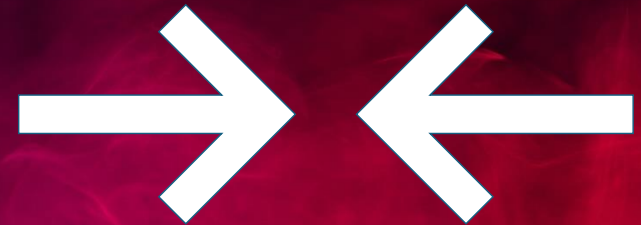


The Space Between

Unlocking the Magic of Leadership
Through Connection & Belonging



Dr. Jennifer Slattery

Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns

We have a
connection problem.



The Numbers are Talking



31% U.S. employees



20% employees globally



\$10 TRILLION

Employee Engagement Has Consequences



+18%
Productivity



+23%
Profitability



-21% Turnover



-78%
Absenteeism

A photograph of a group of people in a meeting or workshop. Several individuals have their hands raised, suggesting an interactive session. The word "ENGAGEMENT" is overlaid in large, bold, white letters with a blue outline. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the hands and the text.

ENGAGEMENT

People don't engage with organizations-- they engage with *people*.

- Supervisor
- Colleagues
- Team
- Community

Leaders are Bridge Builders

*Leadership is the bridge
between organizational strategy
and the human experience.*





*What happens when we stop
thinking about leadership as what
we do **TO** people—
and start thinking about it as
what we create **WITH** them?*

The Leadership Question

What makes someone want to follow you?





What makes someone want to follow you?

NOT:

- Your title
- Your expertise
- Your authority
- Your position on the org chart



Instead...

How do people **FEEL**
when they're around
you?

