

Year.

Everyone deserves a little couch-time.



Quarterly Leadership Series

**Turning Stressful Situations
Into Collaborative Solutions**

Presented by
Douglas E. Noll, JD, MA

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

**Douglas E. Noll, JD,
MA**

- Lawyer and Peacemaker
- Author and Professor
- Internationally-Recognized Mediator
- Mobius Executive Leadership
- California Lawyer of the Year
- Best Lawyer In America Lawyer of the Year
- Co-Founder, Prison of Peace Project
- Encore Fellow since 2014



Agenda

- Understanding Stress in Leadership Contexts
- Why Collaboration Breaks Down
- The Neuroscience of Stress and Safety
- Core Skill: Affect Labeling
- The Collaboration Playbook (5 Steps)
- Leadership Behaviors that De-Stress Teams
- Practice Scenarios
- Key Takeaways & Q&A





What Is Collaboration?

A process where people work together toward shared goals by sharing ideas, resources, and responsibility.



Key Elements:

-



Shared purpose



Mutual respect



Shared
resources



Stress in the Workplace



83% of U.S. workers
suffer from work-
related stress

A close-up photograph of a person's hands in a dark jacket pulling on a thick, white rope with blue stripes. The rope is wrapped around a silver metal winch on the deck of a boat. The background shows the blue sea and a bright sky with some clouds. The text "Managers and VPs are often emotional shock absorbers" is overlaid in white on the image.

Managers and VPs are often
emotional shock absorbers

Chronic stress
reduces trust,
engagement, and
creativity

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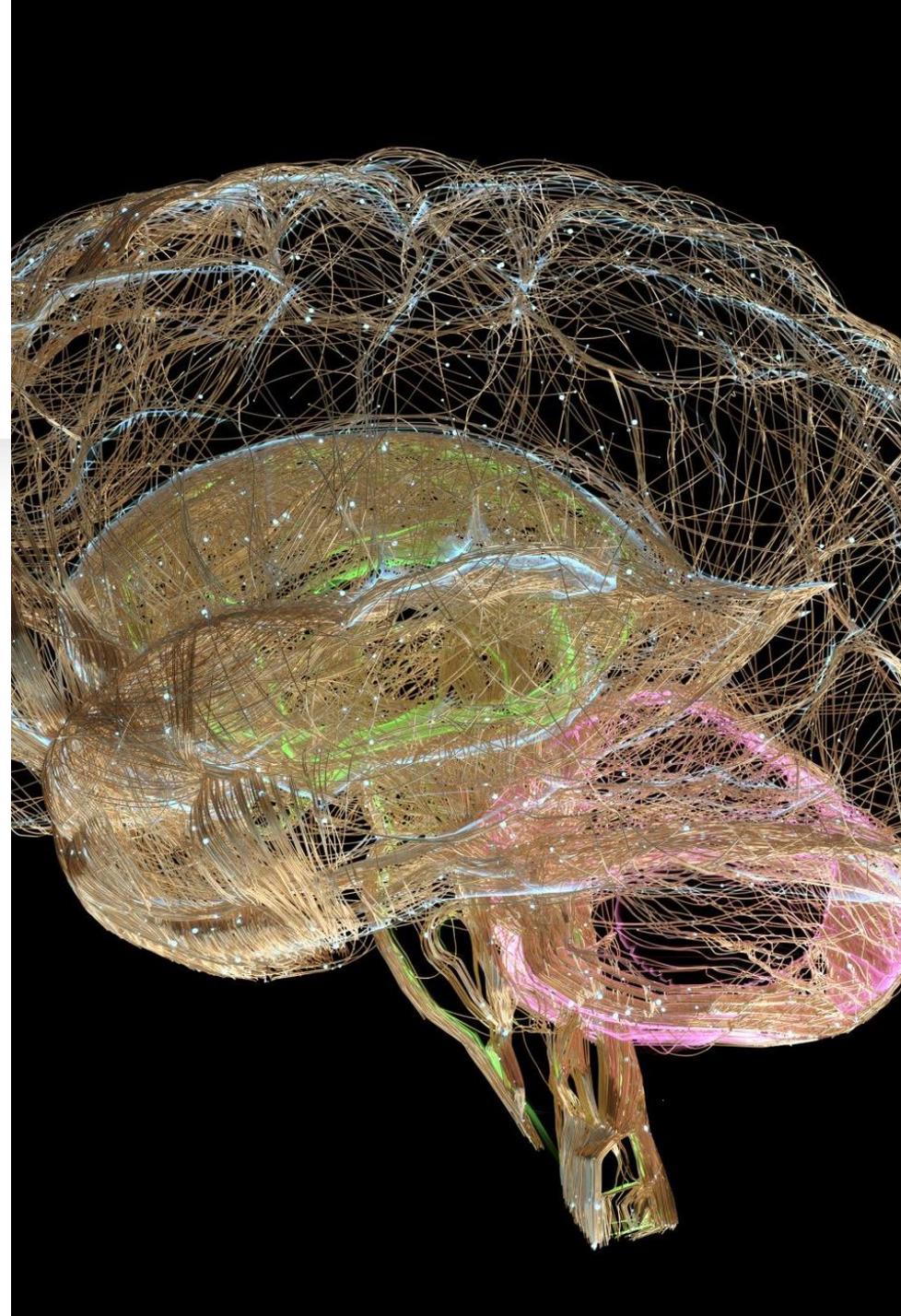
Why Collaboration Breaks Down

