A workhuman* spotlight PRODUCTION

THE leadership RESET



PLAYBOOK

the reset playbook

Work is changing quickly. Teams are more fluid, technology is reshaping jobs, information moves faster, and leaders are being asked to make decisions in circumstances that can change by the hour.

The Leadership Reset examines what that means for the people responsible for getting work done.

The documentary brings together 5 very different perspectives:

- **Prof. Amy Edmondson**, organizational psychologist
- **Joanne Chang**, Flour founder
- **Dr. Syra Madad**, emergency management expert
- **KeyAnna Schmiedl**, HR leader
- **Dr. Meisha-Ann Martin**, workplace analyst

Their experiences range from running a growing bakery to leading through a global health crisis, but they keep arriving at versions of the same problem:

The way work is changing, and the way organizations see, support, and manage people, are no longer fully aligned.

This guide picks up from there. It offers a closer look at each conversation, the ideas we think are most important to take away, and offers some next steps for HR leaders and managers. The goal is not simply to recap what you watched. It is to help you see your own organization through the same lens, and then decide what needs to change.

BE READY FOR WHAT'S NEXT.

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part one

THE DOCUMENTARY



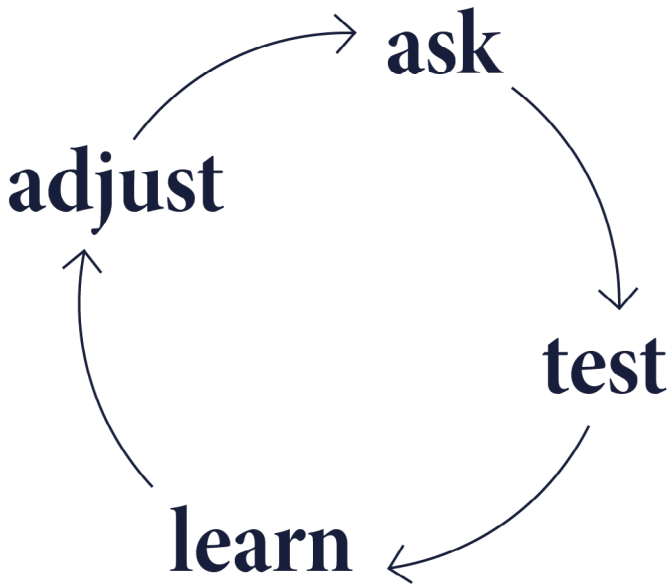
what happens when the manager can't have all the answers?

WHAT YOU SAW

Amy Edmondson starts with the changing conditions of work. We have talked about **VUCA — volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity** — for years. But, as she puts it, we are now in **"VUCA squared."** Uncertainty isn't abstract anymore. Managers feel it, their teams feel it, and the old ways of managing begin to show their limits.

The traditional model assumes a manager can set the direction, establish the plan, keep everyone on track, and evaluate how well people execute. That works much less well when the plan itself needs to change.

Amy's alternative is not to give managers a different set of answers. **It is to change the job.** Managers need to think more like scientists: ask good questions, bring people into the process, experiment, learn, and adapt.



But there is a catch. Teams can only learn quickly **if people are willing to say what they know**, especially when what they know is uncomfortable.

Amy describes the human tendency to hold back ideas, questions, and concerns as a form of impression and risk management. Speaking up may be good for the team, but it can feel risky for the individual. That makes the leader's response enormously consequential.

Her Ford example shows what happens when a leader makes bad news useful. Her NASA example shows the consequences when a critical concern stays stuck below the surface. And her discussion of Google's research reinforces that psychological safety isn't simply a characteristic of a company. It can vary dramatically from one team to another.

THE BIG IDEA

in a world where the answer keeps changing, the manager's job is less about having the answer and more about helping the team find it.

WHAT TO NOTICE

The old model is breaking down.
When plans need to change constantly, managing to the original plan is no longer enough.

Speaking up is inherently risky.
People don't need to be told that candor matters. They need evidence that candor is safe enough to practice.

Bad news is useful.
A problem surfaced early can become a team problem to solve. A problem kept quiet can become something much harder.

Humility is a leadership skill.
Saying "I don't know," admitting you may be wrong, and genuinely wanting to learn from others all change the conditions around a conversation.

Psychological safety is built locally.
It lives in everyday interactions between managers and teams, not just in company values or training materials.

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what to take away

> The manager-as-answer-giver model doesn't hold up well under sustained uncertainty.

> People are going to manage their own interpersonal risk. Leaders have to make speaking up worth the risk.

> The first response to bad news teaches everyone else whether to bring the next piece of bad news.

> "I don't know" can be the beginning of a better conversation, not a failure of leadership.

> Psychological safety isn't the absence of discomfort. It is the ability to be candid when something matters.

> HR can't simply ask managers to create this environment. The surrounding systems have to support it.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

01. Where are managers still expected to have answers before they have enough information?

02. What happens here when someone raises a problem without a solution?

03. What happens when someone admits a mistake?

04. What happens when someone disagrees with the boss?

05. What would people tell us if they were more confident it was safe to do so?

06. Are we teaching managers how to create learning environments, or just giving them a list of competencies?

07. Where are we relying on individual leaders to compensate for a system that makes candor difficult?

A USEFUL TEST

think about the last time someone brought a leader bad news. what happened next?

That moment may tell you more about the culture than your stated values do.



what happens when the person who can do it best has to let go?

WHAT YOU SAW

Joanne Chang opened Flour because she loved baking. Then she discovered that running a bakery meant doing far less of the thing she was best at and far more of the thing she had not expected to spend her life doing: leading people.

At first, that was difficult. Joanne had a vision for what Flour should be, and reality kept getting in the way. Pastries weren't perfect. People did things differently. Problems appeared. She eventually realized that trying to personally control every detail was not sustainable.

The breakthrough came when she stopped thinking of letting go as lowering the standard.

Instead, she started teaching other people how to reach it.

For her, that changed the meaning of leadership. Her satisfaction increasingly came not from making the perfect croissant herself, but from seeing someone else master it, and then seeing that person teach someone else.