The Space Between

YOU



ME

*This is where
LEADERSHIP
lives*

Leadership is Relational

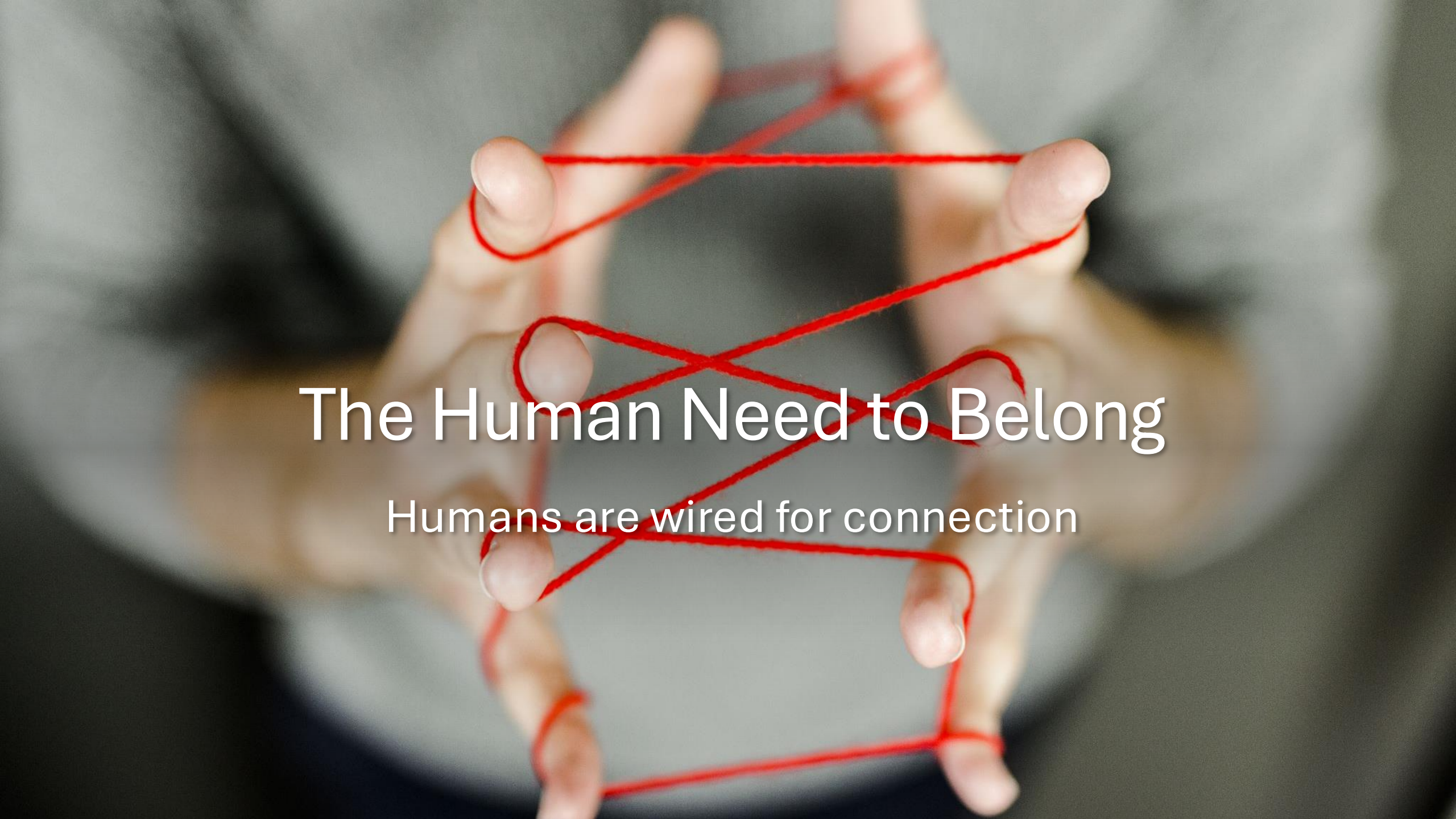
• **Leader** → **Followers**

• **Leader** ↔ **People** ↔ **Purpose**

The background of the image is a dark blue surface with a network of thin black lines connecting various white, stylized human figures. These figures are positioned at the nodes of the network, which is spread across the entire frame. The figures are connected in a complex, web-like pattern, with some having multiple connections and others having fewer. The overall effect is one of a large, interconnected community or network.

Connection Before Influence

You cannot effectively influence people you haven't connected with.

A close-up photograph of two hands, palms facing each other, holding a vibrant red string. The string is intricately looped and crossed between the fingers, creating a complex geometric pattern that resembles a knot or a web. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey, which makes the red string and the hands stand out. The lighting is even, highlighting the texture of the skin and the smoothness of the string.

