

Prepared by the Co-Founders of

Bonfire.



Work Like  
a *Woman*

The Influence Playbook for women rewriting the rules of work.

# The Setup

# Why We Built This

We built this Playbook because influence is the power most available—and most essential—to women at work. It's how we lead when we don't yet have the title, the budget, or the final say. It's how we move change through workplaces that weren't exactly designed with us in mind.

Let's be honest: We've been influencing forever, without calling it that. We've been reading the room, building alliances, framing the story so others can see what we see. This Playbook simply names what we've already been doing—and shows how to do it with more intention, confidence, and impact.

The Influence Playbook is one part inspiration, three parts perspiration. Some of it will hit close to home. Some will stretch you. All of it will build your muscle for influence. Don't just read it—work it.

Use the tools, stories, and exercises in the back until they start to feel like second nature.

We've used these strategies in our own careers, but when we studied them systematically—across industries and around the world—we saw success patterns that were undeniable. At Bonfire Women, Inc., we taught these strategies to over 5,000 women across 400 companies, and the results spoke for themselves.

A grant from the Omidyar Network made the original research possible. Support from the Lumena Foundation allowed us to share it with you.

Now it's yours to use and to share.

This is what it means to Work Like a Woman.



Rachel Bellow, Co-Founder



Suzanne Muchin, Co-Founder

# This is For You Because ...



You've hit a wall you can't name. You're stuck.

See how a POV can help. [Page 15](#)

You want to be taken seriously.

Learn how to frame your ideas. [Page 23](#)

You're exhausted from proving yourself.

Time to show not tell. See how modeling works. [Page 26](#)

You care about something ... but they don't.

Incentives are the key. [Page 29](#)

You need to get through to your boss.

Time to organize. [Page 32](#)

# What You'll Find Inside

## A New Way to Think About Influence

You already have ideas about influence—what it means, how it works, who wields it. This Playbook will change all that. And once you see influence differently, you'll use it differently.

## New Ground Rules

Before you reach for strategy, start with first principles. Strategy guides your actions. Ground rules guide your mindset. They offer the lens that determines whether those actions will work.

## Key Strategies

Here's where influence becomes action. Each play adds to your power portfolio. Move through them in any order, but take them all in. This is the toolkit for how you Work Like a Woman.

## Ask Yourself

These are thought starters to spark reflection and shift your perspective. Each one invites you to pause and ask yourself questions about what you've just read. You'll find them sprinkled throughout the Playbook.

## Your Missions

Small, practical assignments designed to help you put these ideas into action. You'll find them in **THE WORKBOOK (PAGE 39)**—your chance to practice what you've learned and build your influence muscle. These are at the back of the book. Don't ignore them!

## Vignettes

Real stories from real women—some we know personally, others we've read about. Each vignette shows how women like you have created change in their workplaces, communities, and lives.

## The Setup

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# Ready?

(Let's Go!)

# Our POV on Influence

# You Know What Influence Is, Right? (No, You Don't.)

Close your eyes and conjure the key adjectives to describe the kind of woman you'd associate with someone who has influence over the way things work in the world.

What came up for you?

Charismatic? Big personality? Great communicator? Boss lady? Center stage type? Salesy? Brash?

Right. That's what we thought too.

But then we looked into it. And what we discovered changed our whole understanding of what influence is...and what it's not.

Charismatic  
SALESY

Great Communicator

Brash

Center Stage Type

BOSS LADY

## What Influence *Actually* Is

# influence

The process of intentionally shaping the attitudes, norms, and behaviors of your environment in order to create change

# How We See It



01

## It's Not About You

Influence isn't about you, your charm, or your spotlight. It's about reading the room, spotting the incentives, and painting a future everyone wants in on.

**WE'LL WALK YOU THROUGH IT.**

02

## Influence Is a Verb

It's not something you have—it's something you do. Forget persuasion. Stop convincing and start creating the conditions for agreement.

**WE'LL HELP YOU FLIP THAT SWITCH.**

03

## Focus on Values, Not Opinions

Opinions are fickle. Values endure. Influence connects to what people stand for—not what they think right now.

**WE'LL HELP YOU FIND THEM.**



### **BOTTOM LINE**

Influence builds common ground, fuels shared goals, and shapes a future big enough for everyone.

**“A leader is best when people  
barely know [she] exists.  
When [her] work is done,  
[her] aim fulfilled, they will say:  
We did it ourselves.”**

**— Lao Tzu**

# Ground Rules of Influence



Before you can think about your strategies to achieve influence, you need to understand the basic rules of the game:

- 01 **Establish Your POV shot**
- 02 **Map Your Ecosystem**
- 03 **Play Your Role (Not Your Title)**
- 04 **Surf the Power Zone**



#### **BOTTOM LINE**

Influence starts with clarity. You can't have it without a clear Point of View and an understanding of who's affected by it. Remember—you already have power, no title required. Connect your ideas to others so the concepts feels true, not just new.



## Establish Your POV Shot

A point-of-view (POV) shot is a filmmaking term. It's the camera shot early on that shows the audience exactly what a character sees, as if through their eyes. It creates intimacy and alignment with the character's perspective, often heightening emotion or tension. All influence begins by deciding what conversation you want to be having and drawing others into your POV. You can't assume that others understand why you care, what your desired change might mean, and why it matters. A clear point of view is your north star. Name the change you seek, why it matters, and for whom.

A concise POV turns vague desire into a brief others can respond to—clarifying outcomes, signaling stakes, and inviting alignment. Share it with early allies; their questions will refine your language and strengthen your case. A crisp POV is the seed from which strategy and momentum grow.

