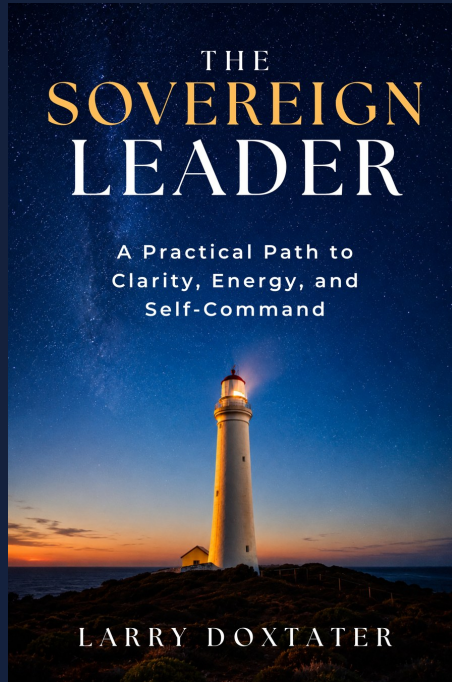


FREE SAMPLE CHAPTER



CHAPTER ONE

STILLNESS EMBRACED

"Meet pressure without being ruled by it."

From THE SOVEREIGN LEADER by Larry "Major D" Doxtater

MAJORDLEADERSHIP.COM

CHAPTER 1

STILLNESS EMBRACED

Stillness Embraced is not the absence of movement, but the ability to clarify your thinking while the world spins around you.

The M577 Moment

THE LOUISIANA HEAT AT FORT Polk did not just sit on you; it pressed against you. In the mid-1980s, I received assignment orders to the 21st MLRS Battery, a new unit under constant pressure to prove we were combat-ready. The field was loud with shouted orders, clanging equipment, and idling engines — an environment dominated by the dangerous myth that leadership required non-stop, chaotic motion.

During a certification exercise, the battery's internal radio communications collapsed. Total silence. The response was immediate chaos. Officers and NCOs moved from vehicle to vehicle, swapping cables, handsets, and batteries. Voices rose. People moved faster. Everyone looked engaged.

But nothing was improving.

As a young sergeant, I felt the pressure instantly. The expectation was clear: move, speak, react, and show that I was part of the fight. But as a natural introvert, I could feel the chaos draining my ability to think. There was motion everywhere, but no clarity. When the unit finally broke for a meal, the frantic energy shifted toward the mess area.

I didn't follow.

Instead, I climbed back into our M577 tracked vehicle, the tactical operations center for the platoon, and pulled the heavy hatch shut behind me. The difference was immediate.

Outside there was heat, noise, and pressure. Inside was the low hum of electronics, the smell of steel and diesel, and quiet enough to think. In that moment, I wasn't retreating from leadership. I was reclaiming it.

Away from the pressure to perform, I could finally work the problem methodically. I slowed down. I checked the smaller connections others had missed in their urgency. My thinking cleared. My focus sharpened. By the time the others returned, ready to restart the scramble, the signal was back online.

What I remember most was not simply that the equipment worked again. It was the change in the people around me. Their energy shifted.

Minutes earlier, everyone had moved with urgency, frustration, and visible pressure — voices sharper, hands faster than thinking. The pace itself had become part of the problem. But when the team saw the system was working, the emotional temperature dropped. People stopped scrambling. The motor pool settled into its rhythm again. The problem no longer felt larger than us.

I did not give a speech. I did not raise my voice. I did not try to project authority through volume. I simply explained what I had found, what I had corrected, and what needed to happen next.

That was enough.

The quiet inside me had become useful outside of me.

I didn't know it then, but there's a kind of leadership that moves like water — it doesn't force its way through a problem, it settles low, finds the level ground, and waits until the picture is clear enough to act on. That was the M577. That was me, learning to settle instead of scramble.

Fire had been running the show since Fort Polk woke up that morning. For those few minutes inside the hatch, Water finally got the floor — and the Performative Extrovert didn't put up a fight.

In that moment, I saw something I would not fully understand until years later: people do not only respond to a leader's words. They respond to the leader's state. When I focused on clarity instead of adrenaline, the team had something steadier to follow. My stillness did not stay private. It entered the environment.

