

EMPOWER2Evolve

PRESENTS

Are You Leading or Reacting?

The Invisible Barriers Diagnostic for Leaders

Most leaders don't know they're reactive. That's what makes it so costly.

This diagnostic takes 10 minutes. It will show you exactly where reactive patterns are running your decisions, your relationships, and your results. You will also see what it looks like to lead from the other side.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- A 15-question diagnostic to reveal where reactive patterns are costing you most
- Your score + what it means for your leadership right now
- The three invisible barriers most leaders never name
- Three shifts you can make this week
- A reflection to take this from insight to action

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Before You Begin

Let's be real. Most leaders I work with are highly capable, deeply committed, and genuinely believe they're leading well. And they are, most of the time. The problem isn't a lack of skill or intention. The problem is what happens when pressure hits.

Under pressure, our brains revert to survival mode. We focus on the problem instead of the outcome. We protect ourselves instead of connecting with others. We react instead of choosing. And because it happens so automatically, most of us don't even see it until we look at the patterns.

That's what this diagnostic is for. Not to judge, not to label. This is to bring into focus what's already operating in the background. Because once you can name it, you can change it.

Answer each question based on how you actually behave, not how you aspire to behave. The only way this is useful is if you're honest.

PART 1: THE DIAGNOSTIC

For each statement below, check the response that most accurately describes your behavior. Circle or highlight your answer.

Section A: Where Is Your Focus?

These questions reveal whether your attention defaults to problems or to outcomes.

1

When a project goes sideways, my first instinct is to figure out what went wrong **and** who dropped the ball.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

2

I spend more mental energy thinking about the problems in front of me than the outcomes I want to create.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

3

In a difficult meeting, I find myself focused on what's already broken rather than what we're trying to build.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

4

When I'm stressed, I tend to move into "fix it" or "manage it" mode rather than asking what I most want to create from this situation.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

Section B: How Are You Showing Up?

These questions reveal which role you tend to play when pressure is high.

5

When a team member struggles, my first move is to solve the problem for them rather than ask what they think or what they need.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

6

I get frustrated when people don't perform at the standard I expect, and that frustration shows up in how I communicate.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

7

I often feel like I'm the one who **cares most, works hardest**, or holds the team together. And that's exhausting.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

8

When I give feedback, I sometimes leave the conversation wondering if I shut the other person down rather than opened them up.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

9

I avoid certain conversations because I don't want to deal with the conflict or the emotional fallout.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

Section C: What Actions Are You Taking?

These questions reveal whether your actions are driven by anxiety or by intention.

10

I find it hard to delegate, either because I don't trust others to do it right or because it feels faster to do it myself.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

11

I leave meetings, calls, or difficult conversations feeling drained, like I was managing or performing rather than leading.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

12

My team rarely pushes back on my ideas or tells me when something isn't working.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

13

I react quickly in the moment and sometimes realize later that I responded out of frustration, defensiveness, or assumptions.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

14

My mood, stress level, or intensity sets the tone for my team's day, and not always in a good way.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

15

I know what I need to do differently as a leader, but something keeps pulling me back to the same patterns.

Rarely / Never

Sometimes

Often / Always

PART 2: YOUR SCORE

How to Score

Assign points to each response:

| Response | Points |
|----------------|----------|
| Rarely / Never | 1 point |
| Sometimes | 2 points |
| Often / Always | 3 points |

Add up your total from all 15 questions. The maximum score is 45.

MY TOTAL SCORE:

What Your Score Means

15 - 24 POINTS

Mostly in the Creative Zone

You're largely leading from intention rather than reaction. You tend to stay outcome-focused, bring a coaching mindset to your relationships, and recover quickly when pressure hits. The invisible barriers still exist. They're just less dominant right now. Your work is to stay conscious and deepen the practice, especially in the areas where you still checked "Sometimes."

Your next move: Read Part 3 and notice which of the three barriers shows up most for you, even at low intensity.

25 - 34 POINTS

The Reactive Pull Is Real

You're operating in a mix: sometimes leading from a creative, outcome-focused place, and sometimes getting pulled into reactive patterns, especially when the pressure is high. This is actually the most common range for high-performing leaders. You're capable and committed, and the reactive patterns are costing you more than you realize in energy, relationships, and results.

Your next move: Part 4 has three specific shifts that will create immediate traction. Start there.

35 - 45 POINTS

The Invisible Barriers Are Running the Show

Here's the thing: a high score doesn't mean you're a bad leader. It means you're in an environment where reactive patterns have become the default, driving more of your decisions than you may want. The good news? You just named it. Most leaders never get this far. What you're experiencing isn't a character flaw. It's a focus problem, a relationship pattern, and an action loop. All of which can change.

Your next move: You need more than tips. Part 5 has a reflection exercise to help you identify where to start. The invitation at the end of this guide is worth reading.

PART 3: THE THREE INVISIBLE BARRIERS

Reactive leadership isn't random. It follows a pattern, and that pattern is driven by three interconnected barriers that most leaders never name. Here's what they are, and how they show up.

Barrier 1: Your Focus Is Locked on the Problem

There's a model I use with every leader I work with called FISBE: Focus, Inner State, Behavior. Here's how it works. Wherever you put your focus determines how you feel. How you feel drives how you act. And how you act produces results that reinforce your original focus.

