

SH*T...

AM I A

ROLE

MODEL?

THE PLAYBOOK

THIS IS MANLY

**YOU'RE
ALREADY A
ROLE MODEL,
WHETHER YOU
MEAN TO BE
OR NOT.**

Everyday men shape the people around them through small choices, quiet moments, and the values they live. This playbook helps you step into that influence with confidence, intention, and humility.

Most men don't think of themselves as role models. The title feels heavy, like it belongs to athletes, celebrities, or men who've "earned" it through flawless character. But the truth is simpler: role modelling happens in the everyday. A father's patience, a colleague's advice, a coach's encouragement, a mate's respect, a brother's honesty - these everyday actions ripple outward, shaping how men understand what it means to be a man, how to treat others, and how to carry themselves in the world.

The Accidental Role Model Playbook is about reclaiming and reframing this everyday influence. In a world where online influencers and curated masculinity "mentors" are pulling boys into harmful echo chambers, what matters more than ever is the steady, authentic presence of real men in real life. Men don't need to be perfect - they just need to be present, intentional, and willing to grow.

This playbook offers practical tools, relatable stories, and simple steps for noticing your influence and using it well. It's not about lofty speeches or performative gestures. It's about small, real acts of leadership: showing respect, challenging stereotypes, and opening space for honest conversation. In doing so, men can help build a healthier, more grounded future for boys, men, and the communities we share.

HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

You don't need to read it cover to cover.

This isn't a textbook. You can flick through it, pick the bit that fits your moment, and put it down again. It's built for real life.

It's a playbook, not a rulebook.

There's no perfect way to be a role model. There are just lots of small, everyday ways to show up. Use the ideas that feel right, skip the ones that don't, and come back when something new lands. Think of it like a set of tools - you won't need them all at once.

Start where it feels real.

If a line, story, or Deep Dive makes you pause, start there. The Playbook works best when it connects to what's already happening in your world.

Try it out, then talk it out.

These pages are meant to be used. Try a quick win, share a story with a mate, or ask someone how they'd handle a tricky moment. Role modelling spreads through real conversations, not solo work.

Try it out, then talk it out.

Our videos gives more context to the ideas in the Playbook: real voices, real examples, real moments. Use them as conversation starters, or as a way to see how other men approach the same situations you're facing.



PART 1

Showcasing the real voices that shaped
this playbook.

PART 2

Here we get practical, showing what role
modelling looks and sounds like in
everyday life.

PART 3

Giving you some simple, quick wins that
anyone can start using right away.

PART 4

Through individual Deep Dives, we unpack
some of the tougher or more complex
moments that role models often face.

WHAT WE HEARD

This playbook started with conversations, not theories.

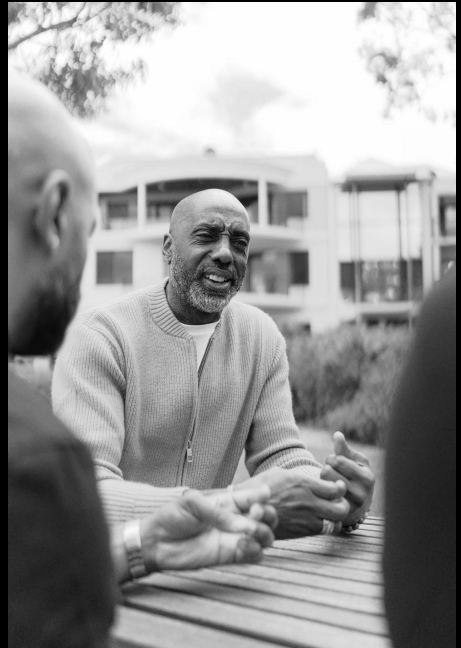
We sat down with everyday men who've all found themselves in the quiet role of shaping someone else's life. We asked them what being a role model feels like. Most said the same thing: *"I never thought of myself as one."*

But as they talked, some truths emerged. Here's what stood out:

Young people can't be what they can't see.

Boys learn what's okay from the men around them - how to talk, how to handle frustration, how to treat others. Sometimes that learning happens in conversation. More often, it happens just by watching.

Men talked about the lessons they absorbed from the men before them, the ones who taught them, not by preaching, but by example. They recognised that today's boys are still learning the same way - only now, those examples compete with a constant stream of louder, online ones.



The strongest role models are close and real.

