

The Three Legged Stool

Using analogy to power team alignment, clarity, and sustainable change

Prepared by

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About Me:

I'm a Business Strategy, Agile & Process expert from Memphis, TN.

I value doing the right things for the right reasons.

I've been working in the Tech / Agile space since 2005. I also am fascinated with the enneagram and studying teams and team dynamics. I enjoy helping teams be better, together.

I've been speaking at conferences for 10+ years, topics like Agile Process to Team Dynamics.

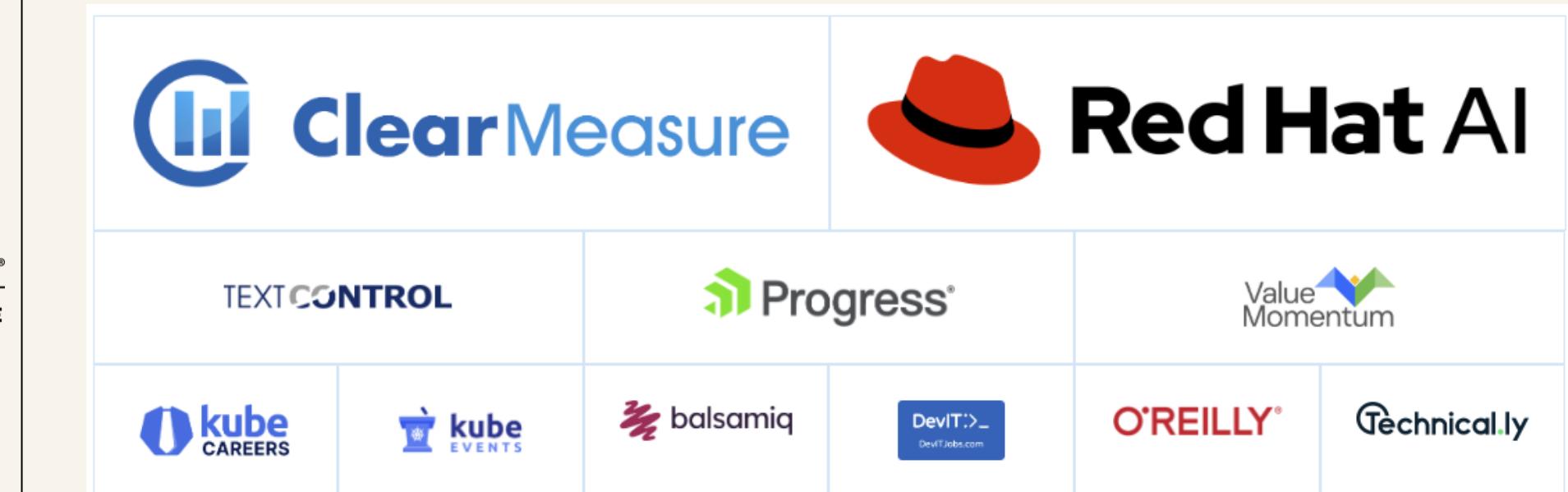
I'm a mom to two beautiful two college girls and a BUSY middle school cheerleader...

AND two adorable tiny velociraptors, I mean Corgis, Shelby (4) and Jack (1).



Big Thanks to:

Techbash and Kalahari Resorts and the rest of this
years sponsors for having us here today!



Today's Agenda:

We'll cover the following items mostly in this order, and throw in A LOT of story telling!

What is the 3-Legged Stool Analogy and How is it relevant

Why is it Effective and Why it Works

Leaders and Balance

How to recognize Imbalance and Rebalance

How to Communicate with Leaders

Q & A

**What is
a Stool?**



The 3-Legged Tool Explained:

I heard this analogy once and used it ever since.