The Human Need to Belong

Humans are wired for connection

Belonging $\neq$ Fitting In

Fitting In

- *How do I change myself so I can belong?*

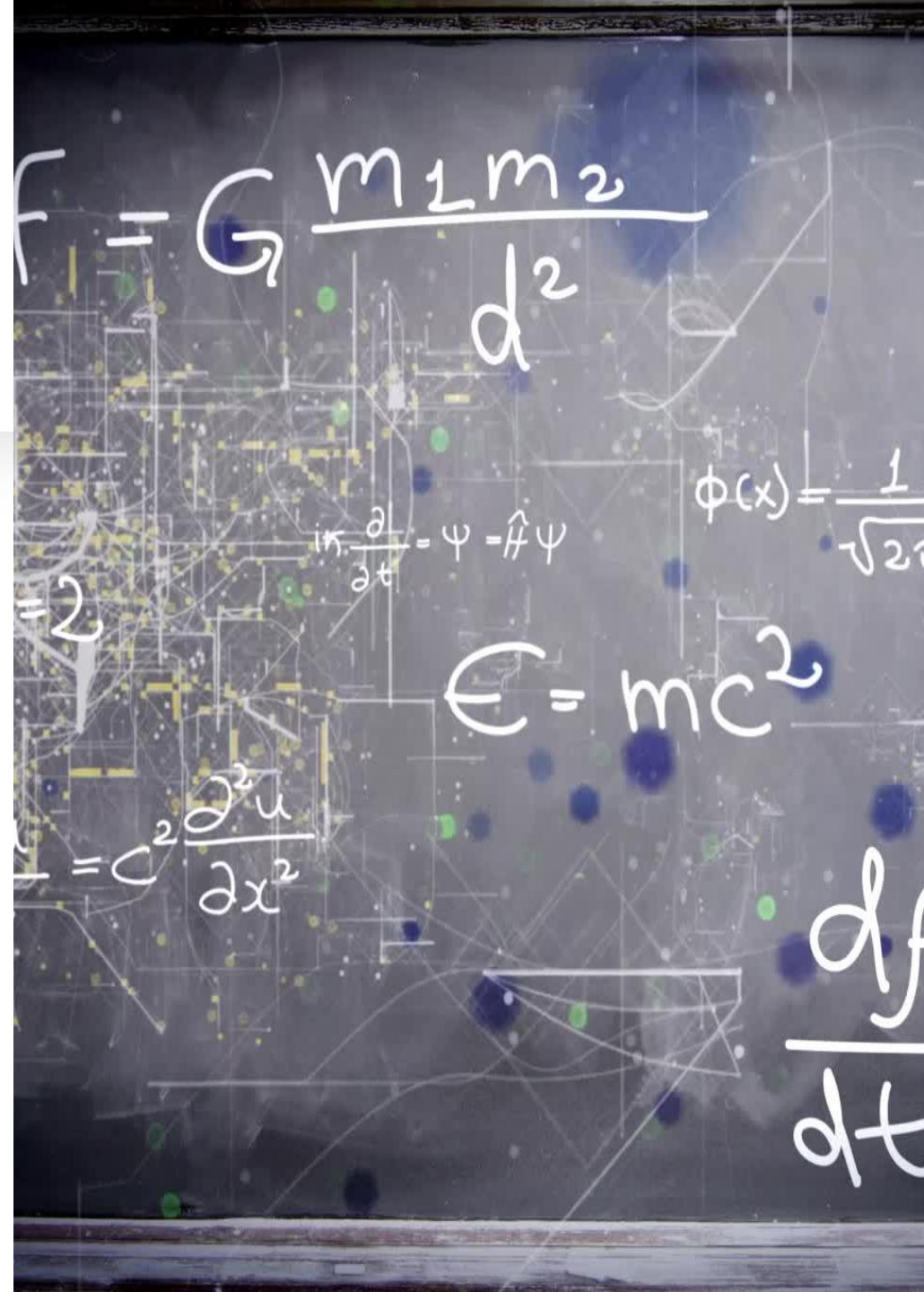
Belonging

- *Can I be fully myself and still belong?*

The Belonging Equation

Belonging =

- Connection**
- +**
- Contribution**
- +**
- Acceptance**
- +**
- Psychological Safety**



A photograph of a group of people, mostly out of focus, with their hands raised