



CALM Under Pressure

A Playbook for Healthcare Leaders

Stabilize moments without absorbing stress

Purpose

Use this playbook before responding in tense moments — to stay grounded, lead clearly, and protect your energy.

And remember that feeling pressure doesn't mean you're failing as a leader. It means you care — and the stakes are real.

C — Control the Body First (10 seconds)

Before speaking, do the following:

- Exhale slowly (longer out than in) — twice
- Drop your shoulders
- Unclench your jaw
- Plant your feet firmly

Now ask yourself:

What does this moment need from me?

Why this protects energy:

When the body is activated, leadership costs more effort. Calming the body first reduces emotional and cognitive drain.

A — Acknowledge the Pressure (10 seconds)

Circle what you're feeling right now:

- Rushed
- Judged
- Frustrated
- Emotionally drained
- Responsible for everything
- Overwhelmed



Now complete:

- If I react, the risk is:

- If I respond intentionally, the result I want is:

Why this protects energy:

Unnamed pressure intensifies and runs the interaction. Naming it creates distance and restores choice.

L — Lead with the Right Path (10 seconds)

In this moment, my role is to:

- Stabilize
- Clarify
- Commit

Why this protects energy:

Trying to do everything at once leads to over-functioning. Role clarity conserves emotional energy.

M — Message with a Script (use one, slowly)

- Stabilize
 - "I can see this is stressful — let's take this one step at a time."
 - "We're on the same team — we'll solve this together."
 - "Let's pause for 30 seconds so we respond, not react."
- Clarify
 - "Help me understand what happened, starting from the beginning."
 - "What's the biggest risk right now — and the next safest step?"
 - "What do you need from me in the next 10 minutes?"
- Commit
 - "Here's what we're going to do next."
 - "I'll own ____; you own ____; we'll regroup at ____."
 - "We're not solving everything now — we're stabilizing the next step."



Why this protects energy:

Prepared language reduces emotional labor and prevents escalation. Improvising under stress is exhausting.

Close the Loop — Energy Protection (2 minutes total)

- Quick Debrief (60 seconds)
 - What worked in how I showed up?
 - What will I do differently next time?

Debriefing turns emotional load into leadership growth.

Leadership Anchor:

Strong leadership doesn't absorb stress — it contains and redirects it.

Complete this sentence:

In the next tense moment, I choose to lead with _____.

Why this prevents burnout:

Identity clarity ends self-criticism and stops moments from replaying later.

Why this tool works

This playbook helps leaders regulate emotion, close mental loops, and lead consistently — without carrying stress forward.

Created by Dr Fatima Ghzala, PharmD

Leadership development for healthcare professionals or organizations