

A FRAMEWORK FOR RESILIENT FOLLOWERSHIP

Overcoming Organizational Cinderella Syndrome & Learned Helplessness

A Framework for Developing Resilient Followership

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TODAY'S SESSION

Agenda

01 Defining Our Concepts

02 Activity: Mapping the Follower Experience

03 Framing Organizational Reality

04 Action Planning

05 Activity: Rewriting the Narrative

06 Closing Reflection



A MOMENT OF REFLECTION

Where do you stand?

For each statement, mark where you honestly land — no one will see your answers but you.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE				STRONGLY AGREE
	1	2	3	4	5
1. I tend to wait for someone else to notice my work rather than advocate for it myself.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. My organization adapts well when unexpected challenges arise.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I've stopped raising ideas because past attempts didn't seem to change anything.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I feel more comfortable when someone else makes the final call, even on things I could decide myself.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I feel confident my organization can handle disruption without losing momentum.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. No matter what I do, it feels like circumstances at work stay the same.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I often hold back from taking on more responsibility, even when I'm capable of it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. The people around me actively look for ways to improve, even when things are going fine.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I find myself going through the motions rather than trying to improve things.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



SECTION 01

Defining Our Concepts

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Organizational Concepts



Organizational Cinderella Syndrome (OCS)

A capable, high-performing follower is repeatedly “rescued” rather than developed. Leaders step in, rework the output, or quietly reassign the hard parts — until initiative starts to feel riskier than waiting to be told what to do.



Organizational Learned Helplessness (OLH)

A follower's effort and input go unrewarded or unacknowledged long enough that trying no longer feels connected to outcomes. Effort quietly gives way to silence — and silence gets mistaken for compliance.



WHY “CINDERELLA”

A new spin on an old favorite

Cinderella was never short on capability. She managed a household, carried the workload of a full staff, and did it well — yet she stayed in the ashes, because no one around her ever asked her to do otherwise.

That's the pattern at the center of OCS. It isn't a story about a follower who lacks ability. It's a story about a system that keeps a capable person in a diminished role — not through malice, but through habit.

The glass slipper doesn't fit because it's magic. It fits because it was made to measure — the same way real growth fits a follower who was actually invited to grow into it.



WHY “LEARNED HELPLESSNESS”

A term borrowed from psychology — on purpose

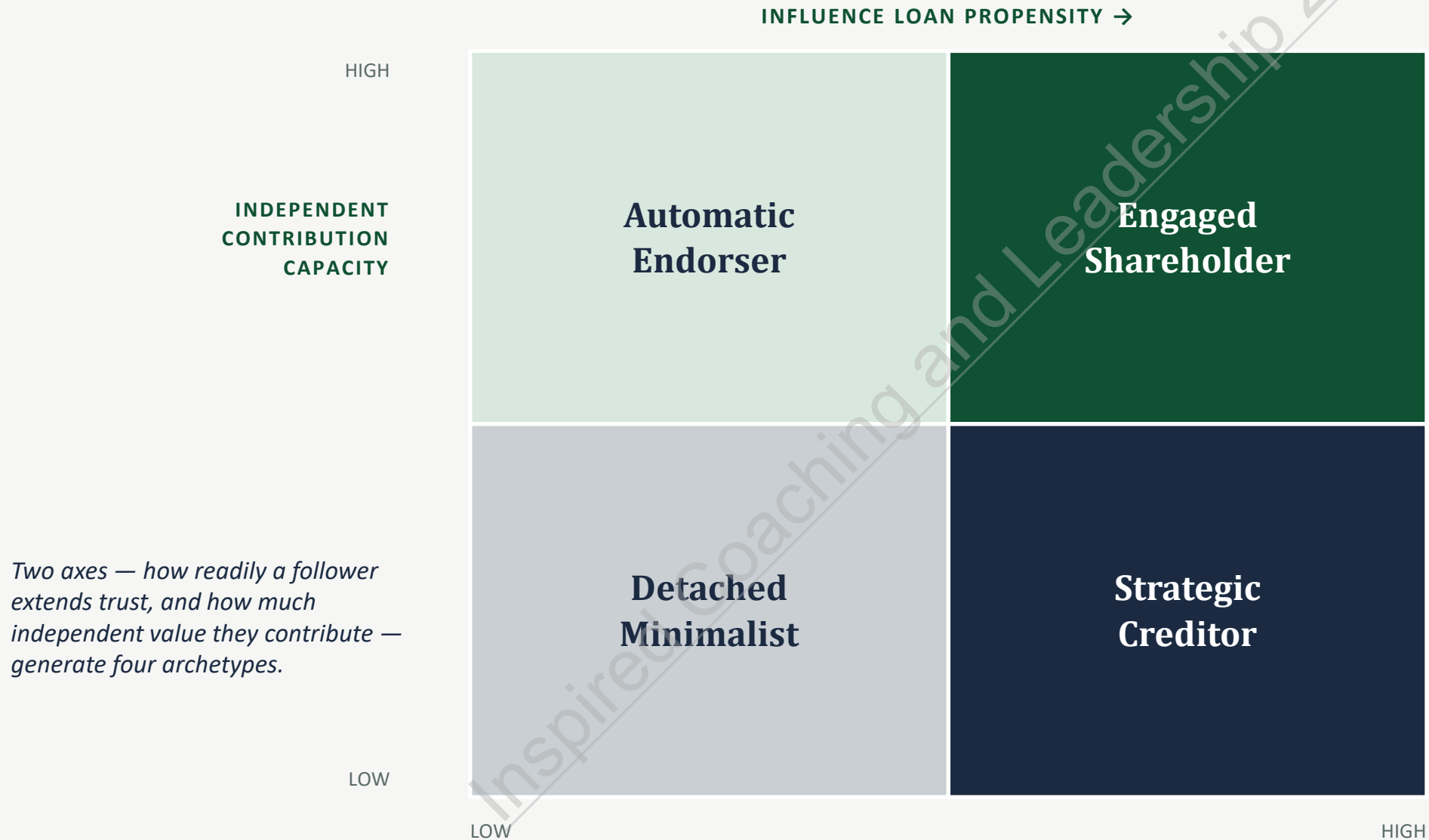
The phrase isn't ours. Psychologist Martin Seligman coined it in the 1960s after watching dogs stop trying to escape a mild shock once escape had repeatedly failed — even after the door was left open.

