Ask A Card

CAREER CROSSROADS

Daniel, Lead or Build — Your Call

“Should I accept the team lead role I was offered or keep focusing on hands-on engineering?”

Prepared for Daniel · November 12, 2026



YOUR QUESTION

Should I accept the team lead role I was offered or keep focusing on hands-on engineering?

THE SHORT ANSWER

Leaning yes — with one practical condition

The cards lean toward accepting the team lead role, Daniel, primarily because the Three of Cups reflects real energy you already bring to mentoring — that collaborative dynamic is something you can build a leadership style around. The practical condition comes from the Ten of Wands: before you accept, get a clear, written answer about what the role removes from your individual-contributor load. If both bundles land on you simultaneously without structural relief, the role becomes a burden rather than a growth move. The Eight of Pentacles confirms that your craft satisfaction is a real resource worth protecting, not a preference to outgrow.

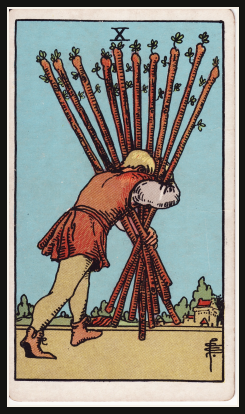
YOUR FIVE CARDS, IN THE ORDER THEY WERE DRAWN



Eight of Pentacles
The work tension



The Magician
A strength to use



Ten of Wands
The real constraint



Three of Cups
An experiment worth trying



The Sun
Your next practical step

This reading was written with AI assistance around the cards you drew and the question you asked. It is a reflection to help you think clearly, not a prediction of the future or of anyone else's feelings.



THE WORK TENSION

Eight of Pentacles

PRACTICE, DILIGENCE, CRAFTSMANSHIP

What the card shows

A craftsperson sits at a bench engraving a pentacle. Other completed pentacles line a post, with a town visible in the distance.

What it means for your question

The Eight of Pentacles sits at the center of your question as the work tension for good reason, Daniel. The craftsperson at the bench, pentacles lined up and a town in the distance, describes exactly the satisfaction you feel when you're deep in a problem and can see your own output accumulate. That image captures something real: hands-on engineering gives you measurable evidence of your own skill, which matters for confidence and job satisfaction. The tension this card names isn't that leadership is wrong — it's that stepping back from the bench feels like giving up something you've earned and still enjoy. The question worth considering here is whether the role change means abandoning craftsmanship or redirecting it toward a different kind of output, one where the finished pentacles belong to the people you've helped level up.

Try this

1. For two weeks, log each task you complete as either 'I built this' or 'I enabled someone else to build this,' without judgment.
2. Identify one current engineering task you could hand off to a junior developer with thirty minutes of guidance, then do it once.

A QUESTION TO KEEP

Which kind of finished work gave you more energy this past month?

WORDS TO KEEP

I find real satisfaction in seeing my own work accumulate.



A STRENGTH TO USE

The Magician

AGENCY, FOCUSED USE OF AVAILABLE TOOLS

What the card shows

A figure raises a wand above a table holding a cup, sword, pentacle and wand. Flowers grow below; an infinity symbol appears overhead.

What it means for your question

The Magician appears as a strength Daniel may be underusing. The figure with all four tools on the table and the infinity symbol overhead isn't a symbol of magic — it's a picture of someone who already holds everything needed and knows how to direct it. What this card adds to your question is the reminder that you aren't choosing between two versions of yourself you haven't tried yet. You already mentor two junior developers, and you already build. The overlooked insight here is that the team lead role doesn't require you to become someone new; it asks you to arrange the tools you've already demonstrated. Your current mentoring habit is more transferable to leadership than you might be crediting, Daniel, and agency in this decision belongs to you, not to the job title.

Try this

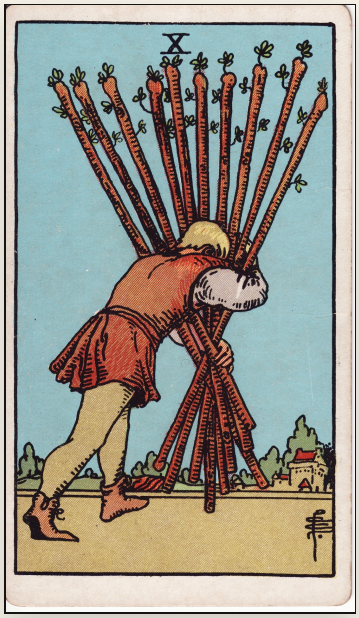
1. Write down three specific things you did as a mentor last month that you'd also want a team lead to do; notice the overlap.
2. Before the decision deadline, ask your manager one concrete question about how much hands-on coding time the lead role actually protects.

A QUESTION TO KEEP

What leadership skill do you already practice that you haven't named as a skill?

WORDS TO KEEP

I already have more tools for this than I realize.



THE REAL CONSTRAINT

Ten of Wands

BURDEN, RESPONSIBILITY, DELEGATION

What the card shows

A figure bends forward carrying ten bundled wands. The bundle fills the foreground while a town lies ahead.

What it means for your question

The Ten of Wands is the most practical card in this spread for Daniel, because it names the real constraint without drama. The figure bent forward under ten bundled wands, town visible ahead, is a picture of someone who can carry the load but is doing so at a cost to their posture and pace. In the context of your question, this card isn't a warning that leadership will crush you — it's a flag that the team lead role brings a different category of weight: coordination overhead, context-switching, other people's blockers becoming your blockers. The constraint isn't your capability; it's your bandwidth. This card asks you to be honest about whether the role as offered comes with any structural support — a reduced individual-contributor load, a clear scope limit — or whether you'd be expected to carry both bundles simultaneously without anyone adjusting the pile.

