

## Seeing What Employees See: Actions for Senior Leaders

How to address the slow drain on motivation,  
contribution and performance

When culture doesn't translate into results, leaders feel the pressure to deliver meaningful change. Employees don't see what leaders see, so they rely on signals of credibility and transparency to make sense of decisions. Our data from 148 organizations and 400,000 employees show that when leadership lacks credibility and transparency, a slow drain on employee motivation and contribution impacts collaboration, psychological safety and business performance. **This practical guide is for senior leaders and executives who understand the impact of their influence and are committed to consistently strengthening culture and business results.**

## ACTION: Experience the organization through employee eyes

Spending time close to the work helps leaders see what hierarchy hides. When leaders experience work the way employees do — and act on what they learn — decisions get better and trust grows. You know it's working when things feel less stuck: fewer late surprises, less re explaining and faster course correction once priorities are clear. Issues surface earlier, and people in the organization experience leadership as informed, credible and fair.

What To Do (Examples):	What You May Say:	What To Watch Out For:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Go where the work really happens.</b> Spend time in roles closest to the work to see how decisions play out beyond your immediate view (virtually, via recordings, in person or AI enabled).</li> <li>» <b>Make it a habit, not a moment.</b> Do this consistently (e.g., quarterly), not as a one off gesture, so employees know what to expect.</li> </ul>	<p><i>“I spent time with the team, understanding key aspect of their work. Here’s what surprised me and what we’re changing as a result.”</i></p> <p><i>“Help me see what I’m not seeing. What feels harder than it should? What do we misunderstand about your day-to-day work?”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Treating time with employees as a visibility/“check-the-box” exercise rather than a learning opportunity.</li> <li>» Not closing the loop. Employees pay close attention to follow-through.</li> <li>» Only visiting high-performing areas; the most insight often comes from where friction exists</li> </ul>

## ACTION: Make the reasoning behind decisions clear enough to move work forward

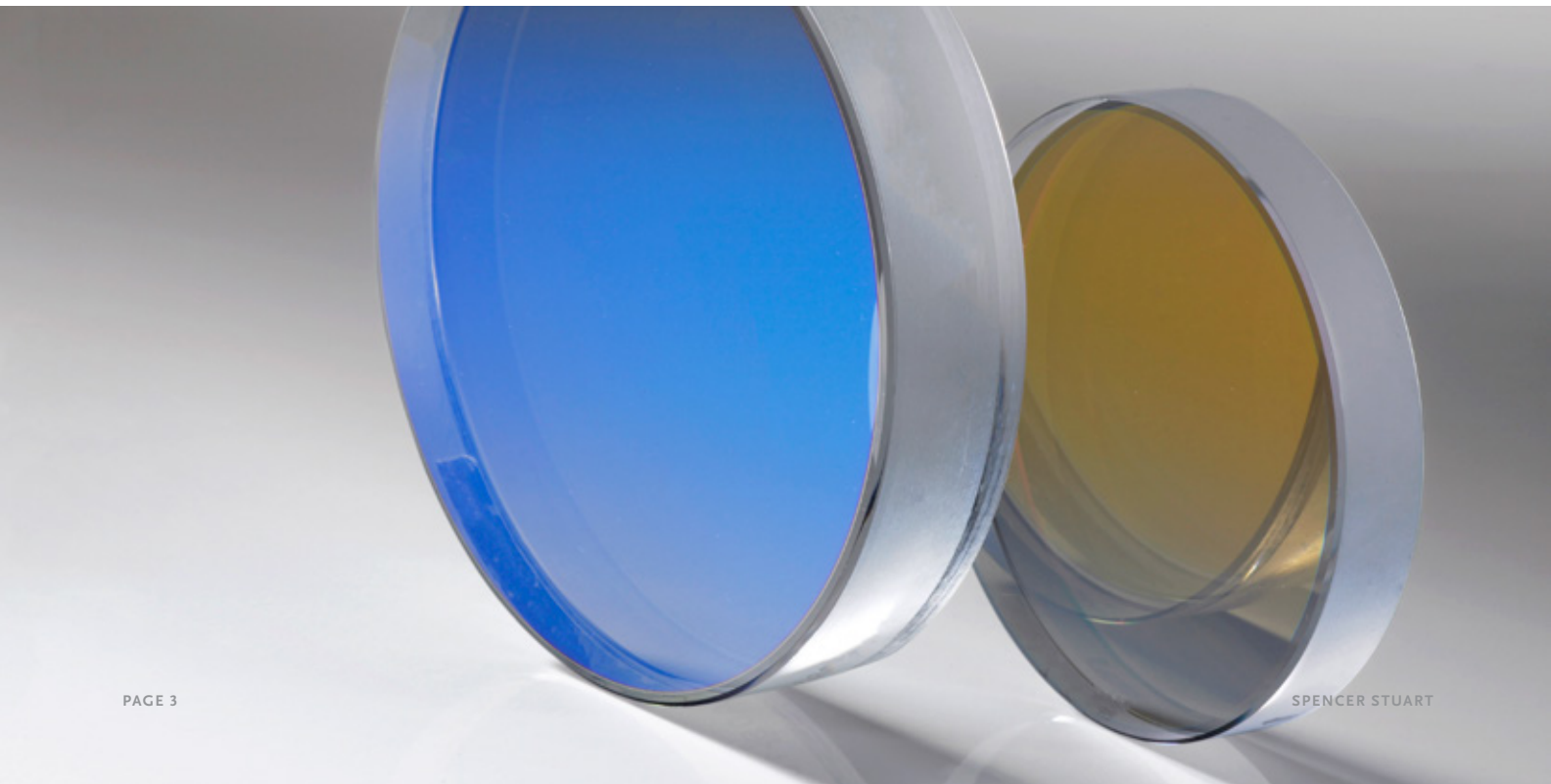
Clarity speeds execution. When people don't understand the why, even good decisions slow down work. Making decision logic visible builds trust and gives teams the context they need to move faster and adjust in real time. You'll know this is working when there are fewer repeat explanations and confidence in leadership grows because people understand how and why choices were made.

