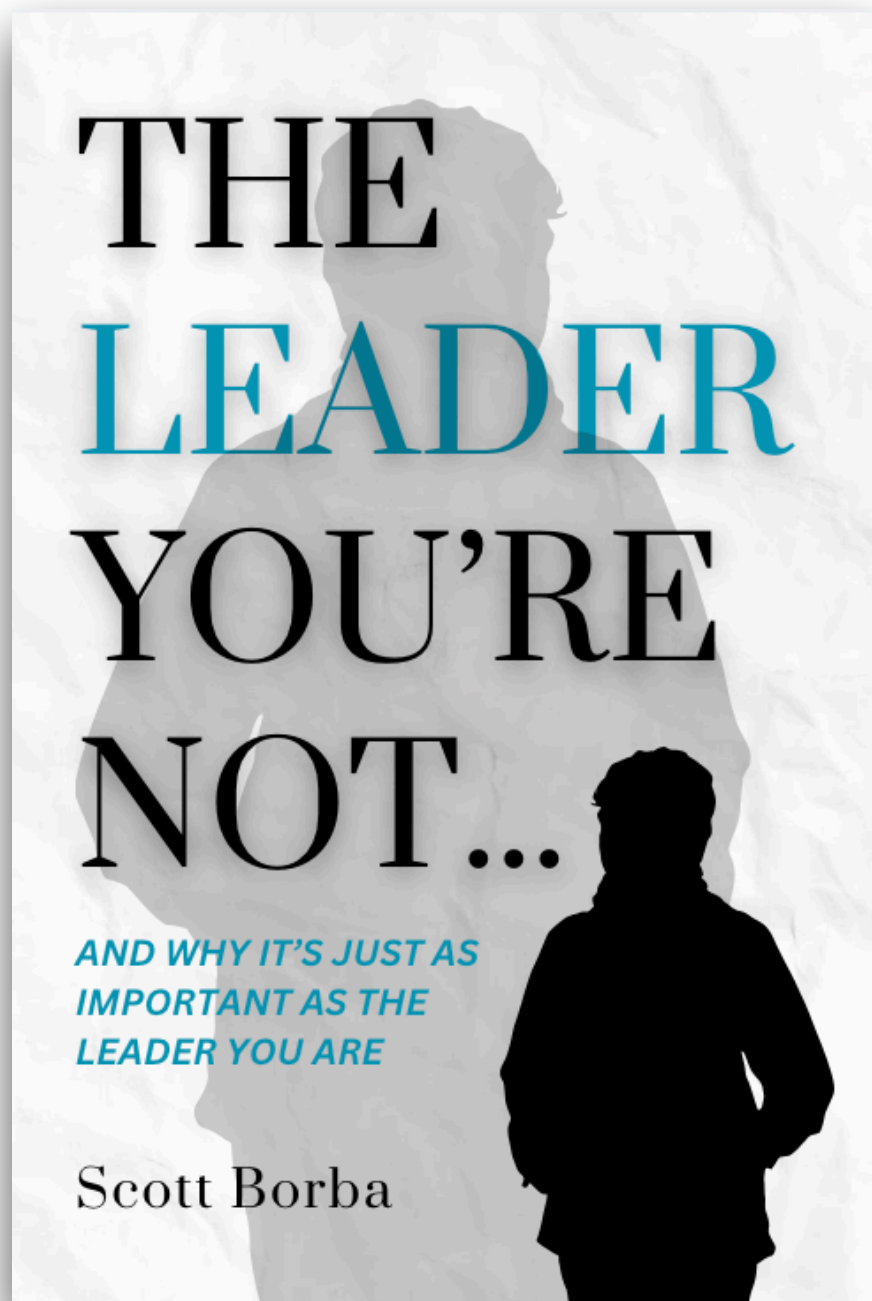


Study Guide



Welcome to The Leader You're Not Study Guide

Whether you're engaging with this guide individually or as part of a leadership team, thank you for taking the time to reflect on your journey—and more importantly, on the leader you're becoming.

This guide was created to help you dive deeper into the themes explored in *The Leader You're Not...and Why It's Just as Important as the Leader You Are*. Each chapter offers a chance to reflect on the side of leadership that is often hidden in plain sight: our blind spots, vulnerabilities, and limitations. Rather than seeing these as barriers to growth, this guide will help you reframe them as opportunities for authentic influence.

Designed for practical use, each chapter is structured around four components:

- Reflection questions that invite introspection
- Application questions that encourage real-world connections
- Action Steps to move from insight to implementation
- A Lessons Learned prompt to capture key takeaways

Leadership isn't just about what we project but what we're willing to confront. This guide will help you and your team have honest, constructive conversations about leadership that go beyond competence and confidence. Together, we'll explore how embracing what we are *not* can unlock deeper trust, greater collaboration, and a culture of continuous growth.