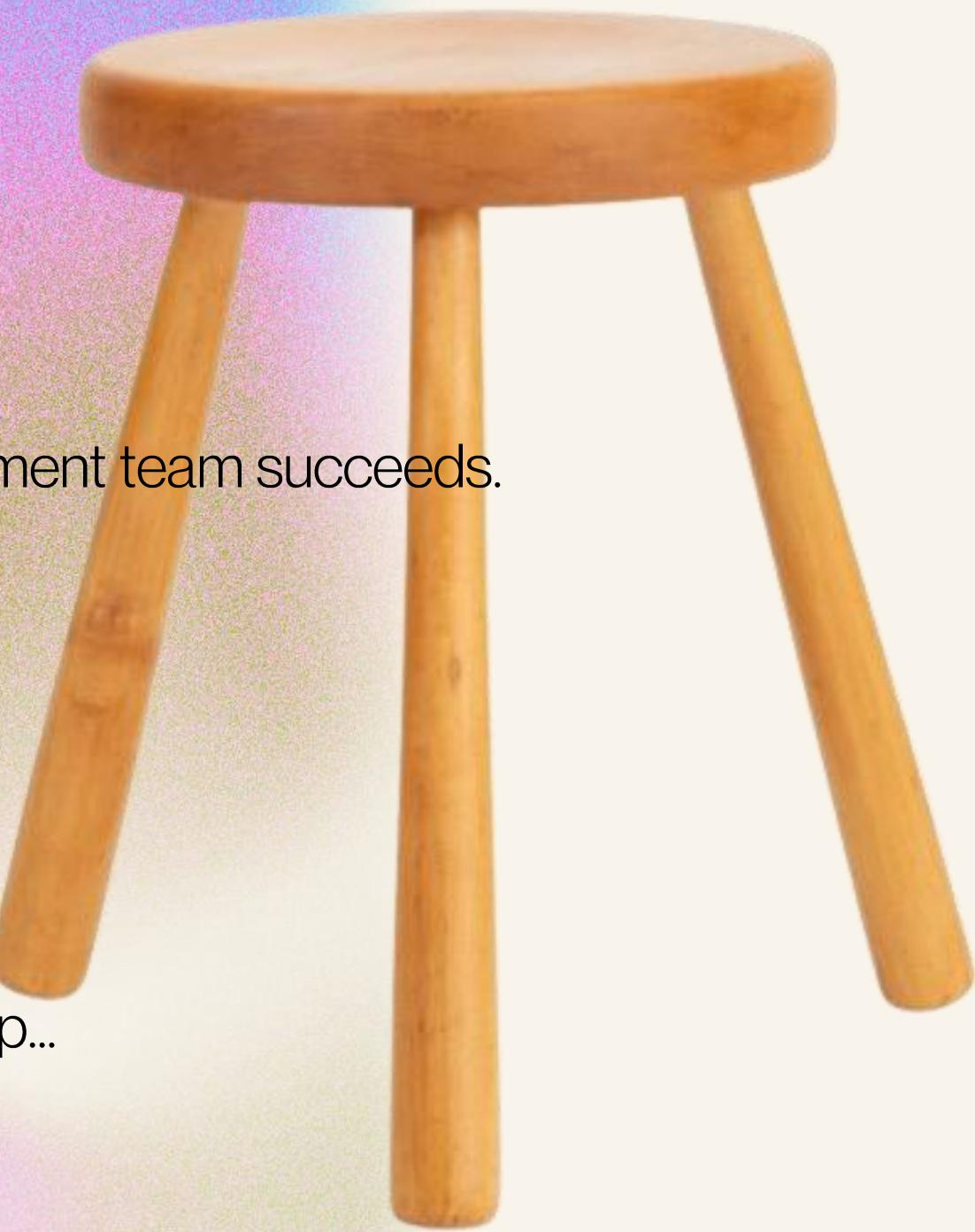
A simple piece of furniture makes a powerful analogy for how a product development team succeeds.

It helps any company explain what's at the heart of their culture.

At its core, it's simple.

People, Process, Product.