The world young people are growing up in has changed. Online spaces move faster than prevention efforts can keep up. Influencers, podcasts and algorithms are drowning out empathy and reinforcing rigid stereotypes, especially when boys lack strong real-life relationships.

We heard from men that what really cuts through is real people - men who show up, stay consistent, and mean what they say. Being a strong role model isn't about competing with the internet - it's about offering what it can't: presence.

Real change happens in conversation, not confrontation.

Men said the best chats were never forced. They happened while driving, working, or kicking a footy. The kind where you can drop a truth, laugh about it, and move on. Those moments create space for honesty without pressure.

Most men don't need someone to fix things for them - they need someone to talk with, not at. A small, calm conversation can shift how someone sees themselves more than any lecture ever could.

Real strength grows from emotional honesty.

Most men we spoke with said they grew up with a narrow idea of strength and were never really taught how to talk about feelings - only how to hide them. But when role models open up about what's hard, it changes the tone for everyone around them.

Admitting when something hurts, when you're proud, or when you're figuring it out doesn't make you weak - it makes you human. When men show that strength and softness can exist together, it gives young people permission to do the same. Those small moments of honesty ripple out further than we realise.



We do this better together.

Almost every man said that when they talked about this stuff with other men, it helped. It made them realise they weren't alone in figuring things out. Real change doesn't happen because one guy gets it right - it happens because men start holding space for each other to learn and keep each other accountable.

MYTH BUSTING

We all do it. We downplay our impact, laugh off responsibility, or tell ourselves someone else is better suited to set the example. These are the stories we hear most often from men, and what we've learned to be true instead.

Myth 1: Role models have to be flawless.

Many men picture a role model as someone who never loses their cool or gets it wrong. But young people don't learn from flawless men — they learn from real ones. What sticks is how you handle the messy moments: the apology after you snap, the way you steady yourself under pressure, the honesty in saying you could've done better. Strength isn't about never slipping up - it's about how you respond when you do.

Myth 2: Role models are distant celebrities.

It's easy to think influence belongs to athletes, actors or online personalities. But what really shapes a young person is the behaviour they see every day. Influence is local, not celebrity.

Myth 3: If you aren't trying to influence someone, you won't.

Most influence is unplanned. Young people pick up more from what you do than from what you say - the way you handle stress at the end of a long day, the words you use when talking about women, or how you treat people when you think no one is watching - all of it sends messages. Silence teaches. Anger teaches. Kindness teaches. You don't choose whether you're modelling something - only what you're modelling.

Myth 4: Role modelling means having all the answers.

A lot of men believe they need to be the unshakeable one - the person who never shows doubt, fear or struggle. But that version of strength doesn't help young people grow. What helps is seeing a man stay open even when things are hard, talk about what he's working through, or show resilience without pretending he's unaffected. Being steady doesn't mean being silent - it means being human, honest and willing to keep going.

YOU'RE A ROLE

**REALISING YOU'RE A
ROLE MODEL CAN FEEL
STRANGE AT FIRST,
LIKE YOU'VE BEEN
HANDED A TITLE YOU
DIDN'T ASK FOR.**

Most men don't think of themselves that way, but someone's always watching how you handle pressure, talk to people, and bounce back when things don't go right.

Owning that influence doesn't mean changing who you are. It's about noticing what you're teaching through the way you show up. Sometimes it's keeping calm when you're tired, showing patience, or actually listening when someone needs to talk.

Once you start seeing those moments for what they are, you begin to use your influence on purpose. You stop thinking you're just doing your thing and realise someone's learning from how you do it. That's what real role modelling looks like.



MODEL IF...

**PEOPLE LOOK TO
YOU WHEN
THINGS GET
TENSE.**

**SOMEONE REPEATS
A JOKE, PHRASE
OR STORY YOU
TOLD.**

**SOMEONE COMES TO
YOU FOR ADVICE.**

**YOU ADMIT WHEN
YOU GOT SOMETHING
WRONG.**

**YOU LEAD BY
EXAMPLE.**

**YOU MAKE
PEOPLE AROUND
YOU BETTER.**

**YOUNG PEOPLE ECHO
THE WAY YOU TALK
ABOUT OTHERS -
ESPECIALLY
WOMEN.**

**PEOPLE ASK FOR
YOUR OPINION, EVEN
WHEN YOU DIDN'T
VOLUNTEER IT.**

**YOU MAKE SPACE
FOR OTHERS TO
SPEAK.**

WHAT IT MIGHT SOUND LIKE

Real influence sounds like real conversation.

