

A stone archway entrance to a garden, surrounded by lush greenery and colorful flowers. The archway is made of dark stone and has a green door. The garden is filled with various plants, including pink and purple flowers, and a stone path leads up to the archway.

Self-Awareness for **Managers**

Yaphi Berhanu
@yaphi1

I opened up every decision to the team

“He’s so
generous!”

“He’s so
open-minded!”

“He’s one of the
good ones!”

- My imagination

What did the team think?

“The decisions are just extra work.”

“Not everything needs to be a whole discussion.”

“Sometimes we just want to move on.”

- **The team**

**Bad
decisions**

Dangerous pattern:

**Blocked
teams**

**Getting feedback from
our own imaginations**

**Missed
tradeoffs**

About me

- **Name:** Yaphi Berhanu
 - **Pronunciation:** Yaphi rhymes with “taffy”
- **Company:** Squarespace
- **Roles:** Management and senior engineering

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Self-Awareness for **Managers**

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@yaphi1

Uncomfortable questions

- Do you know the hidden side-effects of your decisions?
- Are you hurting productivity and morale without realizing it?
- Are your decisions actually good, or are people just agreeing with you because you're writing their performance review?



**It's easy to bog down your teams
*without ever realizing it.***

A hobbit-hole entrance in a grassy hill. The entrance features a large, arched doorway with a dark green door. The archway is constructed from reddish-brown bricks. To the left and right of the doorway are smaller, circular windows with green frames. The hillside is covered in lush green grass and various flowers, including yellow, pink, and purple blooms. A set of stone steps leads up to the doorway. The overall scene is peaceful and inviting.

**Welcome to the journey
of self-awareness**

Where we'll go

**Fog of bad
incentives**

**Sea of
iceberg
requests**

**Palace of
Theory**

Part 1 of 3:

The Fog of Bad Incentives

Beware incentives to agree with you

The background of the image is a soft, misty landscape. It features a central hill or mountain peak covered in a dense forest of trees, which is partially obscured by a thick layer of white mist or fog. The overall color palette is a range of light blues and greys, creating a calm and ethereal atmosphere. The text is overlaid on this background, centered horizontally.