The same idea shows up in how Joanne thinks about talent. As Flour grew, she couldn't personally know everyone anymore. She saw talented employees outgrowing their roles and realized that if the company didn't create room for them to grow, they would eventually leave. Flour's growth became, in part, people-driven: new opportunities created because capable people were ready for them.

And that is where her story becomes bigger than a bakery. What works when a leader knows every person on a small team doesn't necessarily work when the organization grows. At some point, finding talent, seeing contribution, and creating opportunities have to become less dependent on one person's personal observation.

THE BIG IDEA

leadership is not about staying the person who can do the work best. it's about creating more people who can.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Control can look like quality.
Sometimes holding onto work feels like protecting standards. Sometimes it is simply hard to let go.

Delegation is development.
Giving someone a task is not the same as giving them the chance to master something.

Potential doesn't always arrive with a job title.
Joanne's examples show what can happen when organizations pay attention to what someone is actually good at rather than forcing every person into a predefined path.

Visibility changes with scale.
A leader who once knew everyone personally eventually can't. That changes how talent has to be identified.

Growth can be created around people.
The organization doesn't always have to wait for an existing job to open.

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what to take away

> Being indispensable is not the goal of leadership.

> A manager's expertise becomes more valuable when other people can learn it.

> Delegation is most powerful when it builds capability, not simply when it clears a manager's to-do list.

> Talent becomes easier to miss as organizations grow unless there are deliberate ways to see it.

> Career growth doesn't always need to follow a predetermined ladder.

> When managers hold onto work because they want to own it, they may be optimizing today's result at the expense of tomorrow's capability.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

01. What are our managers still doing because they can do it faster or better?

02. Where might “I just need to do it myself” be masking a development opportunity?

03. Who on our teams has outgrown the role they currently occupy?

04. How much of our talent identification depends on a manager personally knowing someone’s work?

05. Where are we missing people whose strengths don’t fit neatly into an existing career path?

06. Are managers rewarded for being the best individual performer — or for building capable teams?

A USEFUL TEST

the next time a manager says, “it’s faster if i just do it myself,” ask:

Is it actually the only way — or is this an opportunity for someone else to learn?



what happens when you know a lot, and still don't know enough?

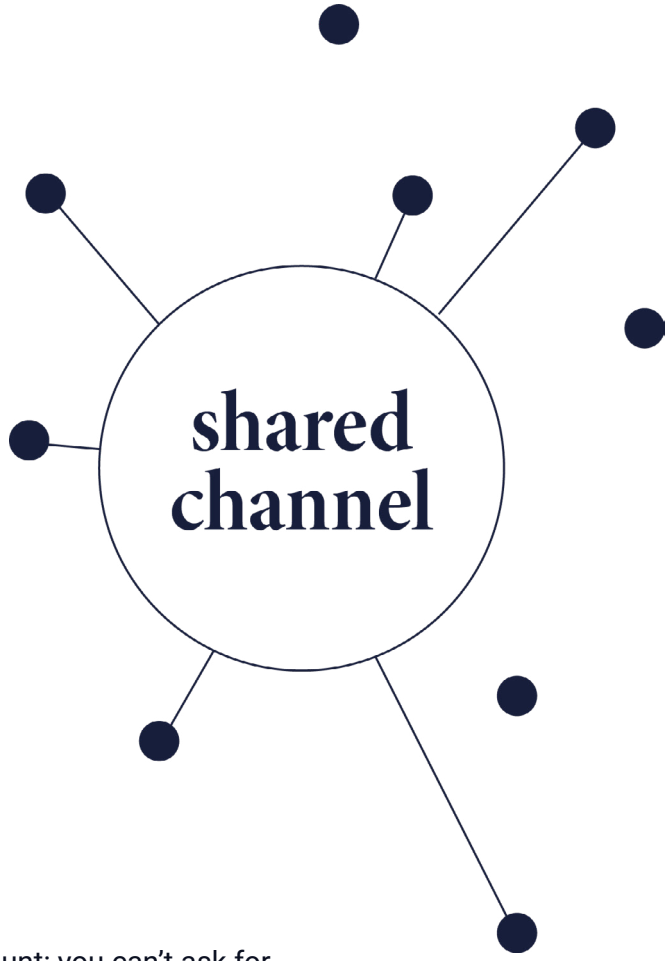
WHAT YOU SAW

Syra Madad's experience leading through COVID-19 offers one of the clearest examples in the documentary of the problem at the heart of modern leadership: the person with the biggest view still cannot see the whole picture.

Syra was working at the system level while also getting close to what was happening on the ground. She knew that the picture being built in leadership meetings was incomplete. The people closest to patients — nurses, physicians, environmental services workers, and others — were seeing things she could not see from her vantage point.

So the question became: how do you get that information into the system?

Syra describes creating a shared inbox where frontline employees could say what they were seeing and experiencing. She describes living guidance that had to change repeatedly when people on the ground said, in effect, this looks good on paper, but we cannot actually do it. That feedback wasn't resistance to the plan. It was information the people designing the plan needed.



She also makes a distinction that feels especially relevant to organizations navigating uncertainty now: leaders may not be able to provide certainty, but they can provide consistency. During the crisis, Syra couldn't promise that today's answer would still be tomorrow's answer, but she could promise when people would hear from her, what she knew, what she didn't know, and who was responsible for what.

And then there is the question of endurance. Syra is blunt: you can't ask for heroism all the time. Organizations need systems that allow people to sustain demanding work without relying indefinitely on extraordinary effort.

THE BIG IDEA

good leadership starts with knowing that you don't have the whole picture — and building ways for the missing pieces to find you.

WHAT TO NOTICE

The frontline may know what the system can't see.
Information doesn't automatically travel upward just because it matters.

A system can create trust.
When people don't have an established relationship with a leader, consistent processes and predictable communication can give them something to rely on.

Certainty and consistency are different things.
You may not know what comes next. You can still be clear about how you will communicate and respond.

Bad news only matters if something happens with it.
Syra describes gratitude, distinction between the messenger and the message, and action as part of making an open-door culture real.

