

# What's Yours to Carry:

## A SoLead Reflection Guide for Leaders & Teams

There is a difference between caring deeply and carrying everything.

Many thoughtful, responsible people spend enormous energy holding things that are real and important, but not fully within their control. Over time, that can create exhaustion, resentment, anxiety, and a feeling of always being "on."

This guide is an invitation to pause and sort through what is actually yours to tend to, what belongs to others, and where you still have room to act with clarity and care.

You do not have to solve everything to begin breathing again.

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## How to Use This Guide

### **Solo**

Work through it in 20-30 minutes with coffee and quiet. Write in the margins. Be honest.

### **With your team**

Spend 45 minutes together. Each person completes their own circles first (silently, 10 min), then shares what feels shareable. Listen without trying to fix.

### **With family and friends**

Simplify the language and do just the circles exercise. It works at any age.

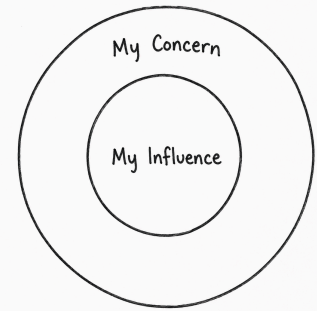
**There are no right answers.**

**The only rule: be truthful about what's actually in your control.**

# PART 1: YOUR CIRCLES

## Step 1: Draw Two Circles

On a blank piece of paper, draw two circles—one inside the other, like a target. Label the outer circle "My Concern" and the inner circle "My Influence."



## Step 2: Fill the Outer Circle (Concern)

In the outer circle, list everything that weighs on you right now. Don't filter. Include:

- Work challenges (projects, team dynamics, goals)
- Organizational or systemic issues (culture, policy, inequality)
- Personal responsibilities (family, health, finances)
- Larger concerns (the state of the world, politics, climate, justice issues)
- Anything that keeps you up at night or takes up mental energy

Examples:

- Getting my team aligned on priorities
- My manager's leadership style
- Staffing shortages in our sector
- My parent's health
- The polarization I see everywhere
- Whether our work actually matters
- Climate change
- The economy

## Step 3: Fill the Inner Circle (Influence)

Now, in the inner circle, list **only what you can actually control, affect, or directly shape**. This is the hardest part—and the most important.

✓ Influence includes:

- Your own choices and actions
- How you show up in conversations
- Decisions you can make
- Boundaries you can set
- People or teams you directly lead
- Relationships you can invest in
- How you spend your time and energy

✗ Influence does **NOT** include:

- Other people's choices
- Systemic change that requires many actors
- The state of the world
- Your boss's decisions (unless you can influence them)
- The past

Examples of what goes in the inner circle:

- How I run my team meetings
- The conversation I can have with my manager about priorities
- Whether I delegate the report I've been holding
- When I take my lunch break
- How I respond to my team's stress
- The one project I can actually focus on this quarter
- Whether I protect time for strategic thinking
- How honestly I listen

**The litmus test: If you're carrying it but can't actually change it, it belongs in the outer circle.**

## Step 4: Shade the Inner Circle

Use a pen, highlighter, or just shade it lightly. You're visually saying: "This is what's actually mine. This is what I can tend to."

Look at your shaded inner circle. **Notice how much smaller it is than the outer circle.** That's not a failure of ambition. That's clarity.

## PART 2: MINING FOR OXYGEN



Now that you can see what's in your actual sphere of influence, the next question is: Which of these could feel like oxygen this week?

Oxygen = something that would ease the exhaustion, restore a bit of aliveness, or give you back a small piece of agency.

It's usually small. It doesn't solve the big problem. But it shifts something.

