



Q4 CONSULTING · LISTENING TOUR REPORT · WINTER 2026

# Still In It

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What 22 Conscious Leaders Are Really Saying About 2026 —  
and what it means for how we lead, decide, and connect from  
here.

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# A Letter to the Leaders

Over the past few months, I've contacted twenty-two leaders I respect. Founders. CEOs. Professors. Executive coaches. A chairman of a manufacturing company. A VP in enterprise marketing. A faith-based healthcare CEO. A tech founder. A fractional CFO. A recruiter. A filmmaker. A strategist. People whose work I've watched with admiration and whose judgment I trust.

I asked them about their experience leading today. I didn't want the conference version, or the optimistic board deck. I asked about what feels challenging and unclear, what drains them dry and lights them up. I asked what thriving means in a year like this one, and about the notion of reinvention, taking the temperature on a word that moves through leadership circles like it means something. Does it?

What I heard was honest, sober, and surprisingly hopeful. It validated something I've been noticing for a while: the work of conscious leadership has never mattered more, and it's never been harder to do well.

The leaders I spoke with aren't naive about that. They're eyes-open, still showing up, attempting to lead with integrity in a world that is not making it easy.

This report isn't research in the academic sense, but a listening portrait, a synthesis of what conscious leaders are carrying in 2026. Quotes are attributed by initials to protect candor and preserve the texture of each voice. There were twenty-two conversations. Six themes emerged. And underneath all of them was one quiet but powerful truth.

***These leaders are still in it.***

I am grateful to each of them, thank you.

Still thinking. Still caring. Still asking the harder questions. If you see yourself in these pages, that's not an accident. You're not the only one navigating this.

*Warmly,*

**Chris Johnson, PsyD**

*Founder, Q4 Consulting | Master Somatic Leadership Coach | Author, The Leadership Pause*

## SIX THEMES

- 01 Fear Is Running Closer to the Surface**  
The biology of fear & what helps
- 02 Decision Fatigue Is Draining Capacity**  
Exhaustion vs. fatigue — the difference matters
- 03 AI Is Accelerating Faster Than Our Wisdom**  
Speed without center is chaos
- 04 Contraction and Emergence Are Coexisting**  
What the pressure is making visible
- 05 Human Connection Is the Missing Resource**  
Presence as the prerequisite
- 06 The Next Generation Is Watching**  
Leadership development as transmission

## ALSO INSIDE

What You Can Do With This  
How I Can Help  
About Chris Johnson, PsyD

# Before We Get Into the Six Themes

Before we get into the wisdom of these twenty-two leaders, I want to offer a frame, because the word "conscious" deserves a definition rooted in actual practice rather than aspiration.

In my book *The Leadership Pause*, I describe conscious leadership as a radical orientation, a new way of seeing and being in the world. It's not a technique and it's not a personality type. It's a practice, and like all practices, it asks something of us.

Leaders who are conscious are mindful of themselves and the world around them, embodied with an ethic of care, courage and skillful action, and generative in creating the future rather than simply reacting to complexities out of fear. They start with self-awareness and enough courage to initiate a shift, first within themselves, then by sharing their perspective, and finally by leading in a way that makes the shift visible to others.

Their primary source of power comes not from position or authority but from the qualities that enable genuine connection, inspiration, and engagement of others toward a greater good.

The essential qualities are presence, curiosity, deep connection with self and others, and genuine care and compassion. The vital skills are focusing attention, working skillfully with energy, listening with real depth, and actively developing the people around you.

Read the six themes that follow through that lens, and you'll notice something: the leaders who are navigating this moment most effectively are practicing these qualities, especially when it's genuinely hard to do so.

## SIX THEMES ACROSS 22 CONVERSATIONS

Across industries and roles, six themes emerged. They're not separate. They're an illustration of what it feels like to lead consciously right now, and they tend to reinforce one another in ways that are worth understanding before trying to address any one of them in isolation.

**01 Fear Is Running Closer to the Surface**  
Fear is present, palpable, and influencing decisions at every level.

**02 Decision Fatigue Is Draining Capacity**  
Decision fatigue is real, costly, and poorly understood.

**03 AI Is Accelerating Faster Than Our Wisdom**  
AI is moving faster than our collective wisdom about it.

**04 Contraction and Emergence Are Coexisting**  
Contraction and emergence are happening simultaneously.

**05 Human Connection Is the Missing Resource**  
Human connection is scarce and desperately needed.

**06 The Next Generation Is Watching**  
Next-generation leadership is underdeveloped and urgently important.



# 01

THEME ONE

## Fear Is Running Closer to the Surface

*Fear isn't theoretical right now. It sits in the background of most meetings and strategy conversations, influencing decisions about what to say publicly and what to keep private.*

It's in the room in most of the organizations these leaders are part of, driving behavior in ways that cost everyone something, even when nobody's naming it as fear.

