

The power of solution-enabling leadership

Joanna Bailey, August 25, 2025



Center for Government
Innovation



WCMA
Washington City/County
Management Association
A State Affiliate of ICMA

Agenda

01

Shift your role

Actions and
intentions

02

Light the fire within

Discomfort
as a catalyst

03

Empower innovation

Team-driven
solutioning





**Are your actions getting in
the way of your intentions?**

Shift your role



Action vs. intention

Role 1: Leader tells

Leader prescribes solution

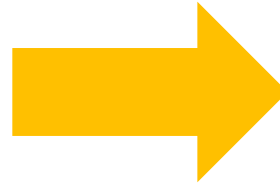
Starts with What

Works *in* the System

Dictates methods

Failure is defeat

Lights a fire under people



Role 2: Leader teaches

Leader teaches team solutioning

Starts with Why

Works *on* the System

Establishes helpful boundaries

Failure is opportunity for growth

Lights a fire within people



Action vs. intention, cont.

Light a fire under people

Externally motivated

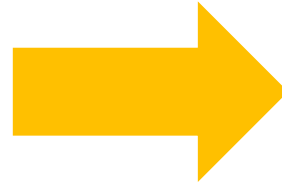
Transactional tasking

Short fuel

Conditioning behavior

Promotes dependency

“Why aren’t they motivated?”



Light a fire within people

Internally motivated

Transformational journey

Long fuel

Developing people

Promotes autonomy

“How can I better inspire those I lead?”



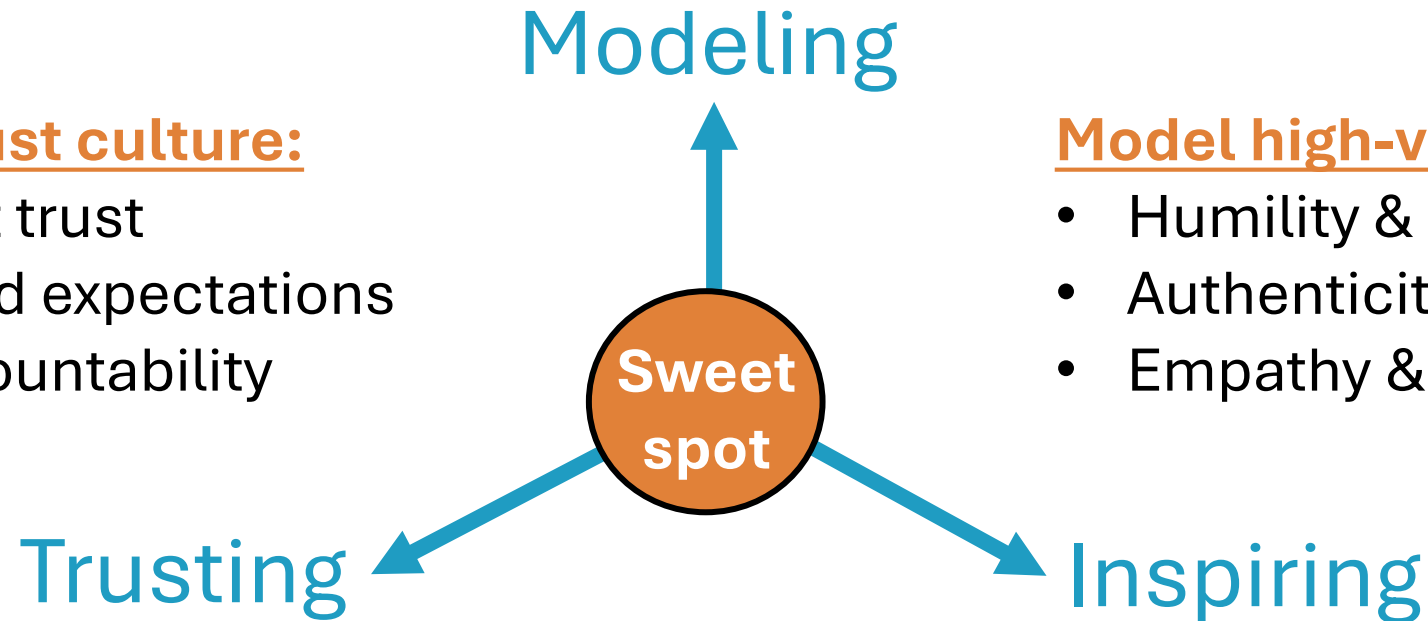
Intrinsic leadership: Trust & inspire

Build a high-trust culture:

- Extend smart trust
- Create shared expectations
- Practice accountability

Model high-value behavior:

- Humility & Courage
- Authenticity & Vulnerability
- Empathy & Performance



Inspire with meaning & purpose

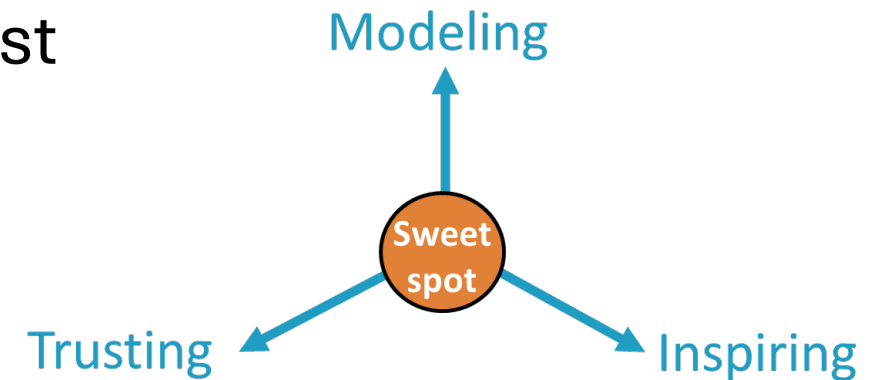
- Meaning = passion & fulfillment
- Purpose = explain & connect to the why

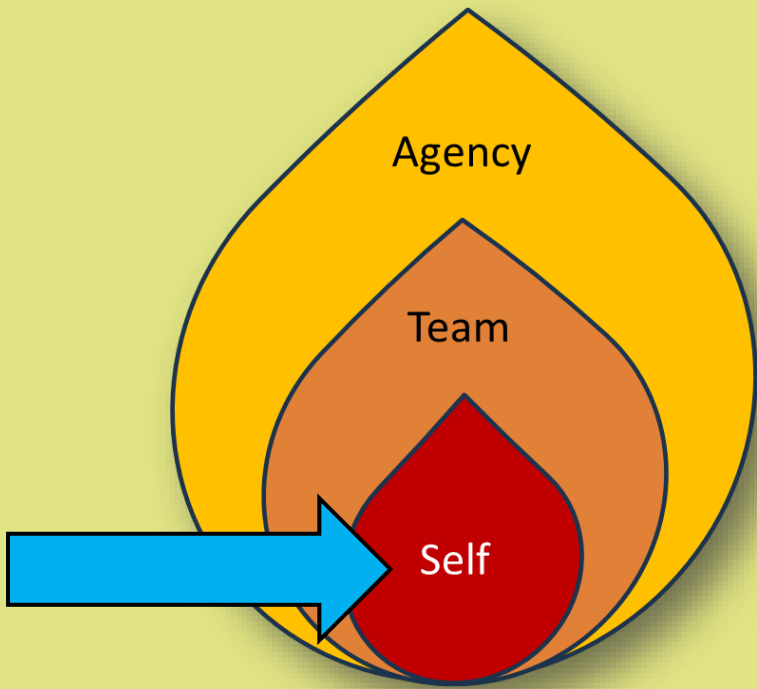


Benefits of trust & inspire leadership

When you practice all 3 elements...

1. People rise to the occasion and perform better
2. People develop new capabilities and confidence
3. People reciprocate and return the trust





