



LAMDA Solutions

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

The LAMDA Leadership Newsletter

Month 5: Culture, Communication, and Retention

Why do good people leave?

Over the past month, we've explored a question that sits beneath many of the challenges leaders face:

Why do good people stop caring, stop taking ownership, stop speaking up...or eventually leave?

At first, these behaviours can look like separate problems.

- > A disengaged employee.
- > Someone who no longer volunteers.
- > A colleague who seems difficult to communicate with.
- > A team that has stopped challenging ideas.
- > Someone who suddenly decides to leave.

But when we look beneath the behaviour, a different picture emerges.

These aren't necessarily separate problems, rather different stages of the same journey.

Care → Ownership → Communication → Psychological Safety → Retention

People rarely reach the point of leaving because of one conversation!



More often, their decision is shaped by hundreds of small experiences.



People don't experience our intentions. They experience the consequences of our leadership.

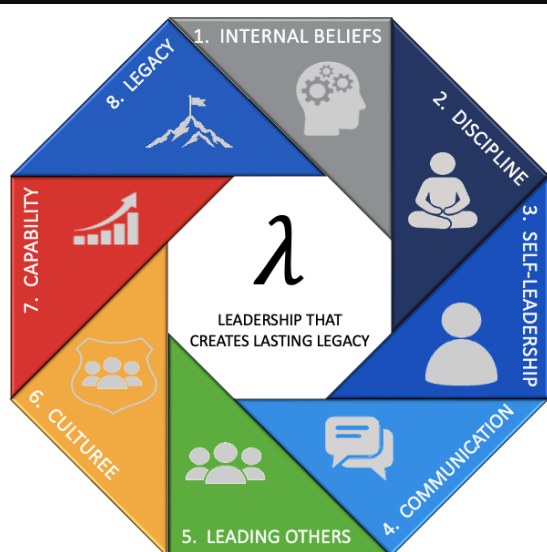
- Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA

The behaviour we see today is often the result of leadership decisions we stopped making yesterday.

- Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA

Every decision which solves today's problem, also teaches tomorrow's culture.

- Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA



A decision that made them feel unseen.

A response that made failure feel unsafe.

A communication style that repeatedly felt like criticism.

An opportunity that stopped coming.

A promise that no longer matched their reality.

Slowly, the gap grows.

Between what they expected...
...and what they experience.

And eventually, they ask themselves:

"Is this still the place for me?"

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THIS MONTH'S CENTRAL QUESTION:

"What are my people learning about what it means to work here?"

Because leadership isn't experienced through our intentions.

It is experienced through:

- Our decisions.
- Our communication.
- Our expectations.
- Our reactions.
- Our support.
- Our recognition.
- And the opportunities we create.

Over time, these experiences become patterns.

Patterns become expectations.

And expectations become culture.

This month, we've explored five connected questions:

- Why do good people stop caring?
- Why do good people stop taking ownership?
- Why do good people experience leadership differently?
- Why do good people stop speaking up?
- And ultimately...why do good people leave?

Leadership is not about being in charge. It's about taking care of those in your charge.

- [Simon Sinek](#)

Managers are the single greatest influence on employee engagement.

- [Gallup](#)

People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it.

- [Simon Sinek](#)

Control leads to compliance; autonomy leads to engagement.

- [Daniel Pink](#)

If you want people to do a good job, give them a good job to do.

- [Frederick Herzberg](#)



EVERY DECISION SENDS TWO MESSAGES
THE LEADER SAW ONE
THE TEAM EXPERIENCED DOZENS OF CONSEQUENCES!

1. Care & Discretionary Effort

"Why do good people stop caring?"

People rarely stop caring overnight, they stop caring one interaction at a time.

- > A change in working expectations.
- > A decision that repeatedly prioritises the operational problem over the human impact.
- > A contribution that goes unnoticed.
- > A commitment that feels increasingly one-sided.

Each individual experience can seem insignificant, but people don't experience leadership as isolated events.

They experience a pattern, and every decision sends two messages.

The practical message: *"This is what we're changing."*

And the psychological message: *"This is how much your life, contribution, and needs matter to us."*

Leaders often focus heavily on communicating the first.

But people remember the second.

> Because one decision may affect:

Childcare | Family Time | Appointments | Sleep
Commitments | Relationships | Time Outside Work

A leader sees one decision.

