

THE LEADERSHIP WORK THAT IS TRULY YOURS BY CAMPBELL FORSYTH

In a recent client engagement, a participant shared their go-to strategy for navigating challenge and uncertainty with the group: “Focus on what’s in your control.”

A timeless idea but in today’s fast-paced, pressure-heavy environments, most leaders in the room admitted it was far easier said than done.

And that’s where the conversation got interesting.

When Pressure Rises, so do our Habits and Instinct

Under stress, many leaders default to fixing, advising, or judging or trying to regulate others’ emotions or behaviours. This can feel helpful in the moment. But often, these actions lead us away from what’s actually our work to do. Instead of creating clarity, we absorb problems and emotions that aren’t ours. Instead of coaching others to grow, we rush to solve. Instead of owning our part, we focus on theirs.

A Grounding Question: What is My Work in This?

This is a question I return to often with clients, with teams, and personally. It acts like a compass, pointing us back to where we can lead most effectively: our own thinking, our own behaviour, and our own choices. Because while it’s easy to think that others need to be more accountable, less reactive, or better at listener, leadership maturity begins when we shift the spotlight inward.

What does this look like in practice?

- When someone around you is emotionally reactive, rather than judging them or jumping in to calm them down, ask yourself: *What’s my work in this?* Can I acknowledge their emotion without becoming emotional myself? Can I stay productive in the emotional discomfort? Can I model the steadiness I want to see?
- When influencing feels hard, instead of defaulting to “they just don’t get it or they should listen more” try: *How can I represent my thinking more clearly?* What is the core idea I’m trying to communicate, and have I made it as clear as I can? How do I turn tension into dialogue? Can I stand firm and stay open?
- And when a project is going off-track, before taking over or pointing fingers, pause and ask: What patterns are emerging here? What role am I playing in them? What would leadership look like in this moment, not rescue or takeover?

The most effective leaders I work with don’t try to control every situation or fix every issue. They lead from calm, clarity, and curiosity—even when the stakes are high. This kind of self-leadership has a ripple effect. It fosters psychological safety, encourages ownership, and builds a culture where accountability grows without force.

Next time you’re in a high-pressure moment, try asking: What’s actually mine to do here and what isn’t? The answer might be what separates momentary relief from meaningful progress.