

Stories about **LEADERSHIP**

A STORY ABOUT CLARITY



At 7:58 a.m., the screen shows me a familiar image: twelve tiles, twelve faces, twelve variations of "we really should...". My camera is on, my voice professional. My body isn't quite there yet.

"Good morning everyone," says our CEO, and I can tell from his tone that he has no patience for ambiguity today. The last few weeks have been too tough, too expensive, too noisy. We have Q1 looming, the pilot project is hanging by a thread, and the year-end mood in the company is a mixture of fatigue and pressure to meet expectations.

I click through the agenda. "Status per workstream," "Open decisions," "Risk update." All sensible. All correct. Except that in such complexity, reason is often an illusion: the longer the list, the less direction there is.

"We need to go live in Q1, otherwise we will lose the market," says Marketing.

"Nothing works without interface approval," says IT security.

"If we don't bring the training sessions forward, acceptance will plummet," says HR.

"And the costs are spiraling out of control," adds the CFO, who, as always, is a little too calm when he is impatient.

I nod, write, paraphrase, ask questions. I'm good at that. In recent years, I've specialized in organizing complexity without damaging it. Facilitation instead of confrontation. Connecting instead of defining.

But then I notice how my notes are once again becoming a tapestry of "both/and." Out of consideration. Out of fear of disappointing someone. Out of a desire to hold on to everything.

"Frederik, what's your suggestion?" the managing director finally asks. His voice is friendly, but clear enough to prevent me from dodging the question.

My chest tightens. I feel myself slipping back into old routines: another workshop, another review, a bit more data. If we analyze everything thoroughly, no one will be to blame if it doesn't work out later. It was simply "too complex."

For a brief moment, I see myself from the outside: a project manager who believes he is exercising leadership with every additional vote – while merely delegating the decision to time.

The coach's statement from the last sparring session comes back to me as if it were written on the wall: "When everything is important, nothing is clear. And without clarity, there is no leadership."

I take a deep breath. I put the pen down. Nothing dramatic, just visible. "Okay," I say. "I'll summarize what's really on the table."

I'm sharing my screen. It's not a pretty slide. No design. Just text. Three lines. A list I'd been mulling over in my head last night, but hadn't gotten around to writing down.

"Firstly," I begin, hearing my own voice surprisingly calm. "Our goal for Q1 is a stable pilot program in two regions. Not a global rollout. We prioritize impact over reach."

Marketing wants to say something. I see the impulse in her eyes. I raise my hand slightly. Not as a power play, more as if to say: let me finish thinking.

"Secondly: For this, we need three essential prerequisites by the end of January: interface approval, train-the-trainer, and legal acceptance. Everything else is important, but not critical to the pilot project." I have to consciously swallow hard because the phrase "not critical to the pilot project" quickly sounds like "unimportant" to us. I choose it anyway. Clarity requires sharp edges.

"Thirdly: If any of these three things aren't in place by January 20th, we'll postpone the pilot launch by four weeks. That's the price we pay for stability. I'm communicating this to all the leads today." Silence.

This silence is not a silence of agreement. It is a moment when people need to reorient themselves internally. I know it. I have often avoided it because it feels risky. Today, I allow it.

Marketing clears her throat. "That's a hard line, Frederik." Her gaze isn't hostile. More irritated, perhaps even disappointed. Because clarity always means saying goodbye to possibilities.

"Yes," I say. "Because otherwise we're lying to ourselves. We can't do everything at once and immediately." I hear myself and think: That's what my job actually sounds like.

The CFO slowly raises his eyebrows. "You're setting a cutoff point?"

"I'm setting a reality point," I reply. "Aborting sounds like failure. What I want is a pilot project that works. And for that, we need clarity regarding the conditions. Otherwise, we'll only be keeping deadlines on paper."

IT security gives a barely perceptible nod. HR seems relieved. Operations looks thoughtful, but not defensive.

Our managing director leans back. "That's a clear prioritization." He doesn't say it as praise. He says it as a critical assessment.

"Yes," I say. "Because otherwise we'll be sitting here again in March wondering why everyone is exhausted and nothing is stable."

A few seconds pass. Then he nods. "Agreed. Then we'll do it that way."

I feel my shoulders drop a millimeter. Not because it will be easier now—clarity takes work—but because it will be more unambiguous.

The rest of the meeting suddenly stops being a drawn-out, tedious exercise. We're talking about the three prerequisites. Not about everything anymore. We're clarifying who will deliver what and by when. We're defining how the status will be reported. There's disagreement, there's friction. But there's a sense of direction.

After the call, I sit for a moment. The room is quiet. I can hear the rain on the windows. And I notice my hands are trembling slightly. That rarely happens to me. It's the aftereffect of having made a decision before it felt comfortable.

I open my email program. Three emails. Short and to the point.

To all leads: Goal, three prerequisites, termination point.

1. To the CFO: Cost implications, risk justification.
2. To the managing director: Please provide support in the management update.

As I write, I can already feel the resistance. Some will say I'm being "too harsh." Others will be relieved. Clarity is never neutral.

And yet, it is the only thing that turns a colorful project into a managed project.

I think of the coach. She hadn't smiled when she said that sentence to me. She didn't mean it as a theory. She meant it as a boundary.

Clarity, I realize now, is not a gift to others.

It is first and foremost a challenge to myself: to make a decision before my need for harmony becomes too great.

I save the slide under a rather unassuming name: "Q1 Pilot Reality".

And for the first time in weeks, the program doesn't feel like a pinball machine, but like a path.

Takeaway inspiration

Clarity

Clarity means not explaining away complexity, but rather organizing it in such a way that goals, frameworks, and consequences become understandable and binding for everyone. It arises when you articulate priorities and boundaries, so that orientation becomes more important than harmony.

Formulate three sentences for your current topic: Goal – Must-have criterion – Point of departure. If you can say these three sentences aloud, you have gained clarity; if not, you know where you can still avoid the issue.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT CLARITY FOR YOU

1. Where is my "Everything is important" approach an avoidance tactic?
2. What fear lies behind my desire for further voting?
3. What three clear sentences would I formulate today if I were to commit before it's convenient?



Feel free to contact me anytime::

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