

# Scaling your core skillset

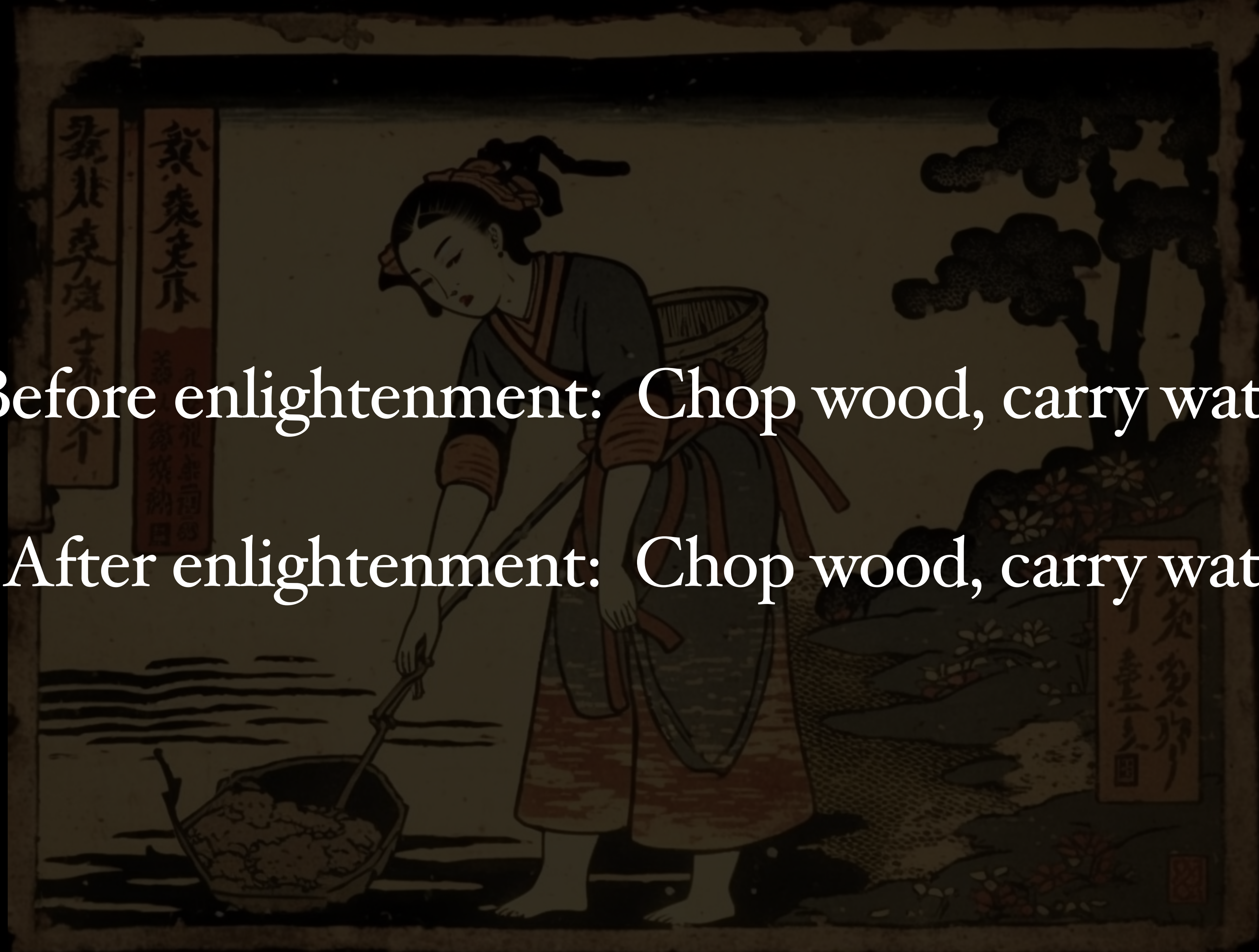


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VP Engineering, Music @ Spotify  
@marcusf most everywhere



