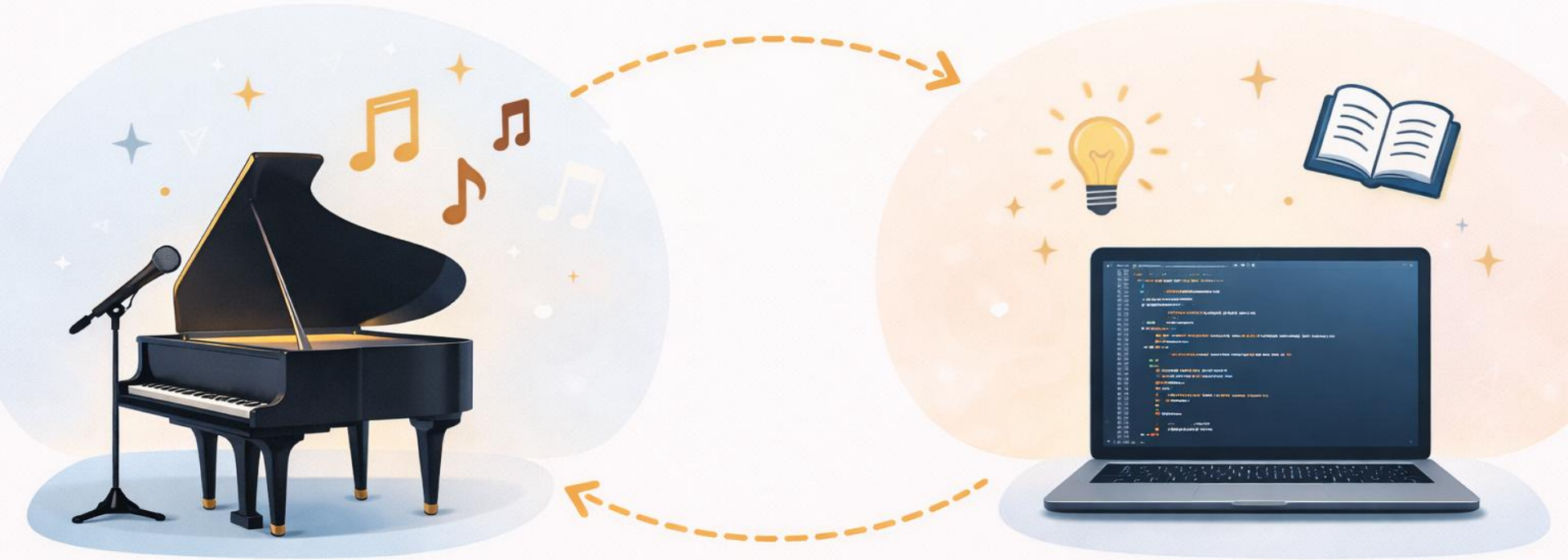
The Staff Engineer's Playbook

Intellectual shift to systemic impact

LIVE MUSIC
SAT
PIES & PINTS
TODAY'S SPECIALS

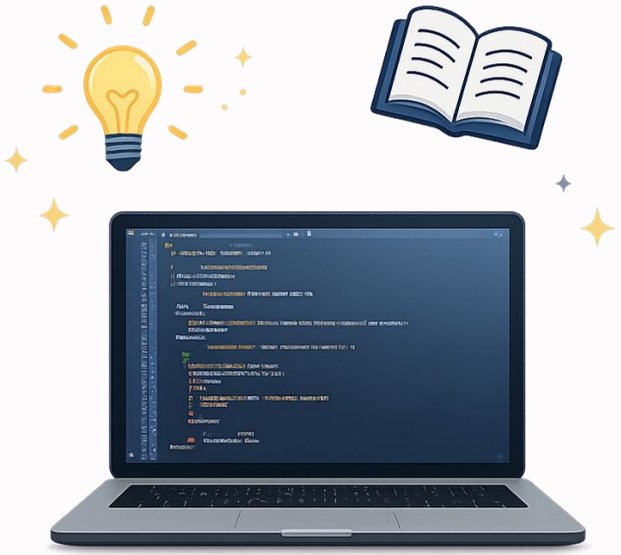
Who am I?

