A FREE COMPANION TO STREET-SMART MANAGEMENT WISDOM

The Manager's Field Kit

Worksheets and pocket rules for the first ninety days, the hard conversations, the bad hires and the worst week of your career.



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How to Use This Kit

Keep it next to your keyboard. Pull out the page you need the week you need it.

Street-Smart Management Wisdom follows three managers: Maya Delacroix, a brilliant engineer promoted to team lead; David Rodriguez, a likable creative director who has been winging it for five years; and Keisha Williams, an operations veteran so good at her job that nothing works without her. Each one gets a guide who hands over a working method. This kit collects those methods as worksheets.

1. **The first ninety days**: listening sessions and the intervention log.
2. **Decisions and communication**: the decision sorter and the team agreement.
3. **Performance and people**: diagnosis before the fix, and the three personnel questions.
4. **Hiring and managing up**: better questions, better references, and the difficult boss toolkit.
5. **If you left tomorrow**: knowledge transfer that works.
6. **Crisis and growth**: the triage card and the early warning question.

> *People-first, problem-second. Every time.*

Part 1: The First Ninety Days

Managing people is a different job from the one that got you promoted. Your instincts haven't caught up yet.

Listening sessions

Hold one with each person. No agenda, no data, no problem solving. Ask, then listen.

- [ ] What's working?
- [ ] What's frustrating you?
- [ ] What do you wish your manager understood about your work?
- [ ] What would make it easier for you to speak up?

The one-week intervention log

Every time you step in to solve something, write it down. On Friday, mark which ones needed you. Maya found that roughly forty percent of her time went to problems her team could have handled.

DAY	WHAT I STEPPED IN ON	NEEDED ME?	WHO SHOULD OWN IT

Part 2: Decisions and Communication

"Stop treating every decision like it's the same size."

The decision sorter

David's department head gave him two questions: how reversible is this, and what's the blast radius if I'm wrong?

	SMALL BLAST RADIUS	LARGE BLAST RADIUS
EASY TO REVERSE	**Just decide.** Most decisions live here.	Somewhere in between. Use judgment.
HARD TO REVERSE	Somewhere in between. Use judgment.	**Slow down** and get more information.

The decision log

Write down what was decided and why, so the next crisis doesn't force you to rebuild months of context from memory.

DATE	DECISION	WHY	WHO MADE IT

The team communication agreement

Maya's team was fighting over unspoken expectations that looked like a people problem. A ninety-minute conversation and a one-page document ended more friction than anything else she tried. Fill this in together.

QUESTION	WHAT WE AGREED
Our core hours, across time zones	
Expected response time on chat	
Expected response time on email	
What counts as urgent, and how we flag it	
What just feels urgent at 11 PM and can wait	

No weasel words

"I think we can," "that looks OK" and "Friday looks good" are ways of avoiding an answer. Ask for yes or no on every deadline. A no is fine. Now you can fix it: extend the date, take something off their plate, or add help.

Part 3: Performance and People

Output is what someone produces. Performance is the thinking and engagement behind it, and the direction it's heading.

Diagnose before you fix

DIAGNOSIS	SIGNS	THE FIX
Capability gap	Works the hours and cares, but the job has grown past their skills	Development: a mentor, a seat in early planning, one project with real latitude
Effort	Knows how, has stopped trying	A direct conversation about standards and expectations
Systemic	Several people drifting the same way at once	Fix the environment first, then hold the individual conversations

Weekly observation notes

David missed eight months of decline because he tracked deadlines instead of people. Keep a line a week on each person for sixty days.

NAME	QUALITY OF THINKING, BEYOND WHETHER IT SHIPPED	CURIOSITY OR HABIT?

Opening the conversation you've been avoiding

> *"I've been watching your last eight months of work and I think something's shifted. I'd like to understand it from your side before I tell you what I'm seeing."*

The three personnel questions

For someone whose effect on the team you've been explaining away. Answer the third one first.

1. **Are they willing and able to adapt in practice?** Judge by observable change over a set period, never by stated intentions.
2. **What does continued investment cost the rest of the team?** This is almost always underestimated, because it's spread across many people.
3. **Am I waiting because I believe change is coming, or because the decision is uncomfortable?** If it's the second, deal with your own avoidance before anything else.

Part 4: Hiring and Managing Up

Hire for the team, the environment and the next eighteen months.

Interview questions with awkward details

- [ ] Tell me about a time you were outvoted on a technical decision you thought was wrong. Walk me through what you did next.
- [ ] Tell me about someone you worked with who learned more slowly than the rest of the team. What did you do?
- [ ] Give them a problem outside their stated expertise. Watch the process, and listen for "I'm guessing here."
- [ ] Have them do a small piece of the actual work before you hire.