The team experiences dozens of consequences.

That's why leadership isn't simply about making the right decision.

It's about understanding the lives that decision lands on.

And trust doesn't disappear because of one decision.

It disappears because of what repeated decisions teach people.

"My time isn't valued."

"My commitments don't matter."

"I'll just have to absorb it."

Eventually, discretionary effort begins to disappear.

Not because people suddenly became less motivated.

Because their experiences have slowly changed what they believe their contribution is worth.



The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. *They* are the one that gets the people to do the greatest things.

- Ronald Reagan

Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

- Steven Covey

A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.

- John C. Maxwell

Strength lies in differences, not in similarities.

- Steven Covey



THE ENVIRONMENT IS A BALANCE OF CHALLENGE, SUPPORT, AND FEEDBACK.

LEADERS OFTEN PROVIDE THE FIRST.

BUT INADEQUATELY PROVIDE THE SECOND AND THIRD!

Leadership isn't measured by how much people need you. It's measured by what they can do without you.

- Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA

2. Ownership & The Environment We Create

"Why do good people stop stepping forward?"

Nobody starts a job trying to avoid responsibility.

People generally arrive wanting to contribute.

They want:

- Challenge.
- Responsibility.
- Growth.
- Recognition.
- The opportunity to make a difference.

So, what changes?

Often, the environment around them.

Three things matter enormously:

- **Challenge:** The opportunities that stretch capability.
- **Support:** The tools, resources, systems, and guidance that enable success.
- **Feedback:** The environment that allows people to learn, fail, and improve safely.

All three (challenge, support, and feedback) need to exist together.

Because:

- Challenge without support creates anxiety.
- Support without challenge creates comfort.

And feedback that creates fear eventually destroys the appetite for risk.

People don't learn to fear failure from failure itself. They learn to fear failure through the reactions of those in power.

If every mistake is **criticised**...

If every decision is **second-guessed**...

If every opportunity carries the **risk of blame**...

...eventually capable **people stop volunteering**.

They sit quietly when the opportunity appears.

Not because they lack ambition.

But because they've learned:

"What's the point in stepping forward?"



Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.

- [Warren Bennis](#)

The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority.

- [Ken Blanchard](#)

People rarely withdraw because of one experience. They withdraw when enough experiences begin telling the same story.

- [Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA](#)



This is also where leadership can unintentionally create dependency.

When someone brings us a problem and we immediately solve it, we teach them something:

"I am the expert."

"I make the decisions."

"I take responsibility."

So, they bring us the next problem.

...and the next.

The workload increases.

We become indispensable.

But the team becomes increasingly dependent.

The better leadership question is:

"How can I help them solve this?"

Because one approach solves today's problem.

The other develops tomorrow's leader.

3. Communication & Different Experiences

"Who do good people experience the same leader differently?"

Very few people are actively trying to be difficult.

They're often just different.

A leader may believe they are being:

- Clear.
- Efficient.
- Direct.
- Honest.

Another person may experience exactly the same interaction as:

- Abrupt.
- Dismissive.
- Critical.
- Uncaring.

Neither person is necessarily wrong.

They're experiencing the same interaction through different lenses.



**IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A LEADER TO
ADAPT HOW THEY COMMUNICATE.**

**LEADERSHIP ISN'T EXPECTING EVERYONE
TO UNDERSTAND YOUR COMMUNICATION
STYLE.**

IT'S UNDERSTANDING THEIRS!

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

- [George Bernard Shaw](#)

Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.

- [Stephen Covey](#)

Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind.

- [Brené Brown](#)

The medium is the message.

- [Marshall McLuhan](#)



Throughout our lives, our experiences create internal beliefs about:

- Ourselves.
- Other people.
- Relationships.
- Authority.
- Success.
- Failure.

These beliefs influence how we interpret what happens around us.

> We don't simply hear words.

> We interpret what we believe those words mean.

This creates one of the most important distinctions in leadership:

Intention ≠ Experience

What were you trying to communicate?

And what did they actually experience?

The gap between intention and experience is where many relationship problems begin.

And the responsibility isn't equal.

When there is a difference in power, the responsibility to adapt increases.

A colleague may feel able to challenge another colleague's communication.

A team member may not feel psychologically safe enough to challenge their manager.