Chapter One:

Beyond the Spotlight – Embracing Your Blind Spots

Reflection

1. Think back to a recent team interaction—did your words or actions have an unintended impact? What assumptions may have shaped that moment?
2. What are some patterns in feedback you’ve received, and how might those connect to a blind spot?
3. How comfortable are you with asking for honest feedback? What holds you back?

Application

1. What’s one open-ended question you can ask your team this week to uncover insight into your leadership?
2. If you were to keep a leadership journal, what would you track to reveal recurring blind spots?
3. Who in your organization can help you see what you might not see in yourself, and how will you invite them in?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Schedule one conversation with a trusted team member or mentor focused solely on feedback.
- Choose one blind spot you suspect might be impacting others and make one small, intentional shift this week.
- Practice a 5-minute daily pause at the end of the day to reflect on how your actions aligned with your intentions.

Lessons Learned

What did Nicole learn about the unintended consequences of her hands-on leadership style, and how might her story inform the way you engage with your team?

Chapter Two:

Humble Confidence – Balancing Strength and Vulnerability

Reflection

1. When have you felt the pressure to appear strong even when you didn't feel that way inside? What was the result?
2. How do you typically respond to moments when you don't have all the answers—do you lean into vulnerability or avoid it?
3. What messages have you internalized about what “strong leadership” should look like?

Application

1. How would your leadership shift if you actively made space for others' ideas before offering your own?
2. What does it look like for you to lead with both confidence and humility in a current challenge or initiative?
3. Who on your team might benefit from seeing you model healthy vulnerability?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Practice active listening in your next team conversation—hold back from offering advice and instead ask open-ended questions.
- Identify one recent mistake or learning moment and share it with your team, framing it as a growth opportunity.
- Celebrate a team member's success publicly this week, emphasizing their contribution without downplaying your own role.

Lessons Learned

What did Jamal's story show about how honest vulnerability can strengthen team trust and inspire shared leadership?

Chapter Three:

The Cost of Perfectionism – Why Leaders Need to Let Go

Reflection

1. When has your desire for perfection gotten in the way of progress—for you or your team?
2. How does perfectionism show up in your leadership (e.g., micromanaging, reluctance to delegate, fear of failure)?
3. What do you believe would happen if you let go of the need to get everything “just right”?

Application

1. Where in your current leadership could 'good enough' lead to greater innovation, efficiency, or team ownership?
2. What message does your leadership send about mistakes? Do your actions invite risk-taking or reinforce fear?
3. How might setting more realistic goals for yourself improve your leadership and relationships?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Identify one area where you’ve been holding out for perfection—shift your focus to progress and take one imperfect step forward.
- Invite a team member to take ownership of a task you typically control, and allow them to approach it in their own way.
- Share a recent failure or mistake with your team, along with what you learned from it.

How did Arianna’s realization about the unintended effects of her perfectionism help shift her leadership culture, and what parallels do you see in your own setting?

Chapter Four:

Listening to Criticism – Turning Weaknesses into Growth Opportunities

Reflection

1. How do you typically respond—internally and externally—when someone offers you critical feedback?
2. What role has criticism played in your growth as a leader? Has it shaped you more than praise?
3. Are there any recurring pieces of feedback you've received that you've struggled to accept or act on?

Application

1. Think of a time when someone shared difficult feedback with you. How could you have responded with more curiosity and less defensiveness?
2. What systems or practices could you establish to regularly invite constructive feedback from your team?
3. Who in your professional circle gives you honest feedback, and how can you make more space for those conversations?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Ask someone you trust to share one area where you could improve as a leader, and just listen.
- Reflect on a piece of past criticism that stung—write down what part of it may have been true and what you can learn from it now.
- Establish a regular feedback loop (weekly check-in, anonymous form, or listening session) with your team to create a culture of growth.

Lessons Learned

What did Dr. Patel gain by truly listening to her community's critique, and how can her example reshape how you respond to difficult feedback?

Chapter Five:

Delegate, Don't Dominate – Recognizing When to Step Back

Reflection

1. What tasks or responsibilities do you struggle to let go of, even when you know others are capable?
2. How do your beliefs about control and responsibility shape your delegation habits?
3. When have you unintentionally limited your team's growth by holding on too tightly?

Application

1. Who on your team is ready for more responsibility, and what's holding you back from giving it to them?
2. How might you better match responsibilities to your team members' strengths and growth goals?
3. What systems (e.g., check-ins, feedback loops) could support more confident and consistent delegation?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Identify one task you currently manage that someone else could own—delegate it and provide clear expectations.
- Meet with a team member to discuss their strengths and find a leadership opportunity they can take on.
- Reflect on a time you micromanaged a situation—identify how you can approach it differently next time.