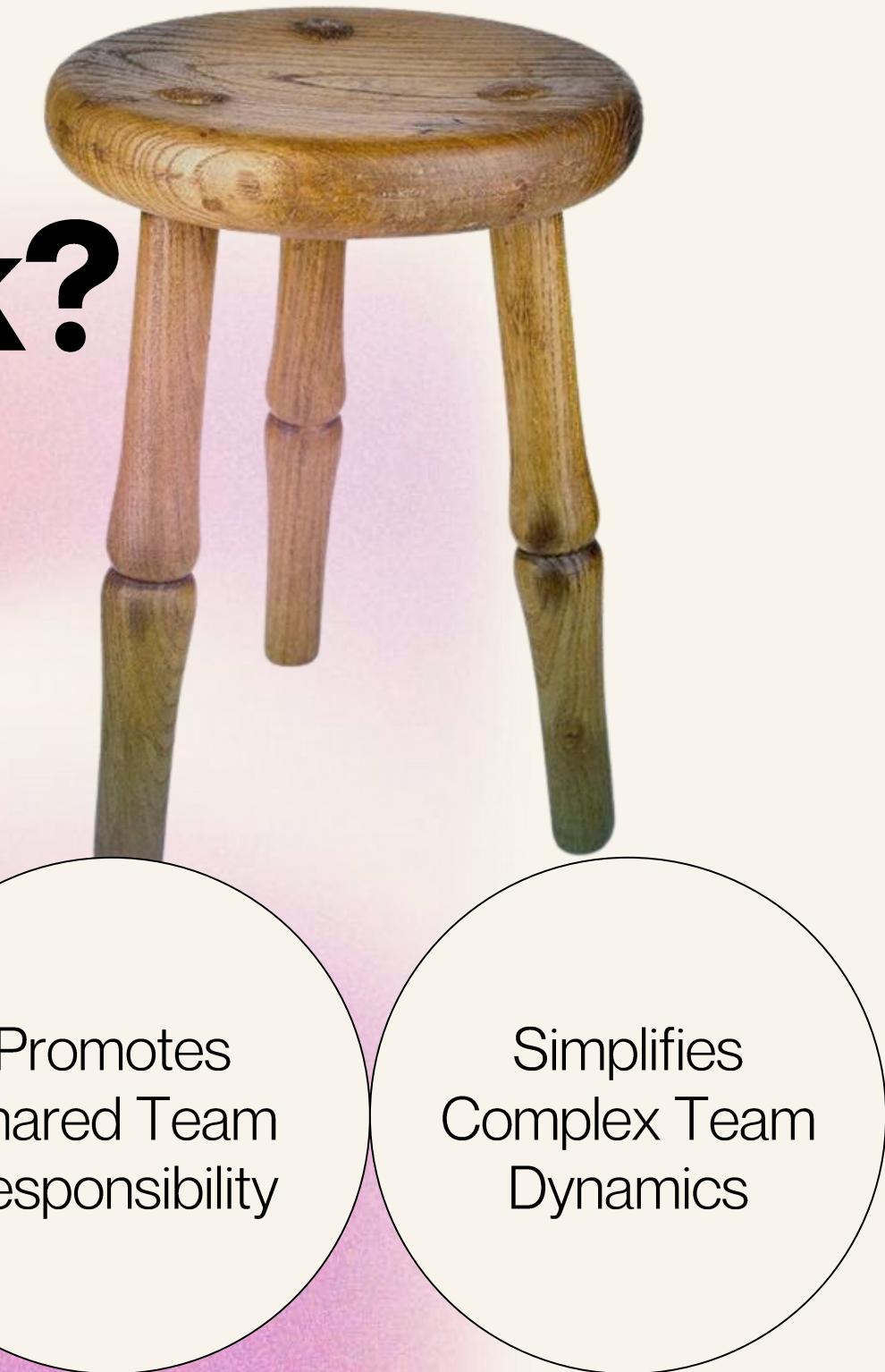
The implications of said analogy, however, run so very deep...



