

004

THE STORY OF UNSTUCK.

Behind every book is a story. This is ours. We are **Sandra Spataro** (a professor of organizational behavior at the Yale School of Management with a passion for teams, diversity, leadership, and what makes organizations effective) and **Keith Yamashita** (a cofounder of a firm in San Francisco that works with CEOs to reinvent, rejuvenate, and recenter their organizations).

The idea for UNSTUCK came about when Sandy was teaching an MBA course at Yale and invited Keith to teach a few classes with her. The topic for the classes? How to flex leadership and communications skills in complicated times. In preparing for those classes, our ambition was to create a tool that would help the students lead their teams through times of change. We wanted to take knowledge from Sandy's research, other thinkers in the field, and Keith's on-the-front-lines work with CEOs—and bake that knowledge into a form that these leaders could use in tough situations to drive the right actions in their teams.

We soon discovered that while there are thousands of books published every year on leadership, management, and innovation, very few function as in-the-moment tools that let

you take instant action. We ended up creating a set of flash cards, which we hastily named Unstuck Cards. And an interesting thing happened. The cards were a hit. The students demanded more of them. One student even remarked, "This is the stuff I came to business school to learn, wrapped up in a way that I can actually use." We were on to something.

Fast-forward a few months. Keith was invited by the editors at *Fast Company* magazine to speak about the topic of change at their annual RealTime conference. Rather than just create a standard presentation, we decided to create an entire experience — a book (a compilation of the Yale flash cards) and a room filled with activity stations and exercises to help conference attendees make change happen. More than 250 people participated. We heard things like "I get it. Finally, a way to get my team's head into the game again." "This helps me think through why we're not making any progress." "Hallelujah, there is hope!"

We knew we were on to not just a good tool, but a whole new way to help organizations get stronger and better at what they do. And the idea for the book you are holding was born.

Step

1

ADMITTING YOU'RE STUCK.

(Or how to recognize the symptoms.)

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BE HONEST. HOW IS IT REALLY GOING?

Stuck? Maybe it's only been for a day. A week. Okay, a month! Get out a pen and write down some thoughts about your symptoms. Be open. Be truthful. After all, no one is reading your answers, and the person who benefits most from your honesty is you.

Just how stuck are you?

- ▶ Describe the nature and duration of being stuck.
- ▶ Write down (in full glory) what you're feeling, why you're stuck, why it seems you can't forge ahead.
- ▶ Are you stuck on something?
With something? In something?
With someone?

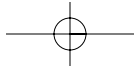
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010

Further things to write about:

- ▶ What are you trying to achieve?
(Don't just focus on the end goal. Think about your values.)
- ▶ Can you identify the roadblocks?
If so, what are they?
- ▶ Is it just you? Or is your whole team in a funk?

011

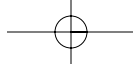


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Yet more things to write about:

- ▶ Have you already tried to get unstuck?
- ▶ Who do you have in your realm who can help you get unstuck?
- ▶ Afraid to admit you're stuck?

013



YOU'RE STU

RE STUCK.

It's okay. Really.
All great people get
stuck at some point.
The trick is knowing
how to get unstuck.

NOW, GO FORWARD BY ZOOMING OUT.

You've had some time to think about your symptoms, and you've taken an important first step: **You've started to admit that you might be stuck.** ▶ So, what do you do with that admission? ▶ How can you cut through the fog, the politics, the loss of optimism that comes from hitting a wall? ▶ How can you move forward when everything seems to be heading in reverse? Oddly enough, we find that moving forward often requires zooming out so you can see the bigger picture. Once you see the bigger picture, the actions you need to take become more clear.

You see, in working with hundreds of leaders, we've observed that there is a process they follow to get unstuck:

1. They diagnose why they're stuck. Like great doctors, they look at the symptoms to determine what's ailing their team, their organization, and their company. (We'll teach you how to do that in step 2, starting on page 28.)

2. They are systems thinkers. They get unstuck by rejuvenating different parts of their organization's system. This is about looking at your organization as a living organism that needs to be fed, inspired, protected, and nourished. To make a healthy organism, you have to put its fundamental systems into balance so the parts are working with each other rather than against each other. Organizations that are out of balance become stuck—unable to move forward. What's more, Darwin might have argued: Those organizations that remain stuck, become dead. (More about "systems thinking" in a moment.)

