



# DESIGN AND POWER

A POLITICAL PLAYBOOK FOR CREATIVE LEADERS

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# 1st Principle: Politics is People

When you organize people to do something, each individual has opinions on what's right. This means no matter how talented leaders are, **some people will not get everything they want.**

This motivates people to influence the powerful or to try and take it for themselves. There are many ways to express ambition, some healthier than others, but **politics are everywhere people are.**

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ANTHROPOLOGY  
SOCIOLOGY  
PSYCHOLOGY



IL PRINCIPE  
DI NICOLO MACHIAVELLI  
AL MAGNIFICO LORENZO  
DI PIERO DE MEDICI

LA VITA  
DI CASTRUCCIO CASTRACANI  
DA LVCCA.

IL MODO CHE TENNE  
IL DVCA VALENTINO  
PER AMMAZZARE VITELLOZZO VITELLI,  
OLIVEROTTO DA FERMO, IL SIGNOR PAGOLO,  
ET IL DVCA DI GRAYNA.

I RITRATTI  
DELLE COSE DELLA FRANCIA  
ET DELL' ALAMAGNA.



*m. m. l. 5.*



M. D. L.







# 4 of Machiavelli's “cynical” Principles

1. It's better to be feared than loved
2. Always being nice leads to ruin
3. People can't handle the truth
4. People resist change



NATIONAL BESTSELLER

# What Would **Machiavelli** Do?



The Ends Justify  
the Meanness

*"The ultimate guide to corporate backstabbing." —Entertainment Weekly*

## STANLEY BING

author of the National Bestseller *Throwing the Elephant*

His philosophy was born in a very difficult time. I don't think you need to be evil to be politically successful.

But some disagree.

Books like this are hard to tell if they're satire or not.



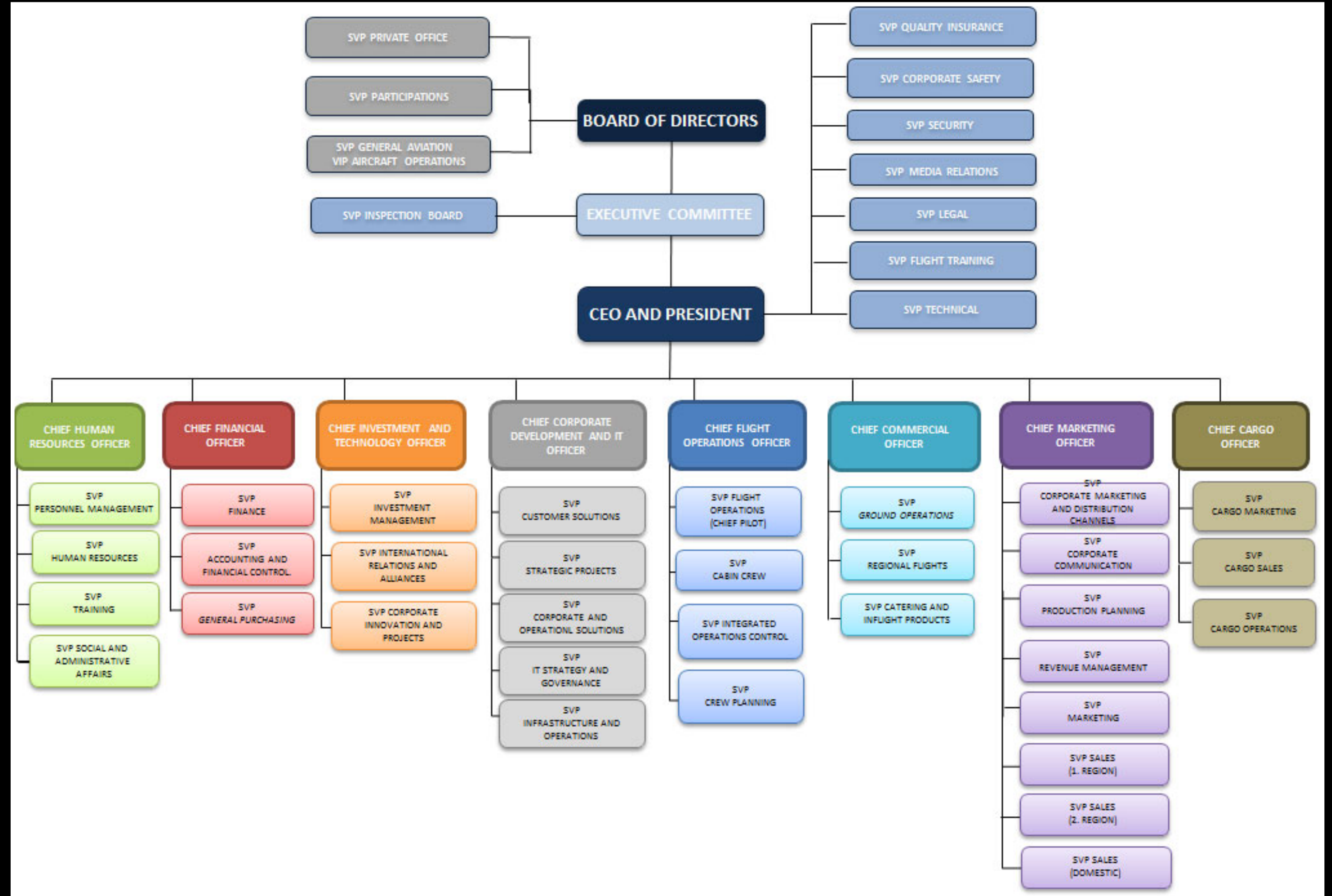
# Machiavellian Pragmatism

**“Do all the worst things you need to do on the first day so later everyone can say ‘well, he’s not as bad as he used to be’”**

**- Salman Rushdie, paraphrasing Machiavelli**

[http://www.openculture.com/2011/07/salman\\_rushdie\\_machiavellis\\_bad\\_rap.html](http://www.openculture.com/2011/07/salman_rushdie_machiavellis_bad_rap.html)



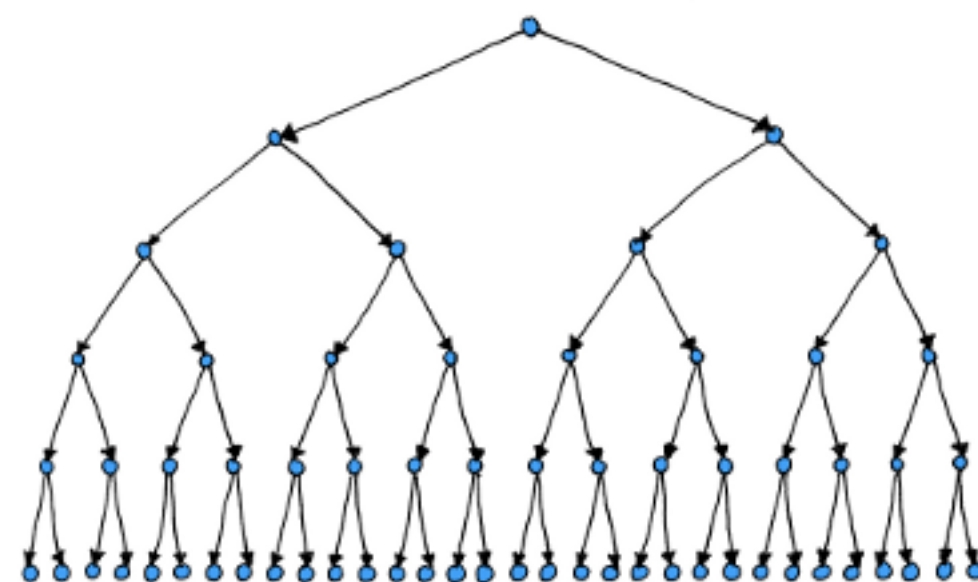


**2nd Principle: your organization is a  
terrain**

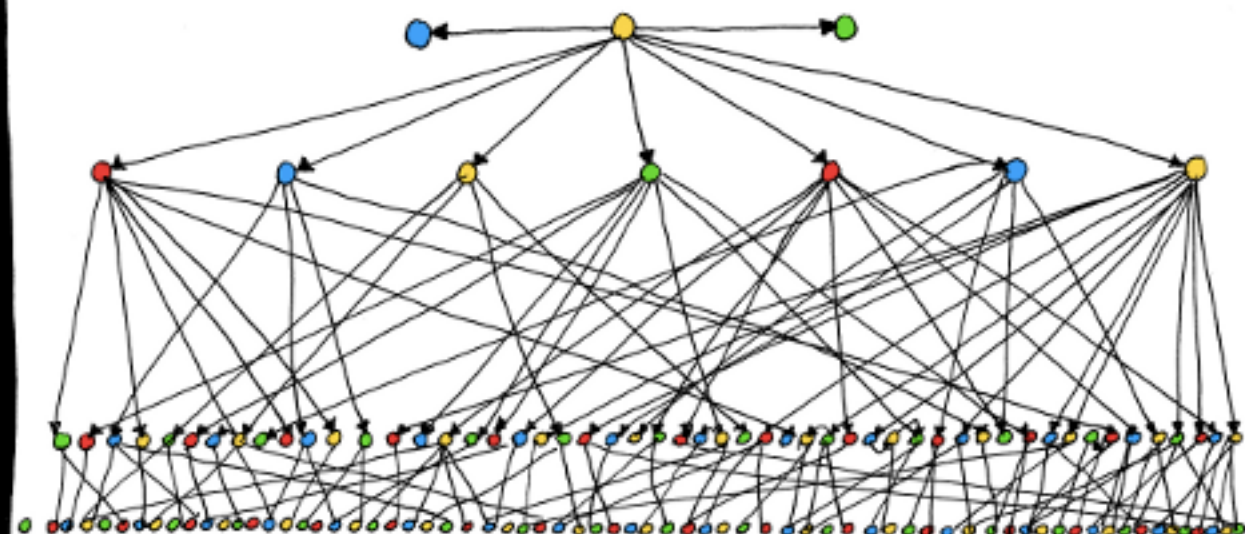
**the landscape defines the kinds of  
tactics that work best**