When your focus is locked on the problem (the underperforming team member, the broken process, the difficult stakeholder), your inner state shifts to anxiety, frustration, or defensiveness. From that inner state, your behavior becomes reactive: controlling, blaming, fixing, or withdrawing. And the results you produce tend to deepen the problem you were focused on in the first place.

The shift is deceptively simple: move your focus from the problem to the outcome you actually want to create. Not as a bypass of reality, but as a reorientation toward what you can actually build from here. This is the first 3 Vital Question: **Where are you putting your focus?**

Barrier 2: You're Playing a Role You Don't Know You're Playing

When pressure hits, most of us slip into one of three reactive roles. The Victim: the part of us that feels powerless, overwhelmed, or at the mercy of circumstances. The Persecutor: the part that criticizes, blames, or pushes hard to make the anxiety stop. The Rescuer: the part that swoops in to fix, take over, or smooth things over, often enabling the very dynamic we're trying to solve.

These roles don't feel reactive from the inside. They feel completely justified. The leader who micromanages isn't thinking "I'm being a Persecutor." They're thinking "My team keeps dropping the ball and I'm accountable for results." The leader who avoids conflict isn't thinking "I'm playing Victim." They're thinking "This isn't worth the fallout."

The second 3 Vital Question asks: **How are you relating to others?** Are you seeing them as capable people with potential, or as problems to manage, crises to survive, and liabilities to protect yourself from?

Barrier 3: Your Actions Are Driven by Anxiety, Not Intention

Reactive leaders aren't lazy or indifferent. If anything, they're overworking. Trying harder, pushing more, filling every gap themselves. But when action is driven by anxiety rather than intention, it tends to create more of what it's trying to solve.

The leader who takes over because they're anxious about results ends up with a team that stops bringing their best thinking. The leader who avoids difficult conversations because they're anxious about conflict ends up with a team that stops being honest. The leader who keeps rescuing ends up exhausted, resentful, and surrounded by people who have learned to wait for them to fix it.

The third 3 Vital Question asks: **What actions are you taking?** And are those actions moving you toward what you want to create, or away from what you want to avoid?

PART 4: THREE SHIFTS TO MAKE THIS WEEK

Insight without action is just interesting. Here are three concrete shifts you can make in the next seven days to start interrupting reactive patterns and leading from a more intentional place.

Shift 1: Practice the Pause

Between every trigger and your response, there is a moment. Neuroscience tells us it's approximately six seconds, long enough for your prefrontal cortex to come back online after your amygdala fires. Most reactive responses happen in the gap before the pause.

This week: when you feel the familiar pull of frustration, urgency, or defensiveness, simply name it internally. "I'm reactive right now." That naming creates just enough distance to choose differently. You don't have to have the perfect response. You just have to interrupt the automatic one.

REACTIVE

React immediately when triggered

->

CREATIVE

Name the trigger, create a pause, then choose

Shift 2: Move from Problem to Outcome

In your next difficult conversation, meeting, or moment of frustration, catch yourself if your focus has locked onto the problem. Then ask yourself one question: "What do I actually want to create from this?" Not what do I want to avoid. Not what's wrong. What do I want to build?

This shift in focus changes everything downstream: your inner state, your tone, your questions, your listening. It's the most high-leverage move I know, and it's available to you in any moment.

REACTIVE

"What went wrong and who's responsible?"

->

CREATIVE

"What do I want to create from here?"

Shift 3: Ask One More Question Before You Act

The next time someone brings you a problem, resist the impulse to fix it. Instead, ask: "What do you think?" or "What have you already tried?" or "What do you need from me to move this forward?" These aren't soft questions. They're the questions that develop your team's capacity, build trust, and free you from being the bottleneck.

It takes longer in the moment. It saves you enormously over time.

REACTIVE

Jump in with the solution

->

CREATIVE

Ask one question before you act

PART 5: YOUR LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

This is the most important part of the diagnostic. Insight lives in the head. Change starts when you get specific.

Looking at my diagnostic score and the three barriers, where is reactivity costing me the most right now?

If I'm honest, which of the three reactive roles do I play most often, and in what situations does it show up?

What outcome do I most want to create in my leadership over the next 90 days?

What is the ONE shift, from Part 4, that I will commit to practicing this week?

What Comes Next

The fact that you completed this diagnostic tells me something about you. You're not just hoping things will be different. You're actually willing to look at what's true.

That's the hardest part. Everything else is a practice.

If you're ready to go deeper, here's where leaders like you start:

THE 3 VITAL QUESTIONS® WORKSHOP

A half-day or full-day experience for leaders and teams. You'll learn the full framework, map your current patterns, and leave with a concrete practice.

Ideal if: you want to bring this work to your team or organization.

LEADERSHIP EVOLUTION COACHING

1:1 coaching designed for leaders who are ready to do the deeper work. We use your real challenges as the curriculum and build from there.

Ideal if: you're ready to accelerate your own evolution.

Either way, the next step is the same. [Click here](#) to book a 15-minute strategy call with Ann, and let's talk about what your score means for your team.

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About Ann Mosso

Ann Mosso is a certified 3 Vital Questions® Practitioner, certified TED* Coach, Leadership Circle Profile practitioner, and co-founder of EMPOWER2Evolve. Ann brings over 30 years of business experience, including a long career as a CPA, to her leadership coaching work, helping leaders and organizations dismantle the invisible barriers holding them back. Her approach is grounded in real-world frameworks, not theory, focused on one outcome: evolving from reactivity to resilience for lasting influence.

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