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VISION WORKSHOP

CULTIVATE 2025

Presented by:

Rob Sproule



Owner-to-Owner
LEADERSHIP COACHING

O2O LEADERSHIP COACHING

WELCOME TO THE OWNER-TO-OWNER VISION WORKSHOP

Today is about clarity, connection, and courage.

Please share:

- Your name
- Your garden center
- One thing you're hoping to gain from today



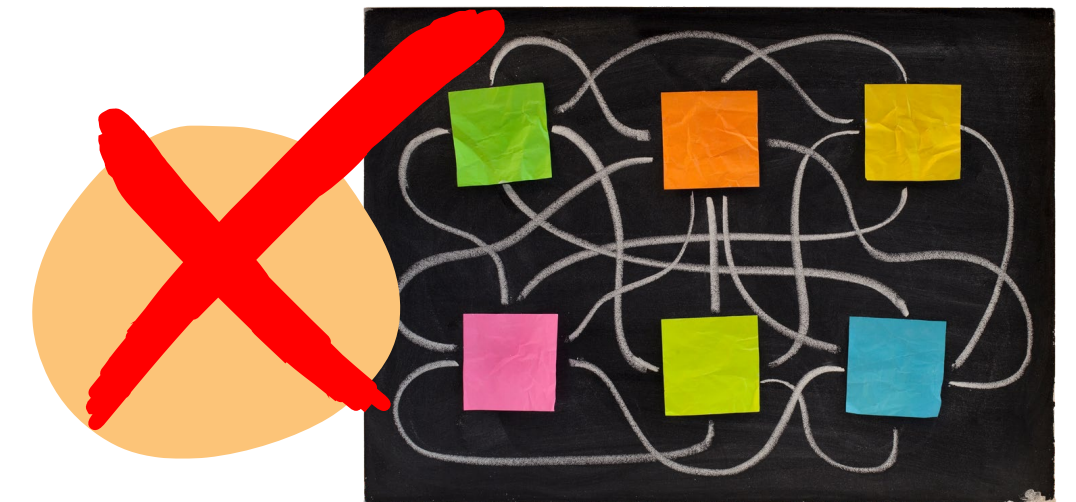
WHY THIS WORK MATTERS — AND WHY IT'S HARD



Defining your vision, mission, and values is some of the most important work you'll do — but also the easiest to postpone.

Putting out fires feels productive. Defining vision feels “luxury.” But without it, all the busyness just spins.

Managers suffer when leadership is unclear. They carry stress, confusion, and burnout that could be avoided with shared direction.



“The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” – Stephen Covey



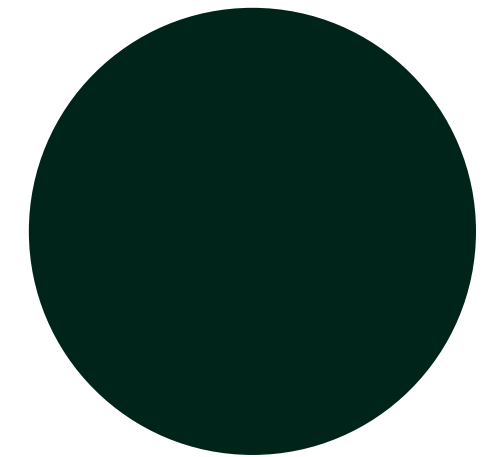
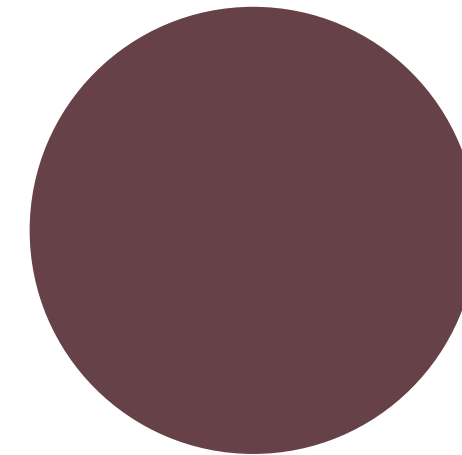
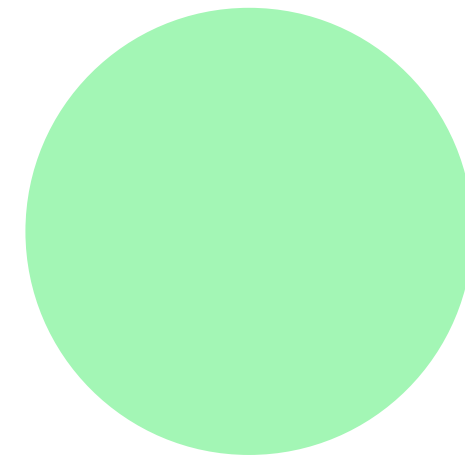
THE COURAGE TO CLARIFY