Lessons Learned

In Monica's story, how did stepping back empower her team and improve the school culture? What lesson does her experience offer for your leadership journey?

Chapter Six:

Managing Emotions – Keeping Cool Under Pressure

Reflection

1. What emotions tend to surface for you when leadership pressures build, and how do they impact your behavior?
2. How aware are you of your emotional responses in the moment? What patterns have you noticed?
3. What do you believe your team learns from the way you handle stress and setbacks?

Application

1. What strategies have helped you regulate your emotions in high-stakes situations, and where might you still need growth?
2. How could you create a school culture where emotional honesty and calm problem-solving are both valued?
3. Who in your leadership circle could support you in managing stress more constructively?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Practice the “pause principle” the next time you feel emotionally triggered—acknowledge, breathe, and respond with intention.
- Schedule one brief check-in with a trusted colleague or friend to talk openly about your current stressors.
- Block out one moment each day for a short emotional reset (breathing, prayer, journaling, or stepping outside).

Lessons Learned

How did DeAndre’s approach to emotional regulation during a crisis strengthen trust with his community, and what can you apply from his story?

Chapter Seven:

The Silent Saboteurs – Addressing Insecurity and Self-Doubt

Reflection

1. What situations or challenges tend to trigger insecurity or self-doubt in your leadership?
2. How do you typically respond when you feel unsure about your abilities—do you hide it, overcompensate, or seek support?
3. Where do you notice imposter syndrome showing up in your thoughts or actions?

Application

1. How would your leadership shift if you gave yourself permission to lead with authenticity, even when you feel uncertain?
2. What daily or weekly habit could help you challenge negative self-talk and build confidence?
3. Who in your life or leadership circle can help reflect your strengths back to you when your self-doubt speaks loudly?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Write down three strengths you bring to your leadership, and revisit them each morning.
- Reach out to a trusted colleague or mentor and ask them, “What do you see in me that I sometimes miss?”
- Choose one fear-based behavior (e.g., over-preparing, avoiding hard conversations, needing constant affirmation) and practice replacing it with a confident action.

Lessons Learned

How did Rita’s transparency about her own struggles impact her staff’s trust and collaboration? What’s one way her story challenges your approach to insecurity?

Chapter Eight:

Transparency in the Trenches – Leading Authentically Through Weakness

Reflection

1. When have you hidden a struggle or challenge in your leadership role to maintain the appearance of strength?
2. What fears arise when you consider being transparent about your limitations with your team?
3. How do you think your leadership culture would shift if honesty about imperfection were the norm?

Application

1. What's one way you could model vulnerability this week without compromising your credibility?
2. How could you create safer spaces for your team to speak openly about challenges, questions, or mistakes?
3. In what situations could transparency lead to deeper trust and stronger team dynamics?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Share a recent leadership challenge with your team, along with what you're learning from it.
- In your next team meeting, invite staff to reflect on a recent obstacle and how they overcame it.
- Start a personal practice of naming and owning your current leadership challenges—write them down, pray over them, or discuss them with a trusted confidant.

Lessons Learned

In what ways did Rita's honesty about her burnout create unexpected momentum and connection with her staff? What part of her story could guide your next step toward authentic leadership?

Chapter Nine:

Adapt or Falter – When Your Leadership Style Needs to Change

Reflection

1. Are there situations where your usual leadership approach isn't working as well as it once did?
2. How comfortable are you with changing your leadership style based on the needs of your team or current challenges?
3. What signals do you tend to ignore that might indicate it's time to pivot?

Application

1. Think of a recent leadership challenge—what would it have looked like to lead with more flexibility or collaboration?
2. What are the core values you want to stay grounded in, even as you adapt your style?
3. How could you involve your team more in shaping new solutions, rather than simply issuing direction?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Identify one area where you've been rigid or 'stuck'—and invite input from your team on how to approach it differently.
- Choose a decision-making moment this week where you'll intentionally shift from telling to listening.
- Reflect on your leadership this past month: What has worked? What needs to shift? Write out one intentional change you'll try.

Lessons Learned

What did Dr. Ramirez realize about the mismatch between her leadership style and her district's culture, and how did adapting unlock new trust and innovation? What lesson from her story speaks directly to your current leadership season?

Chapter Ten:

The Courage to Say No – Setting Boundaries in Leadership

Reflection

1. When have you said “yes” to something out of guilt, fear, or pressure, and what did it cost you?
2. What do you associate with saying “no”? Strength? Conflict? Disappointment? Why?
3. How do your current boundaries (or lack of them) affect your energy, clarity, and leadership effectiveness?