Chapter Promise

In this chapter, you will learn how to create your own version of the M577 moment: a repeatable practice for stepping away from noise, settling your internal system, finding the real signal, and acting with clarity. You will learn how to stop performing busyness and start practicing purposeful stillness — so that your words, decisions, and presence carry precision instead of pressure.

The Tactical Takeaway

Not stillness as escape. Not stillness as hesitation. Stillness as calibration.

The M577 scenario revealed a four-step pattern that I would return to throughout my career. For now, the pattern looks like this:

Step away from the noise: Intentionally break from the performative pressure to look busy or react instantly.

Settle your internal system: Drop into your baseline to lower the adrenaline and stop cognitive drain.

Find the real signal: Methodically isolate the actual root problem from the surrounding panic.

Act with clarity: Execute the solution from a position of alignment rather than momentum.

It is the discipline that makes right action possible. For the introvert, that calibration may require physical space to recover depth. For the extrovert, it may require an intentional mental pause to keep speed from being mistaken for progress. For both, the objective is identical: separate the signal from the noise before acting.

Lens Calibration: The Signal in the Noise

Stillness does not feel the same from every starting point. For the introvert-leaning leader, quiet is the natural operating environment — but that comfort can quietly blur the line between recovery and retreat. For the extrovert-leaning leader, stillness can feel like losing ground — silence mistaken for disengagement. Both temperaments carry a version of the same challenge: learning to stop performing and start listening. What follows are two lenses on how that calibration begins.

The Introvert's Lens

The introvert naturally seeks the M577 moment — a place where noise is filtered, pressure slows down, and clarity can emerge. Inside that tracked vehicle, I wasn't being antisocial. I was being solution-oriented. The quiet gave my mind room to narrow its focus, notice what others had missed, and work the problem with precision.

For the introvert, stillness is often where the best thinking happens. But this chapter is not about hiding from pressure. It is about learning how to convert quiet clarity into decisive leadership.

The Extrovert's Lens

The extrovert often experiences stillness differently. Silence can feel unproductive, even uncomfortable. The instinct is to keep moving, keep speaking, and maintain momentum so the team feels action is happening. But movement without calibration creates Visible Velocity: high energy moving in the wrong direction.

To an extrovert-leaning leader, a sergeant sitting quietly inside a vehicle during a crisis may appear disengaged. But stillness can be one of the highest forms of engagement when it restores clarity to the mission.

For the extrovert, stillness is not a stop. It is refocusing.

True Colors® adds another layer to this same calibration. Under pressure, each temperament grips stillness differently. The structured leader may treat the pause itself as a loss of control and grip the plan tighter instead of loosening it. The action-oriented leader may treat silence as evidence that something has gone wrong and move faster to prove otherwise. The relational leader may read someone else's stillness as withdrawal, and rush to fill it with reassurance. The analytical leader may use the pause well at first, then stay there too long, turning stillness into another form of stalling. Knowing your color doesn't exempt you from the discipline. It just tells you which way pressure will try to pull you off center.

When both lenses find their stillness, the result is the same: a leader whose presence steadies the room rather than escalates it.

This fluid movement is what it means to operate from the Sovereign Center. A Sovereign Leader understands that outer influence is only as strong as inner clarity. When your internal system is balanced and your thinking is calibrated, your presence naturally carries weight — without you ever having to force it.

Internal Friction: The Cost of Static

My best leadership did not come from constant motion, volume, or visible intensity. It came when my internal system had enough quiet to think clearly.

By 1988, I was beginning to feel a price I couldn't quite explain. I could step into a room and command it. The crew trusted me. My evaluations were strong. Promotions kept coming. But something was being spent that no promotion could replenish.

It showed up physically first. I'd come home from a day of high-energy leadership and collapse. Not rest. Collapse. My nervous system would drop from 100 mph to zero with no middle ground. That wasn't Water. Water restores you. This was Fire simply running out — and collapse is a poor substitute for the rest I never scheduled.

Then it showed up professionally in a way I couldn't ignore. One afternoon, I made a tactical error during a fire mission briefing. Not a huge error — correctable — but for the first time, I recognized something: the faster I moved, the more mistakes I made. The more I performed intensity, the less clearly I thought. The Army rewarded visible leadership. The quiet thinking that kept everything running smoothly was easy to overlook.