**Light the fire
within**

Discomfort as the catalyst

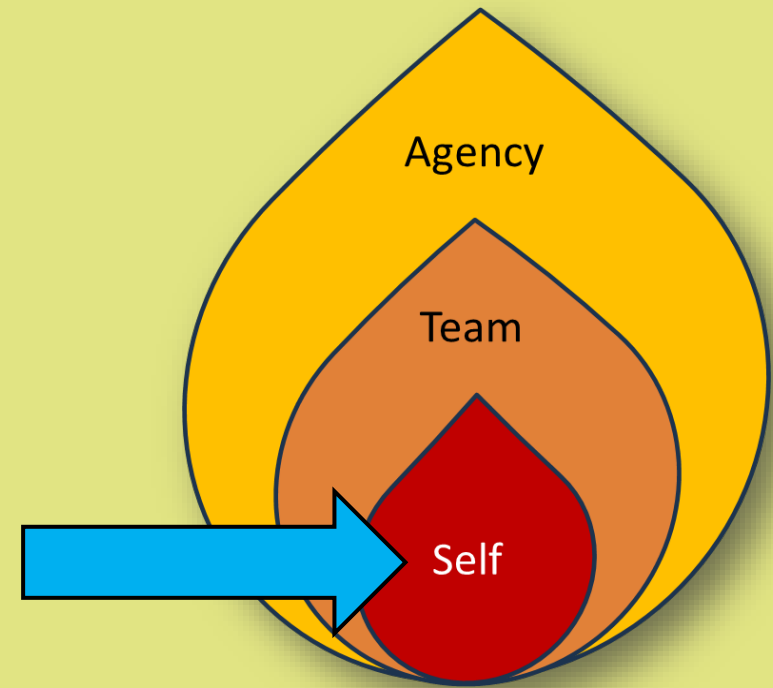


*Growth begins at the edge
of our comfort zone*

*Start with self; become the
leader you want to follow*



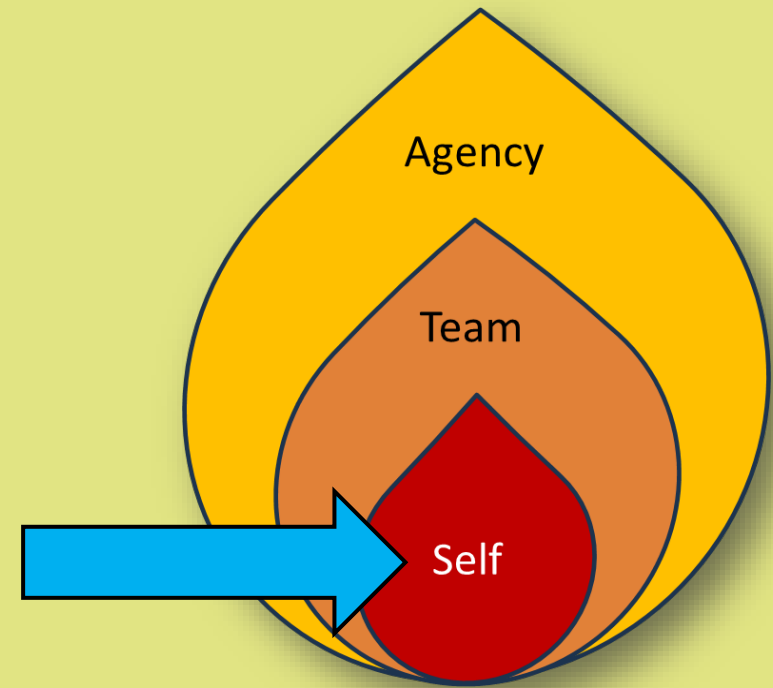
1. Admit when you're wrong or uncertain to model humility and continuous learning.
2. Practice what you preach – if you ask for collaboration be collaborative. If you promote growth, invest in your own.
3. Be respectful by actively listening rather than listening to respond.



Modeling actions



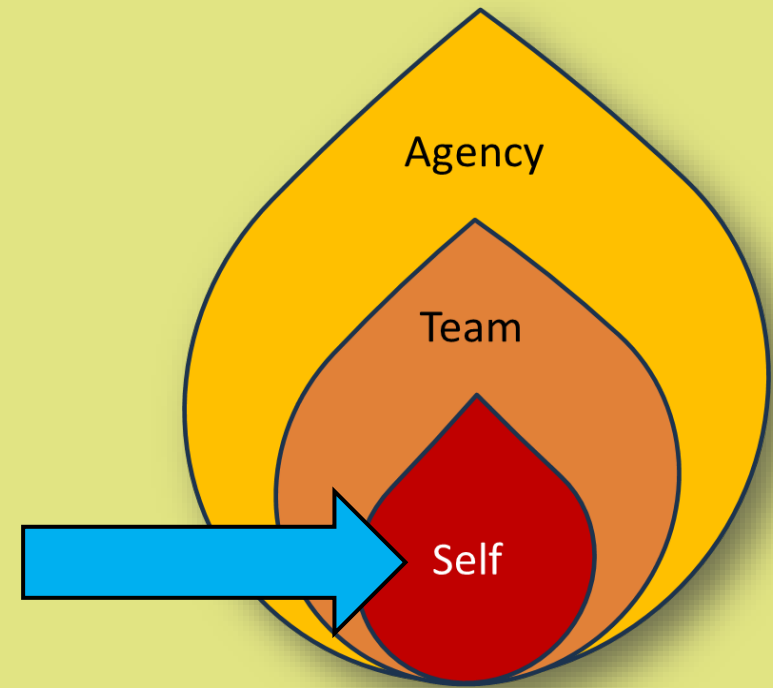
1. Share “the why” behind what you ask for. This helps others connect work to a greater purpose.
2. Co-create a vision, a plan, an outcome with your team rather than imposing one. This builds ownership and shared aspiration.
3. Invite input on big decisions, showing others their perspective matters in shaping direction.



