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From Ambiguity to Alignment

HOW LEADERS CREATE CLARITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

February 18, 2026

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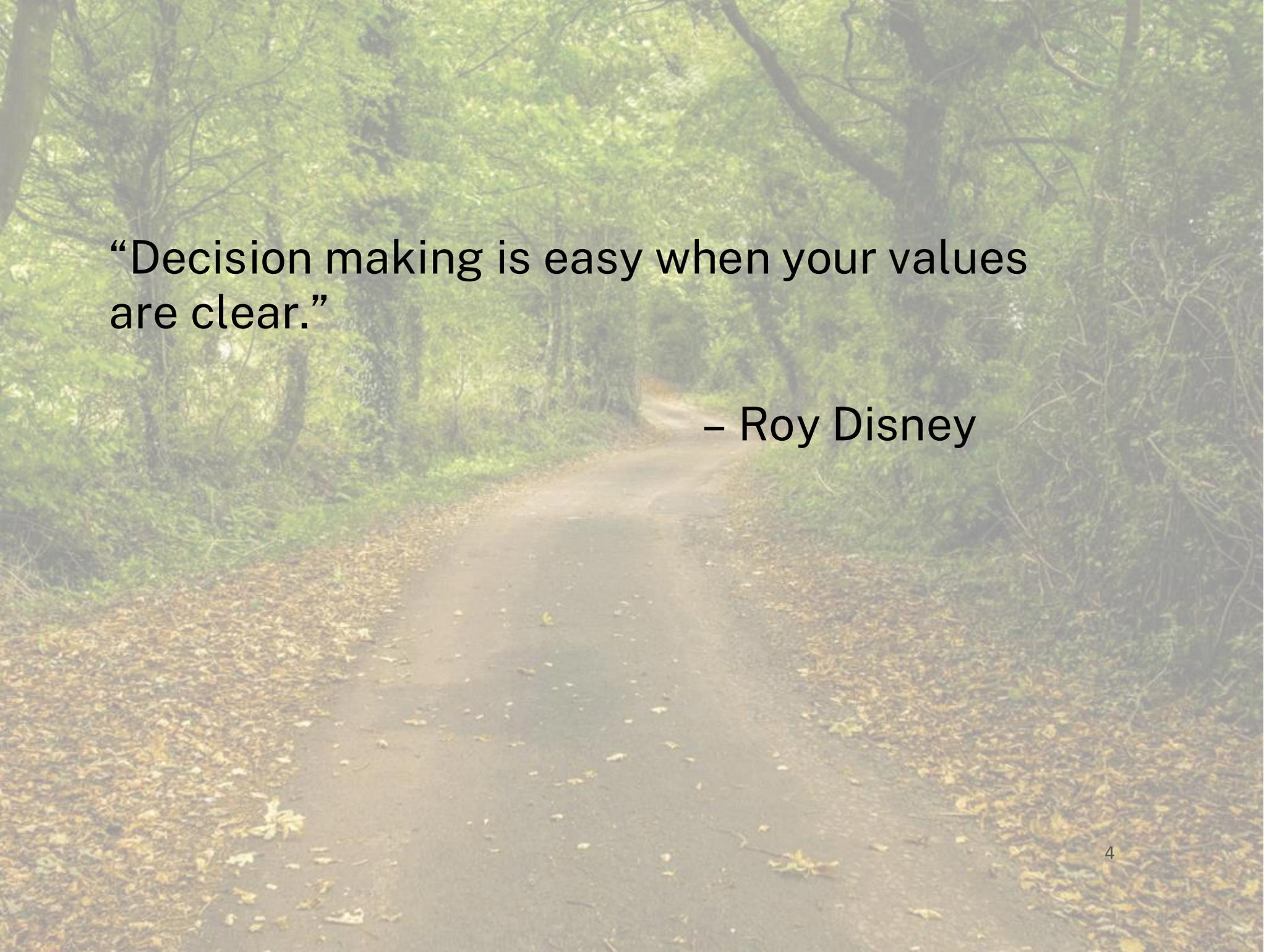
eNPS Score

63

100

Jen Miller received recognition for going above and beyond

Your dedication and hard work have been invaluable to our team! Thanks so much for all of your help!!

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Step Squad

Steps
303,240

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Mark Hamilton

CEO

Versa Culture

"Decision making is easy when your values are clear."

