

# **FIRST 30-DAYS PLAYBOOK**

**A NEW LEADER'S GUIDE TO STARTING  
STRONG**

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"I have no idea what I'm supposed to do first."

Sound familiar?

You just stepped into the role. Maybe you were a teacher last month. Maybe you've been an assistant for years and finally got the promotion. Either way, you're staring at a desk full of urgent things with no clear playbook for what matters most.

Here's what I've learned working with first-year Christian school leaders: the problem isn't that you lack talent or calling. The problem is you're trying to figure out leadership in real time while everyone's watching.

Your first 24 months as a leader are the most critical window you'll ever have.

Think about it: In your first 24 months, you'll either build the trust, systems, and strategic foundation that carry you for decades—or you'll spend years recovering from decisions you didn't know you were making.

This playbook focuses on the first 30 days of those critical 24 months.

Do them right, and you build trust, clarity, and momentum. Do them scattered, and you're playing catch-up for the rest of your tenure.

Your calling deserves a strong start.

Let's build it together.

Building stronger schools,

*Steven Barker*  
*Founder, StrongerSchool*

# HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

30 calendar days. Work Monday–Friday only.

**Weekends:** No playbook work. These two days are for your family and your church. That's the challenge, can you lead well Monday-Friday so you can rest well Saturday–Sunday?

What you'll build:

- Week 1 (Days 1–5): Trust with your team
- Week 2 (Days 8–12): Clarity on your mission and metrics
- Week 3 (Days 15–19): Quick wins that prove you can lead
- Week 4 (Days 22–26): Strategic foundation for Year 1
- Final Days (Days 29–30): Celebrate and commit

What you'll need:

- 50 minutes per weekday
- A notebook for observations
- Courage to ask questions without pretending you know everything



2. **Send this email** (customize for your school):

**SUBJECT:** Let's talk—scheduling our first 1-on-1

*Hi [Name],*

*I'm looking forward to working with you this year. Before I make any big decisions, I want to hear from the people who know this school best, and that's you.*

*Can we schedule a 30-minute conversation in the next two weeks? I want to hear:*

- *What's working well that I should protect*
- *What's broken that I should fix*
- *What you need from me to do your job well*

*Here's my Calendly link: [insert link]*

*Looking forward to it.*

*[Your name]*

3. **Block your calendar** for these conversations

**REFLECTION:**

What does it feel like to start by listening instead of announcing changes?

# DAY 2: LEARN THE MISSION + IDENTIFY EARLY WINS

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Internalize your mission statement AND find 2–3 quick fixes.

## PART A: MISSION

1. **Find the mission statement** (website, handbook, board docs)

WRITE IT HERE:

2. **Break it down:** What are the 3 core commitments?

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

3. **Test it:** Walk through campus. Which commitments do you SEE happening today? Which are just words on a wall?

## PART B: EARLY WINS

1. **Brainstorm:** What are the small, annoying problems everyone complains about but no one has fixed?

Problem	Can I Fix in 30 Days?	Impact (Low/Med/High)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

### MY TOP 2–3 EARLY WINS:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

# DAY 3: UNDERSTAND THE CALENDAR

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Map the school's rhythm for the next 90 days.

**ACTION STEPS:**

1. **Get the master calendar** (board meetings, parent nights, enrollment deadlines)
2. Highlight the non-negotiables:

Date	Event	Who Owns	My Role?

3. **Ask:** "What's the one event that defines this school year?"

THEIR ANSWER:

# DAY 4: HAVE YOUR FIRST HARD CONVERSATION

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Practice saying "I don't know" or "Help me understand."

## ACTION STEPS:

1. Identify one decision you're being pressured to make but don't have enough information yet.

THE DECISION:

2. Script the conversation:

"I appreciate you bringing this to me. Before I make a decision, I need to understand [X, Y, Z]. Can you help me with that? I want to make the right call, not just the fast call."

3. Have the conversation today.

HOW IT WENT:

# DAY 5: MEET WITH YOUR BOARD CHAIR

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Establish communication rhythm with your board chair.

## ACTION STEPS:

1. Schedule a 30-minute coffee or call
2. Ask these questions:
  - "What does the board need from me in the first 90 days?"
  - "How do you prefer to communicate between board meetings?"
  - "What's one thing you hope I'll do differently?"

## THEIR ANSWERS:

3. Propose a communication rhythm:

## WHAT YOU AGREED TO:

# WEEKEND CHALLENGE (DAYS 6-7)

**THIS WEEKEND'S PRIORITY:** No playbook work. Protect these two days for your family and your church.

THE CHALLENGE:

Can you lead well Monday–Friday so you can rest well Saturday–Sunday?

REFLECTION PROMPTS (Sunday evening):

1. Did I check work email this weekend?  Yes  No
2. Did I bring work stress into family time?  Yes  No
3. Was I fully present at church?  Yes  No
4. What's one thing I need to finish this week so I can truly rest next weekend?

**REMEMBER:** Your family deserves to have you back. If you can't protect weekends now, you won't protect them in Month 6.