Inspiring actions



1. Give people autonomy to try new approaches, with support rather than control.
2. Delegate outcomes, not just tasks to give people authority along with responsibility.
3. Ask for feedback on your leadership and act on it to show mutual respect and trust.



Trusting actions

Self-assessment:

	Definitely no <-----> Somewhat <-----> Definitely yes									
Would I want to follow me?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Would I trust me?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Would I be inspired by me?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Would I choose me as my leader?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



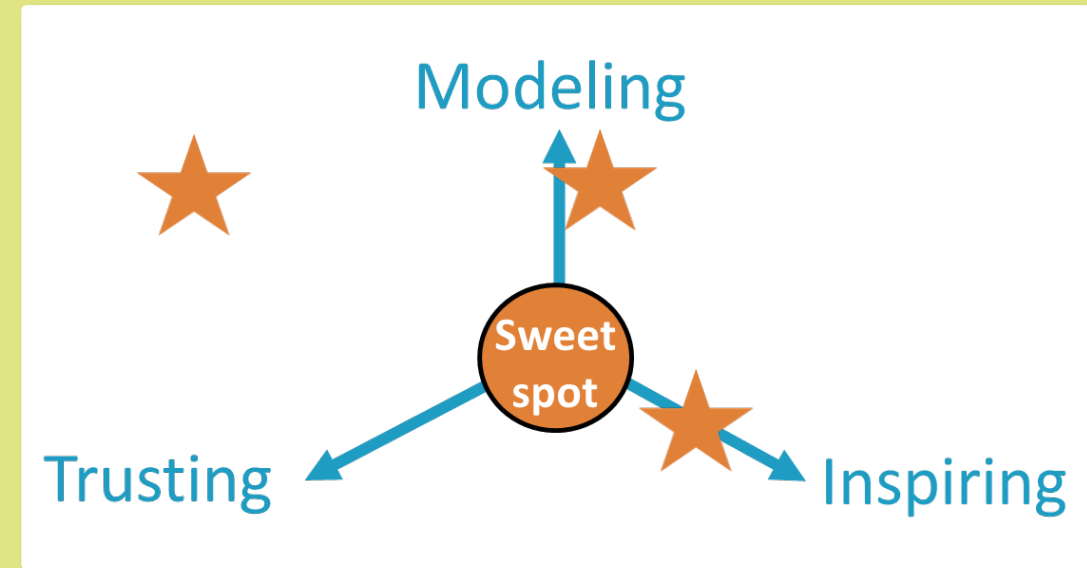
Review your answers in the matrix

	Definitely No <-----> Somewhat <-----> Definitely Yes									
Would I want to follow me?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Would I trust me?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Would I be inspired by me?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Would I choose me as my leader?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

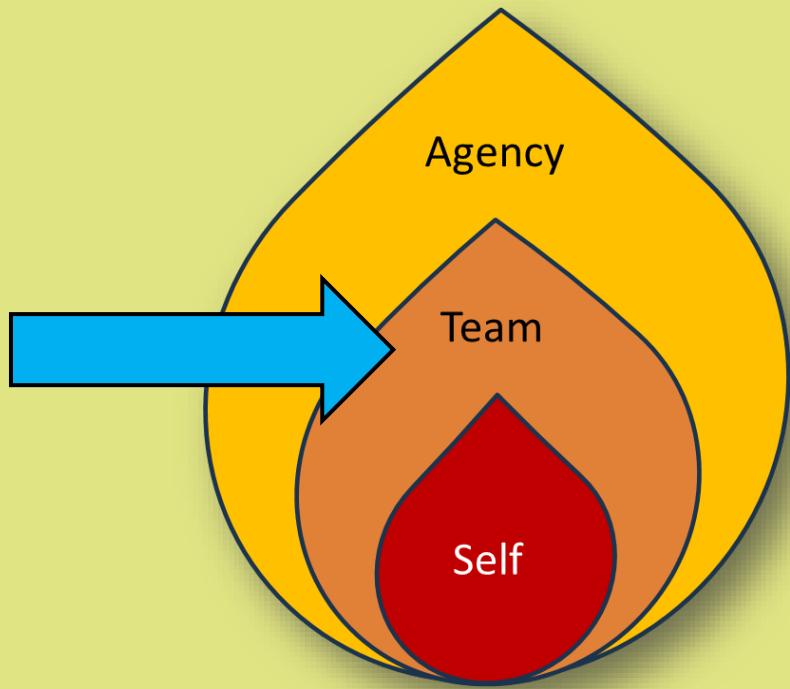
Place your answers on the leadership model.