Before enlightenment: Chop wood, carry water

After enlightenment: Chop wood, carry water

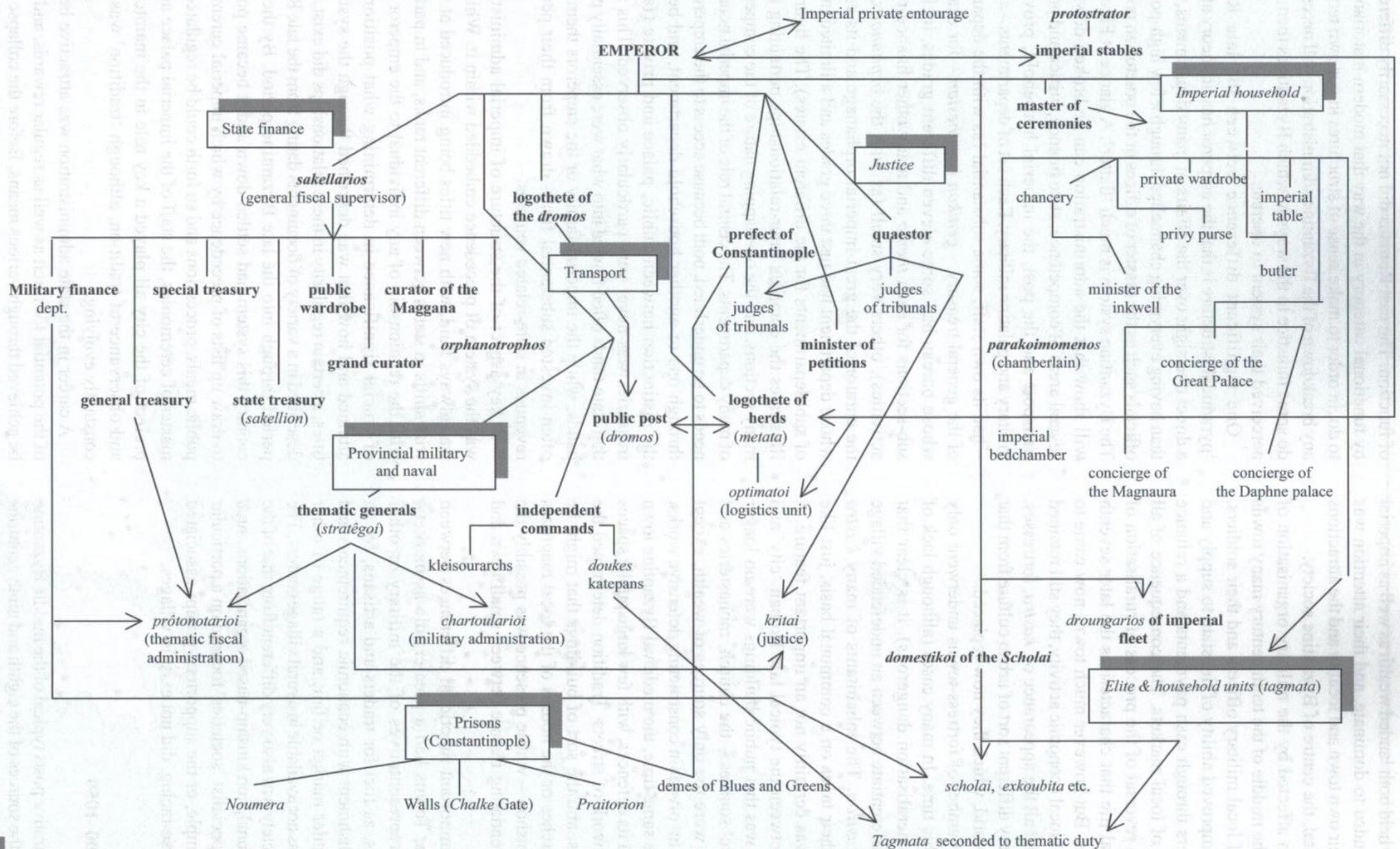




**As I've grown more "senior" I've wondered**

**What does it mean to be more senior?**





Key:



# The “Steve Jobs VP Speech”: From output to outcome

Junior

Senior



Do The **Thing** Right

Do The **Right** Thing



## *Hypothesis*

Seniority is not just a difference in experience (HOW), but a difference in the type of work (WHAT).



# My 4 roles





# 1:1's

What am I not seeing?  
How can I unblock you?  
Where can we do more?

