The Escalation Framework

Decision Tree for When and How to Go Up the Chain — Chapter 11 Play

Escalation is a tool of last resort for the solo practitioner. Done too early, you look like a complainer. Done too late, you've absorbed damage that documentation can't undo. This framework helps you decide when, how, and to whom.

PRE-ESCALATION CHECKLIST

☐ I have documented at least **three instances** showing a pattern (not a single event)

☐ I have attempted to resolve directly with the individual at least **once**

☐ The issue has measurable **business impact** (hours, dollars, timeline, risk)

☐ I have identified the **right audience** for escalation (direct supervisor, sponsor, HR)

☐ I have framed the escalation around **business impact**, not personal frustration

☐ My own conduct throughout has been **unimpeachable** (radical professionalism)

ESCALATION DECISION PATH

LEVEL 1: INFORMAL REDIRECT

Situation: First signs of pattern. Behavior could be unintentional.
Action: Direct, private conversation. "I've noticed [specific pattern]. Can we discuss how to [specific resolution]?"
If resolved: Document resolution. Monitor. Update Resistance Audit.
If unresolved: Move to Level 2.

LEVEL 2: DOCUMENTED CONVERSATION

Situation: Pattern continues after informal redirect.
Action: Follow-up conversation with written summary sent afterward. "Following up on our conversation — here's what we discussed and agreed to."

If resolved: Document. Monitor for 30 days.
If unresolved: Move to Level 3.

LEVEL 3: SPONSOR ESCALATION

Situation: Documented pattern with business impact. Direct resolution failed.

Action: Present Decision Log pattern to executive sponsor. Lead with business impact: "This pattern has resulted in [X weeks delay / $Y cost / Z missed opportunity]."

Let the sponsor decide the response. Your job is the evidence. Their job is the decision.

LEVEL 4: FORMAL PROCESS

Situation: Sponsor escalation insufficient or inappropriate (e.g., sponsor is part of the problem).

Action: HR or formal organizational channels. Bring documentation. Seek counsel first if available.

Minimum Force Doctrine applies at every level. The goal is proportional response, not scorched earth.

CURRENT SITUATION ASSESSMENT

ISSUE DESCRIPTION

CURRENT LEVEL

BUSINESS IMPACT (QUANTIFIED)

NEXT STEP