The Ownership Gap:

Why Associates Don’t Step Up (and What to Do About It)



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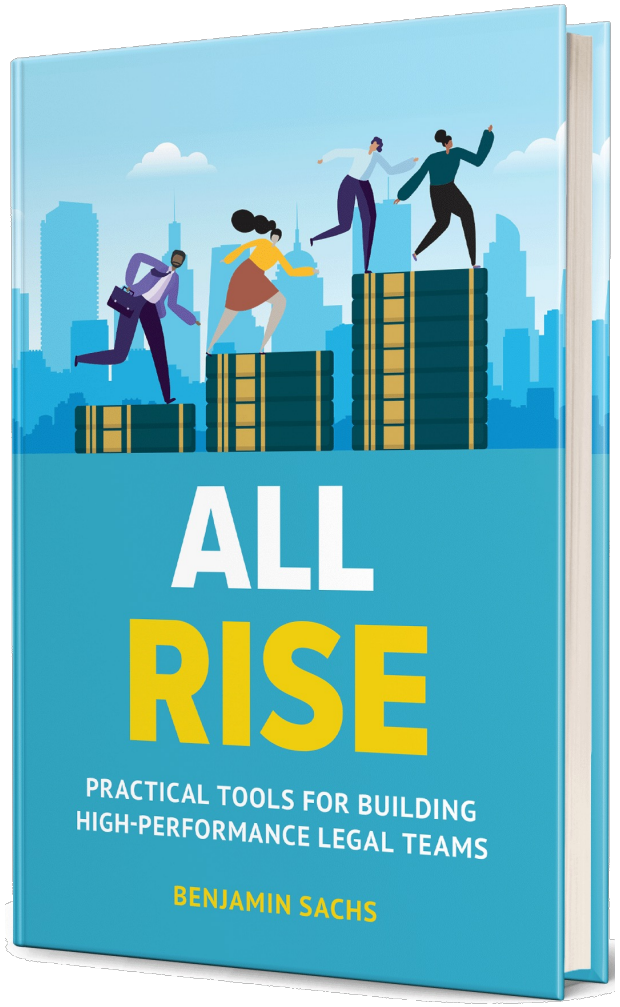

What does it mean to
own your work?


POINT BREAK


- “The name's Johnny Utah!”
- “Who cares?”

Ben Sachs

- Author of *All Rise: Practical Tools for Building High-Performance Legal Teams*
- Teaching at UVa Law
- President of Sachs & Co.
- Former COO and GC at Storyblocks
- Previously at BCG and Sidley Austin