How far off center are the gaps?

List 1 or 2 actions you could take to move toward the balanced center



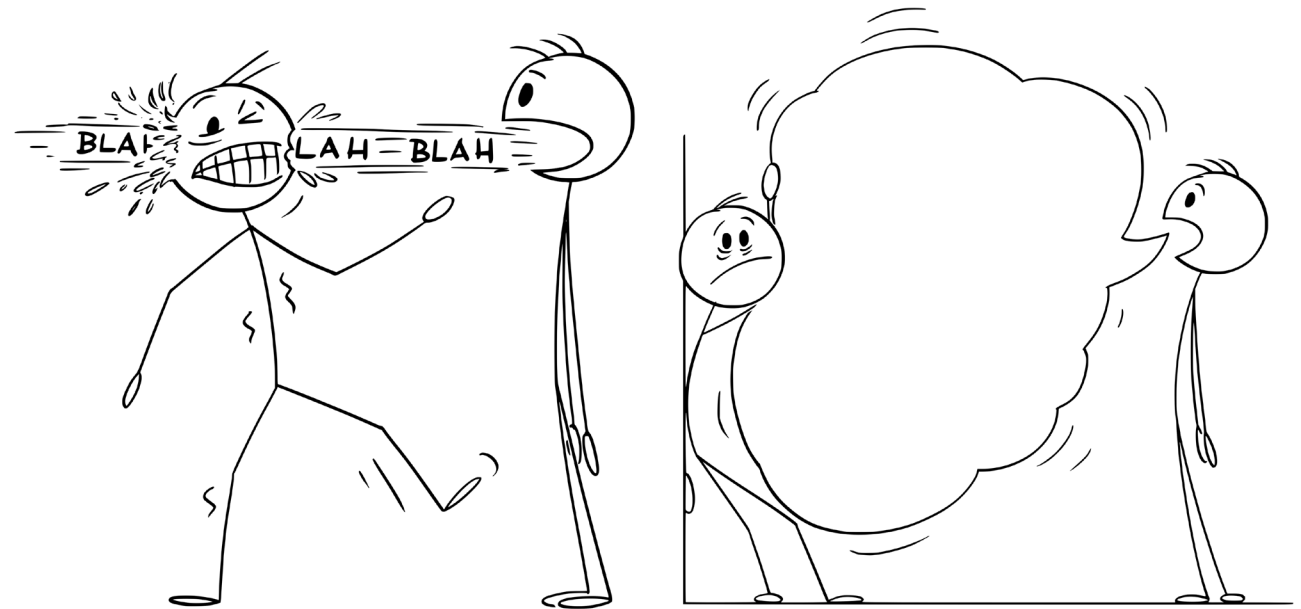
Trust & inspire



**Empower &
inspire the team**



**With people, fast is
slow and slow is fast**



Small strategic actions:

1. Practice 8 seconds of silence

→ *Support not rescue. Question prompts, not solutions. Less helping in the moment; more proactive resilient teams in the long term.*

2. Try structured struggle time

→ *Struggle time is learning time. Allowing the team to wrestle with solutioning gives them ownership of their journey.*

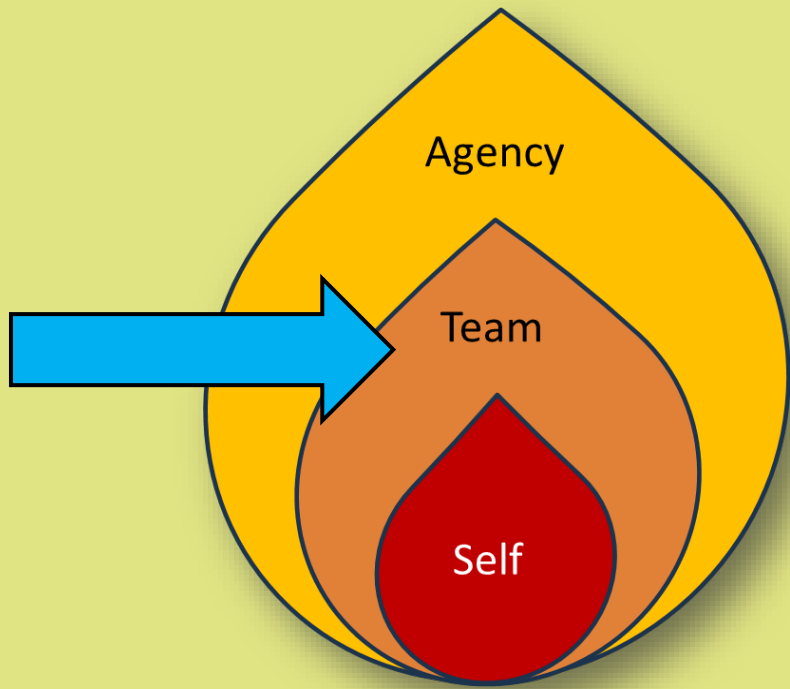
3. Encourage decisions at the level closest to the work.