A creative at heart, a systems thinker by practice



Be more Technical

- Go deeper
- Be correct
- No ambiguity
- Be the person who gets it right



That advice is right... **but incomplete**

The Shift in Thinking

Identify what doesn’t make sense

Understand the system

Form and test a hypothesis

The Staff Engineer's Playbook

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Research Gap
See the system clearly

CUSTOMERS
SUPPORT TEAM
INDUSTRY EXPERTS
DATA ANALYSIS
ACADEMIC RESEARCH
THE RESEARCH GAP
SYNTHESIS
LISTEN
ANALYSE
TRIANGULATE
IDENTIFY
UNCOVER OPPORTUNITIES
TRIANGULATING INSIGHTS
USER INTERVIEWS
EXISTING RESEARCH
INDUSTRY DATA
RESEARCH GAP
DEEPER UNDERSTANDING BETTER SOLUTIONS
WHAT'S MISSING?
LITERATURE REVIEW
INDUSTRY REPORTS
USER INSIGHTS

Research Gap 🔎

Identifying the misalignment in measurement.

Measured Perception

Assumed effort and clearly defined tasks.

Measured Reality

Inconsistent logic using proxies and heuristics.

Target State

Direct system output as a single source of truth.

Research Gap 🔎

Find what others missed. Turn curiosity into insight.

1 **Follow the curiosity**
Question the obvious

Look deeper.
Spot the gap.

2 **Test the hypothesis**
Challenge assumptions

Gather evidence.
Find what's unclear.

3 **Define the gap**
Make it actionable

Clarify the problem
worth solving.