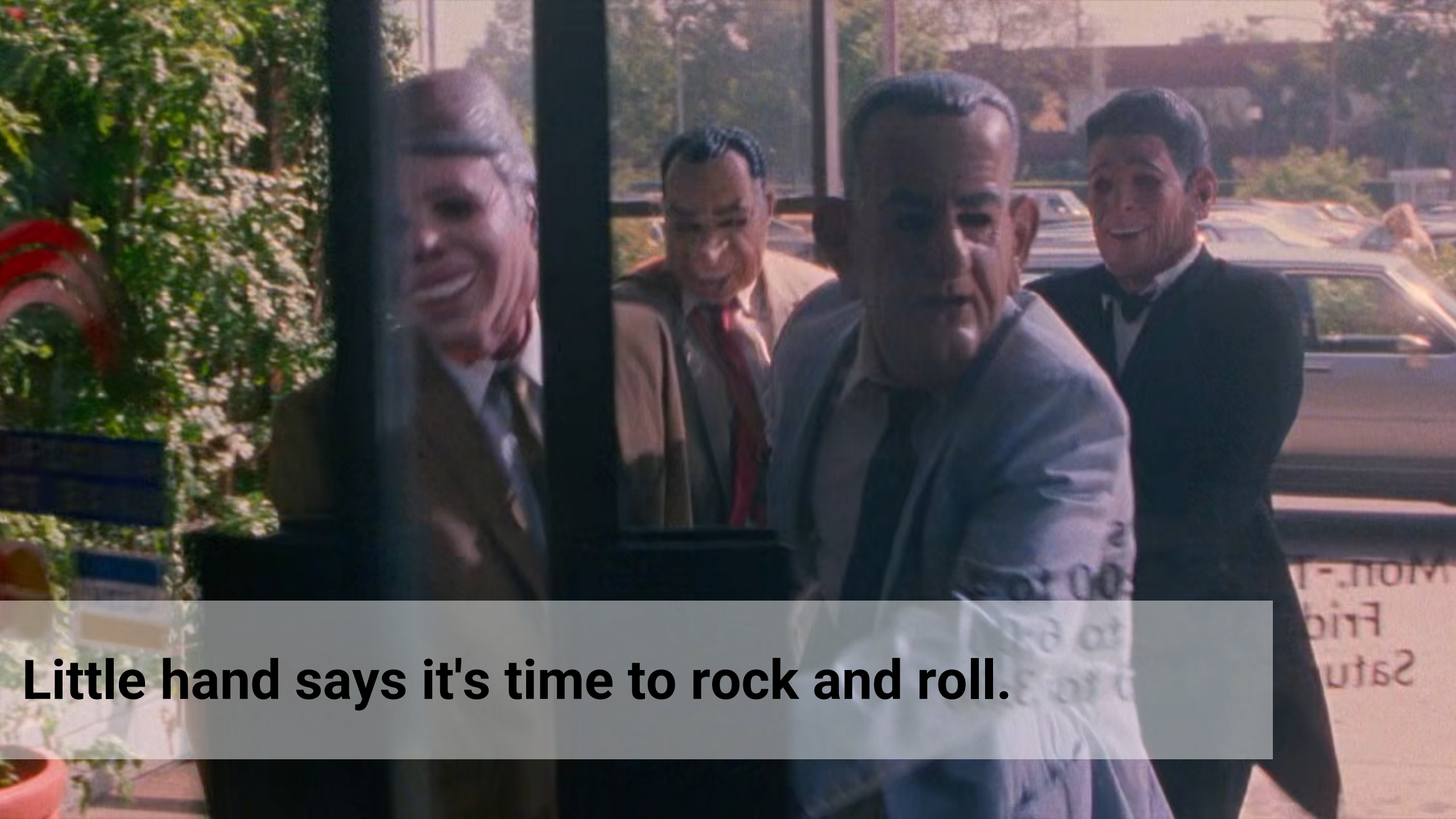


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- Chief of Attorney Talent, Williams & Connolly LLP
- Certified coach, Volta Coach Training
- Former litigator and DC Superior Court law clerk

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- Vice President and Legal Consultant with Javelin Search and Growth Advisors
- 10+ years as a Director in the Career Services office of Vanderbilt Law School
- Columnist, Above the Law
- Previous experience at American Constitution Society, Sidley Austin, and as Federal Law Clerk


Little hand says it's time to rock and roll.



1 How Leaders Get in the Way of Ownership



2 How Team Members Let Ownership Pass Them By

1

How Leaders Get in the Way


This will sting a bit,
but it's for your own growth.