– Roy Disney

Overview:

- Introduction

- Clarity and ambiguity

- Decision clarity

- Leadership clarity

- Conversations with leaders

- Questions and Discussion

We will learn how to

- Recognize clarity in everyday behavior
- Interpret resistance and disengagement as signs of unclear expectations (mixed signals)
- Identify where decision-making, accountability, and priorities break down
- Frame productive conversations with leaders to build trust and improve outcomes

For HR, L&D, and People Leaders

- Seeing hesitation, escalations, workarounds, or uneven execution in your organizations

- Simple way to turn ambiguity into alignment

- Leave with one tool to use in real conversations with leaders

CLARITY AND AMBIGUITY

How ambiguity shows up day-to-day

- Hesitation, re-checking, second-guessing
- Escalations, escalations, escalations...
- Workarounds and "make-shifting"
- Different responses/expectations depending on who you ask (ex. based on title/role)
- Decisions re-thought, adapted

Ambiguity concentrates at the "decision point"

The moment someone asks:

"What do we do here?"

What "ambiguity" means here
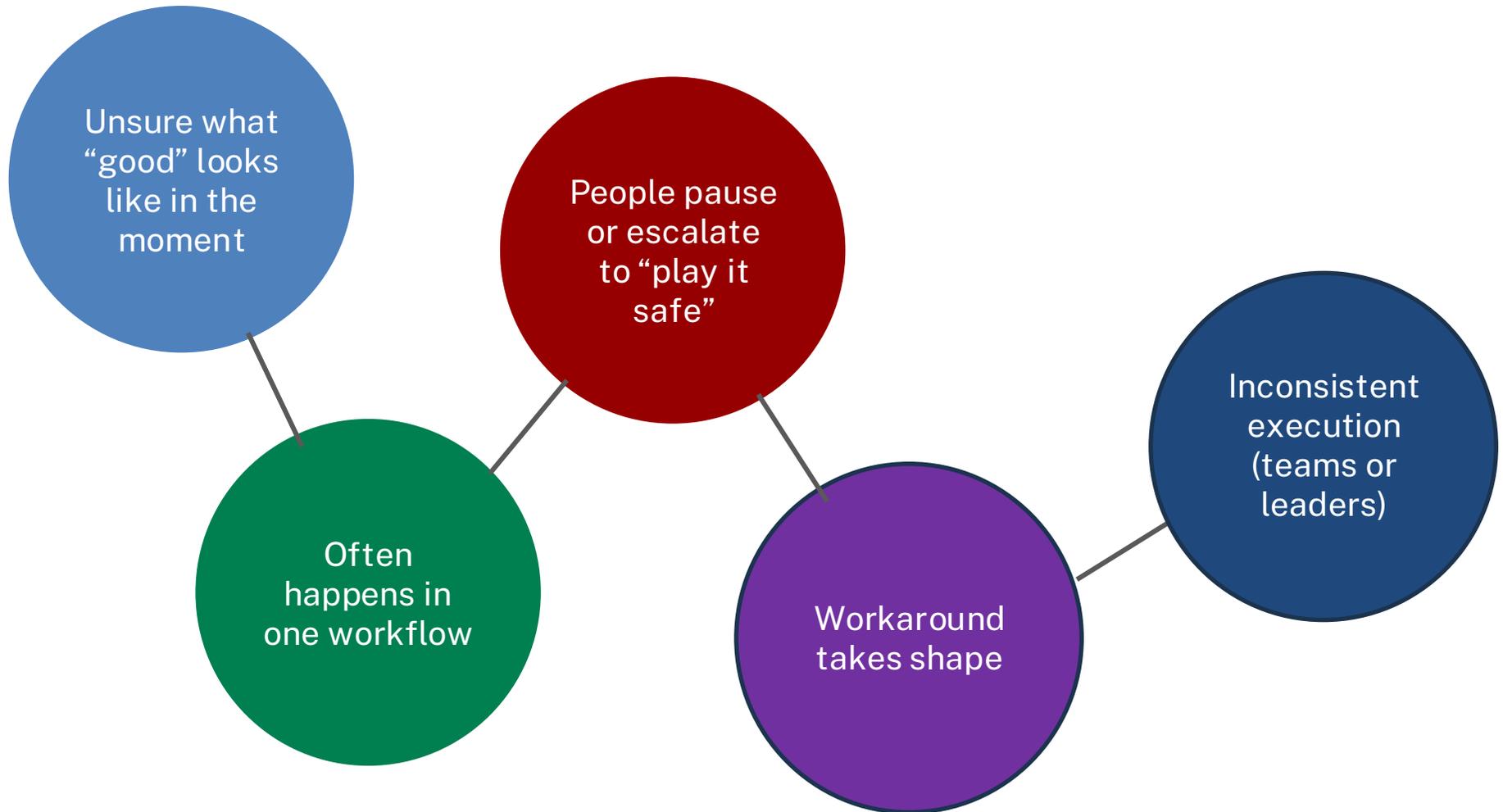
- **Uncertainty:** People don't know what's expected when a real (i.e., tough) decision shows up