**YOUR MISSION:** Write Down Your POV (Page 40) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Brittany's Story (Page 50)



### ASK YOURSELF

What's one change at work that would make your job—and the work of others—better? Remember this as you move through the Playbook.

Why does this matter to you, your colleagues, or your organization?

How would you explain your POV to a high school student?

02

## Map Your Ecosystem

No change happens in a vacuum.

List the people and groups who have a stake in your issue. Note what each values, fears, and needs. This “map” reveals leverage points, likely blockers, surprising allies, and sequencing—whom to engage first, whom to inform, whom to neutralize.

Seeing the whole system helps you aim influence where it will compound, not dissipate.

Strategy improves instantly when you design for interactions, not individuals.

**YOUR MISSION:** List Your Circles of Influence (Page 41) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Shayla’s Story (Page 51)



### ASK YOURSELF

Who stands to benefit, even if they don’t know it yet?

Who protects the systems you’ll need to navigate to make it happen?

Who might push back—and what can their perspective teach you?



03

## Play Your Role (Not Your Title)

Influence flows from the role you occupy, not the title you hold. Define what is “yours to do” based on your credibility and strengths.

What are you known for, and what comes most naturally to you in any environment? Are you a convener? Storyteller? Organizer? Analyst? Fixer?

Claim that role and work from it. When you clarify your role, you quietly force others to clarify theirs, reducing turf fog and duplication. Roles connect; titles separate. Choose the role that advances the work, then act from it consistently.

**YOUR MISSION:** Identify Roles in Your Workplace (Page 42) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Sara’s Story: Part I (Page 52)



### ASK YOURSELF

How do the people you work with describe you when you’re not in the room?

What patterns show up again and again in how you’re known at work and among your friends?

Thinking about the change you want to make, what role naturally fits the person you already are?

04

## Surf the Power Zone

Ask any surfer what this means and they'll tell you that the power zone is the sweet spot on a wave where its energy is strongest and speed comes effortlessly. Surfing it means positioning yourself just ahead of the breaking curl, letting the wave's momentum do the work while you steer and adapt.

What it means for you is this: Don't start from zero; start where energy already exists. Identify adjacent conversations, trends, deadlines, or mandates that favor your aim. Attach your idea to what's already moving—executive priorities, external news headlines, internal metrics, peer examples. Borrow their momentum to lower friction, shorten timelines, and normalize adoption. Surfing involves strategic timing and framing so your proposal feels inevitable, not novel. Momentum is a resource—ride it.

**YOUR MISSION:** Find the Wave in Your Workplace (Page 43) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Sara's Story: Part 2 (Page 53)



### ASK YOURSELF

What conversations or trends inside or outside your organization already connect to your idea?

How could you link your change to something that's already moving, so it feels timely rather than new?

Where's the momentum right now, and how might you ride it?

**“Rules are not constraints; they are the foundation that makes performance possible.”**

**— Peter Drucker**

# Proven Strategies of Influence

Over 18 months, we interviewed experts on how change happens—how decisions are made, conflicts resolved, elections won, and movements built.

From those insights we developed four strategies:

01

## Frame

02

## Model

03

## Incentivize

04

## Organize

Let's go through them one by one, and we can see how together they create the engine of influence.

(See [Building Your Influence Engine](#). **Page 35**)

01

## Frame

Framing is often the place to start, as it shifts how people think and talk about an idea. To be clear: It's not persuasion. It's creating the conditions for agreement by connecting to values, emotions, and meaning.

When people decide whether to support something, they don't run a cost/benefit calculation in their heads—they ask, or rather intuit instinctively: Why does this matter? Do I feel moved? Do I get this right away?

If the answer is yes, you've given them an them a path toward becoming your ally.



### BOTTOM LINE

Framing is about offering a compelling perspective—helping people hear things in new ways so they can believe new things.

# Your Framing Plays

## FIRST PLAY

### Focus on Values over Logic



Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt uses the metaphor of an elephant and rider to describe how our rational mind tries to steer us with logic and facts. The rider is our intellect. The elephant represents our emotions and values—much bigger, much stronger, and it will go where it wants. We like to think the rider is in charge, but in truth the elephant usually decides. Influence begins by recognizing that values and emotion, not logic, will be your power source. Locate the shared values and desires in your workplace and you multiply your potential allies tenfold.

## SECOND PLAY

### Make Information Beautiful



Facts matter. But how you share them matters more. When we're insecure, we often rely on numbers to prove our point. But data alone rarely moves people. Take this question: How big is Apple? A bar graph comparing Apple to its peers? Impressive, but flat. Now check out this famous animation showing Apple's value equal to a hundred entire companies. Same data, radically different impact. When you want people to feel the scale or urgency of an issue, make information not just clear, but unforgettable.

## THIRD PLAY

### Tell a Story



Storytelling is the oldest and most powerful framing strategy because it makes meaning out of information. Stories signal empathy. They make abstract issues personal. When you tell a story—about a colleague, a customer, or even yourself—you're building a bridge between what matters to you and what matters to others. A 2023 Harvard Business School study found that memory of a story fades by 1/3 after a day, while the memory of a statistic fades by 3/4. Facts inform, but stories endure.

**YOUR MISSION:** Frame with Shared Values (Page 44) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Chelsie's Story (Page 54)



## ASK YOURSELF

What values lie beneath the change you want to make?

Can you think of ways to present evidence or data in a visual format? Do you know a graphic designer who might help?

What story can you think of that illustrates what you're trying to get across? A story of success? A failure? One about you or someone else?

**“Not the ones speaking the same language, but the ones sharing the same feeling understand each other.”**

**— Rumi**



02

## Model

Do you ever have the feeling that you've got people nodding yes, and they're even poised to act, but you're still sensing hesitation?