3. They get wildly innovative and intensely tactical about activating different parts of their organization's system. The majority of pages in this book are dedicated to the methods great leaders use to get their teams unstuck. Some of these ways are quirky, while others are common sense. Some are inventive, others are basic. This book is a compendium of these ideas on how to get unstuck; each idea can be powerful if used at the right time.

LEARN TO FIX THE SYSTEM, NOT JUST THE SYMPTOM.

Now you know a little about how great leaders get unstuck, and you're probably ready to charge ahead. But before you do, it's smart to learn a little more about systems thinking. That's because getting unstuck is not merely the act of treating the symptom of being stuck, but rather of getting to the root cause. Or even better, it's about trying to fix the whole system of your company, your department, or your team. To become more effective, you must master ways to help get the system back into balance.

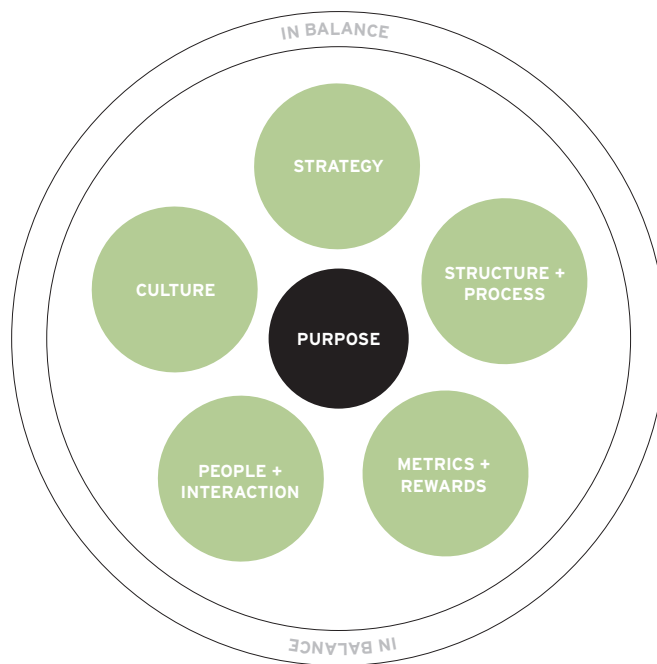
To succeed as a leader (or, for that matter, as an individual), you need to unify:

- ▶ **Your purpose.** The driving ambition that shapes what you and your organization aspire to achieve and work collectively to make a reality.
- ▶ **Your strategy.** The smart way you go about achieving your purpose.
- ▶ **Your people and the way they interact.** The people that are assembled — and rallied — to execute the strategy, and, as important, how they treat each other to get the work done.
- ▶ **Your structure and process.** How the team is structured — who makes decisions, who is included and who is not, who has authority over whom, who is in charge, who has informal authority (not necessarily a title, but lots of influence). And the formal process (or simply the understood method) by which the team collaborates to get the job done.
- ▶ **Your metrics and rewards.** The activities and actions that get measured (or at least paid attention to) as indicators of whether your team or organization is delivering on its purpose. Once these are measured, your organization rewards those who've been part of the accomplishment.
- ▶ **Your culture.** The largely unwritten set of rules that govern behavior — or, as one CEO said to us recently, how work gets done when you don't specify how the work should get done.

It helps to create a visual model of these six elements, and use it to understand where you need to take action.

SEE THE SYSTEM.

This diagram can help you think about what's going right, and what's not, in your realm. It's a picture of a healthy system—the team's essential elements are all in balance. When you're stuck, it's usually because one or more elements have gotten off track. How does this picture compare with what's going on with your team? Is your strategy in line with your purpose? Are you structured to deliver on that strategy? Do you have the right people—and do they work well together? Is it clear what victory is—and do you know what the leading indicators of success look like? To move your team into the success zone, you need to put your system into congruence. That's the road to getting unstuck.