Invisible work deserves attention.
The work that prevents a bigger problem may be the least visible work in the organization.

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what to take away

> Leaders should assume they are missing part of the picture.

> The people closest to the work often have information the people at the top don't have.

> An open-door policy is only as credible as what happens after someone walks through it.

> When certainty isn't possible, consistency becomes a form of leadership.

> People need clear pathways for questions, concerns, information, and requests to move through an organization.

> Sustainable performance requires systems that support people rather than relying on people to continually push beyond their limits.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

01. What does leadership know that the frontline doesn't — and what does the frontline know that leadership doesn't?

02. Where does information go when someone sees that something isn't working?

03. How easy is it to raise a concern that contradicts the current plan?

04. How quickly does information travel?

05. What does someone experience after they raise bad news?

06. Where are we relying on individual heroics to compensate for a system problem?

07. What important work only becomes visible after something goes wrong?

A USEFUL TEST

ask a frontline employee: "what's something leadership doesn't understand about how the work actually gets done?"

Then listen to the answer before explaining why the current process exists.



what happens when we keep adding to the manager's job?

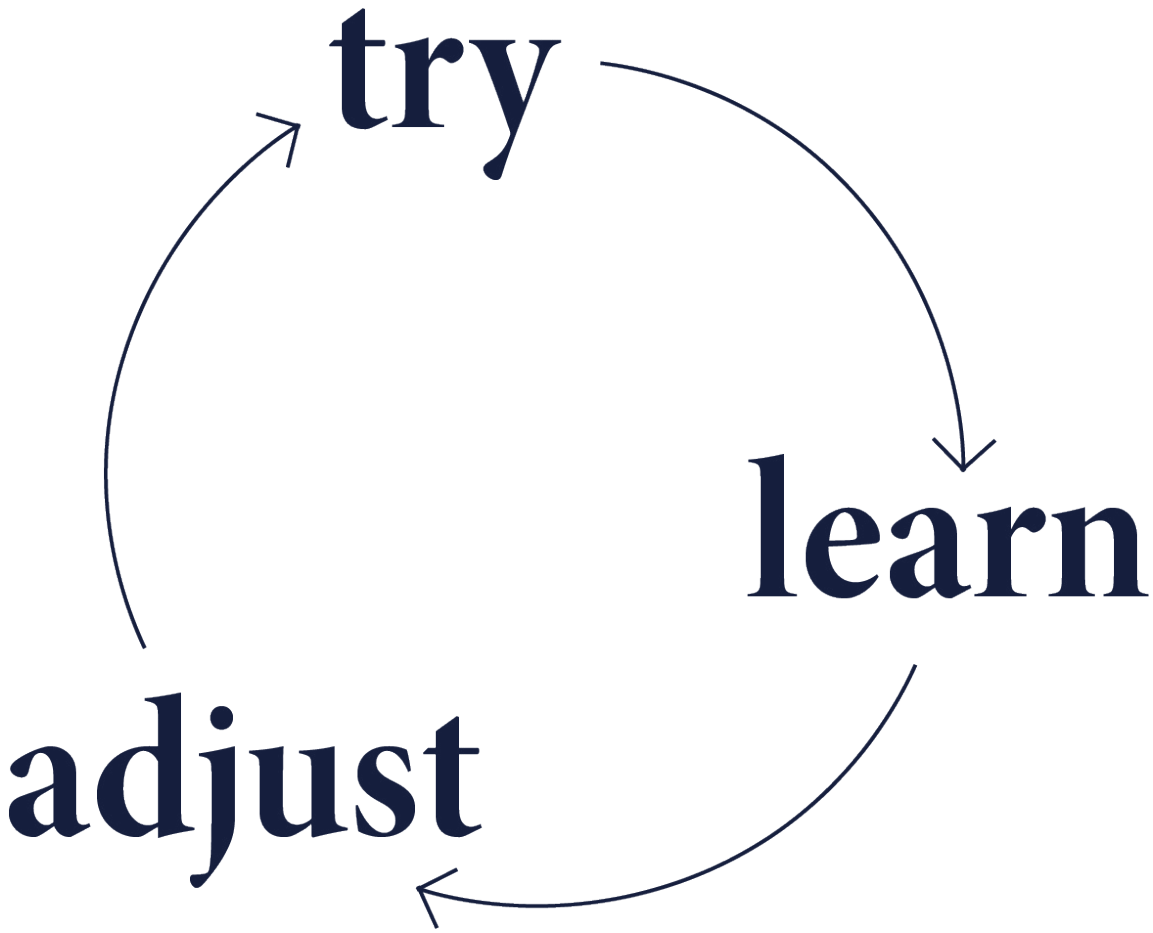
WHAT YOU SAW

KeyAnna Schmiedl starts from a reality many managers will recognize: the manager has become the place where an extraordinary number of organizational expectations land.

Care about your people. Deliver the numbers. Navigate change. Use the new tools. Recognize people. Develop talent. Monitor performance. Translate strategy. Be a player-coach. And, somehow, continue doing your actual job.

The problem isn't simply that managers are busy. It's that organizations often keep adding responsibilities without stopping to ask whether the manager role was designed to carry them.

KeyAnna argues that "equipping managers" has to mean more than giving them another tool. Before holding someone accountable for a behavior, the organization should be able to say that it has defined what good looks like, given the person a chance to learn it, provided an opportunity to practice, and created a safe way to receive feedback.



That leads to a larger role for HR.

KeyAnna sees HR as an organizational thought partner — a function that can look at how the organization operates and ask: If we keep working this way, what are we going to get?

The job isn't just to administer the system, she notes. It is to help question whether the system is producing the outcome the business actually wants. This includes **placing recognition within this system** — as a way to make contribution and potential visible beyond what one manager personally observes.

And she ends somewhere hopeful. The future of work doesn't need to be prescribed in advance. It can be designed, tested, and redesigned by the people doing it.

THE BIG IDEA

if managers are struggling, don't just ask how to make managers better. ask whether we've designed the manager's job well in the first place, and whether we've made them a single point of failure for visibility.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Manager overload is an organizational signal.
When every new priority becomes something managers have to "own," the problem may be the system.