- Emotional safety is absent
- Lack of trust
- Communication becomes transactional, not relational
- People feel misunderstood or defensive
- Misalignment of goals or unclear roles



Neuroscience of Stress & Safety

- The brain scans for threat 5x per second (neuroception)
- When people feel heard, the amygdala calms down
- Oxytocin increases with empathy and connection



Affect Labeling — The Fastest Way to De-Stress a Team

- **Definition:** Listening for emotions (not words) and reflecting them back
- **Examples:** "You're frustrated.", "You're anxious.", "You're feeling unappreciated."
- **Impact:** Calms emotional reactivity in 30–90 seconds, builds trust

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Affect Labeling in Action

L P O O

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S S S S S

S S S S S

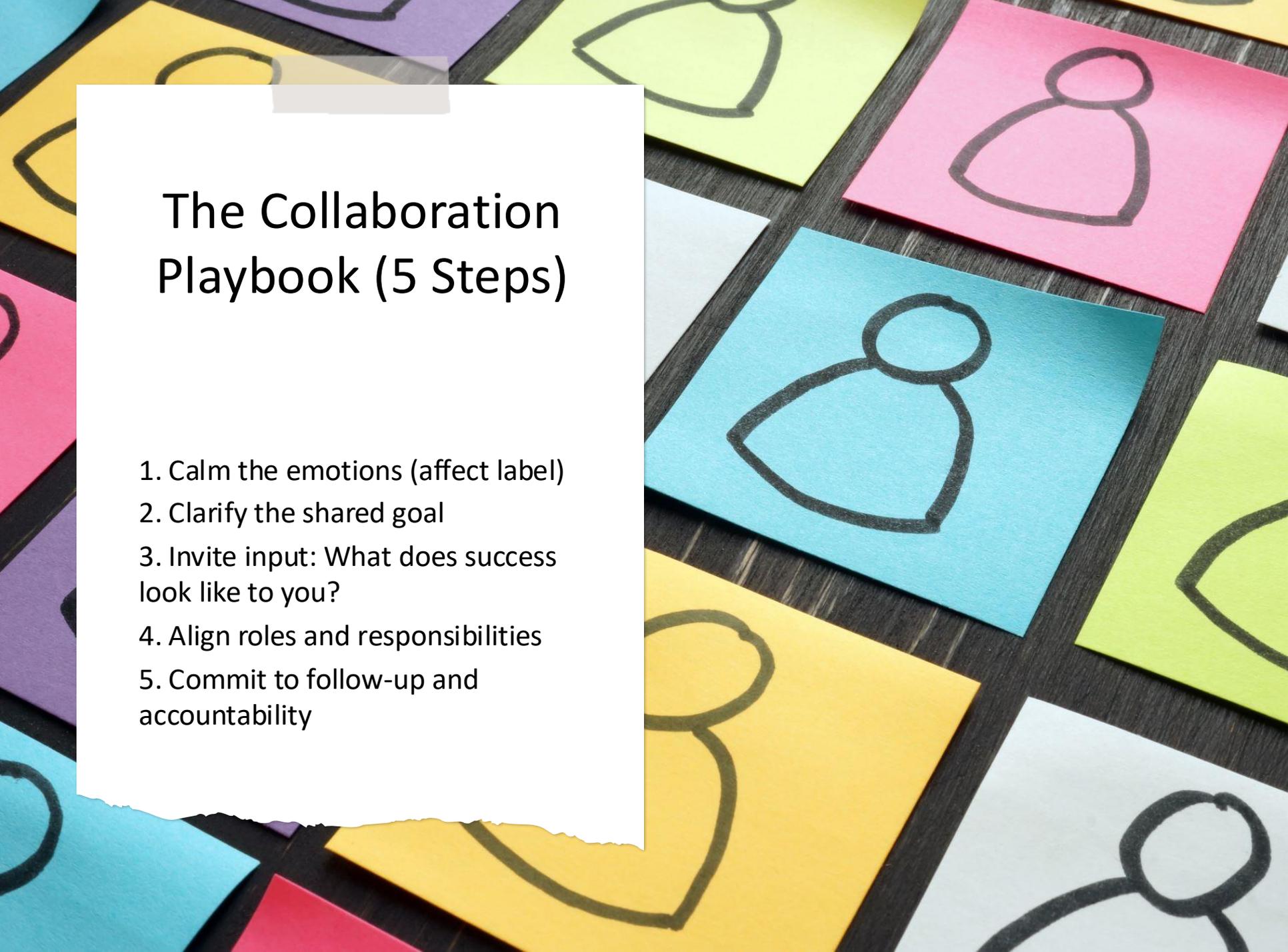
Before: "You're not
making any sense.
Why didn't you follow
the procedure?"

