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THE LITTLE BOOK FOR...

THE CONNECTED LEADER

How to unlock the neuroscience of leadership

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"LEADERSHIP IS THE LYNCHPIN OF ORGANISATIONAL LIFE. IT CAN MAKE OR BREAK SUCCESS... PEOPLE DON'T LEAVE THEIR JOBS, THEY LEAVE THEIR MANAGERS"

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THE CONNECTED LEADER

How to unlock the neuroscience of leadership

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The definition of a successful leader has changed. We need leaders who can create a culture which fosters creativity and helps people feel comfortable and be clear about what they are really good at.

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Our relationships with others and the goals we reach or miss shape our human experience. Leadership plays a big role in both.

At its most basic, leadership is about setting targets and expectations and influencing, guiding and directing others to meet them. But it's also about understanding your own and other people's traits, motivations and behaviour, and creating a culture that takes account of these.

That's why, whether in the largest multinational corporation or the smallest microbusiness, leadership is the lynchpin of organisational life. It can make or break your organisation's success – we know that people don't leave their jobs, they leave their managers.

If you haven't got leadership right, you haven't got employees who trust you and are engaged in the organisation and their jobs. You won't be getting the best out of them and they are going to depart at the first opportunity, leaving you with the cost and responsibility of replacing them, their knowledge and skills, with someone else.

So academics and business people have been hard at work for decades defining different leadership models, influenced by changing business conditions, psychological research into personality types and management fads.

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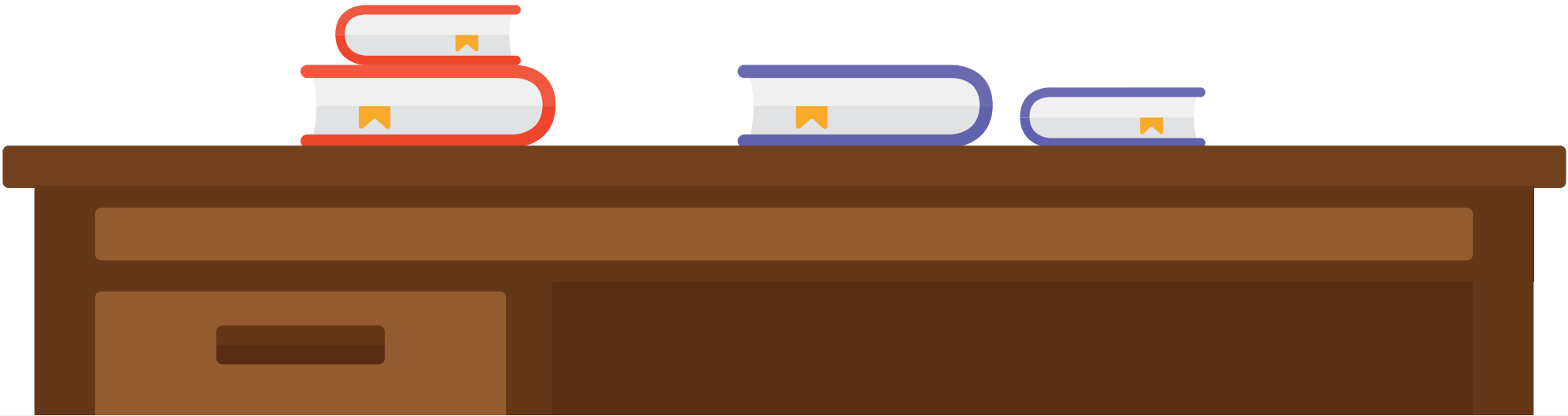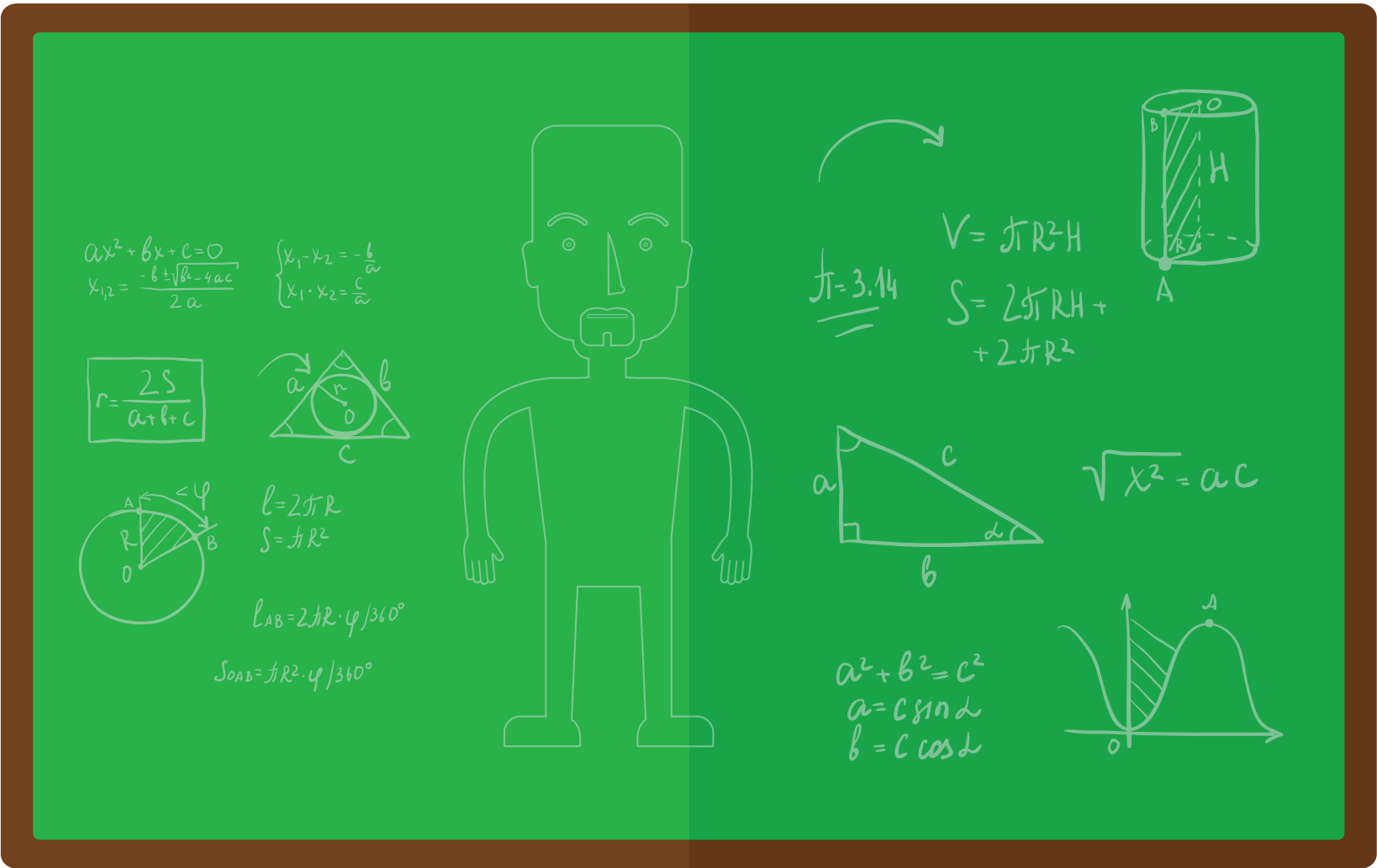
A command and control method made sense when organisations were hierarchical. Corporate behemoths cornered their markets and knew their stuff. Bosses told staff what to do and staff were expected to do it with little question. Authority was the watchword.