Tools aren't the same as support.
More technology can reduce friction — or create another layer of work.

HR can be a mirror, not just a service function.
The people function can help leadership see what its operating choices are actually producing, in a way that is not dependent on any manager.

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what to take away

Managers cannot be the delivery mechanism for every organizational priority.

Accountability without preparation is not a management system.

Before adding another expectation to managers, ask what could be removed.

HR can add more value when it helps the business question and redesign the way work gets done.

More tools do not necessarily mean more support.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

01. What are we asking managers to carry that the organization should own?

02. What could we remove before we add another expectation?

03. Do managers know what “good management” really looks like here?

04. Have they had enough opportunity to learn and practice it?

05. Where is HR reducing friction, and where might it be adding to it?

06. Are our systems helping managers do what we say matters?

07. Where are we prescribing a solution when we could be testing one?

A USEFUL TEST

the next time you hear: “managers just need to…” stop there.

Ask what the organization could change before asking managers to carry more.



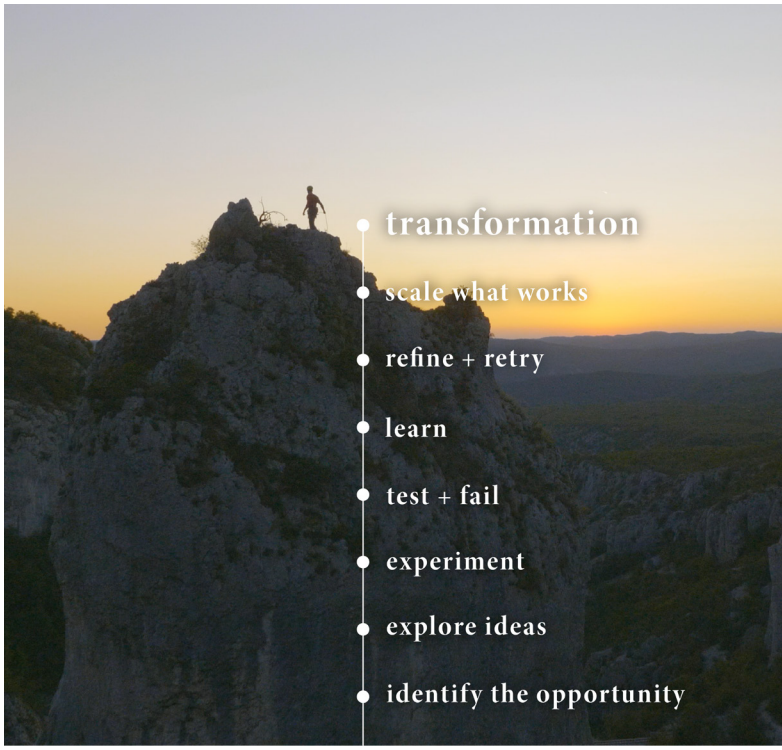
What happens when the work is happening everywhere, but we're still trying to see it from the middle?

WHAT YOU SAW

Meisha-Ann Martin brings the data lens to a question running through the documentary: what happens when managers are expected to understand people and performance even though they cannot see everything that people are doing?

Her starting point is the manager. Employees trust their direct managers more than senior leaders, putting managers in a uniquely important position as translators of strategy, change, and organizational priorities. But managers are also under pressure, short on resources, and increasingly at risk of disengagement.

At the same time, work has become harder to observe. Teams are distributed. Work crosses boundaries. And managers often see the outcome without seeing all the work that produced it. She uses a wall metaphor: many people may spend months weakening a wall, but the person who gives it the final push is the one everyone remembers. The outcome is visible, but the process and the people behind it are easier to lose.



Meisha-Ann also points to frontline workers whose work keeps organizations and economies moving, but who are often farther from the systems, relationships, and routines through which contribution becomes visible.

THE BIG IDEA

if you can't see all the work, you need better ways to understand what is happening, and better ways to make contribution visible.

WHAT TO NOTICE

Managers are the critical middle.
They translate organizational decisions for employees, while also carrying those decisions themselves.

The outcome isn't the whole story.
Innovation, change, and performance are built from many steps, attempts, contributions, and acts of persistence that may never show up in the final result.

Specific recognition tells a richer story.
"Great job" is positive. "You did this, and here's why it mattered" gives someone information about their strengths.

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what to take away

> The manager experience is part of the employee experience.

> You cannot expect managers to keep filling everyone else's emotional tank when their own is empty.

> Organizations often see outcomes more easily than the work that produced them.

> Specific recognition can help people understand strengths they may not otherwise recognize in themselves.

> Recognition can be both a human experience and a source of information about how work is actually getting done.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

01. Are we paying enough attention to the experience of managers themselves?

02. What work is invisible to managers today?

03. Who is easiest to overlook?

04. Are we recognizing outcomes without recognizing the people and behaviors that made them possible?

05. What could recognition tell us about how strategy is actually being lived?

06. Are managers using recognition to support development — or only to say thank you?

07. Who is recognizing our managers?

A USEFUL TEST

when you celebrate a result, ask: who made this possible, and whose work might we have missed?



what all 5 conversations ask us to see

These 5 conversations are different. That's what makes the collection useful. But across all five, a few themes keep surfacing.

01 WE CAN'T LEAD WHAT WE CAN'T SEE.

The work is increasingly distributed, collaborative, fluid, and hard for any one person to observe. The information you need may be with the frontline employee. The talent you need may be in another team. The contribution you need may happen quietly, behind the scenes.

Visibility is becoming a leadership capability.

02 WE WON'T HEAR THE TRUTH UNLESS PEOPLE BELIEVE IT IS WORTH TELLING.

Psychological safety. Humility. Transparency. Recognition. Predictable communication. Different conversations, same underlying problem: people have to believe that speaking up will lead somewhere useful.

Trust is built by what happens after someone speaks.