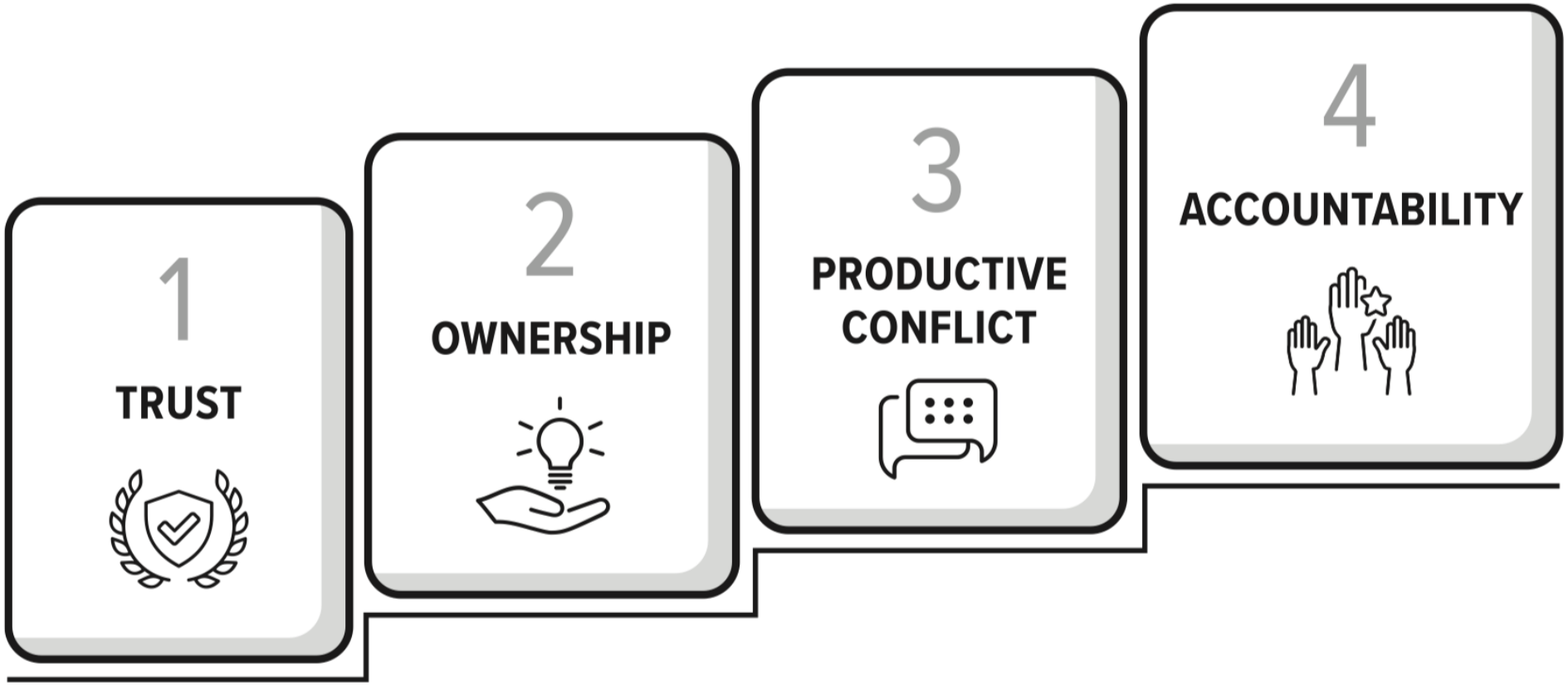
What Leaders Are Thinking

Associates just don’t care

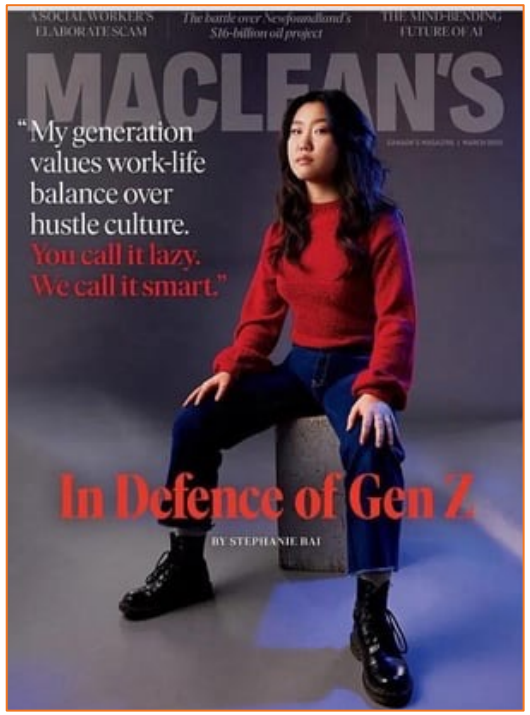
Kids these days…

They don’t want to work hard

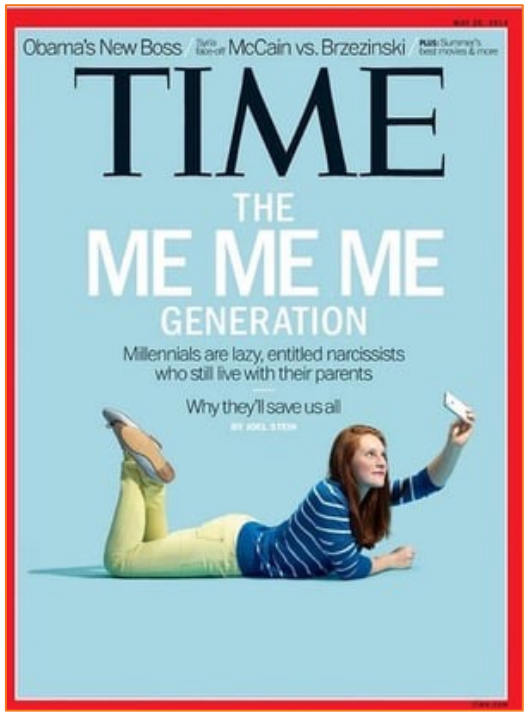
Key traits of high-performance teams



Age-old tradition of calling the youth “entitled”



