

HOW TO LEAD AND WORK WITH CHALLENGING PEOPLE

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Less Likely



Much More Likely



What we label as
“challenging” usually signals
misalignment :

Expectations
Communication Styles
Needs
Values
Strengths and Working Styles
Stress Responses
Boundaries
Feedback Readiness





Hope is
Not a
Strategy

A photograph of a wooden desk with a whiteboard on a textured grey wall. The whiteboard is empty and framed in a dark wood. The desk is made of dark wood and has a drawer. A pen is visible in the drawer.

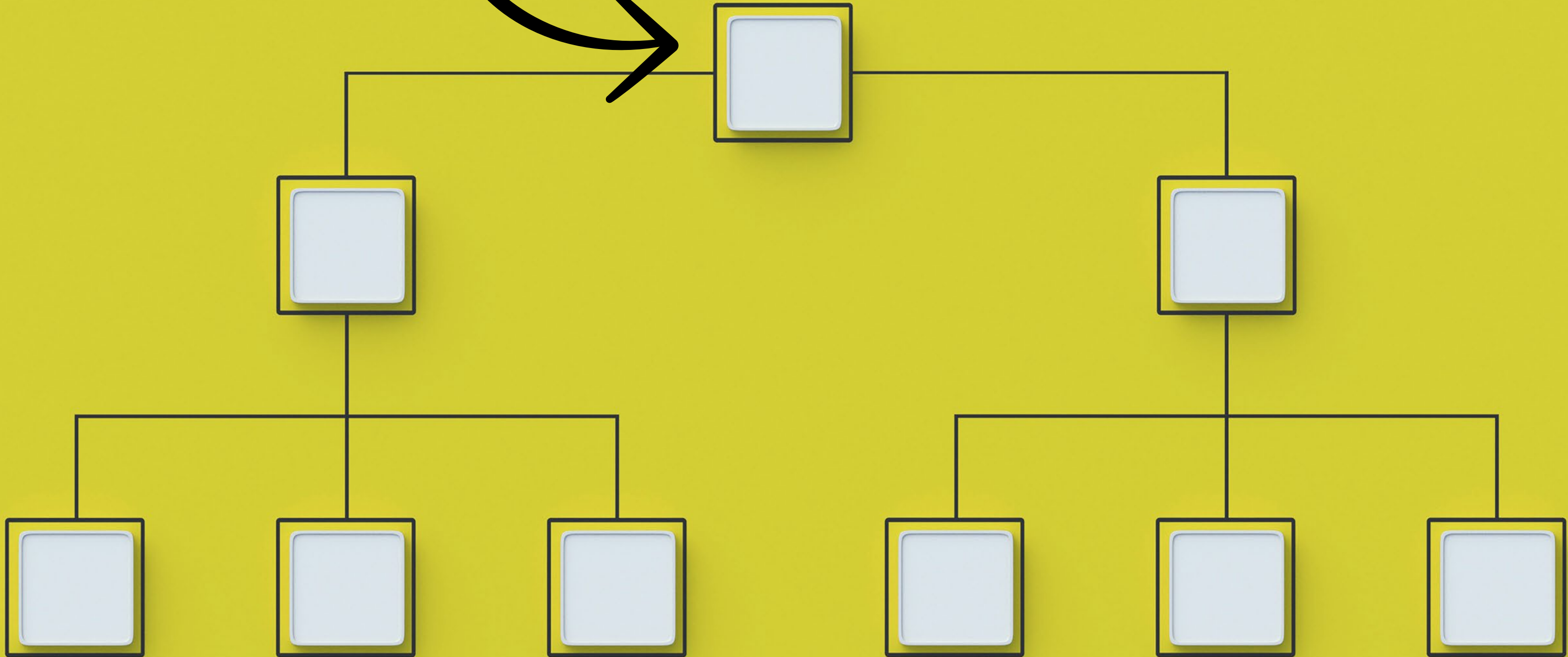
SKILL# 1

Manage Yourself First

The Dunning-Kruger Effect



Less Frequent Feedback Less Honest Feedback





Look Inward First

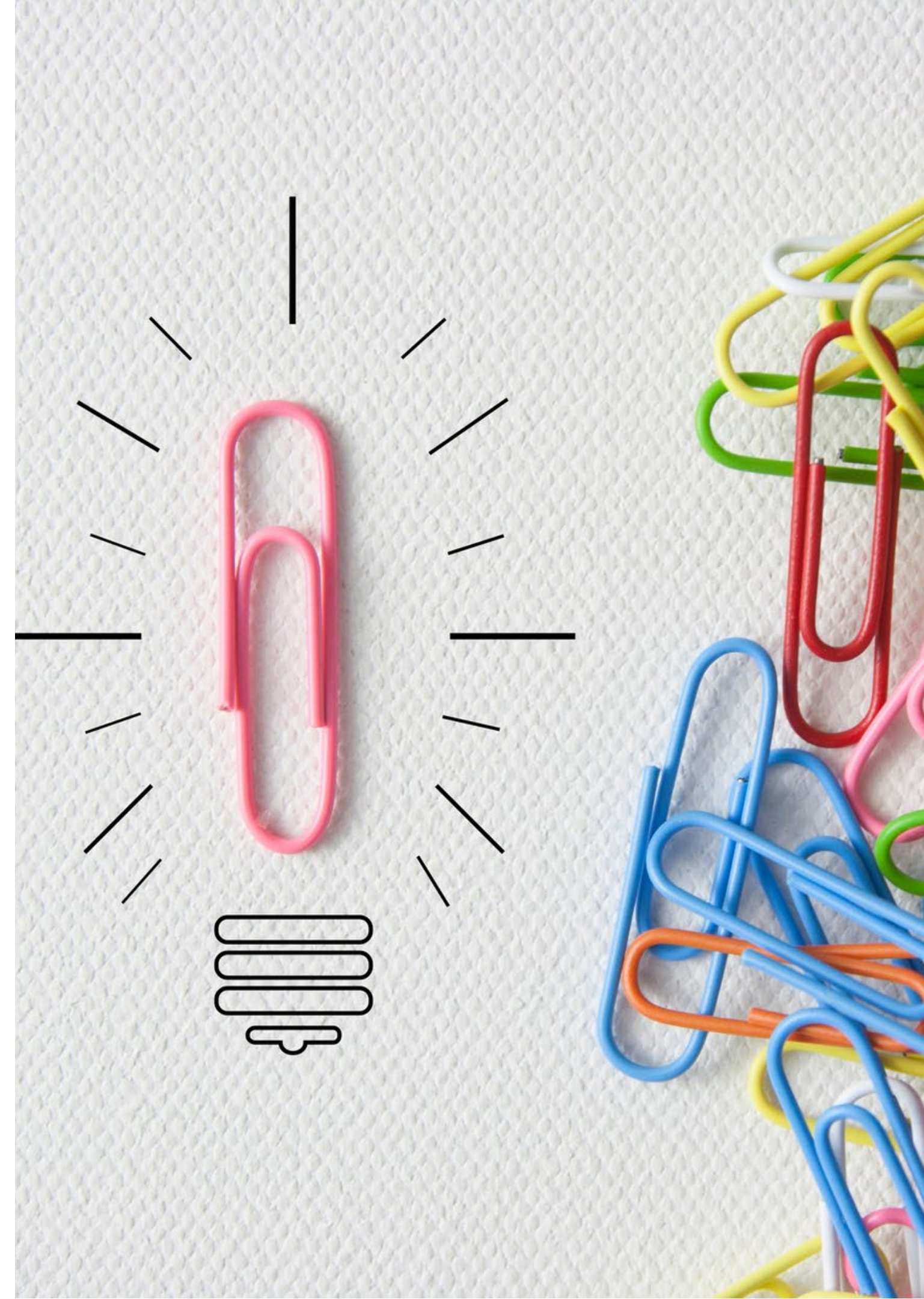
- What am I thinking and feeling? What's underneath these thoughts and feelings?
- Which expectations, values, or personal convictions have been offended here?
- How might I have contributed to this becoming an issue? What can I own?