💡 Better questions lead to **better direction.**

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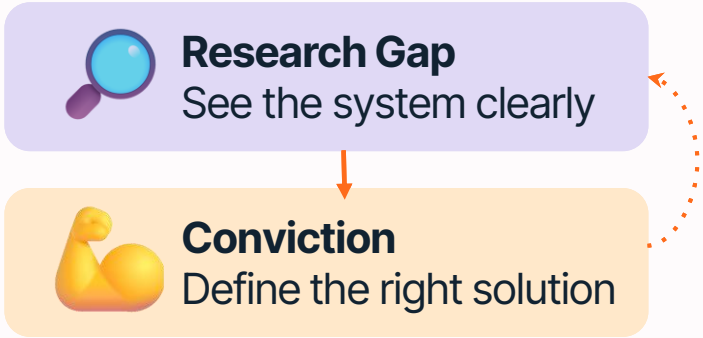
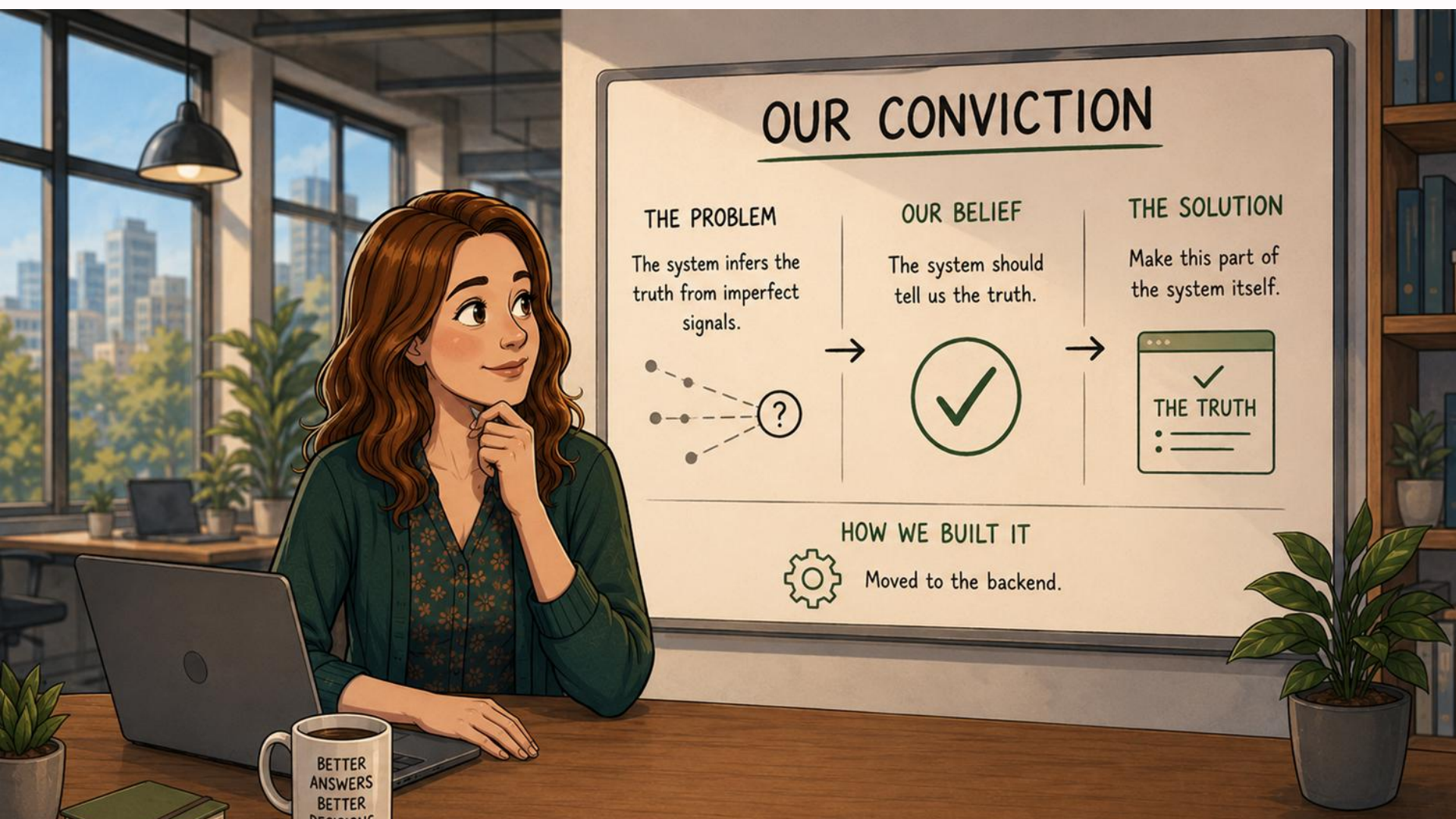
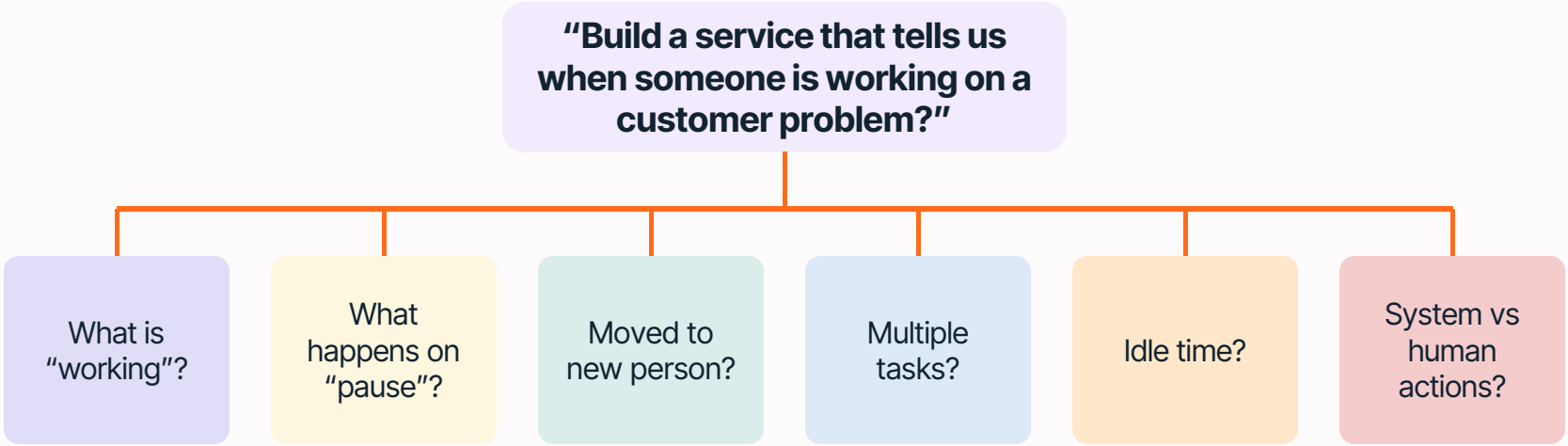