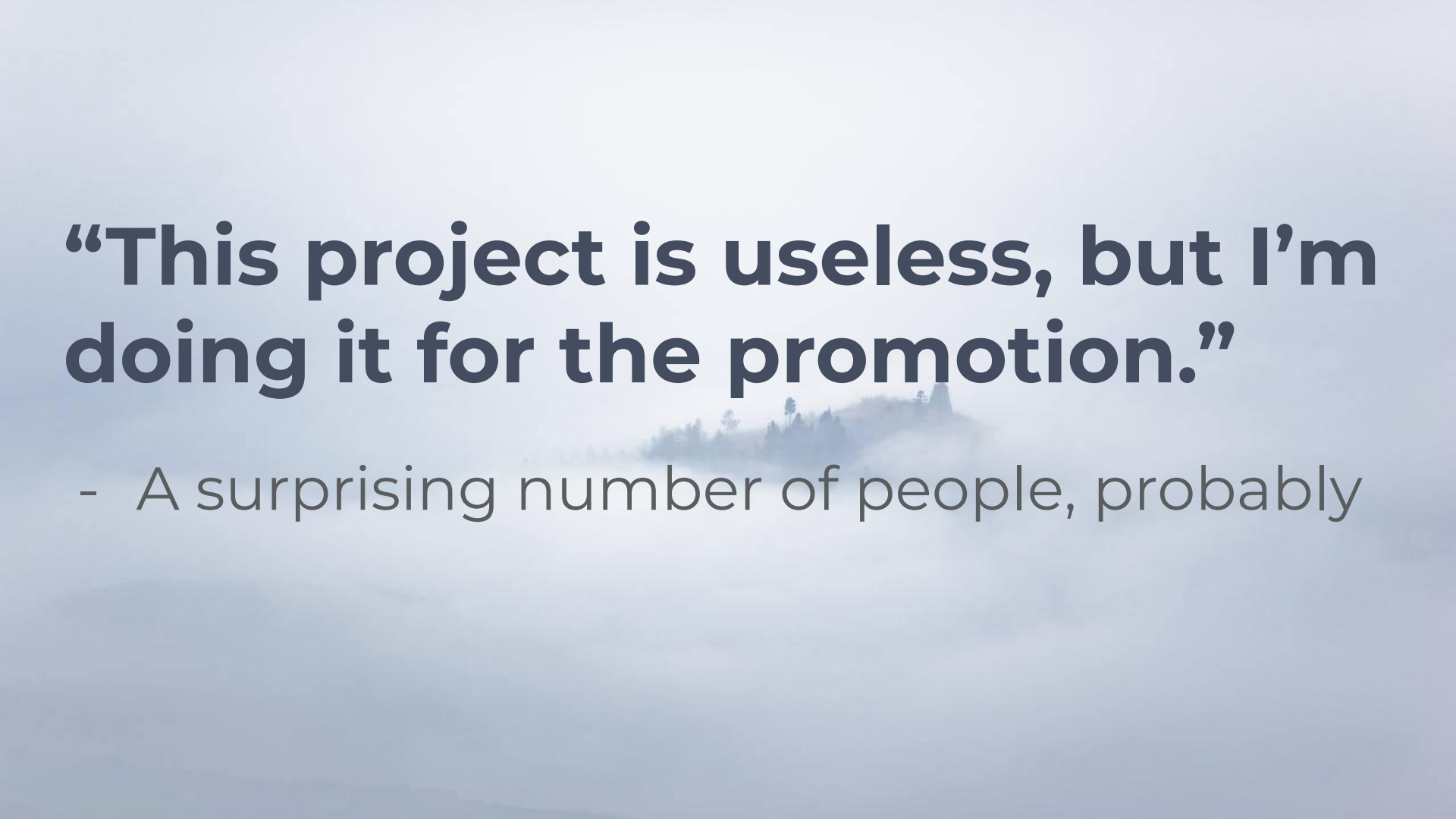
**Your opinions affect
other people's careers**

A background image of a misty, foggy mountain landscape with a line of trees visible in the distance.

**Who has incentives to
agree with you?**

Story time!

The engineer and the useless project



“This project is useless, but I’m doing it for the promotion.”

- A surprising number of people, probably

**The incentive to agree
blocked info from
getting to the manager**

**Make it safe
to disagree
with you**

The background of the image is a soft, misty landscape. It features a range of hills or mountains, with a prominent hill in the center-right that is covered in a dense forest of trees. The entire scene is shrouded in a light, ethereal mist, giving it a serene and somewhat somber atmosphere. The color palette is dominated by various shades of blue and grey, with a very light, almost white, sky at the top.

**Reframe disagreeing
as helping**

A background image of a misty mountain landscape. The scene is dominated by soft, white and light blue fog or clouds that obscure the lower parts of the mountains. In the distance, a small, dark silhouette of a building or structure is visible on a mountain peak, partially shrouded in mist. The overall atmosphere is serene and ethereal.

**“But I’m still
evaluating their
performance...”**

You get what you reward



~~Incentive to agree?~~




Incentive to tell you the truth

The background of the slide is a dark, high-contrast photograph of various gold items. In the upper right, there are several gold bars stacked, with some labeled 'FINE GOLD 999.9' and 'NET WT 1000g'. In the center and lower portions, there are numerous gold coins, some stacked in neat piles and others scattered. A pair of gold rings is visible in the lower center. On the left side, there is a gold-colored glass or chalice. The overall lighting is dramatic, highlighting the metallic sheen of the gold against the black background.

Treasure haul

- **Make it safe to disagree**
- **Reframe disagreeing as helping**
- **Reward truth rather than agreement**



Part 2 of 3:

The Sea of Iceberg Requests

Know what you're asking people to do

Beware making iceberg requests

Small on the surface; huge underneath

A diagram of an iceberg floating in blue water. The tip of the iceberg is white and above the water surface. The rest of the iceberg is submerged and colored light blue. A yellow speech bubble is positioned above the tip of the iceberg. Three orange rectangular boxes are placed on the submerged part of the iceberg.

