



THE ENGAGEMENT LAB: *PART 3*

High Performance Without The Fallout

A practical guide for leaders who want exceptional results
Without burning their teams to the ground.

What We'll Cover Today

This session is built around five core strategies that, when used together, create the conditions for teams to do their best work sustainably.

01

Weekly Cadence

Planning your week intentionally

02

The High-Performance Paradox

Why pressure alone isn't a strategy

03

Radical Prioritization

The art of doing less to achieve more

04

Psychological Safety

The #1 predictor of team success

05

Guardrails, Not Just Goals

Spotting burnout before it spreads

06

Best Practices

Rewards that actually drive performance. Plan for effort equity. Recovery.

Hi, I'm Alex Grande

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Alex is passionate about creating sustainable high-performance cultures. With over 15 years of experience in leadership and organizational development, he founded RecognizeApp.com to help companies foster employee recognition and well-being.



Weekly Rituals

Our first step in building a sustainable high-performance culture is mastering radical prioritization. Don't just make todo lists. Think more in terms of intentionally focusing on what truly matters and actively deprioritizing everything else.

01

The 15-Minute Capacity Async

A weekly ritual for managers to align their teams, clarify focus, and safeguard well-being.

03

Make Tradeoffs

Explicitly decide what will be deferred, delegated, or dropped to protect focus on priorities.

02

Define Priorities

Identify the 1-3 critical outcomes that will drive the most impact for the week ahead.

04

Schedule Cooldowns

Integrate essential recovery periods and breaks, understanding they are non-negotiable for sustained output.

CHAPTER 2

The High-Performance Paradox





The Myth vs. The Reality

The Myth

"Pressure creates diamonds."

We've glorified relentless intensity as if it's the only path to greatness.

The Reality

Pressure creates diamonds, but constant pressure creates dust.

Sustained overwork leads to diminishing returns, quiet quitting, and eventually, resignations.

The Business Case: Burnout Is Expensive

Burnout is a **financial and a wellness issue**. The cost of replacing a single knowledge worker can reach 50–200% of their annual salary when you factor in recruiting, onboarding, lost institutional knowledge, and the productivity dip across the team. Retention is almost always cheaper than replacement.

\$4,700

Average Cost

To hire a single new employee (SHRM)

3–8mo

Ramp-Up Time

For a new hire to reach full productivity

2.8x

More Likely

Burned-out employees are to actively job search



 Nelson Connects



Unveiling the Hidden Costs of Hiring

While direct costs like salaries and job postings are obvious, hidden expenses can have an even greater financial impact.



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Employee Burnout Statistics 2026: Causes, Costs, and Recovery Trends

From 43% of workers feeling burned out globally to \$322 billion in lost productivity, these 17 statistics reveal why employee burnout has become the defining workforce crisis—and what it's...

Redefining High Performance

High performance is about **speed you can maintain**. Think of it as the difference between a sprint and a marathon pace. The best teams aren't the ones that run fastest for a week; they're the ones that sustain excellent output quarter after quarter.

