

Welcome Back!



Now what do I
do?

- **This hour is about the gap between knowing and doing.**

- Not a recap. Not a highlight reel.
- Not five leadership habits to start tomorrow
- How I work with the gap when I coach — and how you can start practicing on your own

- **Take out *your* notes.**

- The card from this morning
- Or a piece of paper
- Or the notes app on your phone
- You'll want something you can write on



Leadership Without Lipstick™

Sharp. Honest. Unapologetic.



Everything we “put on” so people believe we're capable.

THE POLISH

The version of ourselves we think leadership requires.

THE ANSWER

The one that sounds more executive than the honest one.

THE CONFIDENCE

Performed when we are not confident.

THE EASE

Making it look easy, because struggling in public would cost credibility.



Human first.
Leader second.



Training teaches the skill. **Coaching works with the gap.**

TRAINING HELPS WHEN...

You need information or a skill.
Reading a financial statement.
Conducting an interview. Building a
project plan.

COACHING BEGINS WHEN...

You already know what to do —
and you are still unable to do it.

- **Something underneath the behavior makes it feel needed.**

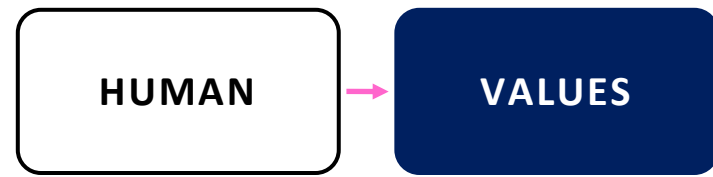
- You know you need to delegate — and keep taking the work back
- You know you need the difficult conversation — and have postponed it six months
- You know you should stop proving yourself — and still feel compelled
- It isn't that nobody taught you the right behavior

● THE VALUE CHAIN

HUMAN

Starts here.

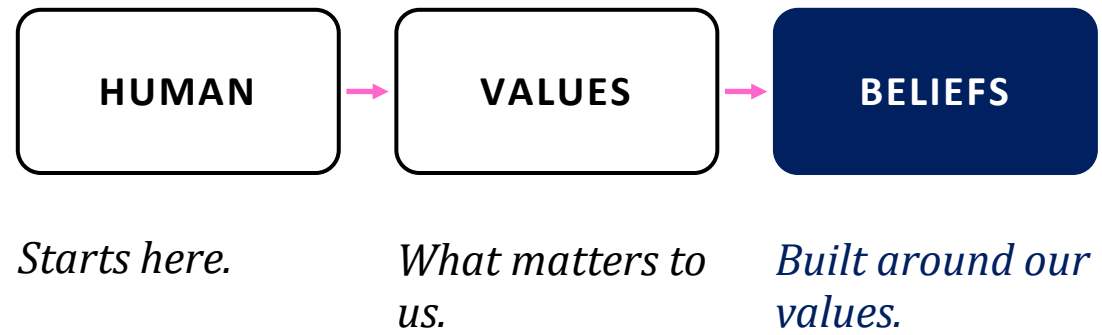
● THE VALUE CHAIN



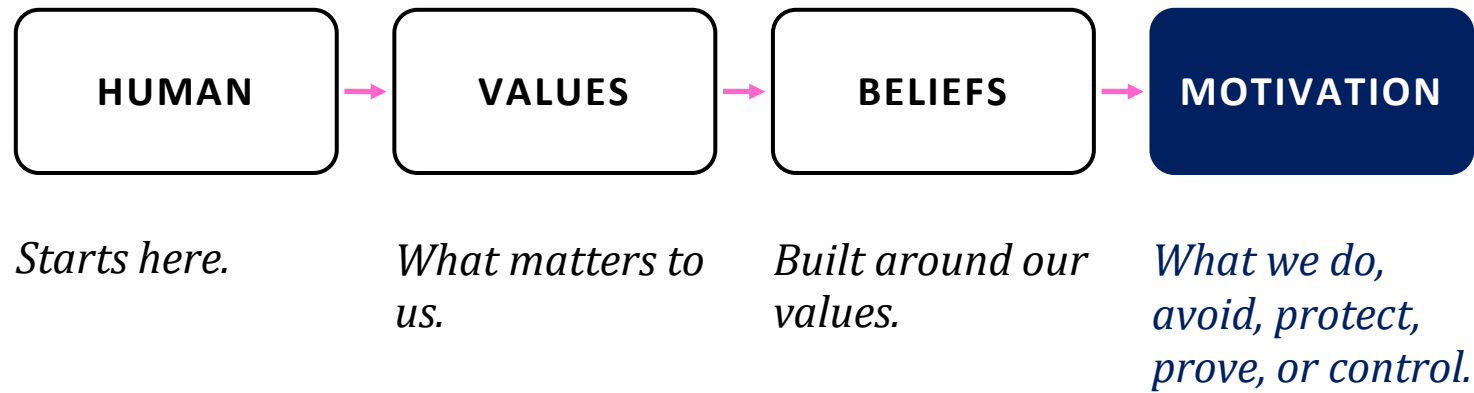
Starts here.