- **Rights and boundaries:** They aren't sure what's allowed (i.e., what they can/cannot decide, and under what conditions)

- **Standards:** They aren't sure what "good" looks like in that moment

The common chain

Unsure what "good" looks like in the moment

Often happens in one workflow

People pause or escalate to "play it safe"

Workaround takes shape

Inconsistent execution (teams or leaders)

A non-defensive diagnostic move

Start with the pattern → find the tough decision → review expectations

Are they clear enough to act upon? If no, what will make it clear (org/systems-level)?

Alignment is clarity you can act on

Ambiguity turns into alignment when expectations become "actionable" when decisions are toughest.

This is where friction most often appears—and where misalignment and mistrust can form.

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Many "people problems" are clarity problems

Look at observable behavior, not assumptions.
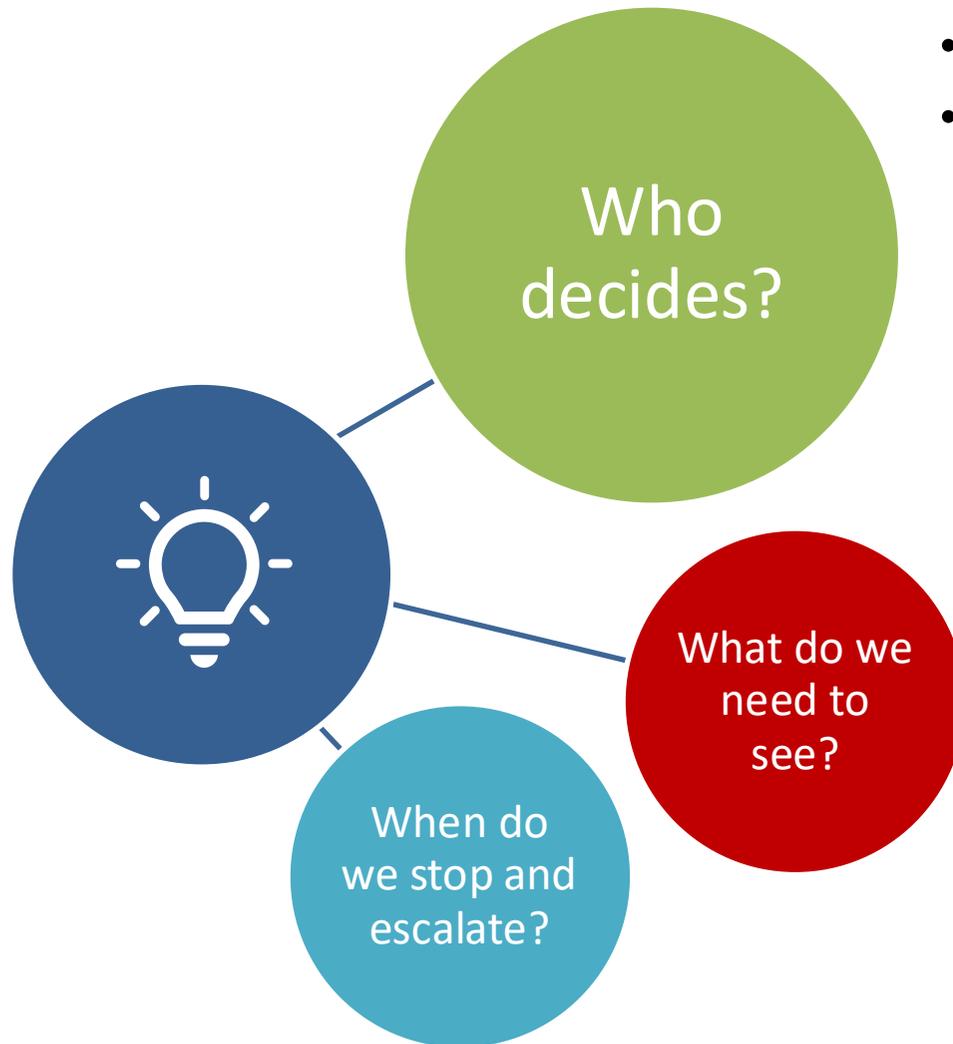
DECISION CLARITY

The Decision Clarity Map

Identifies the "who-what-when" of any decision made—especially at critical moments in the workflow.