But now the boundaries have changed. Our world is complex, and it's the leaders of successful organisations who know that innovation and creativity is vital.

You can't afford to sit back in a crowded marketplace in which your competitors could be virtual businesses built by entrepreneurs in their spare bedroom.

The matrix structures of many organisations now encourage leaders to collaborate with workers and share their views. And economic and social changes mean you could be managing a 16-year-old and a 76-year-old in the same team.

At the same time, a growing body of neuropsychological research made possible by technology suggests that positive relationships between managers and employees trigger an area in the brain that activates openness to new ideas, which is absolutely vital for innovation.

All this has paved the way for a need for a new kind of leader, a 'connected' leader. This leader knows themselves – their strengths and weaknesses – and isn't afraid to show their vulnerability, or say

"do you know what? I'm rubbish at this and need help." They are human and, even though it might sound trite to say it, authentic.

Connected leaders are open and collaborate with the people who report to them and encourage honest dialogue and input from them in return.

They make an effort to understand the traits and motivations of different team members and recognise that they must tone up and tone down aspects of their personality and leadership style for different situations and individuals.

"DO YOU KNOW WHAT? I'M RUBBISH AT THIS AND NEED HELP."

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But, equally, we're not simply talking about a leadership 'type' – a charismatic hero or heroine. We're putting forward an approach that starts with the individual leader and ends with them becoming the best possible version of themselves.

It's not easy and there are no shortcuts. For some, this comes naturally. For many, it doesn't. That's why we have created the The Little Book For.... The Connected Leader to show you how to reflect on what kind of leader you are and create a culture for your fellow leaders to do the same.

We're not always aware of how we're relating to other people. We might be rubbing them up the wrong way or encouraging dishonesty. Either way, human relations themselves can scupper any chance that targets are reached.

Engaging in some self-reflection, armed with tools and techniques to understand and collaborate with other individuals, we can become connected leaders and develop successful relationships with our teams.