*What matters to
us.*

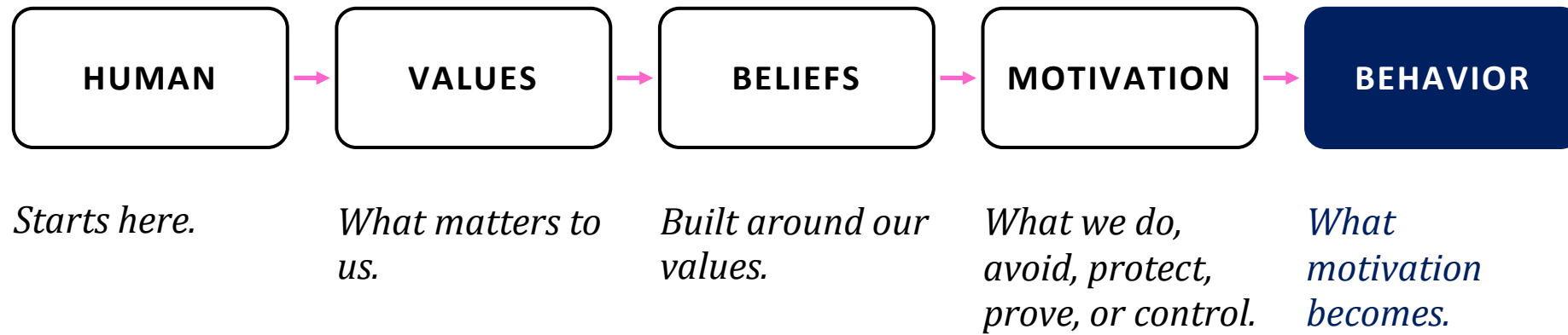
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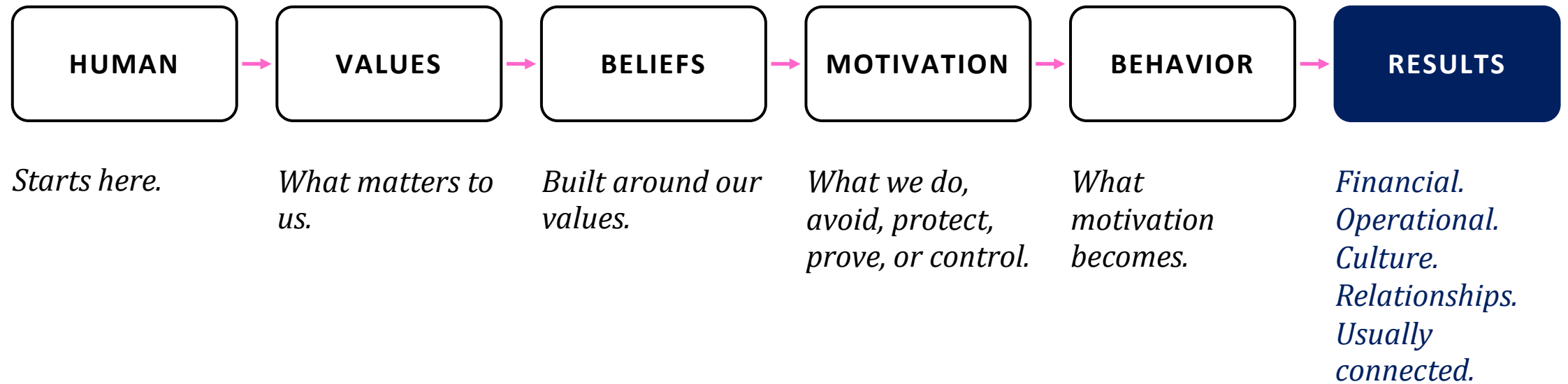
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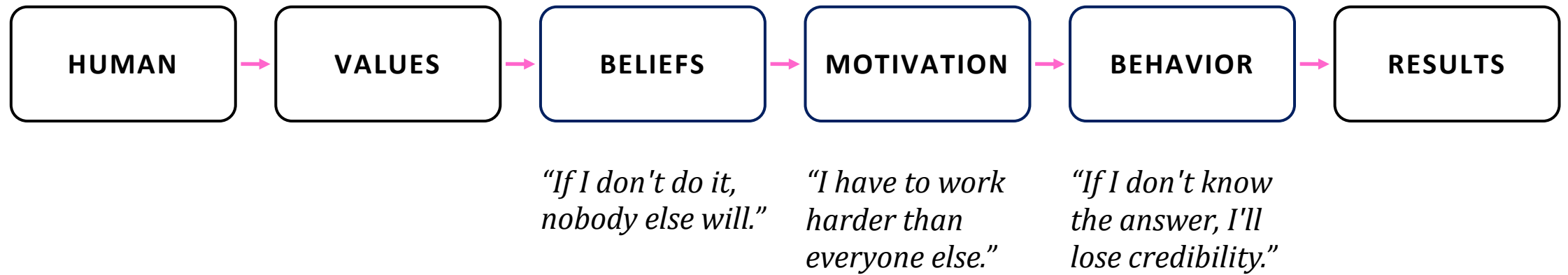
● THE VALUE CHAIN



● THE VALUE CHAIN



● THIS MORNING



- **This afternoon, we start with the moment something changes.**

- A comment
- Someone challenges your work
- A speaker says something and you think, "Yeah, but..."
- Or something opens up: interested, relieved, energized



**Notice what,
exactly?**

- **From what you think
to what you feel.**

- This morning: the rules, the stories, the explanations, the “yeah, but’s”
- Now: one layer deeper
- The explanation often arrives after the reaction
- Your body knows

- **A reaction can lead to several different discoveries.**

01

A belief I need to question.