Taking the temperature of my org  
Coaching managers to manage



Coaching my engineers to  
grow in their careers



“What am I supposed to say  
in this meeting?”





# Delivery

Balance our portfolio  
so it makes sense



Shift capacity to meet our goals



Remove blockers to delivery



Getting my work done,  
being a dependable colleague





# Values

Articulate our values



Build an org to our values



Manage to our values



Make fun of our values





# Hiring

Build business cases to get funding  
Build cross-functional alignment  
Woo executives

Shape skill mix based on goals  
Drive process improvement



Write job specs  
Make hiring calls



Participate in the process  
Have opinions about interviews





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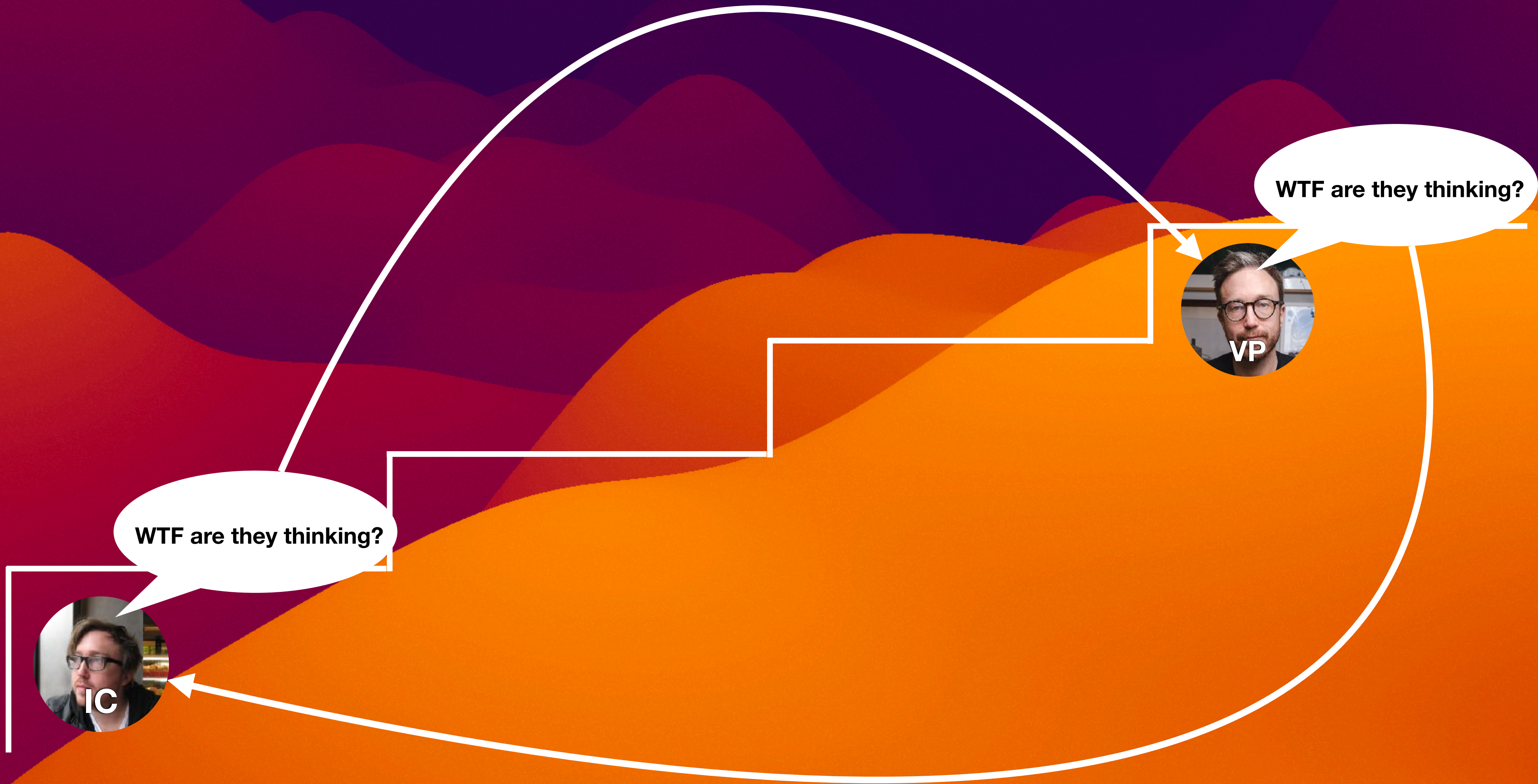
**Not just a difference in HOW  
A difference in WHAT**