That's the pattern at the center of OLH. It isn't a story about a follower who lacks resilience. It's a story about what happens when effort meets the same uncontrollable outcome often enough that trying stops looking worth it.

The door was open. The dog just stopped checking. That's not laziness — that's a lesson, learned one ignored effort at a time.

THE INFLUENCE BANK MATRIX

Introducing a New Concept for Follower Archetypes



Where concepts collide



Engaged Shareholders

OCS RISK

High trust, high capacity — exactly the followers leaders lean on hardest. That reliance can slide into rescuing instead of developing, without either side noticing.



Automatic Endorsers & Detached Minimalists

OLH RISK

Both already withhold independent input. When that input goes unacknowledged, the pattern reinforces itself — agreement or silence becomes the safest response.



Strategic Creditors

CROSSROADS RISK

Conditional trust needs a response. Met with neither coaching nor follow-through, a Strategic Creditor's healthy scrutiny can curdle into OLH-driven silence.



FROM THE LEADER'S PERSPECTIVE

What it looks like from the top

Appears lazy

Lack of initiative

Needs “hand-holding”

Attendance issues

Low or mediocre performance

Disengaged

Won't volunteer for new tasks, promotions, or positions

“Radio silence”

Low morale



FROM THE FOLLOWER'S PERSPECTIVE

What it feels like from the inside

- Leaders aren't trustworthy
- Nothing is ever going to change for the better
- Why should I even try?
- “They” don't care
- Nothing I do is ever good enough
- This is hopeless — what's the point?

Followers experiencing this pattern often carry real decision fatigue and lowered self-esteem — not just lowered output.



GROUP ACTIVITY

Mapping the follower experience

1

Recall a follower behavior that puzzled or frustrated you recently.

2

Write down the leader's read of that behavior — the surface-level story.

3

Now write the plausible follower's-eye view — what might actually be driving it.

4

Share with your table: what closes the gap between the two?