“Could you do this one quick thing?”

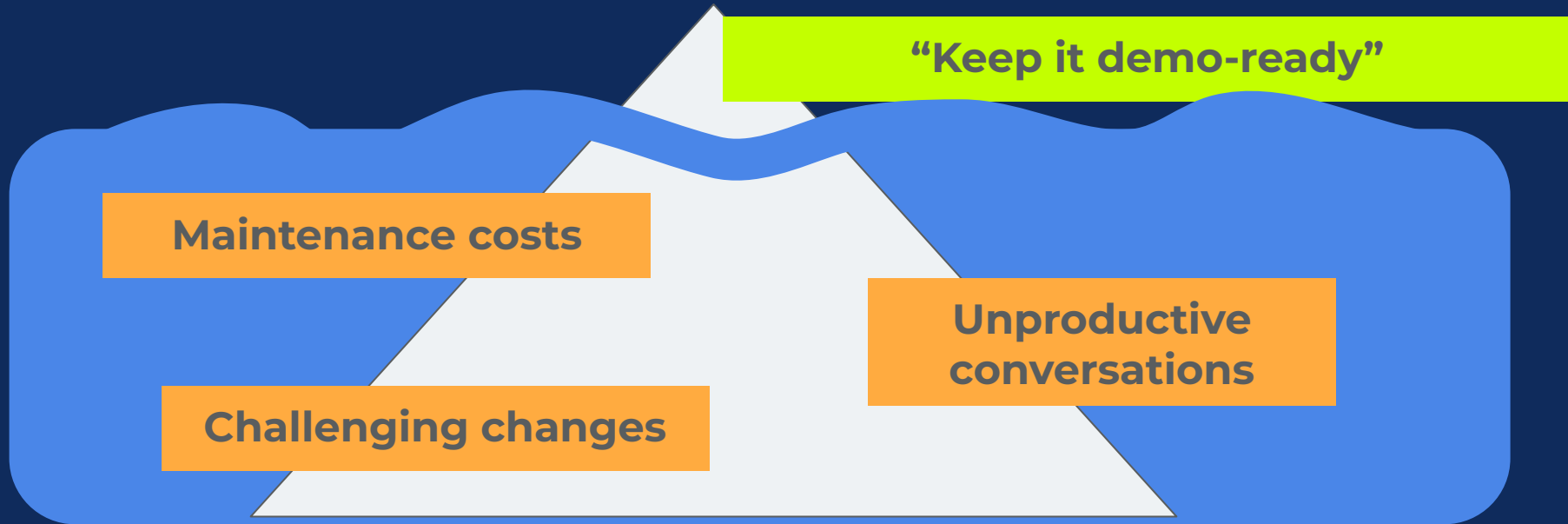
Tons of research


Distracted team

Real priorities on hold

Story time!

The Tale of the Ruined Project





How to avoid making iceberg requests

1. Make the priority level clear

How to avoid making iceberg requests

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2. Get feedback and then follow through

How to avoid making iceberg requests

1. Make the priority level clear
2. Get feedback and then follow through

A grand, dimly lit room, likely a palace or a formal meeting hall. The room features a large, ornate chandelier hanging from the ceiling, casting a warm glow. The walls are decorated with intricate carvings and framed artwork. In the foreground, a long, polished wooden table is visible, flanked by rows of dark, ornate chairs. The overall atmosphere is one of elegance and formality.

Part 3 of 3:

The Palace of Theory

Do not let theory shield you from reality

A grand, dimly lit conference room with a long wooden table, ornate chairs, and multiple large chandeliers. The room is filled with dark wood paneling and intricate carvings. The lighting is warm and focused on the chandeliers, creating a dramatic atmosphere. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**Think about your own
previous managers**

A grand, dimly lit conference room with a large wooden table, ornate chairs, and a massive crystal chandelier. The room features dark wood paneling, decorative wall carvings, and a balcony with a railing. The chandelier is the central focus, casting a warm glow over the scene. The text "Could that be me?" is overlaid in white, bold font across the center of the image.