That hesitation is about not being able to picture this new future. Or worse, doubting that it will work. They need to see what you're saying ... and they need to believe that others have done it successfully. At some point, in order for people to envision the desired future that your influence is intending to create, **you'll need to show, not tell.**

Modeling shows people there exist workable alternatives to their present state.



### BOTTOM LINE

Modeling makes the future tangible by showing people what it looks like in practice, proving it's real, safe, and possible.

# Your Modeling Plays

## FIRST PLAY

### Shift Our Associations



Implicit bias forms early and is reinforced constantly through images we consume. Photographer Kate Parker set out to disrupt that. In her book *Strong Is the New Pretty*, she captured girls demonstrating athleticism, toughness, and courage. These images dismantled gender stereotypes and planted new associations in the minds of both girls and adults. Modeling, in this case, was as simple and as powerful as changing what people see every day.

## SECOND PLAY

### Use the Power of the Herd



Most people don't want to take risks alone, especially in workplaces where short-term performance metrics dominate. That's why social proof is so powerful. If people see others like them doing something new and succeeding, they're more willing to follow. For this reason, pilots and early adopters matter. Show that "others just like you" have done it and suddenly the change feels possible, even safe.

## THIRD PLAY

### Lead by Example



Culture doesn't shift by decree—it shifts by observation. People mirror what they see more than what they're told; multiple studies on the phenomenon known as "social contagion" show that witnessing a single peer take visible action increases the likelihood of others following by a huge percentage. That's the power of modeling. You don't need a title to lead—just the willingness to embody the behavior or risk what you want normalized. Every act you model becomes social proof that "this is how we do things here." Over time, those visible examples compound into norms, and norms are what define culture. Influence begins the moment you act.

**YOUR MISSION:** Find Images that Challenge Assumptions (Page 45) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Jasmine's Story (Page 55)



## ASK YOURSELF

What hidden or unconscious assumptions shape how people see the change you're pushing for—and what images can you use to change those associations?

Who's already proving that your idea can work, and how can you point to those people or places?

Think about how the change you're proposing requires you to behave or present yourself differently ... and start doing that now!

**“Example is not the main  
thing in influencing others.  
It is the only thing.”**

**— Albert Schweitzer**



03

## Incentivize

Incentives answer the question: Why should I care? They **shift the balance of costs and rewards** so people feel that adopting a change is in their own interest. Incentives can be structural, social, or emotional.

Sometimes it means dismantling bad incentives—ones that lead people to do the very things you're trying to change.

Sometimes it means making participation prestigious.

And sometimes it means making saying “yes” so easy that saying “no” feels too hard.



### BOTTOM LINE

Incentivizing works by tipping the scales—it makes change easier, more rewarding, and more compelling than staying put.

# Your Incentivizing Plays

## FIRST PLAY

### Dismantle Faulty Reward Systems



In 2014, General Motors faced a crisis over faulty ignition switches linked to 124 deaths and a billion-dollar fine. The company had known about the defect for years but delayed a recall—because it prized speed over safety. Organizations often sabotage themselves by rewarding the wrong behaviors. Leaders say they want collaboration but reward individual performance; they claim to value teaching, but promotions hinge on research output. People do what’s rewarded, not what’s preached. If you want to change a culture, align incentives with the outcomes you actually want—then no one has to choose between what gets praised and what gets paid.

## SECOND PLAY

### Create a Special Club



In its second year, the TED Conference deliberately set about to create an aura of exclusivity. Attendance shifted from a first-come-first-served format to a highly curated “club.” TED attendees, now called “Tedizens,” scored swag, insider access, and social clout. The result? TED became not just a conference, but a signal of special status. The effect was culture-shifting. Status and belonging are powerful levers for change. Want more men to mentor women? Create a Champions Club, induct someone everyone admires, and elevate mentoring to an act of prestige.

## THIRD PLAY

### Make Them Opt-Out



In the US, organ donation has long been an opt-in choice—you check a box on your driver’s license if you want to donate. As a result, participation stays low. (Who says yes when asked to picture their own death?) When countries switch to an opt-out system, donation rates soar. (Who wants to feel stingy by unchecking a box they can always change later?) In Austria, where it’s opt-out, nearly everyone is registered; in Germany, where it’s opt-in, very few are. Studies show that changing the default can raise participation by up to 78%. People follow the path of least resistance, which means influence often comes down to making “yes” easier than “no.”

**YOUR MISSION:** Form the Special “Club” (Page 46) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Shelley’s Story (Page 56)



## ASK YOURSELF

If someone looked only at your organization’s rewards, what would they assume you really value?

Is there any status advantage to being part of the change you want to make happen?

Are you making it too easy for people to say no to your idea?

**“If you would persuade,  
you must appeal to interest  
rather than intellect.”**

**— Benjamin Franklin**



## Organize

Agreement isn't action.

People can be nodding yes, but sitting on the sidelines.

Organizing creates the frameworks, processes, and venues for people to act.

This is the mobilization moment.

Your job is to give people the means and methods to get things done.



### BOTTOM LINE

Organizing turns ideas into action by giving people spaces to connect, methods and frameworks to act, and a collective voice that registers with those who hold power. When those three align, change takes hold.

# Your Organizing Plays

## FIRST PLAY

### Create Free and Brave Spaces



When your stakeholders include people with vastly different roles and perspectives, you need places where they can meet, online or offline. That means more than “safe spaces,” where conflict is avoided. It means “brave spaces,” where disagreements surface and real progress happens. Free spaces—physical or online—become incubators of alignment and action. For example, in the 1970s, women gathered in living rooms and church basements to talk honestly about their lives. These were places where hard truths surfaced and new ideas were tested. Out of those messy, candid conversations came some of the most powerful collective insights of the women’s movement: that the personal was political, and that issues like workplace harassment weren’t individual struggles but systemic problems.

