THE MODERN IT LEADER

THE LEADERSHIP STARTER SERIES / 01

Your First 30 Days
as an IT Manager

A practical guide to building trust, assessing operations and setting the direction for your team.

01	02	03	04
LISTEN	ASSESS	CONNECT	PRIORITIZE

Published by The Modern IT Leader

Founded by Randy Young

Lead Smarter. Work Better. Deliver Results.

Your leadership journey starts here

A note from The Modern IT Leader

You have earned the opportunity to lead.

Technical expertise may have opened the door to management, but the work ahead is different. Your success now depends on how well your team delivers, how reliably technology supports the business and how effectively you earn the trust of the people who depend on you.

Why the first month matters

New managers often feel pressure to prove themselves by fixing problems immediately. Resist the urge to redesign the organization before understanding it. Spend your first month discovering how decisions are made, what your team needs and which technology risks deserve attention. Act immediately on urgent safety, security or service risks through established channels; defer discretionary changes until you understand their consequences.

How to use this guide

Set aside a short block each day for discovery and reflection. Work through the weekly actions in order, then use the worksheets on pages 9–12 and 14 to turn observations into commitments. Share appropriate findings with your manager and team. Repeat the assessment as your understanding improves.

> **A practical success measure**
>
> By day 30, aim to have a credible baseline, a map of key relationships, a short list of priorities with owners, and a clear agreement with your manager about the next 60 days.

Our philosophy

Leadership is about developing people, building trust and delivering value. The Modern IT Leader was founded by Randy Young to help technology professionals translate those principles into everyday practice.

Educational resource. Adapt recommendations to your organization's policies, authority and risk profile. Use fictional or authorized data in worksheets. © 2026 The Modern IT Leader.

From expert to leader

Change the way you define a successful day.

Your new job is to create capacity

As an individual contributor, you are rewarded for solving difficult technical problems. As a manager, you are responsible for building a team capable of solving them consistently. Ask who owns an issue, what support they need, and what will prevent recurrence. Avoid becoming the default escalation for every routine decision.

Instead of...	Practice this...
Fixing every ticket yourself	Coach the owner; agree on a checkpoint.
Reporting how busy the team is	Explain service outcomes and business impact.
Accepting every request as urgent	Clarify impact, deadlines and trade-offs.
Making promises before checking capacity	Confirm resources, dependencies and authority.

Example / The recurring printer issue

A manager could personally troubleshoot every incident. A better approach is to assign an owner, review recurring ticket patterns, engage the appropriate support teams and communicate the next update to affected leaders. The manager remains accountable without becoming the sole technician.

Three habits to establish now

Protect time for one-on-ones, hold a brief recurring operational review and send your manager a concise status update. Keep these meetings focused on decisions, risks and support needs rather than exhaustive activity reports.

- [ ] Identify one task you should delegate this week.
- [ ] Agree on the decision authority and escalation trigger with its owner.

The first 30 days at a glance

Four weeks. Four outcomes. One clear direction.

When	Focus	Evidence of progress
Days 1–7	Listen and learn	Manager expectations, team introductions, escalation paths and initial notes.
Days 8–14	Assess operations	Service baseline, known risks, key dependencies and validated data gaps.
Days 15–21	Build relationships	Stakeholder map, communication cadence and agreed service expectations.
Days 22–30	Establish priorities	Ranked action plan, owners, measures and a reviewed 60-day roadmap.

Daily rhythm

Start with critical service issues and team blockers. Reserve time for discovery, follow up on commitments and capture decisions before the day ends. A short decision log can prevent confusion later.

Weekly rhythm

Review service trends, overdue commitments, new risks and stakeholder feedback. Confirm next actions with owners. Share only the information appropriate to the audience.

> **Keep a separate urgent-action lane**
>
> Do not wait until week four to address an active outage, suspected security incident or significant safety issue. Follow established incident and escalation procedures immediately.

WEEK 01 / DAYS 1–7

Listen and learn

Outcome: understand expectations and establish trust.

Start with your manager

Ask what success looks like at 30, 60 and 90 days, what decisions you can make independently, and which risks require immediate escalation. Clarify budget and staffing authority, reporting cadence and any commitments already made to the business.

Meet the people who do the work

Schedule individual conversations with direct reports. Ask what works, what gets in their way, which recurring issues consume time and what support they need. Avoid promising fixes before you understand constraints. Record themes without attributing sensitive comments unnecessarily.

- [ ] Confirm role scope, reporting lines and on-call responsibilities.
- [ ] Review active incidents, critical services and escalation contacts.
- [ ] Schedule initial one-on-ones with every direct report.
- [ ] Locate key policies, current projects, service reports and team documentation.
- [ ] Summarize expectations and confirm them with your manager.