Tracy Arnold

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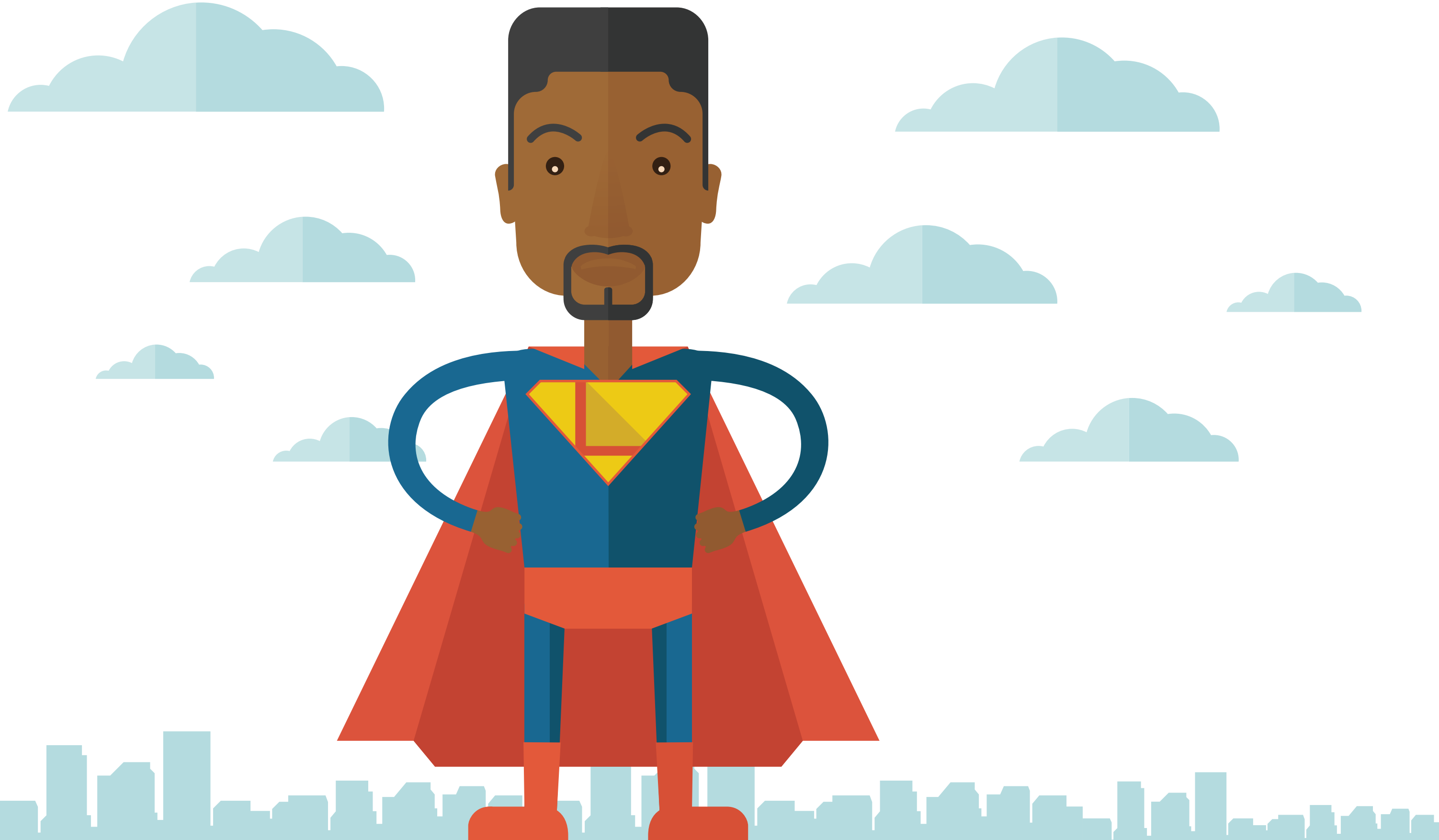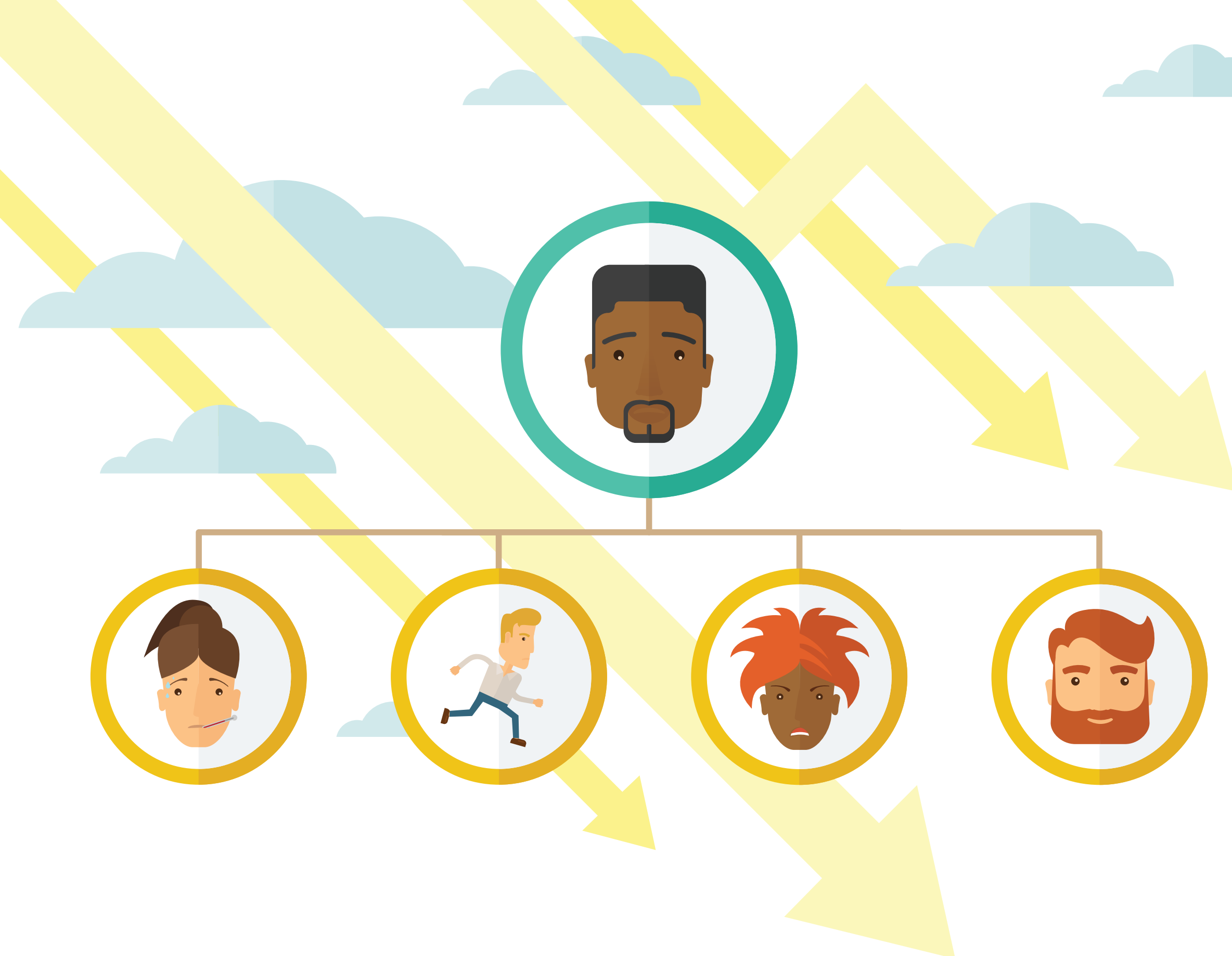
MR DEMANDING

Mr Demanding was an impressive man. He'd worked his way up in his company to become a senior manager and was now responsible for a large team. But the people who reported to him weren't happy and his team wasn't performing well.

This is the story of how Mr Demanding became a different kind of boss and made his employees happier and more successful.... by becoming a connected leader.

Mr Demanding joined his company more than 20 years ago as a trainee. He worked hard, proved he was loyal and reliable, and was promoted. He'd already done most of the jobs of the people reporting to him, and Mr Demanding felt that he lived and breathed the challenges his team faced.

He attended some management courses, had regular one-to-ones with his team members and was diligent when it came to the company's appraisals process. But there were problems in his team. Caroline took a lot of days off sick. Mark was always 10 minutes late. Sophie disagreed with the way things were done and had a lot of rows with Mr Demanding. She was looking for another job.

There was just one team member Mr Demanding felt he could rely on. Alex came in on time and did what was asked of him without complaint. Alex picked up the slack.