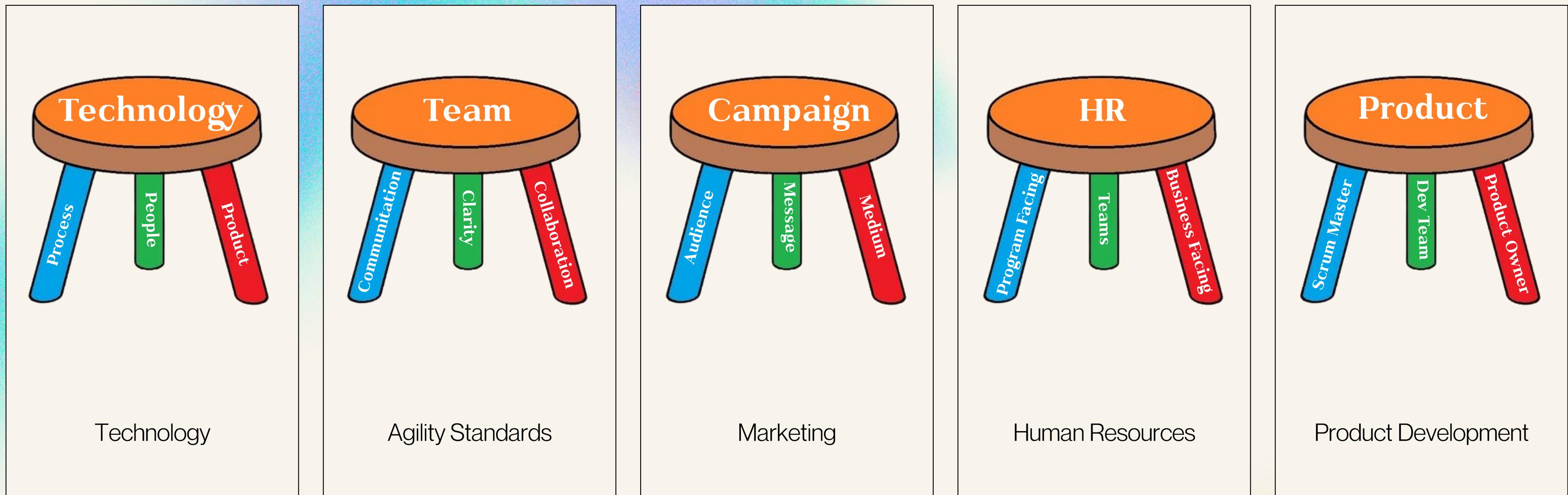


Why does this work?

The 3-legged stool works because...



What Can a Stool Support?





Agile's 3-Legged Stool



The three legs represent key components:

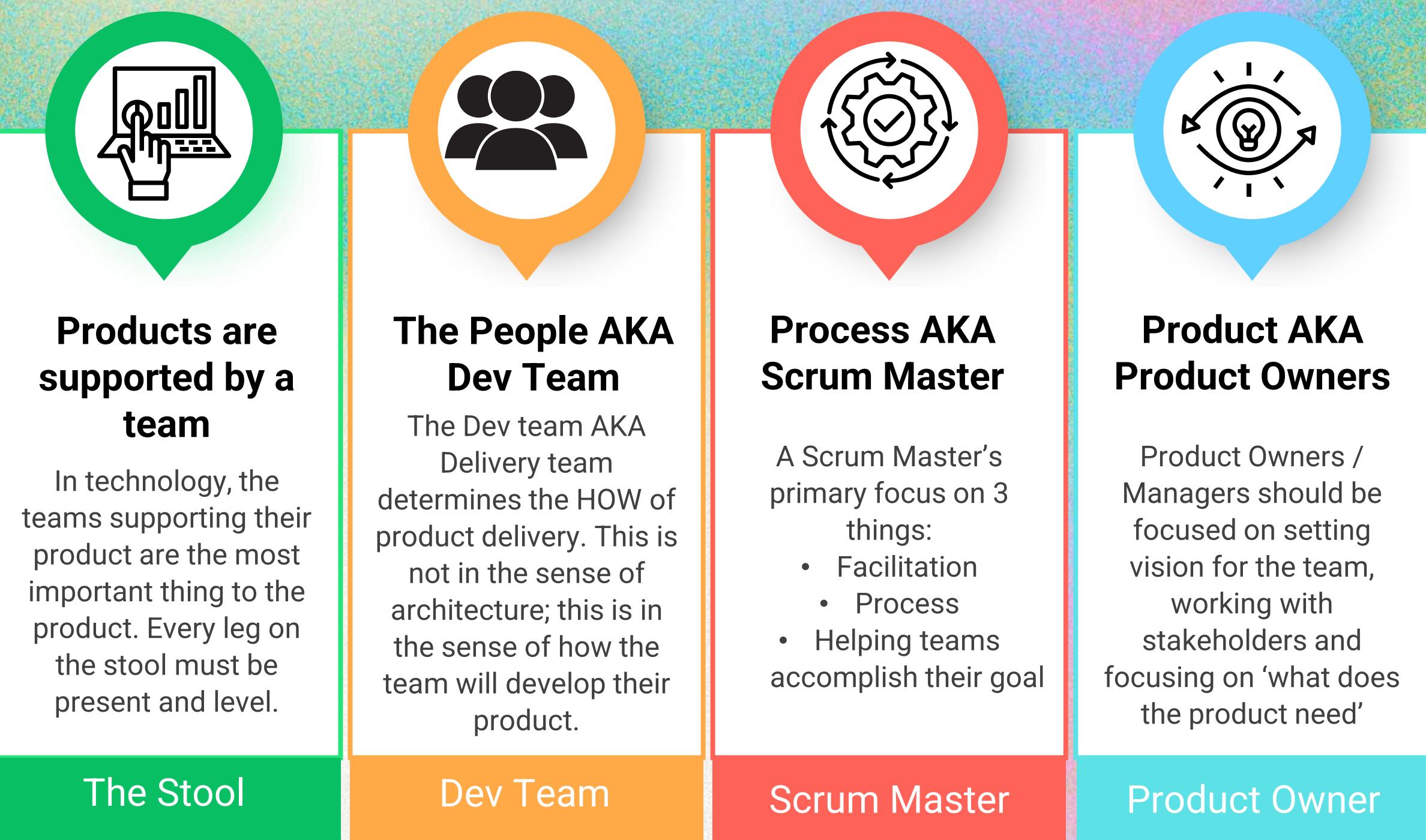
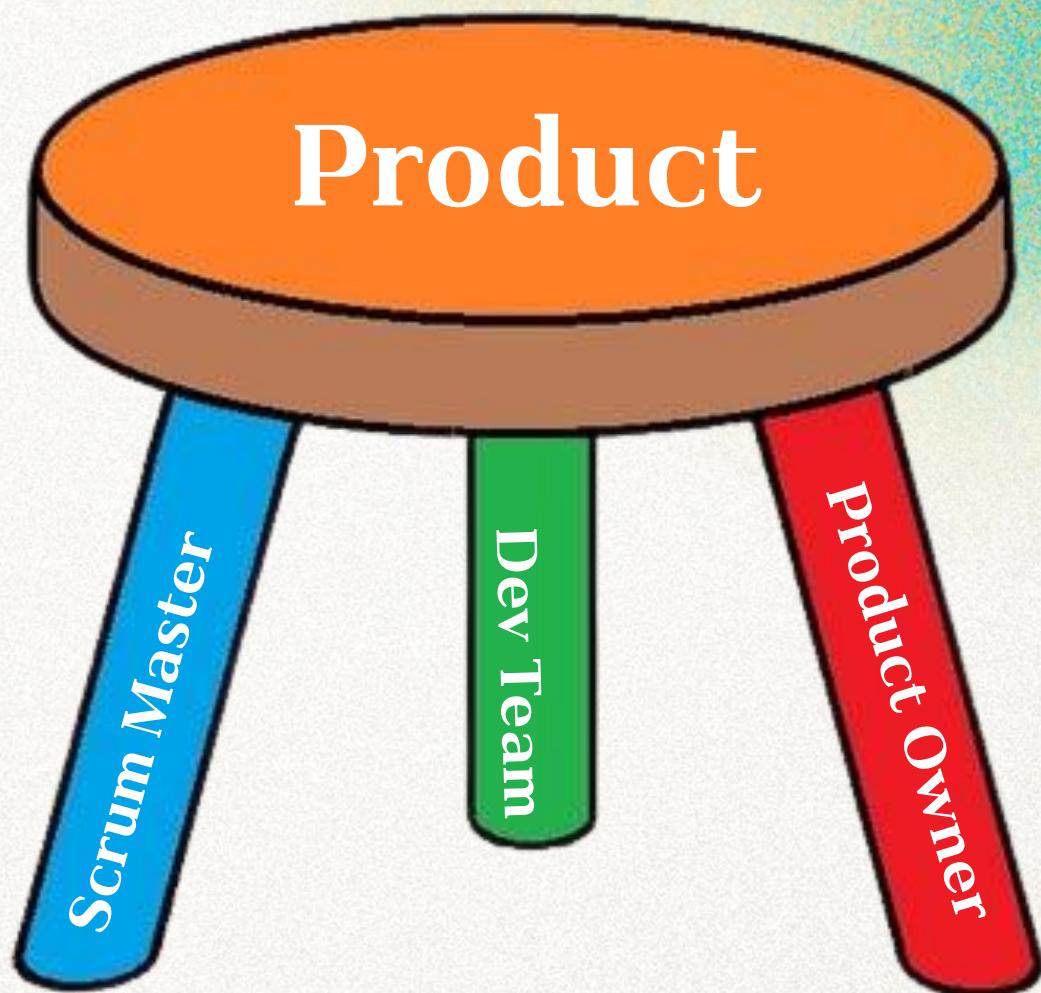
Clarity