## Examples of oxygen:

### At work:

- Having one honest conversation with a colleague instead of a performative one
- Saying "no" to one thing and meaning it
- Delegating something you've been holding
- Taking your actual lunch break
- Ending work at a real time (not 10 p.m.)
- Asking for help with something specific
- Having a planning session instead of reacting all week

**In leadership:**

- Running one meeting differently (asking better questions, shorter, more listening)
- Giving feedback you've been avoiding
- Protecting time for strategy instead of only crisis management
- Having your team do something without you solving it first
- Setting one boundary with an over-functioning colleague

**Personal:**

- Taking a walk during work hours
- Saying no to one obligation that doesn't align with what matters
- Having a real conversation with someone you trust
- Protecting time for something you care about
- Asking for support at home

**In community:**

- Showing up to one meeting you've been avoiding
- Calling one person you've been meaning to reach out to
- Having a conversation across difference instead than staying in your silo

# Your Turn

Look at your inner circle. What is one thing you could do this week that would feel like real oxygen?

Write it down. Be specific. Include when you'll do it.

Not:	Better:
"Be more present with my team"	"Have one 15-minute coffee conversation with my team member on Wednesday without checking my phone"
"Set boundaries"	"I will not check email after 6 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday"

**Your oxygen action:**


## PART 3: NOTICING THE RIPPLE

This matters: when you recover your own presence and make one small choice aligned with what's actually yours, other people notice. The practice becomes contagious.

After you do your oxygen action, pause and notice:

- How did it feel in your body? (More spacious? More tired? More clear?)
- Did it change how you showed up in any conversation? (More patient? More present? More willing to listen?)
- Did anyone else respond differently to you? (Did your team relax? Did someone open up?)
- What became possible that wasn't possible before? (A new idea? A difficult conversation? A delegation?)

**Write down one thing you notice.**


## PART 4: FOR TEAMS

If you're doing this with your team:

### Step 1: Individual work (10 min)

Everyone completes their own circles silently. No talking yet.

### Step 2: Pair share (10 min)

Turn to one person next to you. Share your inner circle only (not your whole concern circle). What's actually in your control? Listen. Ask: "What would feel like oxygen for you?"

### Step 3: Group reflection (15 min)

Come back to the full group. Don't overshare the detail, but notice together:

- What patterns do you see in what's actually in people's influence circles?
- What does your team have collective influence over?
- What are you carrying that you don't actually have control of?
- How much energy is going to the outer circles?

## Step 4: Make one team agreement (10 min)

As a team, what is one thing you could protect or change in your sphere of influence? Examples:

- We will not have meetings before 9 a.m. or after 4 p.m.
- We will end our standup in 15 minutes, not 45.
- We will have one strategy conversation per month instead of only reacting.
- We will delegate one thing per person per quarter.
- We will ask "Is this mine to carry?" when we feel overwhelmed.

Make it small. Make it real. Make it yours.

**Our team oxygen action:**


## PART 5: A COACHING QUESTION TO RETURN TO

Keep this question somewhere visible. Return to it when you feel the swirl returning:

**"What is mine to carry, and what is not?"**

That's it. Answered honestly, it reorganizes your week. Answered repeatedly, it reorganizes your culture.

## PART 6: THREE REMINDERS

### 1. The outer circle doesn't go away.

Your concern is real. The problems are real. You still care deeply about them. The outer circle just isn't your job alone. You're part of a larger ecosystem of people and systems. You get to tend to your part.

### 2. Your inner circle is enough.

One person can't solve systemic problems. But one person who is resourced, present, and clear can shift the culture around them. That's not small. That's everything.

### 3. Oxygen is not selfish.

Taking a walk, protecting your time, asking for help, setting a boundary—these aren't luxuries you earn after you've solved everything. They're the fuel that makes you able to show up at all. A burnt-out leader can't imagine. A disconnected person can't collaborate. A depleted team can't innovate.

**Your presence matters. Your clarity matters. Your aliveness matters.**

It ripples.

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### Questions?

This guide is a living thing. If a question comes up that this doesn't answer, or if you try something and it shifts something, we'd love to hear.

We're building this practice with you.

In partnership,  
Glori & Cris



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