After: "You're overwhelmed
and feel like your hands are
tied."



A photograph of a business meeting in progress. Several people are gathered around a table, looking at a tablet computer. One person is holding a smartphone, and another is holding a coffee cup. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an office environment with large windows. The text 'Result: Calmer conversation, clearer thinking, increased cooperation' is overlaid in white on the image.

Result: Calmer conversation,
clearer thinking, increased
cooperation

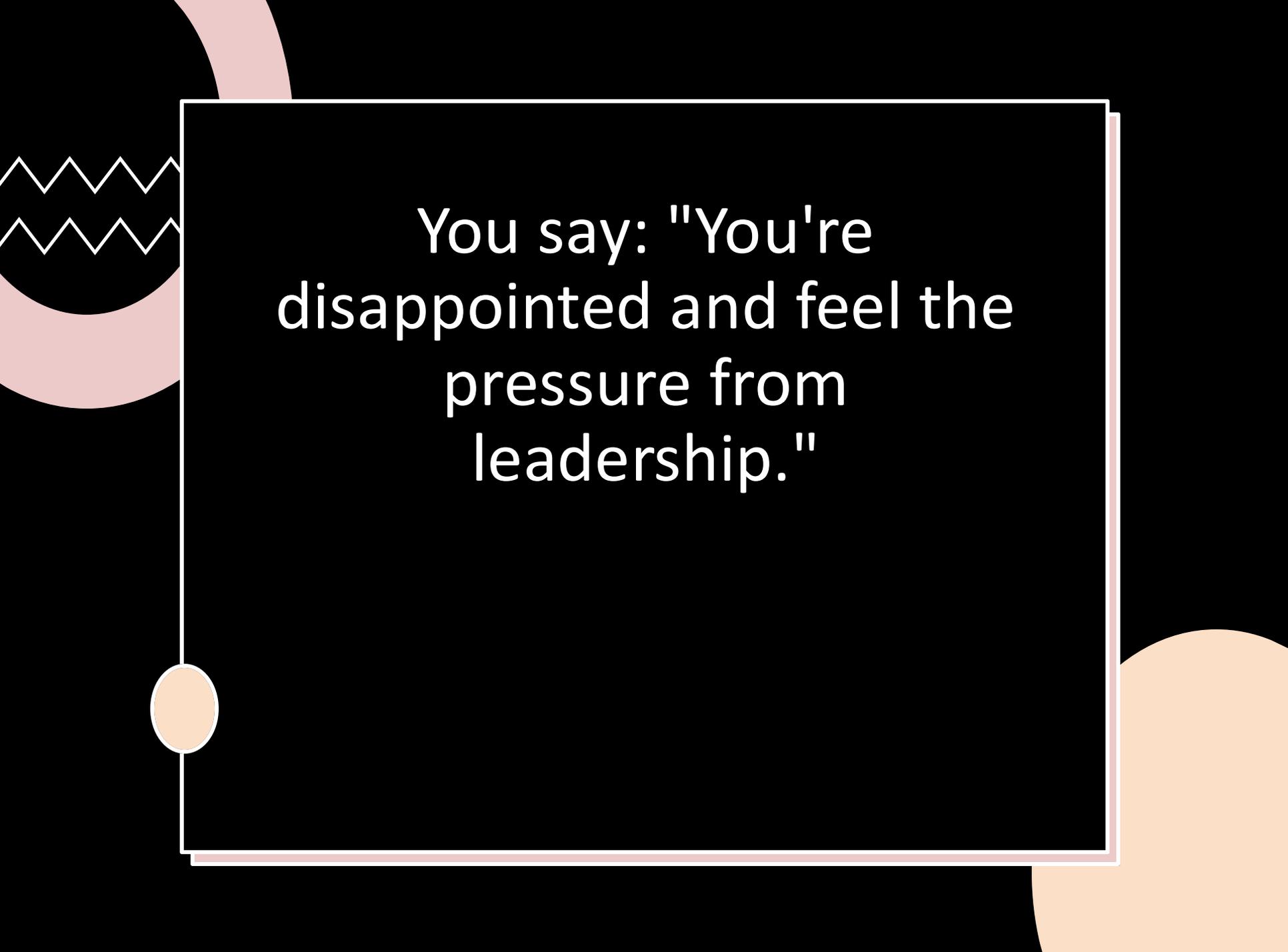
The background of the slide features a dark wooden surface covered with several colorful sticky notes in shades of yellow, pink, blue, and purple. Each sticky note has a simple black outline drawing of a person's head and shoulders. A white rectangular box with a torn bottom edge is positioned on the left side of the slide, containing the title and a list of five steps.