A managing director in management consulting, someone who's spent decades working at the highest levels of organizational life, was unusually direct about what he's seeing.

*"There's a general level of fear right now, just all the uncertainty in the market, in the global environment. People are making decisions out of fear. They're hoarding information because sharing feels risky. Fear is dictating behavior more now than I've ever seen it. The level of stress it involves is tough. People are avoiding hard conversations because they don't know how they'll land. I've been in this work for a long time, and I've never seen it this concentrated."*

— DH

An executive advisor, working across industries, observed something related: organizations are pulling back from values-based commitments not because they believe less in the underlying principles, but because the environmental conditions leave leaders and their teams feeling too exposed, too psychologically risky. The values are still there, yet it's the courage to act on them that fear is quietly eroding.

***"There are communities of people who feel truly under attack right now. And the leaders who serve those communities are carrying a fear that isn't abstract. It's personal and it's present every single day."***

— RBG

An HR tech founder described a flywheel that's taken hold without anyone deciding to let it: when a problem feels too large or too systemic to solve, people stop believing they can have any meaningful impact. Then that belief settles in and initiative dies, then the locus of control shifts outward. What remains is a kind of "learned helplessness dressed up in the language of pragmatism."

The weight of this moment showed up most plainly in a conversation with the CEO of a faith-based long-term care system. She leads a workforce watching policy shift daily while trying to provide consistent, compassionate care to people who depend entirely on them.

***"There's not a lot of hope right now. And I'm saying that as someone who hasn't given up, because I'm still here doing the work. But I'd be lying if I said it didn't feel heavy."***

— KT

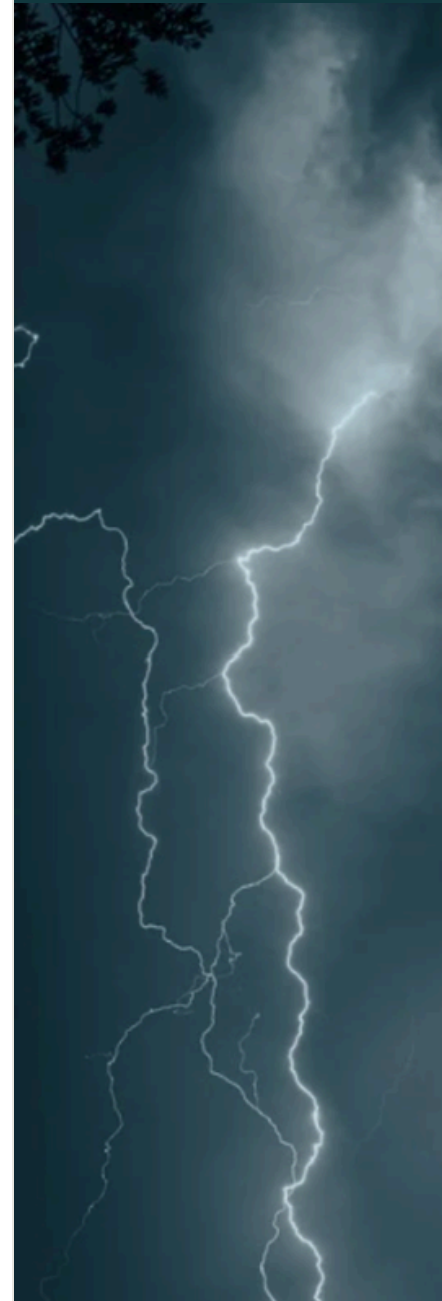
Naming the weight, she told me, isn't giving up. It's what integrity requires, and it's the prerequisite for the kind of clear-eyed leadership that helps people rather than performing optimism at them.

Fear at this scale doesn't just impact wellbeing either. It impairs cognition, narrows perspective, and activates survival-mode thinking at exactly the moment when leaders need their most expansive capacity.