“Could that be me?”

A grand, dimly lit room, likely a conference room or a formal meeting space. The room features a long, polished wooden conference table in the foreground, surrounded by ornate, dark wood chairs. The walls are adorned with intricate carvings and framed artwork. A large, multi-tiered chandelier hangs from the ceiling, casting a warm glow. In the background, another chandelier is visible, and the room appears to be a formal setting. The overall atmosphere is elegant and sophisticated.

Story time!

The Tale of the Future Promotion

A grand, dimly lit room with a large chandelier and ornate furniture. The room features a long wooden table with chairs, a large chandelier with many lights, and ornate wall decorations. The lighting is warm and focused on the chandelier.

Their plan (the theory):

Don't bring up the promotion too early and risk disappointing the team members in case it doesn't work out

A grand, dimly lit conference room with a large wooden table, ornate chairs, and a massive crystal chandelier. The room features dark wood paneling, decorative wall carvings, and a large doorway in the background. The lighting is warm and focused on the chandelier and the table.

Observed reality:

Star performers quit

A grand, dimly lit conference room with a long wooden table, ornate chairs, and a large crystal chandelier. The room is filled with dark wood paneling and intricate carvings. The chandelier is the central focus, casting a warm glow. The text is overlaid on the image in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

Navigating theory vs reality

**Get feedback from the
people who are affected**

Getting useful feedback

The background image shows a grand, ornate room, likely a formal dining or meeting room. It features a large, multi-tiered chandelier with many lit candles, casting a warm glow. The room has dark wood paneling, decorative wall carvings, and a long table with many chairs. The overall atmosphere is formal and elegant.

- Ask questions in neutral ways
- Talk to people on different parts of the career ladder

Getting useful feedback

If too much of your calendar involves people at your career level, you might be missing valuable information.

A grand, dimly lit room, likely a formal dining or meeting room. The room features a large, ornate chandelier hanging from the ceiling, casting a warm glow. A long, polished wooden table runs down the center of the room, flanked by rows of dark, upholstered chairs. The walls are decorated with intricate carvings and a large framed picture or tapestry. The overall atmosphere is elegant and sophisticated.

Navigating theory vs reality

**Learn from other
people's stories**

A grand, dimly lit room with a long wooden table, ornate chairs, and multiple large chandeliers. The room is filled with intricate details, including a large chandelier hanging from the ceiling and several smaller chandeliers on the walls. The lighting is warm and focused on the table, creating a sense of depth and grandeur. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**The Palace of Theory
is too comfortable**