Application

1. What’s one area of your leadership where setting clearer boundaries would help you serve more effectively?
2. How can you reframe saying “no” as an act of leadership rather than avoidance?
3. Who on your team might benefit from watching you model healthier boundaries?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Say “no” to a task or commitment that doesn’t align with your core priorities—and do so with clarity and kindness.
- Block out time in your calendar this week for deep work, reflection, or rest, and protect it.
- Have a conversation with someone close to you about a boundary you need to reinforce or reestablish.

Lessons Learned

What did Hannah gain by learning to say “no,” and how did it affect both her well-being and her school culture? How might her journey inform your next leadership decision?

Chapter Eleven:

The Role of Emotional Agility – Navigating Complexity with Grace

Reflection

1. When faced with emotionally complex situations, do you tend to avoid, suppress, or confront your feelings?
2. How often do you pause and reflect before reacting in emotionally charged leadership moments?
3. What emotions are hardest for you to lead through, and how do they tend to show up in your behavior?

Application

1. How could developing emotional agility help you respond with more clarity and calm in your current leadership season?
2. What would it look like for you to treat discomfort as a source of insight instead of something to escape?
3. What regular practices could help you increase your emotional awareness and intentionality?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- When a difficult emotion arises, pause and name it—then ask, 'What is this feeling trying to tell me?'
- At the end of each day this week, journal one emotionally challenging moment and how you responded.
- Practice a daily grounding activity (deep breathing, mindfulness, prayer) to build your pause muscle before reacting.

Lessons Learned

How did Ms. Carter's emotionally agile leadership during the boundary change forum impact trust, clarity, and collaboration? What part of her approach might you try in your next emotionally charged situation?

Chapter Twelve:

The Art of Asking the Right Questions – Unlocking Growth Through Inquiry

Reflection

1. In your current leadership role, do you find yourself giving more answers or asking more questions?
2. When was the last time a powerful question helped shift your thinking or opened a new path forward?
3. What fears or assumptions might keep you from asking questions instead of offering solutions?

Application

1. What kinds of questions could help your team reflect more deeply, own their growth, or spark innovation?
2. How could you use questions to build greater trust and collaboration in your next team meeting or coaching session?
3. What's one area where curiosity could serve you better than certainty?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Replace one directive or statement this week with a thoughtful, open-ended question, and observe how it changes the conversation.
- Begin your next staff meeting with a reflective question instead of an update.
- Identify a leadership challenge you're currently facing and write down five different questions you could ask before jumping to a solution.

Lessons Learned

What did Principal Jennings gain by shifting from giving answers to asking questions, and how did that change the dynamic with her staff? What might be possible if you did the same?

Chapter Thirteen: Beyond Self-Awareness – Cultivating Organizational Awareness

Reflection

1. How aware are you of the unspoken dynamics, power structures, or cultural norms within your organization?
2. When have you overlooked a schoolwide or team issue because you were too focused on your own role or perspective?
3. What assumptions might be limiting your ability to see how others experience your leadership or decisions?

Application

1. What systems or routines could you implement to check the cultural pulse of your team or organization regularly?
2. Who are the quieter voices or overlooked perspectives in your leadership circle—and how can you invite them into the conversation?
3. What organizational patterns (conflict, low morale, inequity, etc.) might be signaling a deeper cultural blind spot?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Spend intentional time in a space (physical or relational) you don't usually visit—observe, listen, and take note of what you learn.
- Ask at least two people this week, 'What's something you think our leadership team might not be seeing?'
- Review a recent initiative or policy through the lens of its impact on different stakeholder groups (staff, students, families).

Lessons Learned

What did Dr. Liao's story reveal about the risks of being self-aware but culturally unaware, and how did she shift her leadership to better serve the whole community? What's one step you could take in that direction?

Chapter Fourteen:

The Legacy of a Self-Aware Leader – Building a Culture of Continuous Improvement

Reflection

1. How do you want to be remembered by your team, not just for what you accomplished, but for how you led?
2. What habits or mindsets do you model that either support or hinder a culture of reflection and growth?
3. When has your own willingness to grow inspired others to do the same?

Application

1. How could you make reflection and feedback a more regular part of your team's culture?
2. What structures (coaching, peer support, collaborative inquiry) could help continuous improvement take root in your school or organization?
3. Who is someone you could invest in now as a leader, with the long-term goal of building leadership capacity beyond yourself?

Action (Choose one to put into practice this week.)

- Invite your team to share one idea that could make your organization stronger and commit to acting on at least one of them.
- Write a short 'legacy statement' that describes the kind of leadership impact you want to leave behind, and begin aligning one habit to it.
- Highlight one small but meaningful improvement someone on your team has made this month and recognize it publicly.

Lessons Learned

What did Ms. Alvarez's story reveal about the long-term impact of modeling self-awareness and reflection as a leader? How might you begin shaping a similar legacy?