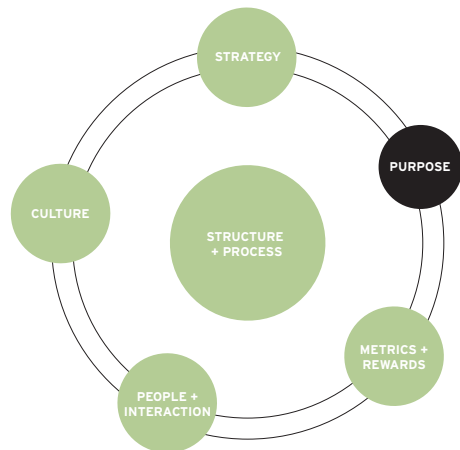


The inspiration for this model came from two primary sources: a classic Friday late-afternoon conversation with Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, who is one of the more holistic systems thinkers we know; and from David A. Nadler and Michael Tushman, whose work in "A Congruence Model for Organizational Effectiveness" shaped our thinking. **TO LEARN MORE, SEE OUR LIST OF SOURCES, STARTING ON PAGE 172. ►**

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DO ANY OF THESE SYSTEMS GIVE YOU INSIGHT INTO YOUR OWN?

These diagrams show just a few of the ways systems can get out of balance. You might see your situation in one — or even a few — of these. Or your situation might look completely different. Whatever the case, our goal is to help you train your mind to examine your symptoms of being stuck, and determine what might be out of alignment about the system of your team.

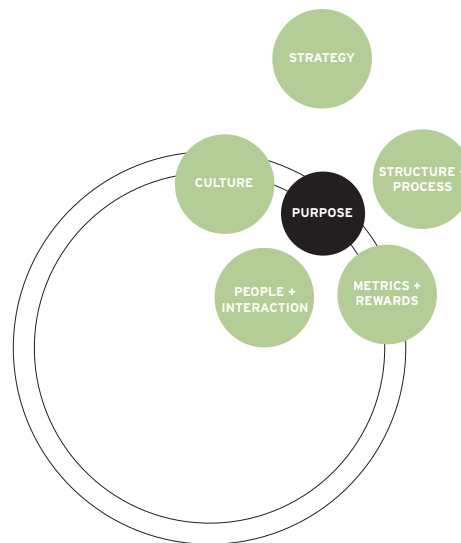


◀ **Protocol-crazy**

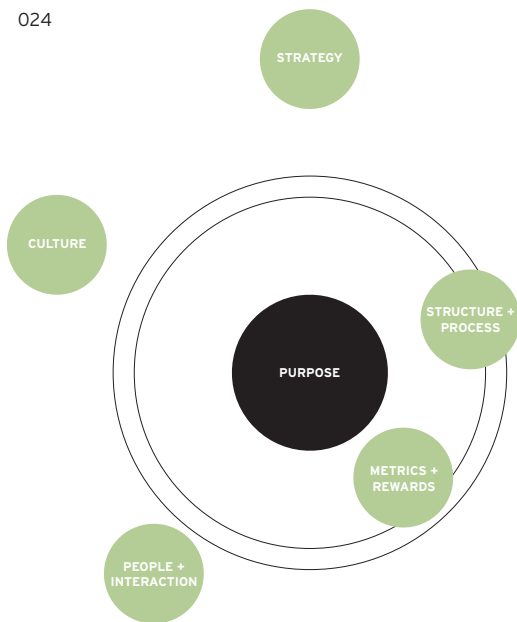
Does your organization value structure (hierarchy, titles, rank, who reports to whom) and process ("This is the way we've always done it.") over anything else? It's protocol over substance. Think DMV.

▶ **Off-kilter**

Is your organization high-performing but caught in a seismic shift in your industry? Your system may be aligned but aimed at the wrong task. Think Microsoft caught by surprise in the rapid rise of the Internet.



