



## **PIVOT: LEADING WITH CLARITY WHEN THE PRESSURE IS ON**

**By Lisa L. Baker**

It's rarely convenient. It's rarely comfortable. And it never asks if now is a good time.

You're in the middle of a pivotal leadership moment.

The numbers aren't landing.

A conversation shifts unexpectedly.

A key team member gives notice.

Or you recognize that your current strategy has run its course.

Expectations are high. The pressure is real. And the next move is yours to make.

Your chest tightens.

Your thinking speeds up.

In that moment, you feel the weight of being the one others look to for direction.

This is the unseen reality of leadership under pressure. The part no one prepares you for.

### **Why Pressure Changes How You Think**

Even experienced leaders can default to survival mode here. You might overanalyze. You might rush toward the first solution just to relieve tension. You

might hesitate longer than you'd like to admit.

That's not a flaw in your leadership. It's a natural human response to stress.

And there's science behind it. According to the American Institute of Stress, 83% of U.S. workers report experiencing work-related stress, and elevated stress levels directly impair decision-making and cognitive clarity. When pressure rises, your brain shifts into threat response.

Strategic thinking narrows. Perspective shrinks. You're wired to protect, not to plan.

Resilience alone won't carry you through moments like these.

In high-pressure moments, you need structure.

Over years of working with leaders, entrepreneurs, and executive teams, I've seen one consistent pattern: clarity doesn't arrive on its own. It's created — intentionally.

That's why I developed the PIVOT Framework. It's a practical way to move forward without rushing, reacting, or compromising your long-term direction.

**PIVOT stands for:**

- P – Pinpoint the Problem or Possibility
- I – Identify the Need and Investigate the Impact
- V – Verify the Vision Alignment
- O – Outline the Options
- T – Take Purposeful Action

Let's walk through it.

**P: Pinpoint the Problem or Possibility**

When pressure hits, speed feels productive. It usually isn't.

Pause long enough to ask: What is actually happening?

Is this a true performance issue?

A people dynamic?

A structural gap?

Or is it a signal that growth is required?

Not every disruption is a threat. Some signal you've outgrown your current approach.

Ask yourself: What's driving this moment?

When you identify the real issue, you stop reacting to symptoms and start addressing causes.

That shift alone steadies your leadership.

**I: Identify the Need and Investigate the Impact**

Once you've named the issue, the next question becomes: What's needed now?

Do you need immediate action?

Additional data?

A candid conversation?

A recalibration of priorities?

Be honest about what the situation

requires — not what feels easiest.

Then step back and evaluate the impact.

What happens if you move forward with this decision?

What happens if you delay?

What happens if you choose not to act at all?

Strong leaders think beyond immediate relief. They consider ripple effects — on morale, on culture, on credibility.

This step moves you from reaction to strategy.

**V: Verify the Vision Alignment**

Pressure tempts you toward quick fixes.

But quick fixes often come with long-term costs.

Before committing to a direction, ask: Does this align with where we're going?

Not just this quarter.

Not just this initiative.

But the bigger vision.

Does this decision reflect your values?

Does it reinforce the culture you're building?

Does it support your long-term objectives?

Alignment isn't a luxury. It's the anchor that keeps you steady when everything

else feels unsteady.

If a decision pulls you further from your strategic direction, it's not a pivot — it's a detour.

### **O: Outline the Options**

Stress narrows your thinking. It convinces you that there are very few viable paths.

There are usually more.

Start with the obvious choices. Then push further.

What would you consider if fear weren't influencing the room?

What option have you dismissed too quickly?

Where might there be flexibility you haven't explored?

When you outline real options, you regain agency. You move from feeling boxed in to recognizing you have choices.

And leaders who operate from choice lead with greater confidence.

### **T: Take Purposeful Action**

At some point, leadership requires movement.

Purposeful action doesn't mean you have certainty. It means you choose one clear next step and commit to it.

One conversation.

One decision.

One structural adjustment.

You don't need to resolve the entire situation in a single move. You need to create forward momentum.

Momentum builds confidence. Confidence steadies teams. And stability builds trust.

### **When the Next Pivotal Leadership Moment Arrives**

Because it will.

Leadership isn't defined in calm seasons. It's defined in the moments when expectations collide with reality.

The next time you feel the pressure rise...

The next time the plan shifts...

The next time you realize something must change...

Remember this:

You don't have to react.

You don't have to rush.

And you don't have to solve everything at once.

### **You can PIVOT.**

Pause long enough to think clearly.

Assess what's truly needed.

Choose in alignment with your vision.

And take the next step with intention.

Pivotal moments aren't interruptions. They're leadership responsibilities.

And how you handle them — especially under pressure — is what ultimately defines you.

Pressure will always be part of the role.

The difference is whether it drives you or you lead through it.



**Lisa L. Baker** is the Founder of Ascentim, an award-winning executive coaching and leadership development firm that helps high-achieving professionals lead boldly and live fully.

Backed by 20+ years of Fortune 500 experience and her signature G.R.O.W. coaching process, she guides clients to align strengths, passions, and purpose to discover their Area of Greatness.

A member of the Forbes Coaches Council and a sought-after speaker, Lisa believes, "When we lead from our greatness, we are our most powerful, authentic selves."