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***Fear is dictating behavior more now than I've ever seen it.***

— DH





*Purpose becomes a centrifugal force. The leaders clearest on why they exist are holding steadier.*

— TL

Not every voice in this theme was heavy. One leader who works with those across a wide range of perspectives offered a counterintuitive observation. Precisely because his clients have diverse stakeholder populations, he sees them being pulled toward the center, toward balance, toward nuance, even as the surrounding culture polarizes.

*"Business leaders have a very diverse set of stakeholders. That creates a kind of magnetism toward the center. It's not manipulation, it's the pull of having to serve a lot of different people. When everything external is destabilizing, purpose becomes a centrifugal force. The leaders who are clearest on why they exist are holding steadier."*

— TL

The leaders navigating this most effectively aren't fear-free. They're metabolizing fear instead of letting it run the show, and there's a real, learnable difference between those two things.



#### THE CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP RESPONSE

The biology of fear wired into our nervous systems can hijack even the most well-intentioned leader. Our biology doesn't distinguish between an angry bear and an angry board. What helps isn't suppressing fear but learning to pause, metabolize, re-regulate, and respond from grounded presence rather than reactive self-protection.



THEME TWO

02

## Decision Fatigue Is Draining Capacity

*The volume and velocity of decisions required right now is extraordinary, and the well from which good judgment is drawn is running genuinely low for a lot of people.*

**What makes this moment different from ordinary busy-ness is the particular kind of tiredness involved:** not physical exhaustion but the depletion of the cognitive and emotional resources required for wise decisions.

A founder in executive recruiting sees the downstream cost of this depletion every single day. Her clients wait too long on a hiring decision, become desperate, make a poor choice, and end up back in her office six months later starting over with a team that's already burned out from absorbing the gap.

*"They think if they sit on something for months, things will magically change. So the role stays open. The team absorbs the work. They burn out. Then it's an emergency."*

— AK

A CEO in food production was unusually honest about what accumulated non-renewal actually feels like from the inside. His candor in naming it as a leadership problem rather than a personal failing was striking.

*"I'm fatigued because I'm working hard on things that matter all day, and then I'm unable to rejuvenate. Which leads to symptoms of mild depression. Where are my energy levels? Can I be mindful? Or am I going to delay the hard work because what's the point?"*

— NB

That phrase, "because what's the point," is worth sitting with for a moment. This isn't someone who's given up. It's someone whose capacity for meaning-making is being slowly eroded by relentless demand and insufficient restoration. His tank isn't empty, but it's not being refilled, either.

The leader who earlier offered a useful reframe in the fear conversation returned to this theme with the same precision, pointing directly to the nature of depletion itself — perhaps explaining why so many capable leaders feel stuck even when they haven't technically run out of energy.

*"There's a difference between exhaustion and fatigue. Exhaustion comes from a sprint. Fatigue is what happens when you've been running at altitude for too long with no recovery. Most leaders I work with are fatigued, not exhausted. And the treatment is completely different."*

— TL

A brand expert raised a concern that connects decision fatigue directly to the AI theme that follows. The outsourcing of thinking, she observed, isn't neutral.

*"Are we starting to not trust our intuition anymore? I find myself outsourcing thinking to AI in the interest of time. But what does a 20-year-old do who doesn't have decades of experience to lean on?"*

— MR



*Our bodies are not designed for this volume of decisions on top of chronic stress.*

— RBG





*The systems I use aren't exciting, but they protect my capacity for the decisions that actually matter.*

— RBG

One leader described how her 2026 is shaping up with disarming candor. She's currently operating almost entirely in the reactive present, making short-term decisions because the longer horizon feels too uncertain to plan toward, overwhelmed by juggling an accumulation of work, health concerns, and family obligations. "I need a nimbler way of making decisions."

A fractional CFO working with values-driven brands responded by building simple but genuinely effective systems to work around her own depletion: templated meals, weekly task lists she can copy rather than recreate from scratch, deliberate protection of her cognitive bandwidth for the decisions that actually require her full attention.