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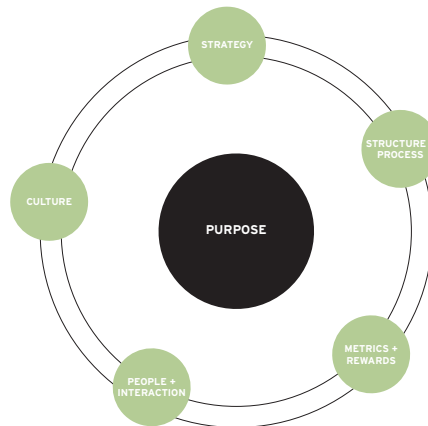


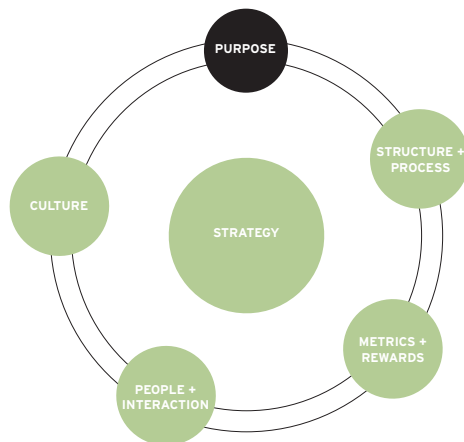
◀ **Discombobulated**

All the right elements are present within the system—even a vital and compelling purpose. But nothing pulls them together. Each element is working against the others, and the system is out of balance. Think about an organization going through a major restructuring, or two firms that have been recently merged into one.

▶ **All heart, no action**

Do you have an amazing purpose, but little means to act on it? Think about the not-for-profit with an important cause, but lacking the talent or discipline to execute it.



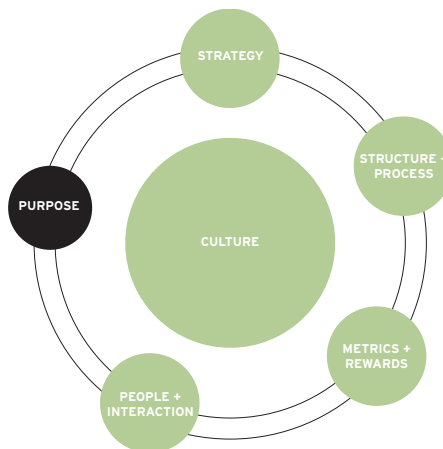


◀ **All brains, no brawn**

All strategy, but no ability to pull it off. Start-ups often suffer from this ailment.

▶ **Stuck in your own lore**

Do you have a culture so dominant that it has become impossible to innovate within it? Everything is about preserving what has been, not focusing on what could be. Think megacorporations gone complacent. Or cults, for that matter.



JUST HOW STUCK ARE YOU?

One last diagnostic to determine the severity of your stuckness. Look over your scribbles and notes on the previous pages, then answer these questions:

▶ Do you have a clear, inspiring purpose?

YES

NO

HMM...

▶ Do you have the right people, in the right positions to make a difference?

YES

NO

HMM...

▶ Do you work effectively as a team?
Can you always get the right stuff done?

YES

NO

HMM...

▶ Does the team truly get the most from diversity — in skills, geography, gender, age, ethnicity — to broaden its thinking?

YES NO HMM...

▶ Do you know how to make decisions?

YES NO HMM...

▶ Do those decisions stick?

YES NO HMM...

▶ Is your team capable of radical ideas?

YES NO HMM...

▶ If your team leader quit today, could the team carry on?

YES NO HMM...

If you answered no to any of these questions, turn the page to dig even deeper. (By the way, if you answered yes to all of these questions, you're either part of an extraordinary organization or you're deluding yourself. Even the highest-performing teams rarely earn a yes on all fronts.) Looking for even more help? Go to the "Diagnostic Tools" section at www.unstuck.com.

Step

2

DIAGNOSING WHY YOU'RE STUCK.

(Or how to get at the root causes.)

030

THE SERIOUS SEVEN

Let's move from symptoms to causes. Symptoms vary quite a bit—no two teams feel stuck in quite the same way. But a great majority of “stucks” result from at least one of seven primary causes—what we've termed the Serious Seven. In the following pages, we describe each cause. If you suffer from one or more of the Serious Seven, you'll very quickly recognize yourself in these descriptions. Then, knowing which causes apply, you can craft a plan of action.