- What do we actually stand for?
- What's worth protecting in our culture?
- What do we say no to?

Patagonia publicly rewrote its purpose as: “We’re in business to save our home planet.” It was risky, bold — and true. Their customer loyalty soared.

Thank you for choosing courage.

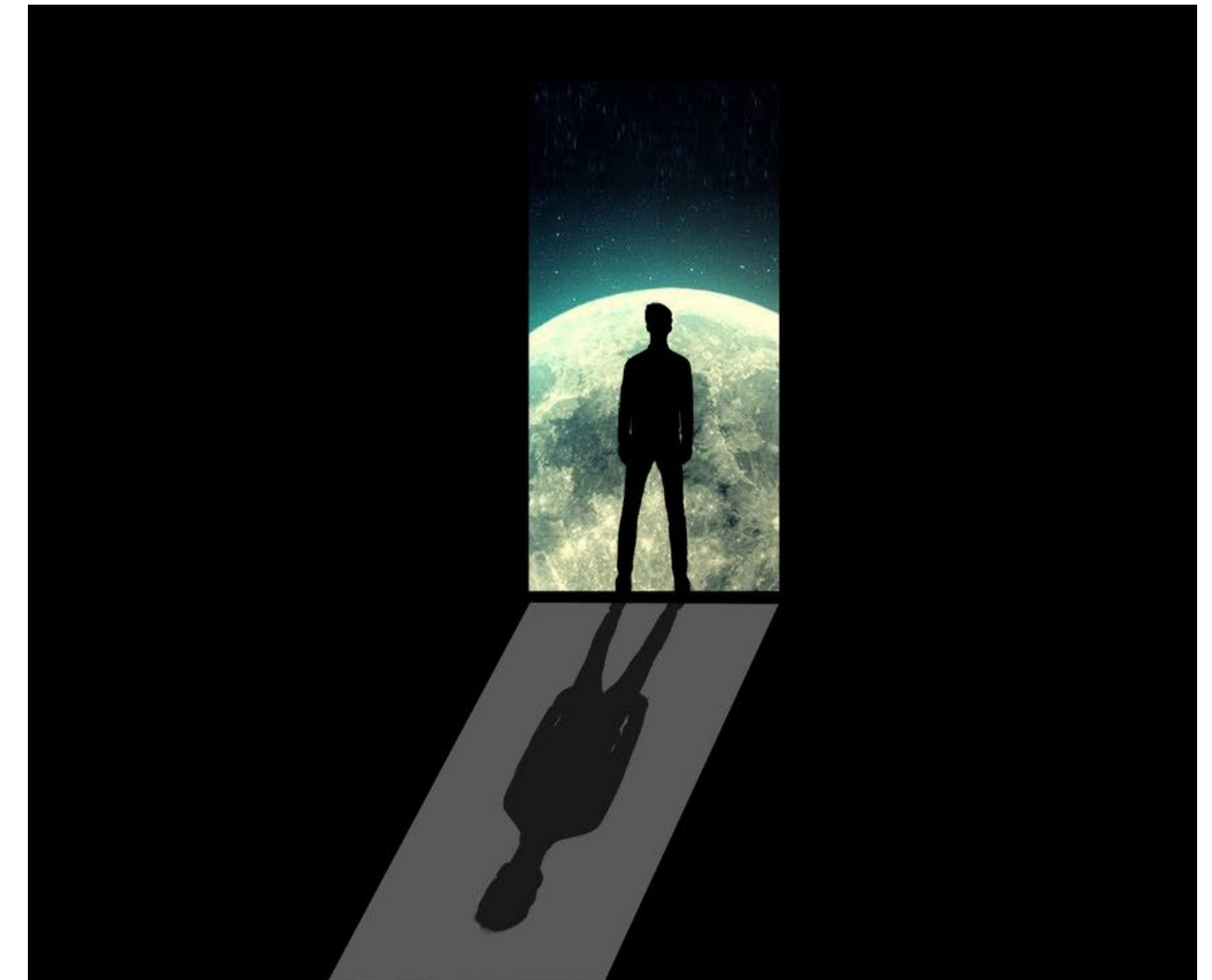
OWNER ISOLATION IS REAL



60% of small business owners say they feel “frequently isolated” in leadership
(Source: Vistage, 2023)

Being the boss can be lonely. Having peers today — even just for a few hours — can shift something profound.

Managers sometimes feel stuck in the middle. This clarity work will give them a language to lead better — and maybe advocate up, too.



MY STORY – SALISBURY & BEYOND

Rob Sproule

- Co-owner, Salisbury Greenhouse
- 3rd generation in the business
- Leadership coach for garden center owners
- Co-led our growth to Top 100 IGC in Canada
- Still learning, still listening, still in it



To help other owners move from chaos to coherence, from reacting to leading.

