

WIRED FOR AI LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

FRAMEWORK REFERENCE SHEETS

Six frameworks. Print them. Keep them close. The thinking tools that separate leaders who scale from leaders who stall.

MASTER FRAMEWORK · STERLING'S IP

THE CASCADE

Every leadership breakdown traces to the same root cause: leaders firefighting at the bottom — relationship friction, misalignment, capability gaps — because the structural work at the top was never done. The Cascade is the map.

1	Vision	What are we building toward? The lens that makes every downstream decision coherent.
2	Strategic Pathways	The 3-5 bets that move the org from current state to that future. Where we will and won't compete.
3	Capabilities	What must the organization be structurally able to do? Org design, systems, and processes required.
4	Competencies	The specific behavioral skills required in each role to deliver on those capabilities.
5	Talent Assessment	Who can perform at the level the strategy actually requires? Honest calibration, not wishful thinking.
6	Development Plans	How do we close the gap between current performance and what the strategy demands?
7	Relationship	The stakeholder trust architecture that makes execution possible across the enterprise.
8	Alignment	Shared understanding across teams — so what's decided at the top actually happens at the front line.

“MOST LEADERS ARE DOING OPERATIONAL WORK THAT ONLY EXISTS BECAUSE STRATEGIC WORK WAS NEVER DONE. THE CASCADE SHOWS YOU WHERE TO STOP firefighting AND START BUILDING.”

Module 2 — Strategy
 Read the strategy. Design the org.
 Map your leverage.

Module 3 — Teams
 Assess capabilities. Calibrate talent.
 Build development plans.

Module 1 — Relationships
 Build trust. Map stakeholders. Earn
 the access required to execute.

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MODULE 1 · RELATIONSHIPS

THE TRUST EQUATION

Trust is not a feeling — it is a ratio. Four measurable components. The one most leaders ignore is the one that can collapse all the others overnight.

$$\text{TRUST} = \text{CREDIBILITY} + \text{RELIABILITY} + \text{PROFESSIONAL INTIMACY}$$

 SELF-ORIENTATION

CREDIBILITY

Do they believe you know what you're talking about?

Track record, expertise, clarity under pressure.

Thin here = visibility problem. Fix: demonstrate competence in a context they can see.

RELIABILITY

Do they expect you to do what you say?

Follow-through, consistency, no surprises. **Thin here = pattern problem.** Fix: make fewer commitments. Keep every one.

PROFESSIONAL INTIMACY

Do they give you the real picture or the managed version?

Access, candor, psychological safety. **Thin here = they're managing you.** Fix: ask better questions. Stop giving the polished version yourself.

SELF-ORIENTATION ÷ — THE DENOMINATOR

Do they believe you're primarily looking out for yourself?

Even high scores above collapse if this is elevated. Political maneuvering, credit-taking, self-protection — perception matters as much as reality. **Fix: demonstrate visible generosity of credit and interest, in public, consistently.**

Low credibility + low professional intimacy together = they are politely tolerating you. The most dangerous combination because it is invisible.

02

MODULE 1 · RELATIONSHIPS

AOS STAKEHOLDER INQUIRY

Most leaders walk into stakeholder meetings with an agenda. AOS gives you a diagnostic instead. Three questions, in sequence — the goal is to understand what this person is actually dealing with, not to impress them.

A

Ambitions

What does this person care about winning? What does success look like for them — in this role, this org, their career? Not what you assume. What they actually tell you.

O

Obstacles

What's in their way? What are they quietly frustrated by? Where is the org failing them? This is where trust gets built — understanding someone's problem before they've asked you for anything.

S

Support

What kind of help would actually be useful? Not “is there anything I can do?” — a specific, informed offer only someone in your seat can make. This is the move that turns a meeting into a relationship.

PREP TEMPLATE — ONE PER PRIORITY STAKEHOLDER

Complete before every key meeting. What you cannot answer is what you need to ask.

Stakeholder / Role	
Ambitions I already know	
What I'll ask to confirm	
Obstacles I suspect	
What I'll listen for	
My specific support offer	

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MODULE 2 · STRATEGY

THE SEVEN-ELEMENT STRATEGY MAP

A strategy document is not a strategy. Most orgs have elements 1–3 and are missing element 4 — the one that matters most. Without a clear answer to element 4, you cannot delegate, prioritize, or develop talent with any strategic logic.