The Collaboration Playbook (5 Steps)

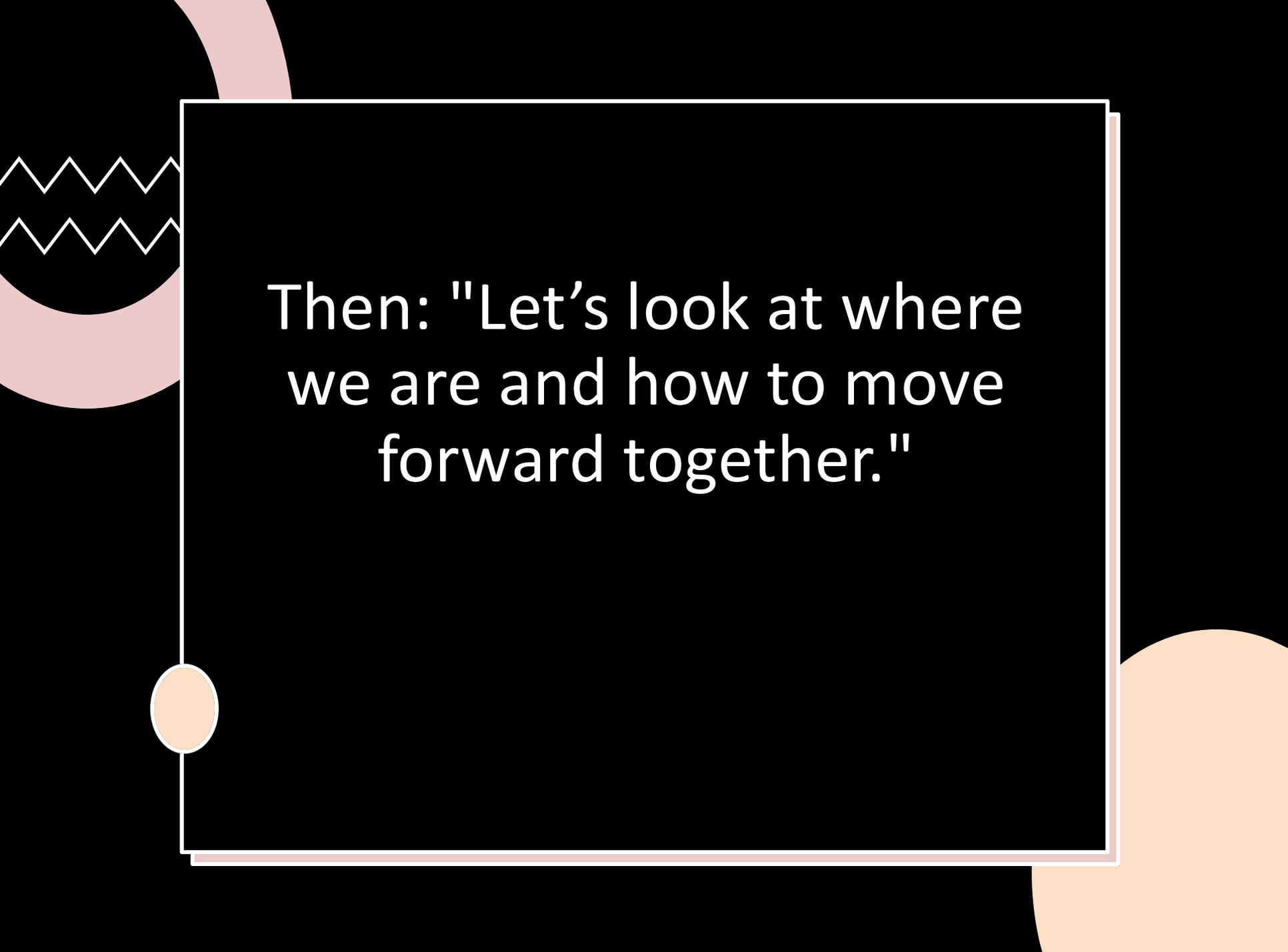
1. Calm the emotions (affect label)
2. Clarify the shared goal
3. Invite input: What does success look like to you?
4. Align roles and responsibilities
5. Commit to follow-up and accountability