Communication

Collaboration

HOW DOES THE 3-LEGGED STOOL APPLY?

Steps to assign meaningful labels for supervised learning



**What's A
Leader's
Role?**



Leaders Balance Load

All legs should be strong and stable, not higher / lower than the other or the stool is supporting it's item.

There can also not be extra load on any leg to compensate for weak or missing legs (roles), nor can we extend one.

A Leader's role for a team is to be engaged with the team to keep each leg performing as it should and keep balance in the team.



Communication and Collaboration

When an org promotes and fosters communication and collaboration as a part of their culture, it's proven employees will perform better, success rates improve, mistakes are fewer, retention rates are higher.

What?

Teams Communicate a lot, but mostly to stay up to date on what each other is doing, share what's happening in their areas, teach about their learnings, pair program, troubleshoot, etc...

When?

Teams generally meet each morning (day) at the daily stand up, and have a chat open all day long so they can keep in constant communication.

Where?

Daily Stand up, Teams / Zoom / Slack chats (1 that the team lives in all day every day, including SM / PO). Shared Team SharePoint or Confluence that everyone owns and maintains.

Why?

Team members will alert quicker, accountability is enabled in teams, team members are able to work together and support each other with shared knowledge.

How?

Typically, your PROCESS leg set up successful processes for the team. If they're not available, team leaders need to ensure the team is set up for success and has good working agreements on what they'll do and agree to.

The 2025
Game
Changer

ISSUES FACED BY EMPLOYEES IN 2025

This is a NON-comprehensive list of things INSIDE work



Negative Affects of AI

The “Lead with AI First” strategy is backfiring with employees.

Ethical concerns are not being followed. Employees are blowing the whistle in several big and small companies. Fear of being replaced without upskilling is prevalent.



Sociopolitical Polarization

In the last year, an increase in social and political polarization has heightened the risk of employee conflicts and stress, impacting broader organizational priorities.



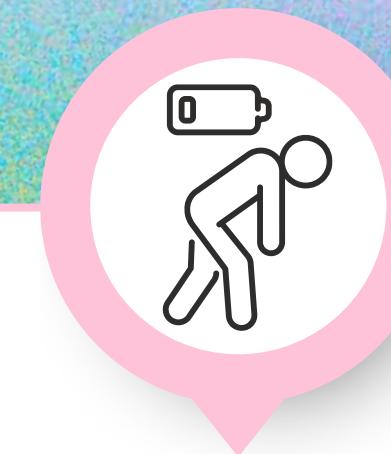
Too Much Change Too Fast

While everyone knows we all must adapt to change, the changes keep coming and before we can adapt, it seems some are changing again! It seems for some it's all just a bit too much.



Not Enough Mental Health Support

With the current political climate and remote work environments, there is a call for more mental health awareness and training for our managerial staff. The ask is for them to become more aware of what to look for and how to guide employees to get help.



Burnout

Developer burnout shows through several warning signs. When passionate programmers lose interest in their projects, that's usually the first red flag. The body shows signs, too. Fatigue, sick, emotional drain and attitude start to drop, irritability.



Not enough people

There's a trend where leaders think they're “trimming the fat”, cutting headcount but not cutting the amount of work to be done - expecting the rest of the staff to do sometimes double the amount or work with $\frac{1}{2}$ the staff.

ISSUES FACED BY EMPLOYEES IN 2025

This is a NON-comprehensive list of things OUTSIDE work



Political issues / Legislation

Political shifts can heighten political discourse in the workplace; differing views can threaten interpersonal relationships. Legislative changes can heighten stress and anxiety for employees, especially if new laws result in the removal of available offerings such as employer- or state-sponsored benefits.