# WEEK 2: BUILD CLARITY (DAYS 8-12)

## Your Week 2 Goal:

End the week with 3 measurable goals for Year 1 and a simple way to track progress.

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## DAY 8: DEFINE SUCCESS FOR YEAR 1

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Answer the question, "What does a successful Year 1 look like?"

### ACTION STEPS:

1. If you could only accomplish 3 things this year, what would they be?
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.

2. **Make them measurable:** Turn vague into specific.

MY 3 MEASURABLE YEAR 1 GOALS:

- 1.

- 2.

- 3.

3. **Gut check:** Are these aligned with the mission?

Yes  No

# DAY 9: IDENTIFY YOUR METRICS

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Choose 3–5 numbers you'll track monthly.

Metric	Current Number	Year 1 Target	How Often?
			<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly
			<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly
			<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly

WHERE I'LL TRACK THESE:

# DAY 10: CLARIFY YOUR NON-NEGOTIABLES

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Define 3–5 values you will not compromise on.

MY NON-NEGOTIABLES:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Why define these now?** So you know your hills to die on before you're in the heat of conflict.

# DAY 11: AUDIT YOUR TIME

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Track how you actually spend your time today.

Time Block	What I Did	High-Priority?
8:00–9:00		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
9:00–10:00		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
10:00–11:00		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
11:00–12:00		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
12:00–1:00		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
1:00–2:00		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2:00–3:00		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3:00–4:00		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4:00–5:00		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

At day's end:

- % of time on high-priority work: \_\_\_\_\_%
- % of time on urgent-but-not-important: \_\_\_\_\_%

**REFLECTION:**

What needs to change?

# DAY 12: BUILD YOUR WEEKLY RHYTHM

## WEEKLY RHYTHM

Block recurring time for:

- Strategic thinking (2–3 hours/week)
- 1-on-1s with direct reports
- Family/rest (non-negotiable)

MY IDEAL WEEKLY RHYTHM:

<b>Day</b>	<b>Morning</b>	<b>Afternoon</b>	<b>Evening</b>
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			

# WEEKEND CHALLENGE (DAYS 13-14)

**THIS WEEKEND'S PRIORITY:** No playbook work. Protect these two days for your family and your church.

THE CHALLENGE:

Can you lead well Monday–Friday so you can rest well Saturday–Sunday?

REFLECTION PROMPTS (Sunday evening):

1. Did I check work email this weekend?  Yes  No
2. Did I bring work stress into family time?  Yes  No
3. Was I fully present at church?  Yes  No
4. Did I protect my weekly rhythm this week?  Yes  No
5. What will I say "no" to next week to protect margin?

# WEEK 3: EXECUTE QUICK WINS (DAYS 15-19)

## Your Week 3 Goal:

End the week with 2–3 visible improvements that prove you're a leader who listens and acts.

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## DAY 15: EXECUTE QUICK WIN #1

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Take action on your first quick win from Day 2.

QUICK WIN #1:

ACTION STEPS:

1. Break it into tasks:
  - 
  - 
  -
2. Assign ownership:
3. Set a deadline:
4. **Communicate the fix** to the people affected

# DAY 16: EXECUTE QUICK WIN #2

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Take action on your first quick win from Day 2.

QUICK WIN #2:

ACTION STEPS:

1. Break it into tasks:

- 
- 
- 

2. Assign ownership:

3. Set a deadline:

4. **Communicate the fix** to the people affected

# DAY 17: EXECUTE QUICK WIN #3

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Take action on your first quick win from Day 2.

QUICK WIN #3:

ACTION STEPS:

1. Break it into tasks:

- 
- 
- 

2. Assign ownership:

3. Set a deadline:

4. **Communicate the fix** to the people affected

# DAY 18: CELEBRATE THE WINS

## CELEBRATE

**Send a thank-you email** to everyone who helped execute the quick wins.

Share the wins publicly:

"In the last two weeks, we fixed [X, Y, Z] because you told me it mattered. This is what happens when we listen and act together."

THEMES I'M SEEING:

# DAY 19: CLARIFY DECISION AUTHORITY

## DECISION AUTHORITY

Make a list:

<b>Decision Type</b>	<b>I Own It</b>	<b>Board Approves</b>	<b>Collaborative</b>
<b>Hiring teachers</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Budget changes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Curriculum</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Clarify gray areas** with your board chair this week.

# WEEKEND CHALLENGE (DAYS 20–21)

**THIS WEEKEND'S PRIORITY:** No playbook work. Protect these two days for your family and your church.

THE CHALLENGE:

Can you lead well Monday–Friday so you can rest well Saturday–Sunday?

REFLECTION PROMPTS (Sunday evening):

1. Did I check work email this weekend?  Yes  No
2. Did I bring work stress into family time?  Yes  No
3. Was I fully present at church?  Yes  No
4. Did my quick wins land well with the team?  Yes  No
5. What other decision rights do I need to clarify?

# WEEK 4: BUILD STRATEGIC FOUNDATION (DAYS 22–26)

## Your Week 4 Goal:

End the week with a leadership dashboard and a 90-day roadmap.