> **Example / A credible first-week update**
>
> “I met with the team and reviewed current service issues. Two themes need validation: recurring access delays and inconsistent escalation ownership. I am gathering baseline data before recommending changes. No new commitments are being made without confirming capacity.”

One expectation I need to clarify with my manager:

Assess your organization

Outcome: establish a reliable operational baseline.

Understand the service environment

Map critical services, locations, support teams, vendor dependencies and escalation paths. Review open incidents and requests, backlog age, change history, staffing coverage and known risks. Ask how each metric is captured; incomplete ticketing or inconsistent definitions can distort conclusions.

Measure before you prescribe

Start with a small set of indicators: incoming and resolved tickets, aged backlog, service-level attainment, critical incidents and coverage gaps. Compare a consistent reporting period and distinguish observed facts from assumptions. Use business impact to interpret numbers rather than treating volume as the sole measure of performance.

- [ ] Identify critical services and their business owners.
- [ ] Validate ticket and incident reporting definitions.
- [ ] Review staffing, coverage and single points of failure.
- [ ] Inventory major projects, vendor commitments and dependencies.
- [ ] Document risks and missing data with owners for follow-up.

> **Example / Low ticket volume**
>
> Low recorded ticket volume may indicate good service, informal requests bypassing the service desk, or poor categorization. Compare the data with staff observations and stakeholder feedback before making staffing recommendations.

A data gap I need to validate:

Build relationships

Outcome: establish reliable two-way communication.

Map the people who influence outcomes

Identify your executive sponsor, business leaders, peer IT teams, security, finance, procurement and key vendors. Understand their priorities, how they prefer to receive updates and which decisions require their participation. Not every stakeholder needs the same level of detail.

Translate technology into business language

Instead of describing only technical symptoms, explain the affected service, business impact, current action, owner and next update. For unresolved incidents, distinguish confirmed facts from estimates and avoid unsupported restoration promises.

- [ ] Meet priority business stakeholders and ask what matters most.
- [ ] Confirm preferred escalation and communication channels.
- [ ] Establish a recurring check-in with your manager.
- [ ] Agree on cross-team handoffs and ownership boundaries.
- [ ] Send a concise summary of commitments and open questions.

> **Example / Executive escalation**
>
> “The scheduling application is intermittently unavailable, affecting appointment processing. The application team is investigating with the vendor. Staff are using the approved workaround. Restoration timing is not yet confirmed; the next update will be at 2 p.m.”

A relationship that needs intentional attention:

WEEK 04 / DAYS 22–30

Establish priorities

Outcome: agree on the next 60 days with your leadership team.

Select a manageable set of priorities

Group findings into immediate risks, quick wins and longer-term improvements. Rank discretionary work by business impact, urgency, effort and dependencies. Separate mandatory compliance or safety actions from optional improvements; use the appropriate governance process for significant risks.

Make commitments measurable

For each priority, define the current state, intended outcome, owner, target date and evidence of completion. Confirm resources and decision authority before committing. Be clear about what will be deferred and why.

- [ ] Review findings with the team and validate assumptions.
- [ ] Choose three to five priorities with measurable outcomes.
- [ ] Assign owners and agree on realistic milestones.
- [ ] Identify decisions, resources and approvals needed.
- [ ] Present a concise day-30 review and agree on the next 60 days.

> **Example / A small, measurable win**
>
> If handoffs are causing ticket delays, agree on ownership criteria and test them with one support queue. Compare reassignment rates and aged tickets before and after the pilot. Expand only if the data and team feedback support it.

My highest-priority outcome for days 31–60:

THE MODERN IT LEADER

WORKSHEET / 01

IT department assessment

Mark each area reviewed. Record evidence and follow-up rather than relying on memory.

- [ ] Critical services, business owners and support coverage
- [ ] Incident response, escalation and outage communications
- [ ] Service desk volume, backlog and service-level reporting
- [ ] Staffing, skills, on-call coverage and cross-training
- [ ] Assets, lifecycle, licensing and vendor dependencies
- [ ] Security, access, continuity and recovery ownership
- [ ] Budget, project commitments and change governance
- [ ] Stakeholder satisfaction and communication cadence

Area / finding	Evidence or gap	Owner / follow-up
Example: On-call coverage	Only one trained responder for a key service	Team lead / validate roster

Use authorized reports and avoid recording passwords, sensitive personal information or confidential details in unsecured copies.

THE MODERN IT LEADER

WORKSHEET / 02

Employee one-on-one

Use this reusable worksheet to listen, coach and agree on next steps.