Discuss With a Neighbor

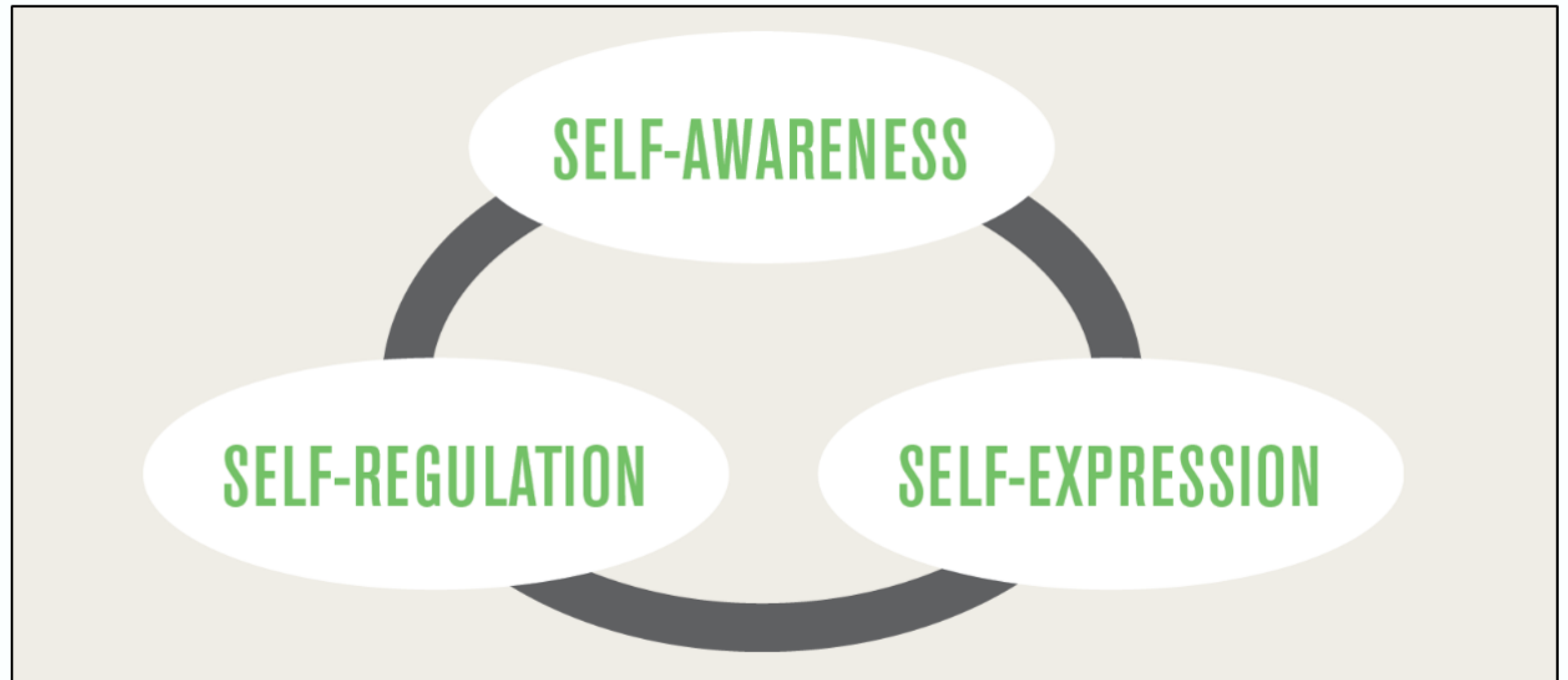
How might your natural strengths or personality make you challenging to work with — even when you have good intentions?