- Make expectations clear enough to act on

- Use on <u>one</u> tough call in <u>one</u> workflow

- Reduces guessing, hesitation, and escalation

The Decision Clarity Map (3 questions)

Who decides?

What do we need to see?
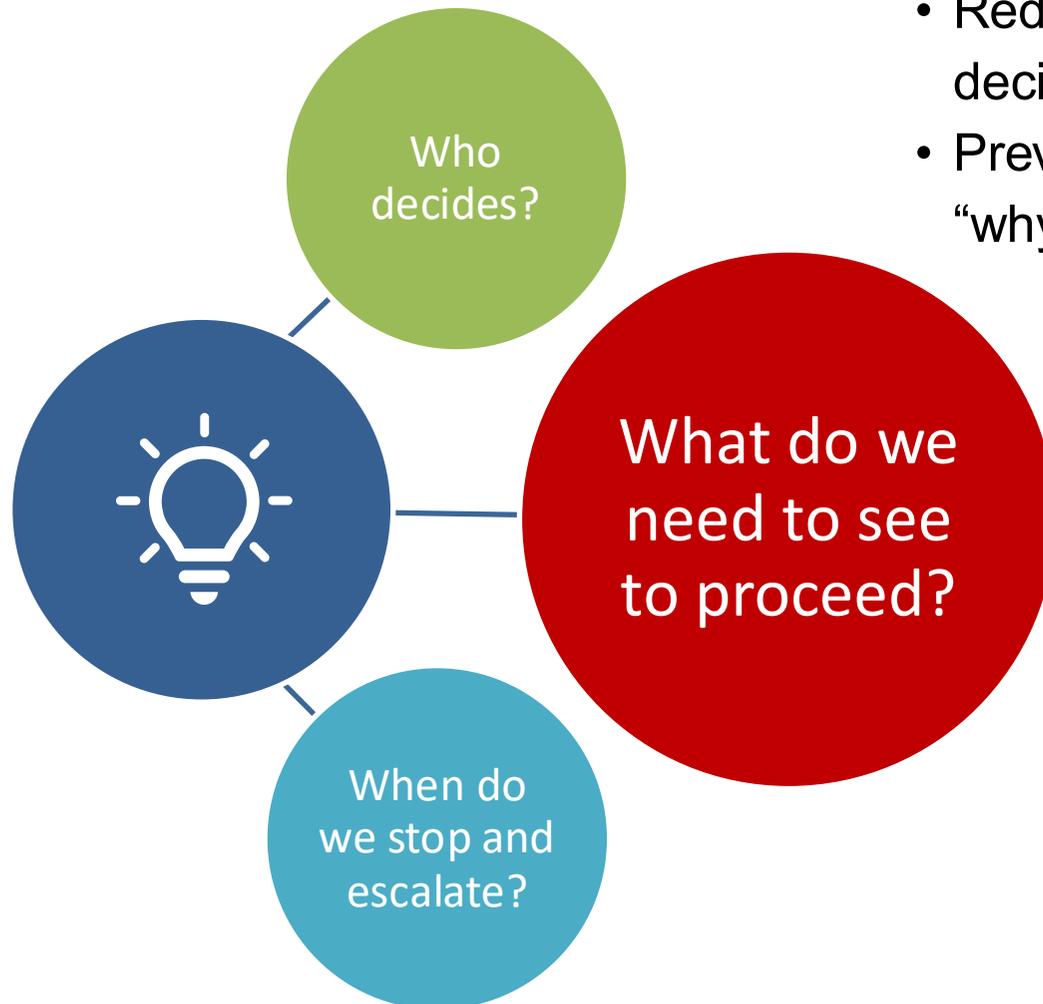
When do we stop and escalate?

The Decision Clarity Map

- Removes guessing, "cover yourself" behavior
- Reduces escalations
- Makes it clear when to decide locally vs pull someone in

Who decides?

What do we need to see?

When do we stop and escalate?

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The Decision Clarity Map

- Defines what counts as "enough information"
- Reduces re-checking and re-deciding
- Prevents debates after the fact: "why did you proceed?"