Their Health

In the last year, an increase in social and political polarization has heightened the risk of employee conflicts and stress. Employees fear for their own safety at work, conflicts at work and the stress / worry has taken a toll on their physical and mental health.



The Economy and Rising Costs

Economic uncertainty puts immense pressure on workers. Organizational investments in financial wellbeing are falling short. In their 2025 report, 70% of respondents report economic instability as one of the largest threats to the wellbeing of their workforce.



Volatile Job Market

A recent Forbes study found that 61% of the employees surveyed they are questioned their career path due to the global market and career path. 54% of those people say their mental health is also suffering because of the fear this is causing them. Employees want to work where they are valued.



Loneliness

Staff surveyed over remote and in person teams reported this as one of the highest problems for employees today due to the polarization of topics across the US. This impacts the work day to day motivations and completion of work.



Financial Stress

Financial stress is a major contributor to employee's overall stress. Research also shows that a majority of professionals feel stressed at work. This may be due to a workplace culture that normalizes stress or external pressures such as financial concerns.

**How Do We
Fix It?**

How Do You Recognize Imbalance?

When a team is going through massive change, do you know how to spot a wobble big enough to say something or stop the work?

Look for the signs or imbalance.
(These could be signs of burnout too.)

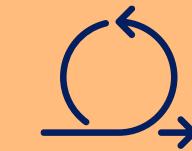
Overload

A team member is overloaded and not asking for help, allowing other to help or saying anything to the scrum master / product owner. Or the team in general is taking in too much work sprint after sprint without accomplishing their goals.



In-Fighting

Team Members are fighting with each other and it's very uncharacteristic. Or team members who do tend to pick fights are doing it more frequently with new people.



Processes are Breaking

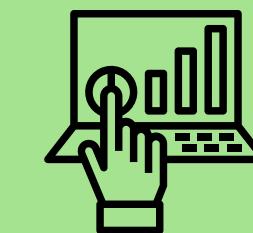
Teams begin not following their working agreements, they begin not testing / QA'ing their work and producing more bugs than usual. You begin to notice DoD / DoR is not being enforced by the team....



Sizing is changing

One of the other things are going on AND... The team's sizing seems to be different.

1



There's Always a Crisis

If you have someone or a team of someone's who tends to get hypersensitive to events... watch for when they react to a lot of events stacked together. Something could be afoot.

How to Re-Balance the Team



Employee Focused

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Utilize HR For Their Resources

Encourage your leaders to include HR in their employee upskilling and engagement. Include them in how they can better the lives of employees as a whole.



Call Out the Mental Health Inequity

Openly discuss mental health challenges in your org and happenings in your region. Allow employees a space to talk about their issues in a safe, non-judgmental space. When employees feel supported, there is trust and hope.



Promote Psychological Safety

Help leaders find ways to open up lines of communication where employees can freely talk and share what's working and not working with their leaders and with them.



Prioritize Stability

If companies are in the middle of change, and who's not, right? Try to prioritize stability in the midst of change. Buy trust with your staff.



Take A Preventative Approach

Encourage HR to take steps to bring preventative approaches to the workplace. We know there will be crisis, help employees manage stress and build resilience before they reach a breaking point.



Manager Focused

Training for Leaders in Today's Climate

Train managers to support employees in managing stress while also addressing their own. Organizations should offer targeted training that includes resources like mental health apps, lunch-and-learn sessions, and dedicated paid training days.



Help Set Up Good Processes

Help your Management Team set up great program wide processes for the organization. Ensure the team is able to collaborate well and deploy.



Enable Communication

Establish thorough communication processes across the organization. Ensure these are operational from top to bottom, that all C-Suite is staying up to date as required as well as team members.



Retrain Managers on Burnout

The tech industry's culture makes things worse by celebrating overwork. Impossible deadlines become normal "crunch time." This traps developers in an endless cycle of rush and burnout.



Engage Your Employees

Lonliness is at an all-time high for all employees. Engage your employees with teambuilding activities and non-work activities. Get to know them as humans, take stock in their day to day lives.

How Can We Help Leaders



Personal Challenge

Given you new tool to explain agile clearly.



