

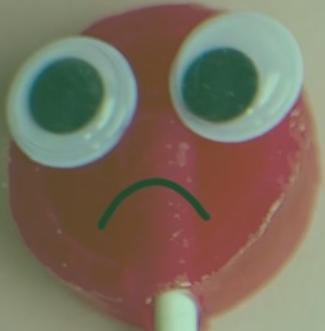
# Learned Helplessness Getting Your Team Unstuck

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**Principle Solutions Strategist**  
**3Cloud**

Level: Intermediate, etc.

Your Code Powers the World.  
Our Training Powers You.

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X  
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# Learned Helplessness Getting Your Team Unstuck

Sara Caldwell

# Activity

# Sara Caldwell

## Passion Led Me Here



Values	Kindness   Adaptability
Passion	Helping organizations solve complex problems
Location	St. Louis
Quirks	Loves Old Rescued Dogs, Jigsaw puzzles
Email	<a href="mailto:scaldwell@3CloudSolutions.com">scaldwell@3CloudSolutions.com</a>

# Jane

## Agile Leader

- + Is a fan of Daniel Pink (mastery, autonomy, & purpose)
- + Knows ‘the best architecture, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.’
- + Truly believes Agile Leadership enables better decisions and outcomes
- + Tells her team they have the authority to make decisions



Connect between a history  
of command-and-control  
leadership and helpless in  
the workplace



