

Signaling What Matters: Taking Over Building the Right Culture

Exercise for Leadership Clarity and Cultural Congruence

Part 1: Introduction & Line of Thought

In Chapter 8 of *When You Are Not in the Room*, we examined a **central paradox** in organizations: we say we value certain things—like trust, collaboration, or innovation—but we often measure and reward completely different behaviors.

This isn't just a system flaw. It's a leadership trap. Because the moment leaders start aligning to what's rewarded (rather than what's needed), **culture weakens, people disengage**, and leadership becomes **executional** rather than **transformational**.

The truth is, most leaders didn't choose these contradictions—they inherited them. But here's the reality: *you may not control the system, but you do shape the signals*. Every decision, every reinforcement, every moment of recognition is a chance to either amplify the noise or change the tone.

That's what this exercise is about.

It invites you to diagnose the implicit messages within your company:

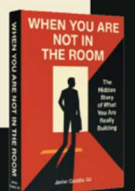
- What is claimed as valuable?
- What actually gets tracked?
- And what behaviors are consistently rewarded or promoted?

Once you see the misalignment, you can begin doing what great leaders do: **operate beyond the system**. Because culture, value creation, and fluidity don't depend on **permission**. They depend on **practice**.

And remember—just because the system hasn't changed yet, doesn't mean you can't lead like it has.

"Stop rewarding the ability to deliver and ignoring the inability to lead."

— From Chapter 8



Part 2: The Exercise – Mapping the System’s Priorities

Instructions: Choose 5 values or leadership expectations your company claims to hold (e.g., empowerment, collaboration, innovation, feedback culture). Then fill in how these are—or are not—reinforced.

What the company says it values	What gets measured	What gets rewarded and How
e.g. “We value collaboration”	Team KPIs are rarely used; performance reviews are individual.	Promotions go to individual high performers. Mostly based on Targets Met or Financial Results.

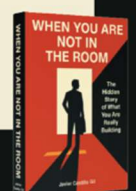
Where the Gaps Hurt

Instructions: Reflect on the table above. Where are the gaps? How do they show up in leadership behavior or team morale?

- What values are talked about but not measured or rewarded?
- What stories are being told? Which ones are not?
- What kind of behavior do people mimic to “get ahead”?
- Where are you (even unconsciously) reinforcing the same contradictions?

→ **Optional Exercise:** Share the exercise with your team. Ask for their input, their perceptions and feelings about what is rewarded and what matters to the company and to you.

(CAUTION: This option is not for the faint of heart, be open-minded.)



Part 3: Your Leadership Mandate—Even When the System Fails

Now reflect on what Chapter 8 framed as the four real outcomes of leadership:

- **A Thriving Culture**
- **An Organization that Flows**
- **Value Creation** through inclusion and innovation
- **Extraordinary Execution** that becomes self-reinforcing

Think and Challenge: Even if the system doesn't reward these outcomes, you can.

- How can you make these outcomes more visible in your own team?

- What daily practices can you implement or model—even quietly—that reinforce them?

- Who needs to hear from you, be recognized by you, or be challenged by you to build a different future?

“If not You, Who? If not Now, When?”

Think of one behavior, system, or signal you wish the company would change. Now ask yourself:

- *Could I be the one to model or pilot a better version?*
- *What if I began to change the signal—even in a small way?*
- *What if leadership wasn't about fixing the system, but about moving people forward despite it?*

