

Why Most Leaders React (Even When They Don't Mean To)



Let's be honest—staying grounded when emotions run high is hard. Someone shows up defensive, and we get prickly. Someone withdraws, and we assume the worst. It's understandable. But it's also unhelpful.

In those moments, we often default to an inward mindset—one where we see others primarily in relation to ourselves. Are they helping or hindering me? Do I feel respected or dismissed? Am I winning or losing in this interaction?

Having this mindset doesn't mean you're a bad person—just a very limited one. Because when we're inward, our world shrinks. We respond not to how someone is behaving, but to how we feel about it. We become reactive. And our leadership becomes accidental, not intentional.

The Power of an Outward Mindset

The shift to an [outward mindset](#) begins when we start seeing others as people—with hopes, needs, and challenges as real as our own.

It means pausing long enough to consider:

- What's really going on for this person?
- What might they need right now?
- How am I contributing to the temperature of this room?

With an outward mindset, we don't ignore what we feel. But we don't let it dictate our behavior either. Instead, we use those emotions as indicators of where we are stuck and focus instead on the kind of impact we want to have—*right now*.

That's where real leadership begins. Not with position. Not with charisma. But with choice.

Thermostats Lead with Intention

Think of someone you admire as a leader—not for what they did, but for how they showed up. Chances are, they brought a calm center into chaos. They stayed open when others shut down. They invited possibility when the room felt stuck.

In other words, they didn't just reflect the room—they *reset* it.

They were thermostats.

And that ability isn't mystical. It's mindful. It's available to any of us who are willing to lead from an outward mindset.

Here's what that looks like in action:

1. Check in Before We Speak Out

Before we respond, we pause. We notice our inward reaction—defensiveness, blame, frustration—and ask ourselves: *Is this reaction going to help or hurt the situation?*

That single pause gives us space to choose. And in that space, we begin to lead.

2. Seeing Past Behavior to Humanity

People aren't always at their best. But neither are we. When someone's tone is short or their energy feels off, we can choose to interpret that as disrespect—or we can get curious about what might be behind it.

Leaders who chose to have an outward mindset look past the surface and ask, *what else might be true here?*

3. Setting the Tone, Not Matching It

When we walk into a difficult room—with tension, frustration, or disengagement—we carry something powerful: the ability to shift the atmosphere.

That doesn't mean “being positive” no matter what. It means being *present*, grounded, and intentional. We don't mirror the dysfunction. We model a different way. Because energy is contagious.

Small Choices, Big Consequences

When we understand the implications of mindset we recognize that **impact doesn't wait**. The way we show up in a single moment can shape the entire trajectory of a relationship—or a culture.

The words we choose, the tone we use, the posture we hold.

All of it sets a temperature.

And over time, those choices compound.

A hallway check-in leads to a trust-filled conversation. A moment of patience prevents a months-long conflict. A leader who sees a struggling employee as a person—not a problem—helps them rise instead of retreat.

That's what thermostats do. They steadily create climates where people can breathe, connect, and grow.

This Isn't About Perfection. It's About Practice.

None of us gets this right all the time. We're human. We slip into inwardness. We react. We forget to pause.

But every moment gives us another chance to reset.

To notice the temperature. To choose our impact. To lead from the mindset that sees others as people first. When we do that we're not just changing the room, we're changing the way we relate, the way we lead, and ultimately, our cultures.

Interested in learning more about developing and implementing an outward mindset at work? [Chat with an expert from our team.](#)