Who decides?

What do we need to see to proceed?

When do we stop and escalate?

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The Decision Clarity Map

Who decides?

What do we need to see?

When do we stop and escalate?

- Makes red flags clear
- Protects people and the operation
- Creates consistency under pressure

The Decision Clarity Map (fill in)

Decision / Decision point: _____

Who decides (in the moment): _____

What we need to see before we proceed:_____

_____

When we stop / escalate (red flags):_____

_____

Two examples (same tool, different contexts)

Example A (ops-neutral)

- Decision: Proceed or pause when a check is borderline
- Who decides: Team lead in the moment
- Need to see: Two checks + note variance
- Stop/escalate: Safety risk or repeat variance

Example B (people/HR-neutral)

- Decision: Coach locally vs escalate a repeated issue
- Who decides: Manager in the moment
- Need to see: Two specific examples + impact + prior coaching
- Stop/escalate: Policy/safety/legal risk

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LEADERSHIP CLARITY

Clarity fails without safety

If people fear consequences, they hesitate—even with "clear" rules/guidance.

Empathy as a "clarity" pathway

- Empathy isn't separate from clarity — it's a pathway that makes clarity "stick"

- It creates conditions where people can act, pause, and escalate when needed

- People adapt and execute faster when they trust they won't be blamed later on

What leaders can say "in the moment-of-decision"

- "Thanks for pausing—what are you seeing?"

- "Let's use the decision map—what do we need to see before we go ahead?"

- "If this is a red flag, escalate it early. No penalty to you or the team for calling it."

Myth: accountability is a mindset problem

Pressure and reminders can't replace clear expectations.

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Reality: accountability improves when expectations are clear

Clarity and consistency beat pressure.

What we often do in place of clarity

Common substitutes	Examples
More reminders	"Again, this is the standard."
More meetings	"Let's all review the process."
More escalation	"Go ask the manager."
More ambiguity	"Just use good judgment."

A better sequence

1. Name the tough call — now

2. Map it out (ask the 3 questions)

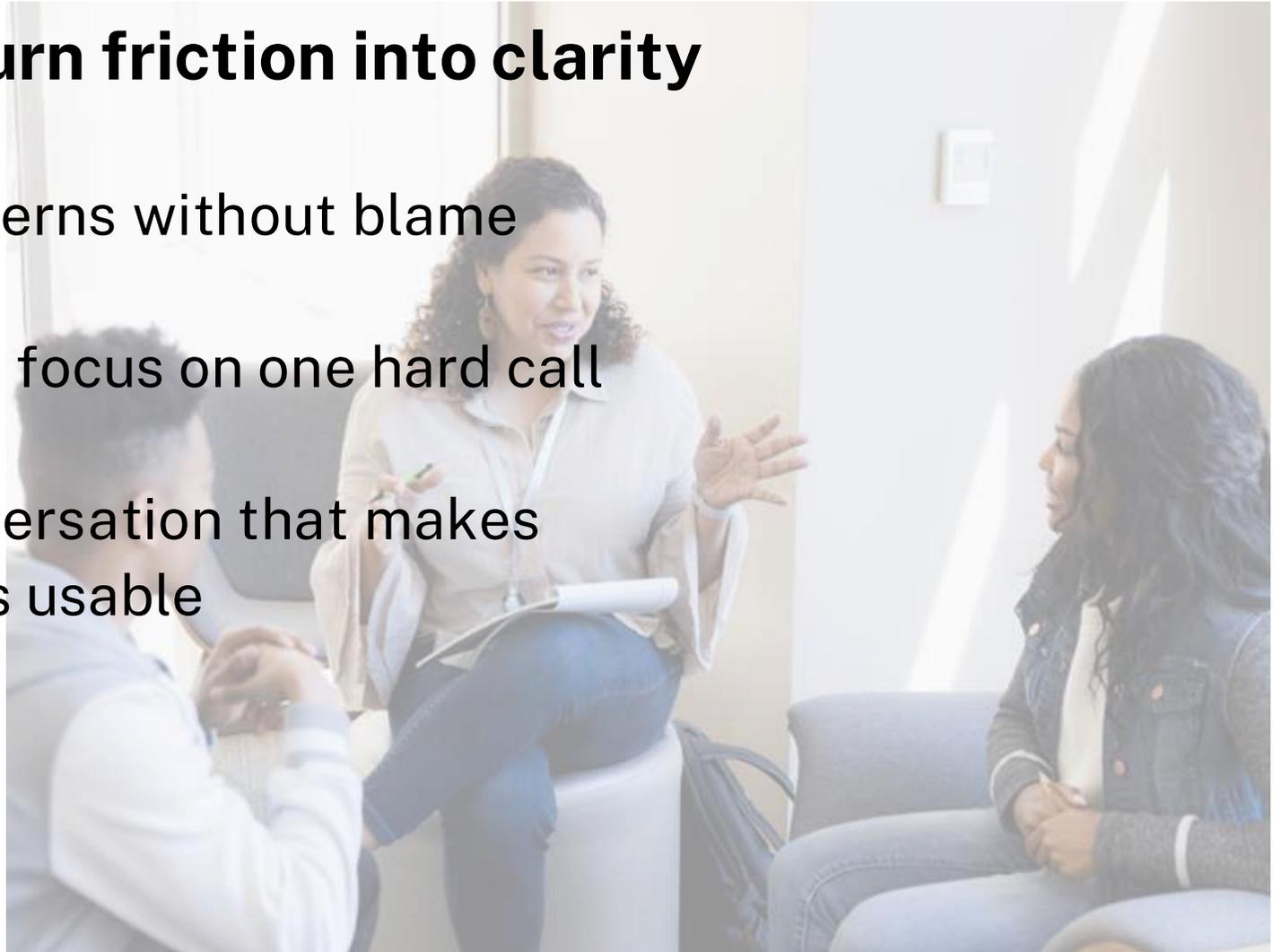3. Experiment, learn, and "co-create"