**When you master one thing  
The reward is a new and unfamiliar thing**







**Is becoming more senior**

**A question of SKILL or  
a question of SCALE ?**



## **SKILL IS**

**the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance**



# What skills do managers have?

TAKE INPUT

COMMUNICATE

EXECUTE

SYNTHESIZE





A photograph of four stone carvings of monkeys, known as the Four Wise Monkeys, arranged in a row on a single base. From left to right: the first monkey has its hands covering its ears; the second has its hands covering its eyes; the third has its hands covering its mouth; and the fourth has its hands crossed in its lap. The background is dark, and the text is overlaid in white.

**Four Wise  
Monkeys**

**Hear No Evil**

**See No Evil**

**Say No Evil**

**Do No Evil**



A photograph of four gorillas dressed in business suits, sitting at a table. From left to right: the first gorilla is looking down at a glass; the second is resting its head on its hand; the third is looking at a laptop; the fourth is looking towards the camera. The image is dimly lit and has a dark overlay.

# Four (Wise?) Managers

Hear ~~Stuff~~ Evil

Think ~~Stuff~~ Evil

Say ~~Stuff~~ Evil

Do ~~Stuff~~ Evil



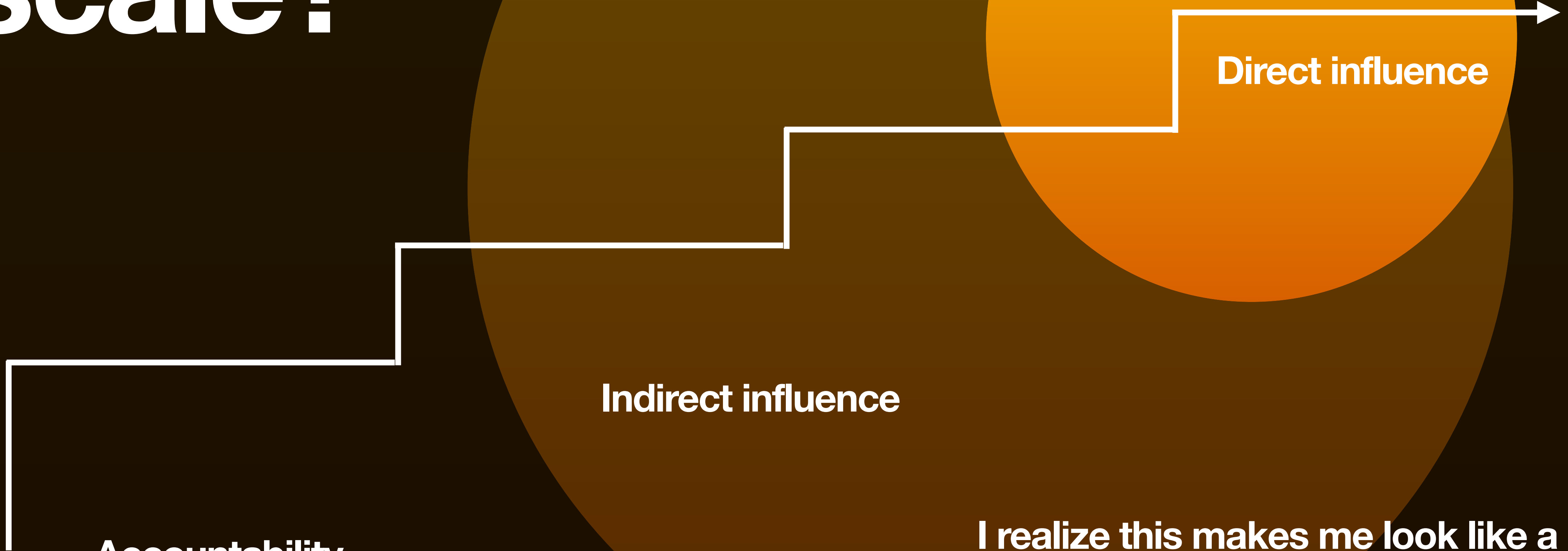
# 1:1's - The skill view

## Hear / Think / Say





# How about scale?



I realize this makes me look like a mix between a Capri Sun and the death star



# Constraint & Opportunity



**FEW**

**MANY**

**NUANCED**

**BLUNT**

**FAST**

**SLOW**

**PEOPLE**

**SYSTEMS**

**NIMBLE**

**IMPACTFUL**

Small Scale

Large Scale





**FEW**

**SCOPE**

**MANY**

**NUANCED**

**CONTEXT**

**BLUNT**

**FAST**

**TIME**

**SLOW**

**PEOPLE**

**MODE**

**SYSTEMS**

**NIMBLE**

**LEVERAGE**

**IMPACTFUL**

Small Scale

Large Scale



**Opportunity**  
Easy to change your mind

**Constraint**  
Highly deliberate decisions

**FAST**



**SLOW**

**Constraint**  
May need constant reevaluation

**Opportunity**  
Create long term stability

Small Scale

Large Scale



**A SOMEWHAT RELEVANT  
DIGRESSION ABOUT THE  
*FEELING* OF SCALE**



# **BAD things about scale**

**EVERYTHING is your fault**

**So you're probably overworked**

**Only the truly worst escalations reach you**

**If you decide too slowly,  
your analysis paralysis kills velocity**

**If you decide too quickly,  
your unpredictability causes whiplash**



# **GOOD things about scale**

**You have incredible leverage**

**You can have real impact on many people, and you get to work with ambitious, accomplished people**

**You have lots of autonomy & discretion**

**(It's fun!)**



The background consists of several overlapping, semi-transparent shapes in shades of pink and orange. A large, bright pink circle is on the left side. Overlapping it and extending towards the right are several orange and light pink shapes, including a large, irregular shape that resembles a stylized 'S' or a series of overlapping curves. The overall effect is a vibrant, layered composition.

**</DIGRESSION>**



**Skills**



**Scale**



Hear  
Think  
Speak  
Do



Scope  
Context  
Time  
Mode  
Leverage

What do I feel confident doing?

What constraints and possibilities do I have?