in a gesture of agreement or participation. The hands are in various positions, some open, some with fingers slightly curled. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting with light coming from the right. The overall tone is collaborative and positive.

The Invisible Signals

Every interaction sends a message



We are More Connected Than Ever

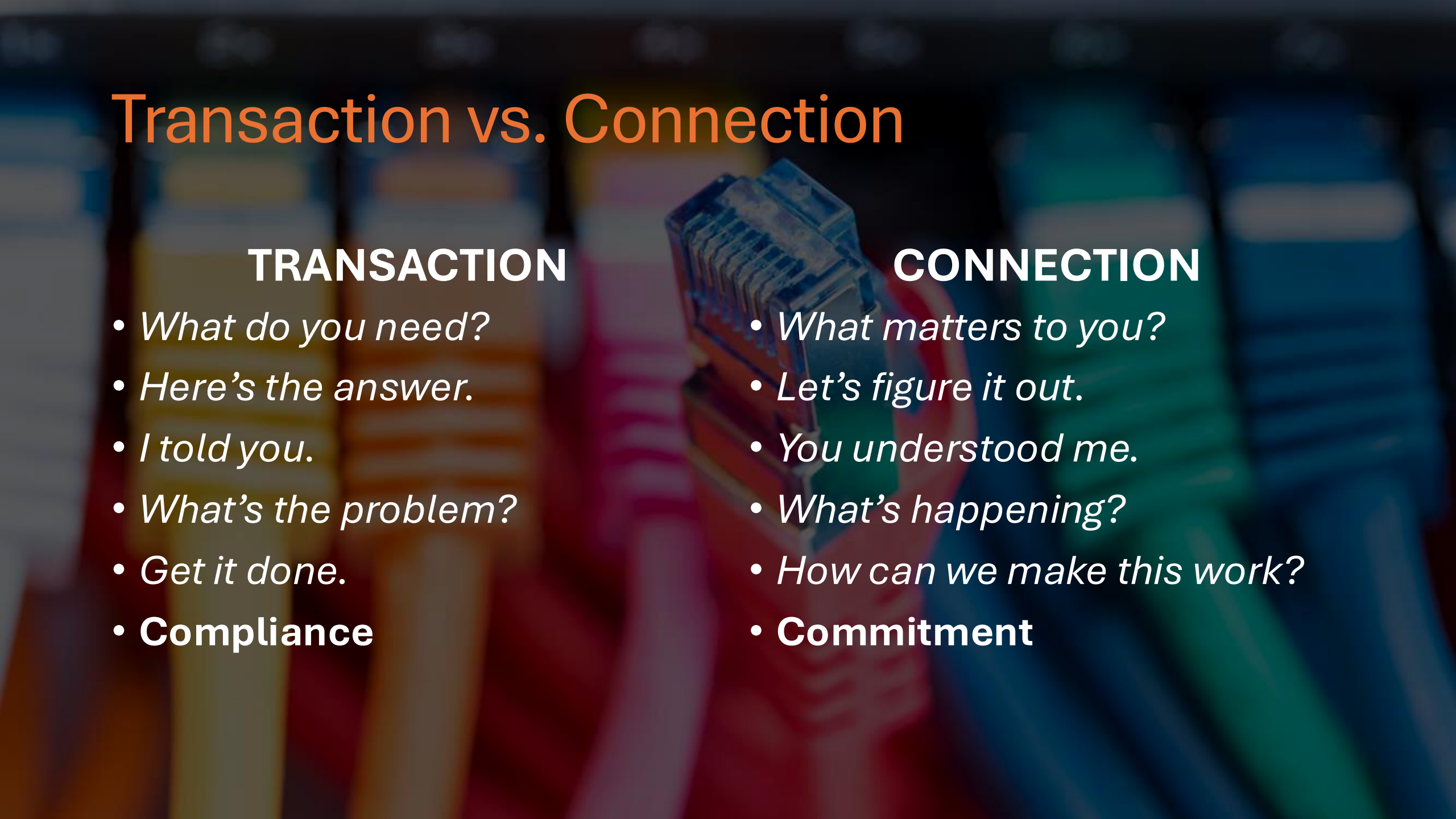
...and sometimes more disconnected than ever.