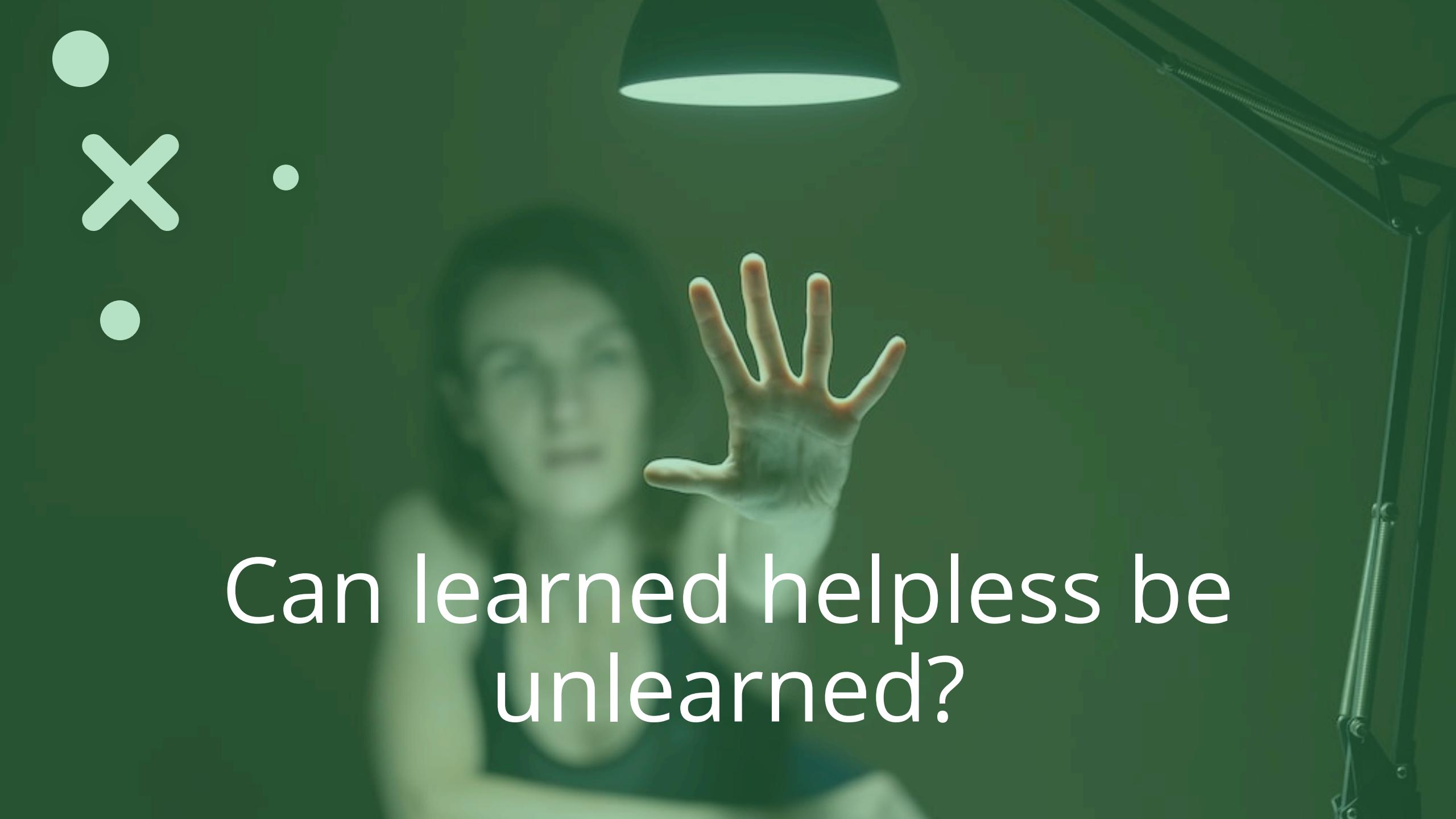
Nerd Alert





If we feel that we have no control in an area, we learn any improvement effort is a waste of time.



A photograph of a person sitting at a desk, looking down and to the side with a thoughtful expression. Their right hand is raised near their face. A desk lamp is positioned above them, casting light on their face. The background is dark.

Can learned helplessness be  
unlearned?

x

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Let's talk about what happens inside people

# Two Forces Within Us

1. Be good self
2. Get better self

# Leadership Is Language

*The Hidden Power  
of What You Say—*

*and What  
You Don't*

**L. DAVID MARQUET**

Author of *TURN THE SHIP AROUND!*

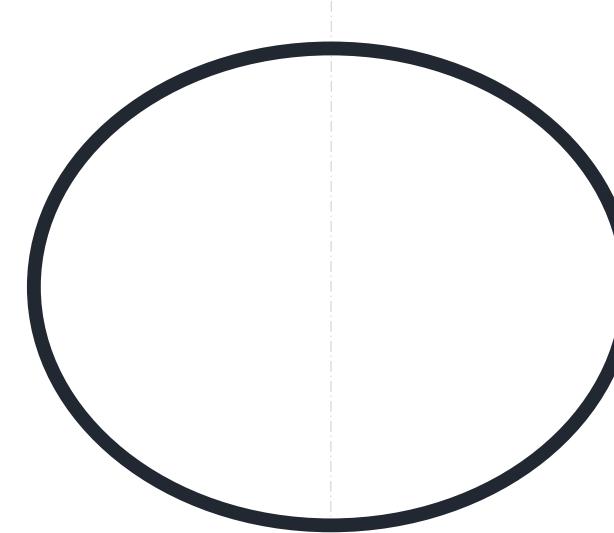


## Be Good Self

Protect one's previous choices

Feel good about work we have done

Validate we belong at the table

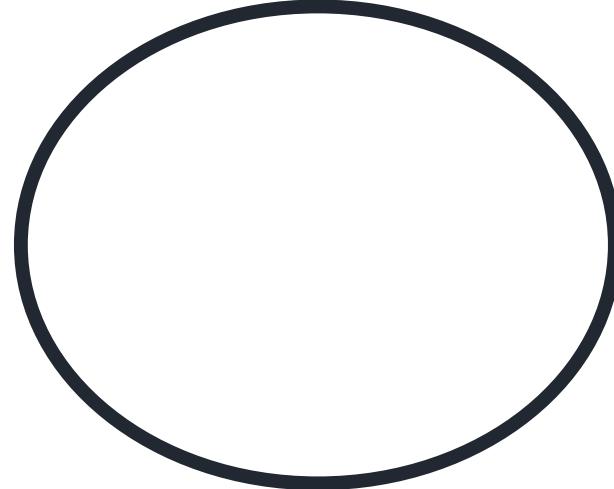


## Get Better Self

Distance oneself from previous learning and knowledge

Curious about what others think

Focused on improvement



## Be Good Self

"This is the way we have always done it"