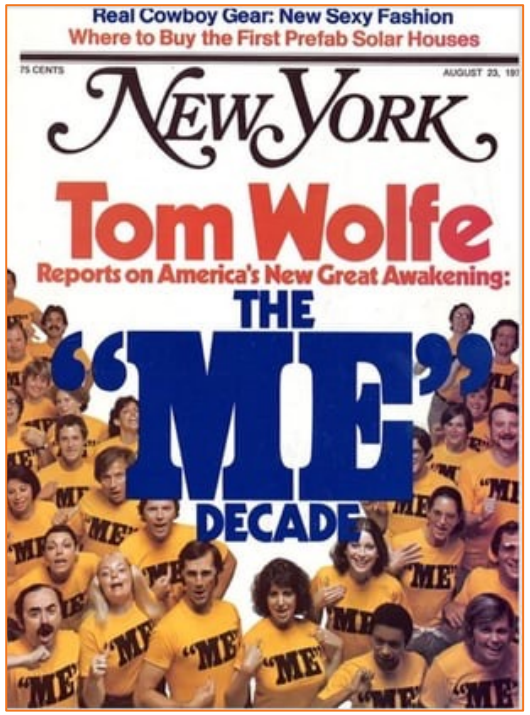
2023



2013



1990



1976



It’s a killer rush.


Just do it again. Pop up.