I was winning by the Army's measure and losing by my own.

As a sergeant and Fire Direction Specialist, my energy was divided between two vastly different demands. One required deep concentration — the kind that needs silence and precision. The other was the visible culture of Army leadership, where presence was measured by volume and stillness was mistaken for disengagement.

For years, I tried to operate at full intensity in both worlds. The cost was enormous. Every hour spent performing drained my internal power grid.

The goal is not less energy. The goal is cleaner energy.

I remember that season in the 21st MLRS Battery when the pressure felt almost physical. I tried to lead by increasing my pace — thinking that more activity would produce better results. Instead, I created more static. The faster I moved, the more tension my crew absorbed from me.

Eventually, I understood something that changed how I led: my team did not need me to be louder than the problem. They needed me to be the clean signal. When everyone else is reacting emotionally, the leader who

speaks with calm, calibrated clarity becomes the one people trust instinctively. Stillness does not remove authority. It concentrates it.

This is where emotional intelligence becomes practical. Self-awareness allows you to recognize when your internal system is beginning to overload. Self-regulation allows you to interrupt that escalation before it spreads into your leadership. Stillness becomes the bridge between the two — giving you enough space to lower emotional intensity, stabilize your thinking, and return to the situation with greater precision.

You stop reacting to the environment and begin regulating your presence within it. When your own system settles, your words become clearer, your decisions become steadier, and your team has something stable to follow.

The Sovereign Principle: The Power of Pause

Every pressured moment has a gap in it — a half-second between what happens and what you do about it. Inside that gap is the leader's power to choose. Most people never find it because pressure pulls them straight into reaction. Urgency, emotion, expectation, and visibility all demand an immediate response. Stillness is how you widen the gap — enough distance to interrupt the reaction before it takes control.

This is where performance pressure becomes dangerous. When a leader feels the need to constantly appear engaged, stillness can feel like weakness. The instinct is to move faster, speak louder, and prove involvement through visible action. But without pause, leadership becomes reactive performance instead of intentional influence. Stillness slows the emotional momentum long enough for clarity to return.

The M577 was more than a vehicle in that moment. It became the gap between stimulus and response. I was not simply fixing a radio system. I was reclaiming control over my internal environment before the chaos outside shaped my thinking for me. The quiet did not remove the pressure. It gave me enough separation to respond with precision instead of adding more noise.

The leaders who shape outcomes under pressure are rarely the fastest or loudest people in the room. They are the ones who remain steady while everyone else accelerates. That is the heart of sovereignty: the ability to pause, settle yourself, identify the real issue, and act from clarity.

When the 21st MLRS Battery descended into technical chaos, the sovereign act was not joining the scramble. It was stepping back long enough to see what the scramble was missing. True influence rarely comes from reacting first. It comes from responding clearly after the reaction fades.

Stillness is not disengagement. It is observation before action.

It is not waiting passively for your turn to talk. It is slowing yourself down long enough to notice what reactive leaders miss. You hear the hesitation behind someone's agreement. You notice the tension beneath the discussion. You recognize who needs structure, who needs reassurance, who is overloaded, who has withdrawn, and where the real pressure in the room lives.

You stop reacting to the noise and start identifying the signal.

That kind of observation — seeing clearly what others caught up in the scramble cannot — is only possible when a leader has protected their internal clarity. And protecting clarity sometimes requires a harder discipline: the authority to say no.

A Sovereign Leader does not wait for permission to protect clarity. They take responsibility for it. Sovereignty is the internal authority to say no when a path no longer aligns with who you are becoming — even when that path appears successful from the outside.

Choosing alignment over external expectations is not rebellion against an organization. It is the ultimate act of self-command. When you stop allowing external expectations to define the shape of your leadership, you protect your center. That is one of the deeper purposes of stillness: it gives you enough clarity to recognize when approval is pulling you away from authenticity.

Stillness lets you hear your own signal clearly enough to lead from truth instead of performance. When you master that kind of stillness, quiet stops feeling like weakness. It becomes the source of your strongest influence.

The Three Vantages

Stillness does not look the same in every leadership role. The environment changes. The pressure changes. The level of authority changes. But the principle holds: clarity before reaction.