## SECOND PLAY

### Build a Shared Toolkit



Organizing isn’t just about bringing people together, it’s about giving them a common framework to act on. Vision Zero, a global initiative to eliminate pedestrian deaths, shows how this works. In New York City, agencies that usually operate in silos—transportation, police, public health, and planning—began to align around a single toolkit: shared metrics, coordinated strategies, and regular convenings. That toolkit transformed scattered intent into a unified, citywide movement.

## THIRD PLAY

### Create a Chorus



Collective instruments like surveys and online channels are powerful ways of demonstrating popular demand for change. For example, one of the world’s largest tech companies launched an anonymous Slack channel where employees flag bureaucratic hurdles. Leaders now refer to the channel as a real-time barometer on their progress. Wrenly and Abot are both anonymous Slack tools that can be used to surface latent pain points, building collective power behind needed change.

**YOUR MISSION:** Design a Survey (Page 47) ♦ **VIGNETTE:** Naomi’s Story (Page 57)



## ASK YOURSELF

As you start to grow your conversation around the change you want to see, think about what venue (online or offline) you can dedicate to this discussion. Spaces become sacred.

Are there rules—or a manifesto—you could develop that serve as basic principles to outline the change you want?

If you were to create an online channel where people could chime in, what single focus would that channel have?

**“Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.”**

**— Dolores Huerta**

# Building Your Influence Engine

Start your own influence strategy wherever you wish—depending on your comfort level and intuition around where to begin. But to build a winning plan you'll ultimately need to have all four strategies in play. Here's what happens if you *don't* do that:

**If you don't  
Frame the idea ...**

... people won't grasp what it is you're getting at, and they feel suspicious or threatened.

**WHAT'S THIS  
REALLY ABOUT?**

**If you don't  
Model the idea ...**

... they can't imagine how this could possibly work, and they lose faith in your idea.

**I CAN'T PICTURE  
THE END GAME.**

**If you fail to  
Incentivize people ...**

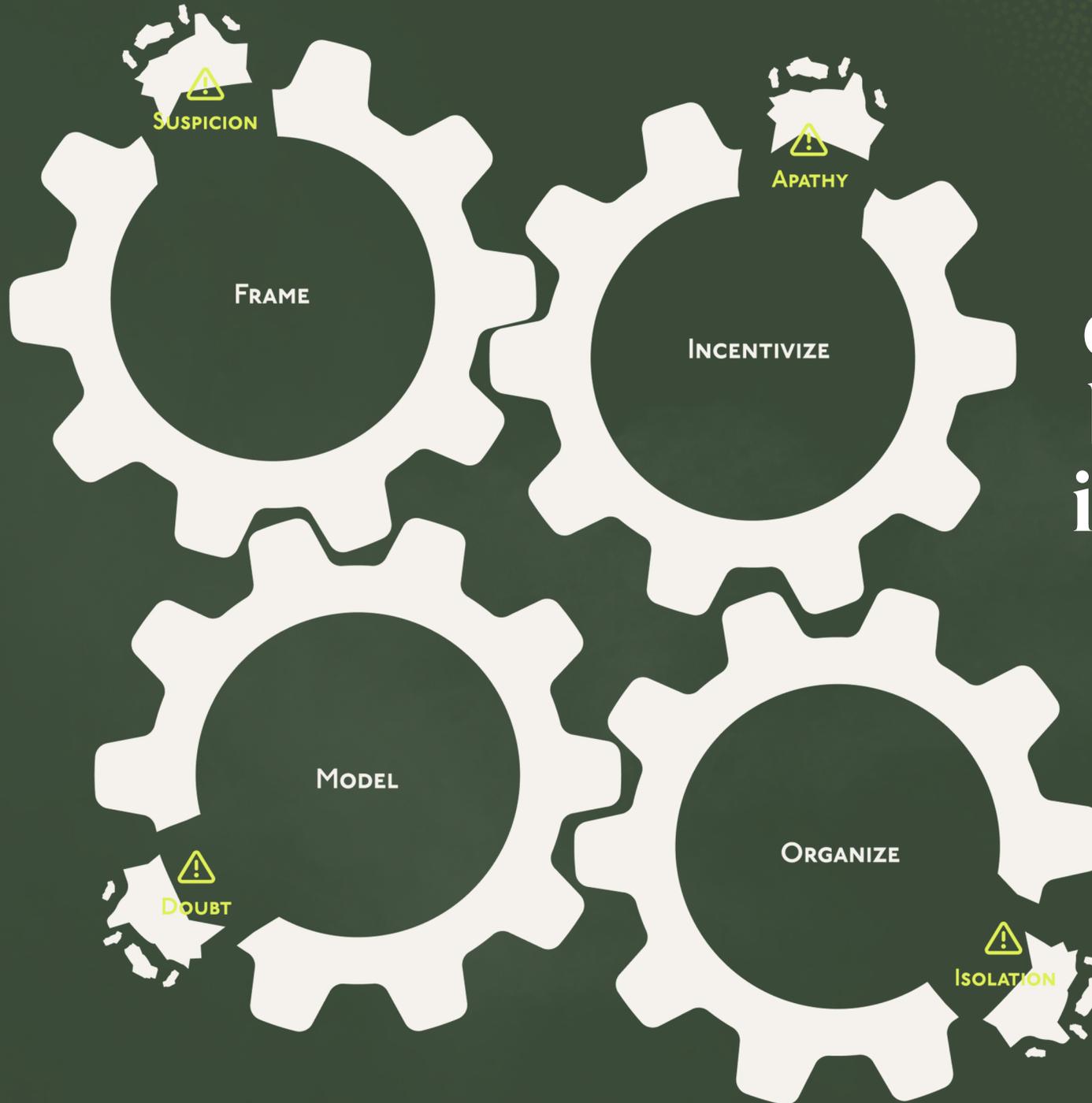
... they simply won't follow you. They're busy, they have other priorities.