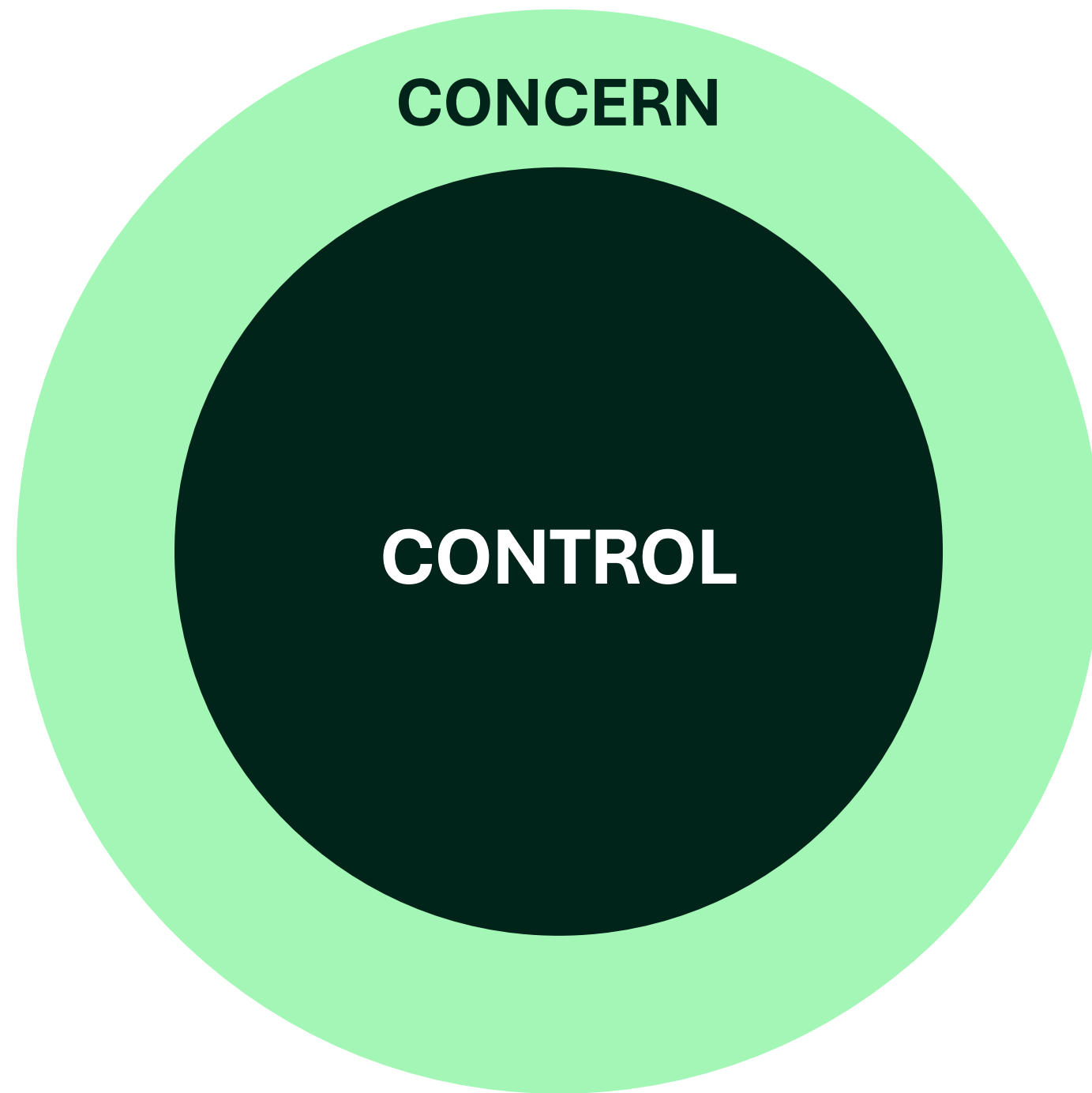




MY LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

**Leadership is creating clarity.
Clarity creates alignment.
Alignment creates results.**

“When the vision is clear, the decisions are easy.” – Andy Stanley



WHAT I LEARNED FROM MARCUS AURELIUS

