

The Wisdom Orchard

Leadership Development Worksheets



What Needs to Change — and How Do We Try?

A Practical Guide to The Pruning Season and Leading Innovation

Challenging the process doesn't mean blowing everything up. It means being honest about what's not working, curious about what could work better, and disciplined enough to test ideas before betting the farm on them.

First: Reframe What 'Challenge' Means

Most leaders associate challenging the process with big, dramatic change — a restructure, a new system, a bold initiative. But Kouzes and Posner's research points to something quieter and more durable: the habit of noticing what's not working, asking why, and running small experiments. Identifying what needs to be pruned and when.

The orchard analogy is useful here. You don't overhaul an orchard in a single season. You prune what's dead, try a new variety in one row, adjust the irrigation in one section. You observe, learn, and scale what works. That's not timidity — that's wisdom.

This worksheet takes that approach. You'll identify real friction in your work, design a small experiment, and think honestly about where AI tools might give you new leverage.

Part One: See the Friction Clearly

You can't challenge what you haven't named.

STEP 1 — Think about your team's daily and weekly work. Where do things get stuck, slow down, or feel harder than they should?

(Don't reach for the big strategic problems yet. Start with the small, recurring ones — they're often where the real leverage is.)

Friction points I keep noticing:

STEP 2 — Now ask: which of those is actually a symptom of something deeper? What's really causing it?

Example: "Reports are always late" might be a symptom of unclear ownership, not a time management problem.

The deeper cause behind the biggest friction point:

STEP 3 — What's the cost of leaving this unchanged? Be honest — to your team, to the people you serve, to yourself.

What staying the same is costing us:

Part Two: The AI Lens — Where Might Technology Help?

AI isn't a solution to every problem. But it is genuinely useful for a specific set of leadership and operational challenges — and most leaders are underusing it, not because they're resistant, but because they haven't asked the right questions.



Using AI to Spot Friction You Might Be Missing

Try this prompt with an AI tool (Claude, ChatGPT, or similar):

Prompt: "I lead a team of [X people] who do [describe the work]. The biggest sources of frustration or inefficiency I've noticed are [list 2-3]. What are some causes I might be overlooking, and what are other leaders in similar situations typically doing about them?"

Use the response as a thinking partner, not an answer. Does it name anything you recognize? Anything that surprises you?

What the AI surfaced that I hadn't considered:

STEP 4 — Look at your friction list from Step 1. Which of these might AI genuinely help with?

Common areas where AI is already adding real value for leaders:

Where AI helps	Practical example for a leader
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Drafting and communication	Turn rough notes into a polished team update, feedback message, or meeting summary in minutes
Research and synthesis	Ask AI to summarize what's known about a problem, compare approaches, or explain a concept in plain language
Thinking through decisions	Use AI as a sounding board — "Here's a situation I'm facing. What am I missing? What are the tradeoffs?"
Onboarding and documentation	Draft SOPs, FAQ documents, or role guides from rough input — faster and more consistent
Meeting preparation	Generate agendas, pre-read materials, or discussion questions from a brief description of the goal
Data sense-making	Paste in survey results or feedback and ask AI to identify themes, patterns, or outliers

The friction on my list where AI might give me real leverage:

Part Three: Map It and Pick Your Experiment

Use the table below to document up to five friction points, what they cost, and one experiment worth trying for each. Then choose one to actually run.

(An experiment isn't a solution. It's a test. Keep it small enough that it won't cause damage if it fails.)

Where friction lives	What it costs (time, morale, quality)	One experiment worth trying

STEP 5 — From the table above, which one experiment will you actually run in the next 30 days?
Pick the one with the best combination of: manageable risk + meaningful impact + your ability to influence it.

My Experiment Design	
The challenge I'm targeting:	
My hypothesis:	
What I'll try (the experiment):	
How small can I make this first step?	
Who needs to know / be involved:	
How I'll know if it's working:	
Timeline:	

Part Four: The Human Side of Change

Experiments involve other people. Before you launch, think through the human dynamics — because a technically sound idea can still fail if people aren't ready for it.

Who is most affected by this change? How might they feel about it?

Who do I need to bring along before I start — not just inform, but genuinely involve?

What resistance should I expect, and how will I respond to it with respect rather than frustration?

 **Using AI to Prepare for Resistance**

If you're anticipating pushback, try this:

Prompt: *"I'm planning to change [describe the process] on my team. The people most affected are [describe them]. What objections are they likely to have, and how might I address each one in a way that feels genuine rather than dismissive?"*

This isn't about scripting a sales pitch. It's about taking other people's concerns seriously enough to think them through before you're in the room.

Part Five: After the Experiment — Learning, Not Just Judging

Most experiments don't fail or succeed cleanly — they teach. The question isn't just "did it work?" but "what did we learn, and what do we do next?"

Reflection question	My notes
What actually happened?	
What surprised me — good or bad?	
What would I do differently?	
What did my team learn from watching me try this?	
Scale it, adjust it, or abandon it?	

The orchard keeper doesn't wait for perfect conditions. They observe, they adjust, they try. A leader who experiments — even imperfectly — builds a culture where learning is normal and stagnation is not. That's how orchards grow. That's how teams do too.

— The Wisdom Orchard

Name: _____ Date: _____ Role: _____