→ *You make the critical decisions; empower those closest to the work with clear criteria and expectations to make the rest.*

Tip

On the other side of discomfort and uncertainty is growth and innovation

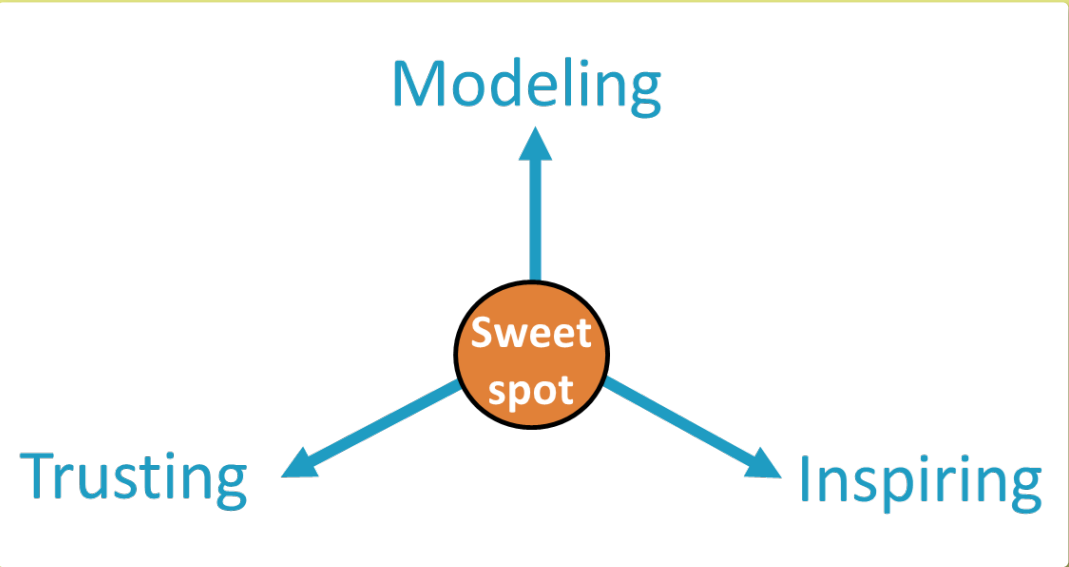




How might we

1. Practice 8 seconds of silence?
2. Try structured struggle time?
3. Encourage decisions at the level closest to the work?





Empower
innovation

Team-driven solutioning





Strategic actions

1. Share “the why” behind initiatives to help teams connect their work to a greater purpose: *Inspiring*
 - *Agree on what we want to accomplish and why*
2. Delegate outcomes, not just tasks to give people authority along with responsibility: *Trusting*
 - *Collaboratively establish guidelines and goals*
 - *Agree on accountability methods (Check-ins, milestones, metrics)*





Strategic actions, cont.

3. Give team members autonomy to try new approaches, with support rather than control: **Trusting**
 - **Identify available resources for team success: Human, financial, technical, etc.**
4. Celebrate progress, even in uncertainty, to reinforce belief in the team's capacity: **Inspiring**
 - **Celebrate small incremental wins along the way**



Framework for team success

Subject	Project name: Grants & Contracts Management	Date: 03/13/25
Background	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Process & Purpose:</i> Grants & Contracts Management process; The purpose is to develop an efficient and streamlined process for managing our grant and contract needs for our department.2. <i>Prioritization:</i> This project is a priority for the following reasons: 1) It's a necessary core process; With 84% of our department's budget being funded by grants and contracts, operations are heavily grant-funded and contracting occurs frequently so any improvement will be very impactful; 3) It is a timely opportunity to involve the Procurement & Contracts Specialist, a position newly created and intended to be heavily involved in this process.3. <i>Cost of Current Condition:</i> There is no standard process for grant and contract opportunities, and the outdated county and departmental processes are perceived as barriers so policies and procedures not being followed, resulting in grants and contracts that have been 'approved' without proper review and involvement. This creates risk to the agency and considerable stress and frustration for the department.	
Targets	<p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand current steps, handoffs and waste in current process• Identify pain points and root cause(s)• Develop improvement recommendations and next steps that align with post-kaizen targets for leadership approval• Report out to stakeholders to share discovery process and establish buy-in for next step implementation <p>Outcomes & Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy and procedures will successfully integrate with other county-wide policies and procedures.• Staff training on the new process will be rolled out to all 100+ staff involved in grants and/or contract processes.• Reduction in process time by 50%.	