The company was also operating in a tough market. Growing numbers of foreign competitors meant it had to cut costs. The knock-on effect of this was heavier workloads, corners cut, and unhappy clients.

Mr Demanding was having difficulty with his own line manager too, who often postponed meetings, including his six-monthly appraisal.

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70%

OF EMPLOYEES ARE NOT ENGAGED OR 'ACTIVELY DISENGAGED' IN THEIR WORK.

When eventually the day came for his six-monthly appraisal, the conversation went something like this:

Mrs Leader: *How have the last six months gone?*

Mr Demanding: *It's been tough. My team has met 80% of their goals, which is a big improvement.*

Mrs Leader: *What's changed to make them improve?*

Mr Demanding: *I monitor what they are working on each day. We meet on a Friday afternoon to establish what goals we've reached and missed over the week and targets for next week.*

Mrs Leader: *And how are we doing on new client leads?*

Mr Demanding: *Well, I've set up a spreadsheet for the team as we'd discussed at our last one-to-one but the market is tough out there. And, er, some of the team have a few issues which have meant they've not been pulling their weight.*

Mrs Leader: *Hmm, okay. And what about your six monthly takings target?*

Mr Demanding: *Well, my target was £50,000 and I've reached £39,000.*

Mrs Leader: *I can't downsize your targets as I've already cut savings targets for procurement. I'd also like you to try and get two more clients on board for our next appraisal. And as you're team is improving let's get the target rate up to 90% next time. Okay?*

Mr Demanding: *Okay, I'll do my best.*

Mrs Leader: *Great, thanks. Well I don't have anything else to discuss. Do you?*

Mr Demanding: *Well, er…. no. That's fine.*

Mr Demanding left his appraisal feeling he didn't have his manager's support and questioning his loyalty. And his bad mood had an effect on his team, who were already feeling completely demotivated and overworked. A week later, Mark started looking for a new job and Caroline went off sick for a fortnight.

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54%

OF EMPLOYEES CLAIM THEY DON'T REGULARLY
GET RESPECT FROM THEIR LEADERS
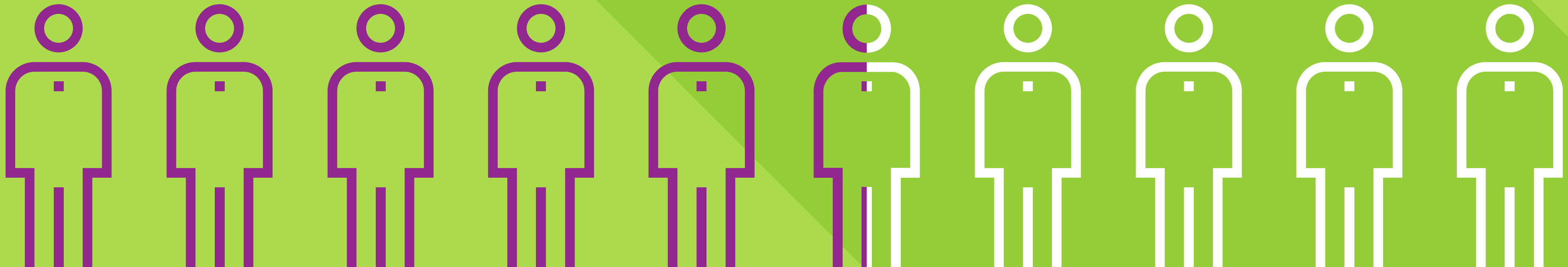
INEFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP CULTURE

After reflecting on his situation, Mr Demanding realised that he had not been managing his team well, but also felt Mrs Leader wasn't a good boss.

It occurred to him that:

The leadership culture of his organisation was not effective. Functional experts, including himself, had been promoted to management roles and given a couple of days' management development, then left to get on with the day job. Mr Demanding had fallen into his functional role because he had proven that he could 'do the do'. But how he motivated others to do this hadn't really been considered.

His own boss was operating a command and control style of management which centred on telling Mr Demanding what to do, when to do it by and questioning why he hadn't done it. Mr Demanding managed his own team in the same way.

People were left feeling that they couldn't be honest with their managers about any difficulties, whether at work or home.

Caroline's constant sickness absence was the result of stress over her workload. Mark missed the earlier train every day because he was waiting for a carer to arrive for his mother. Even Alex, who responded well to this kind of leadership, was beginning to resent his extra workload.

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Everyone was stuck in a cycle of constantly meeting an increasing number of goals each week. Team members were too busy to even question whether meeting these goals was in the best interests of the company.

Sophie was frustrated because she could see this but the closed communication style of Mr Demanding and other managers meant she found it difficult to share her ideas without getting aggressive and being labelled as "difficult".

When goals weren't reached, Mr Demanding decided to micromanage his team, thinking that by checking up on what they were doing every day they would get more done.

Instead they felt that, at best, he didn't have any faith in their ability to get things done and, at worst, he didn't trust them. As a consequence they did the bare minimum to meet targets, made mistakes and felt disengaged, unmotivated and unhappy.

Mr Demanding hated his job. He looked longingly at companies making a success of themselves despite in the difficult market and saw leaders with charisma who inspired workers.

He wanted to be like that but had become so full of self-doubt and didn't think he had the right personality to lead. Mr Demanding felt he "put a face on to come to work", but the stress of work was having an impact on his personal life.

We can see that Mr Demanding's approach to leadership is not working, but how do we know what successful managers look like?

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONNECTED LEADERSHIP

WE DETERMINE WHETHER WE TRUST SOMEONE WITHIN MILLISECONDS OF MEETING THEM

Did you know that? You may have had an idea but we now have evidence from the world of neuroscience. Adult learning expert Margie Meacham cites a 2008 study by Paul Zak for highlighting why creating a culture of trust is so important for leaders.

Zak found that the neurochemical oxytocin, which is associated with social bonding, is released when we meet someone that we trust and continually updated when more information is received from that person.