Practice Scenario 1

- Context: A project team missed a deadline. Tensions are high.



You say: "You're disappointed and feel the pressure from leadership."



Then: "Let's look at where we are and how to move forward together."

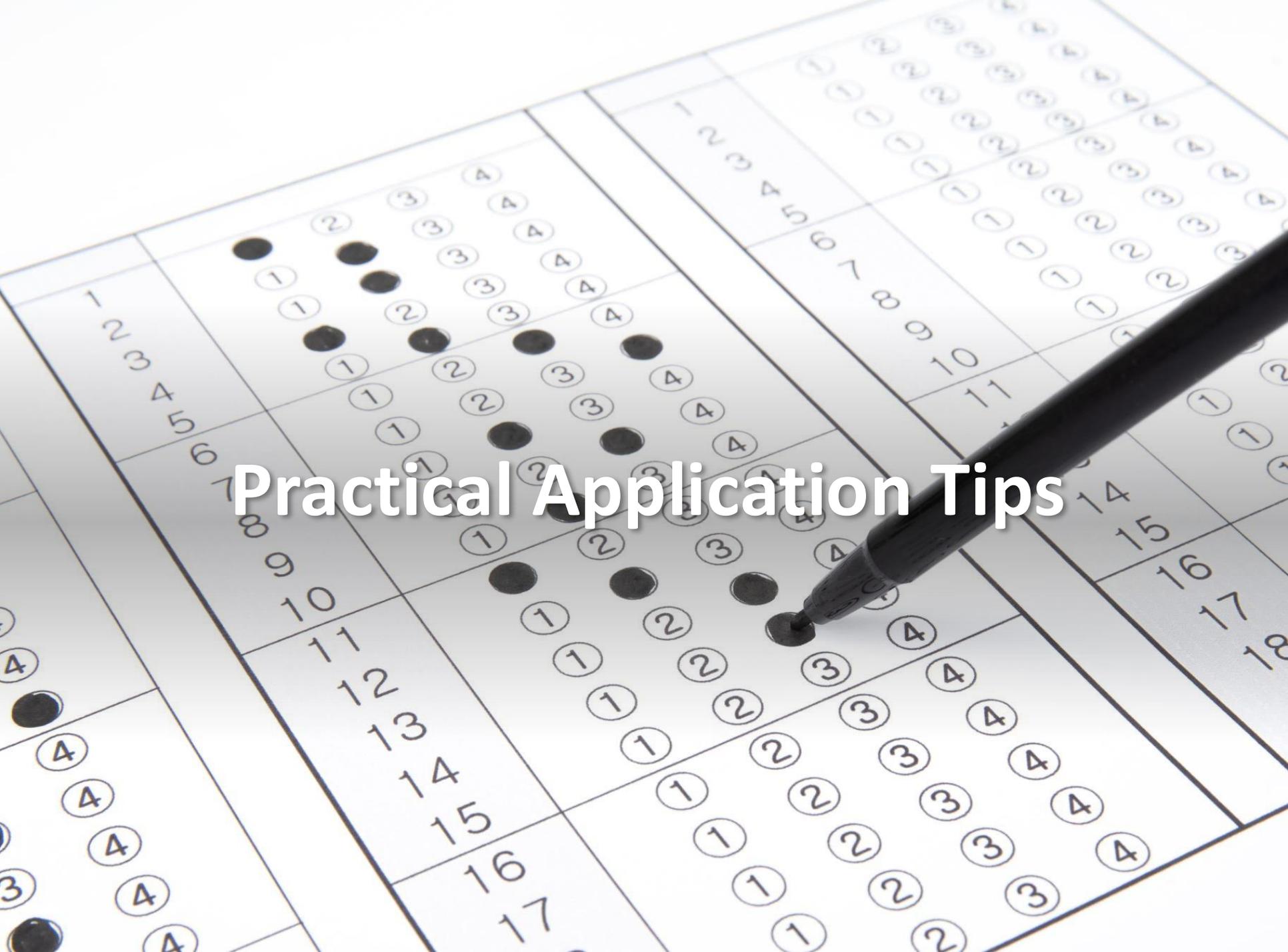
Practice Scenario 2

Context: Two department heads are in conflict.

You say: "You're both feeling dismissed and worried about being undermined."

Then: "Let's find a common goal that matters to both of you."

Practical Application Tips



Pause before reacting;
scan for emotion

Use simple emotion words (angry, sad, anxious, frustrated, overwhelmed)

Speak in short,
declarative sentences



Don't use "I"
statements;
focus on "You're
feeling..."

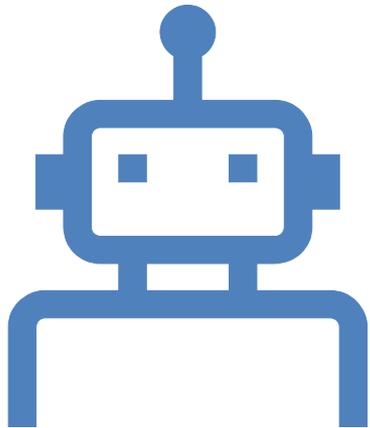
Summary

– What You Can Do Today

- Learn to listen for emotions, not just words
- Use affect labeling in every emotionally charged situation
- Lead with empathy, then align goals
- Build trust first — collaboration follows

A large, glowing pink question mark graphic is centered on the page. The question mark is composed of a thick, neon-like line that forms the shape of a question mark. The glow is brightest in the center and fades towards the edges. The background is solid black.

Questions?



Want some help?

Check out my De-
Escalation Advisor

[https://dougnoll.co/De-
Escalate-Advisor](https://dougnoll.co/De-Escalate-Advisor)

Thank You

For information about workshops
and coaching contact me at:



www.dougnoll.com



zoom

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doug@dougnoll.com



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EAP Benefit Spotlight

Resources for total wellbeing

Aware: A MINDFULNESS PROGRAM



FEATURES

- Six telephonic sessions with an Aware specialist who is trained in mindfulness
- An individualized practice plan, tailored to your needs