The Active Leader

I was in a briefing once with a commander who made a decision I disagreed with. The room was tense. People were looking at me to see if I'd challenge it. The old me would have spoken immediately — pushed back, asked clarifying questions, tried to influence the outcome in real time because its who I had become, not centered.

But I'd learned by then that my first instinct under pressure is rarely my best one. So I paused. I sat with the discomfort for thirty seconds — which felt like thirty minutes. In that pause, three things became clear: the commander had information I didn't, my objection was emotional not tactical, and the room was waiting for me to either escalate the tension or hold it steady.

I chose to hold it steady. I nodded, and the meeting moved forward. Later, the commander pulled me aside and said, "I saw you disagree. I respect that you didn't make it about ego." That moment confirmed something: the Active Leader's greatest power isn't how fast they can react. It's how steady they can remain calm when everyone else is destabilizing.

The Specialist

Consider the analyst who sits quietly through a tense planning session while louder voices compete for influence. She doesn't speak often. But when she does, people stop. Not because she demanded attention, but because she waited until her words could land with precision. Over time, her colleagues stopped seeing her silence as withdrawal. They began recognizing it as preparation.

For the Specialist, stillness becomes grounded presence. It allows thoughtful contributors to absorb patterns others miss — gaps, risks, tensions, and opportunities that reactive voices talk past. The Specialist may not always carry formal authority, but their clarity shapes the room. Over time, people turn toward them not because they speak the most, but because their words consistently carry weight.

The Transitioning Leader

Consider the senior leader who retires after thirty years of decorated service and finds, within weeks, that the silence is louder than anything they faced in the field. Without the rank, the mission, the schedule, and the team, the question arrives: who am I now? The instinct is to fill that silence

quickly — take on a new role, pursue a new title, prove that value did not retire with the uniform.

Stillness interrupts that panic. It creates space to separate external expectations from internal direction, so the next chapter of leadership is built intentionally instead of reactively. The Transitioning Leader learns that they do not have to rush into another performance to prove they still matter. They can pause, listen, recalibrate, and choose the next form of service from alignment rather than fear.

Across all three vantages, stillness serves the same purpose: it gives the leader enough internal room to choose before pressure chooses for them. Pause. Settle. See clearly. Then act.

The Lionhearted Connection: The Vulnerability of “No”

In my previous book, *Lion Hearted: Stand Tall — Find Purpose, Lead From Within*, I explored the courage required to lead from authenticity. My introversion was trained out of me early — by youth, by the Army, by a culture that rewarded volume over clarity. But I didn’t just adopt loudness poorly. I became excellent at it. I mastered the performance.

I learned to violate myself very well — and the more excellent I became at it, the harder it was to stop.

That thread connects directly to stillness. We often think of being lionhearted as something loud: bold speeches, aggressive confidence, or visible dominance. But sometimes courage is much quieter. Sometimes it is the willingness to be still long enough to hear yourself again — even when you’ve become expert at ignoring that voice.

That is the deeper act of courage. And it is where stillness and sovereignty meet.

The Sovereign Practice: The M577 Method

To a Sovereign Leader, stillness is a discipline — the intentional practice of protecting clarity before the noise of the environment begins shaping your thinking for you.

As a sergeant, I had to learn how to create moments of stillness inside one of the loudest leadership cultures imaginable. The Army did not slow down because my internal system needed recovery or recalibration. If I

wanted clarity, I had to build practices that protected it. Over time, the M577 became more than a tactical operations center. It became a practical operating model.

You met the four steps in miniature after the M577 story. Here they are as a full practice — four pillars you can build into any environment:

1. Environmental Control — Step Away from the Noise

The M577 gave me a physical space where the signal could separate from the chaos. Every leader needs a version of this boundary — whether it is a closed office door, a parked vehicle before a high-stakes meeting, or ten minutes of uninterrupted silence. The location matters less than the function: giving your mind enough distance to recover its depth.

2. Biological Regulation — Settle Your Internal System

When you cannot leave the room, stillness must become internal. Controlled breathing — even for sixty seconds — interrupts the adrenaline response and restores cognitive control. Practices like intentional breathing settle the nervous system so the brain can think. You must regulate yourself before you can hope to regulate your environment.

