3️⃣Crucial Conversation Sample

Moving From Compliance to Agency

Scenario:
An associate repeatedly submits project reports late. Each time, the explanation is reasonable. The pattern continues.

Version 1: Compliance-Based Leadership (What Often Happens)

Leader: “I need those reports on time.”

Administrator: “I know. It’s just been a heavy week.”

Leader: “Okay, just try to get them in earlier next time.”

Result: “Of course”

Sympathy → No ownership → Pattern continues.

Version 2: Agency-Based Servant Leadership

(Using Your Diagnostic Tool)

Leader:
“Let’s talk about the project reports. The last three have been late. The agreed deadline is Monday at noon. They arrived Tuesday afternoon. That’s the reality. Do you see it differently?”

Associate:
“No, that’s accurate.”

Leader:
“What part of finalizing a report is owned by you?”

Associate:
“All of it is mine”

Leader:
“What interfered?”

Associate:
“I prioritized other issues and assumed that you would understand.”

Leader:
“What commitment did you make?”

Associate:
“That I would deliver by Monday at noon.”

Leader:
“And what is your plan to correct this?”

Associate:
“I’ll block time on Friday afternoons and draft them earlier. If I anticipate delay, I’ll notify you before the deadline.”

Leader:
“By when will I see that adjustment?”

Associate:
“Starting this week.”

Leader:
“What day and time, and what support do you need?”

Associate:
“None. I just need to plan differently to deliver on Monday at noon”

Leader:
“Good. I’m holding you to that. We’ll review after the next two cycles.”

What Happened Here?

- Reality was named.
- Responsibility was owned.
- A corrective action was proposed.
- Accountability was established.
- Dignity was preserved.

No anger.
No lecture.
No rescue.
No punishment.

Just movement toward agency.

Why This Demonstration Is Critical to Your Book

It shows:

- Empathy without indulgence.
- Confrontation without dominance.
- Accountability without humiliation.
- Authority exercised without diminishing the other.

That is the narrow path you described earlier.

If You Want to Deepen This Further

Next we could:

- Write the same scenario when the person refuses ownership — and how to escalate without punishment.
- Create a “Leader Rescue Reflex” section (how leaders unintentionally undermine agency).
- Draft a short case study from your consulting career that shows a breakthrough moment.