- Opportunity to experience and learn mindfulness exercises within each scheduled session
- Electronic resources such as a practice plan journal, guided practice exercises and an additional resource guide

The Aware mindfulness program helps you learn to meaningfully engage in the present moment. It offers a research-based approach to stress management, which is derived from some of the world's leading experts in the field.

A specially trained Aware specialist will guide you through a step-by-step process to learn the skills you need to reduce stress, emphasize the present, establish greater mind-body balance and increase overall wellbeing.



COLLABORATION PLAYBOOK



FOLLOW THESE FIVE SIMPLE STEPS TO HELP TURN THAT STRESSFUL SITUATION INTO A COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION.



1

Calm the Emotions (Affect Label)

De-escalate tension and create space for a productive conversation. This step is not about fixing the emotion—just acknowledging it. When people feel heard and validated, they're more likely to engage constructively.

2

Clarify the Shared Goal

To establish common ground and keep the conversation focused on what matters most. Ask: "What's the outcome we're all aiming for?"

3

Invite Input: What does success look like to you?

Helping to uncover expectations, perspectives, and unmet needs, this question surfaces hidden assumptions and allows different definitions of success to be aired. It's also a great way to invite collaboration.

4

Align Roles & Responsibilities

Clarify who is doing what, by when, and how decisions are made. Clear boundaries and shared understanding of roles reduce duplication or frustration.

5

Commit to Follow-Up & Accountability

This is to ensure agreements stick and momentum continues. Define how and when you'll check in: "What's the best way to update each other if something changes?"