Our brains are wired to be highly aware and in tune with our environment, which includes other human beings.
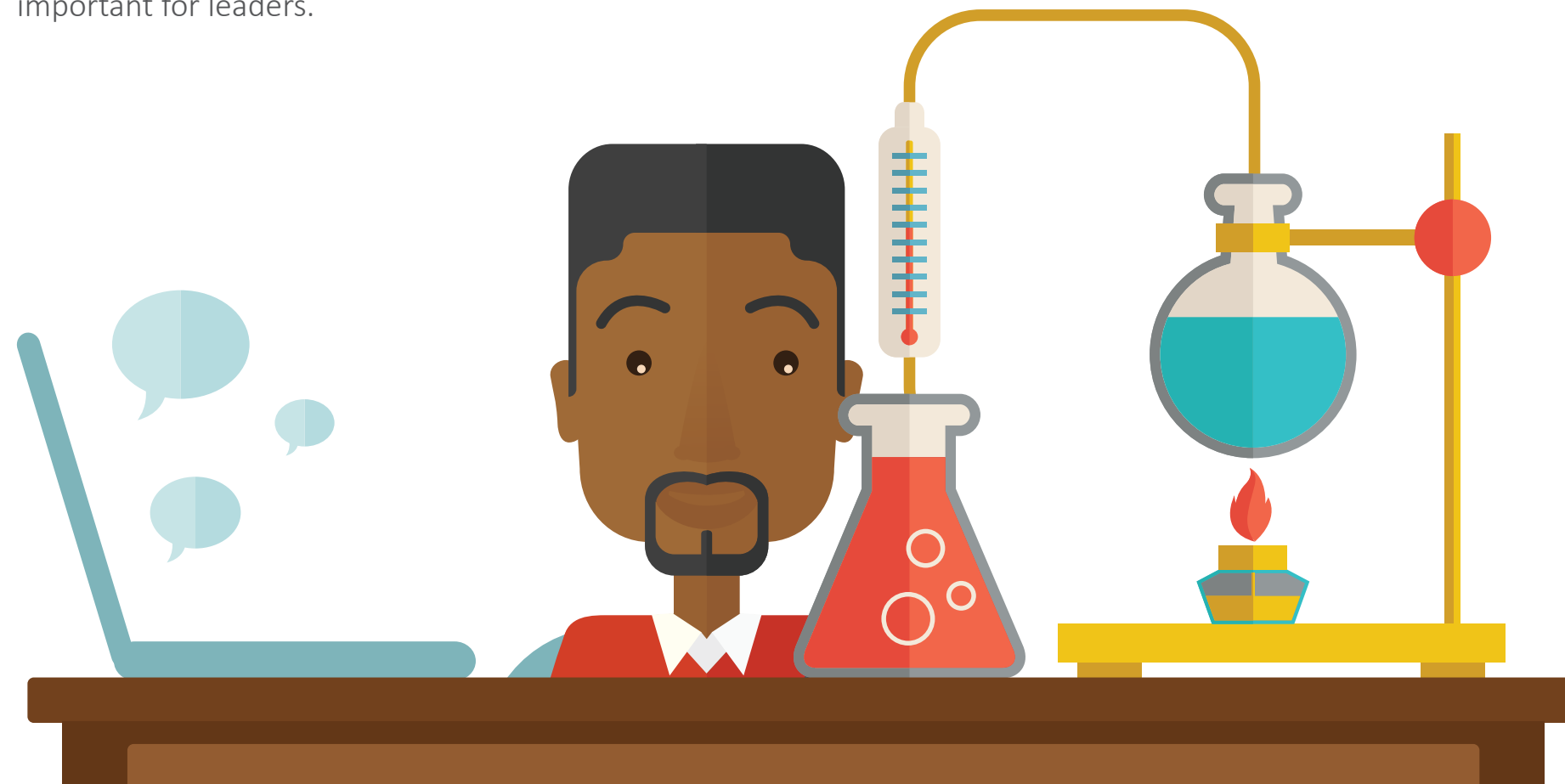
VULNERABILITY IS NOT A WEAKNESS

Contrary to popular belief, vulnerability is not about being weak or submissive but about showing you are human. According to social connection expert Brené Brown, vulnerability and authenticity are at the heart of human connection.

We protect our self-worth in all human relationships, and fears of judgement or disrespect run deep, even for leaders. We assume that showing weakness is a weakness. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS REAP POSITIVE RESULTS

It's a no-brainer, right? But command and control styles of management, which leaders so often fall back on in times of stress or because they simply know no other way, usually lead to anything but positive relationships.

Academic Richard Boyatzis found that when managers and employees had positive relationships with one another, activity increases in brain areas associated with social orientation towards others and an openness to new ideas. Nurturing those kinds of relationships can both improve collaboration and creativity.

82% OF EMPLOYEES DON'T TRUST BUSINESS LEADERS TO TELL THE TRUTH

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THREATS TO STATUS CAN HAVE THE SAME EFFECT ON US AS PHYSICAL PAIN

Academic David Rock's SCARF model lists the top five social rewards and threats that lead to neural activity – Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness.

So if individuals perceive any threats to their status for example, the part of the brain which registers pain will be activated. And a negative response is triggered in individuals who do not feel they can relate to their managers – they do not trust them.

TRUST YOUR GUT

The idea of making a decision based on instinct rather than cold, hard analysis of available information spells panic for leaders.

But the neuroscience tells us that the hunches we have actually lead to physiological changes in the body such as increased heart rate or sweating.

This fight or flight response suggests the feelings happen for a reason. Scientists Adam Waytz and Malia Mason say that trusting your gut feeling can lead to avoiding risky situations.