*"Our bodies aren't designed for this volume of decisions on top of chronic stress. The systems I use aren't exciting, but they protect my capacity for the decisions that actually matter."*

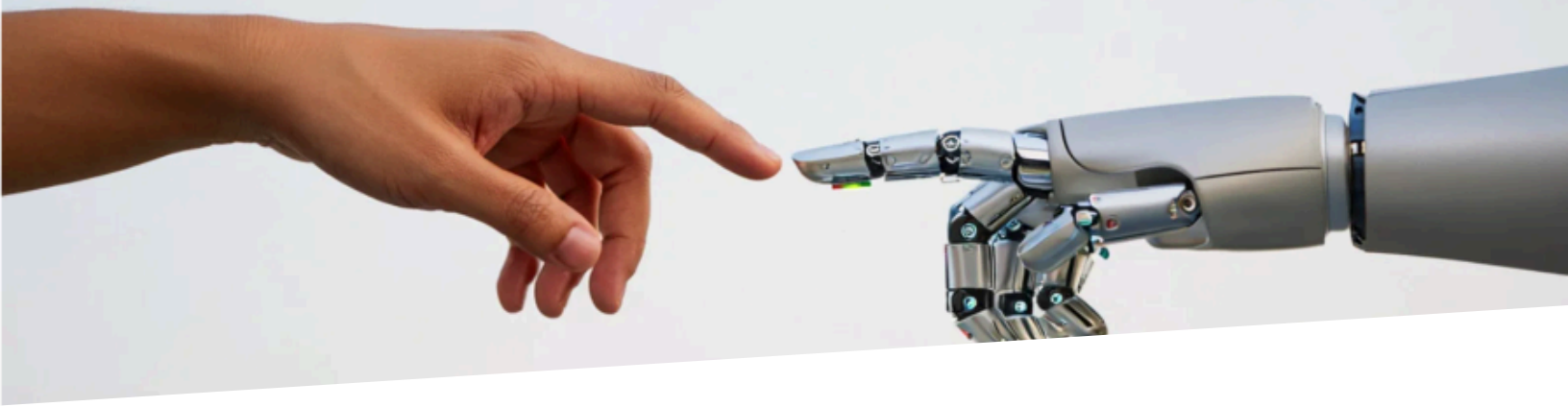
— RBG

This isn't about productivity hacks. It's about recognizing the physiological reality and designing around it rather than trying to power through it. The leaders doing this most effectively are the ones who stopped treating their own capacity as an infinite resource.



#### THE CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP RESPONSE

Decision fatigue is a somatic experience as much as a cognitive one. The body carries the load of tensions and unresolved choices. Practices that restore the body aren't luxuries, but they're the maintenance that leadership requires. You wouldn't expect your phone to keep performing at 3 percent battery. Yet we extend far less grace to ourselves than we do to our devices.



THEME THREE

03

# AI Is Accelerating Faster Than Our Wisdom

*Artificial intelligence came up in every single conversation I had. Not always front and center, but always present, like a current running underneath everything else.*

The concern wasn't primarily about job loss, though that came up. It was about something more subtle and ultimately more consequential: the pace of AI adoption is outrunning our capacity to make wise decisions about what the technology can do and cannot do, and whose interests it serves.

A tech founder offered a line I haven't been able to stop thinking about: **"Don't drive faster than your guardian angel can fly."** He's been watching organizations race to adopt AI not because they've thought carefully about whether and how they should, but because competitive pressure makes the race feel mandatory. The question of what we're racing toward gets lost entirely.

Another founder offered the most consequential insight plainly: the leaders who lack human skills will have nowhere to hide. The tasks are being done for us. What remains are the human skills — the capacity to build trust, navigate conflict, inspire commitment, read a room, and respond to what's needed in that moment. Those skills can't be automated, and they've been underfunded in most leadership development for years.

*"Budgets that historically would have gone to people skills and L&D are shrinking and being displaced to line items like technology and AI. Companies are automating broken processes. Chaos is just churning faster. The investment in human skills, the things that might actually change the underlying culture, is getting deprioritized in favor of tools that make the dysfunction more efficient."*

— AC

One VP named the cultural erosion that comes with AI-amplified misinformation: when truth is genuinely hard to discern, trust becomes harder to build and easier to destroy. The shared foundation of reality that good leadership requires starts to fracture.

*"Social media misinformation amplified by AI is a real concern. Cancel culture risk. Truth being hard to discern. These are things my father's generation didn't have to contend with, and I don't know that we have the tools to manage them yet."*

— BF

A leader who teaches at a major business school shared that one of her students gave her a metaphor worth keeping: a walled garden. Some things need to remain human, not as a rejection of technology, but as a deliberate choice about what we're not willing to outsource. She lives this out by reading every student survey by hand — all 75 of them — before each new class, even though AI could summarize them in minutes.