So, if the person with greater influence is unaware of how their communication lands...

...the person with less power adapts instead.

They:

- Speak less.
- Offer fewer ideas.
- Avoid difficult conversations.
- Stop challenging.
- Withdraw.

This is why adapting our communication isn't about becoming inauthentic.

It's about recognising that our preferred style isn't universal.

Leadership isn't expecting people to understand our style.

> It's understanding theirs.

Culture is what repeated experiences teach people.

- [Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA](#)

**EVERYTHING I SAY SEEMS TO BE TAKEN
THE WRONG WAY!**



**I GOT STRAIGHT TO THE POINT.
I TRIED TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM.
THEY PROBABLY THINK I'M BEING ABRUPT!
MAYBE A BIT DISMISSIVE.**

Psychological safety is a climate in which one can speak candidly.

- [Amy Edmondson](#)



**DON'T BE THE LEADER YOU
EXPERIENCED...**

...DON'T LEAD EVERYONE THE SAME WAY.

**LEARN HOW EACH PERSON NEEDS TO BE
LED!**

4. Psychological Safety

"Why do some teams stop speaking up?"

Psychological safety doesn't suddenly appear when something goes wrong.

It is built long before the difficult conversation arrives.

It is created through ordinary interactions.

Every conversation teaches people something:

"Can I ask for help here?"

"Can I disagree here?"

"Can I admit I don't know?"

"Can I make a mistake here?"

"Can I be myself here?"

And perhaps most importantly:

"Does my voice matter?"

Psychological safety grows when people repeatedly experience being:

- Heard.
- Understood.
- Trusted.
- Supported.
- Challenged fairly.
- Recognised.

This is why leadership cannot simply be about treating everyone the same.

People don't all need the same leader.

They need:

The same standards, delivered in different ways.

One person may need more freedom.

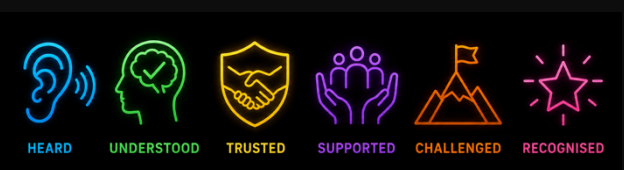
> Another may need more structure.

One may grow through challenge.

> Another may need reassurance first.

One may need you beside them.

> Another may need you to step back.



You don't build psychological safety by making people comfortable. You build it by making it safe for them to be honest.

- [Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA](#)

Psychological safety is not about being nice.

- [Amy Edmondson, HBR](#)

Psychological safety – a shared belief among team members that it's okay to speak up with candour...

- [Amy Edmondson and Michaela Kerrissey, HBR](#)

The opposite of psychological safety is not psychological danger.

- [Amy Edmondson](#)

HOW DO I BECOME BETTER FOR MY TEAM?



SAME STANDARDS...
...DIFFERENT LEADER!

ASK YOURSELF:

WHO ON YOUR TEAM NEEDS SOMETHING
DIFFERENT FROM YOU NEXT WEEK?

The standard can stay the same, whilst the leadership changes.

- [Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA](#)

Fairness isn't giving everybody identical leadership.

Fairness is **creating the conditions** each person needs to succeed.

And when that happens consistently, something changes.

People begin to:

- Speak up earlier.
- Ask for help sooner.
- Challenge ideas.
- Share mistakes.
- Take responsibility.
- Contribute more freely.

Not because they suddenly became more confident.

Because they became safer.

5. The Expectation-Reality Gap

“Why do good people eventually leave?”

This is where it all comes together.

People leave for different reasons.

Sometimes:

“My face doesn't fit anymore.”

> Their values and ambitions no longer feel aligned with the organisation.

Sometimes:

“I no longer feel valued or respected.”

> The opportunities, recognition, or development they once experienced have gradually disappeared.

And sometimes:

“I've hit a ceiling here.”

They have grown, developed and progressed...
...but can no longer see a future.



PEOPLE LEAVE LEADERS...DO THEY?!

**SOMETIMES THEY LEAVE
THE GAP BETWEEN:**

EXPECTATION

AND

REALITY!

Understanding why employees leave is central to effective retention.

- [CIPD](#)

People need clear expectations, meaningful recognition, development opportunities, and a strong sense of purpose.