Examples:

- *“Because I’m very direct, sometimes people think I’m angry when I’m not.”*
- *“Since I take extreme ownership and want to know all the details, my direct reports might feel micromanaged.”*



People With
High Social
& Emotional
Intelligence
Do All Three





SKILL# 2

Mine for Talent and Tendency in Others



FILL IN THE BLANK

"Everything would be so much better around here if everyone would just _____."

RICK THE RISKASSESSOR

LEILANI THE LAUNCHER



CALENDAR *CLARA*

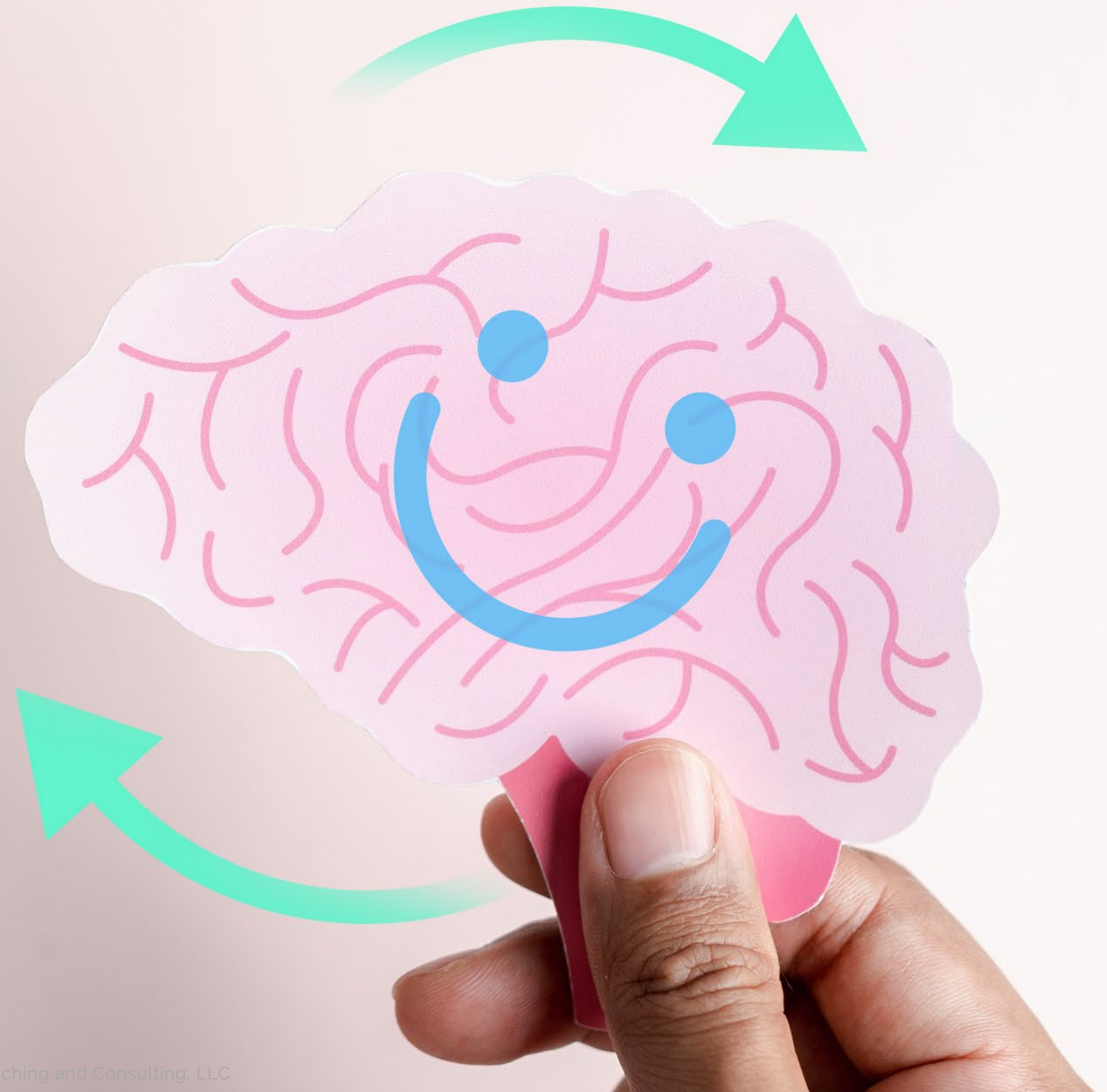


IVAN THE *IDEA GUY*



MINDSET SHIFTS

will lead to
communication
and behavior
shifts





SKILL# 3

Communicate With Clarity, Boundaries, and Accountability

Clear Expectations

Only 50% of employees say that they know what is expected of them at work.

That number drops to 30% in scientific, technical, and computer-related jobs.





Your Collective Villian:

Role Ambiguity

Role Ambiguity Red Flags

- Misalignment on vision and strategy
- Shifting goals and priorities
- Low ownership and accountability
- Increased conflict and turf wars
- Gatekeeping behavior
- Hesitation in decision making
- Frequent reassignments



Questions to Ask Yourself

- **Clarity:** Have I clearly defined what I expect, and what success looks like?
- **Purpose:** Have I explained why this expectation matters?
- **Confirmation:** Have I checked that they understand it in their own words?

When Leading Tough Conversations