*"Not everything that can be delegated should be. They spent 30 minutes filling out that survey, telling me about themselves. The least I can do is read it."*

— BV

That choice extends dignity. And it doesn't happen by accident. AI isn't the threat. Unexamined acceleration is. The human skills that can't be automated are the differentiator now — treating them as soft skills is a category error with real consequences. They're power skills.

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*Don't drive faster than your guardian angel can fly.*

— Tech Founder



#### THE CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP RESPONSE

In practicing the art of aikido, speed without center is chaos. The conscious leader's job isn't to resist technology but to ask, relentlessly and without apology: What is this for? What does it make possible? Who does it serve? Those aren't technical questions. They're leadership questions, and they belong at the top of the agenda.



# 04

THEME FOUR

## Contraction and Emergence Are Coexisting

*Budgets are tightening and hiring has slowed. Planning horizons have become shorter than anyone would like. At the same time, something new is emerging from underneath the pressure. Those being squeezed are also having breakthroughs.*

Organizations that are cutting budgets are also discovering, sometimes for the first time, what they actually care about. These two things are happening simultaneously, not sequentially. The leaders navigating most thoughtfully are the ones who can hold the ambiguity and the creative tension without collapsing into either.

A filmmaker who thinks carefully about creative cycles and conscious business offered a frame from the natural world, then complicated it with something more urgent.

*"There is a brief period of time coming where the systems will have been torn down, and there will be an opportunity to build them better. What we need to be investing in right now are the networks, the relationships, the systems that can create what's new once this moment passes. I'm disappointed that so many people seem to be in self-preservation mode. I understand it. But we might miss the window."*

— NH

The CEO of the long-term care system — whose organization turns 100 years old this year and who serves one of the most economically vulnerable communities in the country — offered something almost geological in its patience and its clarity.

*"We're seeing the last gasps of an old system which is not going to go down without a fight. I believe in the long arc of justice. Sometimes you have to have destruction before there's growth. Be like a tree and let the dead leaves drop."*

— KT

The fractional CFO reported on an interesting signal in the market: organizations with coherent values and authentic community are often gaining share in this environment rather than losing it. People are hungry for something they can trust. The brands that feel real are doing better than the brands that feel polished.

When I asked about thriving, the answers in this theme were the ones that moved me most. Leaders are redefining the word in ways that matter. One leader painted a picture of 2026 with disarming specificity: just enough work that's satisfying and low stress, connecting with friends and family, focus on health and fitness, activities filled with laughter and joy. That's not settling. It's the emergence of true priorities from underneath years of accumulated obligation. "It's a year of reemergence."

One business strategist, who works with organizational leaders when they've hit their ceiling, described the same moment from a different angle, often producing diminishing returns.

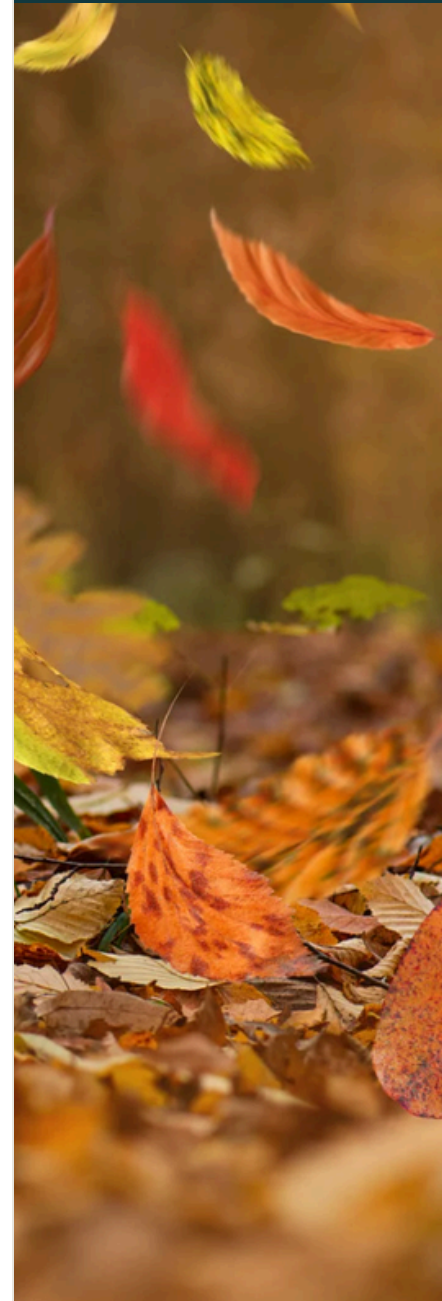
*"Most of what we've been taught, most of what we've been mentored, most of what we get bonused on, it's the wrong stuff. People are slowly coming to this realization. And they're saying: I'm not really sure what I'm supposed to do now. I can't afford to fail. Help me out."*