OUR CONVICTION
THE PROBLEM
The system infers the truth from imperfect signals.
OUR BELIEF
The system should tell us the truth.
THE SOLUTION
Make this part of the system itself.
THE TRUTH
HOW WE BUILT IT
Moved to the backend.
BETTER ANSWERS BETTER

Conviction 💪

Turn a hypothesis into a clear, principled direction.



👉🏻 This isn’t a metric problem anymore. **It’s a system design problem.**

Conviction 💪

Turn a hypothesis into a clear, principled direction

1. Define the principle
What is actually broken?

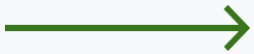
→

2. Design at the source
Where should the truth live?

→

3. Make it viable
How do we get there safely?

FROM
Fragile & Inferred



TO
Clear, Source of Truth

That's conviction 🚀 Not just a better metric. **A better system**

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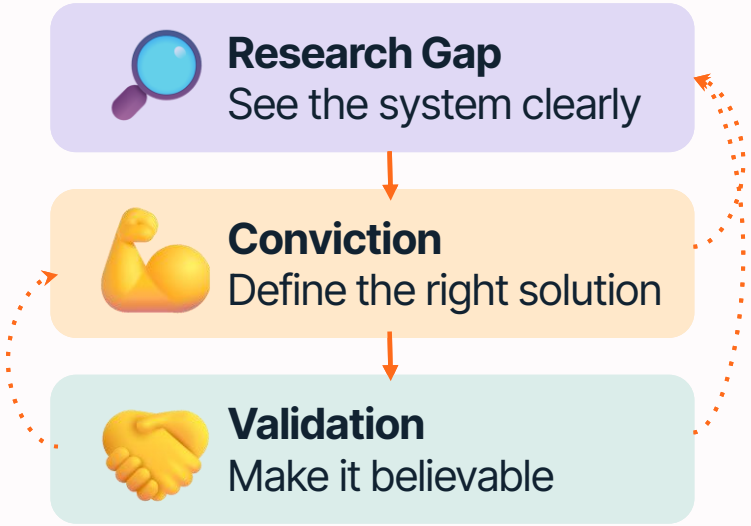
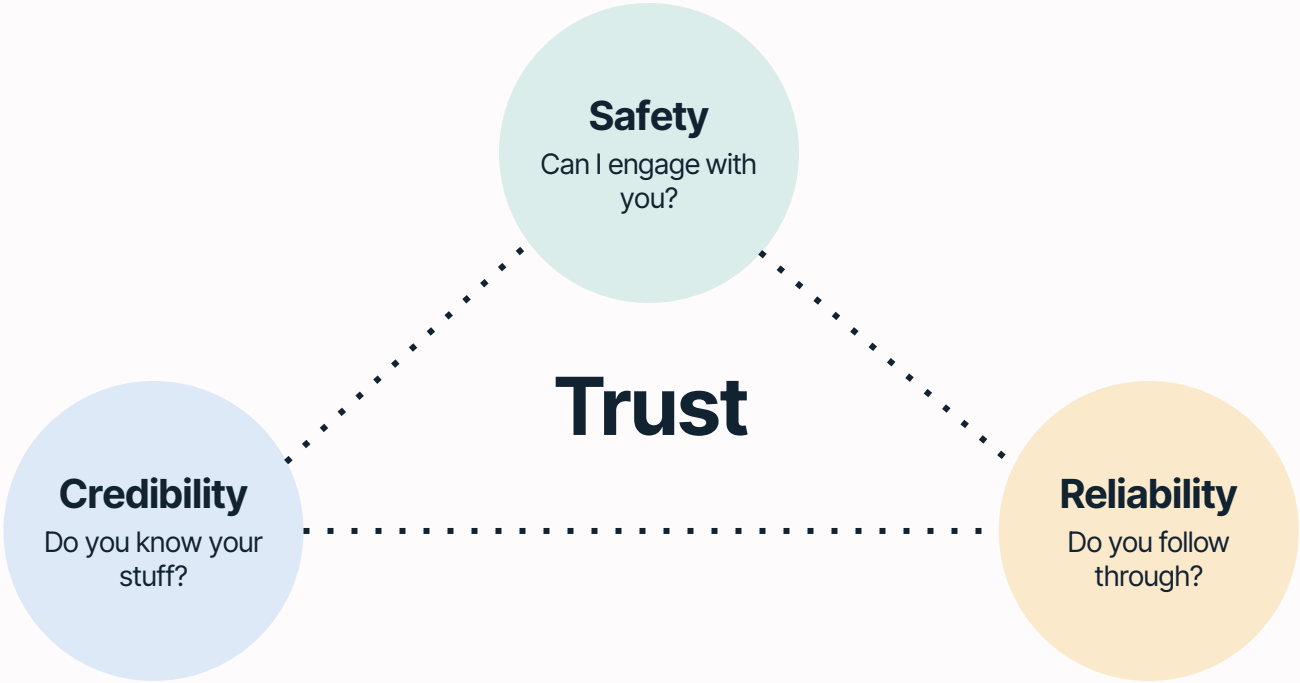