“You have power over your mind — not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.” – Marcus Aurelius

Ace Hardware, a decentralized cooperative, empowers store owners to control what they can (local selection, staffing) and lets go of what they can't (global trends).

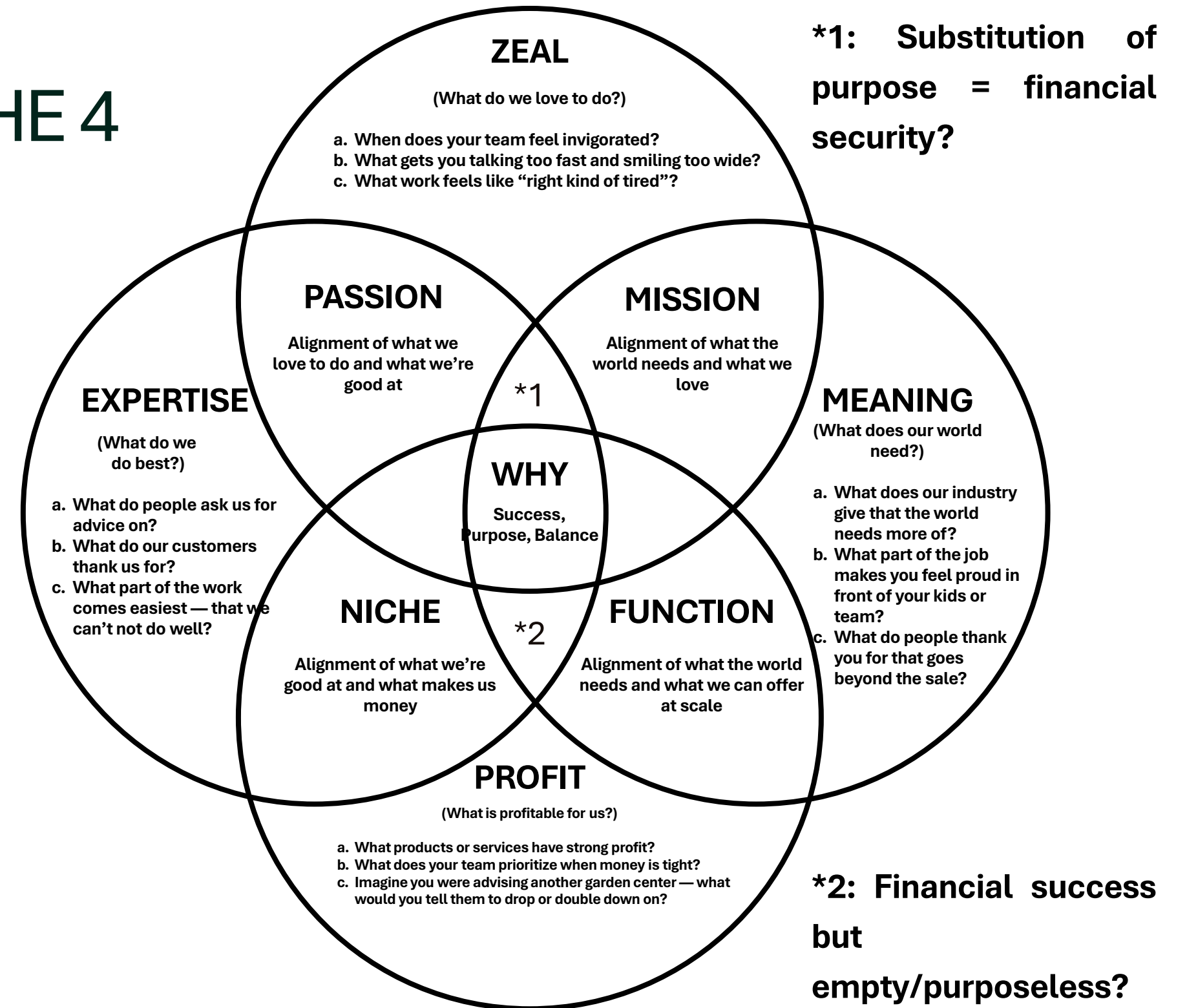
WHERE WE'RE GOING TODAY – THE 4 VIRTUES MODEL