02

A value I need to honor.

03

A boundary I need to set.

04

An environment that doesn't fit.

05

Work that gives me energy.

06

Mostly exhaustion. No deeper meaning needed.

- **Your emotions can be a *SUPERPOWER* —
when you learn to read them.**

- We learned to read the room
- We sense tension before anyone says a word
- We notice who stopped participating, who's irritated, who's excluded
- We hear the “That's fine” that means nothing is fine

- **We monitor everyone else.**
Then dismiss ourselves.

"I'm fine."

**"It doesn't
matter."**

**"I'm probably
overreacting."**

**"I just need to
be more
professional."**



Feelings are DATA.
They are not directions.

THE FEELING

DOESN'T AUTOMATICALLY MEAN

Anger



Confront someone.

Fear



Stop.

Anger



Confront someone.

Fear



Stop.

Excitement



Quit your job and start a baby goat farm.

- **The feeling tells you something changed.**

01

What changed?

02

**What did I make
it mean?**

03

**Is that meaning
accurate?**

● A COMPOSITE OF SEVERAL LEADERS

Meet **Cathy.**

- Exceptionally good at her job
- When someone questioned her work
- Warm face. Tight chest. Exposed.
- Then: defend every detail

- **What Cathy wanted: to eliminate the reaction.**

Handle her emotions better.

Stop taking things personally.

Be less transparent.

A better balance between emotional and intellectual.



The emotion wasn't creating the meaning.

It was alerting us that meaning had already been created.



The exercise.

- **Same person. Same voice.**
Two completely different reactions. (why?)

WHAT I SAID

WHAT CATHY FELT

"You may be the stupidest person I have ever met."



"That hurt."

"Your hair is the purplest I have ever seen."



"Not at all. I know it isn't true."



It didn't arrive as words. **It arrived as evidence.**

- One comment passed through a filter that already existed
- Part of her feared she wasn't as capable
- Her first manager tore apart her work in front of the team
- She learned a question was the beginning of public humiliation
- Different person, different room — her body prepared

- **Once she could see the filter, she had options.**

- Pause
- Ask: "Am I being humiliated, or am I being asked a question?"
- Decide: an answer, a boundary, a correction — or nothing at all
- Use the signal without letting it make the decision

- **Not every hurt reveals an insecurity to repair.**

- Sometimes a comment hurts because it is cruel
- Sometimes it violates a value, or crosses a boundary
- Sometimes it tells you about the person speaking, or the environment
- Sometimes it shows you what you're no longer willing to tolerate



Get curious enough to tell the difference.

- Did this hurt because I believe it?
- Did it bother me because something I value was dismissed?
- Am I reacting to this person — or someone this reminds me of?
- Is there a boundary I need to set?
- Is this environment asking me to become someone I no longer want to be?
- Or am I simply depleted?



**The feeling can't tell you which
answer is right.**

It can tell you where to look.

- **The signal may say “something is wrong.”**
It may also say “something is right.”

- The conversation where you didn't have to perform
- Work where three hours passed without checking the clock
- The moment today you sat up a little straighter
- Relief: someone finally gave language to what you already knew
- Watching another woman's life and thinking, “I want that.”

- **Find one moment today when you had a reaction.**

- Something irritated you
- You immediately disagreed
- You thought, "Yeah, but that would never work for me."
- Something made you uncomfortable and you weren't sure why
- Something gave you energy, relief, or recognition



Hold on to it.

● WE MEET OURSELVES WHERE WE THINK WE SHOULD BE

“Meet people where they are.”
Including yourself.

- Where someone with our title should be
- Where someone our age should be
- Where we expected to be by now
- Where that woman on LinkedIn **appears to be**

- **You can only begin from where you are.**

- What you're trying to protect
- What you're afraid of losing
- What you believe you still need to prove
- What consistently drains you — and what gives you energy
- What happens inside you when the world doesn't behave the way you think it should

● WHAT DID SHE ACTUALLY DO?

Get specific.
And it can't be Suzie.

- Change a decision without involving you?
- Take credit for work you did?
- Fail to complete something you were depending on?
- Question an answer you were certain was correct?
- Ignore a process you believe everyone should follow?



Different situations.

Different values.

Different actions.

RESPECT

She changed a decision without involving you.

FAIRNESS

She took credit for your work.

IDENTITY

You've attached who you are to being the one with the answer.

OR...

Suzie really does need to do her job.



Self-awareness isn't assuming every problem is yours.

It's being accurate about which part is.

● SEVEN PLACES WE CAN LEAD FROM

1

**Just Trying to Keep
the Lights On**

SAFETY

2

Don't Rock the Boat

BELONGING

3

Making My Mark

ACHIEVEMENT

4

**Figuring Out
What's Mine**

AUTHENTICITY

5

**Nothing Left to
Prove**

INTEGRITY

6

**Reading the Room
Before It Speaks**

CONTRIBUTION

7

**It Was Never About
You**

SERVICE

- **Not types.**
Not identities.
Not a ladder.
- Not personality types
- Not permanent identities
- Not a ladder with the enlightened at the top
- All seven contain something valuable
- The question: what happens when a level runs us without our awareness?