**WHAT'S IN IT  
FOR ME?**

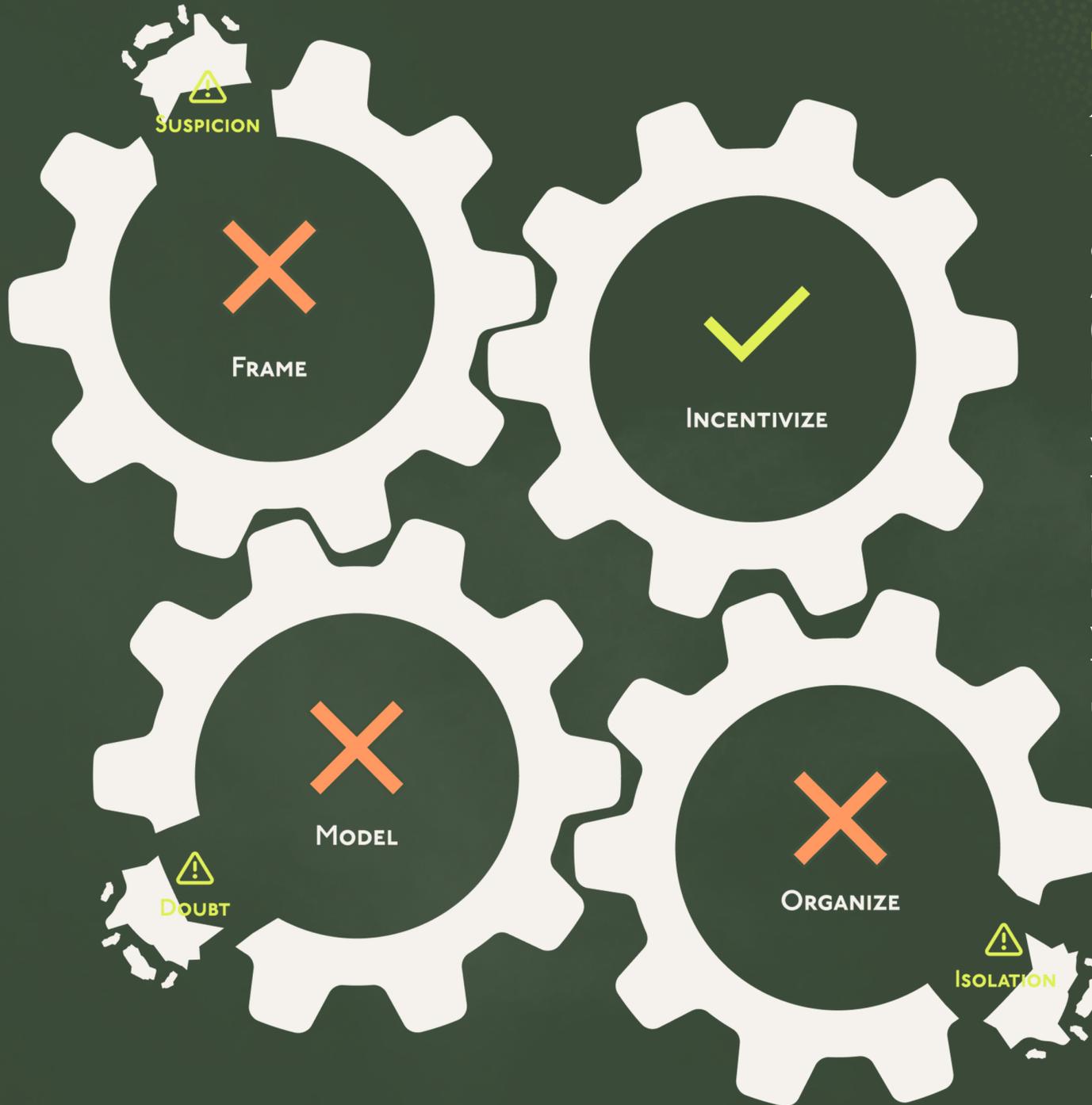
**If you do it all  
except Organize ...**

... there's no movement, no action. There's no group momentum.

**WHO'S WITH ME?  
THIS IS TOO HARD.**



When one strategy is missing, the entire engine breaks down in predictable ways.