Velocity

Speed and quality of output

How quickly a team delivers meaningful results

Sustainability

The capacity to maintain that pace without degrading people, quality, or culture

Our objective: **Velocity + Sustainability = True High Performance.**



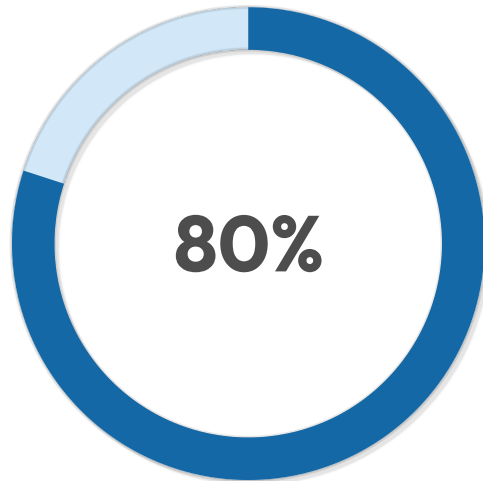
CHAPTER 3

Radical Prioritization

The "Stop Doing" List

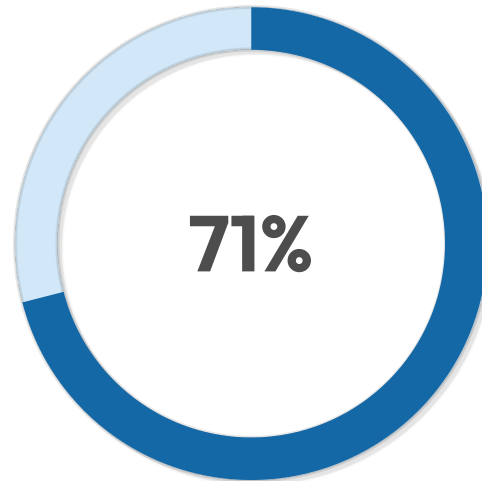
Most teams have a **prioritization problem**. Research consistently shows that roughly 20% of any team's work drives 80% of meaningful outcomes. The rest? It's organizational noise: redundant reports, legacy meetings, and "nice-to-have" projects that quietly devour hours every week.

Your job as a leader is to help your team build a **"Stop Doing" list** that's just as intentional as your roadmap. Ask the hard question: *"If we dropped this tomorrow, what would actually break?"*



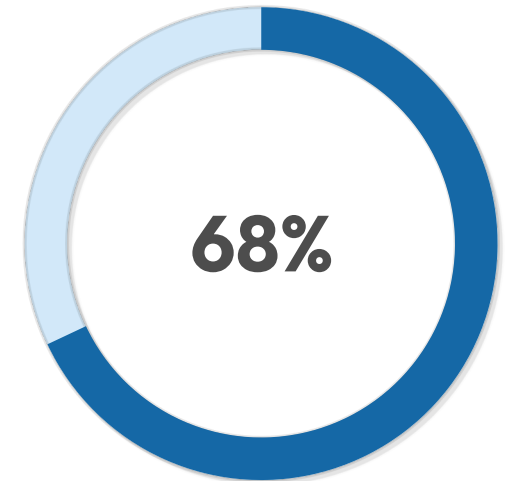
Results

Come from just 20% of your team's activities
(Pareto Principle)



Meeting Time

Of senior managers say meetings are unproductive (<https://curiumsolutions.com/the-hidden-cost-of-inefficient-meetings>)



Of Workers

Of workers say they lack uninterrupted focus time (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/will-ai-fix-work>)

Teach How to Say "Not Now"

One of the most underrated responsibilities of a manager is serving as a **shield**. Managers need to learn how to protect their team from **organizational noise and low-value requests**. These things erode focus and thus productivity.

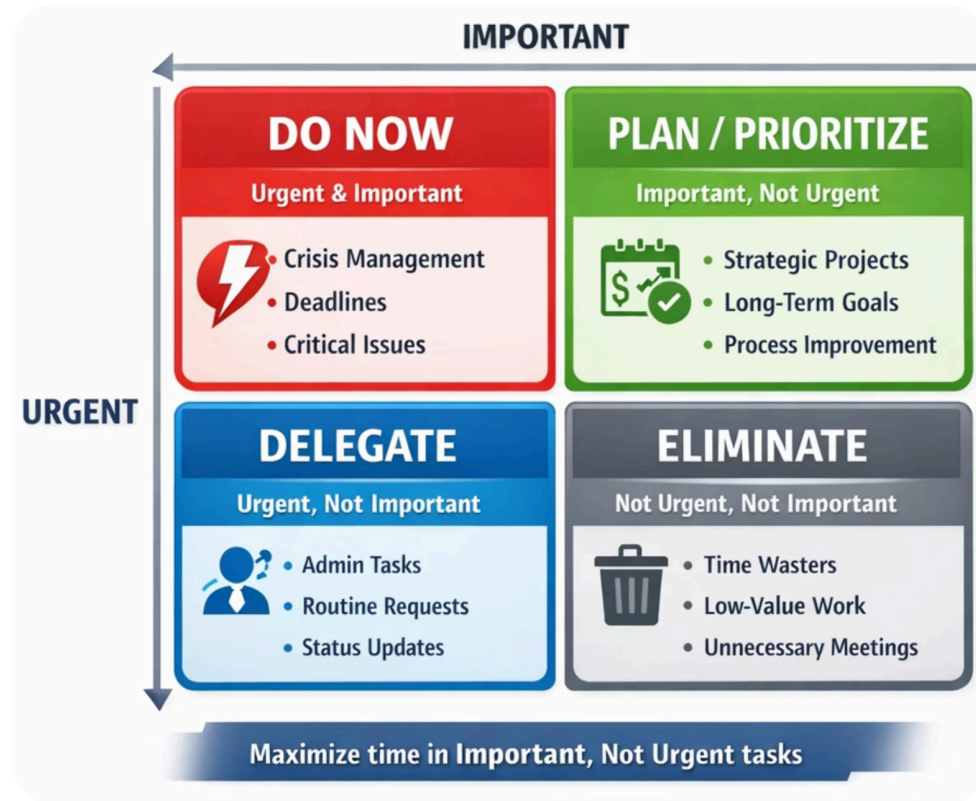
Every "quick ask" from another department, every all-hands survey, every cross-functional committee invitation adds friction. Teach how to say no.