- **As we go, listen for **four things**.**

01

**What
matters
here?**

02

**What might
someone
believe?**

03

**How could it
feel?**

04

**What
behavior
might
follow?**

- **If a level sounds familiar, make your mark.**

ME

This is where I go.

**MY
ORGANIZATION**

This is where we operate.

BOTH

Me, and the place I work.

NOT TODAY

Not my last thirty days.



Think about the last thirty days.

- An ordinary difficult week — not your best moment, not the day everything caught fire
- Under pressure, uncertainty, disagreement, disappointment: where do you go?
- Do you control? Accommodate? Prove? Question?
- Or stay connected to what you value, and choose from there?

Just Trying to Keep the Lights On

WHAT MATTERS

Safety, security, and control in a world that feels unpredictable.

THE BELIEF

“If I don't stay on top of everything, it will fall apart.”

HOW IT FEELS

Bracing. Solve one problem, immediately look for the next.

THE BEHAVIOR

Control more decisions. Check more work. Stay close to the details. Move fast.

● LEVEL 1 • SURVIVAL

Just Trying to Keep the Lights On

IN THE ORGANIZATION

Reactive decisions. Budgets built to prevent the worst. Problems flow upward to whoever feels responsible.

THE GIFT

Decisive in a crisis. Stabilizes. Sees risk. Moves when everyone else freezes.

THE COST

Crisis leadership becomes the only kind. Ideas stop coming. The leader stays exhausted.

MAKE YOUR MARK: ME • MY ORGANIZATION • BOTH • NOT TODAY

Don't Rock the Boat

WHAT MATTERS

Connection,
acceptance, being
part of the group.
“Will I still
belong?”

THE BELIEF

“Good leaders
keep people
happy.” “Conflict
damages
relationships.”

HOW IT FEELS

Tension when two
people disagree.
Monitoring the
room so no one is
upset.

THE BEHAVIOR

Listen. Include.
Seek consensus.
And soften,
postpone, say yes
when you mean
no.

● LEVEL 2 • BELONGING

Don't Rock the Boat

IN THE ORGANIZATION

“We're a family.”
Sometimes genuine care
and belonging. Sometimes
no accountability at all.

THE GIFT

Empathy. Building
connection. Creating
belonging. Noticing who's
been left out.

THE COST

Harmony over honesty.
Poor performance
unaddressed. Resentment
under the surface. The
leader loses her voice.

MAKE YOUR MARK: ME • MY ORGANIZATION • BOTH • NOT TODAY

● LEVEL 3 · ACHIEVEMENT

Making My Mark

WHAT MATTERS

Excellence, accomplishment, recognition, and visible impact.

THE BELIEF

“My results prove my value.” “I can rest when the work is done.”

HOW IT FEELS

Exciting — and restless. A day without a visible win feels wasted. Setbacks feel personal.

THE BEHAVIOR

High standards. Challenge convention. Take risks. Create results others didn't think possible.

● The whiteboard.

- Corporate director of FP&A, leading a team of five
- I brought a whiteboard and markers into the department
- Put it directly in the middle of the team
- “If I am ever wrong, I want you to write it on the board.”



My competence was real.
**And It was supported by the
organization and culture.**

● LEVEL 3 · ACHIEVEMENT

Making My Mark

IN THE ORGANIZATION

Growth, innovation, accountability, exceptional performance. And burnout, internal competition, worth = productivity.

THE GIFT

The courage and energy to make something happen.

THE COST

Achievement becomes evidence of who you are. Slowing down = falling behind. Delegating = giving away your value.

MAKE YOUR MARK: ME · MY ORGANIZATION · BOTH · NOT TODAY

Figuring Out What's Mine

WHAT MATTERS

Autonomy,
authenticity, and
separating what's
yours from what
you inherited.

THE BELIEF

“I know how to
succeed here, but
I'm no longer sure
I want to.”

HOW IT FEELS

Unsettling.
Dissatisfied
without knowing
why — while still
performing well.

THE QUESTIONS

What does success
mean to me?
Which parts did I
choose? Who am I
under the roles?

Figuring Out What's Mine

IN THE ORGANIZATION

Room for questions.
Challenging tradition.
Talking about purpose and values. Inconvenient to anyone who preferred the earlier you.

THE GIFT

Discernment. Separating what's expected from what's true for you.
Reclaiming choices you'd surrendered.

THE COST

Staying in the questions forever. Explaining your unhappiness beautifully, and changing nothing.

MAKE YOUR MARK: ME · MY ORGANIZATION · BOTH · NOT TODAY

Nothing Left to Prove

WHAT MATTERS

Living what you value — not merely being able to describe it.

THE BELIEF

“I can make a decision someone dislikes and still be a good leader.”

HOW IT FEELS

Steadier. Not easy, not always calm — but less dependent on the room.

THE BEHAVIOR

Consistent under pressure. Accountable when the person is well-liked. Lets others struggle productively.

● LEVEL 5 • INTEGRITY

Nothing Left to Prove

IN THE ORGANIZATION

Values visible in decisions: who gets promoted, what's tolerated, how conflict is handled.

THE GIFT

Integrity. People don't have to guess which version of her will walk into the room.

THE COST

Steadiness becomes certainty. Forgetting how convincing an old belief feels to someone else.

MAKE YOUR MARK: ME • MY ORGANIZATION • BOTH • NOT TODAY

- **Circle where you go.**
Star what gets rewarded.