Everyday encouragement

Sometimes all someone needs is to know they're doing alright. It builds confidence and can keep someone going longer than you think.

Setting the tone

You don't have to shut people down to keep things respectful. A small nudge can remind others where the line is without killing the mood.

Showing care

Checking in doesn't need a deep-and-meaningful. Often it's just noticing when someone is off and letting them know you're there.

Modelling accountability

Admitting when you're wrong or could've done better builds more respect than pretending to have it all together.

Encouraging reflection

Good role models don't always lecture - they listen. Asking a question or inviting someone's perspective shows trust and respect.

Emotion without fuss

You don't have to pour your heart out to be real. Being open about what's hard shows others they can be too.

WHERE IT MIGHT HAPPEN

It's not just what you say, it's where you show up.

At home

The people you live with see the unfiltered version of you. How you handle big and small everyday moments teaches more than any big speech.

At work

How you deal with pressure, setbacks and feedback shows others what leadership looks like. Your reactions set the tone for how people treat each other.

In public

Public moments reveal who we are when we think no one's paying attention. Small acts of patience, courtesy, and fairness - leave a lasting mark.

Online

What you post, like and comment on teaches just as loudly as what you say in person. Being real online shows others than can be too.

On the field

Whether it's sport, coaching or casual games, your attitude shapes the whole team's culture - win or lose.

In conversation

Chats in the car, at the pub, or over a coffee are where honesty sneaks in. These small moments often become the talks people remember.



QUICK WINS

Own a mistake out loud.

Say what you got wrong and what you'll do differently next time.

Ask questions before giving advice.

Start with curiosity - *"How are you feeling about it?"* Listening first helps people work things out for themselves.

Back someone who's being talked over.

A simple "Hang on, I want to hear what they were saying" makes space for respect and shows leadership without grandstanding.

Show appreciation.

Say thanks when someone does something helpful, especially if it's small. People feel seen when effort is noticed.

Tell someone you're proud of them.

Be specific and tell them *what* they did that made you proud. That's what sticks and builds confidence.

Let someone else take the lead.

Say what you got wrong and what you'll do differently next time.

Put your phone down when someone's talking.

When you stop scrolling, look up, and give someone your full attention, it tells them they matter. Even thirty seconds of undivided attention can change the tone of a chat.

Check in, even when you're not sure how.

You don't need the perfect word, try *"I don't know what to say, but I wanted to see how you're doing."*

Say good effort, not just good result.

Praise people for how they showed up, not just whether they won. Shift the focus from performance to character.

Speak up when someone crosses the line.

Keep it calm and direct - *"That's not on, mate."*

Ask for help when you need it.

Saying *"I could use a hand"* shows trust and reminds others it's okay to lean on people sometimes.

Define your values.

Writing down what is important to you can help you practice them more intentionally.

You don't have to overhaul your life to be a good role model.

Say what you mean.

Be clear and honest instead of sugar-coating or hinting. It saves confusion and builds trust.

Don't rush to fill silence.

Sometimes sitting quietly gives others the space to share more. Patience can be more powerful than pep talks.

Encourage without rescuing.

Let people work things out for themselves where safe, and remind them you believe they can handle it. *"You've got this, but I'm here if you need."*

Notice your tone.

It's not just what you say, it's how you say it. Slow down, lower your voice, and you'll be heard better.

Celebrate small wins.

Notice progress, not perfection. Saying *"that better than last time"* keeps motivation going.

Show up on time.

Turning up when you say you will builds reliability and is the foundation of trust in every relationship.

Show genuine interest.

Pay attention when someone shares something they care about. A follow-up question goes a long way.

Share stories, not sermons.

Instead of telling people what they should do, share what you've learned and what you'd do differently. Real stories land deeper.

Plan an activity for someone.

Some of the best conversations happen shoulder-to-shoulder, not face-to-face. Go for a walk, kick a footy, tinker in the shed, cook together

Pass on a skill.

Teaching is one of the oldest ways men connect. The way you teach becomes part of what they carry forward.

Talk positively about people who aren't in the room.

It shows integrity and teaches others that respect isn't situational.

Say what you value about the men around you.