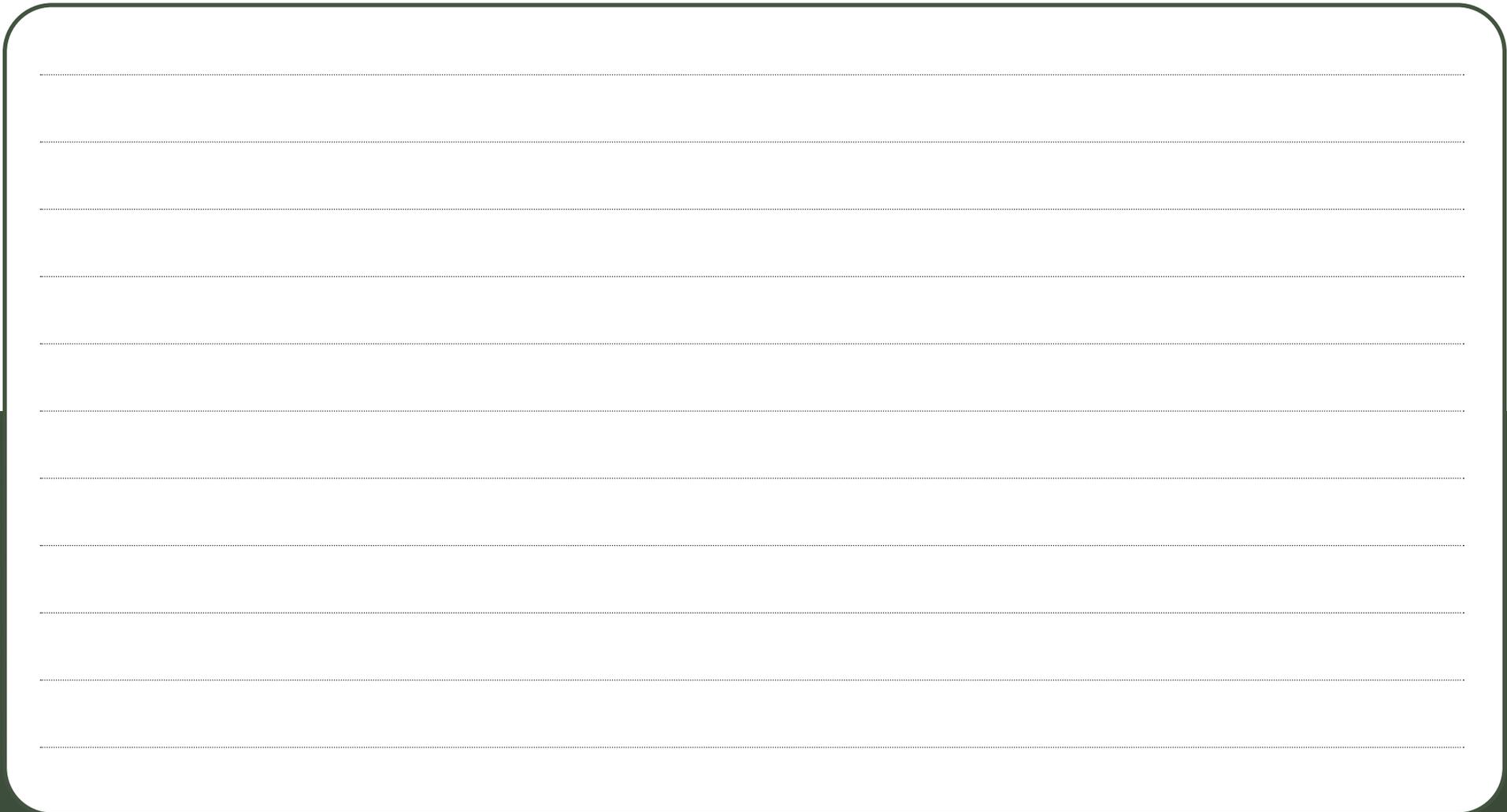
### EXAMPLE

## AI Adoption in the Workplace

Organizations rushing to deploy AI tools often Incentivize adoption (increase speed/productivity, promises of advancement, etc.) but neglect Framing (which would need to take account of the human resistance to this potentially threatening change) or Modeling (show how this is being used elsewhere, and how it's worked out to everyone's benefit). The result is suspicion, inconsistent use, and low trust in new systems.

# The Workbook: Your Missions

Write down your POV on a single page so that you can share it, get feedback on it, and refine it through conversation.



# Your Mission



Establish Your  
POV Shot

### 1. List your inner circle of supporters

These are the people who care about this change as much as you do.

### 2. List the beneficiaries of your proposed change

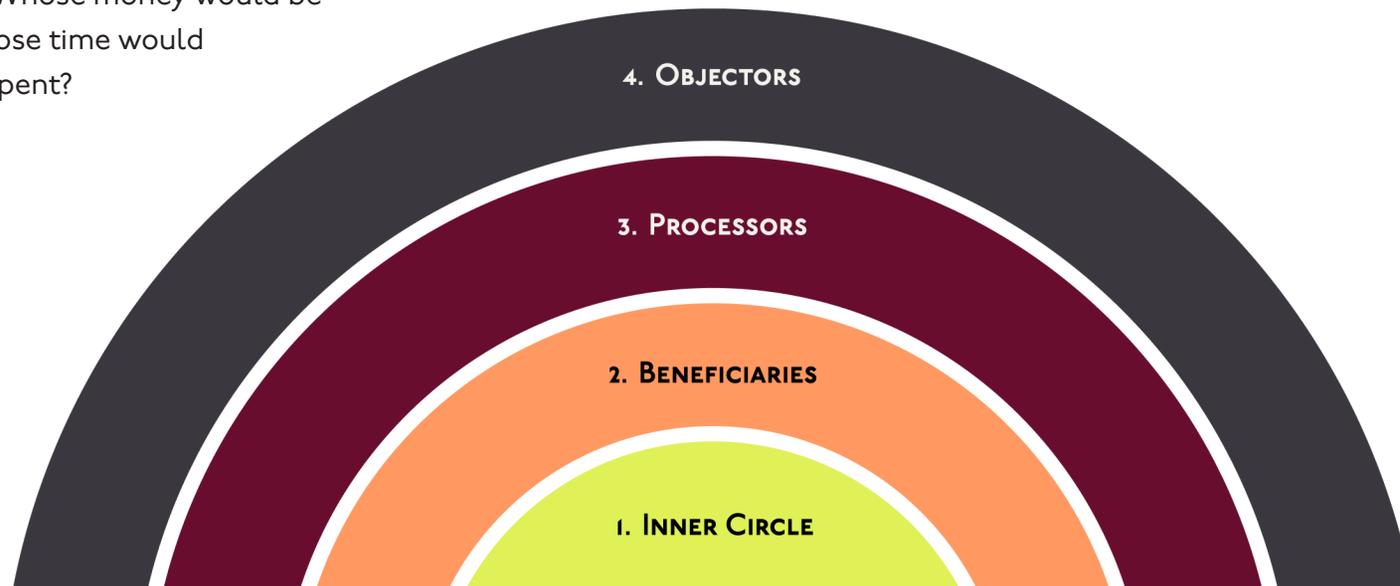
These are people who will benefit from this change, though they may not realize it yet. Whose lives would be better? Whose work would be easier? Whose money would be saved? Whose time would be better spent?