- Prime for trust. Use a “Soft Startup.”



The Neuroscience of Communication



Conversations trigger the release of chemicals in the brain, influencing how we perceive and respond to others.



Amygdala Hijack

High-stress conversations can activate the amygdala, leading to *fight, flight, freeze, or appease responses*, which can hinder effective communication and decision-making.

When Leading Tough Conversations

- Prime for trust. Use a “Soft Startup.”
- State your conversational goals and intentions FIRST.
- Then send relationship-building messages.
- Clearly state the problem and the impact of the problem.



When Giving Evaluative Feedback

- Focus on Concrete Behavior, Not Personality
- Separate Intention from Impact
- Connect the Feedback to a Shared Goal or Purpose
- Use Future-Focused Language



Preparing For Tough Conversations Workbook



leannelagasse.com/preparingfortoughconversations



Hope is
Not a
Strategy

A hand is holding a white speech bubble against a blue background. The speech bubble contains the text "What's Your ONE Big Thing?". The text is in a bold, dark blue font. The word "ONE" is in all caps and slightly larger than the other words. The hand is positioned at the bottom left of the speech bubble, with the thumb and index finger visible.

**What's Your
ONE Big Thing?**

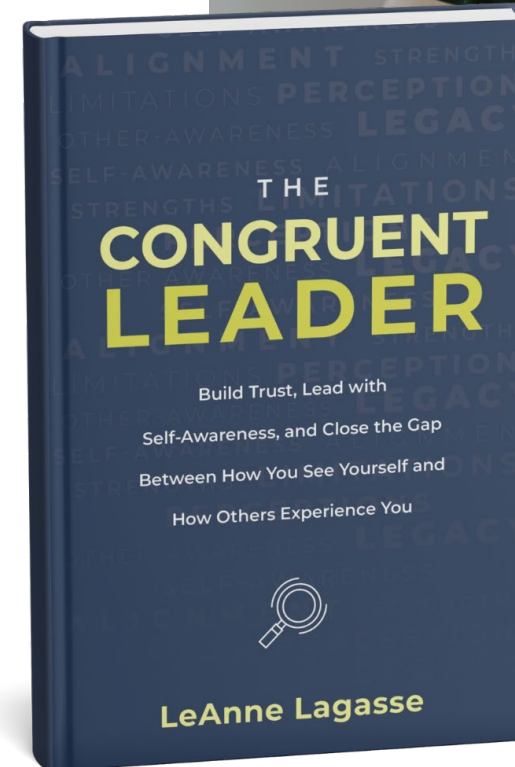
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