1. **Zeal** – what excites you
2. **Expertise** – what you do best
3. **Profit** – what sustains you
4. **Meaning** – what fulfills you

- **Passion**
- **Niche**
- **Function**
- **Mission**

Which leads us to your Why.

“Clarity precedes mastery.” – Robin Sharma



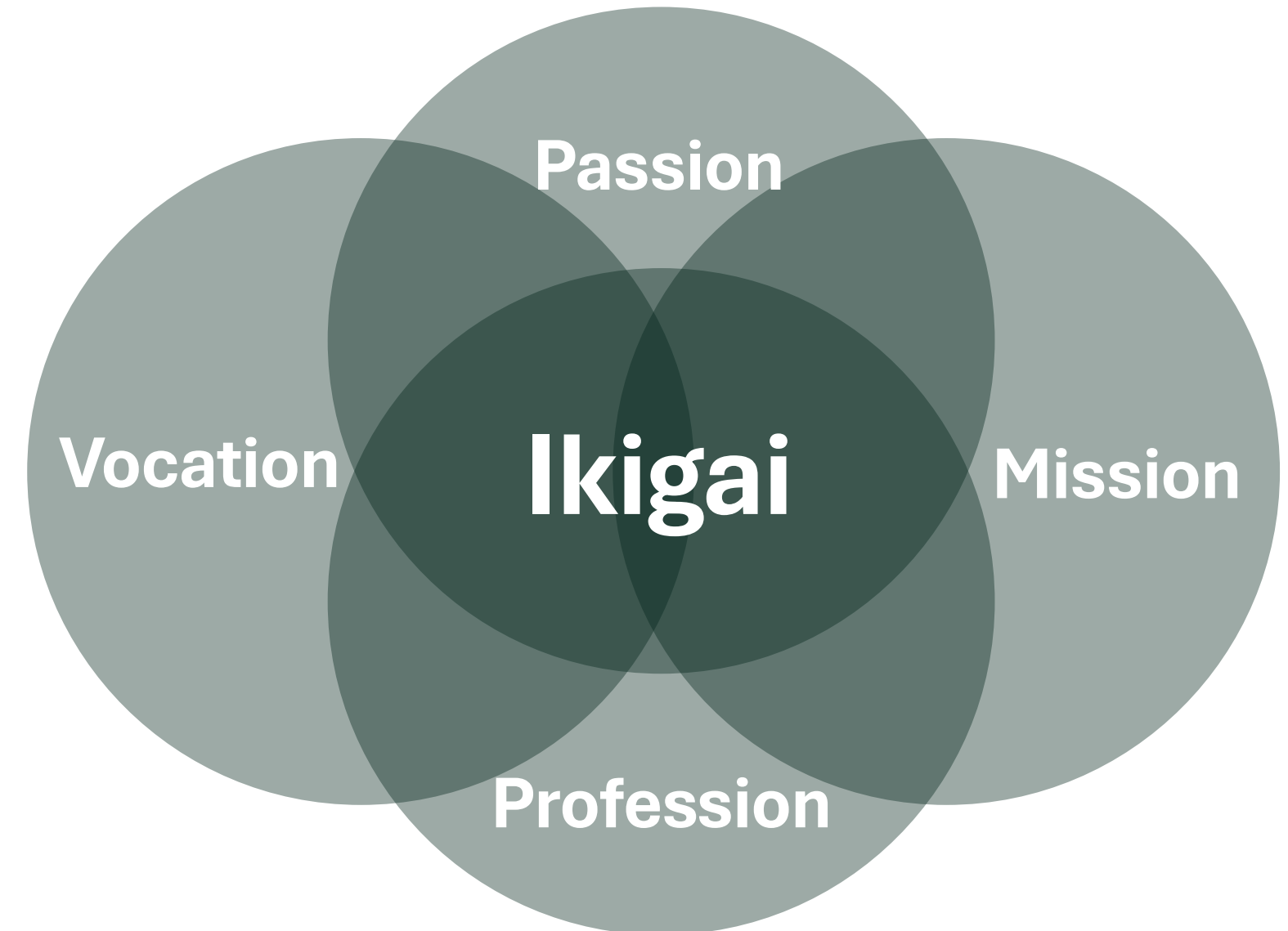
“IKIGAI” – A BEAUTIFUL BUT FLAWED TOOL FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