PROBLEM

Treat them like cogs in a machine, and that’s how they’ll act

SOLUTION

Show an interest in their careers, not just your tasks

PROBLEM

Managers have different expectations

SOLUTION

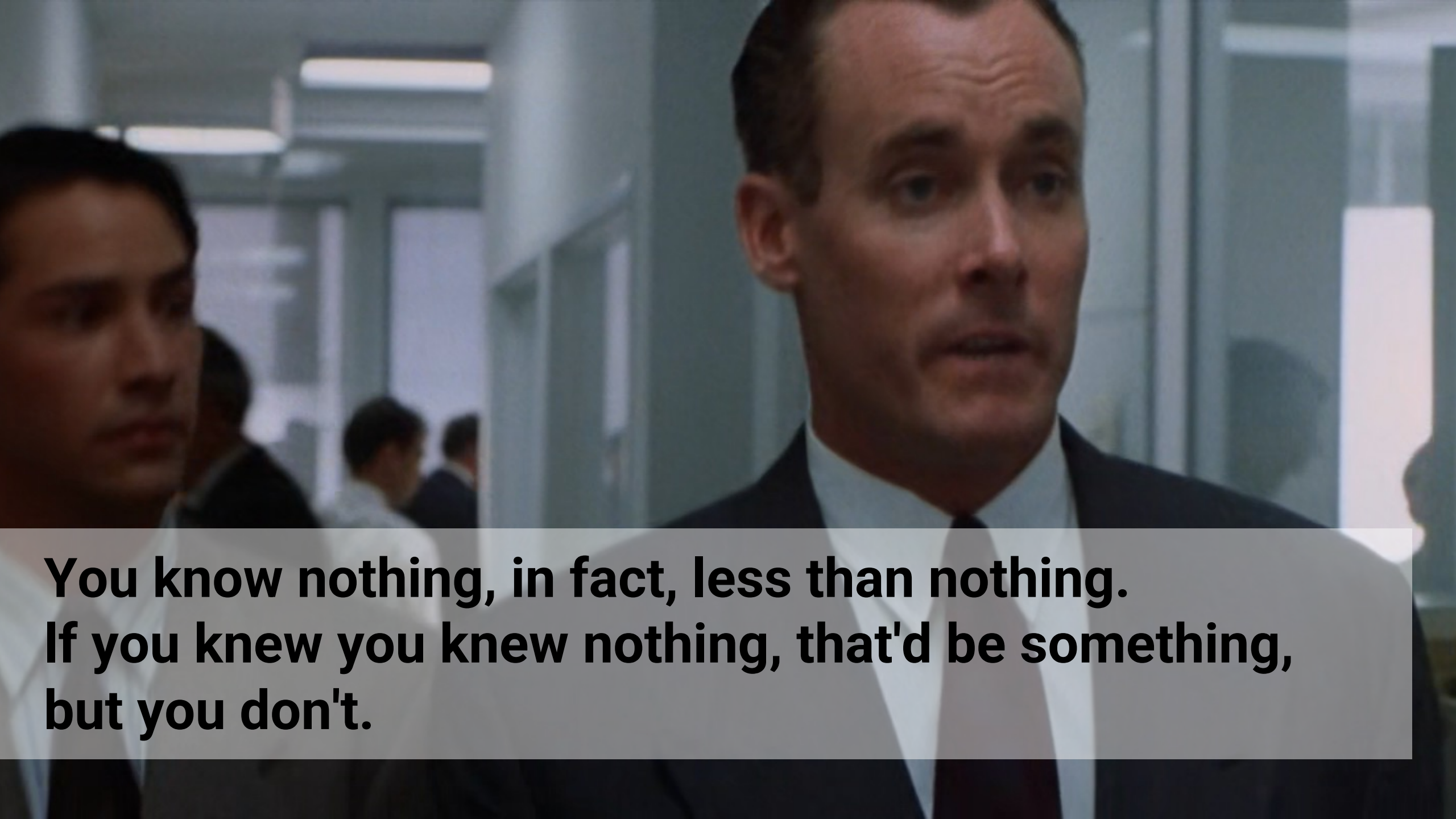
Be open about yours

PROBLEM

Micromanaged team members never learn to think for themselves

SOLUTION

Guide them with questions, not lectures


You know nothing, in fact, less than nothing.
If you knew you knew nothing, that'd be something,
but you don't.

2

How Team Members Let Ownership Pass Them By


My whole life has been about this moment, Johnny.

What is ownership?

Ownership is thinking about what happens outside the four corners of your assignment.

1. **Communicating before anyone has to ask**
2. **Fixing things you didn’t break**
3. **Treating the team’s to-do list as your own**

What is ownership?

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Barriers to Proactive Communication