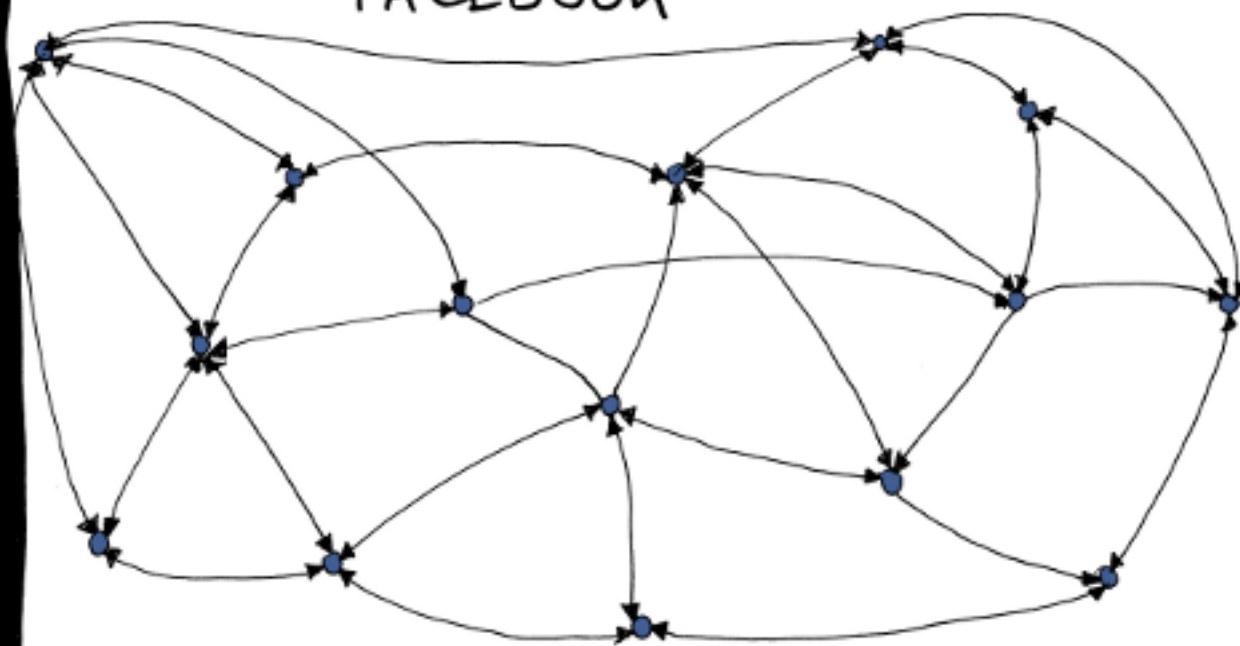
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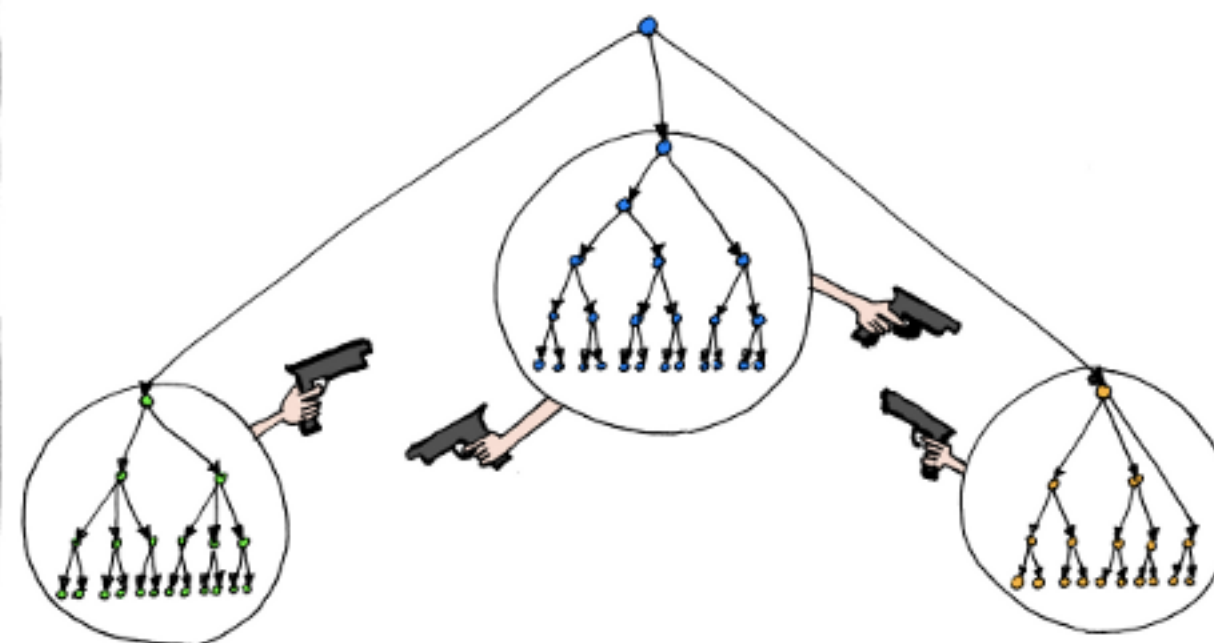
GOOGLE



