A FRAMEWORK FROM MERIDIAN LEADERSHIP CONSULTING

The Three Ropes™

Three patterns that quietly hold experienced leaders in place and what changes when you finally see the one you're running.

Swipe →

Hi. I’m Caleb Shuey.

I spent more than twenty years leading technology and operations teams. The last fourteen years at a large beverage distributor, the years before that running operations in a demanding nonprofit. I led people, made decisions under pressure, and made my share of mistakes I did not see clearly until years later.

Meridian Leadership Consulting is the work I built from inside that experience. The Three Ropes is one of its core frameworks, a way of naming the patterns I kept seeing in the leaders around me, and in myself, and could not at first explain.

Most leadership development teaches new behaviors on top of patterns the leader cannot see.

The patterns win.

Six months after a leadership program ends, much of what was learned has often faded. Not because the content was wrong, but because the leader’s patterns under pressure were never named in the first place. And unnamed patterns run unchecked.

Behavior repeated under pressure and rewarded by results doesn’t stay a behavior.

It starts to feel like part of who you are.

And people defend what feels like who they are. That is what a rope is, a leadership behavior that has stopped being something you do and become something you are.

Feedback that challenges a pattern you see as part of yourself does not feel like information.

It feels like a threat.

That isn’t a weakness. You are doing *exactly* what people do: protecting how you see yourself. Which is why these patterns can run for years, quietly and often at real cost, inside leaders who are smart, self-aware, and trying.

ROPE 01

Competence Identity

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Leading through being the most capable person in the room. That's what got you to where you are in the first place. The standard is yours. The answers route through you. The team relies on your expertise.

YOU'LL RECOGNIZE IT WHEN

You are holding the answer in your head before the team has finished asking the question, or you give the answers before any questions are even asked. People route around each other to get to you. You feel useful...and a little exhausted.

THE COST

Problems flow up. The team stops thinking because they do not need to. The most ambitious people leave because there is no room above your expertise for them to grow.

ROPE 02

Conflict Calculus

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Leading through keeping the room comfortable. You translate hard feedback into something digestible. You absorb tension before the team feels it. The warmth is real.

YOU'LL RECOGNIZE IT WHEN

- *You leave a difficult conversation having said most of what you meant, just gently enough that the other person did not quite hear it.*
- *Often, in difficult situations you handle the friction so the team does not have to.*

THE COST

Conversations never quite say the thing that needs to be said. The warmest cultures can end up the least honest. The leader carries weight no one else can see and the team never builds the muscle of working through hard things.

ROPE 03

Productivity Identity

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Leading through output. You set the pace. The standard is your performance. The team is elevated by proximity to your work ethic.

YOU'LL RECOGNIZE IT WHEN

When something is at stake, you take it on yourself. Not because the team isn't capable or can't do it, but because the work is faster, cleaner, and more reliable in your hands. Late nights feel like leadership.

THE COST

A team that performs but does not own. When you step away, the performance steps away with you. Succession is fragile, because no one has been allowed to be slow enough to actually learn.

Which one is yours?

When you imagine letting this pattern run less often, does it feel a little difficult, or does it make you anxious and feel like a threat to who you are?

If the honest answer is threat, it's more than just a habit. You are looking at a rope.

Most leaders run one rope primarily and a second one underneath it. If more than one feels familiar, that is normal. The dominant one is usually the one with the highest cost.

The work is not to drop the rope.

The rope got you here. It built your career. It produced real results.

The work is to see it clearly enough to choose when it serves you and when it does not.

The pattern still runs.

But you start to notice it running.

In the moment of noticing, you have a choice you did not have before.

That moment is the whole work.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE WHEN IT IS RUNNING

An observation, not a case study.

A senior leader is in a meeting. A direct report half-finishes a sentence about a project that has stalled. The leader already has the answer. They give it. The room nods. The meeting moves on.

The leader leaves feeling effective. The direct report leaves having lost one more rep at thinking out loud, sitting with not-knowing, and arriving at the answer themselves. The competence the leader is demonstrating is the same competence they are quietly preventing from forming in their team.

That is the Competence Identity rope tightening.

IF THIS LANDED

Which rope feels most familiar?

Drop it in the comments: 1, 2, or 3? Or if you want to have a conversation about which rope you are holding onto the tightest, drop me a message.

I read everything that comes in. And if there is a deeper conversation to have about which rope is running and what it is costing, I do that work one-on-one through Meridian.

MERIDIAN

LEADERSHIP CONSULTING

We work with experienced leaders on the patterns they cannot fully see in themselves.

Sequence-Based Behavioral Design™

Know yourself. Lead better. Build something that lasts.

meridianleaders.com