Ikigai is a Japanese concept that loosely translates to “your reason for being.” The Western version includes:

- What you love (**Zeal**)
- What you’re good at (**Expertise**)
- What the world needs (**Meaning**)
- What you can be paid for (**Profit**)

Ikigai gets idealistic fast. We need something that also accounts for burnout, profit pressure, and people management.

“Only staying active will make you want to live a hundred years.” –
Japanese proverb (related to ikigai)



SIMON SINEK'S GOLDEN CIRCLE – A GREAT START TO CLARIFYING YOUR WHY

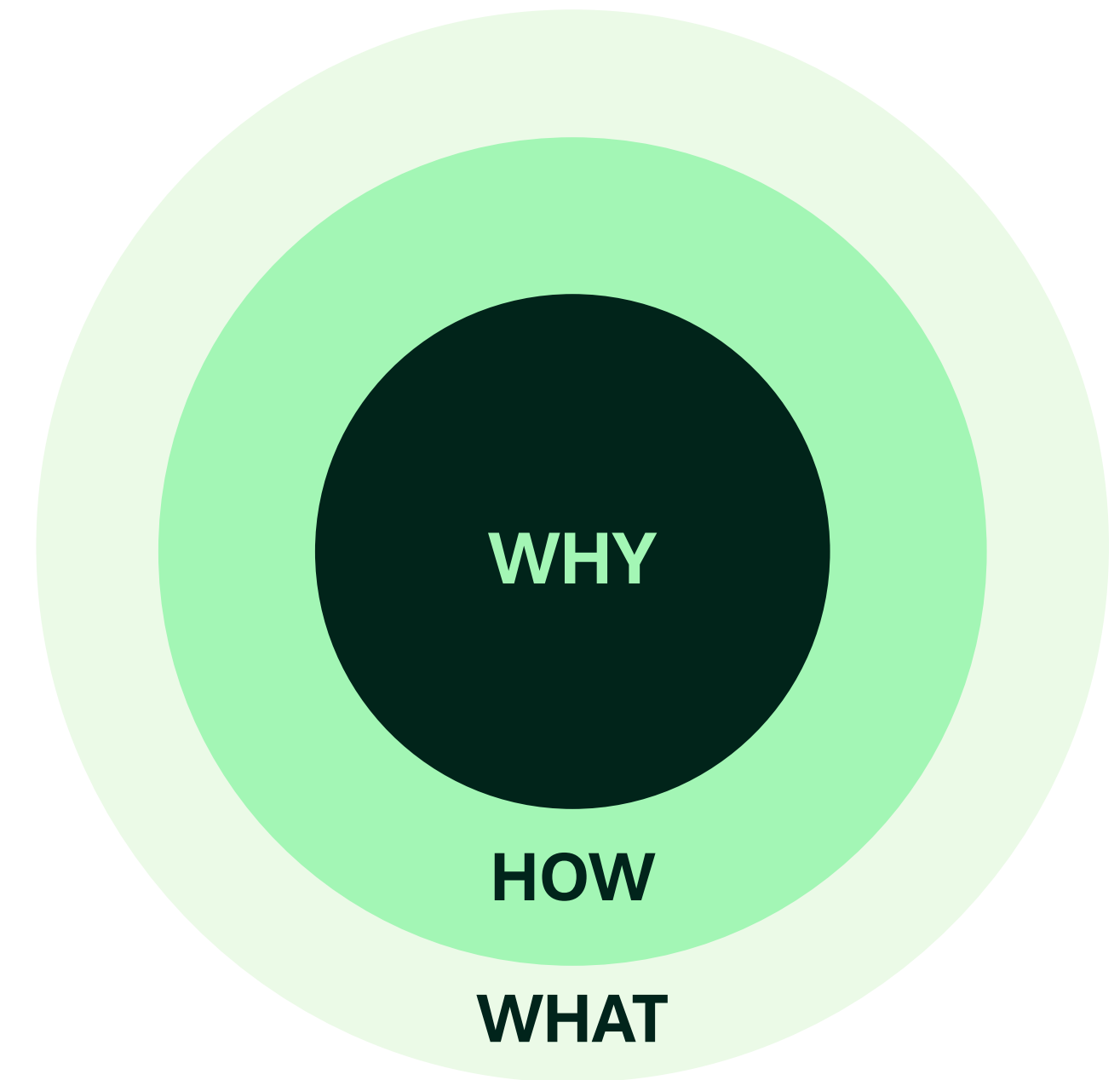
1. **Why** – Your purpose
2. **How** – Your differentiators
3. **What** – Your product/service