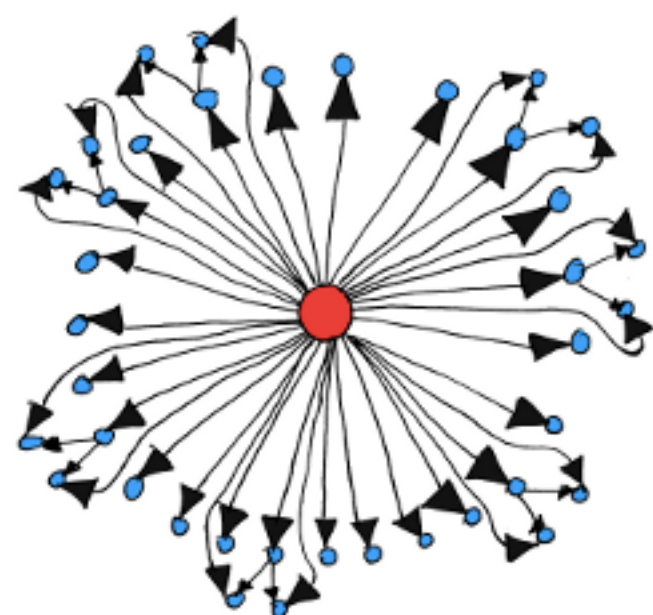
FACEBOOK



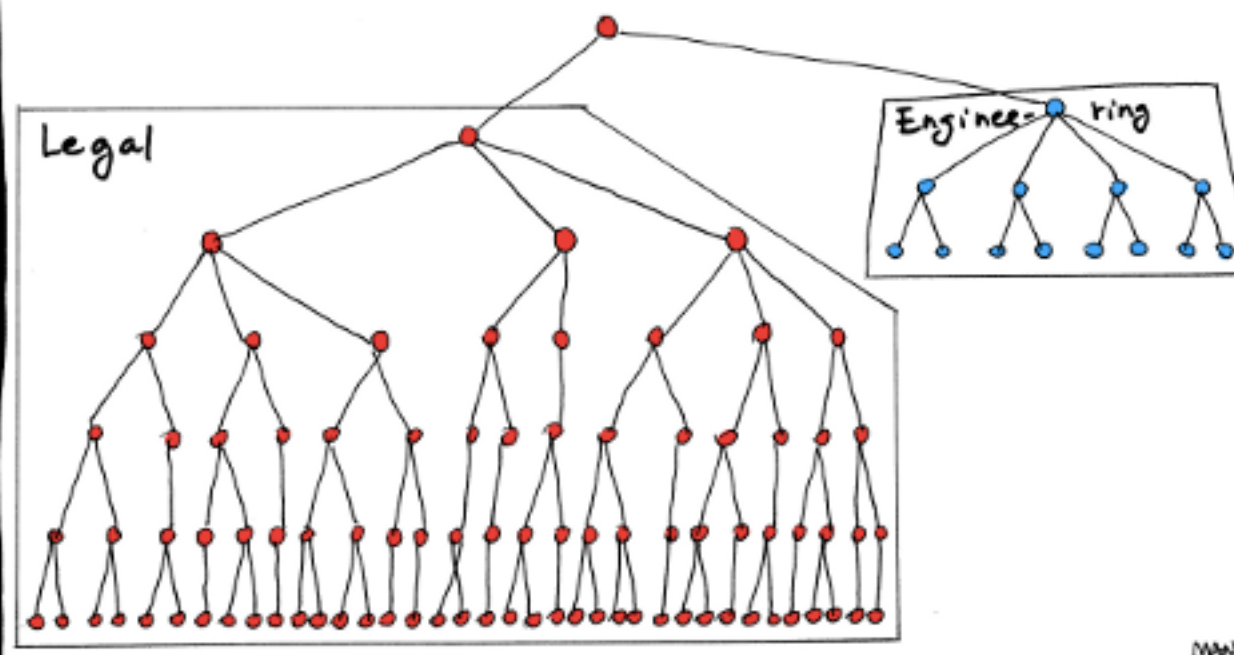
MICROSOFT



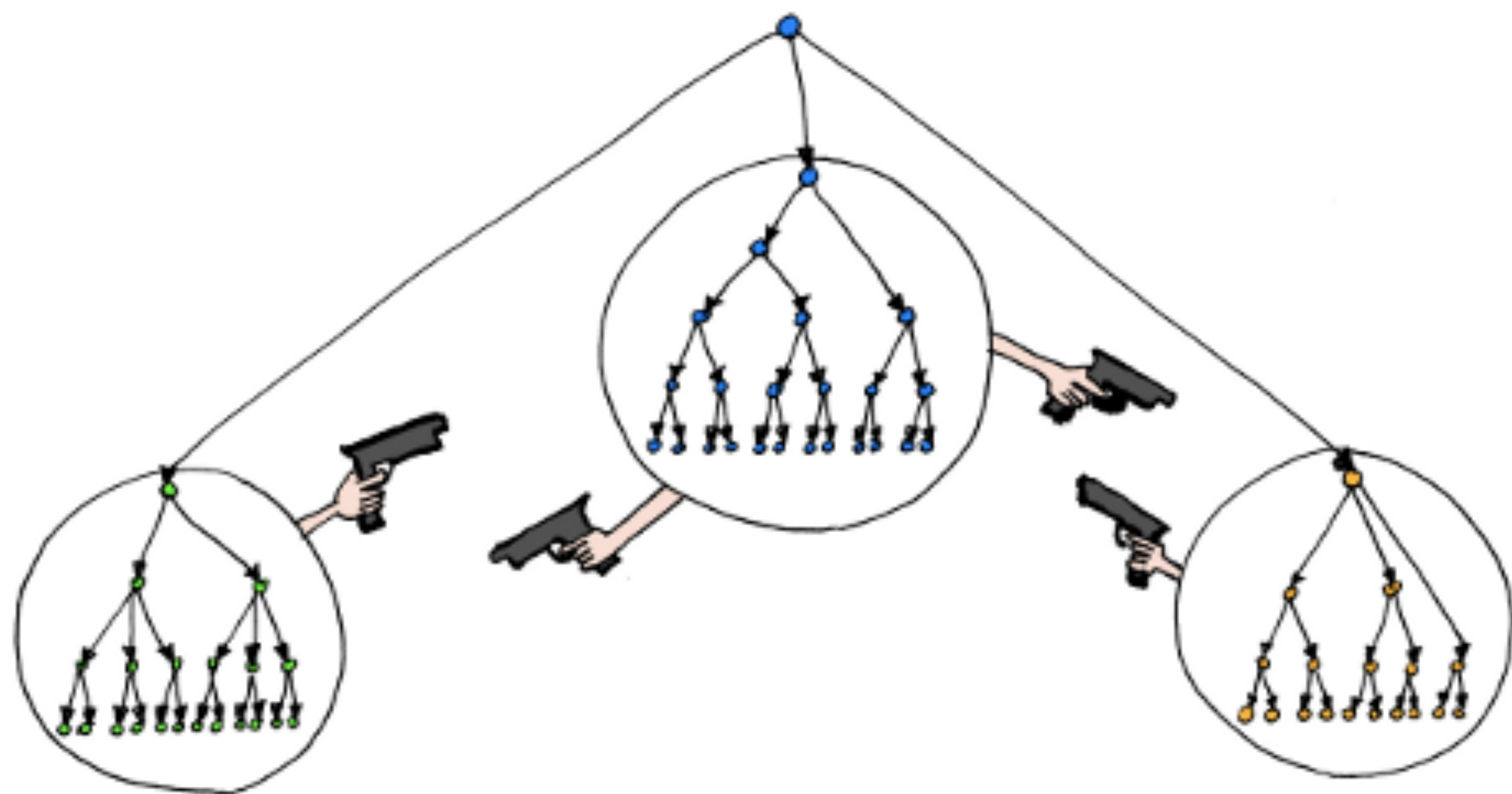
APPLE



ORACLE



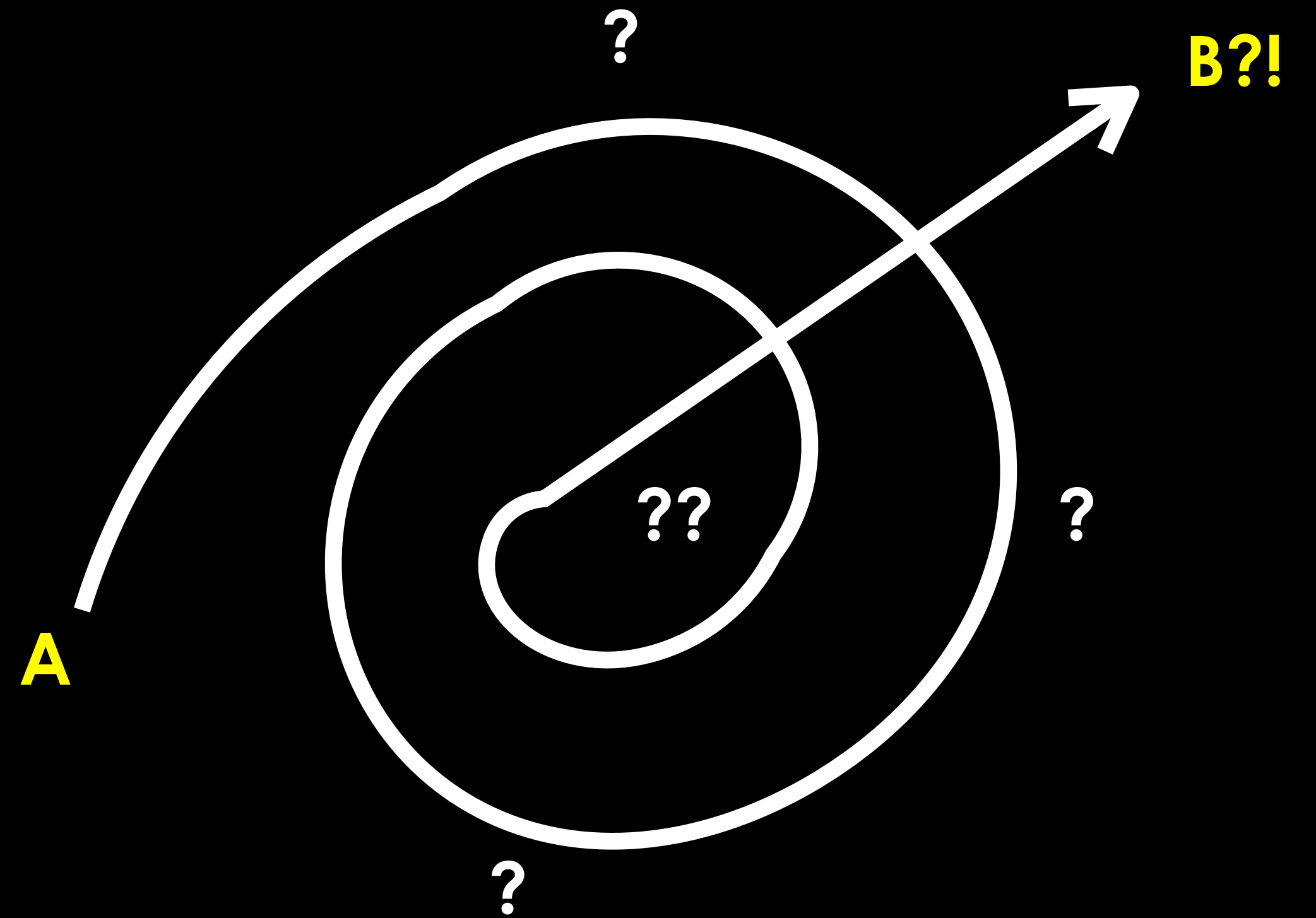
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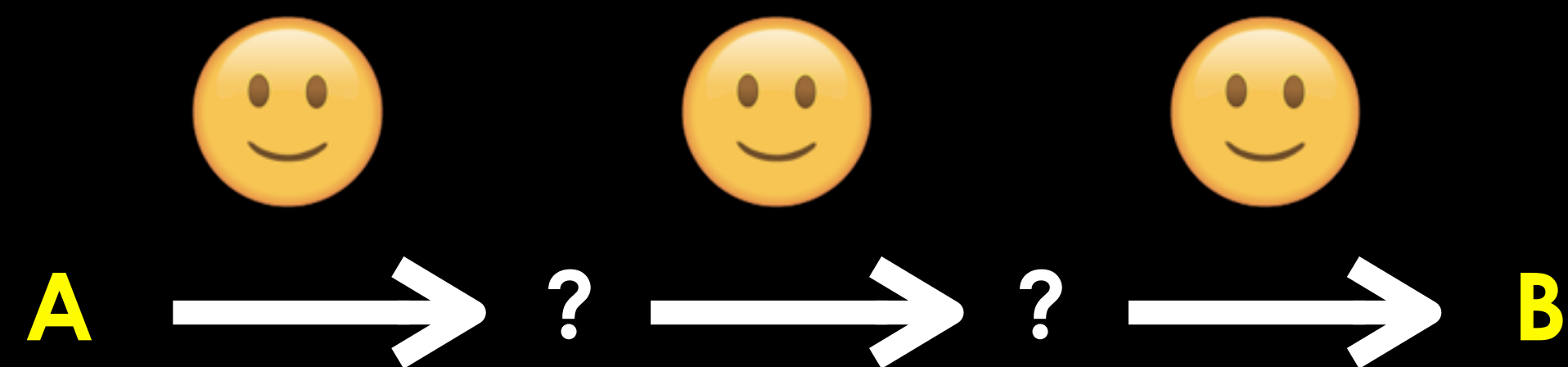
**Direct communication style**



**Passive Aggressive, Insecure,  
Indirect Communication Style**



Direct communication style



~~Passive-Aggressive, Insecure,~~  
Indirect Communication Style



## **2nd Principle applied:**

**All landscape have challenges -  
good leaders find and share paths  
to thrive in the current environment**

# Survey results

<b>Years in leadership</b>	<b>2-10 years: 74%</b>
<b>Team size</b>	<b>0-10 : 64%</b>
<b>Design is advantage</b>	<b>64% (30% neutral)</b>
<b>Responses</b>	<b>58 (+20 not here)</b>
<b>Gender Ratio</b>	<b>7 M / 3 F / .2 O</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>24-45: 81%</b>

**(Sorry about the survey UX)**



# Play #1: Study the landscape

- Who is thriving? Who is struggling?
- Who isn't even here?
- What tactics do you observe working for others?
- Who has skills or resources you need?

# **Play #2: Know the Business**



“Steve Jobs didn’t commit Apple to competing on Design because he was some patron of the Arts. He did it because it was the ONLY option for adding value to a commoditized market.

Companies are Capitalist enterprises so unless you find ways to articulate how Design helps in the goal of making money, you’re not going to get much attention or support.”

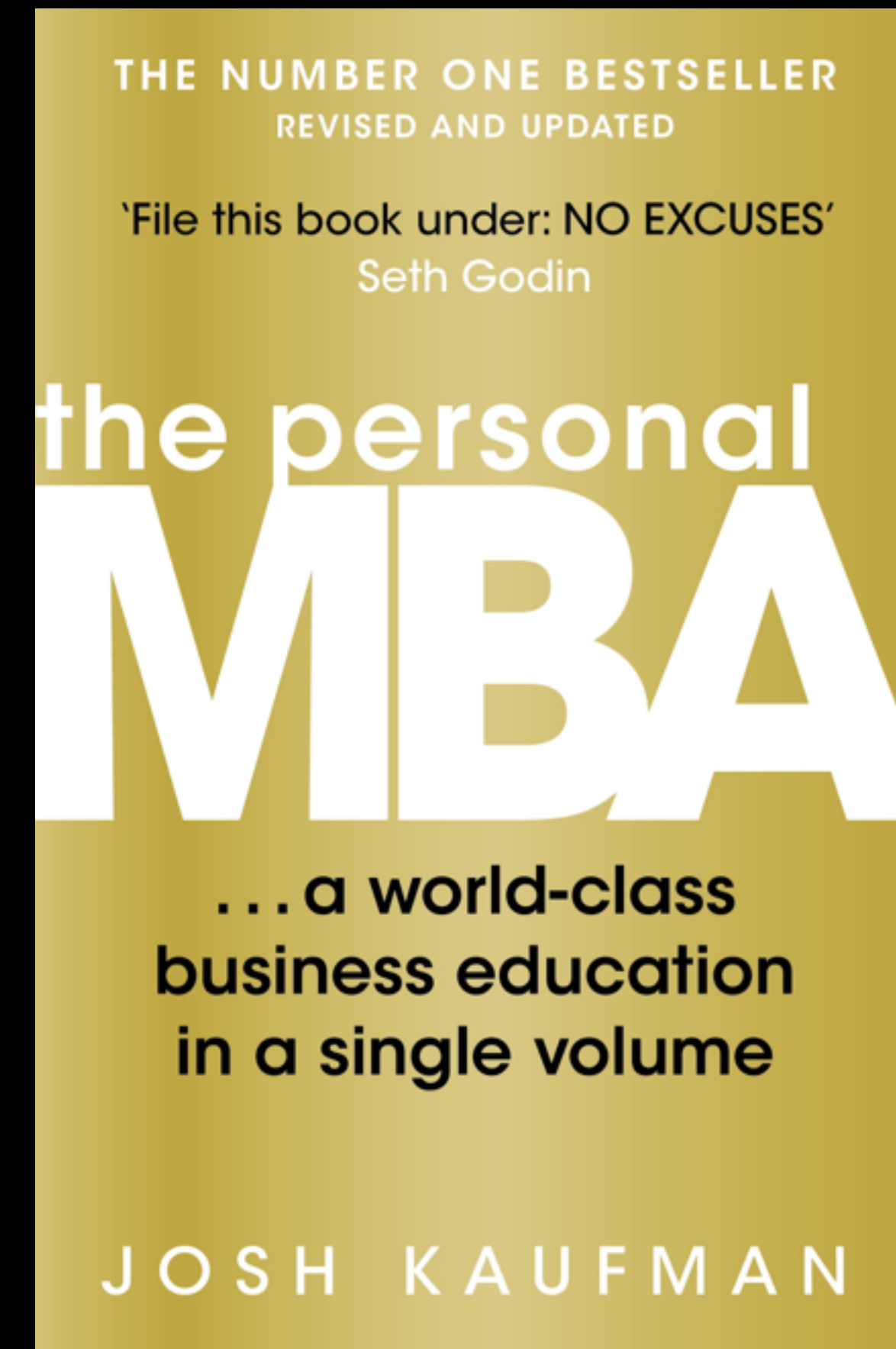
– **Bob Baxley, Director of Design @ Apple, Pinterest, Yahoo**

**A.**

Who is your closest peer or ally who primarily makes business decisions? Ask them to mentor you in what you don't know.

(local info + make an ally)

**B.**





**Play #3: Invest in how others  
perceive you & your team**

HCI / HHI / HGI



**HCI**



**HHI**

**Human to Human**



**HGI**

**Human to Group**

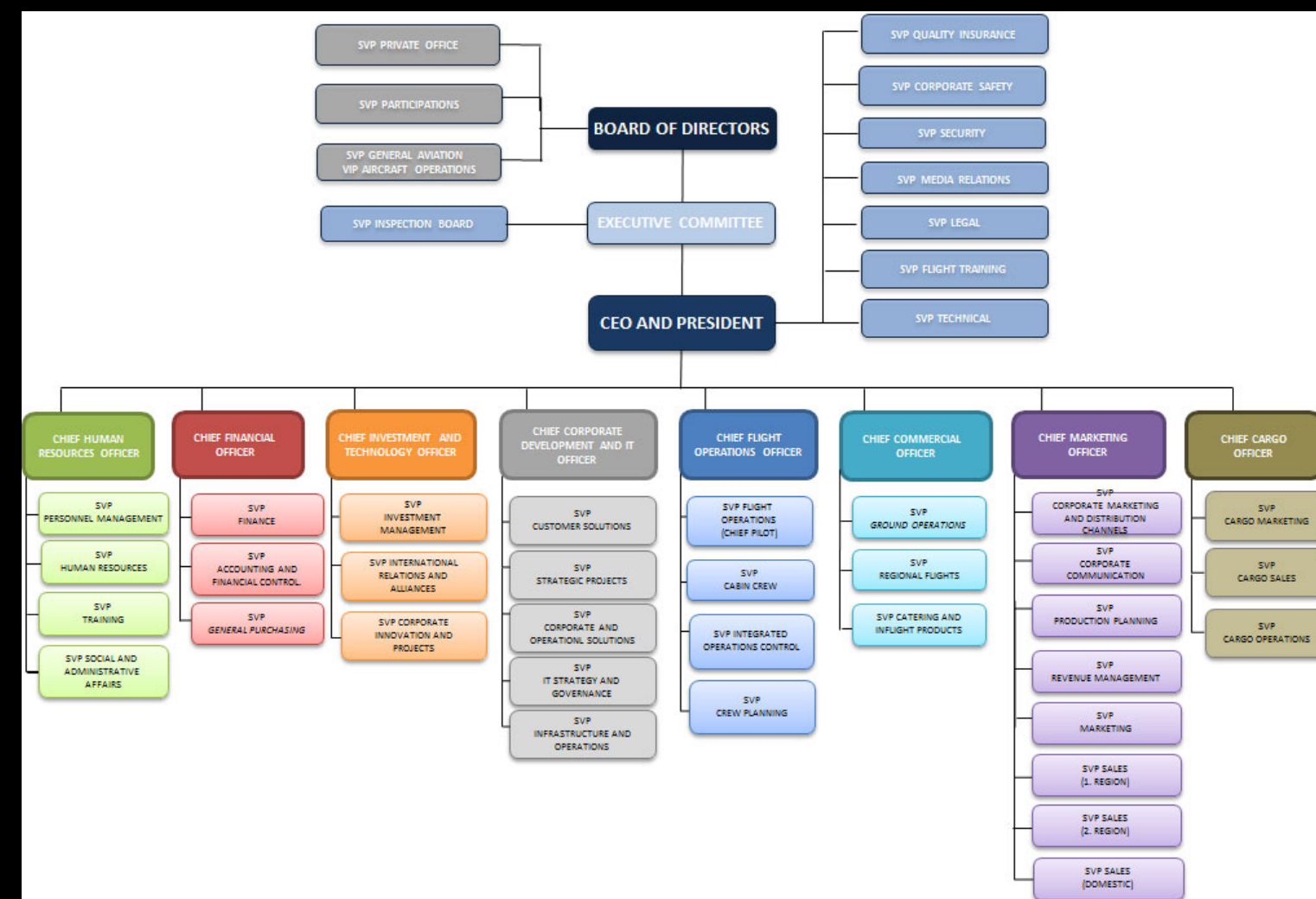
# FACT: You will always be explaining Design

- Think of you and your team as **ambassadors**
- Designers should see teaching as investment
- “Designers are my favorite people to work with even when they challenge me”
- Be inviting, be known as problem solvers, be reliable - if you do this people will want MORE design involvement



work politics is just another kind  
of problem-solving: **people problems**

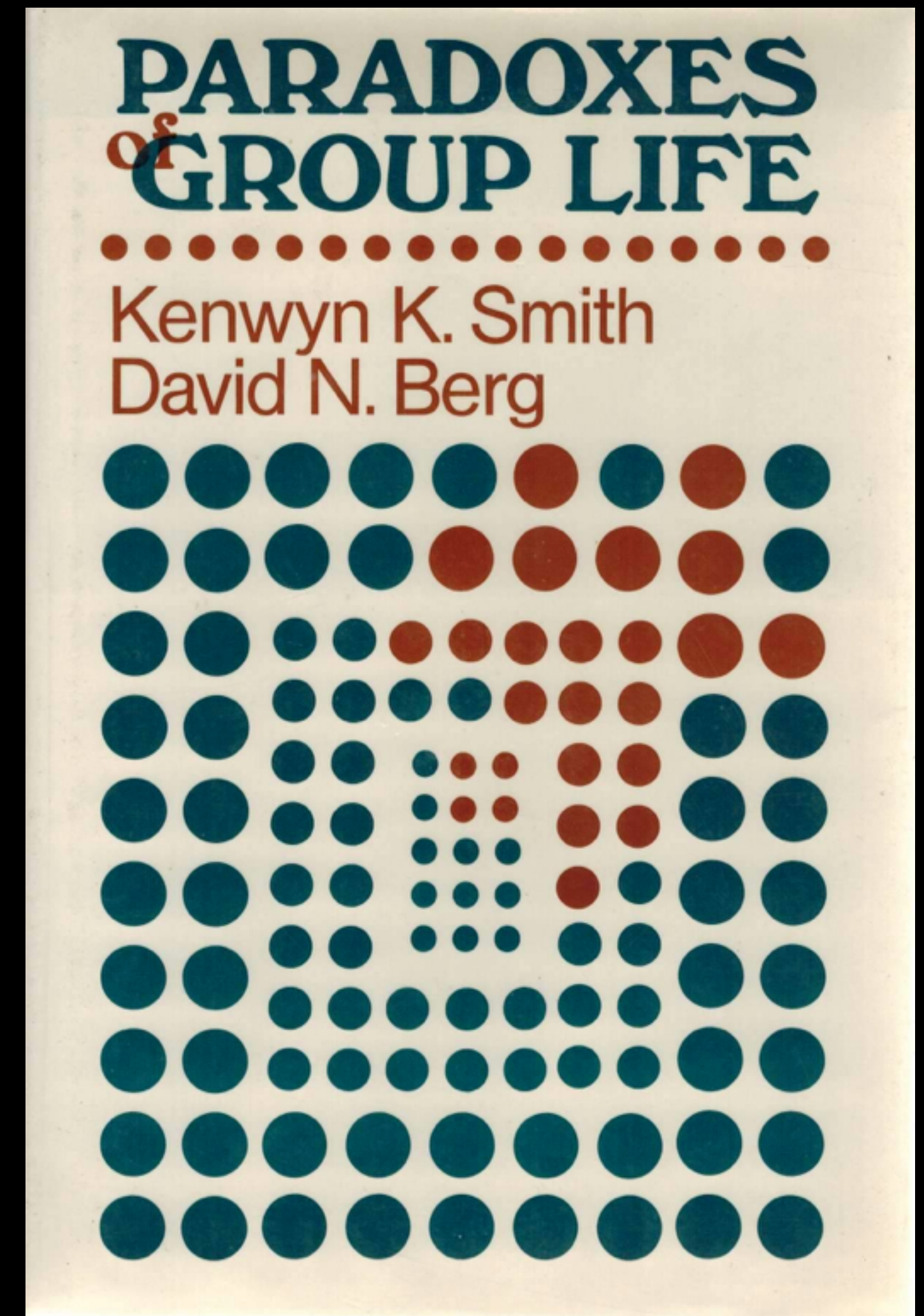
*But do not despair ye designers!*  
Organizational design is a kind of  
design - **You have more potential for  
solving these problems than your peers.**



## Inclusion / Exclusion paradox:

“I want to be seen as special  
AND I want the group to accept  
me as one of their own”

“X for designers” reinforces being  
“other” as we exclude ourselves

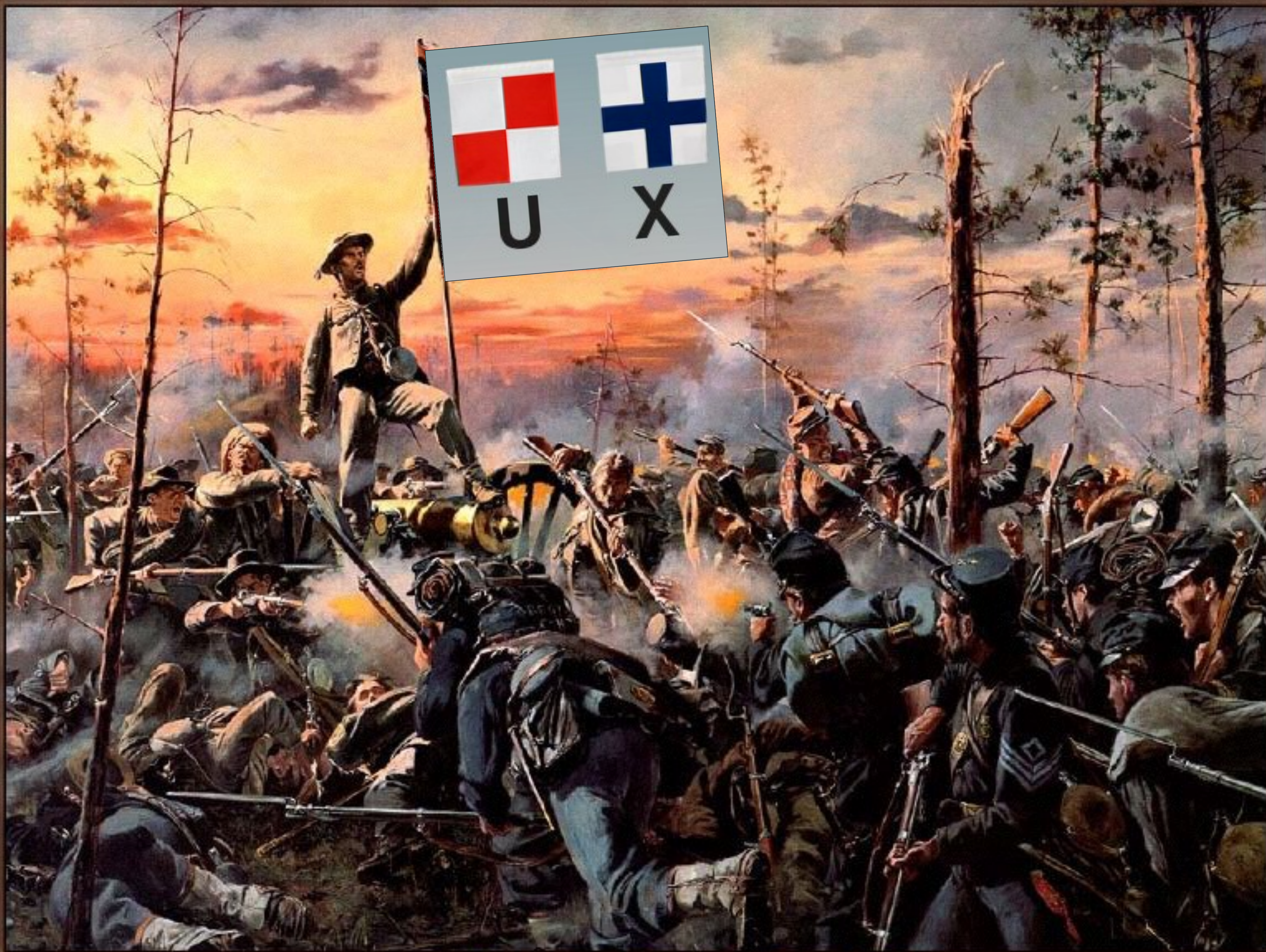






Southern Cross Battle of Glendale, June 30 1862





Southern Cross Battle of Glendale, June 30 1862

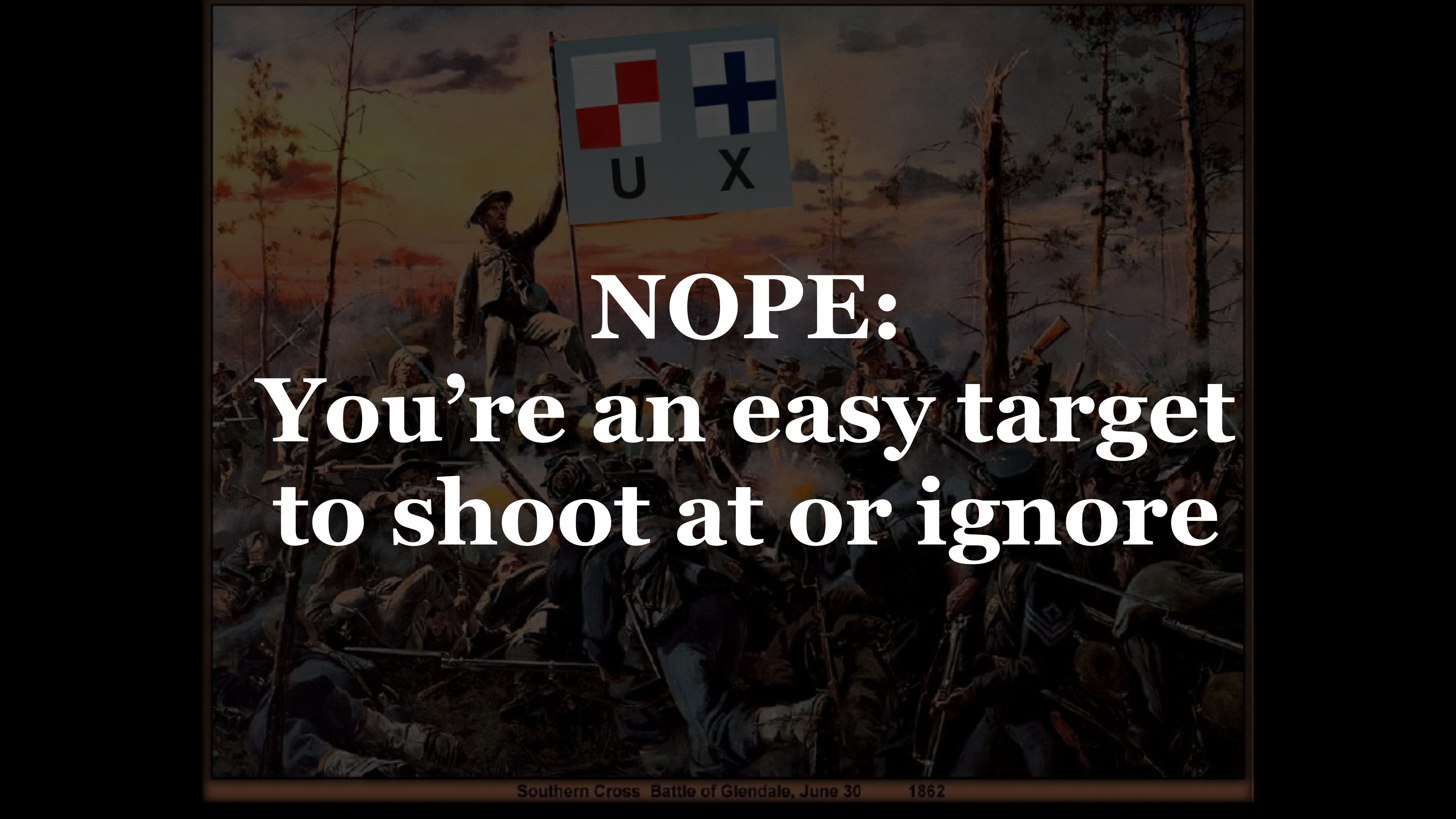




I'M A CHAMPION!

Southern Cross Battle of Glendale, June 30 1862



The background is a historical painting of a battle scene, likely the Battle of Glendale. A soldier is perched on a flagpole, holding a flag. The scene is filled with soldiers in 19th-century attire, some on the ground and others standing. The sky is hazy and the ground is covered in smoke and debris. Overlaid on the top center is a grey rectangular box containing two flags: the Union Flag (red cross on white) and the X-Flag (blue cross on white). Below each flag is a black letter: 'U' under the Union Flag and 'X' under the X-Flag. The text 'NOPE: You're an easy target to shoot at or ignore' is written in large, white, serif font across the center of the image.

**NOPE:**  
**You're an easy target**  
**to shoot at or ignore**

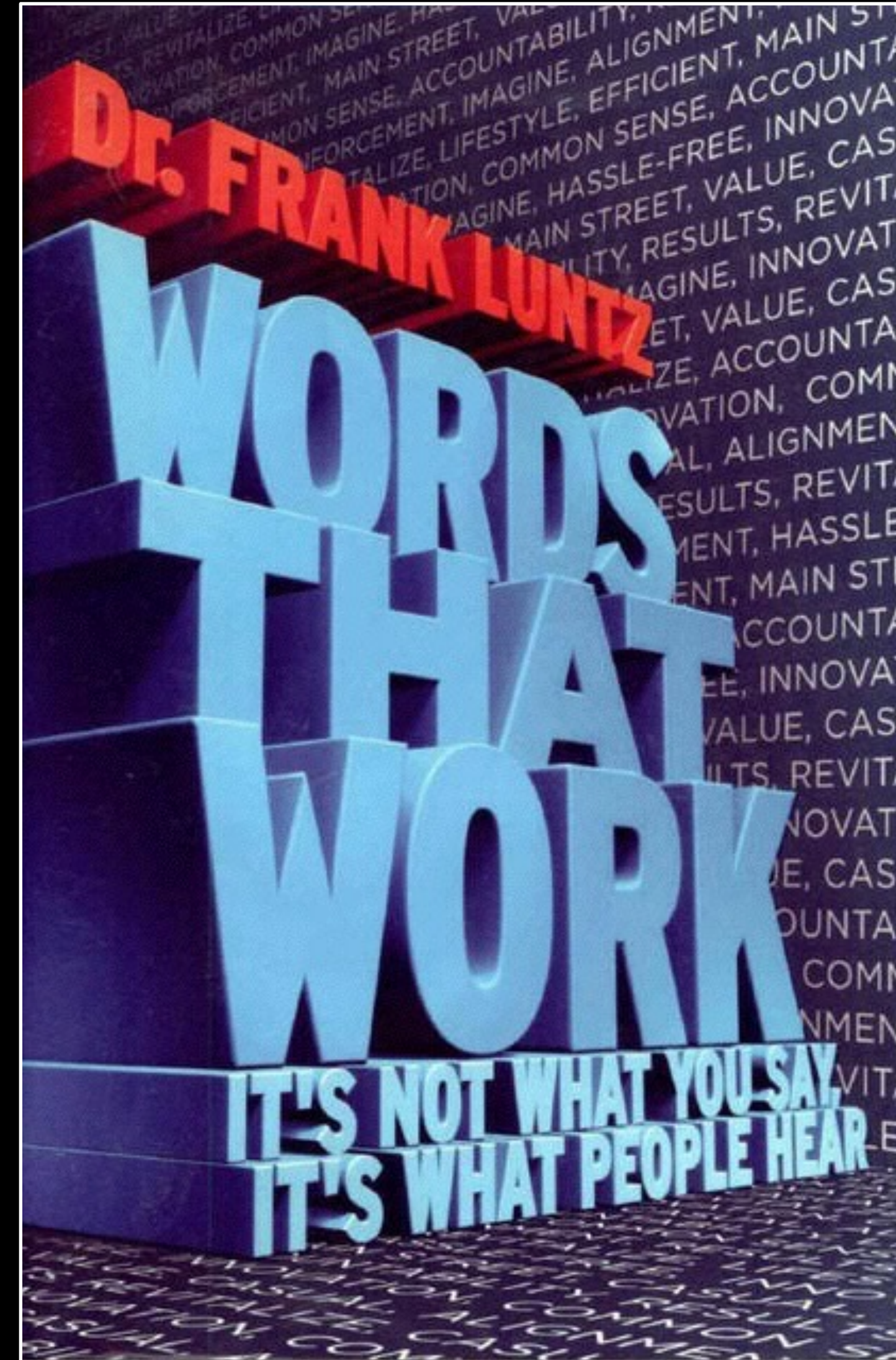
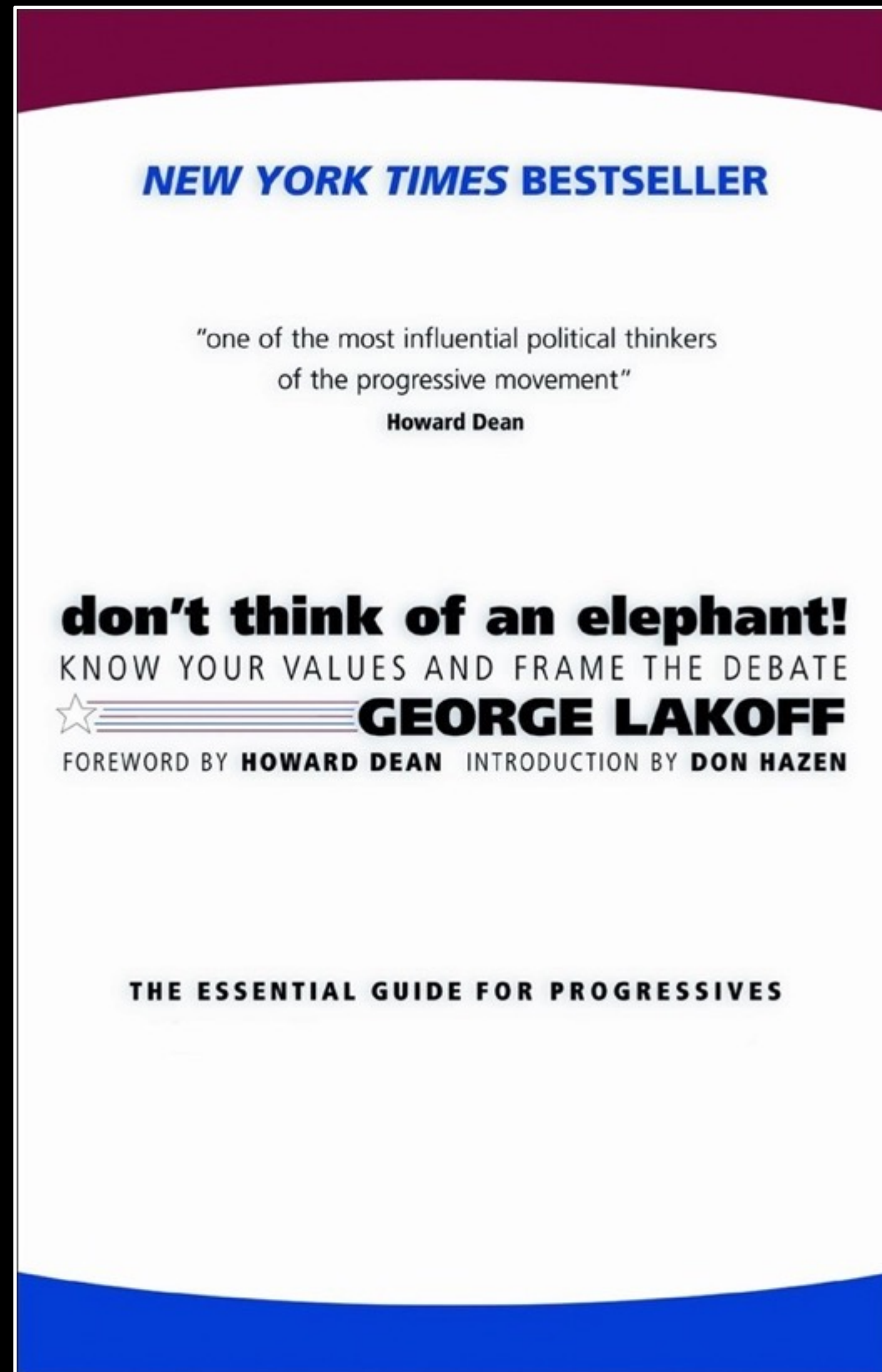


“Each time I visit a conference I hear the same problems faced by UX professionals... ‘my CEO just doesn’t listen to me in meetings, they seem to switch off and just don’t understand my point of view.’ In the majority of cases this is probably your problem, not theirs. “

- **Alastair Simpson, Head of Design, Atlassian**



# Thinking In Frames / Metaphors





CHARM

CHARM IS  
DESIGNED

# CHARM DEPENDS ON CONTEXT

DIFFERENT PEOPLE ARE CHARMED BY  
DIFFERENT BEHAVIORS



“AS THE LEAD  
DESIGNER, I’M TELLING  
YOU WHAT YOU ARE  
DOING IS WRONG”

“HERE IS SOMETHING  
THAT WILL SOLVE  
YOUR PROBLEM”

“HERE IS SOMETHING  
THAT WILL INCREASE  
REVENUE”

“HERE IS SOMETHING  
THAT WILL MAKE US A  
TRUSTWORTHY BRAND”



“HERE IS SOMETHING  
THAT WILL **SAVE**  
**YOUR TEAM DAYS OF**  
**WORK”**

“HERE IS SOMETHING  
THAT WILL HELP ME  
GET MORE POWER”

**HCI**



**HHI**

Human to Human



**HGI**

Human to Group



COACHING

WORKSHOPS

CUSTOM L+D

RETREATS

ACCELERATOR

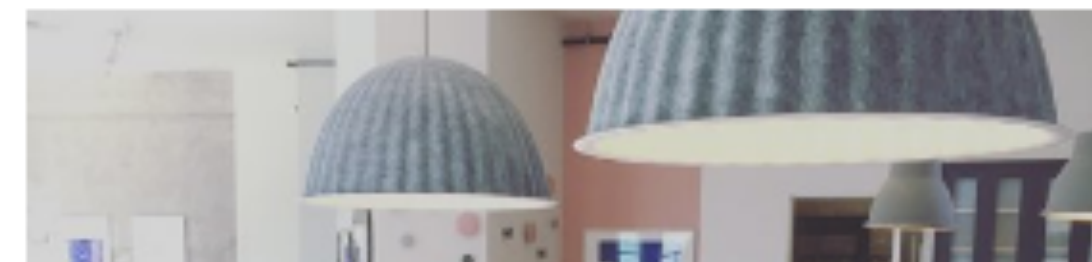
ABOUT

WORKSHOPS

# Leadership workshops for every level

Join a group of peers from  
across the industry for one to  
two days of guided, interactive

Workshops are held throughout  
the year in a variety of cities,  
with visits from local guest





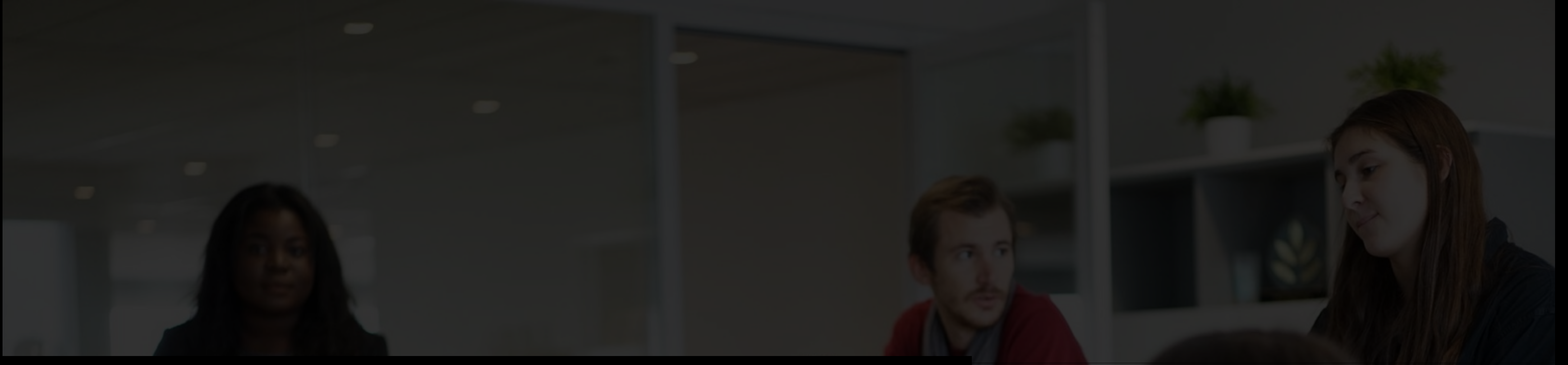
# **Play #4: TALK ONE ON ONE**

**(Seats at tables are overrated)**











# **You rarely make allies *in* meetings**

- **When meetings start, people already have positions**
- **People behave differently when others are watching**
- **Pitching an entire room at once is very hard**
- **But after a meeting, a coffee with someone can transform your understanding of what is going on**

# Grow acquaintances into allies

- Relationships grow from interactions over time
- If you need more influence, you need to lead the creation of more relationships
- Like dating, success rates are low - but worth it
- Goal: Engineering VP fights for resources for you

# **Play #5: Befriend Engineers**







**“YOUR SUCCESS DEPENDS ENTIRELY  
ON YOUR ABILITY TO  
INFLUENCE ENGINEERS”**

**-Joe Belfiore (my first PM boss),  
VP, Microsoft**



**MBWA** - Management by Walking Around

**IBWA** - Influence by Walking Around

# Think of everyone as a partner

“One day I suddenly realized it didn't matter who reported to who. I should treat everyone like they reported to me, which means this:

When you report to me, I make it clear what you need to do to make me successful, and I help you do that. Then you tell me what you need and I do that too. Our success is interlinked: it's just about conversation and support. So it doesn't matter who reports to who, we all need to communicate and support each other.”

- Christina Wodtke, Former GM @ Yahoo, Myspace, Zynga



# **Play #6: Read the room**







ANALYSIS:

\*\*\*\*\*

234654 453 35

654334 450 16

245261 865 26

453665 766 46

382856 863 09

356878 544 04

664217 985 89

254346 956 32

SCAN MODE 43894  
SIZE ASSESSMENT

ASSESSMENT COMPLETE

FIT PROBABILITY 0.99

RESET TO ACQUISITION  
MODE SPEECH LEVEL 78

PRIORITY OVERRIDE  
DEFENSE SYSTEMS SET  
ACTIVE STATUS  
LEVEL 2347923 MAX

MATCH ■











**Sally (Biz Dev VP)**

**Wants to be CEO**







**Nancy (CEO)**

**Knows all budgets must be  
cut by 25%**





**Steve (VP of Marketing)**

**Is leaving the company  
but no one knows yet**





**Sam, Director of PM**

**Is frustrated by engineers  
ignoring PMs**





**Linda, Director of Engineering**

**Thinks Sam's PMs are dumb, wants  
more engineers instead**

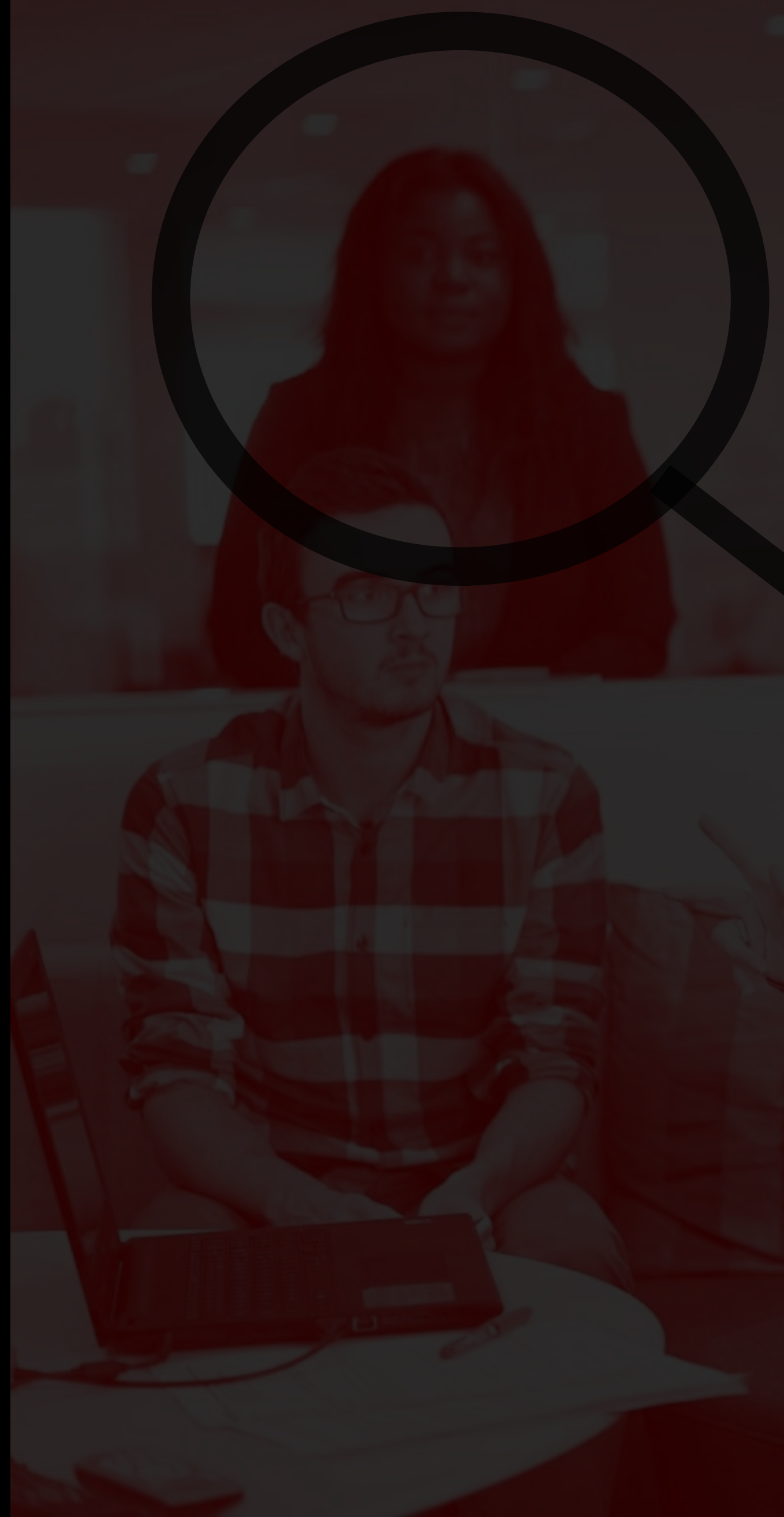
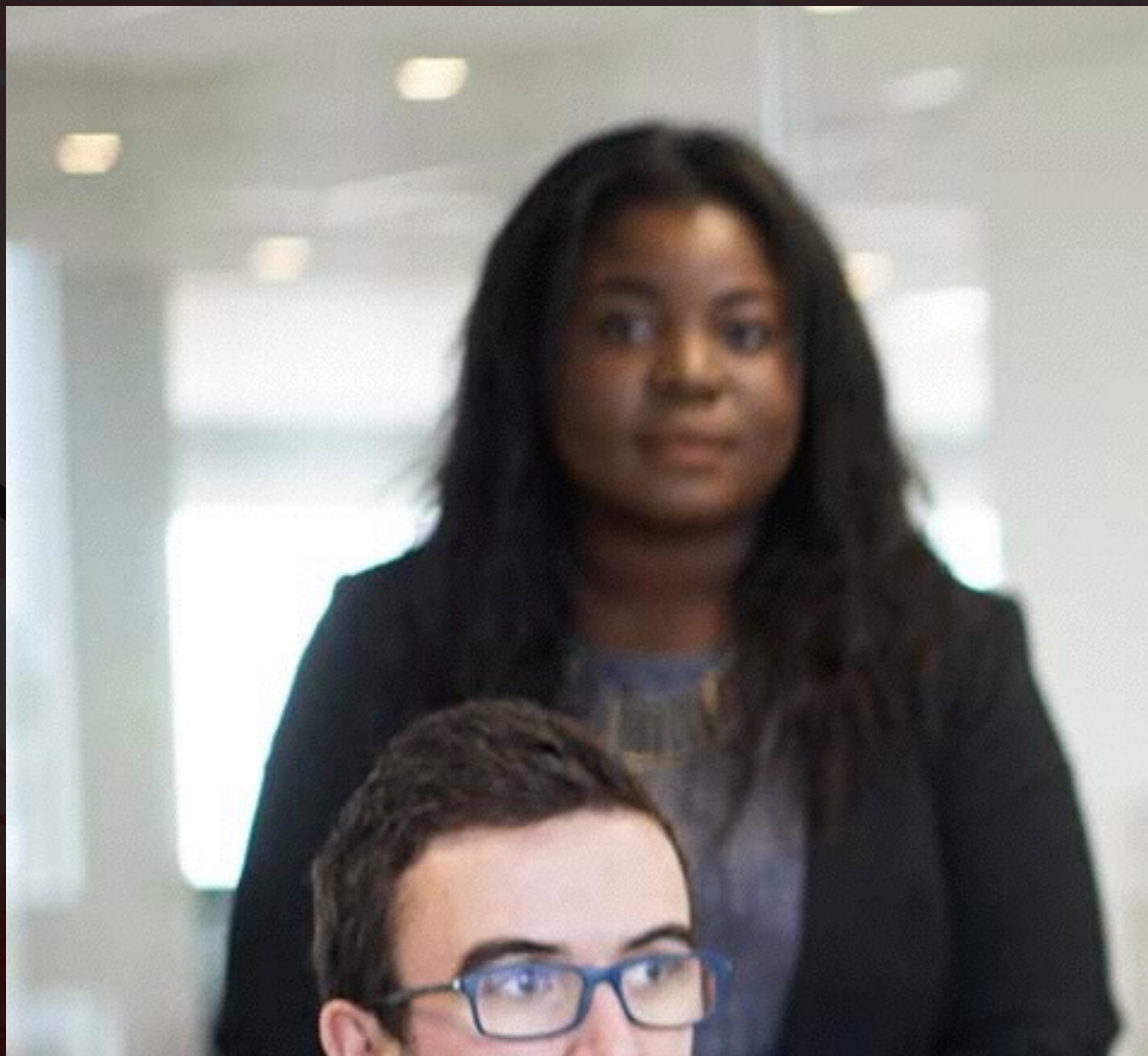