Score what predicts the future

CAPABILITY	CANDIDATE 1	CANDIDATE 2	CANDIDATE 3
How fast they learn something new			
Adaptability when things are unclear			
How they respond to being wrong			

Reference questions

- [ ] Tell me about a project that brought out their strengths. What kind did they struggle with?
- [ ] Describe a time requirements changed midway. How did they respond?
- [ ] If you were staffing a new team and could take two people from your previous org, would they be one of them? Why or why not?
- [ ] Talk to a peer as well as a manager. Peers know how someone works in the weeds.

The difficult boss toolkit

- [ ] Study your boss's patterns for thirty days before you try to influence anything: when they move fast, what framing they respond to
- [ ] Send a short pre-brief before any decision you care about, data up front, framed as something your boss can present upward
- [ ] Build relationships that don't route through your boss, before you need them
- [ ] Keep a factual record: what was decided, who made the call, what happened
- [ ] For each executive, learn whether they want data or a summary, updates or results, options or a recommendation

Part 5: If You Left Tomorrow

Keisha's ten-day vacation brought forty-seven messages by day three. Her documentation existed. It recorded what she did and none of how she thought.

What would break?

WHAT ONLY I CAN DO OR DECIDE	WHO SHOULD OWN IT	BY WHEN

Write it in three layers

1. **Procedures** for routine work, usable by anyone with basic training.
2. **Decision trees** for complex but predictable situations, with your judgment criteria written out instead of assumed.
3. **Principles** for situations nobody can predict: the reasoning behind the rules, so someone can work from first principles when the playbook runs out.

Then have your team read it and mark every place they still have to guess. Each one marks a gap in the document.

Hand over a decision

Keisha told her floor lead: “For the next ninety days, I want you to make the call on any supplier decision under fifty thousand dollars. Don't check with me first. Tell me what you decided and why after the fact.”

Decision type: _____ **Owner:** _____ **Limit:** _____ **For how long:** _____

Make it survive a successor

- [ ] What would a competent successor with different priorities do with this program?
- [ ] I have written down the problems it prevents and what would happen if it stopped
- [ ] The people who benefit from it are on record saying so
- [ ] I asked the person taking over what they need, instead of only telling them what I know

Part 6: Crisis and Growth

David's worst week brought five crises at once. They didn't add up. They compounded.

The triage card

1. **Legal or HR first.** Harassment and discrimination complaints get same-day engagement. Hand them to the people whose job it is.
2. **Business-critical second.** Call the person directly and ask what went wrong from their side.
3. **Important but can wait forty-eight hours third.**
4. **Everything else waits.** Making peace with what has to wait is a skill.

When crises feed each other, deal first with the one making the others worse. Then hold a short, honest team meeting: this is a hard week, here's what I'm focused on, here's what I need from you.

THIS WEEK'S FIRES	TIER (1 TO 4)	NEXT ACTION

The early warning question

Ask it in every check-in with your leads, every time:

> *What's developing that I don't know about yet?*

If your team doubled next quarter

- [ ] I know what would break first in the management structure
- [ ] I know which decisions route through me that don't need to
- [ ] My cost model counts the time new hires take to get up to speed
- [ ] Quality is checked by the team together, and the standard doesn't live only in my approval queue
- [ ] I have been surprised lately by a good decision made without me

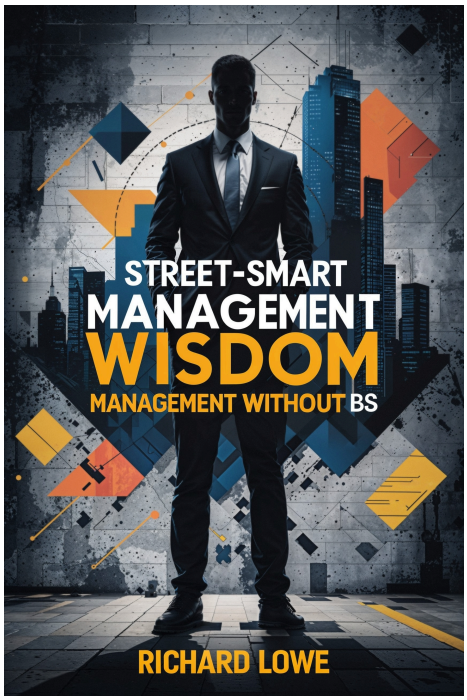
My guides

Maya had Sarah Braddock, David had Carla, Keisha had Loretta Fines. Find yours before the crisis, when you can still think.

1. _____ **2.** _____

The Whole Story

These tools come from the stories in Street-Smart Management Wisdom, where Maya, David and Keisha make nearly every mistake a manager can make and find the frameworks that get them through. Read the book to watch each tool get earned, and to see what changed when they used it.



Street-Smart Management Wisdom: Management Without BS
The Working Life

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