— CN

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*Be like a tree and let the  
dead leaves drop.*

— KT





*It's a year of reemergence.*

— Leader, Anonymous

One business leader grew the family-owned business by leaning into purpose. He offered a different lens: *uncertainty itself is curriculum*. Every fast decision made under pressure, every pivot, every crisis navigated, is building organizational muscle.

*"Each fast decision under pressure builds team capability. Uncertainty is the training ground. My father always said problems are never as bad as they initially seem. And I've found that going through hard things together is what actually builds a team."*

— BF

Another leader, working at the intersection of fashion and sustainability, expanded the definition of thriving beyond the individual entirely, and issued a call that landed with real weight.

*"We are at a moment that requires us, not just invites us, to step up, step in, and step out. Thriving means everybody being able to benefit. My personal ability alone to thrive is not what is going to make the planet better."*

— LH

The distinction between "requires" and "invites" is doing the real work. An invitation can be declined; this moment isn't offering that as an option.



#### THE CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP RESPONSE

The space between stimulus and response isn't passive. It's where choice lives. The leaders course correcting through contraction, without being crushed by it, have learned to use that space — to discern what's ending, because it should, and what's trying to grow. That level of discernment is a practiced capacity, not a feeling.



THEME FIVE

05

## Human Connection Is the Missing Resource

*Across all twenty-two conversations, one hunger was unmistakable. It wasn't networking, or engagement scores, or team-building events with a debrief. People long for the real thing.*

An experience of being fully seen by another person, of being in a room where the masks are genuinely off, where honesty is welcome, and where you leave feeling like you were connecting with someone rather than performing at them.

*"How to quiet the noise and genuinely connect with one another, recognizing our collective humanity. That's my top concern."*

— SG

What strikes me about that framing is the phrase "collective humanity." Not just *my* team and not just *my* network, but something broader: the recognition that we're in this together, all of us, including the people we're inclined to dismiss or who dismiss us. What's lighting her up right now? Time in nature, and hearing stories of people helping people. Both are experiences of being part of something larger than yourself.

One leader acknowledged something rarely said aloud in professional contexts: leadership is lonely. He runs a peer accountability group, not as a professional development exercise but as a genuine lifeline, and it's what makes it possible for him to keep doing the work at the level he wants to do it.

Gone are the days of transactional networking — the kind where everyone performs, hands out business cards, says they'll follow up yet never do. Another leader voiced her longing for conversations that change how she sees something, but she doesn't always know where to find them. Such hunger is widely shared and almost never named.

The business strategist pushed back on the idea that connection is purely a matter of personal intention and goodwill. She reminds us that structure and time both matter because no one can will a team into real connection without creating the actual conditions for it to happen. Today, a lot of organizations are stripping those conditions away in the name of efficiency and paying for it in ways that don't show up immediately in the numbers but eventually show up everywhere.

*"The leaders who lack human skills will have nowhere to hide. The tasks are being done for us. What remains is the human skills."*

— MR

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*When people feel seen,  
heard, and valued, it  
provides a little bit of light.*

— KT





*He named it in a way that made twenty other people's private hunger suddenly audible.*

— CJ

The hospital CEO offered something quietly luminous when the conversation turned to connection. Her voice through this entire listening tour was one of its most consistent, and here she arrived at the heart of what makes care actually sustaining.

*"When people feel seen, heard, and valued, it provides a little bit of light. Care doesn't need to be stingy. That's what we offer. And it's enough to keep people going when very little else is."*

— KT

The CEO who had been unusually candid in the decision fatigue conversation — naming what accumulated non-renewal actually feels like from the inside — here named what he was hungry for. His pragmatic voice cuts through abstractions quickly, stopping me with its nakedness.

*"What I want is a platform that I can contribute to meaningfully, in reasonable chunks, that provides hope of unf\*#king everything. Whoever can figure out what that is, I will be the first funder and the first member. As long as somebody can tell me what it is, because I can't figure out what it is."*

— NB

He's not alone in wanting that platform. He just happened to name it, and named it in a way that made twenty other people's private hunger suddenly audible.