3. Strategic Observation — Find the Real Signal

Stillness shifts your focus from preparing your next response to reading the room. By slowing down to observe, you gather critical data before applying influence. You notice what reactive leaders miss: who is overloaded, who needs structure, and where the real tension in the team lives.

4. Clear Action — Move with Clarity

Stillness is not the final step. It prepares the leader to act with precision. Once the signal is clear, move decisively without adding unnecessary noise. The goal is not delay. The goal is calibrated action.

That is the M577 Method: control the environment when you can, regulate your body when you cannot, observe before you act, then move with clarity. Over time, these four practices become more than stress-management tools. They become a leadership discipline. Stillness stops being a retreat from leadership. It becomes the foundation underneath it.

No leader holds that center perfectly. Pressure will pull you back into old patterns. The point is not perfection. The point is return. You will drift. Notice it. Recalibrate. Come back.

Mentor Voices: The Advisors on the Page

The voices in this chapter point toward one shared truth: stillness is the discipline that makes leadership possible.

Ryan Holiday's *Stillness Is the Key* establishes the foundation. Holiday draws from Stoic philosophy, Eastern thought, and military history to argue that the leaders who shaped outcomes under pressure were rarely the fastest or the loudest — they were the ones who found a way to remain internally settled while the world accelerated around them. Stillness, Holiday argues, is not a passive state. It is an active discipline that must be practiced before the moment of pressure arrives.

Susan Cain's *Quiet* gives this truth its temperament dimension. Cain's research demonstrated that introversion — long treated as a liability in leadership culture — is often the source of the deepest thinking, the most careful judgment, and the most durable influence. The introvert-leaning leader who steps away from the scramble to think clearly is not failing the mission. They are serving it in the way they were built to serve it.

Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* adds the daily practice. Aurelius returned to stillness not as a retreat from responsibility but as preparation for it. He governed one of the most complex empires in history — and spent his private hours deliberately settling his mind before pressure could govern it for him. For leaders carrying significant responsibility, the *Meditations* remind us that stillness is not a luxury of the unhurried. It is the discipline of those who carry the most.

John Maxwell's Law of Awareness, from *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth*, sits between Cain's research and Aurelius' discipline: you must know yourself to grow yourself. Maxwell argues that leaders who never pause long enough to understand their own wiring, their own triggers, and their own capacity end up managing everyone else's growth while neglecting their own. The M577 moment was self-awareness before it was anything else. I couldn't lead the crew back to clarity until I found mine first.

Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Miracle of Mindfulness* closes this chapter's counsel by bringing stillness into the ordinary moment. Hanh taught that presence is not found only in silence or retreat — it is available inside the task

directly in front of you when the leader chooses to give it full attention. Stillness is not a destination. It is a practice returned to, repeatedly, inside whatever environment the leader finds themselves in.

Together, these voices confirm what the M577 taught long before I had language for it. Holiday reminds us that stillness is the key to clear action. Cain reminds us that quiet thinking is not a weakness — it is precision. Aurelius reminds us to settle the mind before pressure settles it for us. Maxwell reminds us that self-awareness comes before self-command. Hanh reminds us that the practice is available right now, in this moment, regardless of the noise around it.

I did not discover any of this from a book. I discovered it inside a metal box in the Louisiana heat when everything else failed. What I read later did not teach me stillness. It confirmed what survival had already shown me. That distinction matters — because the moment a leader starts believing stillness is something to be understood rather than practiced, they have already lost it. No author can return you to your center. Only you can.

The Relapse Plan: When the Smoke Settles

Even after you learn the value of stillness, there will be moments when pressure overwhelms your filters and old patterns return. The goal is not to become a leader who never loses clarity. The goal is to recognize the drift early enough to recalibrate before the noise takes over again.

For me, that drift appeared in predictable patterns. Sometimes stillness collapsed into isolation — instead of recovering, I withdrew emotionally and detached from the people around me. Other times, I swung the opposite direction and matched the emotional volume of the environment, talking faster, moving faster, trying to lead through intensity instead of clarity — Visible Velocity turned inward. Occasionally, pressure quietly eroded my long-term growth. The college courses, preparation, and disciplined habits connected to my larger vision would begin slipping because exhaustion made immediate survival feel more important than future direction.