📄 **Manager Mantra:** "My job isn't to add work. It's to remove the obstacles between my team and their best work."



Tool: The Eisenhower Matrix for Teams

Originally used by President Eisenhower to manage competing demands, this framework is even more powerful when applied to **team-wide capacity planning**. Use it in your next planning session to categorize every active project and recurring task.



The magic is in the bottom-right quadrant. Most teams are shocked by how much lives there.



CHAPTER 4

Psychological Safety as a Performance Driver

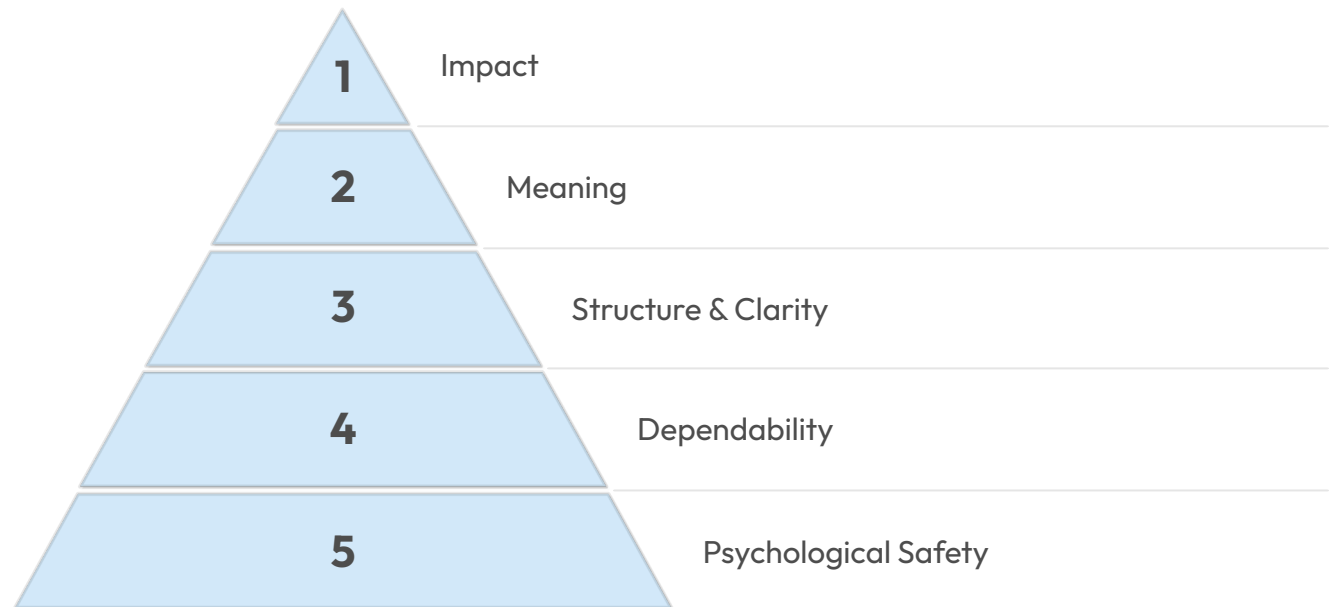
Case Study

Google's Project Aristotle

Google spent two years studying 180 teams to find the secret to high performance. They expected to find that the best teams had the smartest people or the most experienced leaders. **They were wrong.**