Tell your mates what you admire about them. It breaks the silence around healthy respect between men.

Here are 22 small, practical things you can start doing right now.

THE MOMENTS THAT TEST YOU.

Being a role model isn't hard most of the time.

It's the everyday stuff - showing patience, showing up, giving someone a bit of your attention. But every now and then something pops up that feels different. A comment that lands wrong. A kid who shuts down. A moment where the energy shifts and suddenly everyone's looking at you.

Most men told us they know exactly when these moments appear, they feel it in their gut. They know something's off, or someone needs guidance, or the situation could go two ways depending on how they respond. What they weren't always sure of was what to actually do next.

These are the moments that test you. Not because they're dramatic, but because they're unscripted. They ask you to read the room, stay steady, and be the kind of man who can hold the moment without making it bigger.

That's what the Deep Dives are for.

They unpack situations men face most often and offer practical ways to respond with calm, respect and clarity. They're not scripts - just simple ways to stay grounded when things get tricky.

Use them like maps for tough moments.
Take what fits, try it once, and see how it feels.

Your influence grows in these moments - often more than you realise.

01.

What do you do when boys get lost in harmful online spaces?

You start to notice a young guy repeating things he's picked up online - big opinions, harsh takes, strange confidence. This one's about grounding those conversations in real life, even if you don't speak the same digital language.

02.

What do you do when stereotypes creep in?

A mate says, "He's soft," or "That's not what real men do." This one's about gently widening the picture of what being a man can look like.

03.

What do you do when conversations get real?

There's something that needs saying but you're not sure how to start. This one's about staying open when it's awkward, and showing that honesty and care can live in the same sentence.

04.

What do you do when banter goes too far?

A joke lands wrong. Someone looks uncomfortable. Everyone feels it, but no one says anything. This one's about knowing when the line's been crossed - and how to pull things back without killing the mood.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN BANTER GOES TOO FAR?

Banter is how lots of men connect - it builds ease, humour and belonging. But it's also one of the places where things can quietly go wrong.

A joke is only funny when everyone's laughing, and other men learn just as much from the tone you set as from the words you use. When teasing turns into targeting, or when one person is always on the receiving end, the humour can slip into exclusion. What's seen as "just a bit of fun" by some can feel like humiliation or pressure to others - especially for young men who are still figuring out where they fit. They are watching, not just at what's said, but at what's encouraged, ignored, or challenged.

As a role model, the way you handle these moments sets the tone, and shows that humour and respect can exist side-by-side.



SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS

Spotting the red flags gives you a chance to act before things cross a line.

- ☐ The same person is always singled out as the punchline.
- ☐ People start laughing less naturally, are forcing their smiles and looking away.
- ☐ Someone changes their behaviour to be more timid or reserved.
- ☐ The topic hits a nerve.
- ☐ 'It's just a joke' becomes the defence - if you need to explain the intent, you missed the mark.
- ☐ The joke keeps going long after the fun has stopped.

ADDRESS IT IN THE MOMENT

When you hear something that crosses the line and everyone freezes for a split second...

1. Take a breath and keep your tone light, not angry.
2. Use a quick line that resets the tone: "Alright, that one landed a bit hard, let's move on."
3. Smile as redirect to diffuse the tension.
4. Give the group something else to pivot to: change the topic, shift the energy. Move on quickly with no lectures.

Why it works: You've drawn a boundary without embarrassing anyone.

CHECK IN ON YOUR MATE

You think someone was uncomfortable but didn't speak up...

1. Wait until you are one-on-one.
2. Say something short and direct: "Hey mate, that joke before didn't sit right with me. Are you alright?"
3. Don't assume - ask - and listen more than you talk.
4. Back them if they need support: "If you want, I can say something next time."
5. If they shrug it off, fine. They'll remember that you noticed.

Why it works: Quiet support builds trust. It tells people they're safe around you and that's the core of real leadership.

RESET THE TONE AFTERWARDS

You want to keep relationships strong but stop something from repeating...

1. Catch them privately after.
2. Keep it calm and clear, naming the behaviour and not the person: "When you said X, it got a bit uncomfortable."
3. If they get defensive, stay steady: "Yeah, I know, I'm just flagging it early."
4. Explain impact over intention - That your intention can be good and the impact can still be hurting, which matters.
5. Finish with something neutral or positive to keep connection: "You're good, I just wanted to say something."

