
NON-NEGOTIABLE AUDIT

Non-Negotiable

AUDIT: A QUICK RESOURCE

A 15-MINUTE PRACTICE TO CLARIFY WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS IN YOUR SYSTEM

Most leaders think they've been clear about priorities. But teams are reading stress signals, email patterns, and reactions to slowing down. They're concluding that everything is urgent.

This simple audit helps you get honest about what's truly nonnegotiable and what you've accidentally made urgent through your own behaviour.

STEP ONE

LIST YOUR ASSUMED NONNEGOTIABLES (5 MINUTES)

Write down everything you currently treat as nonnegotiable in your team or organisation. Be honest. Include:

- Response times (emails, messages, requests)
- Meeting attendance
- Reporting deadlines
- Project timelines
- Quality standards
- Approval processes
- Communication methods

Don't edit yourself. Just capture what you're currently operating as if it can't be negotiated.

STEP TWO

APPLY THE REALITY TEST (5 MINUTES)

For each item, ask three questions:

1. What actually breaks if this slips by 24 hours?

- Not what feels uncomfortable. What actually breaks.
- Be specific. "People get frustrated" is different from "we lose the contract."

2. Is this nonnegotiable because of genuine constraint, or because we've always done it this way?

- Genuine constraints: legal requirements, safety issues, client commitments with real consequences.
- Habit patterns: "this is how we've always worked," "people expect it," "I feel better when it's done."

3. Am I confusing my own anxiety with system necessity?

- Your need to feel in control is valid. But it's not the same as an actual system requirement.
- Sometimes our stress makes us tighten control on things that could actually flex.

STEP THREE

SORT INTO THREE CATEGORIES (3 MINUTES)

True Nonnegotiables

- Genuine constraints with real consequences
- Safety, legal, or contractual requirements
- Things that genuinely break if they slip

Negotiables We've Made Urgent

- Things we treat as critical but could actually flex
- Deadlines that are habits, not requirements
- Standards we've imposed without questioning why

Unclear (Need More Information)

- Things you're not sure about
- Items where you need to check with others
- Areas where the team might have better information than you do

STEP FOUR

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY (2 MINUTES)

Choose one item from your "Negotiables We've Made Urgent" list. This week, explicitly tell your team:

- *"This can wait."*
- *"Take the time you need to think this through."*
- *"I'd rather you pause and get this right than rush and need to redo it."*

Watch what happens. Notice how much relief this creates. Notice how decision quality improves when people have permission to think.

THE FOLLOW THROUGH

Do this audit quarterly. Your non-negotiables change as your context changes. What was genuinely urgent in a crisis phase might not be in a stability phase. What mattered last quarter might not matter this quarter.

And pay attention to the gap between what you say is negotiable and what your behaviour signals. If you say “take your time” but then check in every hour, your team will believe your behaviour, not your words.

THE GOAL ISN'T TO SLOW EVERYTHING DOWN. THE GOAL IS TO CREATE CLARITY ABOUT WHAT ACTUALLY NEEDS SPEED AND WHAT NEEDS SPACE TO THINK.

When people know what's truly nonnegotiable, they can relax about everything else. And that's when their best thinking shows up.