Most businesses start outside-in. The best ones lead inside-out.

Ben & Jerry's starts with their Why:

linked social justice + fun product = passionate customers and teams.

This is powerful for staff too. A clear Why builds loyalty and initiative on the floor.



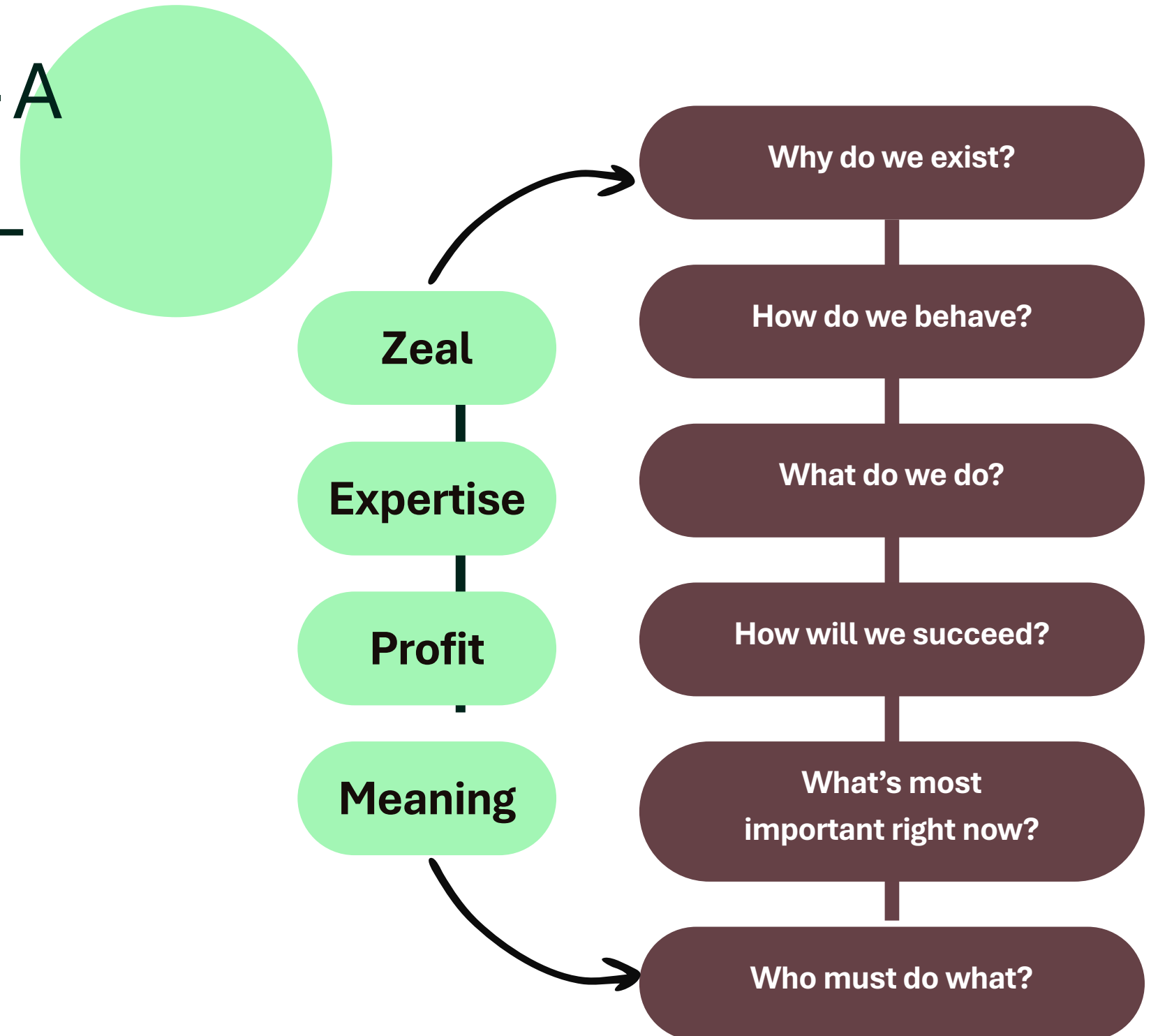
“People don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it.” – Simon Sinek