It'll just mean more work for me

They want as little communication from me as possible

I don't know the next step

Five examples of proactive communication

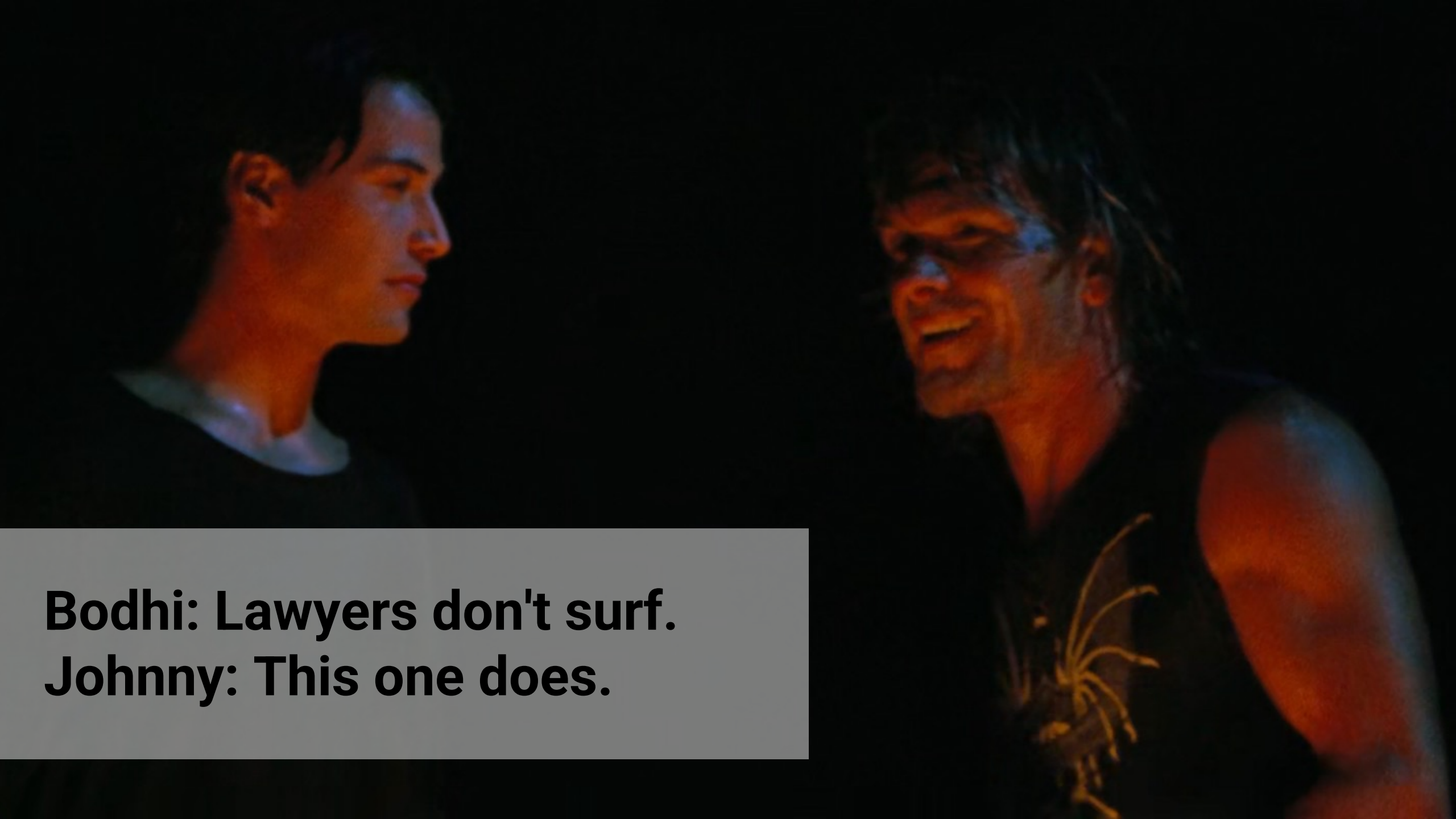
1. “Here is an outline of the memo based on my initial research. Sharing it with you in case you see any red flags. No need to respond if you’re busy. I’ll keep moving forward either way.”
2. “Just letting you know I’m halfway through the brief and encountered two potentially tricky issues. Below is a summary and my proposed argument for each if you want to discuss.”
3. “FYI: I just got through the first batch of discovery docs. Not as dense as expected, so no concerns about timeline right now. I’ll let you know if anything changes.”
4. “Quick question: I told you I’d get you an answer by EOD tomorrow, but I am getting pulled into an emergency request on another matter. If I take another 24 hours to get back to you, would that throw off your work? If so, I’ll figure out an alternative.”
5. “The expert witness hasn’t replied to my last few emails. I think hearing from you might do the trick. Here’s a draft email you could send: …”

Sachs & Co.

What is ownership?