#### THE CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP RESPONSE

Connection requires presence. You can't genuinely see someone while you're half-attending to your phone, and you can't hear someone while you're composing your response. Presence is the prerequisite for connection. This isn't complicated, but it is difficult.



THEME SIX

06

## The Next Generation Is Watching

*Underneath every other conversation, like a bass note you feel more than hear, was a question nobody could quite let go of: who comes next?*

Not just who are our successors in the narrow succession-planning sense, but something much larger and more urgent: what kind of leaders are we actually developing, and will they be equipped for the world they're going to have to lead? The honest answer, based on what these twenty-two leaders told me, is that we don't entirely know, and we're not yet moving with enough urgency to find out.

The business school leader who spoke to not outsourcing our humanity — protecting it like a walled garden — here describes what she calls the "no control group" problem. We've never before trained leaders entirely in an AI-shaped world. We don't have a developmental baseline for this context. We're running the experiment in real time and will find out the results later.

Her conclusion? It's a troubling way to approach the formation of the people who'll be leading organizations, communities, and families into the future. And, as a mom chatting with other parents of young professionals, she's heard questions like these arise: Did we prepare our kids for the wrong thing? They went to great schools, earned great credentials, developed skills that are now being automated at speed. Her thoughts?

*"I see a push toward more in-person, human interactions. Whatever it is, once a year, twice a year, once a quarter: figure it out. Because reminding each other that there's a human being who's complicated, that's worth it."*

— BV

The recruiting leader, from her vantage point on the hiring side, sees it every day. Young graduates with solid credentials are competing for positions where hundreds of equally credentialed candidates have applied. Yet a credential alone no longer differentiates. What differentiates, in her direct and daily observation, is the human: the capacity to build relationships, read a room, and bring genuine curiosity and care to an interaction. Those are also the skills nobody's teaching systematically.

The healthcare CEO offered the most concrete and encouraging example of next-generation leadership development. Their LPN apprenticeship program places young healthcare workers on a mentored track from the moment they join the organization, combining skill training with values formation and community accountability. It's working because it's relational rather than merely instructional.

*"If leaders don't model the behaviors we want the next generation to learn, no curriculum will compensate for that. Leadership development is ultimately a transmission. You pass on what you practice."*

— TL

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*Leadership development is ultimately a transmission. You pass on what you practice.*

— TL





*What we practice is what we pass on. Every choice is a lesson.*

— CJ

Another educator concurs that students navigating this moment most effectively aren't necessarily the ones with the most impressive credentials. They're the ones with enough self-awareness to know what they're good at, why it matters, and who they're becoming. The development that lasts is identity work, not only skills training.

The next generation isn't primarily learning from slides or certifications or formal programs. *They're learning from watching the leaders in front of them.* What we practice is what we pass on. Every choice we make in front of them is a lesson, including, and maybe especially, the ones we think no one is noticing.



#### THE CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP RESPONSE

Developing people is a core leadership skill, not an add-on, and certainly not something to delegate to HR. It's a daily practice of paying attention, and genuinely investing in the humans around you. The question isn't whether we're modeling. We always are. The question is what we're modeling, and whether we're doing it with intention.

# What You Can Do With This

Twenty-two conversations. Six themes. And underneath all of them, a consistent undercurrent: people want to lead more effectively, live better, and feel less alone in the effort. The question isn't whether you recognize yourself in these pages, but what you do next. This report can work for you in three ways: as a mirror, as a conversation catalyst, and as a design framework.



## USE IT AS A MIRROR

*Start with yourself. Sit with these questions and bring them into your own context honestly. Notice where you feel resistance — that's likely where the real work is.*

### ON FEAR

Where is fear influencing decisions in your organization, and is anyone actually naming it? Fear that goes unnamed tends to run the show from the background.

**Action Step** — Name what's underneath hesitation before moving to solutions in your next team meeting.

### ON DECISION FATIGUE

Where is depletion delaying clarity, and who's carrying the cost of that delay? What fills your tank, specifically, and when does it happen? Protect your renewal with the same rigor you protect your calendar.

**Action Step** — Block 30 minutes this week for restoration, no devices, no agenda. Treat it with the same protection you give a client meeting.

### ON AI

Where are you automating without examining what you're replacing? Some things should be automated; some things should stay human. Knowing the difference is a leadership skill, not a technology skill.