The image features two network cables against a dark blue background. On the left is a yellow Ethernet cable with a standard RJ45 connector. On the right is an orange Ethernet cable with a different, more complex connector that includes a metal shield. The two cables are positioned horizontally, facing each other but not touching, creating a visible gap between them. Overlaid on this gap is the title text.

The Connection Gap

Communication is not connection.

Transaction vs. Connection



TRANSACTION

- *What do you need?*
- *Here's the answer.*
- *I told you.*
- *What's the problem?*
- *Get it done.*
- **Compliance**

CONNECTION

- *What matters to you?*
- *Let's figure it out.*
- *You understood me.*
- *What's happening?*
- *How can we make this work?*
- **Commitment**

Trust is the Bridge



Connection



Trust



Belonging



Collaboration



Results



The Trust Test

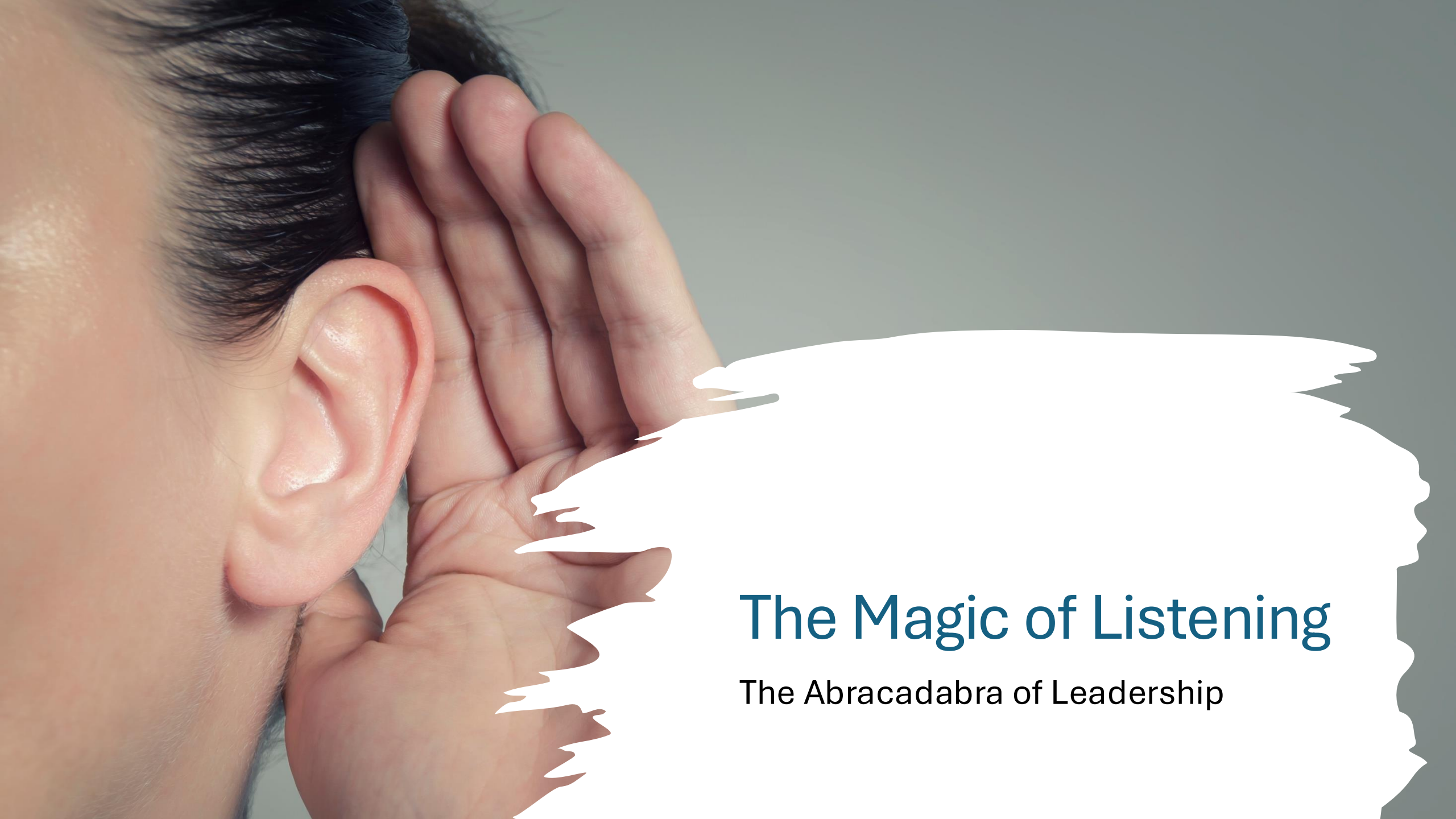
People are asking 3 questions:

1. Can I trust you?
2. Can I trust myself around you?
3. Can I trust this team?



What Leaders Do That Builds Trust

BE PRESENT	Put the phone down. Pay attention.
BE CURIOUS	Ask before assuming.
BE CONSISTENT	Do what you say.
BE HUMAN	You don't have to have all the answers.
BE COURAGEOUS	Have the conversation.
BE GENEROUS	Give credit. Share information. Assume positive intent.