CIRCLE

The level where you spend the most time under pressure. Where you go when something important feels threatened.

STAR

The level your organization appears to reward most often.

THE DISTANCE

Those may be the same. They may not be. The gap between them may explain some of what you've been feeling.

● The rest of the map.

LEVEL 6 · CONTRIBUTION

Reading the Room Before It Speaks

Seeing patterns across people, functions, systems, and time. Developing other leaders. Considering people she'll never meet.

GIFT Perspective and contribution.

COST Carrying problems that aren't hers to own.

LEVEL 7 · SERVICE

It Was Never About You

Leadership grounded in service: the contribution, the institution, the community, the people who'll carry on the work.

GIFT Purpose without the constant need for credit.

COST Service becomes self-erasure. Even service needs boundaries.

- **Now look at *your* marks.**

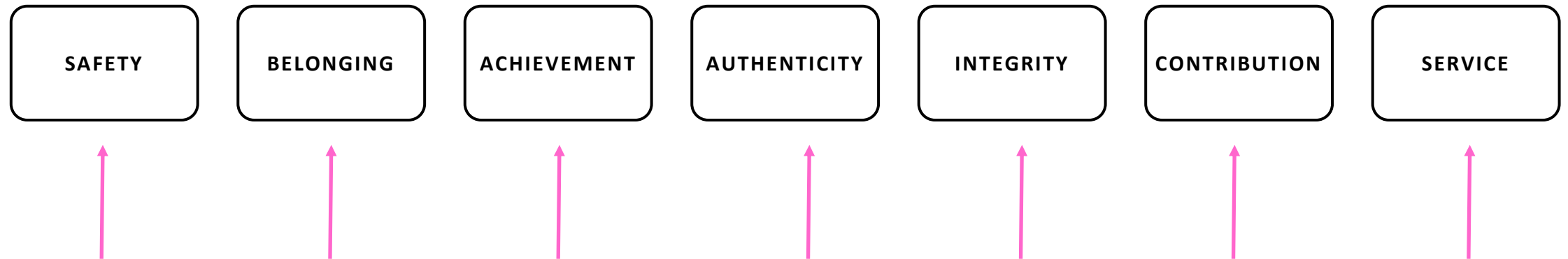
- Which one made you feel most recognized?
- Which one made you slightly uncomfortable?
- Which one did you immediately want to explain?
- And where did you place your organization?

- **A mismatch can become toxic without either side being bad.**

- Sometimes a “toxic environment” is a genuine pattern of harmful behavior
- Sometimes it's a mismatch: what you value, what the organization rewards, what each expects leadership to look like
- It doesn't tell you to stay. It doesn't tell you to leave.
- It gives you better information about the decision you're actually making



What did your reaction **touch**?



● FROM FEELING TO CHOICE

Reflective inquiry.

- Two pieces of information: a reaction from today, and where you go under pressure
- Not a fixed list of questions in the same order every time
- Each question comes from the answer before it
- The goal: move beneath the first explanation without assuming what we'll find

● A COMPOSITE OF SEVERAL LEADERS

Meet Donna.

- Grew up in a blue-collar family
- Work you could see
- Became a CPA
- Accounting still had visible evidence
- Worked hard, was good at it, and was promoted

- **That's when everything began falling apart.**

- Kept most of her old work while trying to lead the department
- Didn't delegate enough
- When she did, she checked so closely it would've been faster to do it herself
- Her team: frustrated. Donna: exhausted.
- By the time she asked for help, she was seriously considering leaving



The obvious answer: delegate.

The real question: why did holding on make sense?

- We could teach her to assign responsibilities (skill)
- Define expectations, establish checkpoints, provide feedback (tools)
- All of that would be useful
- None of it would answer the question that mattered most



I A S K E D

D O N N A S A I D

“What is exhausting you?”



“I'm doing everything.”



I ASKED

DONNA SAID

“What is exhausting you?”



“I’m doing everything.”

“Why are you doing everything?”



“Because it has to get done.”



I ASKED

DONNA SAID

“What is exhausting you?”



“I’m doing everything.”

“Why are you doing everything?”



“Because it has to get done.”

“What would happen if you handed more of it to your team?”



“Then I wouldn’t know what I was doing all day.”



I ASKED

DONNA SAID

“What is exhausting you?”



“I’m doing everything.”

“Why are you doing everything?”



“Because it has to get done.”

“What would happen if you handed more of it to your team?”



“Then I wouldn't know what I was doing all day.”

“And if you didn't know what you'd done all day, what would that mean?”



“It would mean I hadn't really worked.”



**“Real work is
work you can see.”**

- **The problem wasn't the value.**
It was having only one way to live it.

- Where did the belief come from? People she respected
- A family whose hard work created stability, pride, and opportunity
- Donna valued hard work — and it built an extraordinary career
- Not something we wanted to eliminate

● Hard work, redefined.

AS AN INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR

Producing the work.

AS A LEADER

Teaching someone. Creating clarity. Developing judgment. Letting someone struggle long enough to learn. Building a department that succeeds without her hands on every piece.

● THE EXPERIMENT

Not “delegate more.” Just One piece of work.