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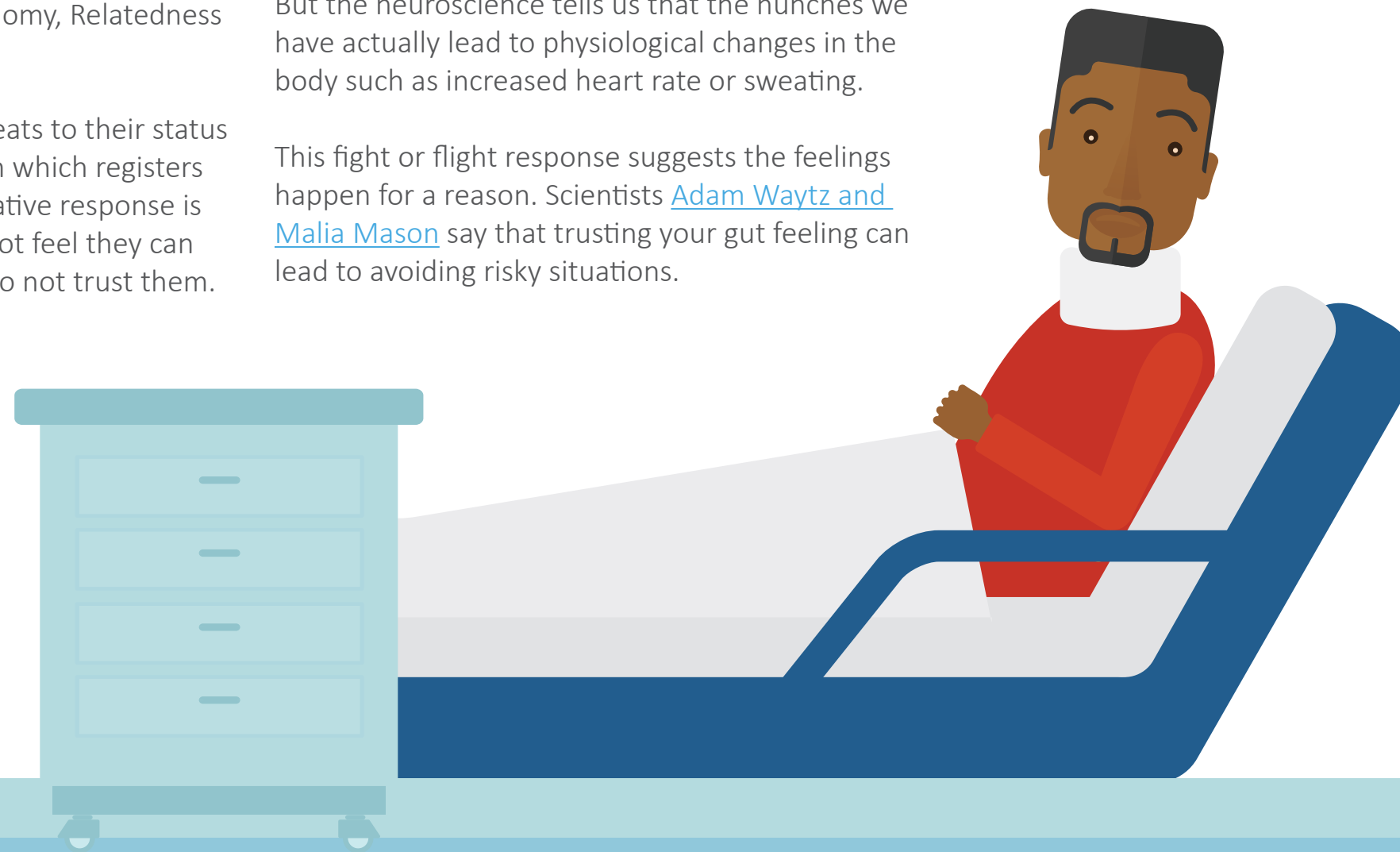
BECOMING A 'CONNECTED LEADER'...
WITH MARTYN MOUTINHO, HEAD OF PEOPLE
DEVELOPMENT AT ITV

Work isn't just about having a job anymore. And it's not just the millennials who realise that. All four generations now present in the workforce have different motivations, working styles and needs, and want meaningful work.

And organisations do not operate in clearly-defined sectors with obvious competitors anymore – they must be agile and innovative to survive.

ITV is a business with creativity as its currency. And hierarchical structures of command and control just won't breed an environment which allows people to flourish, thrive and be at their best.

"At ITV, we've been working on a number of initiatives to ensure our culture is a high performing one," says Martyn. "We've taken a more modern approach to performance management which emphasises the quality and frequency of the conversations that people have, rather than the process or system in place."

"We've developed a tailored leadership and management programme which focuses on individuals first and then how best they can lead in changing times.

"We've designed a number of masterclasses based on the latest thinking across a variety of topics such as neuroscience. The challenge is bringing that into the workplace in a practical and meaningful way, using tried and tested tools and providing access to resources that help adults learn in a fast-paced environment, and promotes continuous learning for themselves and their teams.

"Our programmes always aim to answer three things: what's in it for the individual, what's in it for the team, and what's in it for the business.

It's not just about what the organisation does. The key point for connected leaders is self-reflection, and Martyn agrees.

