



(LEADER GUIDE)

THE COFFEE MUG LEADERSHIP METHOD

DR. JOE HILL
higherperformancegroup.com

LEADER CORE Guide: Message Consistency Matters

Why Leaders Must Embrace Repetition

Duration: 30 Minutes

Purpose:

To facilitate a meaningful dialogue about transitioning from complex strategic frameworks to simple viral language, helping team members explore how memorable phrases drive real cultural transformation in schools and districts.

Pre-Session Preparation

- Send the article to participants 24-48 hours before the session
- Request that they bring one example of a current initiative that's struggling to gain traction
- Set up a comfortable meeting space that encourages honest dialogue
- Prepare sticky notes for the Coffee Mug Test exercise
- Consider your own example of simple language that transformed a situation

Session Flow with CORE Process Opening (5 minutes)

- Welcome participants
- Briefly explain the CORE process (Call It, Own It, Response, Execute)
- Share a personal example of when a simple phrase worked better than a complex plan
- Establish relevance: "Today we're exploring how simple, memorable language might drive deeper change than our sophisticated frameworks"

C: Call It - Questions of Clarity (7 minutes)

Group Discussion:

- "Based on the article, what is the fundamental difference between strategic language and viral language?"
- "What are the four language types educational leaders need to master?"
- "How does the Viral Language Framework transform culture?"

Facilitation Notes:

- Capture key insights on shared space
- Clarify the distinction between dumbing down and distilling wisdom
- Reference key stat: "Simple phrases drive behavior change 7x more effectively"

O: Own It - Questions of Meaning (7 minutes)

Individual Reflection:

- "Which of your current initiatives has the most forgettable language?"
- "Where have you seen simple phrases actually change behavior in your building?"
- "What exhausting pattern in your organization needs a memorable antidote?"

Coffee Mug Test:

- Each person writes on a sticky note: "What phrase do people actually say here when stressed?"
- Post all responses anonymously
- Discuss patterns that emerge

R: Response - Options for Practice (8 minutes)

Application Exercise:

- Working in pairs, participants select one struggling initiative
- Challenge: Distill its essence into 5 words or less that would:
 - o Work during crisis
 - o Be naturally repeated
 - o Connect to lived experience
 - o Inspire rather than direct
- Test each phrase using the criteria:
 - o Would someone say this at 3 PM Thursday?
 - o Could a first-year teacher use this tomorrow?
 - o Does it address a real pain point?

Group Sharing:

- Each pair shares their phrase
- Group provides feedback: "Would you actually say this?"

E: Execute - Commitment to Practice (5 minutes)

Individual Commitment:

- Each participant completes: "This week, I will test the phrase _____ by using it in _____"
- Participants identify three opportunities to use their phrase
- Commit to tracking if/how the phrase spreads

Closing (3 minutes)

- Round-robin: Share one word describing how this shift feels
- Remind participants to watch for organic spread, not forced adoption
- Leader commits to using one team-generated phrase in next communication

Key Concepts for Reference

- "Transformation happens through viral language, not strategic pillars"
- The four language types: Crisis, Priority, Persistence, Purpose
- "Cultural transformation depends more on memorable phrases than comprehensive frameworks"
- The Complexity Trap: "impressive language creates confusion, not culture"
- Viral Language Framework: Listen, Test, Watch, Reinforce, Release

Remember: Your role is to help uncover the wisdom already present, not impose new complexity. Model the principle by keeping your own language simple and memorable.