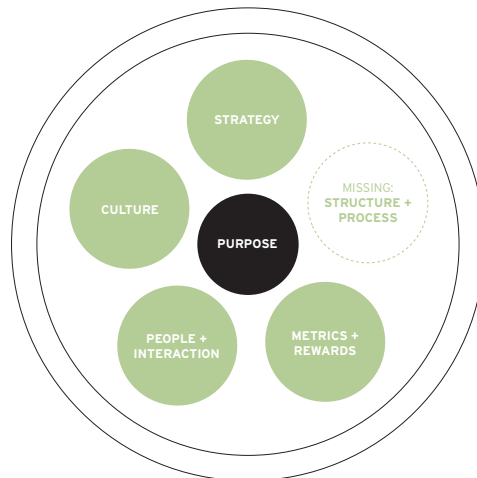
OVERWHELMED
EXHAUSTED
DIRECTIONLESS
HOPELESS
BATTLE-TORN
WORTHLESS
ALONE

WHICH APPLY TO YOU? ▶

032

The Serious Seven No. 1

Overwhelmed



Feeling overwhelmed is most often the result of an organization's lack of structure and process. **TO BEGIN THINKING ABOUT THE PROBLEM, GO TO PAGE 67. ►**

You're stuck because your team doesn't know what to do next. You used to be so certain about where to go, but here you are now, rudderless. It all seems like too much work. Or you feel like you're under too much scrutiny. Or there are too many moving parts. Or you don't have enough people or time to get it all done.

Tell-tale signs: It's procrastination city. You can't figure out why you can't get started—you may even have many of the elements to succeed, but you're still stuck. The task ahead feels huge.

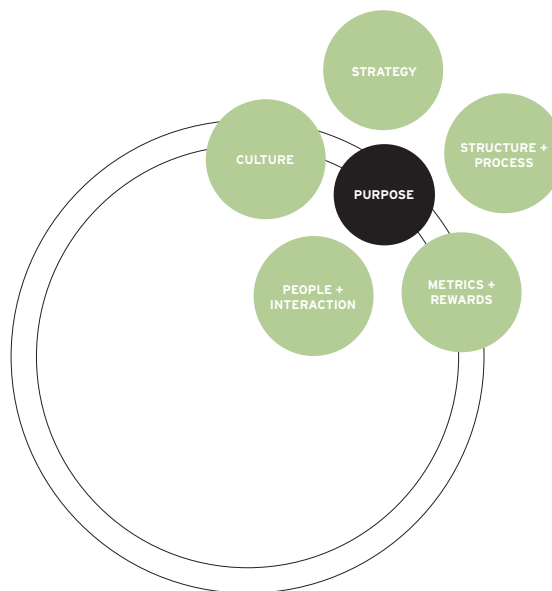
Sound familiar? ▶ "We know what to do, but we have no idea how we're going to get it done." ▶ "Is it just me, or does the boss look like a deer in the headlights?" ▶ "Failure might not be an option. But it doesn't look like success is either." ▶ "Does it seem like we spend more time talking about how to scale back the project than actually doing the work of the project?"

If left untreated: You'll fail to tap into the great talent of your team. It's like having a car with a turbocharger that never gets used.

034

The Serious Seven No. 2

Exhausted



Feeling exhausted most often comes from concentrating on the individual parts of the system, but neglecting to bring them into balance. **TO GET ENERGIZED, LOOK PAST THE EXHAUSTION— AND INVENT A PROTOTYPE OF THE END STATE. GO TO PAGE 115. ►**

You're stuck because it's been rough sailing recently. Perhaps your original intent — your North Star, if you will — was clear. But as the team sailed on, the sextant was thrown overboard. Once a brilliant crew, the team is now paralyzed by politics, wasted efforts, opinions arising from fear, and even the occasional mutiny. Progress is slowing to a standstill.

Tell-tale signs: Team burnout. Resentment over new projects. Waning interest or involvement in team get-togethers and meetings.

