Stewardship Readiness Institute (SRI)
Applied Stewardship Case Study Series

Case Study No. 01
The Founder's Blind Spot

These case studies are reflective stewardship instruments designed to support discernment in complex human systems. They are not prescriptive solutions but invitations to thoughtful engagement.

Applied Stewardship Simulation

Case Study 01 — The Founder's Blind Spot

Workbook Edition (ASF Field Guide Format)

(Downloadable PDF version)

Opening Reflection

Leadership dynamics are rarely simple.
The very strengths that allow someone to build an organization can sometimes create blind spots as the organization matures.

This case invites you to examine how stewardship operates when **loyalty, authority, and responsibility intersect.**

There is no single correct answer.

The goal is to develop **clearer perception, deeper discernment, and wiser response.**

The Scenario

(Same narrative as the online version — reproduced in the workbook so it stands alone offline.)

A mission-driven organization has grown rapidly over the past five years.

Its founder, Daniel, is widely respected for his vision, integrity, and relentless commitment. Many of the organization's early members joined because they believed deeply in his mission.

Under his leadership, the organization has achieved impressive results — expanding programs, attracting international recognition, and influencing policy conversations in its field.

Internally, however, a pattern has begun to surface.

Several senior staff members privately express concern that Daniel has become increasingly difficult to challenge. In meetings, alternative viewpoints are often dismissed

quickly. When difficult feedback arises, Daniel tends to interpret it as a lack of commitment to the mission.

Because of this, staff members have slowly begun to self-censor.

Disagreements are raised informally in side conversations rather than openly in leadership meetings. Some people who once spoke candidly now remain silent. A few respected early team members have quietly left the organization over the past year.

To most external observers, the organization appears successful and cohesive.

But internally, several senior staff worry that the culture is shifting from **mission-driven collaboration** toward **founder-centric loyalty**.

No one is certain how to raise the issue constructively.

Daniel remains deeply committed to the organization's purpose and works harder than anyone else on the team. Many feel grateful for his leadership and worry that confronting him could fracture trust or destabilize the organization.

At the same time, the quiet avoidance of difficult conversations is beginning to affect morale and long-term strategic thinking.

The leadership team now faces a difficult question:

How should responsible stewards respond when a founder's strengths begin to create organizational blind spots?

Section 1 — Pattern Recognition

Before jumping to solutions, examine the dynamics carefully.

Reflection

1. Which leadership qualities likely helped Daniel build the organization successfully?

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2. Which of those same qualities might now create blind spots?

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3. What signs suggest that **psychological safety** may be declining?

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4. Which signals in the case might indicate **early institutional fragility**?

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Section 2 — Loyalty vs Stewardship

In mission-driven environments, loyalty can become complicated.

Reflection

5. What does healthy loyalty to a founder look like?

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6. When might loyalty unintentionally prevent honest dialogue?

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7. What responsibilities do senior team members carry when they notice a concerning dynamic?

Section 3 — Risk Mapping

Avoiding a problem is also a decision.

Exercise

Identify potential risks under two scenarios.

Scenario	Possible Consequences
The team avoids raising the issue	
The issue is raised poorly or confrontationally	

Section 4 — Responsible Intervention

Not all feedback is equal.

Reflection

8. Who would be best positioned to raise this concern?

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9. What tone or framing might protect both the **mission** and the **founder's dignity**?

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10. What leadership structures might help prevent similar patterns in the future?

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Section 5 — Governance Design

Healthy organizations rely on **structures**, not only personalities.

Exercise

List governance practices that could strengthen long-term institutional health.

Examples might include:

- Leadership councils

- Structured feedback loops

- Independent board oversight

- Rotating strategy reviews

Write your own ideas below.

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Closing Reflection

Leadership maturity often involves a difficult shift:

From **personal authority**
to **shared stewardship**.

The question this case invites you to consider is:

How can organizations honor the gifts of founders while still developing structures that protect the mission beyond any one individual?

Stewardship Integration Notes

After completing this case, reflect briefly:

• What insight surprised you most?

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• How might these dynamics appear in other organizations you know?

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• What signals might indicate similar patterns emerging elsewhere?

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