Why it works: You protect the relationship and shift the culture.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN SOMEONE IS LOST ONLINE?

A lot of young men are spending more time online than in conversation with real people. Algorithms feed them the same strong opinions and easy answers about what it means to "be a man" - often wrapped in anger, blame or false confidence - over and over until a passing joke becomes an opinion, and then a value set. It can sound convincing, especially to boys who are trying to make sense of the world or find belonging.

As a role model, you don't need to know every influencer, meme or phrase to make a difference - you just need to show up in a way the internet can't. What matters is being a grounded, authentic presence that shows there's another way to be, and means they're far less likely to be pulled into the noise.



SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS

Keep an eye out for subtle shifts in what young people say or how they talk about others:

- ☐ Repeating extreme opinions with confidence but no curiosity.
- ☐ Making sweeping statements about feminism, success, or "real men."
- ☐ Making jokes that "don't sound like them."
- ☐ Showing frustration or contempt when challenged.
- ☐ Dismissing empathy or respect as "weak."
- ☐ Spending long hours online and withdrawing from real activities or friendships with secrecy.

OPEN A REAL-WORLD CONVERSATION

You hear a young person echo something they've picked up online...

1. Stay calm and curious - no eye rolls or lectures.
2. Ask a question that opens space: "Where'd you hear that?" or "What do you think he means by that?"
3. Let them talk. Don't fact-check. Ask what they think in their own words.
4. Share your own take once they've been heard: "I get why that sounds appealing. Here's what I've seen in real life."
5. End by inviting thinking, not shutting it down: "It's good to hear different views. Just remember - online isn't the whole story."
6. Let them know you are always there to bounce ideas off of.

Why it works: Curiosity builds trust; confrontation builds walls. The best way to interrupt reinforcement is by getting them to think, not copy.

BRING THEM BACK TO REAL LIFE

They seem stuck online or disengaged offline...

1. Suggest doing something shoulder-to-shoulder: cooking, working on a project, kicking a ball - something hands-on.
2. Keep the vibe casual, not corrective. Connection grows from time spent, not pressure to talk.
3. Use the moment to reconnect: "What've you been watching lately?"
4. Build routine contact through regular, low-stakes moments where they can show up as themselves.

Why it works: Real experiences challenge online ones. When you give boys something tangible to belong to, you make the digital echo chamber less appealing.

BREAK THE ALGORITHM YOURSELF

They're quoting online influencers like they're mentors or experts...

1. Ask: "Who do you know in real life who thinks like that?"
2. Highlight lived examples: coaches, uncles, mates, teachers: "What does Uncle Jack think about showing weakness?"
3. Compare the influencer's behaviour with how real men they admire act. "Uncle Jack always admits when he can't do something by himself."
4. Let them draw their own conclusions.

Why it works: Because it shifts their focus from loud, distant voices to the steady, real men in their actual lives - the ones whose actions, mistakes and integrity genuinely shape who they become.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN STEREOTYPES CREEP IN?

Even if we don't believe in old-school ideas about what it means to "be a man," most of us still feel the pressure to live up to them. Stay in control. Don't show weakness. Be the provider. Be tough. Keep emotions in check.

Those unwritten rules can slip into our lives and relationships without us realising. The danger isn't that all those traits are bad - it's that when they're the only ones we allow, they block things like empathy, patience, and honesty.

As a role model, you have the chance to show that there is no right way to be a man, that it is up to each of us to define for ourselves. The way you live your values, follow your interests, share emotion and stand firm in who you are gives others permission to do the same.



SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS

Spot the moments when stereotypes are sneaking in - in yourself, or in others:

- ☐ You feel you have to "fix" things instead of listening.
- ☐ Someone hides a mistake or emotion to look strong.
- ☐ Someone mocks something "soft" or "feminine."
- ☐ Competition turns personal, not playful.
- ☐ You find yourself avoiding vulnerability in front of others.
- ☐ Someone avoids an interest because of how it "looks."

LEAD WITH WHO YOU ACTUALLY ARE

Whenever you notice yourself shrinking or reshaping who you are because of old-school expectations...

1. Name the value or interest that matters to you, even if it's not "traditionally masculine."
2. Act on it in front of others without apologising or softening it.
3. Share why you like it or why it feels important - keep it simple and real.
4. Back yourself publicly when you feel the pressure to "blend in."
5. Encourage others when they show different sides of themselves too.