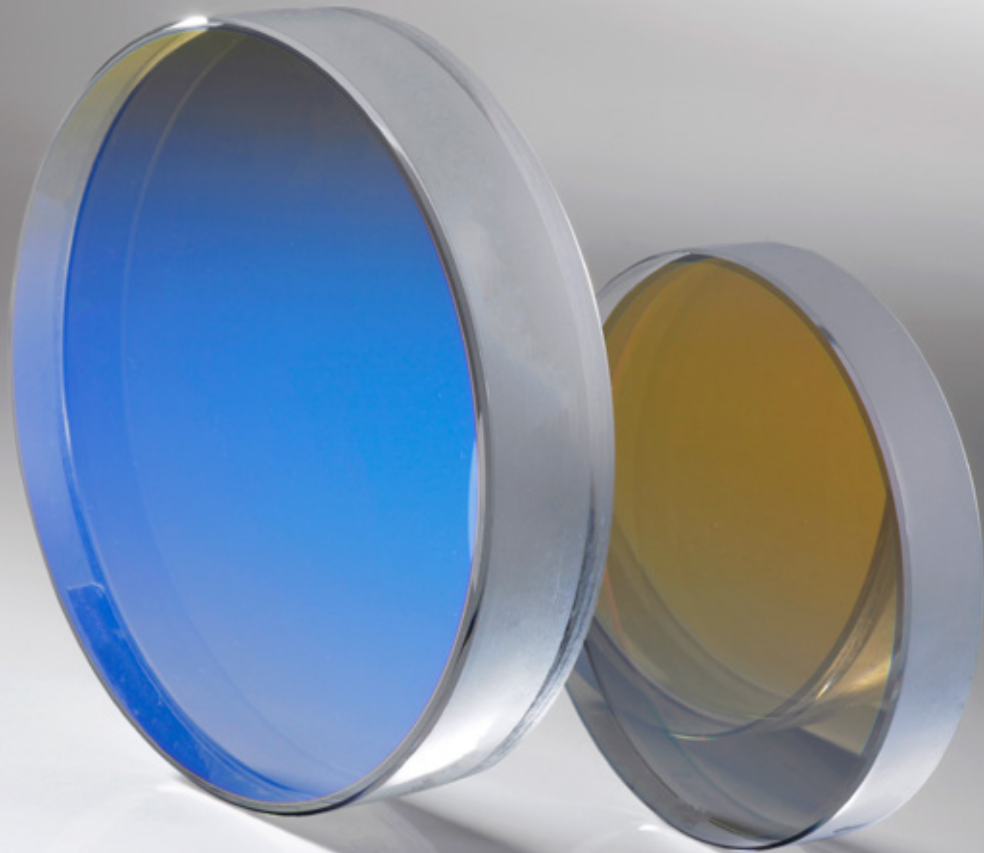
What To Do (Examples):	What You May Say:	What To Watch Out For:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Make the logic visible.</b> Publish a short decision rationale for enterprise-level decisions using a consistent template (criteria, options, tradeoffs, constraints).</li> <li>» <b>Be transparent about limits.</b> When confidentiality limits detail, explain the boundary and commit to what you can share and when.</li> <li>» <b>Close the input loop.</b> Name what employee input was considered and how it influenced the decision.</li> </ul>	<p><i>“We weighed three options against two criteria: customer impact and sustainability. We chose option 2 because it best protects long-term commitments under current constraints.”</i></p> <p><i>“I know this decision may feel frustrating for some of you. So I am going to walk you through how we got here. You may not agree, but you deserve to understand why we made it.”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Only communicating the decision, not the tradeoffs.</li> <li>» Changing direction without updating the rationale (undermines credibility).</li> <li>» Treating transparency as optional; at scale it is an execution tool.</li> </ul>

## ACTION: Model learning wherever it matters

In uncertainty, people watch how leaders react. Learning out loud signals that it is safe to take risks and challenge assumptions, which improves decisions and keeps ideas moving. When leaders become defensive, risk stays hidden, innovation stalls, and issues show up later, especially when they are harder and more expensive to fix. You'll know this is working when more truth travels upward. Risks surface earlier, conversations are more candid, and leaders earn credibility by addressing issues sooner rather than later.

What To Do (Examples):	What You May Say:	What To Watch Out For:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Show that feedback leads to change.</b> Share one clear example each quarter of what you heard and what you adjusted as a result.</li> <li>» <b>Be clear about direction</b> while acknowledging tradeoffs and what you're still learning.</li> <li>» <b>Reward employee voices, not just agreement.</b> Thank dissent or differing views publicly when they improve a decision.</li> </ul>	<p><i>"I heard that our message created confusion about priorities. Here's what I'm changing in how I communicate decisions going forward."</i></p> <p><i>"I moved too quickly to a solution. I appreciate the feedback that helped me see that, and I am adjusting by listening more."</i></p> <p><i>"We received some challenging feedback. Thank you. You helped us make a better decision."</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Performative vulnerability with no change in behavior.</li> <li>» Admitting mistakes but discouraging others for raising issues.</li> <li>» Keeping learning private. People need to see the shift.</li> </ul>





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