- [Gallup](#)

Employees whose manager involved them in goal setting were nearly 4 times more likely to be engaged.

- [Gallup](#)

	DISCIPLINE » Neglect to check-in on the individuals on their team.
	SELF » Neglect to build relationships where mutual trust can grow.
	COMMUNICATION » Tells team members they aren't seen, heard, or valued.
	OTHERS » Those looking to progress feel they cannot do so here.
	CULTURE » People feel the gap between expectations and lived reality.
	DECISION MAKING » Individuals make decisions over over their future.
	CAPABILITY » High potential leaves → Collective capability suffers.
	SUCCESSION » Strongest leadership potential strengthens elsewhere.
	LEGACY » No succession = No future.

Three very different experiences.

But beneath them is a common thread:

EXPECTATION vs REALITY

People arrive with expectations.

They expect:

- Opportunities.
- Development.
- Recognition.
- Progression.
- Responsibility.
- Support.
- A future.

Over time, they compare those expectations with their lived experience.

When the two remain broadly aligned, people are more likely to feel that they belong.

When the gap grows...
...something changes.

They start asking:

“Is this still the place for me?”

The gap between what people expect and what they experience is where retention begins to break.

- [Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA](#)

A leader doesn't control every factor that determines whether someone stays.

But they have enormous influence over the gap.

And the danger is that we often assume we know what our people want.

> We don't.

We don't need to ask.

"How are things going?"

But instead:

> What are you enjoying?

> What are you finding difficult?

> Where do you want to develop?

> What are your ambitions?

> What do you expect from your role?

> How do you see your future?

> What do you need from me?

And perhaps the most important question:

"Does your experience match your expectations?"

Because sometimes the most important leadership conversation is the one we discover we should have had months ago.

The strongest leaders don't create dependency. They create dependency.

- [Christopher T. Waters, LAMDA](#)

Our 12 LAMDA Leadership Insights

Insight 1 – Care:

- When people stop believing their contribution matters, they rarely stop caring immediately. They first reduce the amount of themselves they are willing to invest.

Insight 2 – Ownership:

- People don't need leaders to remove every risk. They need leaders who make it safe to take reasonable risks, learn from failure, and try again.

Insight 3 – Dependency:

- Every problem a leader solves teaches the team something. The question is whether it teaches them how to solve the next problem, or simply where to bring it.

Insight 4 – Communication:

- The meaning within communication isn't determined when the words leave our mouth. It is determined when the other person decides what those words mean.

Insight 5 – Power:

- The greater our position of influence, the less we can rely on others to tell us when our behaviour isn't landing well. The responsibility to notice and adapt therefore sits disproportionately with the leader.

WHY AM I LOSING GOOD PEOPLE?



YOU THINK YOU KNOW...

...BUT HAVE YOU ASKED?

WHAT WOULD YOUR TEAM SAY...

...IF YOU ASKED THEM WHAT THEY EXPECT?

NOW YOU KNOW...

...WHAT WILL YOU DO?

HOW WILL YOU CLOSE...

...THE GAP BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND REALITY?

The LAMDA Diagnostic

The LAMDA Integrated Leadership Framework allows us to trace these behaviours back towards their underlying causes.

A person may appear disengaged.

> But perhaps their environment has repeatedly told them their contribution isn't valued.

A person may stop volunteering.

> But perhaps they have learned that failure isn't safe.

A person may appear difficult.

> But perhaps the communication between leader and team member has become increasingly dissonant.

A team may stop speaking up.

> But perhaps repeated experiences have taught them that challenge isn't welcome.

A person may eventually leave.

> But perhaps the gap between expectation and reality has been growing for some time.

This is why leadership problems rarely exist in isolation.

> They move through the system.

INTERNAL BELIEFS

> What do we believe about ourselves and others, from our experiences?

MOTIVATION

> What underlying motivating factors drives the leader?

DISCIPLINE

> What behaviour from the leader starts this?

SELF

> What assumptions, pressures and behaviours are we bringing into our leadership?

COMMUNICATION

> What are people actually hearing and experiencing?

OTHERS

> What does each individual need from us to succeed?

CULTURE

> What patterns are our repeated behaviours creating?

DECISION MAKING

> What are our decisions teaching people about what matters?

CAPABILITY

> Are we developing people...or creating dependency?