Why it works: Because it gives others the permission to bring their full selves too - not just the parts they think will be accepted.

CHALLENGE THE MAN BOX

Anytime you hear comments, jokes or behaviours that reinforce the idea that there is only one "right" way to be a man...

1. Keep your tone relaxed and steady - not confrontational.
2. Call out the stereotype, not the person: "That's one way, but not the only way."
3. Offer a different example.
4. Make space for others: "You do you - that's what matters."
5. Back the people who are already breaking the mould.

Why it works: It normalises a broader, healthier version of masculinity and gives others permission to define their version.

EXPAND THE EMOTIONAL SPECTRUM

In moments where you or someone else is frustrated, disappointed, stressed or avoiding emotion...

1. Say what you're feeling in a simple, grounded way: "I'm having a tough day."
2. Show that emotions come and go - they don't control you.
3. Invite others to name what they're feeling without judgement.
4. Model calm coping strategies like a breath, a pause, a reset.
5. Celebrate emotional honesty in others when you see it.

Why it works: It teaches that emotions aren't weaknesses - they're tools for clarity, connection and resilience.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN CONVERSATIONS GET REAL?

Some conversations just aren't easy, but they may be the most important moments that you have with people around you. They'll be the chats that feel uncomfortable, the ones that start with silence, frustration, or fear of saying the wrong thing.

Maybe a mate's drinking more than usual. Maybe a teenager in your life has shut down. Maybe someone's going through something you don't understand, and you don't know how to help. Most men tell us they hesitate because they don't want to make things worse.

As a role model, how you show up in these moments matters more than what you say. Tone, attention and honesty matter more than the "right" answer.



SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS

You might be in a tough conversation moment when:

- ☐ Someone close to you is withdrawing, moody or acting out of character.
- ☐ You can feel tension sitting between you - something unsaid that's hanging in the air.
- ☐ Someone brushes off something serious too fast with "I'm fine."
- ☐ They hint at something but avoid details.
- ☐ You keep replaying a moment later, thinking, "I should've said something."

MAKE SPACE, NOT A SCENE

You want to check in on someone, but you're not sure how...

1. Choose a setting that feels natural - the car, a walk, fixing something together.
2. Keep it gentle and casual: "You've seemed a bit quiet lately - everything okay?"
3. Don't press for answers, just give them space to talk if they want to.
4. If they shrug it off, give them space to respond in their own time.: "No worries, mate. I'm here if you want to chat later."
5. Follow up a few days later - consistency builds trust.

Why it works: People open up when they feel safe, not cornered.

LISTEN MORE THAN YOU LEAD

They start talking and you're not sure what to say...

1. Put distractions away, especially your phone.
2. Show you're listening - nod, give small "yeah"s, "makes sense" or repeat key words.
3. Don't jump straight into fixing - let them speak first.
4. When you respond, name what you've heard: "Sounds like that's been pretty heavy for you."
5. Avoid rushing to advice. Instead, ask: "What do you reckon you need right now?"
6. If you're out of your depth, be honest: "I don't have all the answers, but I'm glad you told me."
7. Use everyday touchpoints to stay connected - a text, a quick chat, a shared activity.

Why it works: Being heard is as powerful as being helped.

KNOW WHEN TO HAND IT OVER

When the conversation becomes too heavy, serious or emotionally loaded for you to manage...

1. Stay steady and calm - they borrow your composure.
2. Acknowledge their courage: "Thanks for telling me, that's not easy."
3. Ask gently: "Would talking to someone else help too?"
4. Offer options: a GP, coach, parent, mentor or support service.

Why it works: You're walking with them and helping them get the support they deserve.

NOW, IT'S YOUR TURN.



All the ideas in this playbook come down to one thing: action.

Not big, dramatic action. the small, everyday stuff that sets the tone.

You get to decide what kind of man you're modelling, what kind of culture you're building, and what kind of future you're shaping for the people watching you.

Don't wait for the "right time" to be a role model. Pick a moment. Lead it well. Then pick another. And another.

That's how change starts - One man choosing to show up differently.

SHOW UP.

The kind of man I want to be is:

[]

Three things I want people around me to learn from me:

[]

One thing I will work on this month:

[]

One person I want to show up better for:

[]

THIS IS MANLY

