

The Uncomfortable Middle

Growing as a Director in Uncertain Times

George Mandis

A close-up portrait of a man with a beard and mustache, smiling. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text is positioned on the left side of the image.

George Mandis

Unsolicited endorsements:

"OMG long post." — *Andrej Karpathy*

Recidiviz

- Tools for criminal justice leaders to drive meaningful change through data

recidiviz.org



Recurse Center

- Self-directed programming retreat in Brooklyn
- Hire sharp and self-directed programmers, quickly

recurse.com



The Story

An unexpected path to Director of Engineering

Growth and Promotion Through Downsizing

Immediate Challenges

Morale

Understanding team dynamics

Adapting a new product development process

A push to grow and move fast

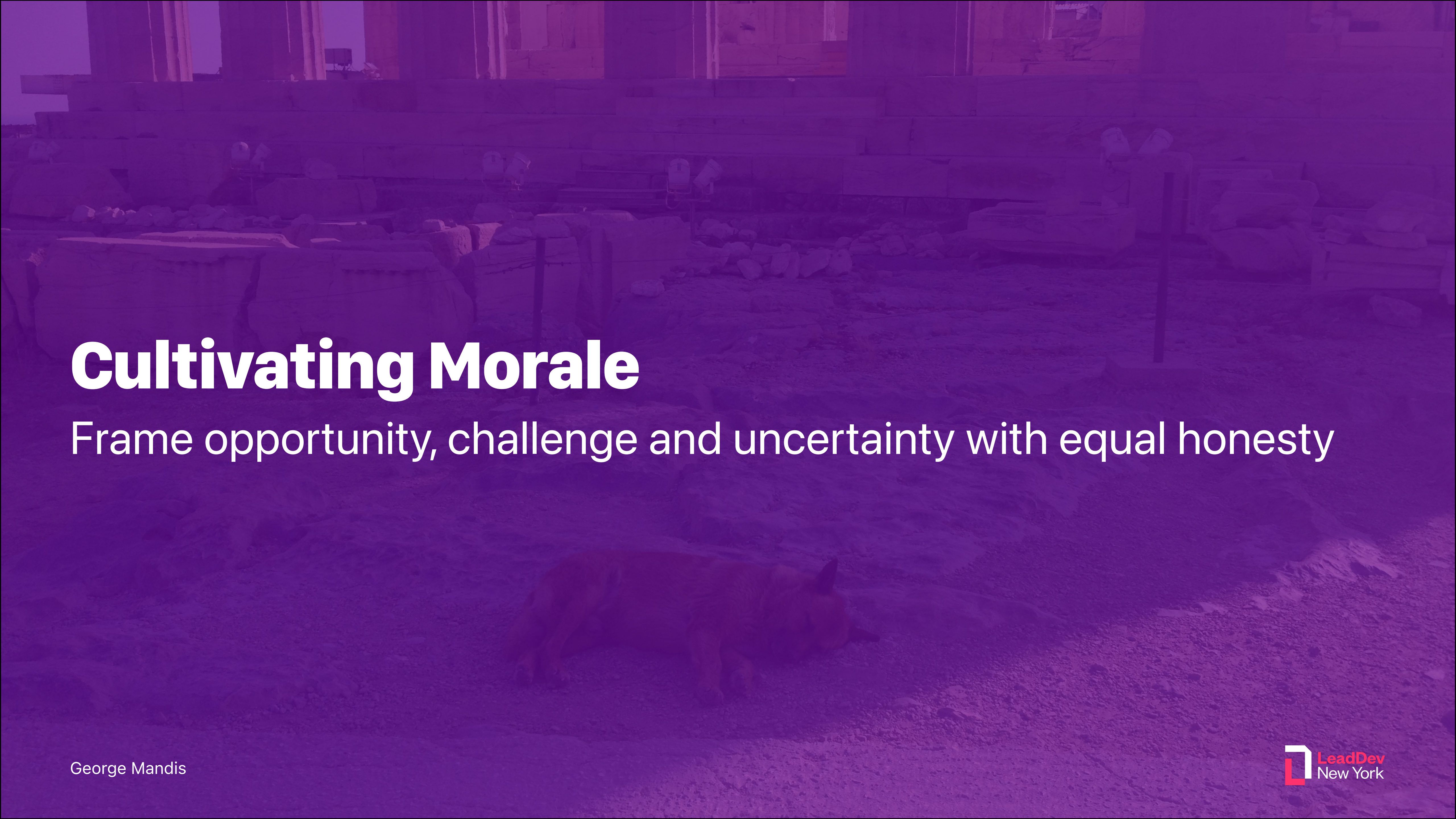
Sharpening execution on work that moves the needle

Understanding individual dynamics

Tactical, technical and strategic alignment

Fostering growth and learning

And, and, and...

A purple-tinted photograph of a construction site. In the foreground, a dog is lying down on the ground. The background shows a large, multi-story building under construction, with many windows and structural elements visible. The overall scene is somewhat desolate and industrial.

Cultivating Morale

Frame opportunity, challenge and uncertainty with equal honesty

Cultivating Morale

Don't be afraid to say "I don't know"

The motivations might be intrinsic

Honesty is respected and can be more inspiring than an aspirational pitch

A person is shown in a meditative pose, sitting on a small mat on a pebbly beach. They are facing away from the camera, looking out over a calm body of water towards distant mountains. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The text is in white, providing a strong contrast against the purple background.

Fostering Team Growth

Balancing high expectations with high empathy

A person is shown in a starting crouch on a beach at sunset. The person is in the center of the frame, facing right, with their hands on their knees and feet flat on the sand. The background features a calm sea, distant mountains, and a sky with soft orange and yellow hues. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

Fostering Team Growth

Expectations without empathy leads to toxicity & burnout

Empathy without expectations leaves your team and the company stagnant

People will trust you to push them if you give them safety to fail

Growing Your Leaders

Leading leaders is different

Growing Your Leaders

Self-doubt is very human

Doubt in a desire to continue the role is a red-flag

People leaders are foundational

My Biggest Mistake

I did not listen

Take Aways

In Hard Times

Morale first

Honesty about the situation

Frame opportunity

Challenging Teams

Foster a culture of working at edge of capabilities

Safely, In every sense

That's where the good stuff happens

When someone tells you who they are...

Believe them.

When people leadership is not for them,
find a place for them *quickly*



Thank You

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