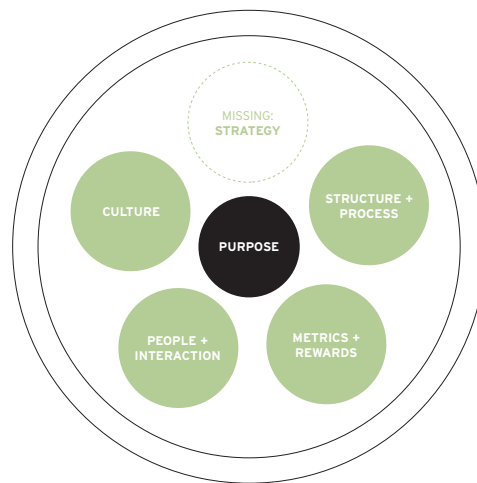
Sound familiar? ▶ "It's not like things are broken, but it doesn't feel right either." ▶ "I'm pooped." ▶ "If it's not one thing, it's another. Once we get one thing fixed, something else springs a leak."
▶ "Have you ever noticed the boss is too chicken to ask for help?"
▶ "Hey, where did all the fun go?"

If left untreated: Exhaustion slowly gives way to cynicism. Shutdown, then backlash, may not be far behind. It's like losing the other runners — and even the course — halfway through a marathon.

036

The Serious Seven No. 3

Directionless



Feeling directionless most often happens when there is a lack of strategy in the organization—or the strategy is out of sync with the rest of the system. **FIX THAT BY FIRST DEFINING YOUR ASPIRATION. GO TO PAGE 51. ►**

You're stuck because your team is all thrust, no vector. People are busy, but aren't necessarily effective. Everyone is obsessed with their to-do list, yet there is no "big picture" to guide their actions. Decisions are made with little regard for the context of the day — let alone what tomorrow might bring.

Tell-tale signs: It may seem like there's a lot of good action taking place, but there are few tangible results. Often, team members are unable to connect their work to the larger context of what must be done. What's more, judgment calls about what's important often turn out to be wrong later.

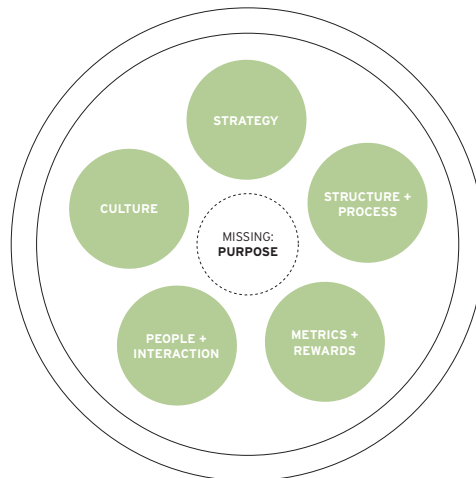
Sound familiar? ▶ "I'm so busy, I don't have time to think."
▶ "We get to good, but rarely to great." ▶ "Why doesn't the boss tell us why we're doing this?" ▶ "Luck is our biggest salvation."

If left untreated: The outcomes are often mediocrity and a failure to reach desired goals. The team may arrive somewhere, but it is not likely to be the correct destination.

038

The Serious Seven No. 4

Hopeless



Feeling hopeless is often the result of an anemic purpose. You might have the other elements to succeed, but without purpose you have no energy. **TO FIX THAT, USE THE EXERCISE ON PAGE 51. ►**

You're stuck because your team lacks a central purpose. A kind of general defeatism has set in. The team is spinning. All the hard work seems like exactly that—just hard work. There is no feeling of reward, no sense of achievement.

Tell-tale signs: Your team used to have tons of passion—but where'd it all go? There's no rallying cry, especially when the going gets tough. It takes an awfully big dose of success to get the same rush you used to.

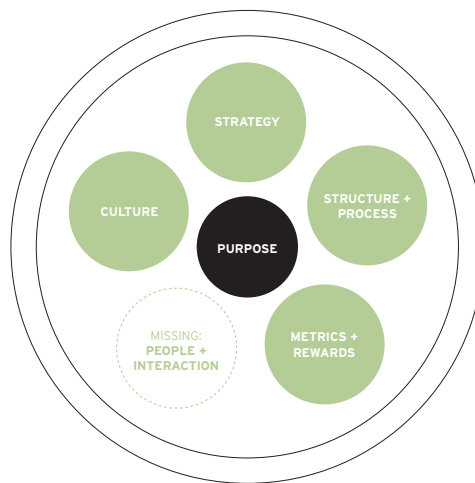
Sound familiar? ▶ "We have no idea why we exist." ▶ "We all have our own agendas, and no one is on mine." ▶ "I get a certain joy when there's a rumor I'm going to be transferred to a different team." ▶ "I'm outta here."