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## DAY 22: BUILD YOUR LEADERSHIP DASHBOARD

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Create a one-page view of your Year 1 goals, metrics, and progress.

### MY DASHBOARD INCLUDES:

- Year 1 Goals (from Day 8)
- Monthly Metrics (from Day 9)
- Weekly Habits
- Quarterly Milestones

### WHERE IT LIVES:

# DAY 23: DRAFT YOUR 90-DAY ROADMAP

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Map out your next 90 days (Months 2–4).

90-DAY PRIORITIES:

Month	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
2			
3			
4			

# DAY 24: ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION RHYTHMS

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Set up predictable communication loops.

MY COMMUNICATION RHYTHM:

- **Staff:** Weekly update email every \_\_\_\_\_
- **Board:** Monthly written report + \_\_\_\_\_ check-ins with chair
- **Parents:** \_\_\_\_\_ newsletter or update

# DAY 25: BUILD YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Identify 2–3 people who will be your inner circle.

MY LEADERSHIP TEAM:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
Role: \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
Role: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
Role: \_\_\_\_\_

REFLECTION:

Why can't you lead alone?

# DAY 26: SET BOUNDARIES

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Define when you're "off" and communicate it.

MY BOUNDARIES:

- I don't check email after \_\_\_\_\_
- I don't work on \_\_\_\_\_ (day of week)
- I protect \_\_\_\_\_ for family

HOW I'LL COMMUNICATE THIS:

# WEEKEND CHALLENGE (DAYS 27–28)

**THIS WEEKEND'S PRIORITY:** No playbook work. Protect these two days for your family and your church.

THE CHALLENGE:

Can you lead well Monday–Friday so you can rest well Saturday–Sunday?

REFLECTION PROMPTS (Sunday evening):

1. Did I check work email this weekend?  Yes  No
2. Did I bring work stress into family time?  Yes  No
3. Was I fully present at church?  Yes  No
4. Do I have a clear leadership dashboard?  Yes  No
5. Have I communicated my boundaries?  Yes  No

# FINAL DAYS (DAYS 29–30)

## DAY 29: SHARE YOUR VISION + WRITE YOUR RETROSPECTIVE

### PART A: SHARE YOUR VISION

**Write a 2-minute vision statement** for where you're leading the school this year.

MY VISION STATEMENT:

**Share it** at a staff meeting, chapel, or parent event.

### PART B: WRITE YOUR RETROSPECTIVE

1. What's the biggest leadership lesson from your first 30 days?
2. What decision are you most proud of?
3. What decision do you wish you could redo?
4. What's one thing you'll do differently in Days 31–60?

# DAY 30: CELEBRATE + COMMIT

**TODAY'S PRIORITY:** Acknowledge how far you've come and commit to the next 90 days.

CELEBRATION:

What are you proud of from your first 30 days?

COMMITMENT:

What's your #1 focus for Days 31–90?

# BOOK YOUR DEBRIEF CALL

You've completed your first 30 days. Now let's talk about what you learned.

Your First 30-Day Playbook package includes a **50-minute debrief call** with me to help you:

- Review your progress and celebrate your quick wins
- Process your biggest leadership challenges from the first month
- Customize your 90-day roadmap (Months 2–4)
- Remove one major obstacle that's blocking you

**BOOK YOUR DEBRIEF CALL NOW:**

<https://stevenjbarker.as.me/coachingsession>

Before the call:

- Upload your completed playbook (I'll review it beforehand)
- Bring your Year 1 goals (from Day 8) and your biggest current challenge

I'm looking forward to hearing how your first month went.

Building stronger schools,  
Steven

# YOUR NEXT STEP

You've made it through your first 30 days. You built trust. You created clarity. You executed quick wins. You laid strategic foundation.

**But here's the reality:** You're only 30 days into the most critical 24 months of your leadership.

Think about it: **Your first 24 months set the trajectory for your entire tenure.** This is your window to build the trust, systems, and strategic foundation that will carry you for decades—or to make mistakes that take years to recover from.

The next 6 months (Months 2–7 of your first 24) will test everything you just built. You'll face decisions you weren't trained for. You'll have staff conflicts, board tensions, and parent complaints. You'll be tempted to abandon the rhythms you just created when urgent things pile up.

Most first-year leaders try to figure it out alone—which is why so many of them burn out before their 24 months are up.

That's exactly what the Building a Stronger School Coaching program solves.

What you get (6-Month Engagement):

- ✓ 2 Monthly 1-on-1 coaching calls (12 x 50 minutes)
- ✓ Leadership dashboard customized for your school
- ✓ Crisis decision-making frameworks (staff, board, parents)
- ✓ Board presentation templates for your first year
- ✓ Text access for urgent leadership questions

**Investment:** \$6,000 (6-month engagement, payment plans available)

**Next Step:** We'll talk about this on your debrief call if it makes sense for your school.

**STRONGERSCHOOL.COM**

**BUILT FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOL  
LEADERS WHO KNOW THE NEXT 24  
MONTHS MATTER MOST.**