#	Element	What It Is	The Real Test
1	Aspirations	Long-horizon ambition — what the org wants to become.	Shared across leadership, or on a wall?
2	Mission	Core purpose — why the org exists and for whom.	Does it guide actual decisions?
3	Values	Non-negotiable behaviors.	What does the org reward vs. what it says it values?
4 ★	Strategic Positioning	How the org intends to WIN. The most critical element.	What's true about your strategy that isn't true about your top 3 competitors?
5	Capabilities	What the org can do consistently, at scale, better than competitors.	Do these follow from positioning, or are they legacy holdovers?
6	Metrics	Lag indicators (outcomes) + lead indicators (behaviors).	Are lead indicators tracked, or only results?
7	Priority Actions	The 3–5 bets the org is making in the next 12–18 months.	Are these resourced, or aspirations with no backing?

★ If you cannot describe how your org wins differently from competitors, you do not have a strategy — you have a description of the industry.

THE CASCADE MOST ORGS REVERSE

STRATEGIC POSITIONING ➤ CAPABILITIES ➤ STRUCTURE ➤ TALENT

Making talent decisions before capability decisions — or capability decisions before you can articulate strategic positioning — means working backwards. Most transformation failures trace to this reversal.

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MODULE 3 · TEAMS

THE BEHAVIORAL MATURITY SCALE

Without a behavioral scale, team assessment is opinion — subject to loyalty, proximity bias, and discomfort with low ratings. Observable behavior is the only input two people watching the same person would agree on.

5	<p>Mastery Consistent under pressure and in novel situations. Coaches others. Visible to the broader organization.</p>
4	<p>Proficiency Reliable in familiar situations. Occasional support needed in high-complexity or high-stakes contexts.</p>
3	<p>Development Demonstrates in low-stakes situations. Inconsistent under pressure. Aware of the gap.</p>
2	<p>Early Stage Shows understanding but limited behavioral evidence. Needs structured support and deliberate reps.</p>
1	<p>Not Yet Demonstrated No observable evidence of this capability in this role and context.</p>

STRUCTURAL GAP

Across most of the team. Not a performance management problem — a development system problem. The question is what is missing in how capability is being built.

INDIVIDUAL GAP

One person. Different diagnosis, different intervention. Before concluding fit has development been offered? Has the person received the work that builds the capability?

CAPABILITY MAP TEMPLATE

Team Member	Competency 1	Competency 2	Competency 3	Gap Type (S / I)

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MODULE 3 · TEAMS

HANDOFF CONVERSATION + SBI FEEDBACK

Two conversations. The Handoff is the moment development either begins or does not. The SBI is the moment feedback either lands or produces a defensive reaction. Most leaders skip Part 1 of the Handoff — that is why delegation stays task assignment.

THE HANDOFF CONVERSATION

Use before delegating any significant work. Four parts, in order. **Do not skip Part 1.**

1	Why You	<i>"I'm handing this to you because [specific capability this builds]. Not because it's convenient for me — because it's the right work for where you need to grow."</i>
2	What I Need	<i>"Here's the outcome I need: [specific, observable result]. The how is yours to figure out."</i>
3	Your Authority	<i>"Here's what you can decide without me: [explicit list]. Here's what requires a check-in: [explicit list]. No ambiguity."</i>
4	Where I'm Available	<i>"Here's our check-in: [date, format, purpose]. Not hovering. A defined touchpoint."</i>

THE SBI COACHING CONVERSATION

Works equally for affirming and developmental feedback. Vague positive feedback is as useless as vague critical feedback.

S	Situation	<i>A specific moment — not a pattern. "In the [meeting / call] on [date]..."</i>
B	Behavior	<i>An observable act — not interpretation. "You [did / said / did not do] [specific thing]..."</i>
I	Impact	<i>Effect on team, client, work, or relationship. "The impact was [specific effect]. Here's why that matters: [connect to work or growth]."</i>

If you cannot describe the behavior in observable terms, you are not ready to deliver the feedback.