**The Palace of Theory
is a dungeon**

Treasure haul



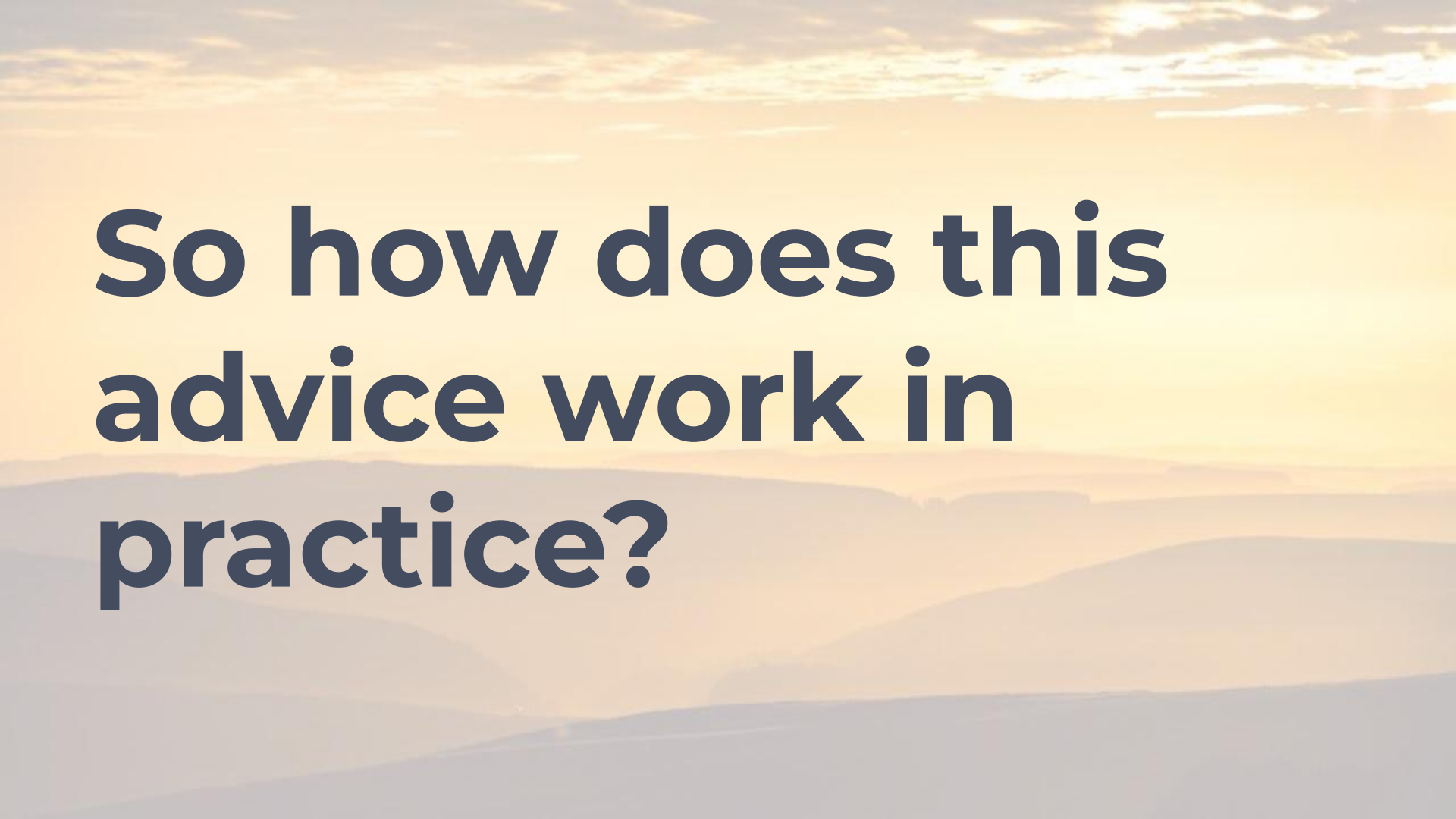
- **Get feedback from affected people**
- **Ask questions in neutral ways**
- **Talk to people at different career levels**
- **Reframe a lack of feedback as a danger zone rather than a comfort zone**

The background of the image is a soft-focus landscape of rolling hills under a warm, golden sunset sky. The sun is positioned on the right side, creating a bright glow and casting long, gentle shadows across the terrain. The colors are muted and atmospheric, with shades of orange, yellow, and light blue. The text is overlaid on the left and center of the image.

The Realm of Self-Awareness

Tips from our journey

1. Deflect **incentives** to agree with you.
2. Know the **costs** of what you're asking people to do.
3. Mind the gap between **theory** and **practice**.



**So how does this
advice work in
practice?**

What you can do, starting today

1. **Ask** people about their **past managers**.
2. **Thank** someone for **disagreeing** with you.
3. Next time you make a **request**, make the **priority level** clear and ask about the **costs** of following the request.



Why this matters

A scenic background image showing a sunset or sunrise over a mountain range. The sky is filled with soft, golden light and scattered clouds. The mountains in the foreground are silhouetted against the bright sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

**No matter how good
your intentions are,
you might be bogging
down your team.**



But don't overthink it



**You gain the
perspectives
you invite**

The End

YAPHI BERHANU

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