The single strongest predictor of team success was **psychological safety**: the belief that you won't be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.

Teams with high safety took more risks, surfaced problems faster, and ultimately delivered better results. Safety didn't make teams soft, it made them **brave.**



Google's five dynamics of effective teams — safety is the foundation.

Lowering the Stakes of Failure

Change behavior away from the safest possible output is default. This is how overwork and perfectionism take root: people spend extra hours polishing work to avoid any risk of criticism.

The antidote is encouraging "**smart risks**".

High Safety Culture

Permission to fail → smart risks → faster learning → innovation →
engagement

Low Safety Culture

Fear of failure → perfectionism → overwork → burnout → disengagement

Check-In vs. Check-Up

The tone of your 1-on-1 meetings sends a powerful signal about your leadership style. There's a world of difference between a **"check-up"**: where the manager audits progress and probes for problems.

And a **"check-in"**: where the manager asks how they can help.

✘ Check-Up Questions

"Where are we on the deadline?"

"Why isn't this done yet?"

"What's taking so long?"

✔ Check-In Questions

"What's getting in your way?"

"What do you need from me?"

"How are you feeling about your workload?"

Small shifts in language create massive shifts in culture. Your team will mirror the tone you set. Avoid why questions... with everyone!





CHAPTER 5

Setting Guardrails, Not Just Goals

Defining the "Red Zone"

Burnout doesn't arrive with a warning label. It builds slowly, and by the time someone says "I'm burned out," you've already lost months of their best work. As a manager, you need to recognize the **early warning signs** of the yellow flags before everything turns red.



Cynicism

Sarcasm replaces enthusiasm. "Sure, another initiative" becomes the default response. Disillusionment with the mission or leadership surfaces regularly.



Withdrawal

Cameras off. Fewer messages. Skipping optional meetings. The person who used to volunteer now goes silent. Social connection fades.

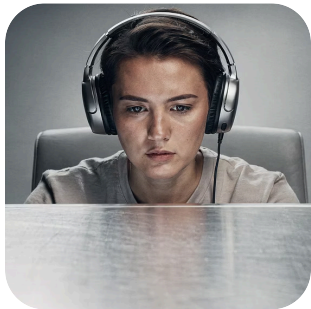


Decreased Quality

Mistakes increase. Attention to detail drops. Deadlines start slipping from someone who was previously reliable. They're running on fumes.

The Power of Off-Ramps

High performance requires recovery. It's a **structural element** of how your team operates. Without built-in off-ramps, people will either crash or quietly disengage. Two practical strategies every manager can implement:



Normalize "Focus Time"

Block 2–3 hours of uninterrupted deep work on your team's calendars. Make it visible and respected: no meetings, no Slack, no interruptions. Protect it like you'd protect a client meeting.



Respect "Logged Off" Hours

Define clear boundaries for after-hours communication. Unless it's a genuine emergency, messages can wait until morning. Make this explicit, not implied ambiguity always favors overwork.

Model the Behavior



The 11 PM Email Problem

When a manager sends emails at 11:00 PM, they might think, *"I'm just getting ahead for tomorrow."* But what their team hears is: **"This is what commitment looks like here."**

It creates a culture of **invisible overtime** where no one is technically required to respond after hours, but everyone feels the pressure to do so. Over time, this erodes trust, increases anxiety, and normalizes unsustainable habits.

- ❏ **Pro tip:** Use scheduled send. Write the email at 11 PM if you want, but schedule it for 8 AM. Your team will thank you.