03 WE ARE ASKING MANAGERS TO CARRY A LOT

Managers are absorbing strategy, change, technology, people concerns, performance expectations, development, recognition, and the day job. Some of that is management. Some of it may simply be work the organization has pushed downward.

The manager problem is partly a system problem.

04 LEADERSHIP IS INCREASINGLY ABOUT CREATING CAPABILITY.

Joanne's lesson is easy to miss because it starts with a delicious croissant. The real shift is from "I can do this" to "I can help other people do this." That shows up everywhere in the documentary: developing people, creating growth, asking better questions, distributing expertise, and helping others contribute more fully.

The best leaders don't just deliver results. They leave more capability behind them.

05 RECOGNITION IS ONE WAY WE SEE THE WORK.

Recognition can tell someone, *I saw that.* But across these conversations, it can do more than that. It can help reveal strengths. Surface invisible contribution. Reinforce behaviors. Create development conversations. Give leaders another way to understand what is happening beyond the formal reporting structures.

Recognition can be both human and informative

06 THE SYSTEM MATTERS.

None of these challenges can be solved by telling managers to try harder.

- If you want people to speak up, build pathways for speaking up.
- If you want people to grow, create opportunities to grow.
- If you want managers to lead well, equip them and give them room to lead.
- If you want contribution to be visible, create ways to see it.
- If you want to experiment, make room to learn from what doesn't work.

The question isn't only whether people are doing the right things. It's whether we've made the right things easier to do.



5 questions to take away

After watching **The Leadership Reset**, these may be the most useful questions to keep asking:

01 WHAT ARE WE FAILING TO SEE?

What information, talent, work, or contribution sits outside our usual line of sight?

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02 WHAT ARE PEOPLE RELUCTANT TO TELL US?

Where might our culture, systems, or leadership behavior be making candor harder than we realize?

03 WHAT ARE MANAGERS CARRYING THAT THE ORGANIZATION SHOULD OWN?

Where have structural problems quietly become individual manager responsibilities?

04 WHOSE CONTRIBUTION OR POTENTIAL ARE WE MISSING?

Who gets seen because they are visible — and who gets overlooked because they aren't?

05 WHAT WOULD WE REDESIGN?

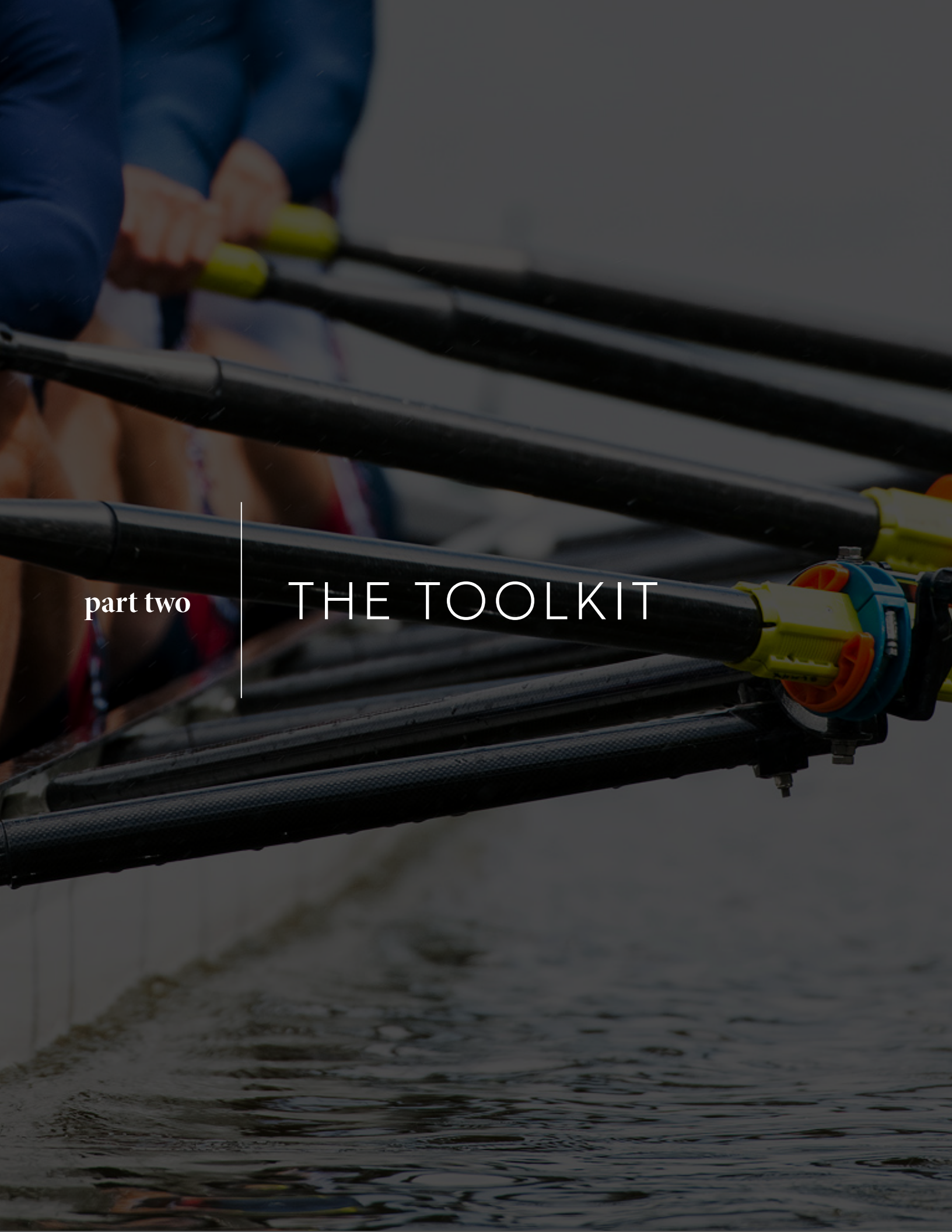
If we wanted the behaviors we value to happen more naturally, what would we change about the systems around work?



ONE IDEA TO CARRY FORWARD

the future of work will not be built by managers carrying more.