If left untreated: A lack of inspiration can be contagious. One person's uncaring attitude soon becomes the mood of the group. Before long, motivating your team, rather than doing the work, is how you spend virtually all your time. And you feel like a cheerleader with laryngitis.

040

The Serious Seven No. 5

Battle-torn



Feeling battle-torn can result from any number of problems with the people on your team and the way they interact. **BEGIN FIXING THAT BY GETTING PEOPLE TO PLAY NEW ROLES IN MEETINGS. GO TO PAGE 99. ►**

You're stuck because your team can't get along. This syndrome leads to a group so torn by its own foibles that it never even gets to fight the outside enemy. This is friendly fire at its most disturbing. It can bring even the toughest to their knees.

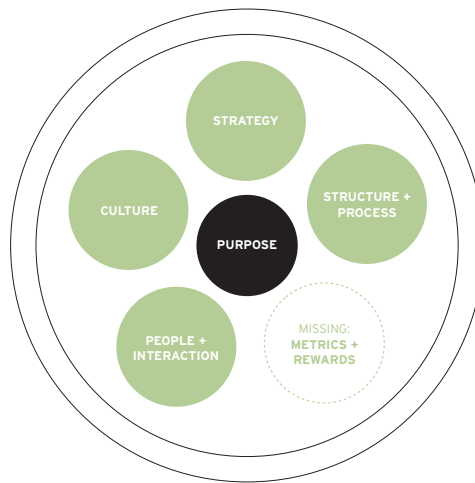
Tell-tale signs: Team members with hurt feelings, bruised egos, or political agendas. Team interactions characterized by unresolved conflict, defensiveness, lack of communication, and high levels of inhibition. Factions, cliques, bullies, and desertions.

Sound familiar? ▶ "We spend more time fighting than working."
▶ "You don't dare speak up in meetings because someone will take your head off." ▶ "Psst. Collude with me, and you'll be okay."
▶ "I never said I'd protect you." ▶ "Emotions are for wimps."
▶ "Let's take this offline." (And all the real decisions are made in the hallways after official meetings.) ▶ "People are only comfortable offering ideas one on one."

If left untreated: The team never turns its attention to the real task at hand. It's like a dysfunctional family trying to throw a wedding.

The Serious Seven No. 6

Worthless



Feeling worthless is often the result of poor metrics (you don't know what leading indicators to watch for) and poor rewards (when you do good work, it goes unnoticed). **START THINKING ABOUT MOTIVATION AND INCENTIVES ON PAGE 68. ►**

You're stuck because your team is unable to recognize what success looks like. Moving targets. Muddy expectations. The right actions aren't rewarded. Even when the team does something amazing, it's overlooked. Before long, the team feels its contributions don't matter.

Tell-tale signs: You don't know what victory looks like — so you wouldn't know if you achieved it. The metrics of performance seem vague. Team members are puzzled over which goals to pursue. Management has little credibility — when they request that work be done, employees don't always listen. Commitment wanes.

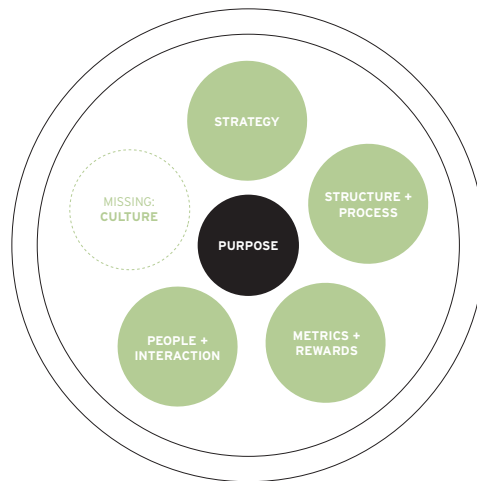
Sound familiar? ▶ "The boss asked me to do this. Should I even bother?" ▶ "Do you think when they said it was due Friday they meant Friday?" ▶ "It seems like we're all just going through the motions." ▶ "Okay, I'll do your project — but what will you give me if I do?"