- One recurring responsibility someone on her team could learn
- Define the result. Transfer responsibility.
- Set a reasonable checkpoint
- Let them complete it differently than she would have
- Don't take it back the moment it gets uncomfortable



When the urge to step in hits:

ASK

“Is the work actually at risk?”

OR

“Am I having a reaction because leadership doesn't look enough like work to me?”

- **Every success was new evidence.**

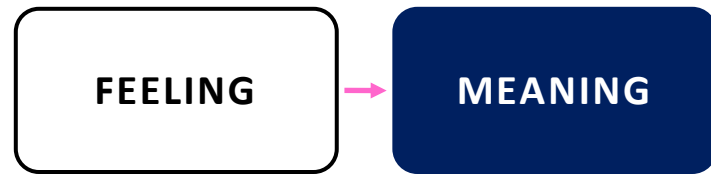
- Leading people is real work
- Teaching is real work
- Creating capability is real work
- A department that doesn't need me to do everything is evidence I led it well

● DONNA'S PATH

FEELING

*Exhaustion, with
fear underneath.*

● DONNA'S PATH



*Exhaustion, with
fear underneath.*

*"If I hand off the
work, I won't be
doing anything
valuable."*

● DONNA'S PATH

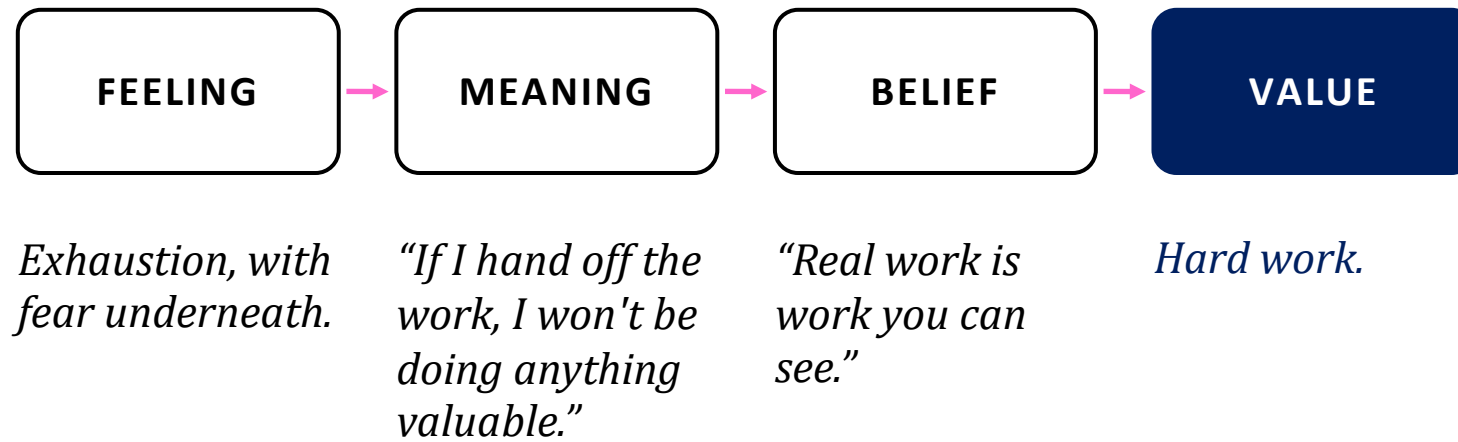


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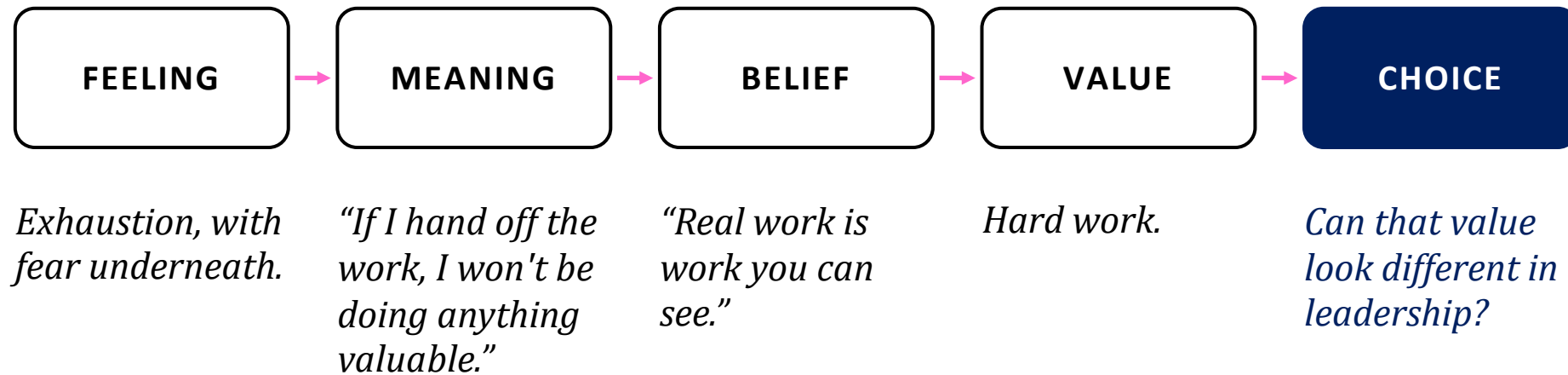
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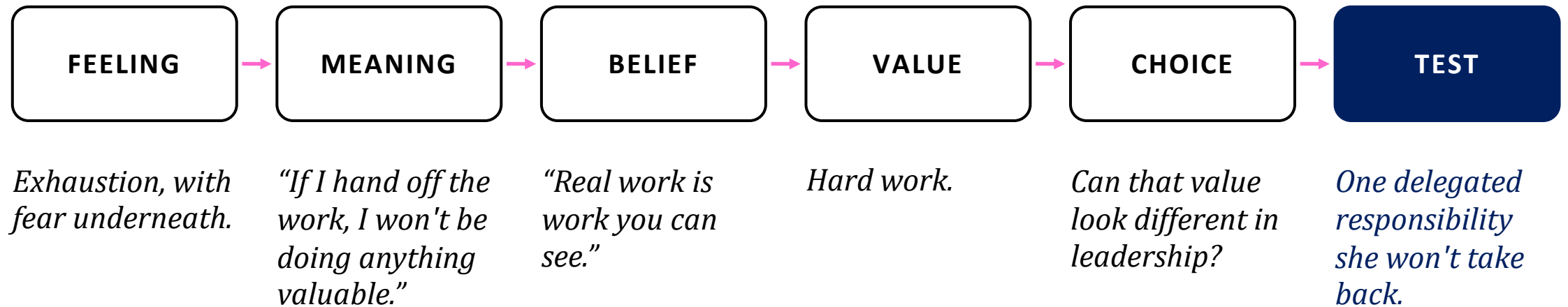
● DONNA'S PATH



