A FREE FIELD GUIDE · RAKSHITHA BRUTSCHE-GOWDA

It's not always you. Sometimes it's the room.

How to read the room, find your part and make your move, from someone who spent eighteen years on the HR side of the table.



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BEFORE YOU START

Good people blame themselves for problems that belong to the room.

For eighteen years I sat in the HR rooms where careers get decided: talent reviews, promotion debates, hiring debriefs. Two things kept happening.

Good people blamed themselves for problems that belonged to the room. A culture that never explained what "good" looked like. A manager stretched too thin to notice. Rules that nobody wrote down.

Other people waited for the room to change, when one honest move of their own would have changed everything.

This guide helps you tell the difference, and then act. It takes about twenty minutes. Bring a pen and one situation you keep thinking about.

IF YOU'RE FEELING IT, YOU'RE NOT ALONE

1 in 4

job seekers have been searching for more than a year.

27–46%

of executive transitions are seen as failures or disappointments two years in.

83%

of white-collar workers report some degree of burnout.

31% vs 45%

of entry-level women versus men have a sponsor speaking up for them.

Sources: Monster Research Institute, via Allwork.Space, May 2026 · McKinsey & Company, 2018 · DHR Global 2026 Workforce Trends Report · McKinsey & LeanIn.Org, Women in the Workplace 2025.

1

IS IT YOU, OR THE ROOM?

Tick everything that's true right now.

Signs it's the room

- [ ] Nobody has told you clearly what "good" looks like.
- [ ] The goalposts move, and nobody explains why.
- [ ] Feedback arrives as a surprise at review time.
- [ ] People who speak loudest get more credit than people who deliver.
- [ ] The same problem keeps happening to different people.
- [ ] You're expected to be reachable at all hours.
- [ ] Decisions about you happen in rooms you're never in.
- [ ] Different rules seem to apply to different people.

Signs it's your part

- [ ] You haven't told anyone what you want next.
- [ ] You wait to be noticed instead of making your work visible.
- [ ] You say yes when you mean no.
- [ ] You avoid the one conversation that would clear things up.
- [ ] You've stopped asking for feedback.
- [ ] You guess what others think instead of asking.
- [ ] You're still doing the job you had, not the one you have now.
- [ ] You're carrying something alone that you could share.

Mostly the room? You're not imagining it. Read the room before you try to change yourself (step 2).

Mostly your part? Good news. That's the fastest kind of problem to fix (step 3).

Both? That's the most common answer. Pick one thing from your side and start there.

2

READ THE ROOM

The questions HR people ask before they judge anyone.

Every team, company and country has a culture. Before you decide what's wrong with you, find out how this room works.

1 **Who gets promoted here, and what did they do that others didn't?**
Look at the last three people who moved up.

2 **How are decisions about people actually made?**
Who's in that room, and who speaks for you there?

3 **What does your manager's manager care about this quarter?**
Your manager is under pressure too. Know what it is.

4 **What really gets rewarded?**
Results, visibility, long hours or relationships? Usually it's a mix.

5 **Who could speak up for you when you're not there?**
That's a sponsor. Mentors advise you; sponsors put your name forward.

6 **What are the rules nobody told you?**
How meetings run, how fast people reply, what "urgent" really means.

7 **What's changing around you?**
A reorganization, a new leader or new technology can explain pressure that feels personal.

New country, new company or new team? Watch for a few weeks before you judge. What looks rude in one culture is efficient in another.

3

FIND YOUR PART

No blame. No excuses. Just what's yours.

Write a short answer under each one. Honest beats perfect.

1 **What do I want next, in one sentence?**

2 **Who knows that, apart from me?**

3 **What am I doing that keeps this pattern going?**

4 **What am I putting up with that costs me sleep?**

5 **Where am I waiting for permission I don't need?**

6 **If I trusted myself completely, what would I do this week?**

4

MAKE YOUR MOVE

Find your words.

Most moves are one conversation. Here are starting lines for the ones people put off most. Change them until they sound like you.

FIND OUT WHAT "GOOD" LOOKS LIKE

"I want to focus on what matters most to you. If I did one thing really well this quarter, what would it be?"

ASK FOR WHAT'S NEXT

"I'd like to grow into a bigger role. What would you need to see from me in the next six months to back that?"

SET A BOUNDARY

"I want to do this well, and I can't do it well by Friday alongside the other project. Which one matters more right now?"

EXPLAIN A GAP

"I stepped away to [one line on why]. During that time I [what you did or learned]. I'm back because [what you want], and here's what I bring."

NAME A PATTERN WITHOUT BLAMING ANYONE

"I've noticed this happen a few times, and I don't think it's about any one person. Could we look at how we handle it?"

TELL YOUR FAMILY YOU'RE CHANGING COURSE

"I know this isn't what you pictured for me. I've thought about it carefully, and it's the right choice for me right now."

5

THE UNWRITTEN RULES

What nobody writes down, from someone who sat where the rules get made.

Especially useful in your first years at work, in a new company, or in a new country.

1 **Ambition has to be said out loud.**
Nobody guesses what you want. Managers back people who've told them.

2 **Visibility is part of the work.**
A short weekly update beats a heroic surprise.

3 **Feedback rarely arrives when you need it.**
Ask for it early, and in small pieces.

4 **Relationships are built in small moments.**
A quick check-in, a real thank-you, a follow-up when you said you would.

5 **Learn how a decision gets made before you try to change one.**
Who decides, who influences, and when.

6 **Write it down after important conversations.**
A two-line email saying what you agreed saves months of confusion.

7 **Your manager's priorities are your priorities, until you agree otherwise.**
Then say what you'd change, and why.

8 **Your best work doesn't come from your worst exhaustion.**
Rest isn't a reward for finishing. It's part of doing the job well.

6

THE QUESTION I COME BACK TO

Is it worth your peace?

Hold one thing in mind: a job, a role, a commitment, a yes you're starting to regret. Answer quickly.

Does it cost you sleep, energy or time with people you love?	○ Yes	○ No
If someone asked you today, would you still say yes to it?	○ Yes	○ No
Is it mostly someone else's expectation rather than your own?	○ Yes	○ No
Does it move you toward the life you want a year from now?	○ Yes	○ No
If it ended tomorrow, would you feel more relief than loss?	○ Yes	○ No

Count a point for each **Yes** to questions 1, 3 and 5, and each **No** to questions 2 and 4.

0–1: Worth it. Protect it. Guard the time and energy it needs.

2–3: Worth it, but not like this. Something needs to change: a boundary, a conversation, a different arrangement.

4–5: Probably not worth your peace. That doesn't mean walking away tomorrow. It means deciding on purpose, not by default.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Want a second pair of eyes?

Book a free 30-minute call. Bring the situation you thought about while reading this. We'll work out what belongs to the room, what's yours, and your first move. You'll leave with a next step whether we work together or not.

Book your free call →

One session	One decision or one hard conversation, in 60 minutes.	**$150**
Six weeks, one-on-one	6 weekly sessions, for a new role, a career move or a life transition. Pay in full or in 2 parts.	**$1,200**
Leadership coaching	Three months for directors, VPs and C-suite leaders. Your company can pay by invoice.	**$3,500**
Team sessions	For you and your team across countries, up to 10 people. 2 sessions for a reset, 3 to make it stick.	**$1,500 / $2,000**
Self-leadership workshops	Small groups on career moves, a new role, life transitions, motherhood and work, and relationships.	**Join the list**

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