Try this

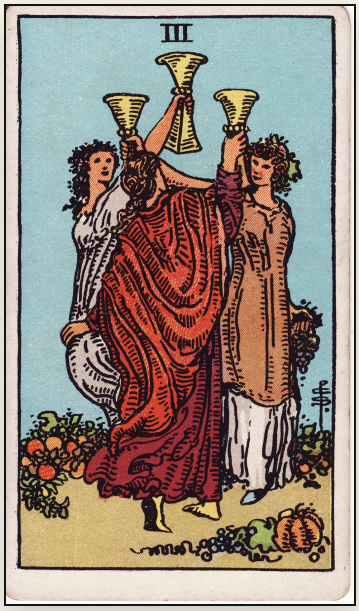
1. Request a written summary of what the team lead role removes from your current responsibilities, not just what it adds.
2. For one week, track how many interruptions per day come from coordination versus deep work, to get a baseline before deciding.

A QUESTION TO KEEP

What would need to change in the role structure for the load to feel sustainable?

WORDS TO KEEP

I need to know what gets lighter before I add more weight.



AN EXPERIMENT WORTH TRYING

Three of Cups

FRIENDSHIP, CELEBRATION, COMMUNITY

What the card shows

Three figures raise cups together in a circle. Flowers and harvested produce surround their feet.

What it means for your question

The Three of Cups lands in the agency position, and for Daniel's specific situation that placement is pointed. Three figures in a circle, cups raised, surrounded by harvest — this card describes the energy that's already present when a team celebrates shared progress. You mentioned enjoying mentoring your two junior developers, and that detail is exactly what this card is pointing toward. The agency it names isn't abstract; it's the choice to treat the lead role as an extension of that collaborative dynamic rather than a departure from it. A practical experiment here would be to formalize one mentoring habit — a short weekly check-in, a code review ritual — and run it deliberately for a month. If that structured collaboration energizes you, it's a signal. If it feels like overhead rather than reward, that's a signal too, and both outcomes are useful data before you commit.

Try this

1. Run one structured thirty-minute weekly check-in with both junior developers for four weeks and note whether it energizes or drains you.
2. After a team win this month, name it explicitly to the group and observe how that moment of recognition affects the team dynamic.

A QUESTION TO KEEP

When you've helped a junior developer solve something, did the win feel shared or one-sided?

WORDS TO KEEP

I already create moments where the team moves forward together.



YOUR NEXT PRACTICAL STEP

The Sun

CLARITY, VITALITY, VISIBLE EVIDENCE

What the card shows

A child sits on a white horse holding a red banner. Sunflowers grow behind a wall beneath a large radiant sun.

What it means for your question

The Sun in the next-step position is about visible evidence, not a promise of ease. The child on the white horse, red banner raised, sunflowers behind the wall, large radiant sun above — the image is one of clarity earned by moving forward into the open, not by waiting for certainty in the shade. For Daniel, this card's role is practical: it suggests that the most useful thing right now is to generate real evidence rather than deliberate indefinitely. A bounded experiment — taking on one or two defined lead responsibilities while keeping a floor of hands-on work — would produce the kind of concrete signal this card describes. You'd know more in a few weeks than you can reason your way to today. The Sun here supports action, but action with open eyes: set a checkpoint, name what success looks like for you, and decide what would make you stop.

Try this

1. Propose a four-week trial scope to your manager: one lead responsibility added, your individual-contributor floor stated explicitly in writing.
2. At the end of week two, write three sentences answering: what did I enjoy, what felt heavy, and what do I want more of?

A QUESTION TO KEEP

What would you need to see after four weeks to feel confident this direction fits?

WORDS TO KEEP

I can generate real evidence instead of waiting for certainty.

ALL 5 CARDS TOGETHER

What your cards say together

The cards lean toward accepting the role, Daniel — but with one practical condition: negotiate a protected floor of hands-on engineering time before you say yes, so you're not carrying two full loads.

How the cards connect

The Eight of Pentacles anchors the whole reading in the real tension: your craft identity is not a vanity, it's a source of fuel, and any role change that strips it entirely will cost you. That card sets the stakes. The Ten of Wands then names the structural risk — not that leadership is wrong for you, but that unchecked scope expansion is what makes it unsustainable. Those two cards together say: the question isn't whether you can lead, it's whether the role as designed leaves room for the work that sustains you. The Magician pushes back on the idea that you'd be starting from zero. You already mentor, you already coordinate, you already hold the tools — the overlooked truth is that you've been doing pieces of this role informally, which means the gap between where you are and where the title would put you is smaller than it may feel. The Three of Cups then points toward the part of leadership you've already shown you enjoy: the collaborative wins with your junior developers. That energy is real and reproducible, and running a structured experiment around it gives you data rather than guesswork. The Sun ties it together by pushing toward action with open eyes — a bounded four-week trial with a named success signal and a stop criterion turns this abstract decision into something you can actually evaluate. All five cards point the same direction: move forward, but build the guardrails first.

YOUR NEXT STEP

As a planning suggestion, consider proposing a four-week trial to your manager — one defined lead responsibility added, your hands-on engineering floor stated in writing. A useful checkpoint around weeks two to three: if the mentoring energizes you and the coordination load feels negotiable, that's a useful signal to continue.

> *I move forward with open eyes and clear conditions.*

Daniel, this spread doesn't ask you to give up the bench — it asks you to be specific about what you need to keep before you say yes. You're not choosing between two strangers; you're choosing how to organize skills you've already built. That's a decision you have real standing to negotiate.

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