

Stories about **LEADERSHIP**

A STORY ABOUT SERENITY AND CONFIDENCE



December is always a bit like a shirt that's too tight. You kind of fit into it, but you know it could rip at any moment.

The hall never truly feels quiet before Christmas. Even though the year is drawing to a close, it's noisy inside: last deliveries, final targets, last-minute decisions. And this year is particularly special. Shift schedules, sick leave rates, pilot stabilization, and on top of it all, the everyday weariness that you can no longer breathe away.

I'm standing at the whiteboard, looking at the weekly figures. We've managed to stabilize the rate. Not perfectly, but solidly. Some measures are working. Nevertheless, I don't feel triumphant. More like someone who's been running against the wind for a long time and has now paused briefly.

The plant manager arrives in the hall at 8:30 a.m. I can see him from afar. He seems tense.

"Florian, do you have a minute?" he asks.

We go into the office. He doesn't sit down. He stands by the window.

"Management is asking if we can ramp up production again in January," he says. "Market pressure. The proposal will be presented in tomorrow's management update. I want your assessment."

My stomach reacts immediately. That old feeling of alarm. Another stomach ache?

It's not the question itself. It's the mode. Another tension. Another balancing act.

I feel my mind immediately wanting to generate solutions. Data, arguments, Plan B.

And then I realize: I'm currently in an internal state that's not a good foundation for leadership. I'm driven. I want to control. I want to prevent.

Serenity does not mean indifference. Serenity means inner control before controlling external circumstances.

I exhale slowly.

"I'll give you an assessment," I say. "But first I want to do a quick reality check."

How stable is our base really?

He finally sits down. "What do you think?"

"Look," I say, turning the screen towards him. "The rate is more stable, yes. But our sickness rate is still high. The new colleagues are still on the learning curve. And while motivation is better, it's only because we're not currently working overtime."

He nods. "Meaning?"

I pause for a moment. Calmness also means not making things more dramatic than they are. But also not making them smaller.

"This means that a ramp-up in January is possible if we do it gradually and adhere to two conditions: Station 3 remains double-staffed, and we maintain the improvement rounds. No side issues. Otherwise, it will all fall apart."

He looks at me. "You sound surprisingly calm."

I smile without irony. "I'm working on it."

As he leaves, I remain seated. I realize that I've done something different today than before: I haven't let myself be swept away by fear. I've acknowledged it, but I haven't let it control me.

In the afternoon is our weekly improvement session. We've kept it going even though December is packed. The team comes together, tired, but present.

Miriam suggests a way to further shorten the material supply chain. Tobias adds an idea for the handover. These aren't game-changers. They're small, clever things that show: We believe in design again.

During the break after the round, Sven pauses briefly.

"You know, Florian," he says, "in October I was really close to mentally quitting. Right now it feels... doable again."

I nod. "That makes me happy."

He looks at the ground. "What did you do differently?"

I think for a moment. "I think I've stopped always acting like we have to carry everything alone. And I've started showing us that movement is possible."

"Yes," he says quietly. "You can tell."

Later, I walk through the hall. The machines are running, the noise level is constant, but the atmosphere is different than in autumn. Not easy. But stable. Like a team that knows: It's not always pleasant, but it's together.

In the evening, I sit at home on the sofa, the living room lights dimmed. Outside, strings of lights hang in the neighbors' windows. No grand Christmas romance, more of a quiet glow. I drink tea and watch the day's news.

I think about the year. About the moments when I was overwhelmed. About the conversations where I had to learn to slow down. About the pressure of the pilot project. About the sick leave rate. About the small successes that only became visible because we shared them.

Serenity is not a state that is "simply there".

It's a practice: seeing reality, not sugarcoating it, but also not being swallowed up by it. And maintaining confidence amidst it all, because you know: we've already achieved progress – so we can achieve it again.

The management update is tomorrow. I don't know what the decision will be. But I know how I want to be perceived in it.

Not as someone who controls everything.

But as someone who grows, holds on, and trusts.

Takeaway inspiration

Serenity & confidence

Serenity and confidence in leadership mean seeing reality clearly without succumbing to frantic activity or panic. They arise when you guide things internally before acting externally, thus maintaining trust in your collective ability to act.

When you start to feel agitated, consciously stop: take a deep breath, state reality ("This is how it is right now"), and state direction ("This is how we'll move forward"). Maintaining composure is a small act of leadership within yourself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT SERENITY AND CONFIDENCE

1. Where am I currently allowing myself to be driven by internal pressure instead of leading it?
 2. What reality do I need to look at clearly, without dramatizing it?
- What gives me and my team justified confidence right now?



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