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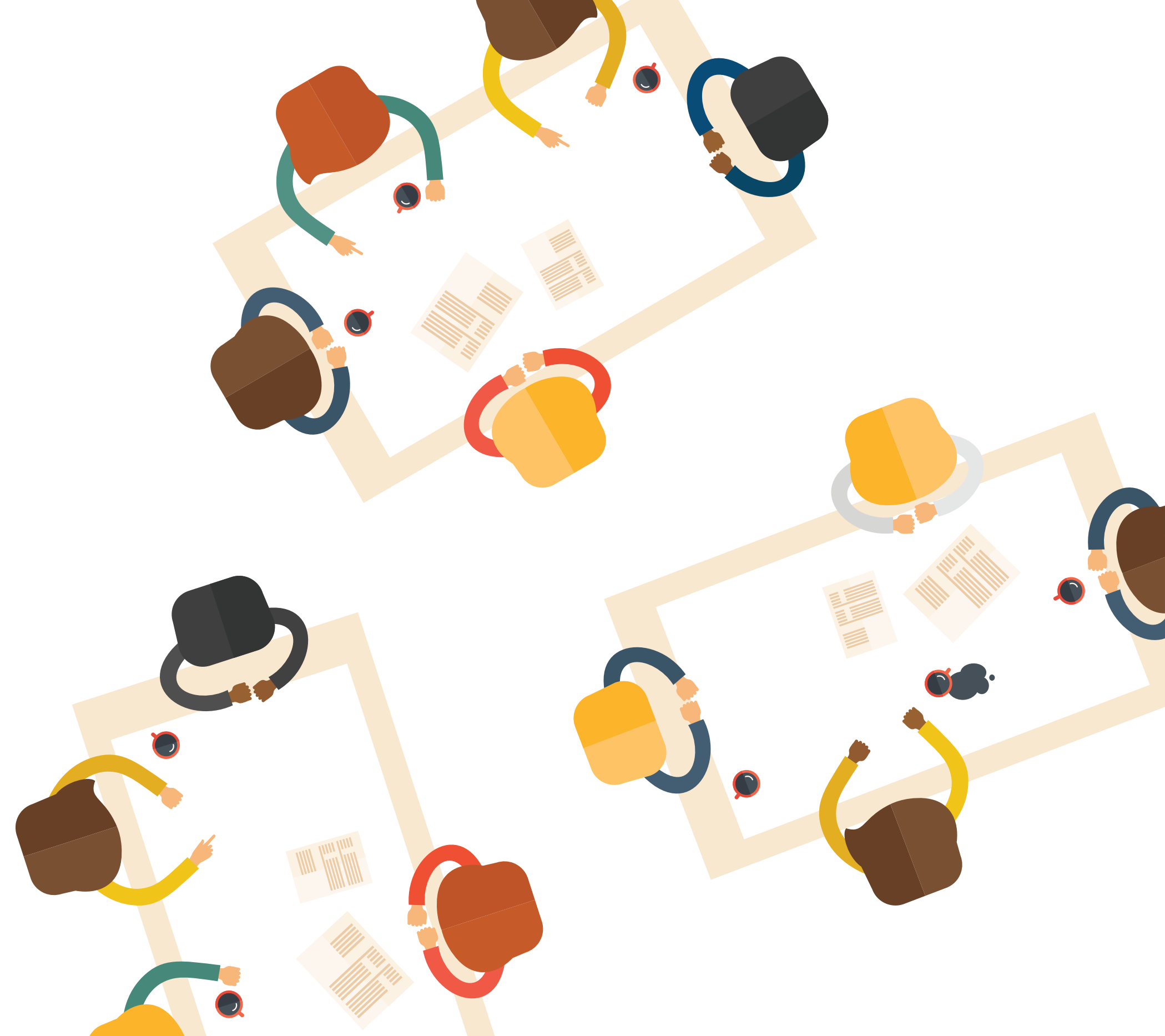
"I am a continually growing and learning. I know that my strengths are curiosity and continually challenging myself. I have a passion for learning and sharing as much of the best stuff I can.

"I set very high standards for myself. I've quickly learnt that the platinum approach is not necessary for every project. I also believe everyone comes to work to do a good job and I'm determined to help the people I work with be able to do their best work more often than not.

"Of course there are times when work is not quite as expected and like most things in life, that can usually be rectified with a conversation.

If the relationship is founded on trust and respect and we've agreed clear standards and expectations then having an open and honest conversation is much easier to have. Every experience is an opportunity to learn. There's a quote I love; if it's not a blessing it's a lesson!

"Leadership is an ongoing learning process. We need to take some time out, pause and think, maybe in much more depth than previously. Practice the difficult conversations, ask for feedback as part of the way you just do business and consider how what you say or do might affect others. I welcome ideas and feedback, but collaboration is key."

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WHAT DID MR DEMANDING DO?

Mr Demanding plucked up the courage to be honest with Mrs Leader about the fact that he was struggling with his team and their workload.

His openness came as a wake-up call to Mrs Leader and she decided to organise some regular coaching for Mr Demanding, just one hour a week.

The coach coaxed Mr Demanding away from focusing on targets towards what kind of a person he was and whether he even wanted to be a manager.

He took a long, hard look at himself and realised he needed to stop focusing so much on finding his own solutions to problems, and instead use the talent within his own team to help him and inspire them.

Mr Demanding made a few changes:

He stopped checking up every day on the work his team had been doing and instead let them brief him on their progress once a week at a short meeting which he moved to a Friday morning.

He introduced a monthly meeting with the sole purpose of the team suggesting ideas for winning new clients or becoming more efficient.

He changed the format of all his conversations with his team, including appraisals, so that team members could give feedback on goals and offer suggestions.
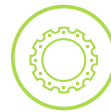
He organised regular team lunches and drinks out so he could socialise more with his team.

He offered employees an open door policy where they could come to him any time with any kind of problem, and made minor changes.

He asked the HR department to introduce a strengths-based personality profiling tool to help leaders understand what energises them and how to play to their strengths.

Now, Mr Demanding has a much closer relationship with his team. He has swapped sparring with Sophie for healthy debates and as a result has implemented some of her ideas and the team are meeting targets.

Mark is no longer looking for a new job, after an honest chat with Mr Demanding. Alex's workload has decreased – he is no longer picking up the slack from other workers. Caroline is recovering and has returned to work part-time.

After some coaching of her own, Mrs Leader has realised she needs to stop using such negative and dismissive language and meet more regularly and informally with Mr Leader.

She's suggested to the board members that the company's leadership recruitment process and targets-based culture is reviewed. She has introduced a programme in which employees are rewarded for sharing the best suggestions for growing business.

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HOW YOU CAN BECOME A
CONNECTED LEADER

1. MAKE AN ACTIVE CHOICE TO BE A LEADER AND SELF-REFLECT

Whether you've been promoted or recruited, you must consciously accept that you are going to lead and not 'do the do'.

Focus on what your purpose is and how it might change in the future. Read, attend workshops, ask for coaching – anything that allows you to accept that management is a full-time job in itself will help.

Reflect on what kind of person you are. Believe it or not, being a leader is more about looking inward than outward. What are your flaws and strengths?

Take a long hard look at what effect you have on others. It's the same person who walks through that office door at 9am as the one who goes to the pub with friends on a Friday night, or takes their mum for lunch on Mothers' Day.

What do you want to be known for? Does your work allow you to do that? Only when you know that for yourself can you persuade other people to come with you.