SECTION 03

Framing Organizational Reality

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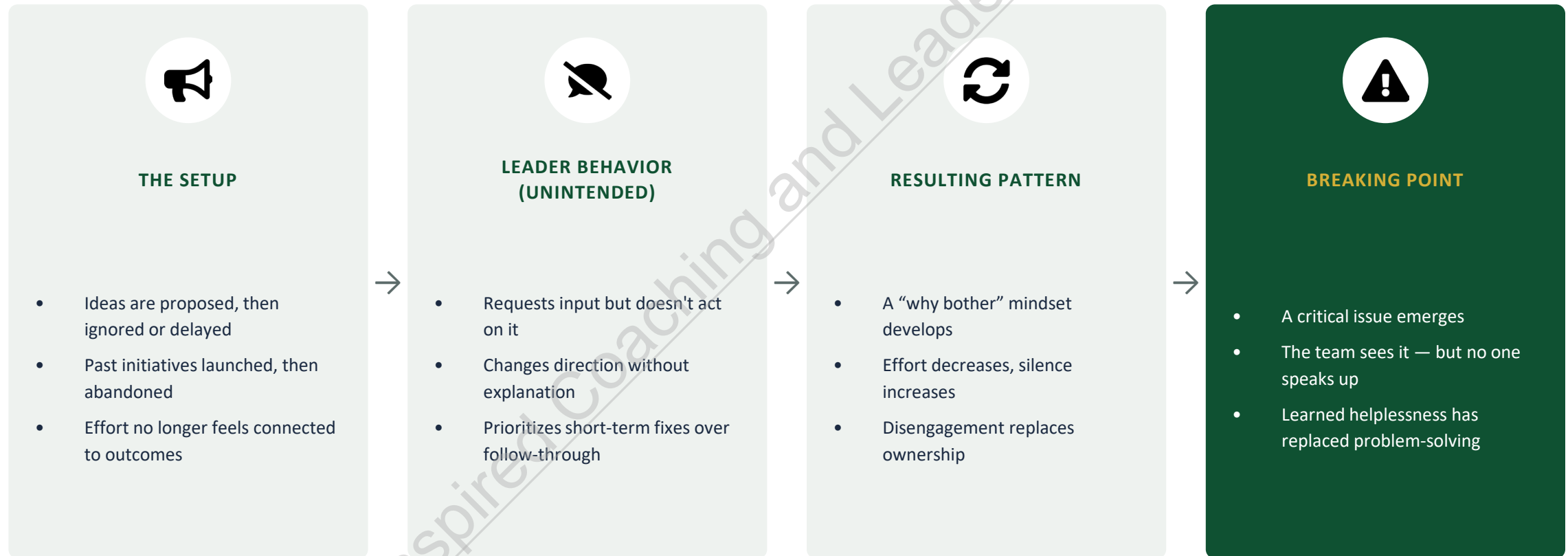
The Star That Waited

A once-proactive team member begins escalating everything — and waiting for leadership becomes the norm.



The Team That Stopped Trying

A team repeatedly proposes improvements — and watches them get ignored, delayed, or quietly abandoned.





SECTION 04

Action Planning

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REVISITING ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

**Organizational culture cannot be resilient
without resilient followers.**

Every strategy in this section is aimed at the same target: giving followers back their initiative and their voice.

Overcoming OCS and OLH



Countering OCS

- Coach instead of rescue — ask what they'd try before stepping in.
- Let natural consequences teach, where the stakes allow it.
- Reward initiative, not just availability or agreeableness.



Countering OLH

- Close the loop on every suggestion — even a no deserves a reason.
- Follow through on stated direction; don't quietly change course.
- Make small wins visible fast, so effort visibly connects to outcomes.



SECTION 05 · GROUP ACTIVITY

Rewriting the narrative

Read each scenario on the next two slides. For each one, discuss at your table:

- 1 What pattern is at work — OCS, OLH, or both?
- 2 Where did the story actually turn?
- 3 What could the leader have done differently at that turn?

SCENARIO A

Jane

Jane has worked for ABD Industries for seven years. For the first four years, she asked for a promotion at every performance review. Her manager told her the company didn't have the budget — and followed up with a comment about potential layoffs.

Meanwhile, he promoted people with reputations for poor performance, justifying it as helping them boost their pension before retirement. He kept promising Jane that her turn would come as soon as the next person retired.

Jane took on more work to “prove her worth.” By year five, her performance had declined and she'd stopped joining team-building events. She never finished the SOP manual she'd started for her unit. Rumor has it she's applied with ABD's competition.

SCENARIO B

Brian

Brian worked in one area of programming at Big IT Solutions, but his access spanned other departments' work too. Over the years he caught a number of bugs elsewhere and brought each one to his manager — who refused to follow up, saying it wasn't his job to fix other departments' work. Brian ended up fixing them himself.

When Big IT Solutions finally landed their dream client, Brian noticed a problem in another department's piece of the project. This time, tired of carrying other people's work with no support, he said nothing and didn't fix it.

No one caught the problem until the client went live — damaging the client's trust and the company's reputation. When management confronted Brian for not reporting it, he resigned on the spot, dropping his company phone in the lobby fish tank on his way out.

DEBRIEF

Scoring your reflection

Go back to your self-check. For each theme below, add your three responses together, then find your total on the scale.



Statements 1, 4, 7

Waiting to Be Rescued (Cinderella Syndrome)



Statements 3, 6, 9

Learned Helplessness



Statements 2, 5, 8

Organizational Resilience

3 NOT PRESENT	4-7 LOW	8-12 MODERATE	13-15 HIGH
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CLOSING REFLECTION

**Which of your followers have quietly stopped trying —
and what would it take for them to start again?**

*“The most dangerous moment in an organization isn't when people are loud. It's when they stop speaking —
and no one notices.”*



Thank You

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Let's discuss — questions welcome.



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