Scan to access
Project Charter



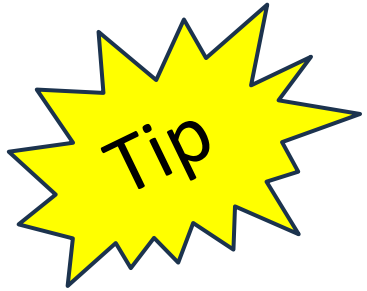
Framework for team success, cont.

Boundaries	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>In Scope</i>: Internal workflow of grant and other funding applications, draft grant awards & contract agreements, procurement of professional service contracts and acceptance of various local, state and federal funding agreements.2. <i>Out of Scope</i>: Purchase of new software, job descriptions cannot be changed3. <i>Start and end of scoped process</i>: From initial opportunity (request to apply/notification of award/procurement to provide goods or services to agency) to award of grant or contract.	
Timeline Dates	<p>Phase 1: April 14 - 16; 6 hours/day with Core Team</p> <p>Phase 2: Trial and check-ins at 3 mo, 6 mo, and 9 mo</p> <p>Phase 3: Full scale implementation of new standard process following final check-in</p>	
Kaizen Team:	<p>Sponsor: Department executive director</p> <p>Team Go-To Person: <i>Administrative assistant</i></p> <p>Core Team Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Process matter experts across divisions</i> <p>On-Call Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>People who work parts of the process and may be called to provide specialized information</i>	<p>Stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Budget Team</i>• <i>Prosecuting Attorney's Office</i>• <i>Human Resources</i>• <i>Internal Auditor</i>• <i>Clerk of the Board</i>

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Project Charter

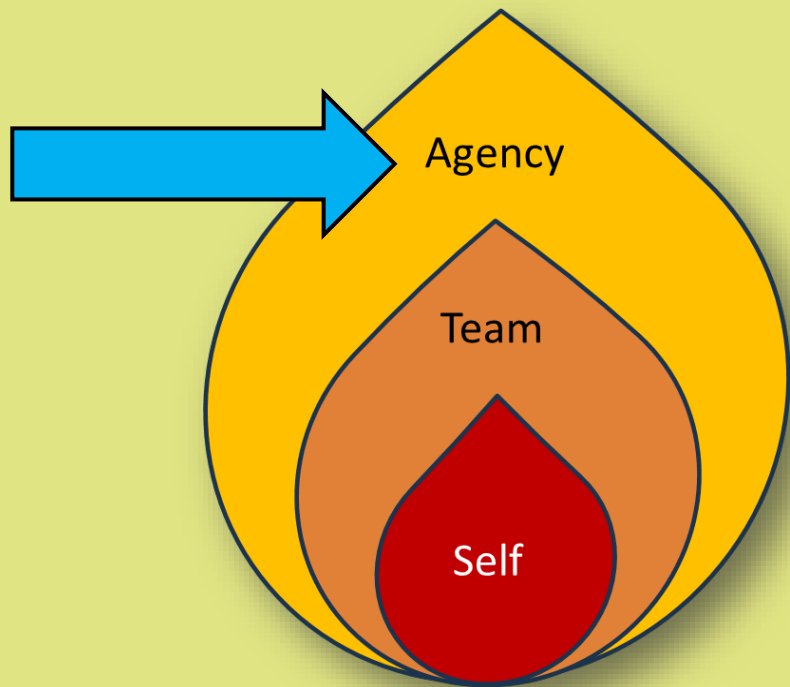


Customized service: Scan to start a conversation



- ✓ Teambuilding and Lean 101 workshops at **no extra cost**
- ✓ Email Center@sao.wa.gov for information about free, facilitated, **team-driven** process improvements