2. BE FLEXIBLE IN HOW YOU MANAGE

Not everyone is the same. Not every situation is the same. Not everyone in your team will be excited in the same way about an upcoming project. Sometimes, command and control styles of management will be needed to get a job done, fast.

Sometimes you can leave employees to come up with ideas themselves, and they will thrive. Some employees need more guidance than others.

Always remember that you're not necessarily failing if one person isn't happy or pulling their weight in your team, but you must take steps to find out why.

Give yourself, and your company, time to think. You can't be innovative if you're like a hamster in a wheel.

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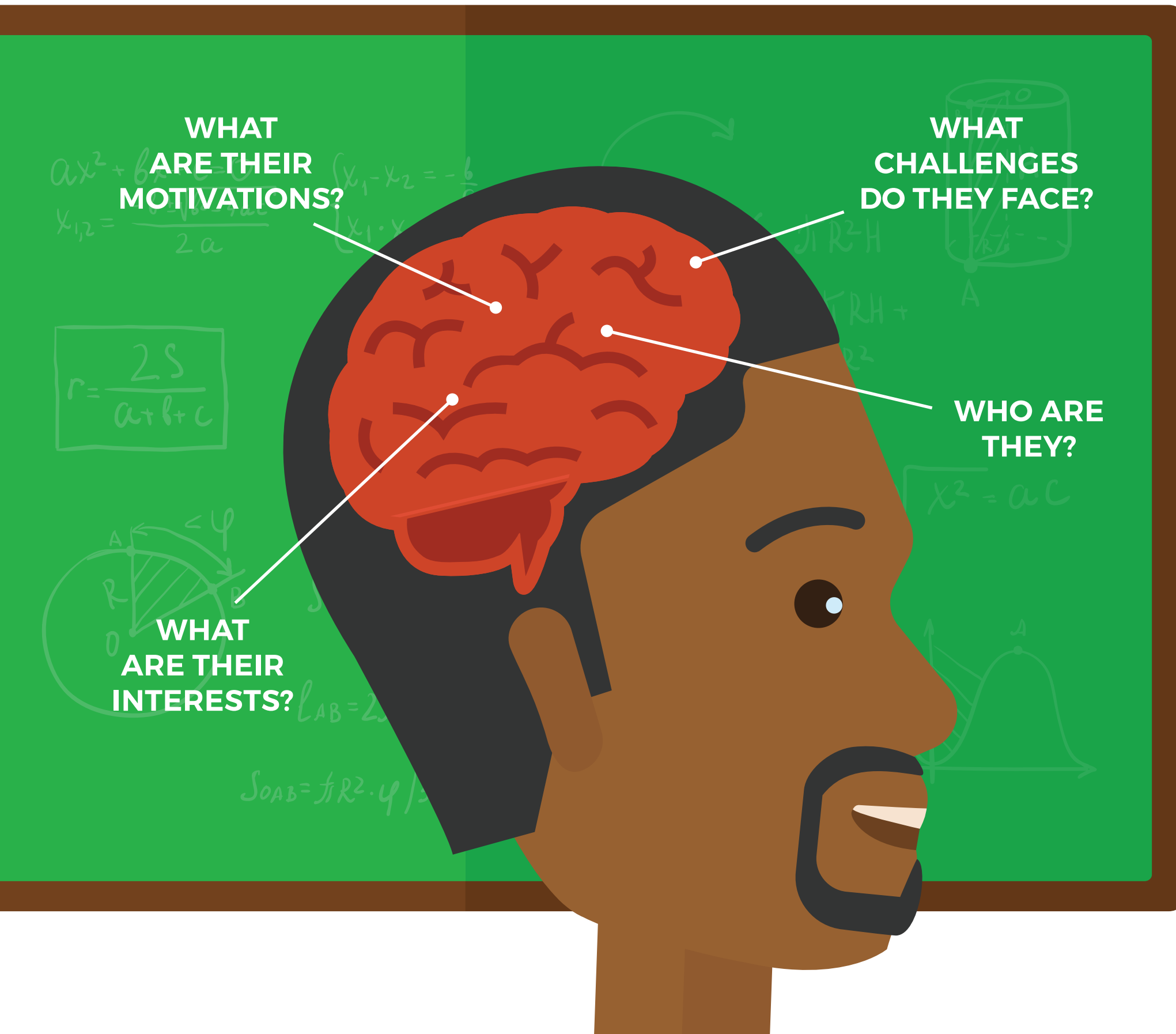
WHAT ARE THEIR MOTIVATIONS?

WHAT CHALLENGES DO THEY FACE?

WHO ARE THEY?

WHAT ARE THEIR INTERESTS?

3. SHOW GENUINE RESPECT AND CURIOSITY

Your team members need more than to just turn up to work, get their work done and go home again. And so do you.

Find out who they are, what their interests and motivations are. What challenges do they face? Offer them ways to hone their skills, through training and development, or develop their interests.

Curiosity and a constant thirst for learning are infectious. Role model that behaviour. And treat people as you would like to be treated yourself. You may be senior to them but everyone has a strong sense of their own status. Be honest and respectful, whether you're giving good or bad feedback.

4. FOCUS ON COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

How do you feel if people don't say "Good morning" to you when you walk into work? It's obvious but cannot be overestimated: communication is vital.

Recognise that people respond differently to different forms of communication and some find it harder than others to communicate honestly at all. Whatever way you choose to do it, do it honestly, respectfully and welcome feedback.

If you've got to say something important or difficult, think about what you are going to say before you say it.

Simple techniques like writing down three things you are going to say in a particular meeting (or any other specific environment) can help focus the conversation and make sure exchanges are effective.

5. SHOW YOU ARE HUMAN!

No one has all the answers. Showing your vulnerability, or revealing that you don't know what to do in a particular situation goes an enormously long way to improving relationships, empowering other individuals and strengthening trust.

Honesty breeds honesty. Teams with managers willing to say out loud that they need help or ideas will rise to the challenge and take pressure off you when you need it.

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If you liked this book, we think you'll love the rest in our Language of Leadership Little Book series.

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