### 3. List those who shape the processes your change affects

In organizations and systems, every change introduces a new set of protocols. These are the people who design them, protect them, or make sure others follow them. You'll need their help to think through the process implications of the change you want to make. Who are they?

### 4. List the objectors to the change you want

You know which people will hate your idea. Don't waste your time being an evangelist. Remember: this is not about persuading, but creating the conditions for agreement. So why do you need them at all? You don't. The more you craft your point of view with theirs in mind ... the sharper your own approach will be.



# Your Mission

## 02 Map Your Ecosystem



Every organization has “power zones”—projects, conversations, or priorities that already have energy behind them. Your mission is to spot one and connect your influence goal to it. This week, scan your workplace for one of the following, and write down at least one “wave” that’s already gathering speed. Then ask: How could my goal ride this wave?

Example: If your goal is more flexible scheduling, link it to an existing company priority like employee well-being or retention.

**1. Topics leadership keeps bringing up in meetings**

Handwritten notes area for category 1, featuring seven horizontal dotted lines.

**2. Trends or deadlines that are already in motion**

Handwritten notes area for category 2, featuring seven horizontal dotted lines.

**3. Initiatives that have clear champions and resources**

Handwritten notes area for category 3, featuring seven horizontal dotted lines.

# Your Mission



Imagine one change in your work environment that would make your experience of work meaningfully better. Now, identify three values that underlie this change—values you believe are widely shared by the people who would need to support it. Name those values below, and be sure your stories, images, and point of view all revolve around them. Whatever change you’re seeking, tie it to a value everyone can agree on. Create a folder named “My Framing Strategy” and add these values.

Example: If I wanted to promote greater work-life balance at my workplace, I’d start by appealing to the value of inspiration at work. Inspiration is inversely related to narrow focus and exhaustion—it comes from being alive to your own life. When people have time to think, play, connect, and rest, they return to work with perspective and imagination—the raw materials of great ideas. Work-life balance isn’t a perk; it’s the fuel that makes inspiration possible.

Value 1	Value 2	Value 3
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....

# Your Mission



Again, keep in mind one change that would shift your experience of work for the better. Now imagine what assumptions or preconceptions people might have about making this change. List them below.

Can you find images or concrete examples that counteract these assumptions? Think about showing how your vision might already be working elsewhere, or what the future might actually look like if your change were implemented. Collect those images in a folder or on your Pinterest board and label that folder “My Modeling Strategy.”

A large white rounded rectangular box with a dark green border, containing ten horizontal dotted lines for writing.

Keep in mind the change that would make work meaningfully better for you. Launch your incentives by answering the following questions:

1. If you were going to create a special status “club” for those who want to join you on this quest for change, what would you call this group?

Handwriting practice area for question 1, consisting of a rounded rectangle with seven horizontal dotted lines.

2. Is there a high status person you’d want to get involved early?

Handwriting practice area for question 2, consisting of a rounded rectangle with seven horizontal dotted lines.

3. What ritual or event might you organize to recognize those who wish to belong?

Handwriting practice area for question 3, consisting of a rounded rectangle with seven horizontal dotted lines.

# Your Mission





# Vignettes



## BRITTANY'S STORY

# Brittany

## 29, Filipina

Call Center Rep at a health insurance company, Phoenix, AZ

Brittany kept getting yelled at by customers for things out of her control—like system outages or claim delays. She knew the problem wasn't frontline performance, it was the lack of a clear escalation process. She needed her company to create one. Her first POV draft was clunky: "We need better documentation and routing of customer issues." A coworker responded: "Just say what you mean."

So she revised it: "We need an escalation path that protects reps from customer rage, which will protect us from burnout, and gets customers answers faster." She tested it with her team lead, who agreed. By naming the issue clearly, anchoring it in the human experience on both ends of the customer call as well as company performance, Brittany had a scaffolding on which she could build a strategy.

01

## Establish Your POV Shot

See the Rule (Page 15)

## SHAYLA'S STORY

# Shayla

## 35, Black

Assistant Manager at a grocery chain, Atlanta, GA

Shayla wanted to introduce a more flexible shift-swapping policy after seeing too many colleagues lose pay or show up sick. She'd tried convincing her boss, but he felt she could handle it by hiring better workers and filling in more herself when they didn't show up. Rather than try and persuade him, she started mapping the ecosystem. She started with her inner circle: two moms who juggled childcare and a semi-retired clerk who covered holidays. Each had told her, "I almost didn't come in today."

The beneficiaries were a broader group: anyone dealing with transportation gaps, elder care, or burnout. The processors lived in the back office: HR folks, who tracked attendance metrics, and the district scheduling coordinator, who managed the software. Her store manager was the objector—he'd once said, "Flexibility just leads to confusion and more coverage failures."