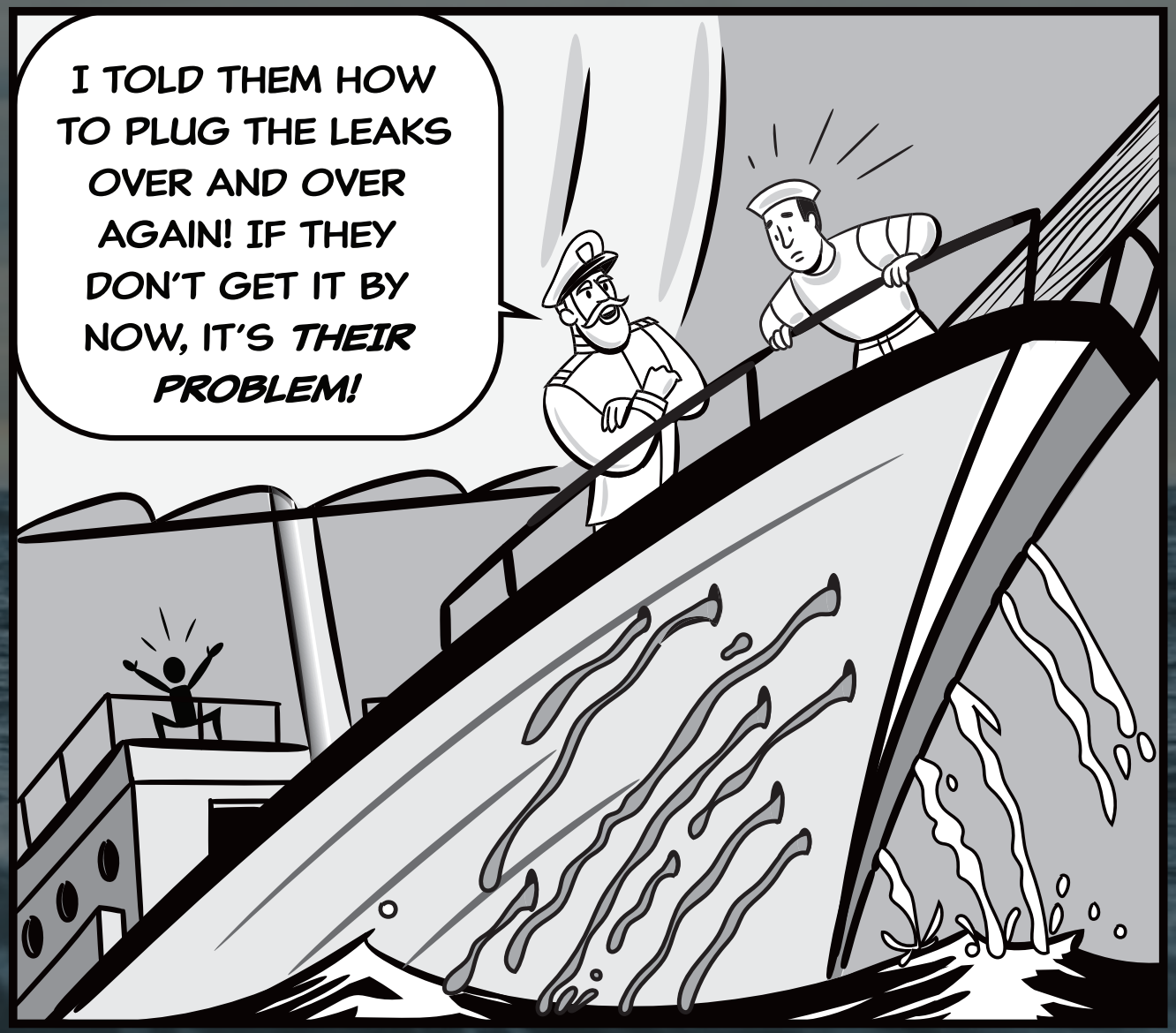
Ownership is thinking about what happens outside the four corners of your assignment.

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2. Fixing things you didn't break
3. Treating the team's to-do list as your own


Bodhi: Lawyers don't surf.
Johnny: This one does.

Complaints Heard ’Round the World

1. I get pulled in too many directions
2. My manager is disorganized
3. Our stakeholders have unrealistic expectations
4. I feel micromanaged
5. I don't get enough feedback



Nope: still your problem

Barriers to Fixing Things I Did Not Break

I'm powerless to solve that

That person won't change

I don't have a better solution

If you had one of these challenges, what steps could *you* take to own the problem?

1. I get pulled in too many directions
2. My manager is disorganized
3. Our stakeholders have unrealistic expectations
4. I feel micromanaged
5. I don't get enough feedback

POWERLESS

(APATHY & VICTIMHOOD)

I CAN HELP

OMNIPOTENCE

(HERO COMPLEX & BURNOUT)

FIND THE HELP ZONE, NOT THE HERO ZONE

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DELIVERING TASKS

"Stay in Your Lane" Mentality

DELIVERING OUTCOMES

Ownership Mentality


You're about to jump out a perfectly good airplane, Johnny! How do you feel about that?

Barriers to Delivering Outcomes

I don’t want to step on toes

I have enough to do as it is

They don’t want to hear my ideas

I was always told to stay in my lane

The Ownership Gap:

Why Associates Don't Step Up (and What to Do About It)

Managers

- Focus on their career, not your tasks
- Treat people like cogs in a machine, and that is how they'll act
- Encourage ownership by asking questions, not giving lectures

Team Members

- Ask, "How can I support the mission?" (not: "What's my task?")
- Not about doing more work; it's about making sure the work gets done
- You have more power than you think


Cop: We'll get him when he comes back in!
Johnny: He's not coming back.

Continue the conversation with us



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Keanu Reeves

As Johnny Utah