



Leadership Recovery Decision Guide

A Practical Tool for HR Leaders, CEOs, and Sponsors

Purpose of This Guide

This guide helps decision-makers determine what type of leadership situation they are facing (development, recovery, or transition) and what kind of intervention is appropriate now, before time, trust, or optionality erodes further.

It is designed to support clarity, not comfort.

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is for you if:

- You are responsible for a senior leader whose role viability is being questioned, quietly or explicitly
- You are hearing repeated feedback themes without clear improvement
- You are unsure whether coaching is enough or whether it is already too late
- You want to act fairly, decisively, and defensibly without rushing to performance management or delay

Step 1: Identify Which Window You Are In

Use the statements below honestly. More than one “yes” in a section is usually enough to indicate the window.

Window 1: Development (Coaching Appropriate)

- ☐ The leader is broadly trusted and seen as an asset
- ☐ Performance is solid, even if range or style needs expansion
- ☐ Feedback is intended to accelerate growth, not mitigate risk
- ☐ Sponsorship is visible and stable
- ☐ Time and patience are still available

If this fits: Developmental coaching, feedback, and stretch assignments are appropriate.

Window 2: Compressed Window (Leadership Recovery Territory)

- ☐ Confidence in the leader is narrowing, even if results remain acceptable
- ☐ Feedback themes are repeating with limited visible change
- ☐ Stakeholders are questioning whether this can work
- ☐ HR has been asked to “support,” “monitor,” or “keep an eye on” the situation
- ☐ Alternatives or successors are being quietly discussed
- ☐ Coaching has been tried or proposed, but without explicit conditions or timelines

If this fits: You are in true leadership recovery territory. Action must be explicit, time-bound, and decision-oriented.

Window 3: Decision Point (Transition Likely)

- ☐ Sponsorship has weakened or become conditional
- ☐ Key decision-makers have already formed private conclusions
- ☐ The organization is preparing contingency plans
- ☐ The leader is no longer being positioned for success
- ☐ “Support” is present, but confidence is not

If this fits: Recovery may no longer be viable. The priority shifts to clarity and dignified transition, not development.

Step 2: Pressure-Test the Coaching Assumption

Before assigning or continuing, coaching, answer the following:

- ☐ Are expectations and risks explicitly named, or left implied?
- ☐ Is sponsorship visible and genuine, or merely procedural?
- ☐ Is there a shared understanding of how much time remains?
- ☐ Will progress be evaluated against clear recovery conditions, or general effort?
- ☐ Are decision-makers prepared to act if conditions are not met?

If you cannot answer these confidently, coaching alone is unlikely to change the outcome, regardless of the coach’s quality.

Step 3: Determine Whether Recovery Is Still Possible

Recovery is not about optimism. It is about feasibility.

Ask:

- What specifically must change for confidence to be restored?
- What evidence would signal progress to skeptical stakeholders?
- What structural or contextual constraints are contributing?
- Who must actively sponsor this recovery for it to succeed?
- What happens if recovery is only partially successful?

If these cannot be articulated, the situation is already drifting toward an implicit decision.

Step 4: Decide on the Appropriate Next Action

Option A: Proceed with Leadership Recovery (Time-Bound)

Choose this when:

- The leader remains capable
- Confidence has narrowed but not collapsed
- Sponsorship can be made explicit
- The organization is willing to define conditions, timelines, and decision paths

This requires: Structured diagnosis, clear recovery conditions, visible sponsorship, and defined outcomes.

Option B: Pause and Clarify Before Acting

Choose this when:

- The situation feels urgent but poorly understood
- Signals are conflicting or politicized
- You suspect bias, role design issues, or misalignment
- You need an evidence-based view before committing to a path

This prevents: Well-intended interventions that accelerate decline.

Option C: Prepare for Transition

Choose this when:

- Trust is no longer recoverable
- Decisions have effectively been made
- Support is symbolic rather than real

This protects: The leader's dignity, organizational credibility, and continuity.

Step 5: What This Guide Is Not

- Not a performance management tool
- Not a coaching substitute
- Not a guarantee of recovery
- Not a way to delay difficult decisions

It is a decision-support tool, designed to help you act earlier and more responsibly.

Final Reflection Question

If nothing changes in the next 90 days, what outcome is most likely? Are we acting in a way that makes that outcome intentional rather than accidental?

If this guide helped you name a situation more clearly but left you uncertain about feasibility, bias, or timing, that uncertainty itself is data. Leadership recovery begins before interventions are chosen.