VALIDATION & ALIGNMENT
Better ideas don't always win.
Found partners. Unlocked engineering and product.
Tough decisions. Lots of opinions.
Became team-owned.
BETTER TOGETHER

Validation & Alignment 🤝

Turn the idea into a shared direction.



💭 Trust is what makes ideas move

Validation & Alignment 🤝

Turn the idea into a shared direction

1 **Test the thinking**
Invite Challenge

2 **Align the direction**
Make it make sense

3 **Secure commitment**
Make it real

🪄 The right answer only matters **if people believe it**.

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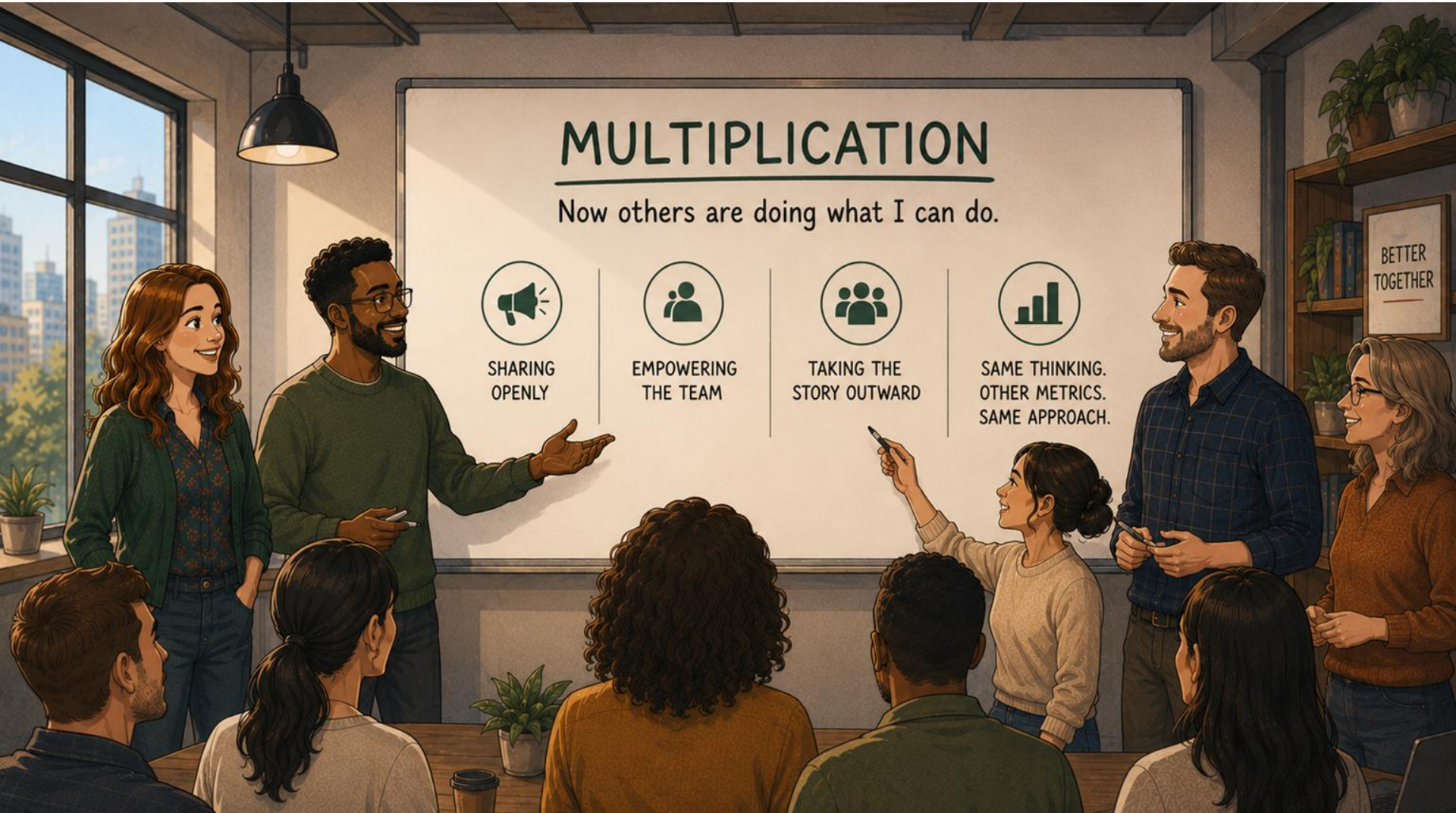
MULTIPLICATION
Now others are doing what I can do.
SHARING OPENLY
EMPOWERING THE TEAM
TAKING THE STORY OUTWARD
SAME THINKING. OTHER METRICS. SAME APPROACH.
BETTER TOGETHER

Multiplication 🌲

People copy what they see - not what you say.

Instruction

- Docs
- Frameworks
- Telling people what to do

→ Doesn't scale

Observation

- **Decisions made in the open**
- Trade-offs explained
- Thinking made visible

→ Scales across teams

Multiplication 🌳

Designing work so it doesn’t depend on you

1 **Enable Autonomy**
Let the team run without you

→

2 **Build Capability**
Grow future technical leaders

→

3 **Design for scale**
Will this hold over time?

🪜 If it depends on you, it doesn’t scale

Shaping Systems

This is what creativity looks like in engineering

See System Clearly

Define the Solution

Make it Believable

Scale Without You

The job isn't to solve problems. **It's to define them** - and bring people with you.

The Staff Engineer's Playbook

by Anna Selway

linkedin.com/in/annalouiseselway

🔍 Research Gap
See the system clearly

💡 Better questions lead to **better direction.**

1. **Follow the curiosity** — Question the obvious
2. **Test the hypothesis** — Challenge assumptions
3. **Define the gap** — Make it actionable

💪 Conviction
Define the right solution

🚀 Not just a better metric. A better system

1. **Define the principle** — What is actually broken?
2. **Design it at source** — Where should the truth live?
3. **Make it viable** — How do we get there safely?

🤝 Validation
Make it believable

🪄 The right answer only matters **if people believe it.**

1. **Test the thinking** — Invite challenge
2. **Align the direction** — Make it make sense
3. **Secure commitment** — Make it real

🌳 Multiplication
Scale without you

🪜 If it depends on you, it doesn't scale

1. **Enable Autonomy** — Let the team run without you
2. **Build Capability** — Grow future technical leaders
3. **Design for scale** — Will this hold over time?