**Action Step** — Ask this question before your next AI decision: what human judgment is this replacing, and do we want to replace it?

### ON CONTRACTION

If things are tightening, the most generative question isn't "how do we stop this" but "what is becoming clear about what actually matters." Contraction tends to strip away what was unnecessary and make visible what's essential.

**Action Step** — Jot down three values, now clearly visible, that you can recommit to. Keep the list visible.

### ON CONNECTION

What does thriving look like in your world right now, and how does your current rhythm reflect or contradict it?

**Action Step** — Reach out today to one person you've been meaning to really talk to. Don't schedule it for next month. Do it now.

### ON NEXT-GEN LEADERSHIP

What are the younger people watching you, learning? One real conversation a month about what leadership feels like from the inside — what you wish you'd known, and what you're still figuring out — is worth more than most formal development programs.

**Action Step** — Offer an ear and your presence, not advice, to someone earlier in their leadership journey. Offer advice only when asked.

### USE IT AS A CONVERSATION CATALYST

Bring this synthesis into your leadership retreats, board discussions, strategic planning sessions, AI governance conversations, or culture resets. Ask your team which quotes resonate and which make them uncomfortable. The discomfort is likely where the work is. A business strategist in these conversations made a point worth noting: we're not going to get to solutions until we identify, together, our collective concerns.

### USE IT AS A DESIGN FRAMEWORK

2026 is asking leaders to do six things:

Clarify purpose so that fear has less room to drive.

Protect energy as a strategic resource rather than a personal problem to manage.

Slow down enough to make choices rather than react to circumstances.

Invest in human development rather than assume technology will compensate for its absence.

Create real connection structures rather than relying on good intentions alone.

Model the leadership you want transmitted to the next generation.



# How I Can Help

If you recognize yourself or your organization in these pages, I hope you won't simply nod and move on.

I've been doing this work for more than thirty years. What I know is that leadership development that produces useful change doesn't come from a seminar, a certification, or a framework absorbed from a report. It involves a commitment to a sustained practice of attention, presence, and honesty, supported by someone who will ask the questions you're not asking yourself, and someone who'll stay with you long enough for the answers to be realized.

The six themes here are the territory I'm privileged to work within. The somatic grip of fear on the decision-making body. The depletion that comes from giving everything to a role that was never designed to be sustainable. The hunger for real human connection in a world that keeps offering transaction instead. The formation of leaders who can carry this work forward with integrity and care and something like joy.

## **Executive Energy Audit**

If you recognize yourself in the fear or decision fatigue sections, this is a focused conversation that surfaces where your energy is going, where it's leaking, and what a more sustainable and effective approach could look like.

## **Leadership Retreat or Workshop**

If you recognized your team in the connection or next-generation sections, a facilitated leadership retreat or workshop built around the frameworks in *The Leadership Pause* can clarify values and purpose and shift the culture of how your team thinks and works together.

## **VIP Day Intensive**

If you're a leader in transition, navigating contraction or reorientation or the genuine question of what comes next for you personally and professionally, a VIP Day intensive is designed to mine that moment of real uncertainty.

## **The Leadership Pause — Book of Practices**

Launching spring 2026, with an exclusive training session for launch team members on March 31st. If you want to go deeper on your own, this is designed for the moment you're in.

[Learn more](#) or reach out at [DrChris@Q4-Consulting.com](mailto:DrChris@Q4-Consulting.com) with questions.

Do share this report widely with colleagues and friends you know will benefit from it.

### GET IN TOUCH

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*Because the listening isn't over. It's the beginning of how we can lead differently to create the future we want.*





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# Chris Johnson, PsyD

I'm Chris Johnson the founder of Q4 Consulting, a Master Somatic Leadership Coach, MBSR-trained mindfulness instructor, and third-degree aikido black belt. I've more than thirty years of experience in clinical psychology, mindfulness-based practices, and embodied leadership development.

I'm the author of *The Leadership Pause: Sharpen Your Attention, Deepen Your Presence, and Navigate the Future*, and *The Leadership Pause Book of Practices*, launching spring 2026. I've been committed to the tenets of Conscious Capitalism for over a dozen years, serving as Chair of the Chicago Chapter.

My work sits at a rare intersection of clinical and developmental psychology, somatic coaching, business consulting, and conscious capitalism principles, and my clients include leaders across education, manufacturing, healthcare, technology, finance, food production, and the social sector.

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— Chris Johnson, PsyD