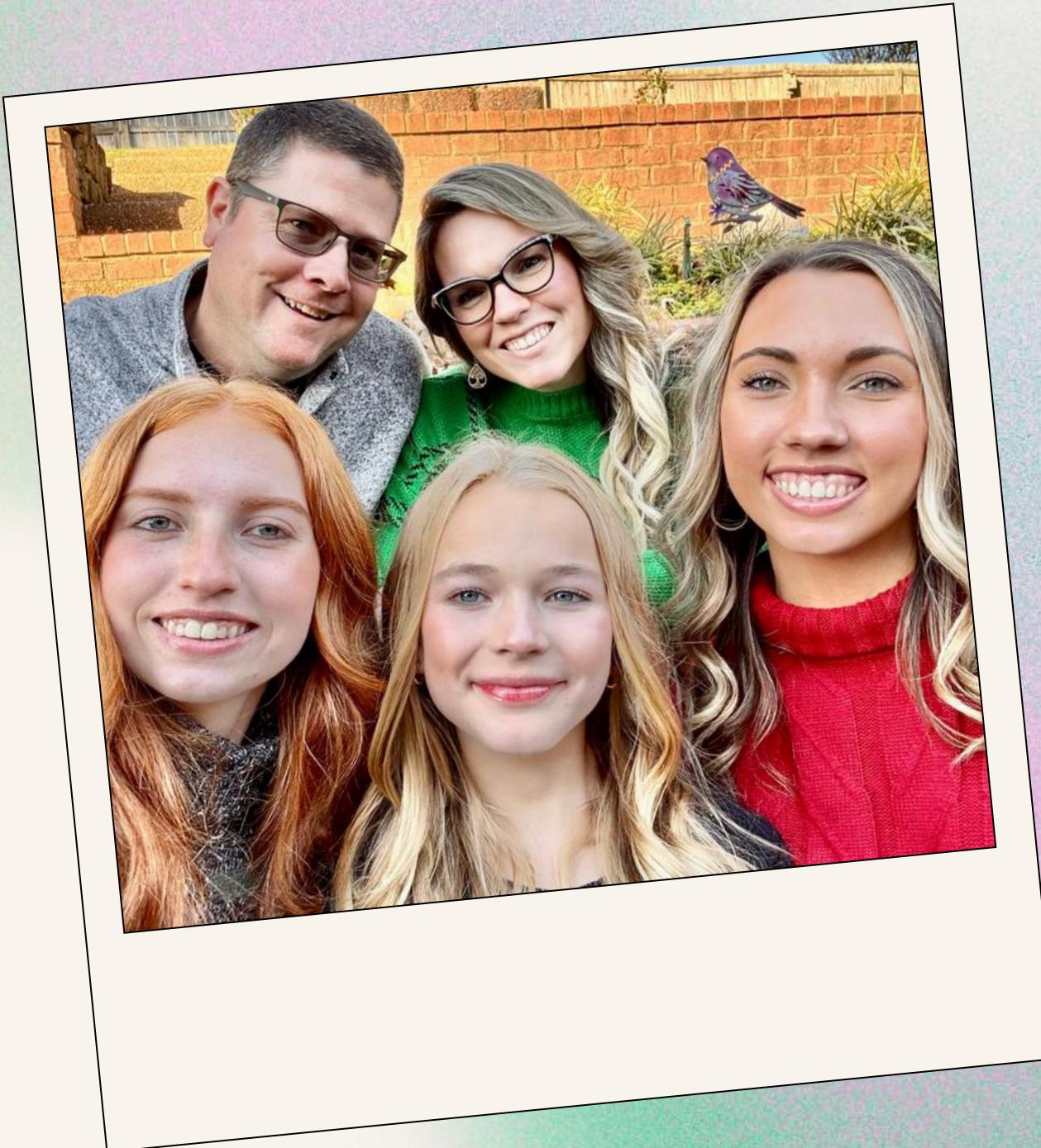
Create your own:

Practical strategies for team balance

Techniques for better conversations with leaders

Proactive strategies for engaging / retaining employees

Q & A?



Contact Me

Let's keep the conversation going!



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Find me again at TechBash 2025, Friday at 11:30



TechBash 2025

Thank You!

Thank you so much for attending today! Please give me any and all feedback so I can bring content that is useful for you in the future.

Aubrey Wade, Wadeing Through Life

References:

