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Leading Beyond the Fix

Building Teams That Think, Solve, and Succeed

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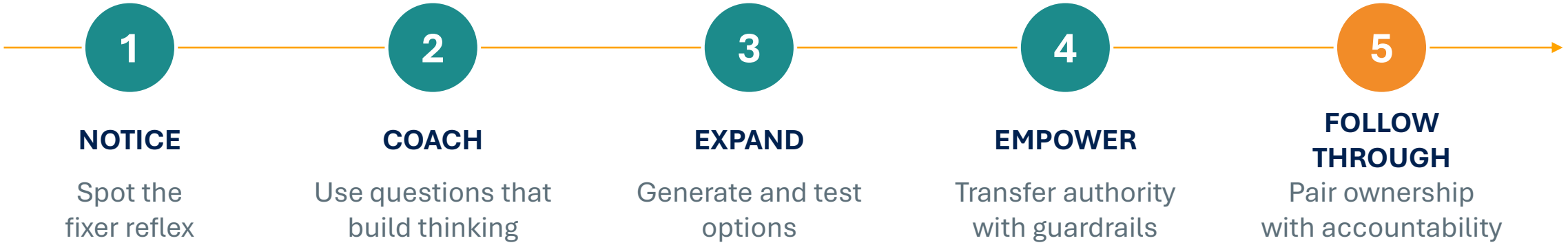
“Ernst & Young Is Giving $100 Million in Bonuses to Staff for ‘Human’ Skills”

- Wall Street Journal 8/31/2026

PURPOSE

Today’s 60-minute journey



Desired Outcome

Leaders leave with one repeatable coaching method and one real conversation to change this week.

DISCUSS

Where do you become the “answer machine”?

Think of a recent moment when someone brought you a problem.

- What made you want to jump in?
- What did your response teach the employee?
- What might you do differently next time?



SHIFT

The fixer reflex solves today but may weaken tomorrow

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What the leader gains

- Speed in the moment
- Control over the immediate outcome
- Relief from uncertainty



What the team learns

- Bring decisions upward
- Wait for the “right” answer
- Avoid reasonable risk



What the system experiences

- Leader bottlenecks
- Slower decisions
- Blurry ownership

A leader’s goal is not to disappear. It is to move from answer-giver to capability-builder.

COACH

Coach the thinking, not just the task

Don't you think you should just escalate it?

- What is the real challenge?
- What options do you see?
- What have you already tried?
- What are you assuming?
- **What do you recommend?**

Ask. Pause. Listen. Then guide.

A REPEATABLE METHOD

Use P-S-A to move from problem to ownership

P

PROBLEM

Find the real issue

“Tell me more. What is happening, and what else?”

S

SOLUTION

Generate and evaluate options

“What could work? Which option best fits the goal and constraints?”

A

ACTION

Turn insight into commitment

“What will you do first? What support do you need from me?”

THINK BEYOND THE IMMEDIATE

Strategic thinkers widen the frame

01 What is changing?

02 What problem are we really solving?

03 What happens if we do nothing?

04 What tradeoffs are we accepting?

05 What will success look like later?



SOLVE

Separate idea generation from idea evaluation

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Diverge First. Converge Second.



DIVERGE

Generate ideas - QUANTITY
Defer judgement until later
Build on ideas



CONVERGE

Evaluate ideas - QUALITY
Apply criteria
Compare tradeoffs
Select, test, or combine

Common Failure:
Judging too early, then mistaking the first workable idea for the best available option.

SOLVE

Diverge and converge at every phase

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Open the thinking first. Narrow the choices second.

DEFINE THE REAL PROBLEM

1

DIVERGE
Explore symptoms, causes, perspectives

CONVERGE
Frame the problem to solve

EXPAND → FOCUS

IDENTIFY THE BEST SOLUTION

2

DIVERGE
Generate multiple possible solutions

CONVERGE
Evaluate, combine, and select

EXPAND → FOCUS

CREATE A SOLID ACTION PLAN

3

DIVERGE
Identify steps, resources, risks

CONVERGE
Commit to owners, timing, checkpoints

EXPAND → FOCUS

Do not stop at the first problem, the first solution, or the first plan.

EMPOWER

Empowerment transfers ownership, not abandonment

Delegation

Transfers work and an expected outcome.

Empowerment

Transfers appropriate authority and ownership.

The Leader Still Provides

Purpose • boundaries • information • resources access • coaching • feedback



GUARDRAILS

Define the decision space

OUTCOME	**What result must be achieved?**
AUTHORITY	**What may they decide without approval?**
BOUNDARIES	**What risks, policies, or limits apply?**
RESOURCES	**What people, time, data, or budget are available?**
CHECKPOINTS	**When will you reconnect, and for what purpose?**



PRACTICE

Breakout: coach without taking over

Groups of 3

1. COACHING LEADER

Use P-S-A. Ask before telling.

2. TEAM MEMBER

Bring the scenario to life. Own the action.

3. OBSERVER

Listen for questions, options, guardrails, and ownership.



The “Don’t Take It Back” Challenge

Triads: manager, employee, observer. Rotate once if time allows.

EMPLOYEE	MANAGER	OBSERVER
• Problem: “I cannot finish the client project by Friday. I need you to tell me what to do.” • Do not reveal the root cause until the manager asks useful questions.	Use P-S-A. Ask at least three questions before offering any advice. End with employee-owned action and timing.	Listen for: • Ask vs. tell • Real problem identified • Employee-generated options • Clear action • Ownership stayed put

DEBRIEF

Did ownership stay on the right side?

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MANAGER TOOK IT	SHARED OWNERSHIP	EMPLOYEE OWNED IT
• What words or questions caused that result?	• What words or questions caused that result?	• What words or questions caused the result?

Best insight to carry forward: _____

DEBRIEF

What changed when the leader stopped fixing?

1 Where did the leader most want to jump in?

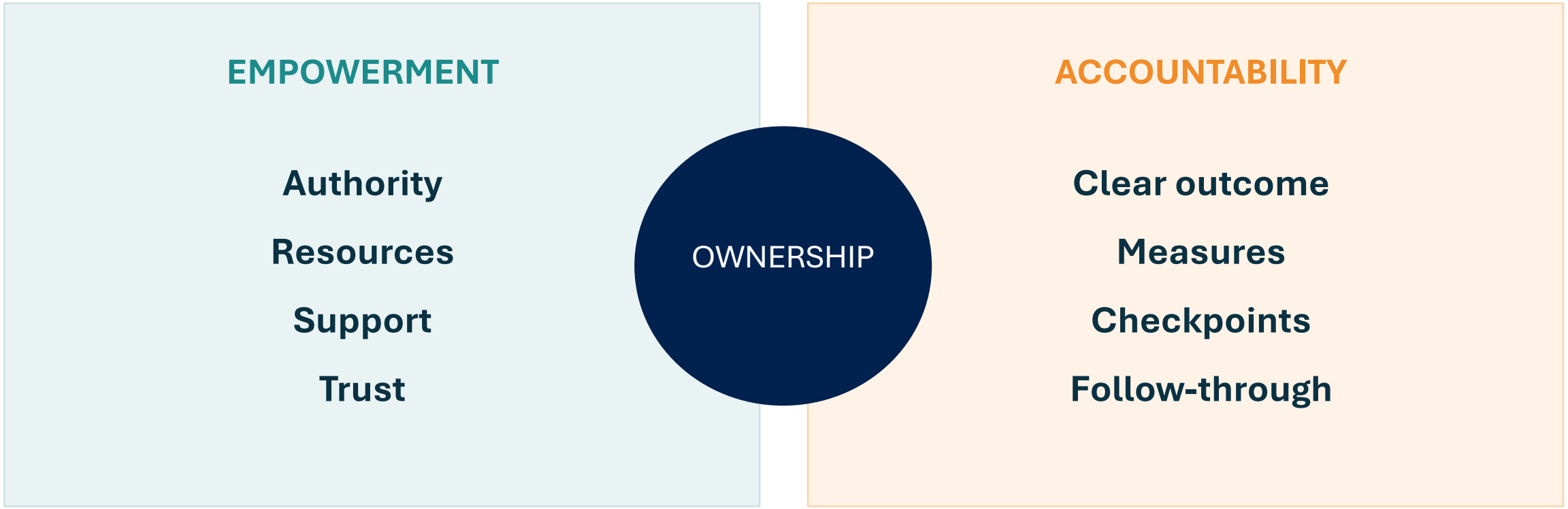
2 Which question unlocked better thinking?

3 Did the employee leave with ownership?

4 What guardrail made the action safer?

Listen for the shift: manager effort moves from producing the answer to strengthening the employee's judgment.

Empowerment and accountability travel together



Accountability is ownership of the outcome, not simply completion of a task.

FOLLOW-THROUGH

Close the loop without micromanaging

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1	2	3	4	5
CLARIFY	**CONFIRM**	**CHECK IN**	**COACH**	**REINFORCE**
Outcome, “why,” authority, measures	Ask the employee to restate ownership	At agreed milestones, not constantly	Address gaps early and specifically	Recognize initiative and learning

Checkpoints answer “How can I support progress?” not “Can I take this back?”

COMMIT

Your leadership reset

STOP What will I stop solving for others?

START What coaching question will I use?

SHIFT What decision can move closer to the work?

FOLLOW What checkpoint will make ownership visible?

WRITE ONE ACTION · SHARE WITH A PARTNER



QUESTIONS?

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THE LEADER'S TEST

Is my team stronger because of my help, or dependent on it?

THINK • SOLVE • OWN • FOLLOW THROUGH



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