Employee / role / meeting date:

Conversation prompts

What is going well? What is getting in your way? What would make your work easier? Which skills would you like to develop? What do you need from me as your manager?

Strengths and recent accomplishments:

Challenges, blockers and support needed:

Development interests and coaching opportunities:

Agreed action	Owner	Due date

Confirm the next meeting date. Keep sensitive personnel notes in approved systems and follow your organization's HR and privacy policies.

THE MODERN IT LEADER

WORKSHEET / 03

Stakeholder relationship map

Identify who depends on IT, what they value and how to maintain trust.

Before the meeting

Review the stakeholder's responsibilities, active service issues and known commitments. Ask what outcomes matter, what frustrates them and what an effective IT partnership would look like.

Stakeholder / role	Business need	Cadence / channel	Next action
Example: Operations director	Reliable access to scheduling	Monthly check-in; urgent escalation by phone	Confirm outage contact list

What commitments have I made, and how will I close the loop?

Use the map to plan communication, not to rank people's personal worth. Confirm preferred channels and escalation rules directly.

THE MODERN IT LEADER

WORKSHEET / 04

Operational risk assessment

Capture risks, assign ownership and route urgent issues appropriately.

A simple prioritization method

Rate likelihood and impact from 1 (low) to 3 (high). Multiply them for a discussion score from 1 to 9. Use 1–2 as low, 3–4 as moderate and 6–9 as high. This is a starter tool, not a substitute for formal risk methodology. Escalate significant safety, security or compliance concerns regardless of score.

Risk / impact	L × I	Mitigation / next action	Owner / due
Example: one trained responder; recovery delay	2 × 3 = 6	Validate backup coverage; schedule cross-training	Team lead / day 30

Risk requiring leadership decision or escalation:

Record status and residual risk in the authorized risk register. Do not accept risk beyond your delegated authority.

Five practical AI prompts

Copy, customize and verify. Use only approved AI tools and permitted information.

01 / Executive status update

Act as an IT communications editor. Using [sanitized facts], draft a 120-word update with business impact, current actions, owner, next update and decisions needed. Flag unknowns; do not invent restoration dates.

02 / One-on-one preparation

Using [non-sensitive role context and goals], suggest five open-ended coaching questions and a 20-minute agenda. Focus on employee development and remove unsupported assumptions.

03 / Operational baseline

Given [approved aggregate metrics and definitions], identify trends, data gaps and three questions to investigate. Separate observations from hypotheses. Do not infer staffing needs from ticket volume alone.

04 / Priority planning

Given [sanitized list of initiatives], propose a ranking by impact, urgency, effort and dependencies. Explain trade-offs, flag mandatory risks separately and ask for missing inputs before recommending commitments.

05 / Day-30 executive review

Using [validated achievements, baseline, risks and proposed priorities], create a five-slide outline with evidence, owners, milestones and decisions needed. Mark unverified claims and avoid overstating results.

> ### Responsible use
>
> Never enter credentials, patient or employee records, confidential vendor information or proprietary data into unapproved tools. Verify facts, calculations, policy alignment and tone before sharing AI-assisted work. You remain accountable for the final output.

THE MODERN IT LEADER

WORKSHEET / 06

Your leadership action plan

Translate your first-month findings into an accountable plan.

My leadership commitment / what I want my team to experience:

Priority / outcome	Measure / baseline	Owner / date

Resources, decisions or approvals needed:

What I will stop, defer or delegate:

Review this plan with your manager at day 30. Schedule a follow-up to check progress, remove barriers and update priorities as needed.

You have a foundation. Now build on it.

The first month is about understanding. The next 60 days are about alignment and delivery.

Your day-30 readiness check

Before moving forward, review these outcomes with your manager. Any unfinished item becomes an explicit follow-up rather than a reason to delay all progress.

- [ ] I understand the expectations, authority and escalation paths of my role.
- [ ] I have listened to my team and identified support needs.
- [ ] I have a validated operational baseline or a plan to close data gaps.
- [ ] I know the key stakeholders and have agreed communication expectations.
- [ ] I have agreed priorities, owners and measures for the next 60 days.



COMING NEXT

The IT Manager's First 90 Days Playbook

A deeper practical guide to leading teams, improving operations, communicating with executives and demonstrating business value. Planned resources include editable management templates, KPI tools, strategic planning worksheets and AI workflows.

Stay connected

Look for The Modern IT Leader's upcoming resources and product announcements. The 90-Day Playbook is in development; availability and final contents will be announced separately.

Lead Smarter. Work Better. Deliver Results.