The Magic of Listening

The Abracadabra of Leadership

Levels of Listening



Listen to REPLY



Listen to UNDERSTAND



Listen for WHAT ISN'T
BEING SAID

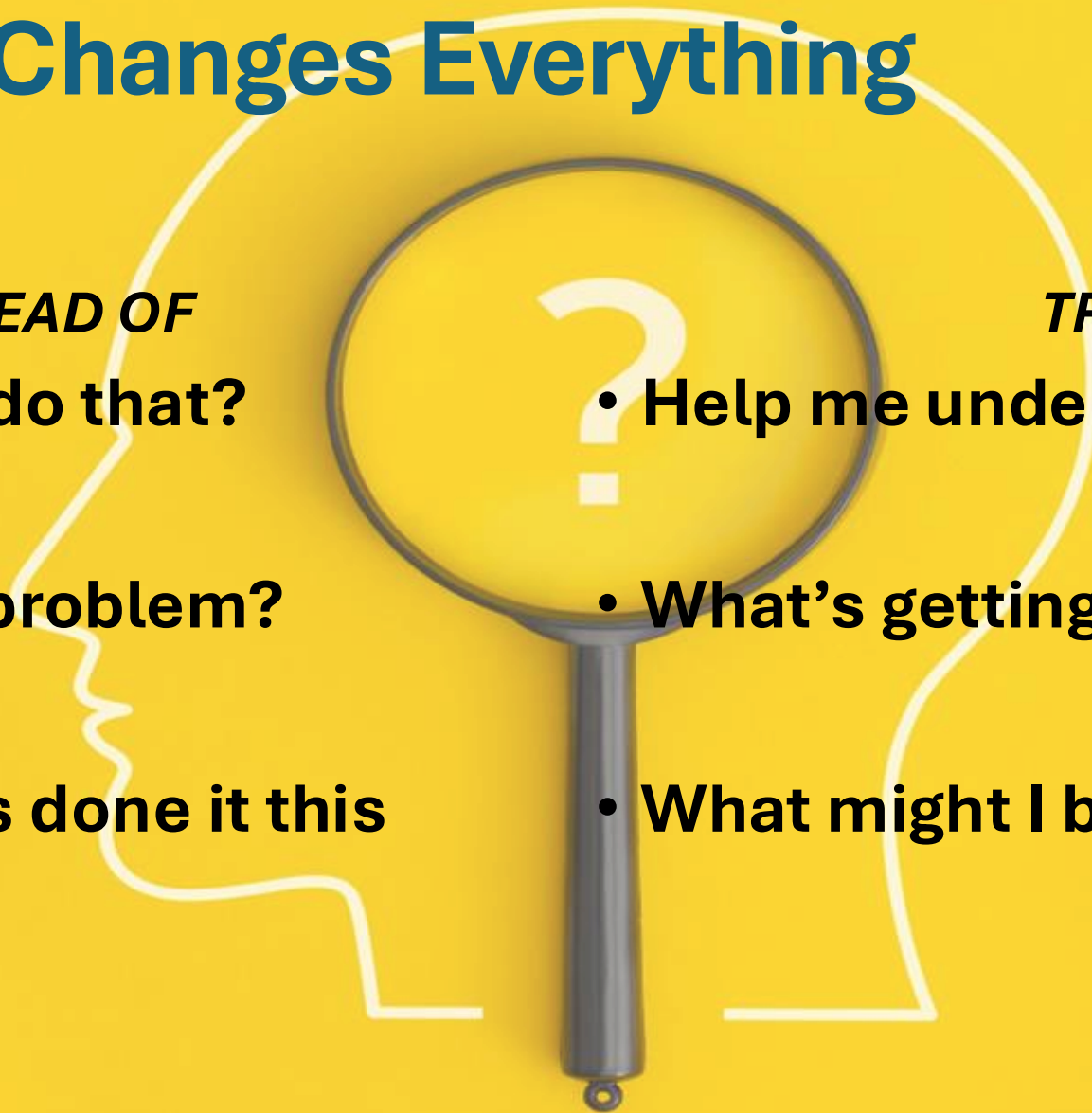
Curiosity Changes Everything

INSTEAD OF

- Why did you do that?
- What's your problem?
- We've always done it this way.

TRY

- Help me understand.
- What's getting in the way?
- What might I be missing?





The 5- Second Leadership Pause

P: Pause

A: Assume less

U: Understand

S: Seek perspective

E: Engage intentionally



The background of the image is a dense crowd of stylized human figures. These figures are rendered in various shades of blue and purple, creating a sense of depth and movement. In the center of the image, a single white figure stands out, with its arms raised in a gesture of triumph or leadership. The overall composition suggests a large gathering or a moment of collective action.

The Courage to Connect

Leadership Happens in the Hard Moments



Conflict: Threat or Invitation?

- Me vs. You
- Us vs. The Problem

Connection Doesn't Mean Avoiding Accountability

Belonging
≠
Lowering the Bar



Goal =



Connection +



Clarity +



Accountability

A group of colorful wooden human figures standing in a line, representing diversity and community. The figures are in various colors including blue, yellow, green, red, and brown. They are standing on a light-colored surface against a blurred background.

Creating Belonging

Belonging is a Leadership Practice

5 Ways to Create Belonging





The Belonging Audit

In my team...(scale of 1-5)

1. People feel heard.
2. People feel valued.
3. People can disagree safely.
4. People understand how they contribute.
5. People know their leader cares about them.

Where your biggest opportunity?

It begins with you...

Leadership is Contagious

You

1

Your Interactions

2

Your Team

3

Your Organization

4

Your Community

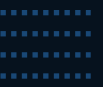


One Conversation Can
Change Everything

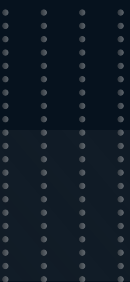
The Connection Challenge

For the next 7 days...

- Have one conversation you wouldn't normally have.
- Ask: "What's something you're working on that you're excited about?"
- Then...just listen.



Three Questions That Change Conversations



“Really? Tell me more.”