**Kayla (Design VP)**

**Only person in the room  
who knows all of this**







To subdue the enemy without  
fighting is the acme of skill.

- Sun Tzu



# **Play #7: Get ahead of decisions**



If there are **more than 5 people** in the  
room, you have less power than you think



**Access is often unfairly based on friendships, golf partners, or other insider connections hard to access especially if you're not a white hetero male\***



**\*The biases of your regional culture may differ**



# Play 8: Manage your boss

As you rise they have less time for you. They become another resource that you must manage.

(psst: you also need to manage your skip level)



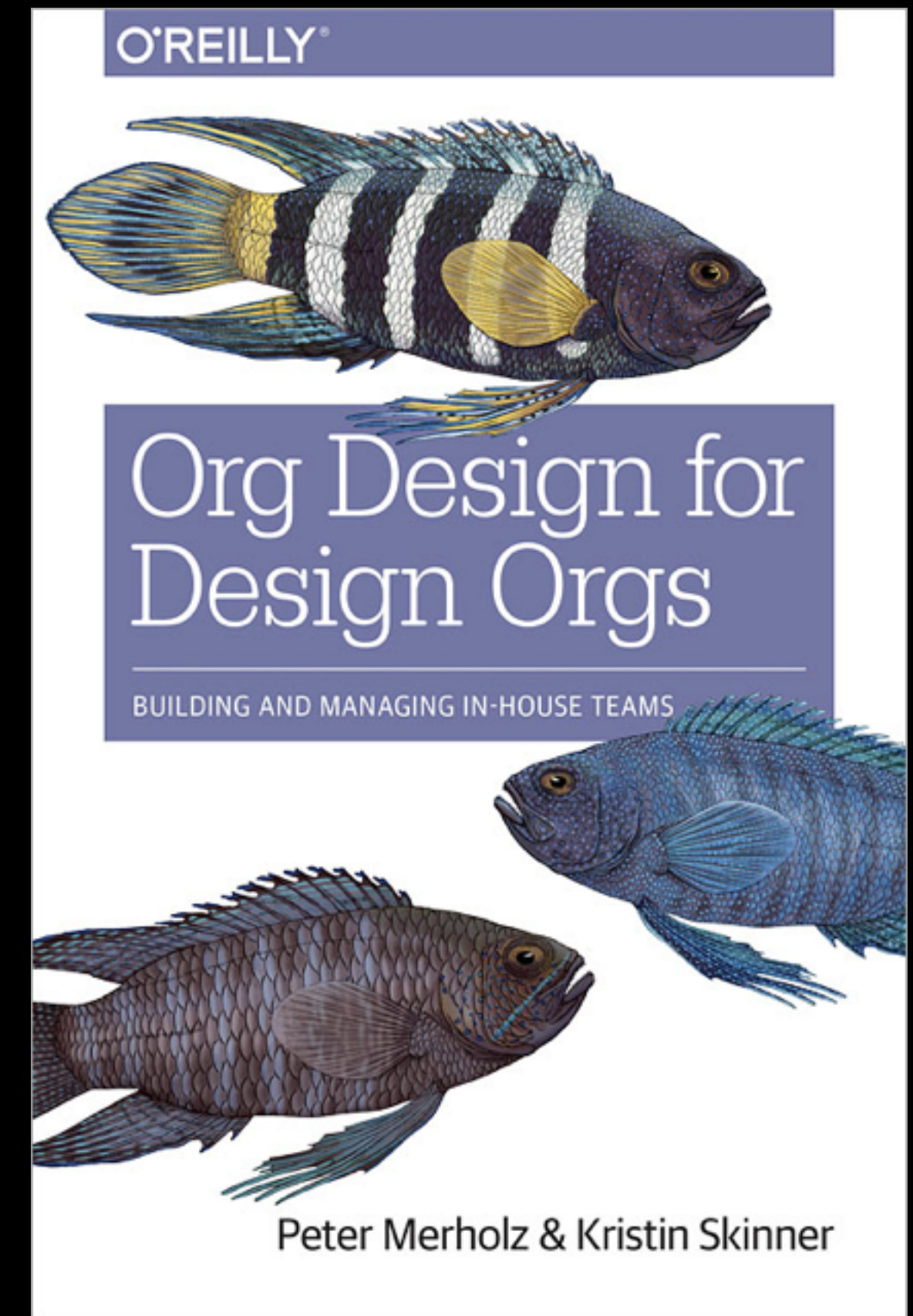
# Play 8: Manage your boss

- Lead them in understanding your value/needs
- Learn how to make them look good, on their terms
- **Be efficient:** earn a reputation as effective & reliable
- When peer leaders complement, ask 'em to tell boss
- Never let them be surprised in meetings, especially from their peers, doubly-so for bad news



# Play 8: Manage your boss

- **Over-communicate:** your team's success isn't self-evident
- **Push back:** don't let your team get run over or spread too thin - learn to say NO
- **Stand up** (respectfully) to executives who don't know better; if you don't who will?
- **Be relentless** in getting what your team needs: Don't take a single "no" for an answer





# Play 9: Create a mini-landscape

- Teach your staff the plays from the playbook
- Protect your team from stupidity (from above)
- When you have influence, improve the landscape
- Be a step ahead of your team



**Ocean of  
Machiavellian  
turmoil and  
despair**



**Oasis of sanity,  
clarity and trust**

**Ocean of  
Machiavellian  
turmoil and  
despair**



# Play #10: When in doubt, look up

- If bad employees don't get fired, look up
- If meetings are unfair and combative, look up
- Executives (\$\$\$\$) are responsible- it's no mystery who's accountable if culture is broken
- Don't be afraid to move on - there are healthier places that will value your talents



# Photo credits

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- <https://shop.barbican.org.uk/products/barbican-cross-section-mounted-print>
- <https://www.nps.gov/lac/learn/nature/mountains.htm>
- <http://bonkersworld.net/organizational-charts> - Manu Cornet



# THANK YOU

## A POLITICAL PLAYBOOK FOR CREATIVE LEADERS

these slides: [bit.ly/ld2018-berkun](https://bit.ly/ld2018-berkun)

1. Study the landscape
2. Know the business
3. Invest in perception
4. Talk one on one
5. Befriend engineers
6. Read the room
7. Get ahead of decisions
8. Manage your boss
9. Create a mini-lanscape
10. When in doubt, look up

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