This is what a leadership relapse often looks like. Not catastrophic failure, but gradual drift.

When the smoke settles and you realize you have lost your clarity, return to the same four steps that restored it in the first place. Step away from the noise if you can. Settle your internal system. Observe what is happening. Then act from clarity instead of pressure.

That return matters. A short walk, a closed door, a parked vehicle, or five quiet minutes may be enough to interrupt the escalation.

Ask yourself one honest question: *Am I leading from alignment right now, or am I performing to satisfy expectations?* That question cuts through the noise because many leaders confuse approval with effectiveness. The final step is to reconnect with your deeper direction. In moments of drift, the most effective interruption is not motivation — it is alignment. Ask one question: *what am I building toward?* Not the next task. Not the next deadline. The larger answer. Pressure feels permanent until it is placed next to purpose. When the immediate noise is measured against the longer direction, its weight changes. The drift does not disappear, but it loses its authority. Return to your why before you return to the work — because work without direction is how drift becomes the default.

The performative mask often begins as a survival strategy. Many leaders adopt it long before they understand themselves clearly. There is no value in attacking yourself every time old habits resurface.

Notice the drift. Recalibrate your lens. Return to practice.

Stillness is not something you achieve once and hold forever. It is something you return to repeatedly. The measure of growth is not whether you ever lose your center. It is how quickly you find it again.

The Leadership Echo: The Stability Field

In the Army, people often describe effective leaders as having “command presence.” Most assume that means being the loudest voice in the room or projecting constant intensity. Over time, I learned something different: command presence is less about volume and more about stability.

Teams absorb the emotional state of their leader. When a leader reacts with panic, frustration, or volatility, that instability spreads quickly. Tension multiplies. Decision-making narrows. Communication becomes reactive. But when a leader remains grounded under pressure, the opposite happens. The environment steadies. Thinking sharpens. The emotional temperature of the team begins to settle.

I saw this repeatedly inside the Fire Direction Center. During moments of technical failure or operational pressure, the crew looked for cues about how serious the situation really was. If I matched the chaos emotionally, the noise intensified. When I slowed down, stabilized my thinking, and worked the problem methodically, the crew began settling with me. At the

time, I did not fully understand the biology behind it. I only knew that leadership was not just verbal. People felt my presence before they fully processed my words.

That realization changed how I viewed influence. Leadership was not simply about directing tasks or managing operations. It was about regulating the emotional climate of the environment. A leader who projects calm clarity under pressure creates stability for everyone connected to them. This became one of the deeper lessons behind my decision to pursue a commission. The military did not need louder leaders. It needed leaders capable of carrying steadiness into complex environments.

This is how stillness scales beyond the individual leader. You stop demanding attention and begin creating trust. In chaotic environments, stability becomes a form of safety — and the grounded leader becomes the emotional architecture the team can organize around.

The Closing Charge: The Discipline of Stillness

Most people believe leadership is measured by how quickly someone reacts under pressure. But reaction is not the same as clarity.

The moments that shaped my growth most deeply were not the loudest moments of my career. They were the quieter moments when I stopped performing long enough to hear my own direction clearly.

Stillness allowed me to separate pressure from purpose. It helped me recognize when I was leading from alignment and when I was reacting to the expectations around me.

The loudest leader in the room is rarely the clearest.

Sovereign Leaders learn to slow themselves down long enough to think clearly while others are still reacting. Calm presence is not weakness. It is disciplined influence under pressure.

Before today ends, create one intentional moment of stillness — no distraction, no performance, no noise. Sit quietly for five minutes and ask yourself: *Where in my life am I reacting instead of leading?* Do not rush to answer. Just listen.

Stand Tall. Not because the noise disappears — but because you no longer surrender command to it.

Sovereign Reflection Questions

Three questions to carry into the work ahead.

Where in my leadership am I reacting instead of pausing — and what is the cost?

What does my version of the M577 moment look like, and when did I last use it?

Am I leading from stillness, or performing steadiness I no longer feel?

That clarity prepares us for the next structural block of sovereignty:

O — Overcoming the Five Hindrances.

THAT WAS TRUTH ONE OF TEN

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