Shape agency culture

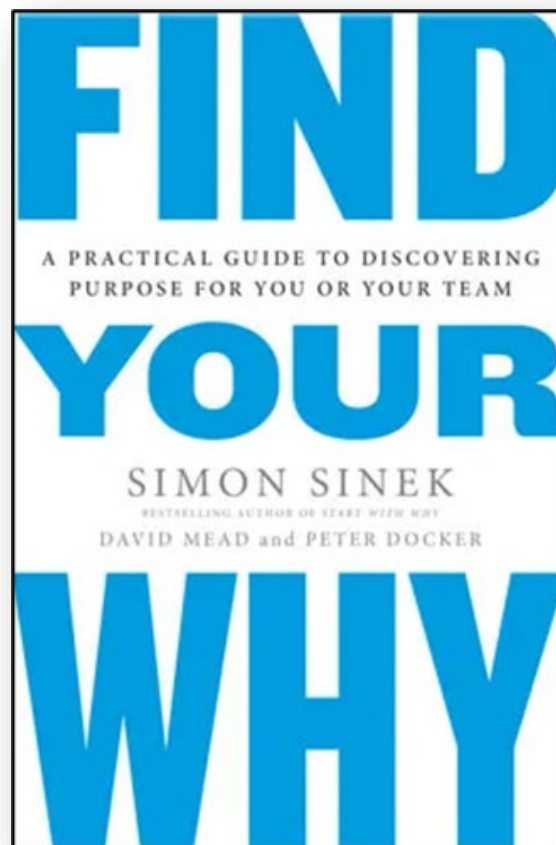
Recognize, inspire, repeat

1. Coach rather than command. Be a model and teach others to adopt these behaviors.
2. Publicly recognize staff-driven contributions across the agency. Leverage small wins to build larger momentum.
3. Invite inclusion. Co-create goals with staff, giving them a voice in setting direction.
4. Advocate for policies and processes that reduce micromanagement and increase autonomy.
5. Champion continuous improvement.

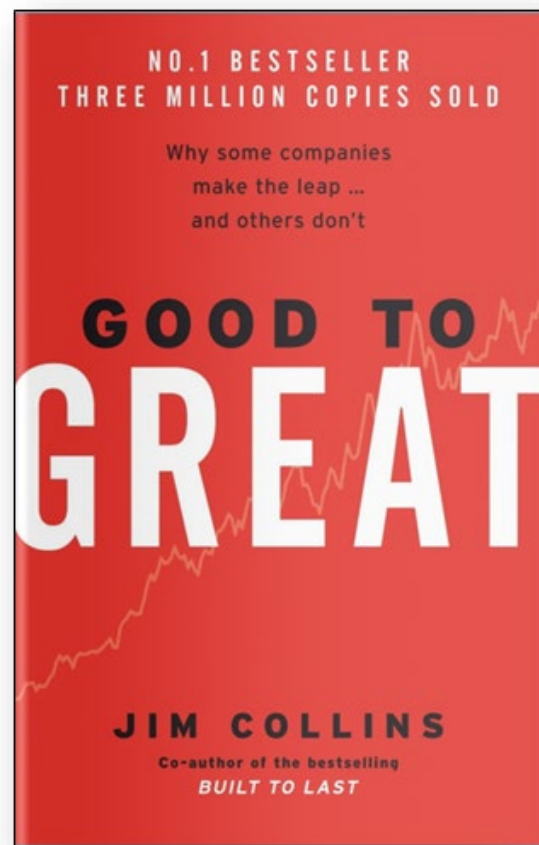


Inspiring reads

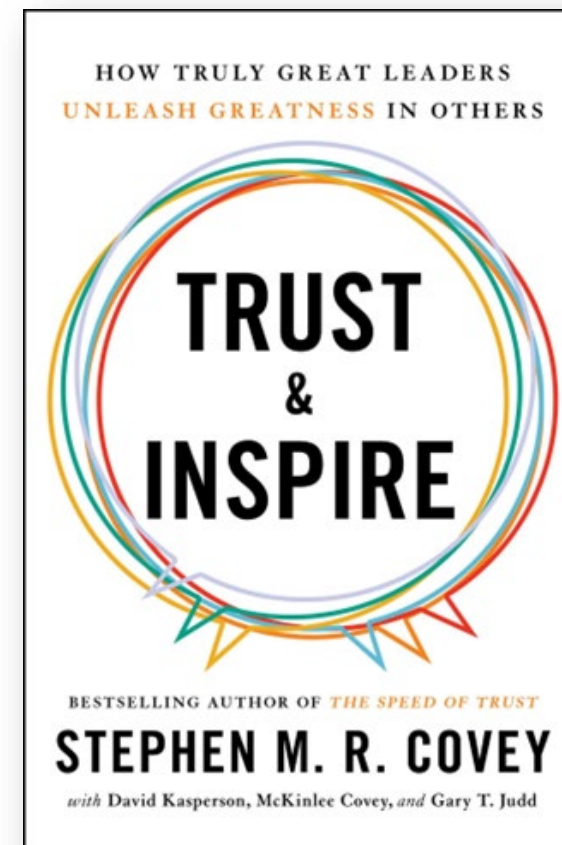
Simon Sinek



Jim Collins



Steven Covey



Questions?



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