“What matters most to you about this?”

“What would be helpful from me?”



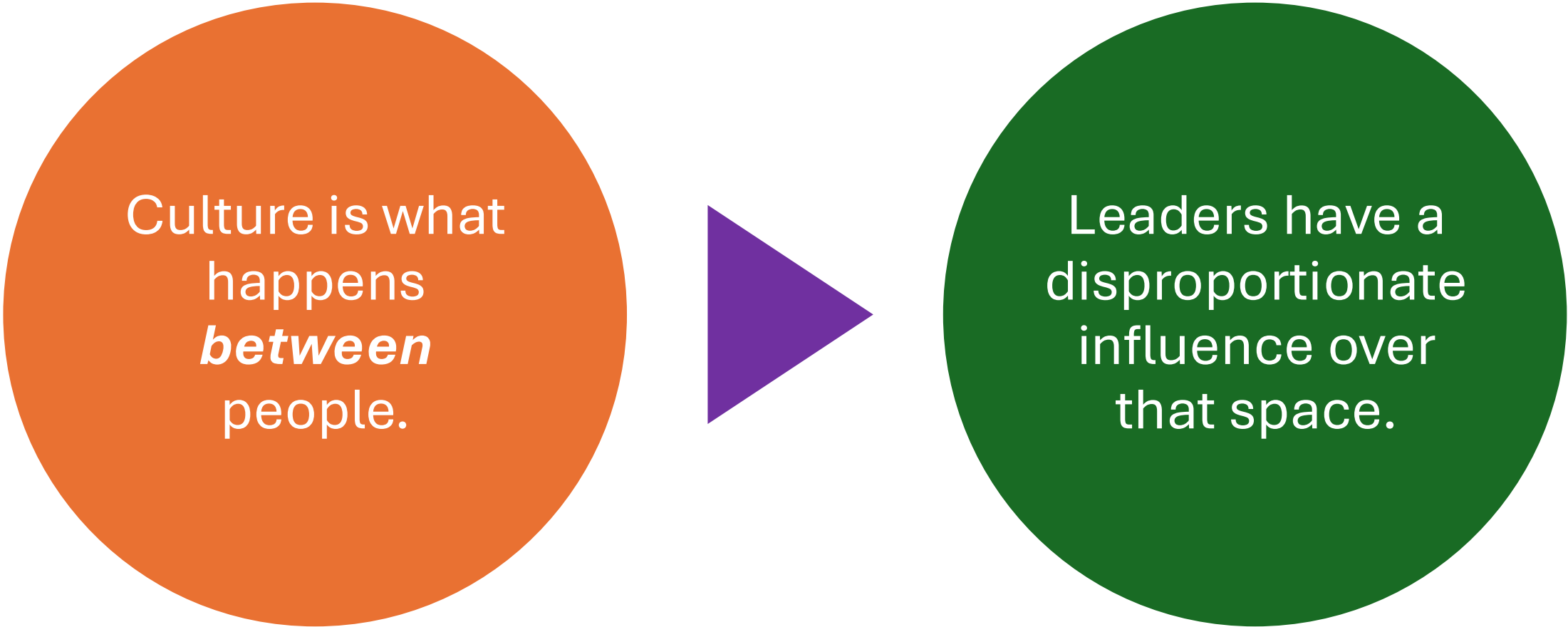
Your Leadership Presence

When people encounter you, do they experience...

- Judgment or curiosity?
- Distance or presence?
- Control or trust?
- Compliance or connection?
- “Prove yourself” or “You belong here”?



The Space We Create



Culture is what
happens
between
people.

The diagram consists of two large circles. The left circle is orange and contains the text 'Culture is what happens between people.' The right circle is green and contains the text 'Leaders have a disproportionate influence over that space.' A purple triangle points from the orange circle to the green circle, indicating a flow or relationship between the two concepts.

Leaders have a
disproportionate
influence over
that space.

The Leadership Choice

Close the space?

Create space?

The Space Between

YOU



ME

***TRUST
CURIOSITY
COURAGE
BELONGING
PURPOSE***



Your Leadership Commitment

“Because of today’s
conversation, I will...”

The Final Challenge

- BELONG
- CONTRIBUTE
- DISAGREE
- GROW
- MATTER





- **Change the space.**
- **Change the experience.**
- **Change what's possible.**

Dr. Jennifer Slattery

Leadership | Learning | Connection | Purpose