If left untreated: Team members spend their time thinking up ways to sabotage progress — except for the few martyrs who continue working when neither the expectations nor the rewards are clear. Imagine a whole team of Dilberts.

044

The Serious Seven No. 7

Alone



Feeling all alone is often the result of a lack of a cohesive culture—the team just doesn't have its own religion to unify everyone. **TO SEE THE LIGHT, LET YOUR SOUL BE YOUR GUIDE AND START ON PAGE 75. ►**

You're stuck because the team has lost its own religion. It used to feel like a close-knit unit, but somewhere along the way the sense of belonging was replaced by the haze of an identity crisis. Your crew lacks a culture to unite it, so it is far less than the sum of its parts.

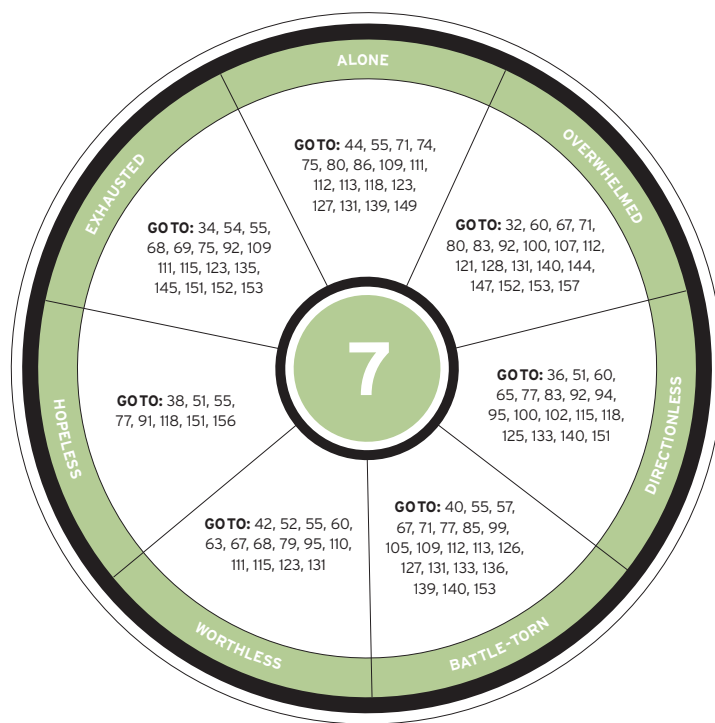
Tell-tale signs: Individual team members make up their own rules. The team never seems to be in sync. Every meeting feels like the first time the team has worked together. Lots of new leaders pop up, but they don't seem to last very long.

Sound familiar? ▶ "Unless the boss tells us what to do, nothing gets done." ▶ "New team members can't seem to master the ropes." ▶ "It's just chaos, chaos, chaos." ▶ "You can get away with pretty much anything you want."

If left untreated: The costs of coordination go through the roof. The group has no natural pattern of success, and methods are invented anew every time. Visionary leadership is replaced by the need for command-and-control authority. "Herding cats" doesn't even begin to describe it.

WHICH OF THE SERIOUS SEVEN APPLY TO YOU?

The wheel at the right suggests paths you can follow to get unstuck. Feeling particularly overwhelmed? Follow the page numbers we've suggested. Feeling battle-torn? Follow the pages suggested for that. Feeling worthless? Well, you get the idea. Each collection of pages represents a journey. Along the way, you'll be given lots of relevant examples, ideas, and tools. That said, you can start virtually anywhere in the next section of this book—just look at the bottom of each page for where to go next. No matter which method you choose, enjoy what you do. (Remember: This is the fun part. Getting unstuck can be liberating!)



The Serious Seven—and what you can do to combat them. Pick the word that best describes your current condition, then use the tools on the pages listed above.
IF YOU WANT A MORE STRUCTURED PATH OF ACTION, TURN TO PAGE 162. ►