Mapping it out helped Shayla stop spinning her wheels. She realized she didn't need to change any one person's mind—she just needed to pilot it more strategically with allies and develop a clear process the objector couldn't poke holes in. Once she had the map, she stopped trying to win everyone and focused on where the leverage lay.



02

## Map Your Ecosystem

See the Rule (Page 16)

## SARA'S STORY (PART I)

# Sara

## 33, White

Project Manager, IT Department, Chicago, IL

Sara didn't have direct reports, but she had something better: a reputation for getting complex tech projects over the finish line on time and under budget. She noticed outdated systems were slowing everyone down. She had an idea. Why not move core systems to the cloud, automate routine tasks with AI, and upskill teams on modern tools?

Rather than pitch it cold, she floated the idea in hallway chats, coffee breaks, and casual lunches. Curiosity grew. By the time she requested to present at the all-hands, several colleagues had already cosigned the ask.

She framed her proposal around those earlier conversations and suggested a cross-functional pilot team. Leadership said yes, not because of her authority or even because she'd cleared it with her manager, but because of her reputation as someone who was able to execute. The idea itself wasn't really the point, though it was important that others were in agreement. What was critical was the perception of Sara's role in relation to plans, period.



03

## Play Your Role, Not Your Title

See the Rule (Page 17)

## SARA'S STORY (PART 2)

# Sara

Project Manager, IT Department, Chicago, IL

As Sara continued socializing her point of view, she discovered something: The HR team was already deep in conversations about upskilling employees, but hadn't yet defined where to focus. By linking her tech-forward vision to their emerging priorities, Sara didn't have to start a new wave. She just caught one already building. The HR team quickly became advocates and cosponsors of her plan, helping expand its reach and credibility. She was able to reference their agenda as she presented the idea to leadership.

Sara didn't try to gain traction for her idea without linking it to existing momentum. She aligned her proposal with a current conversation. That's when she noticed acceleration. Pro tip: There's always a conversational wave you can ride somewhere in or around your organization. Your job is to ride it.



## Surf the Power Zone

See the Rule (Page 18)



## CHELSIE'S STORY

# Chelsie

## 32, White

Co-Founder, Women of Cincy

Chelsie didn't set out to run a media nonprofit—she just wanted to change how people in her city saw each other. After the 2016 election and the Women's March, she and a few friends noticed how polarized daily life had become, especially across race, class, and politics. Instead of debating, they started listening. They interviewed women on buses, at libraries, and in coffee shops, asking simple questions like, "Why are you here today?"

The goal? To create empathy and shift assumptions, not through argument, but through story. As Chelsie put it, "When you tell a story, or we connect somebody to somebody else and create a relationship, we see it as changing hearts and minds." One story at a time, they reframed what civic connection could look like.

01

## Frame

See the Strategy (Page 23)



## JASMINE'S STORY

# Jasmine

## 32, East Indian

Program Coordinator, community health clinic, Denver, CO

Jasmine wanted her nonprofit to invest in a mobile health van to reach uninsured families who rarely came into the clinic. Leadership was hesitant—they worried it would be expensive and underused. Instead of arguing, Jasmine pointed to a case study from a similar clinic in Albuquerque that had doubled patient reach within six months using the same model. She shared photos, patient testimonials, and data on reduced ER visits. By showing that it wasn't a gamble but a proven approach, Jasmine shifted the conversation. What once seemed risky suddenly looked safe, even smart. The board approved a pilot, and the van rolled out within the year.

02

## Model

See the Strategy (Page 26)



## SHELLEY'S STORY

# Shelley

63, White

Founder of The Female Quotient & the Equality Lounge

When Shelley attended CES tech conference in 2012, she saw that women weren't just underrepresented, they were missing from the conversations where deals were made. She didn't try to persuade anyone to "care more" about gender equity. Instead, she created the Equality Lounge, a high-visibility, high-value destination where showing up had immediate benefits: Companies got access to influential women; executives gained reputational capital by being seen there; and women found a place where participation came with resources, networking, and opportunity. She made equity advantageous. Sponsoring the Lounge became a badge of leadership. Suddenly, supporting women wasn't a moral appeal. It was the smart, high-status, strategic move.

03

## Incentivize

See the Strategy (Page 29)



## NAOMI'S STORY

# Naomi

## 25, Chinese American

HR Associate, regional hospital system, Boston, MA

Naomi noticed how often staff nurses vented about broken scheduling software but never filed formal complaints. Everyone agreed the system was a nightmare, but leadership assumed silence meant acceptance. Naomi set up an anonymous Google Poll and circulated it quietly through the nurses' group chat: "What's one thing about scheduling you'd fix tomorrow if you could?" Responses poured in—dozens within the first week. Patterns emerged: requests for more predictability, fairer weekend rotations, and fewer last-minute changes.

When Naomi presented the aggregated results to her boss, it was impossible to dismiss them as "a few complaints." Leadership created a task force, with nurses at the table, to redesign scheduling.

04

## Organize

See the Strategy (Page 32)

This Playbook is for you.  
We created it because we know you're done playing by rules that were never written with you in mind. **You want more power as you lead, work, and move through the world.**

The purpose of everything in this resource is simple: to put practical, proven tools into your hands. We want to help you make what matters to you ... matter more to others.

We created **Bonfire Women, Inc.**, in 2019 because we saw what women wanted, and we knew what they needed—new ways of seizing and exercising power. Since then, more than 400 companies and 5,000 women have used the Bonfire curriculum. **What you'll find in this Playbook is the single most powerful tool we gave them:** strategies, exercises, and success stories to help you frame your ideas, mobilize allies, change yourself, and influence the culture around you.



Rachel Bellow, Co-Founder



Suzanne Muchin, Co-Founder