Hear

Think

Speak

Do

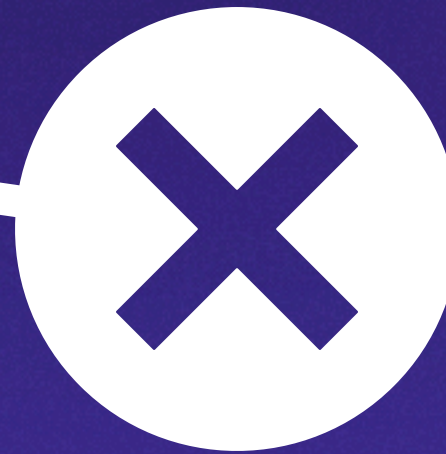
Scope

Context

Time

Mode

Leverage



**Delegation Plan -> Systems Thinking**



Hear

Think

Speak

Do

Scope

Context

Time

Mode

Leverage



**1:1's -> Skip Levels -> Surveys**



Hear

Think

Speak

Do

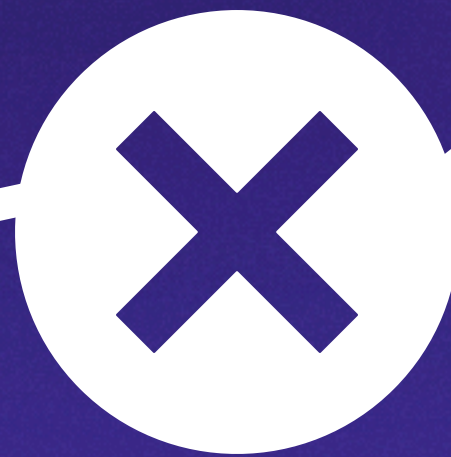
Scope

Context

Time

Mode

Leverage



**Team Meetings -> All Hands**



Hear

Think

Speak

Do

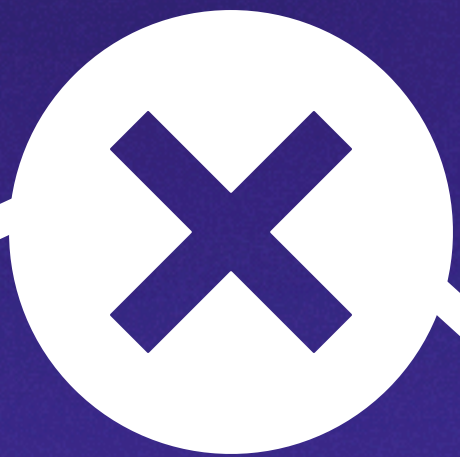
Scope

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Leverage



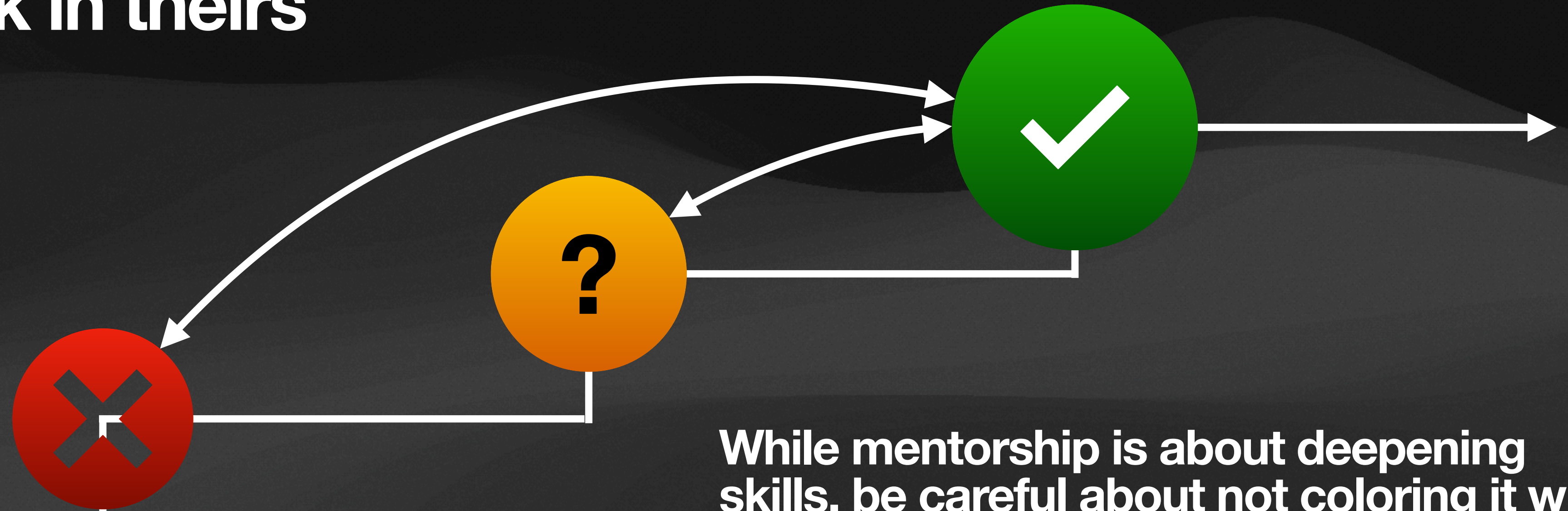
PR's -> Programs



**You can deepen your skills,  
but you have to embrace your new scale**



**What works in your context  
may not work in theirs**



**While mentorship is about deepening skills, be careful about not coloring it with your scale.**

**On the other hand, don't only teach better skills, ready for bigger scale.**



**If you're solving a problem  
for your boss, consider their  
scale**



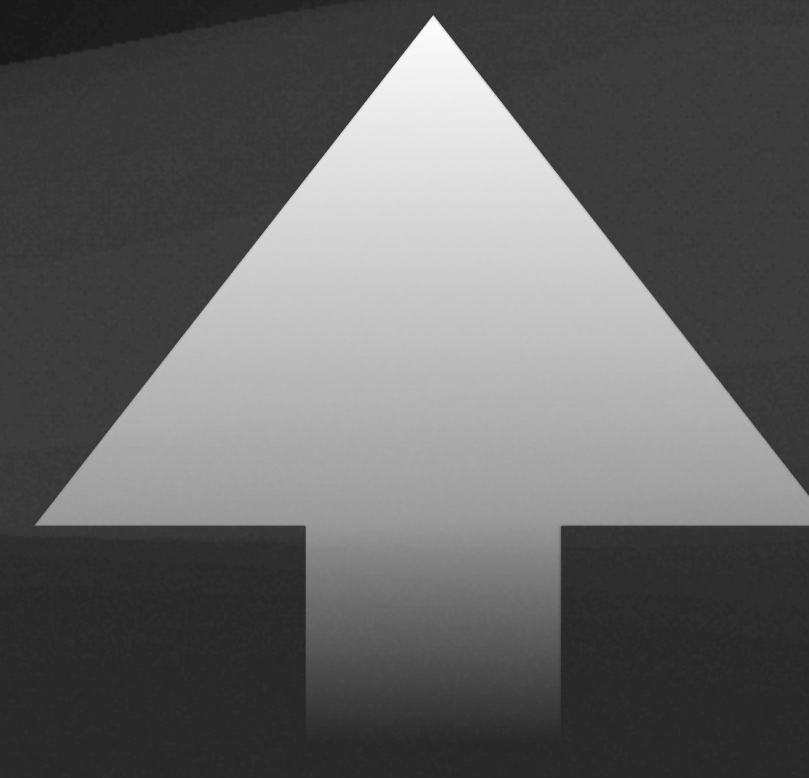
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scale**



# Promotions



VP



Dir

Predict Your Opportunities & Constraints

Use to deepen the four skills



# Case Study: Me



Dir

Spent 6.5 years as a director  
Tried to be the best director I could

Imagined VP role as “super director”  
Didn't consider how scale would impact skill



VP



**Let's test it out**



# Delivery Challenge

**You've just got promoted to director.**

Your new boss put you in this role because of your excellent delivery skills in a team, she expects you to apply them to a bigger context.