4. Reinforce consistently

CONVERSATIONS WITH LEADERS

HR's role: turn friction into clarity

- Surface patterns without blame

- Help leaders focus on one hard call

- Guide a conversation that makes expectations usable

**Start with one workflow where…**

- Escalations are piling up

- Workarounds are spreading

- Different leaders give different answers

- Decisions keep getting reopened

- Results vary by team, unit, or manager

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Safe ways to open the conversation

• "Here's the pattern we're seeing…"

• "It shows up at this decision point…"

• "Can we make expectations clearer so people can act?"

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Complete the map (3-5 mins)

- Name the decision (the tough call)

- Who decides in the moment?

- What do we need to see before we proceed?

- When do we stop / escalate?
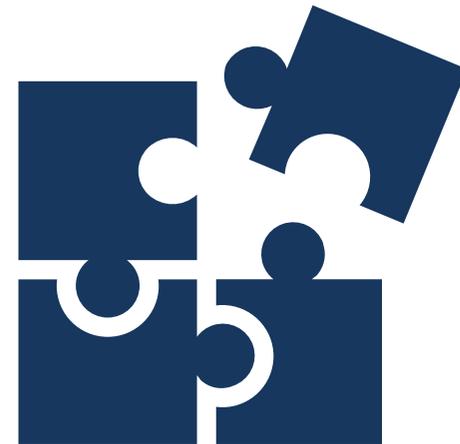
Reinforcement makes alignment "stick"

- What leaders praise, correct, and allow becomes the real standard
- It's built into routines that already exist
- It's consistent—and creates consistent execution

Quick exercise (3-5 mins)

- Pick one workflow

- Name one hard call

- Draft one Decision Clarity Map row

- If you only define "who decides," that's

  progress

What was the hardest?

- Who decides

- What we need to see

- When to stop / escalate

What the answer tells you

If It's...	Then...
Who decides	Decision authority is unclear
What we need to see	Standards are unclear
Stop / escalate	Guardrails are unclear

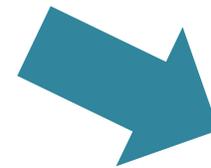Clarify the hardest part **first** — **with participation**

TAKEAWAYS

Ambiguity → Alignment

Patterns point to a tough call

Decision Clarity Map makes expectations clear

Reinforcement makes alignment stick.

When execution slows, don't start with motivation.

Start with clarity people can act on.

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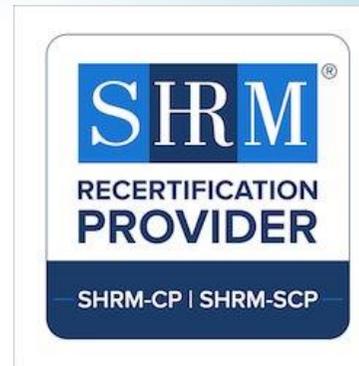
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