It will be built by organizations becoming better at seeing, listening, supporting, developing, and connecting the people doing the work.



part two

THE TOOLKIT

from insight to action

The documentary asks us to look differently at work:

What are we not seeing? What are people not saying?
What are managers carrying? Who is being overlooked?

The next question is harder: **What do we do about it?**
The conversations in The Leadership Reset point to a common answer.

The goal isn't to give managers one more framework to remember or one more tool to add to an already crowded day. It is to build the conditions around work so that good leadership, useful information, growth, recognition, and better decisions can happen more consistently.

- **For HR leaders,** that means looking beyond individual manager capability to the systems, expectations, processes, and habits that shape the manager experience.
- **For managers**, it means focusing less on having all the answers and more on seeing clearly, asking better questions, developing people, and creating the conditions for good work.

THE TOOLS IN THIS SECTION ARE DESIGNED TO HELP WITH BOTH.



the hr manager infrastructure audit

Before asking managers to do more, take a close look at what the organization is asking them to carry. Use this audit with your HR or people leadership team. You do not need to solve everything at once. The goal is to identify where the system is helping managers — and where it is actually making their jobs harder.

01. ROLE CLARITY

The question: Do managers know what good management actually looks like here?

Look for:

- Clear expectations for people leadership
- A manageable set of priorities
- Explicit decision rights
- Clarity about what belongs to the manager and what belongs to the organization
- Expectations that recognize management as work, not an addition to an already full job

Ask:

What are we asking every manager to be responsible for that we have never clearly defined?

02. CAPACITY

The question: Have we given managers enough room to manage?

Consider:

- How much time managers realistically spend on people leadership
- How often new priorities are added without removing existing ones
- Whether managers are expected to remain high-performing individual contributors at the same time
- Where administrative work or fragmented tools are consuming time that could be spent with people

Ask:

What could we remove from the manager role before we add something new?

03. LEARNING + PRACTICE

The question: Have we taught managers the behaviors we hold them accountable for?

Consider:

Looking beyond courses and completion rates, consider whether managers have opportunities to:

- Practice difficult conversations
- Receive feedback on their own leadership
- Learn from peers
- Experiment with new approaches
- Reflect on what worked and what didn't

Ask:

If a manager struggles with a behavior today, where are they supposed to learn how to do it better tomorrow?

04. INFORMATION

The question: Do managers have enough context to lead credibly?

Managers often become the translator between senior leadership and employees. That role becomes much harder when they are handed decisions without enough context—or asked to communicate decisions they did not understand themselves.

Consider:

- How much context managers receive
- Whether they have enough time to process change before communicating it
- Whether they know what is still uncertain
- Whether they know what they can and cannot say
- Whether employees have a clear way to tell managers what they are experiencing

Ask:

Are we asking managers to translate information they don't actually have?

05. FEEDBACK

The question: Who helps managers become better at managing?

Managers give feedback constantly. They also need it.

Consider:

Whether your organization creates regular opportunities for managers to understand:

- What their teams experience from them
- Which leadership behaviors are working
- Where they create friction
- How effectively they support growth, recognition, and candor

Ask:

If a manager wanted honest feedback on their leadership today, where would they get it?

06. RECOGNITION

The question: Are we asking managers to recognize everyone except themselves?

Meisha-Ann makes this point directly: managers are people, too. They need to feel seen and appreciated if we expect them to keep creating that experience for others.

Consider:

- How managers are recognized for good leadership
- Whether recognition reinforces useful leadership behaviors
- Whether managers can see what their teams value about their leadership
- Whether recognition is happening only during formal review cycles

Ask:

What does a manager hear when they are doing leadership well?

07. VISIBILITY

The question: How much of the work can managers actually see?

Consider:

- Remote and distributed work
- Cross-functional contributions
- Frontline work
- Behind-the-scenes work
- Informal collaboration
- Work that prevents problems rather than producing visible outcomes

Ask:

Who is easiest for our managers to see — and who is easiest to miss?

08. ESCALATION + SPEAKING UP

The question: Can people raise problems without having to solve them first?

Look at what happens when employees:

- Disagree with a decision
- Surface a risk
- Admit a mistake
- Challenge a process
- Say that something isn't working
- Bring bad news without a proposed solution

Ask:

What does our organization teach people about bringing problems to leadership?

WHAT DID YOU FIND?

Choose one area where the gap feels most consequential.

THE GAP WE SEE



WHO EXPERIENCES IT MOST



WHAT IT COSTS US



WHAT WE CURRENTLY DO



WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE.



the manager field guide

The best way to make the ideas in **The Leadership Reset** useful is to turn them into behaviors managers can actually practice. Here are some tools. Use one when the moment calls for it.

THE BAD NEWS TEST

The next time someone brings you a problem, stop before trying to solve it.

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try: “thank you for bringing this to me. tell me what you’re seeing”.

Then ask:

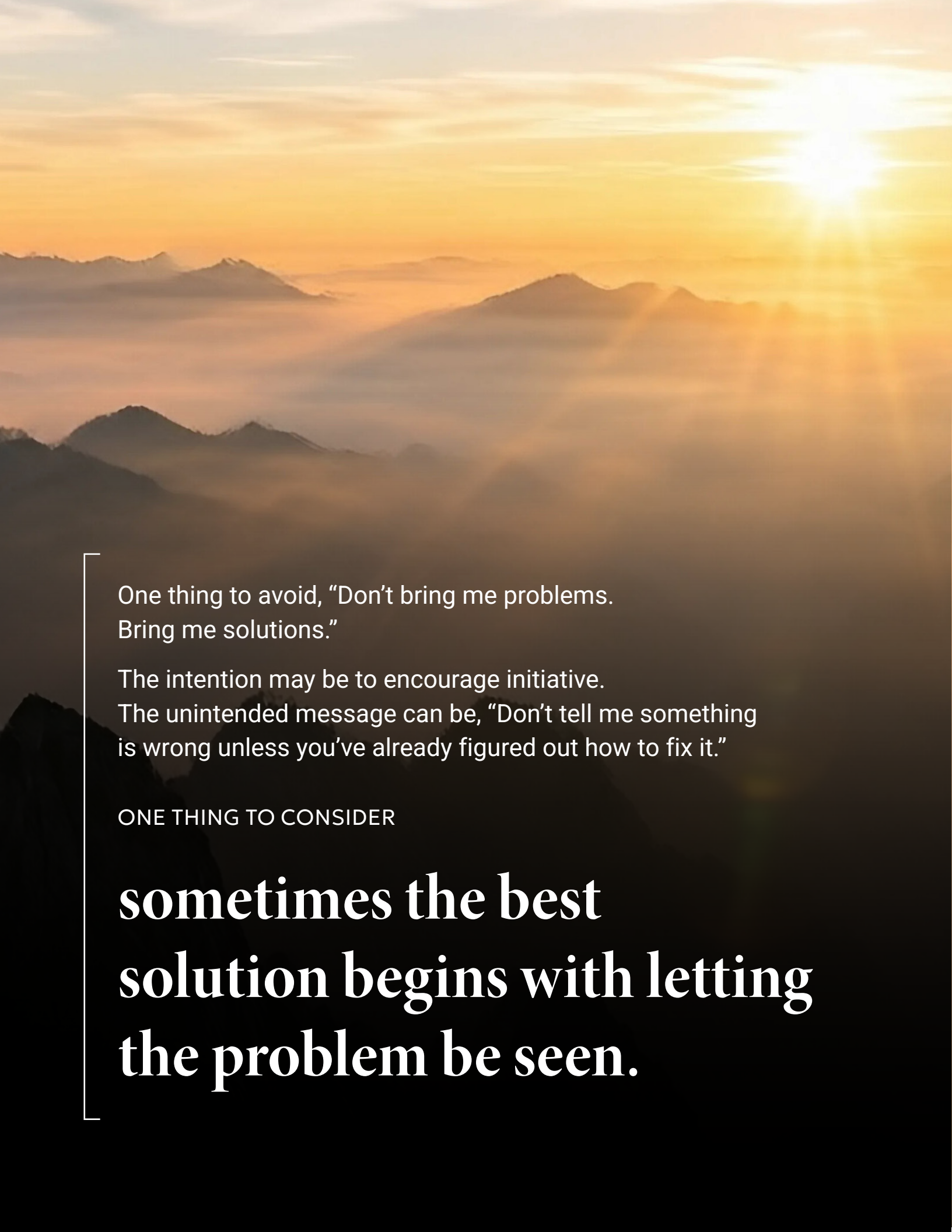
Who else might have information?

What happened?
What do we know?
What don’t we know?
What would make this worse?
What do you think we should understand before we decide what to do?

THE GOAL

is not to agree with everything you hear.

the goal is to make it worthwhile
for people to tell you.



One thing to avoid, “Don’t bring me problems.
Bring me solutions.”

The intention may be to encourage initiative.
The unintended message can be, “Don’t tell me something is wrong unless you’ve already figured out how to fix it.”

ONE THING TO CONSIDER

sometimes the best solution begins with letting the problem be seen.

THE VISIBILITY AUDIT

You cannot see everything. You can get better at noticing what you might be missing.

At the end of a week, ask:

- [ ] **What** do I need to ask rather than assume?

- [ ] **Whose** work did I see directly?
- [ ] **Whose** work did I only hear about?
- [ ] **Whose** strengths am I seeing repeatedly?

- [ ] **Who** contributed outside my immediate team?
- [ ] **Who** helped someone else succeed?
- [ ] **Who** solved a problem before it became visible?
- [ ] **Who** tried something that didn't work?
- [ ] **Who** has not been recognized lately?
- [ ] **Who** might I be overlooking because they are less visible to me?



ONE USEFUL QUESTION

“what happened this week that i probably didn’t see?”

THE DELEGATION + CAPABILITY CHECKLIST

Before taking work back from someone—or deciding to do it yourself—pause.

Ask:

- [ ] Is this something only I can do?
- [ ] Am I holding onto it because it genuinely requires my role?
- [ ] Am I holding onto it because I can do it faster?
- [ ] Am I holding onto it because I enjoy being good at it?
- [ ] Could someone else learn this?
- [ ] Have I explained what good looks like?
- [ ] Have I given them enough context to make decisions?
- [ ] Have I agreed on what they own?
- [ ] Have I agreed on when we will check in?
- [ ] Am I giving them room to solve the problem in their own way?

THE GOAL

isn't to disappear from the work.

The goal is to create another person who can do it well.

THE 15-MINUTE TEAM RESET

Useful after a reorganization, leadership change, project launch, new team formation, or any moment when people are figuring out how to work together.

Start with the reality
What has changed?
(Name it. Don't make people pretend it hasn't happened.)

Then establish the work
What are we here to accomplish?

Then establish the uncertainty
What are we not sure about yet?

Then establish the people
What does each of us bring?
What does each of us need?

TAKE AWAY

A team does not need months of bonding before it can begin to work well.

It does need enough shared understanding to be candid with one another.

THE UNCERTAINTY COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK

You don’t need to have certainty to communicate clearly.

When you don’t know what happens next, try:

What we know →	“Here’s what we know today…”
What we don’t know →	“Here’s what we don’t have an answer to yet…”
What we’re doing →	“Here’s what we’re doing to learn more / address the issue…”
What may change →	“Some of this may change as we learn more…”
What we need from you →	“Here’s what I need you to do…”
When we’ll update you →	“Here’s when you’ll hear from me again…”

TAKE AWAY

when people cannot predict the outcome, predictability in communication can become an important source of trust.

THE “WHO ARE WE MISSING?” EXERCISE

Use this in a team, talent review, or leadership meeting. Start with the people who are easiest to name for a given purpose.

Then ask:

- [ ] Who isn’t on this list?
- [ ] Whose work do we rarely see?
- [ ] Who contributes across teams?
- [ ] Who solves problems behind the scenes?
- [ ] Who is consistently helping others succeed?
- [ ] Who has strengths we have never really explored?
- [ ] Who gets recognized frequently because they are visible?
- [ ] Who might need a more deliberate system of visibility?