● DONNA'S PATH



● DONNA'S PATH



- DON'T ANSWER YET — JUST LISTEN

Now **your reaction.**

- What did you feel?
- What did you make the situation mean?
- What would you have to believe for that meaning to make sense?
- What value might you have been protecting?
- What choice did that belief make seem necessary?

● Same feeling. Different work.

FEELING

Irritated:
someone
changed a
decision without
involving you.

MEANING

“My judgment is
not respected.”

BELIEF

“If people don't
consult me, I
have no
influence.”

VALUE

Respect.
Contribution. Or
control.

- **Not “How do I stop feeling this?”**
Instead: What is mine...

...to question?

...to honor?

...to communicate?

...to change?

AND SOMETIMES

**What is no longer
mine to carry?**

- **From reaction to choice.**

THE FEELING

Gives you the signal.

INQUIRY

Helps you interpret it.

ONE SMALL TEST

Gives you the chance to create different evidence.



Your turn. Follow the signal.

● STEP 1 OF 7 • 20 SECONDS

What happened?

NOT

“She dismissed me.”
“They don't respect my time.”

INSTEAD

Describe the situation without
assigning a motive or conclusion.

● STEP 2 OF 7 • 20 SECONDS

What did **you** feel?

EMOTION

Irritated. Embarrassed. Energized.
Threatened. Relieved. Angry.
Invisible. Excited. Disappointed.

IN YOUR BODY

Tight chest. Warm face. Dropped
stomach. Clenched jaw. More
energy. A sense of relief.

● STEP 3 OF 7 • 30 SECONDS

“When that happened, I made it mean...”

- “My opinion does not matter.”
- “They do not think I am capable.”
- “I am going to be left cleaning this up.”
- “I finally heard someone say what I have been thinking.”
- “This kind of leadership may actually be possible for me.”

● STEP 4 OF 7 · 40 SECONDS

What would you **have to believe?**

- “What would I have to believe for that meaning to make perfect sense?”
- Not what you should believe
- Not the answer that makes you look self-aware
- What belief would make your actual reaction logical?

● STEP 5 OF 7 · 30 SECONDS

What are **you** protecting?

Respect

Fairness

Excellence

Security

Belonging

Independence

Contribution

Being seen as capable

Being someone others can depend on

● STEP 6 OF 7 · WHICH COMES CLOSEST?

What did **you** find?

01

A belief I need to
question.

● STEP 6 OF 7 · WHICH COMES CLOSEST?

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● STEP 6 OF 7 · WHICH COMES CLOSEST?

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Work that gives me energy.

● STEP 6 OF 7 · WHICH COMES CLOSEST?

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Work that gives me energy.

06

Mostly exhaustion. No deeper meaning needed.

● STEP 7 OF 7 • 30 SECONDS

What is one choice **you maybe didn't see while reacting?**

- A conversation. A boundary.
- A question to ask instead of answering for everyone else
- A task to hand off. A decision to stop postponing.
- Permission to do more of the work that gives you energy
- Or dinner, sleep, and a fresh look tomorrow

● What can **you** test?

NOT A BEHAVIOR

OBSERVABLE

"Become more confident."



"I will ask one question before I defend my answer."

"Stop caring what people think."



"I will delegate one recurring responsibility and not take it back at the first discomfort."

"Stop Saying Yes."

"I will state the boundary without a twelve-paragraph explanation."

- **The purpose of an experiment is to create information.**

- You don't have to know whether it will work
- Your old behavior has been collecting evidence for your old belief
- A different behavior gives you the chance to collect different evidence

● The method.

NOTICE

What am I
feeling? Where
did it show up?
What happened
right before it?

INVESTIGATE

CHOOSE

TEST

● The method.

NOTICE

What am I feeling? Where did it show up? What happened right before it?

INVESTIGATE

What did I make it mean? What would I have to believe? What value am I protecting?