You are drowning in a 100 backlog issues from each of your teams, and are unable to form a coherent strategy.



# Constraint: Scope

You can no longer be active in every delivery question for every team.

# Opportunity: Mode

You need to transition from a people view of delivery to a systems view of delivery, which you now have the ability to do.

## LISTEN

Perform 1:1's and skip levels with targeted questions  
Look at output data from your and other teams in the org to create a benchmark

## THINK

Where do you have leverage points?  
Where do handovers occur?  
How do we facilitate the metrics we ultimately care about?

## DO

Implement a delivery system  
Empower or level up your line managers  
Re-organize to minimize costly handovers

## SPEAK

Set expectations with your directs  
Explain with empathy to your larger team why this will make everyone's lives better  
Sell your boss on the changes you want to make and get their buy-in for a chaotic change period



**You're a VP Eng, but have been handed a product and design team to take on a more full accountability for your core platform.**

You notice there is a lot of tension between your product function and the product functions in the company that you support, and you're getting a lot of questions from your stakeholders about the product strategy and roadmap.

# **Drawing Lines**



## **LISTEN**

Meet senior key customers and understand their strategies, how your work should fit in, and where their painpoints are.

Reach out to peers at other companies and interview them, ask to meet key people in their product team and interview them too.

## **THINK**

Do you have the requisite skills to directly manage a product team, or do you need to bring in a senior product leader to run your strategy?

What are the N things you need to achieve in the next 18 months? What defines their commonality? How can you redefine your customer relationship to the teams that need you for those priorities?

## **DO**

Focus down and align as hard as you can: Re-establish OKRs for your function to speak to your N top priorities, and cut from the bottom of the list to achieve this.

Requisition budget for and hire a senior a product leader to work for you to run strategy, base your JD on your 18 month list.

## **SPEAK**

Develop an elevator pitch that is four sentences long max, and say it to every person in every meeting every day for the next six months. Say nothing else.

# **Constraint: Context**

**You can't go around to every level of the company and spin a story that explains the nuanced strategy of your platform roadmap, you need to have a clear and simple message that your wider org can rally and build a strategy around.**

# **Opportunity: Leverage**

**If you can position your product team and their strategy appropriately, you can actually achieve the vaunted leverage internal platforms promise.**



**As I've grown more "senior" I've wondered**

**What does it mean to be more senior?**



**Seniority: To have evolved your core skills to fit the constraints and opportunities of the new scale of your expectations.**





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