This is particularly important when proximity is doing too much of the work of talent identification.

A USEFUL TIP

recognition data can be a terrific way of surfacing hidden contributors.

THE RECOGNITION HABIT BUILDER

Recognition becomes more meaningful when it is specific.

INSTEAD OF: “GREAT JOB.”

try: “i noticed you…”

↓

then: “…and it mattered because…”

↓

end with: “the impact was…”

For example:

“I noticed that you stayed on the call after everyone else had left to help the team work through the issue. That meant we were able to keep the project moving instead of starting over tomorrow.”

Specific recognition tells someone not only that they did something well, but **what others value about the way they work.**

Each week, ask yourself:

- Who helped someone else succeed?
- Who demonstrated a strength?
- Who made a problem easier?
- Who did important work that might otherwise have gone unnoticed?
- Who deserves to hear specifically what their contribution meant?



scripts for moments that matter

Sometimes the hardest part isn’t knowing what you believe. It’s knowing what to say.

TALK TRACKS

Use these as starting points rather than scripts to read word-for-word.

When you don't know

"I don't have the answer yet. Here's what I do know, here's what I'm trying to understand, and here's when I'll come back to you."

When a team has changed

"We're a different team than we were before. That may make some things harder for a while. Let's talk about what we need from each other to work well together."

When you recognize someone

"I noticed you did X. It mattered because Y. I want you to know that contribution made a difference."

When someone challenges your decision

"I'm glad you raised that. Tell me what you're seeing that I may be missing."

Then, when you've heard them:

"I appreciate the input. I'm still going to make the call, and here's why."
Speaking up does not mean every decision becomes a group vote.

When someone brings bad news

"Thank you for telling me. Let's understand what's happening before we jump to a solution."

When you delegate

"I'm giving you ownership of this because I think you can do it. Here's what good looks like, here's what you own, and here's where I'm here to support you."

When you want someone to raise problems earlier

"You don't have to have the solution before you bring me the problem. I'd rather know sooner."



ai prompts for better management

AI will be part of how work gets done. The question is how we use it without handing over the parts of leadership that require judgment, context, curiosity, and human connection.

The prompts below are designed to help managers **prepare, practice, and think.** The goal is not to have AI conduct the conversation for you.
Use AI to prepare for the human conversation, not to avoid having it.

PREPARE FOR A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

I need to have a difficult conversation with an employee about [situation]. Help me prepare by identifying the assumptions I may be making, three questions I should ask before reaching a conclusion, and three ways my language could unintentionally sound defensive, judgmental, or dismissive. Do not write the conversation for me.

PRACTICE RECEIVING BAD NEWS

Role-play an employee who is reluctant to tell their manager that a project is going off track. Give me the information gradually. My job is to respond as the manager. After the role-play, evaluate how well I demonstrated curiosity, humility, and openness to bad news. Identify moments where I became defensive or moved to solutions too quickly.

PRESSURE-TEST YOUR INTERPRETATION

I believe the reason [employee/team/project] is struggling is [your interpretation]. Give me 5 plausible alternative explanations. For each one, suggest a question I could ask to test whether it is true before I act.

PREPARE TO DELEGATE

I am currently responsible for [task]. Help me determine whether I should continue owning it or develop someone else to take it on. Ask me questions about risk, skill, context, decision rights, and what I may be holding onto because I prefer doing it myself.

FIND OVERLOOKED CONTRIBUTION

Based on this project summary, help me identify the kinds of contributions that may be invisible in the final outcome. Consider collaboration, problem-solving, experimentation, persistence, coordination, and work that prevented problems. Then give me questions I can ask the team to identify who contributed in those ways.

TURN RECOGNITION INTO DEVELOPMENT

Here are several examples of contributions from the same employee: [examples]. Identify patterns in the strengths or behaviors reflected in these examples. Then suggest 5 development questions I could explore with the employee. Do not infer personality traits or make decisions about their career; focus only on what the examples support.

CHALLENGE YOUR TEAM'S THINKING

Here is the decision my team is considering: [decision]. Act as a constructive challenger. What information might we be missing? What perspective would someone closest to the work bring? What assumption are we treating as fact? What would change our mind?

REFLECT ON YOUR OWN LEADERSHIP

Here is a recent situation where I led a team: [description]. Ask me 5 questions that will help me examine how I handled uncertainty, invited information, delegated, responded to disagreement, and recognized contribution. Don't evaluate me until you've asked the questions.



your 30-day leadership reset

Don’t try to change everything. Choose just one thing you’ve seen differently because of the documentary and test it.

WEEK 1

see

Choose one question:

What are we failing to see?

What are people reluctant to tell us?

What are managers carrying that the organization should own?

Whose contribution are we overlooking?

WEEK 2

choose

Define one specific problem.

The issue we want to address:

WEEK 3

experiment

Choose one small change.

Not a transformation program.
Not a new framework.

One thing you can actually test.

Our experiment:

WEEK 4

learn

At the end of the month, ask:

What happened?

What surprised us?

What worked?

What didn't?

What did people experience differently?

What did we learn that we didn't know before?

What should we keep?

What should we change?

What should we try next?



The point of the experiment is not to prove that you got it right.

it is to learn your way toward something better.



keep the reset going

The conversations in **The Leadership Reset** point to a simple truth: better work depends on people being able to see each other, support each other, learn from each other, and know that what they do matters.

Recognition has an important role to play in that.

It makes contribution visible. It helps people understand their strengths and the impact they have on others. It gives managers another way to see what may otherwise be missed — especially as work becomes more distributed, complex, and difficult to observe. And over time, those moments can reveal something much bigger: how work is really getting done across your organization.

That is part of what makes recognition more than a thank-you. Done well, it can become part of the infrastructure that helps people and organizations work better together.

Thanks for reading, and we hope you're able to put the ideas from **The Leadership Reset** to work in your own organization.

Want to explore what recognition could look like in your organization?
Talk to a member of the Workhuman team to learn more about how a connected recognition strategy can help you see contribution, strengthen culture, and support your people.