CHAPTER 6

Best Practices

Recognition, Recovery, Equity in Effort

Meaningful Rewards That Actually Work

Generic praise "Great job!" feels hollow after a while. Research from Gallup and others shows that the most powerful forms of recognition aren't trophies or pizza parties. They're **autonomy and growth**. People want to feel trusted and invested in, not just patted on the back.



Autonomy

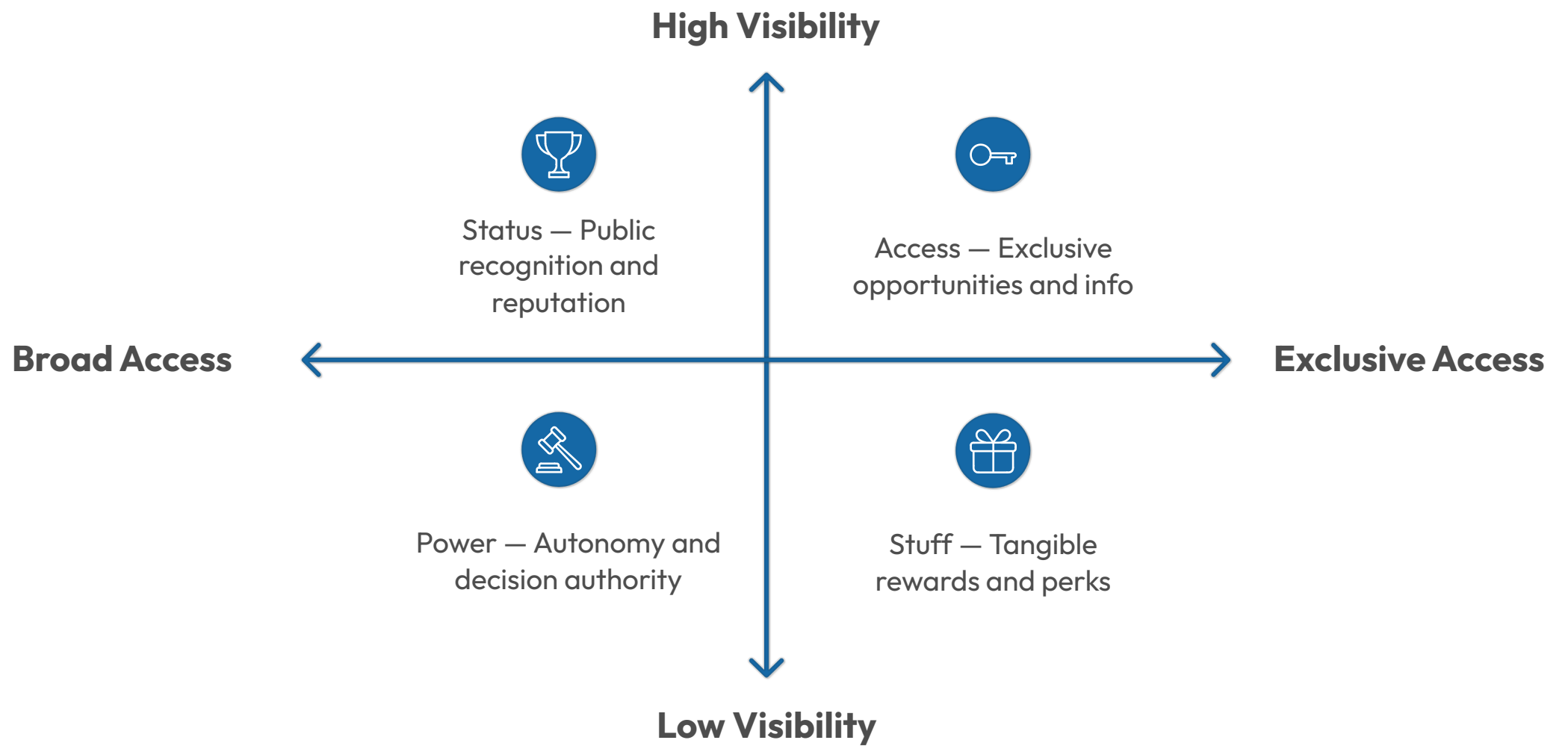


Growth Opportunities



Visibility & Voice

The SAPS Model of Motivation



The SAPS model categorizes motivation into four key areas, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding how to effectively reward and recognize individuals beyond simple monetary incentives.