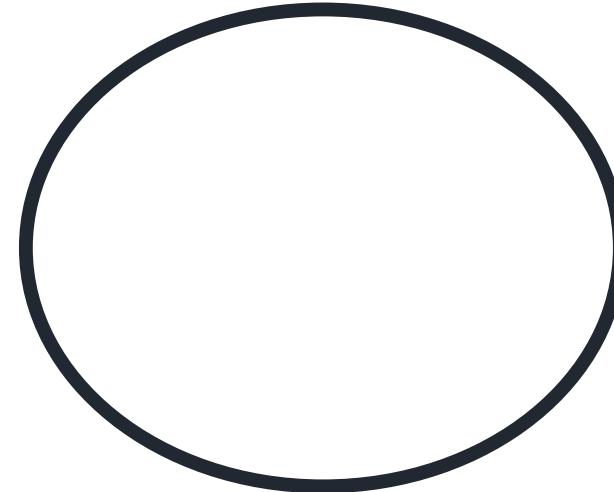
"You are new here"

"I would have done it that way if I had enough time (or insert another constraint here)"

"I think everyone did their best job"...

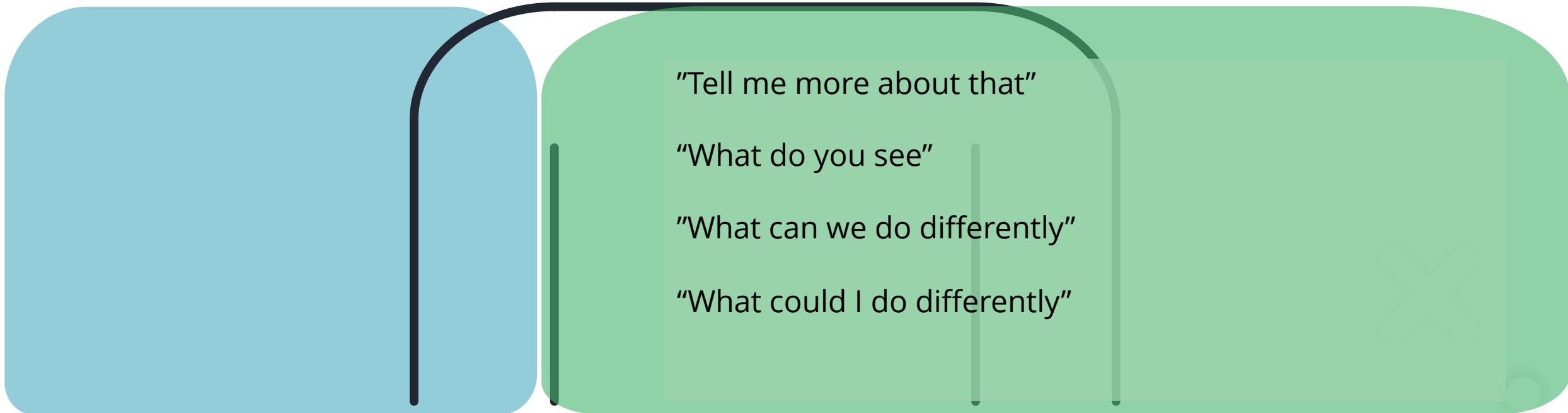
"I think John did their best job"...

## Get Better Self



Be Good Self

Get Better Self



# Learned Helplessness - Getting Your Team Unstuck

1. Stop the clock
2. Waterline
3. Language
4. Tools to tie it all together

# Leadership Is Language

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# Stop the Clock

- + Cadence of retrospectives and planning sessions
- + Remove the pressure (for a small time) so your team can think

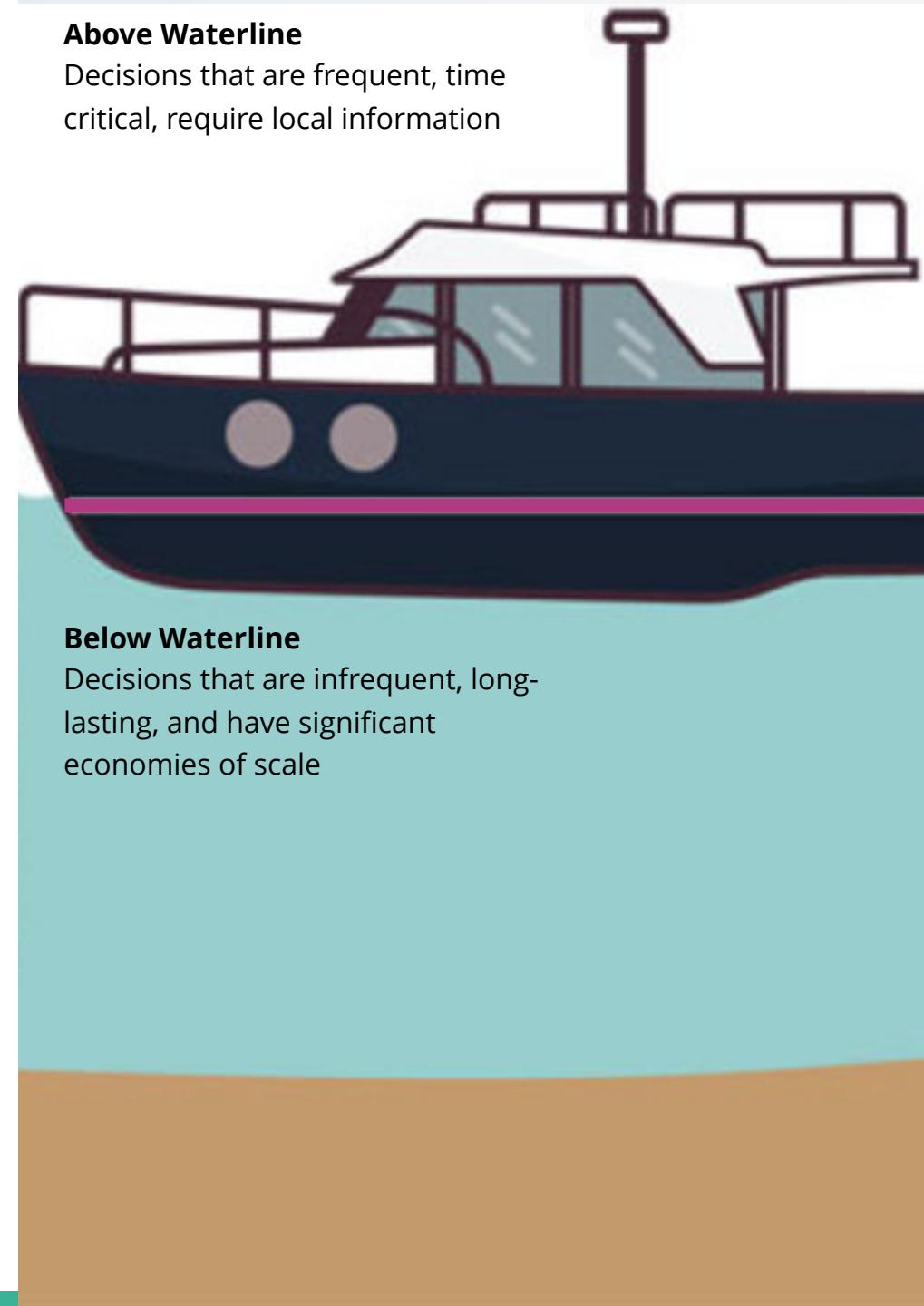


# Waterline

- + What decisions can be made without you
- + Decisions 'above the waterline' can be made much faster
  - These are likely reversible
- + Decisions 'below the waterline' could sink the ship
  - Let the team know you need to involved or make those decisions

## Above Waterline

Decisions that are frequent, time critical, require local information





# Language

- + Question structure
- + Nouns over verbs
- + Process/work not person



# What Do These Questions Have In Common?

- What do we want to do differently in the next sprint?
- How should we change the process during our next process-focused work period?
- What worked well that we want to keep and not change?
- What do we want to remember about this for next time?
- How could this be done better?
- What improvements could we make to the process?

# What Do These Questions Have In Common?

- **What** do we want to do differently in the next sprint?
- **How** should we change the process during our next process-focused work period?
- **What** worked well that we want to keep and not change?
- **What** do we want to remember about this for next time?
- **How** could this be done better?
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# Language

- + 'How' and 'what' questions
- + Learning moment, NOT teaching moment
- + One question at a time (super guilty)

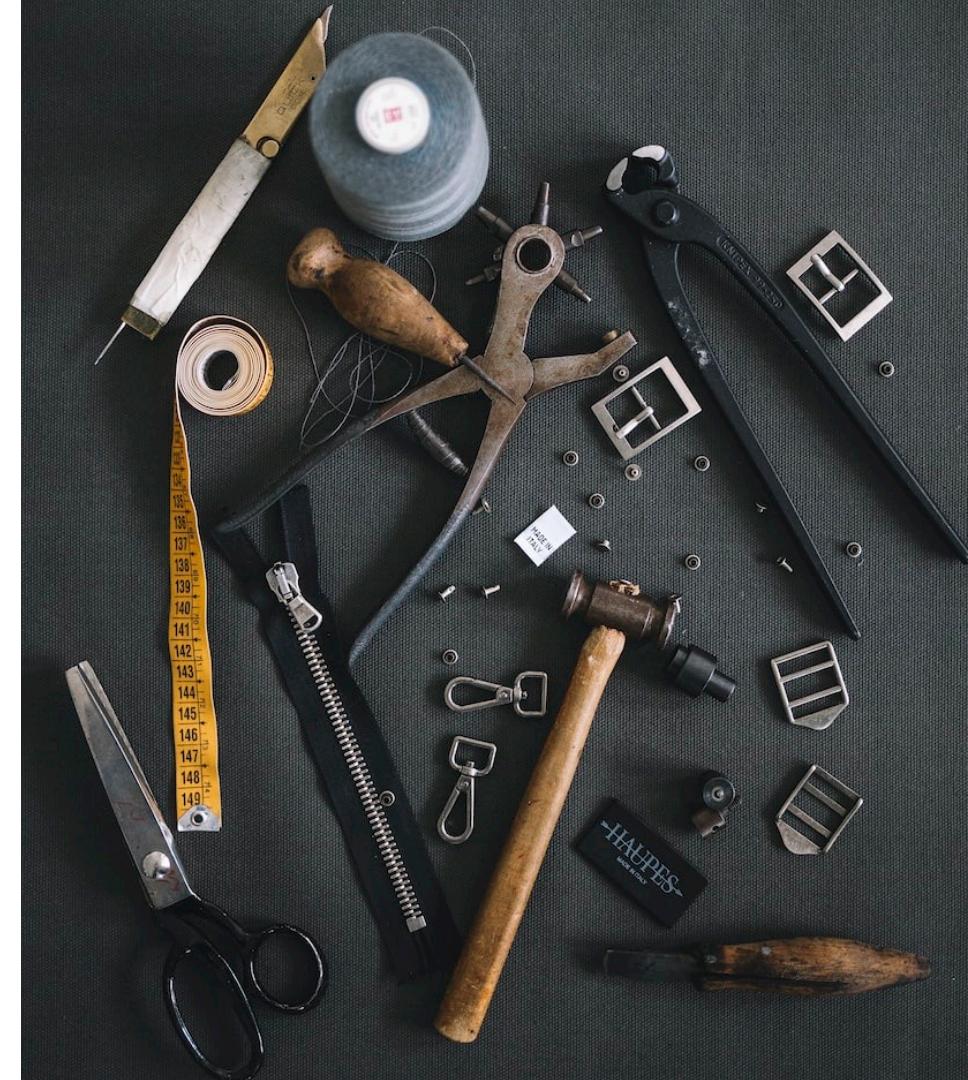
# Tools to Tie It Together

## + Brainstorming

- 1-2-4-all

## + Moving Forward

- Probability cards
  - + What's behind the vote?
  - + What they might be seeing that we don't?



# Caution

- Don't address it directly
- Be gentle and kind
- Don't be a good idea fairy (guilty)
- 'Why' is not your friend



# Activity

# Summary - Getting Your Team Unstuck

- + Stop the clock
  - + Planning and retros
- + Waterline
  - + Clear is kind
- + Language
  - + Question structure
  - + Nouns over verbs
  - + Process/work not person
- + Tools
  - + 1-2-4-all
  - + Probability cards

## Leadership Is Language

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# Resources

- + Seligman ME (1972). "Learned helplessness". *Annual Review of Medicine*. 23 (1): 407–412. [doi:10.1146/annurev.me.23.020172.002203](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.me.23.020172.002203). PMID 4566487.
- + Marquet, L. David. *Leadership is Language*. Portfolio, February, 4, 2020