CHOOSE

TEST

● The method.

NOTICE

What am I feeling? Where did it show up? What happened right before it?

INVESTIGATE

What did I make it mean? What would I have to believe? What value am I protecting?

CHOOSE

Do I want this belief to decide this time? Is there another way to honor the value?

TEST

● The method.

NOTICE

What am I feeling? Where did it show up? What happened right before it?

INVESTIGATE

What did I make it mean? What would I have to believe? What value am I protecting?

CHOOSE

Do I want this belief to decide this time? Is there another way to honor the value?

TEST

One different behavior, in one real situation. See what happens.



You don't need an hour.

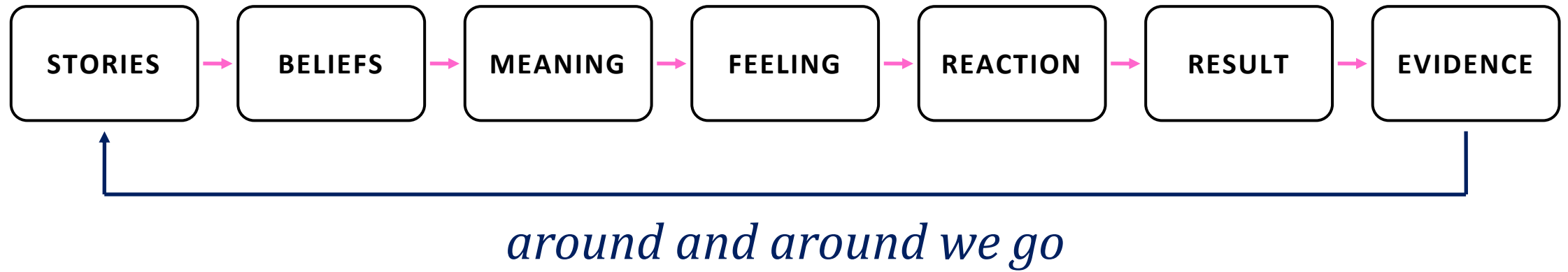
You need space between reaction and behavior.

- After a meeting
- Before a difficult conversation
- When you catch yourself taking work back
- When a comment follows you home
- When an idea gives you energy you can't stop thinking about

- **That's your experiment.**
Not a lifelong promise.

- Not evidence that you've completed the work
- One different behavior
- In one real situation
- That gives you the chance to learn something new

● HOW WE GOT HERE



-

Today, you created an INTERRUPTION.



Every one of these **is useful.**

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The feeling isn't the problem.

It isn't the answer.

It's the signal.

- Your emotions are a **superpower** when you learn to read them
- The signal tells you where to look



“I may not have chosen every story I was given.
But once I can see the story, I have
responsibility
for what I continue to do with it.”

- **Responsibility doesn't ask for judgment.**
It asks for honesty.

**Is this belief
still true?**

**Is it always
true?**

**Does it still
serve what I
value?**

**Do I want it
making this
decision for
me?**

● Your choices **don't stay with you.**

WHEN YOU...

THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU LEARN...

Stop taking the work back



Someone else gets the opportunity to grow.

Set the boundary



What access to you requires.

Say "I don't know"



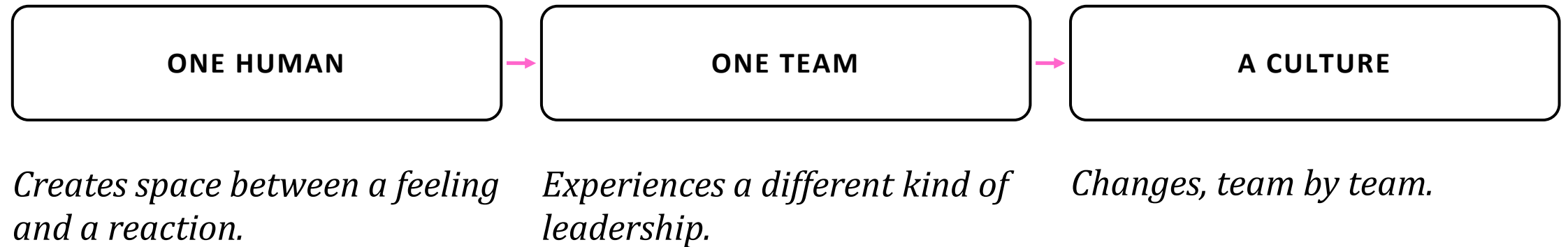
Credibility doesn't require pretending.

Stop avoiding the difficult conversation



Care and accountability can exist in the same room.

- **Repeated often enough,
it changes a culture.**



● **That is Leadership Without Lipstick.**

- Not becoming less ambitious, capable, prepared, or committed
- Understanding what you've been performing, protecting, or proving
- Deciding whether it still belongs in the way you lead



Human first.
Leader second.



**Thank you to the women
who shared their stories today.**



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

One story.

One belief.

One behavior.

One piece of evidence at a time.

HOW DO WE GET SOMEWHERE DIFFERENT?

One reaction noticed.

One belief questioned.

One conscious choice.

One different behavior.

One new piece of evidence at a time.



Now what am
I going to do?



Notice.
Investigate.
Choose.
Test.



**Wherever you are is
a useful place to begin.
But it is not the only place
you are allowed to go.**



Thank you!