The Recovery Period

Every major project push needs a built-in **breathing room** on the other side. Elite athletes don't train at max intensity year-round, they have recovery phases built into their season. Your team should be no different.

Intense Sprint

High effort, focused push to complete key milestones.

Sustainable Pace

Balanced output and continuous improvement.



Recovery Period

Lighter workload with reflection and rest.

After a major launch or crunch period, schedule a lighter week. Reduce meetings. Encourage people to clear backlogs, do creative exploration, or simply decompress. This isn't lost productivity, it's an investment in the **next** sprint.



Equity in Effort

There's an insidious pattern in many teams: the most **reliable** workers get rewarded with *more work*. They're efficient and dependable, so they become the default for every urgent request, every extra project, every "Can you just...?" moment.

Over time, this creates a deeply unfair dynamic. Your best people are punished for their competence while underperformers coast with lighter loads. The result? Your stars burn out or leave, and the team's capability degrades.

Watch For

One person always being the "go-to" for everything urgent

Fix It

Distribute stretch assignments evenly
track who carries what

Reward Right

Efficiency should earn freedom, not a heavier backlog

CLOSING

Let's Make It Real



Live Case Study: The Crunch-Time Scenario

The Scenario

Your team has a major deliverable due in two weeks. A key team member just flagged that they're overwhelmed. Another is working weekends without being asked. Morale is slipping, but the deadline is firm.

What do you do?

Discussion Framework

- **Prioritize ruthlessly**

What can be descope or deferred?

- **Redistribute**

Who has capacity? Who's over-indexed?

- **Communicate up**

What tradeoffs need leadership alignment?

- **Plan recovery**

What does the week after look like?

Your 24-Hour Challenge

You don't need to overhaul your leadership style overnight. But you **can** make one small, meaningful change before your next meeting. Pick one action from the list below and commit to it in the next 24 hours.

Schedule Send

Queue your after-hours emails for 8 AM tomorrow

Ask, Don't Audit

Start your next 1-on-1 with "How are you doing?" and mean it

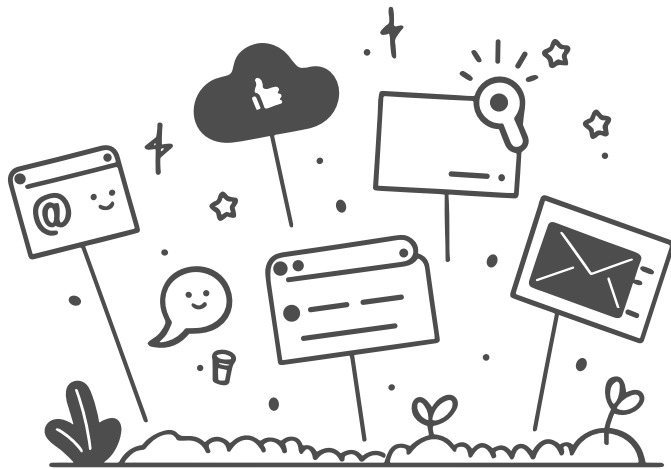
Kill One Meeting

Cancel or shorten one recurring meeting that doesn't earn its time

Say "Stop"

Identify one low-value task your team can stop doing this week

What's Next?



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NEXT WEBINAR:

Frontline Energy, Not Burnout - Recognition Playbooks for Manufacturing Teams - The Engagement Lab, Part 4

Thursday, March 12 - 2 PM ET/11 AM PT

Register here:

https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/2217724850508/WN_PU5Pt3ocSM6ooDYCzoD6mA#/registration



Register here for Recognize's Remix - our live demo shows you how to remix recognition!

Wednesday, March 25 - 2 PM ET/11 AM PT

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