SUCCESSION

> Who is becoming more capable because we lead them?

LEGACY

The behaviour we see today is often the visible end of a much longer leadership process.



INTERNAL BELIEFS



MOTIVATION



DISCIPLINE



SELF



COMMUNICATION



OTHERS



CULTURE



DECISION MAKING



CAPABILITY



SUCCESSION



LEGACY

CARE → OWNERSHIP → COMMUNICATION → PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY → RETENTION

Our 12 LAMDA Leadership Insights

Insight 6 – Psychological Safety:

- Psychological safety is not created the moment, someone finally speaks up. It is created through all the previous moments that taught them whether speaking up was safe.

Insight 7 – Individualised Leadership:

- Treating everyone equally sounds fair, but identical leadership can create very different experiences. Fairness sometimes means changing our approach whilst keeping the standards intact.

Insight 8 – Culture:

- Culture isn't created by what leaders say they value. It emerges from what people repeatedly experience being rewarded, tolerated, challenges, and ignored.

Insight 9 – Retention:

- People don't need every expectation to be fulfilled. But they do need to understand when the reality has changed, and to believe their leader is willing to have that conversation with them.

The Leadership Question

Perhaps the most important lesson from this month is that people rarely leave because of one moment.

They leave after experiencing enough moments that change what they believe about their future.

Enough moments where:

- Their contribution felt unseen.
- Their voice felt unheard.
- Their development stalled.
- Their mistakes felt unsafe.
- Their communication felt misunderstood.
- Their expectations drifted away from reality.

And eventually, the question becomes:

“Do I want to continue experiencing this?”

As a leader, we may not be able to remove every frustration.

We cannot fulfil every ambition.

We cannot guarantee every promotion.

We cannot prevent every difficult decision.

But we can remain curious.

- We can ask.
- We can listen.
- We can adapt.
- We can create opportunities.
- We can provide support.
- We can respond to failure with learning.

And we can regularly check whether the experience we are creating still matches what our people believed they were joining.

Because leadership isn't about preventing people from ever becoming unhappy.

It's about creating an environment where people feel able to tell us when something isn't right.

Before the gap becomes too large...and they leave.

Our 12 LAMDA Leadership Insights

Insight 10 – Expectation vs Reality:

- The expectation-reality gap doesn't necessarily mean someone will leave. But an unmanaged gap gives them a reason to start imagining somewhere else.

Insight 11 – Leadership Responsibility:

- We cannot control every reason someone leaves. We can, however, control how curious we are about what they are experiencing before leaving becomes their only solution.

Insight 12 – Legacy:

- The ultimate test of leadership isn't what happens whilst we are present. It's what people continue to think, do, believe, and share when we are no longer there to influence them.

Overview:

When people stop caring, stop taking ownership, communicate less openly, or start looking elsewhere, the visible behaviour is not the beginning of the story. It's often the result of the hundreds of small experiences that came before it.

As a leader it starts with understanding our own beliefs, motivations, assumptions, reactions, and habits before we can try to influence anyone else. From there, our communication is the bridge between our intentions and another person's experience.

Start with a Conversation. Lead with Curiosity.



Choose – choose 3 people from your team.
No Agenda. No Intent to Fix.



Ask – ask open, meaningful questions.
Create Space for Honesty.



Listen – listen fully without interrupting or preparing a response.
Seek to Understand.



Reflect – take time to reflect on what you heard.
Look for Patterns, Not Just Problems.



Understand – not every gap can be closed, not every expectation can be fulfilled.
But they can be understood.



Act with Intent – use understanding to have honest conversations about what happens next.
Clarity Builds Trust. Trust Builds Retention.

When we understand our people, we create the foundation for real engagement, growth, and retention.

Your Leadership Challenge

This week, choose **three people** in your team to sit down with.

- > Don't give them an agenda.
- > Don't try to solve anything.

Just ask:

- **What are you enjoying about your role?**
- **What would you like to develop?**
- **What are you hoping to achieve?**
- **What do you need from me?**
- **What do you expect your future here to look like?**

And finally:

"Is your experience here matching what you expected?"

Then listen.

- > Don't defend.
- > Don't explain.
- > Don't immediately try to fix everything.

Just listen.

- > Not every gap can be closed.
 - > Not every expectation can be fulfilled.
- But they can be **understood**.

And once we understand it...

...we can have a much more honest conversation about what happens next.

The LAMDA Leadership Reflection

At the beginning of this newsletter, we asked:

“Why do good people leave?”

Perhaps the better question is:

“What have we taught them to believe about working here?”

Because culture isn't created through one-off initiatives.

It is created through accumulated experiences.

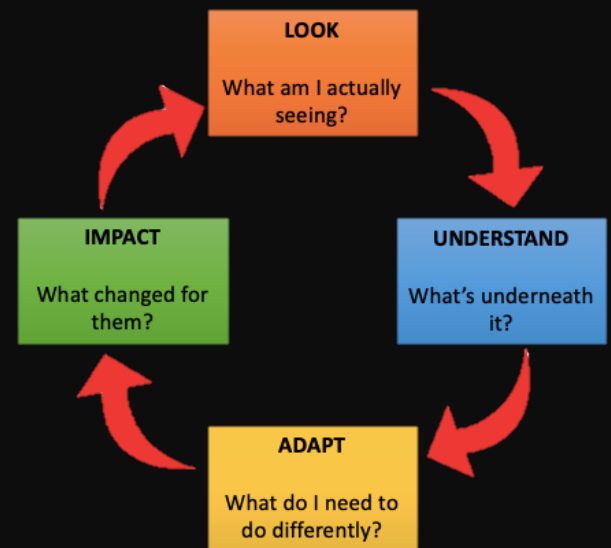
> And those experiences become beliefs.

> Those beliefs influence behaviour.

> Behaviour shapes culture.

> And culture ultimately influences whether people:

- Care.
- Contribute.
- Speak.
- Grow.
- Stay.



What are my people learning about leadership from me?

> Not what do I tell them leadership is.

> Not what do I intend leadership to be.

But what does experiencing my leadership teach them every day?



Our **leadership** isn't **remembered** for what we **say** or **do** in isolation...

...it's remembered for how we **make people feel** about **themselves** and **their future**!



The challenge for every leader is therefore not simply to ask:

“How do I keep my people?”

It is to ask:

“What kind of environment would make good people want to stay?”

That starts with us.

It starts with how we lead ourselves.

It continues through how we communicate and lead others.

And ultimately, it becomes the culture we leave behind.

Because people may forget what we said.

They may forget individual decisions.

But they rarely forget what working with us taught them about their own value.

The LAMDA Integrated Leadership Framework

The LAMDA Integrated Leadership Framework provides a connected pathway for developing leadership at every level:

Lead Yourself → Lead Others → Lead a Legacy

Leadership develops from the inside out.

We begin by understanding ourselves:

- Motivation.
- Discipline.
- Emotional regulation.
- Self-awareness.
- Leadership identity.

We then use that awareness to lead others:

- Communication.
- Trust.
- Relationships.
- Psychological safety.
- Accountability.
- Capability.

And ultimately, we create something that extends beyond ourselves:

- Culture.
- Succession.
- Independence.
- Shared standards.
- Legacy.

The LAMDA Integrated Leadership Framework Self-Reflection:

Discipline: What leadership behaviour do I need to become more intentional about?

Self: What leadership behaviour do I need to become more intentional about?

Communication: What leadership behaviour do I need to become more intentional about?

Others: Who needs something different from me?

Culture: What are my repeated behaviours teaching people to expect?

Decision Making: What behaviour did my recent decisions reinforce?

Capability: Where am I solving problems which my team could learn to solve?

Legacy: If I left tomorrow, what would continue because of me?



Because leadership isn't simply about getting more from people.

It's about creating the conditions in which people can become more.

And perhaps the greatest test of our leadership is not what happens when we're in the room...

...but what happens when we're not.

If your people disappeared tomorrow, what would they say they had learnt about themselves because you led them?

And if you disappeared tomorrow...

What would continue because of the way you led today?

Partner with LAMDA Solutions

At LAMDA Solutions, we work with organisations and individuals to develop confident, capable middle leaders who can drive performance and shape culture.

Through leadership coaching, workshops, and leadership development programmes, we help leaders move beyond simply managing performance... ...and towards building the capability, culture, and succession that creates sustainable leadership.

If you'd like to explore what this could look like within your organisation, reach out via LinkedIn or contact LAMDA Solutions.

The conversation starts with a question.