LENCIONI'S 6 CLARITY QUESTIONS – A FOUNDATION FOR ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH

1. Why do we exist?
2. How do we behave?
3. What do we do?
4. How will we succeed?
5. What's most important right now?
6. Who must do what?

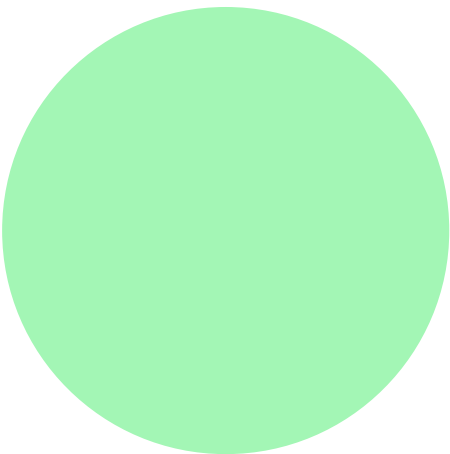
You're not just answering these questions today — you're giving your team the ability to answer them, too.

“If everything is important, then nothing is.” – Patrick Lencioni



FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE —

A MODEL FOR GARDEN CENTER OWNERS



What I needed didn’t exist.

So I made it:

- ✓ Practical enough for daily decisions
- ✓ Deep enough to find your Why
- ✓ Flexible enough to fit family business dynamics

This isn’t another framework from Silicon Valley. It was grown in a greenhouse.

CONCEPT	PURPOSE CLARITY	PRACTICALITY	CULTURE FIT	PATH TO WHY
Ikigai	✓	✗	⚠	✓
Golden Circle	✓	⚠	✓	⚠
Lencioni	✓	✓	✓	✗
4 Virtues	✓	✓	✓	✓

“The models are maps, not territory. We need tools that work where we live.” – adapted from Alfred Korzybski

WHAT IS ZEAL? (AND WHY IT MATTERS)

“Zeal is the contagious energy that makes the business feel alive.”

Zeal isn't just enthusiasm — it's a kind of fuel.

**“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” –
Ralph Waldo Emerson**





ZEAL ON THE FLOOR – WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- ✓ Customers linger longer
- ✓ Staff sell better
- ✓ Innovation is constant
- ✓ The culture feels alive

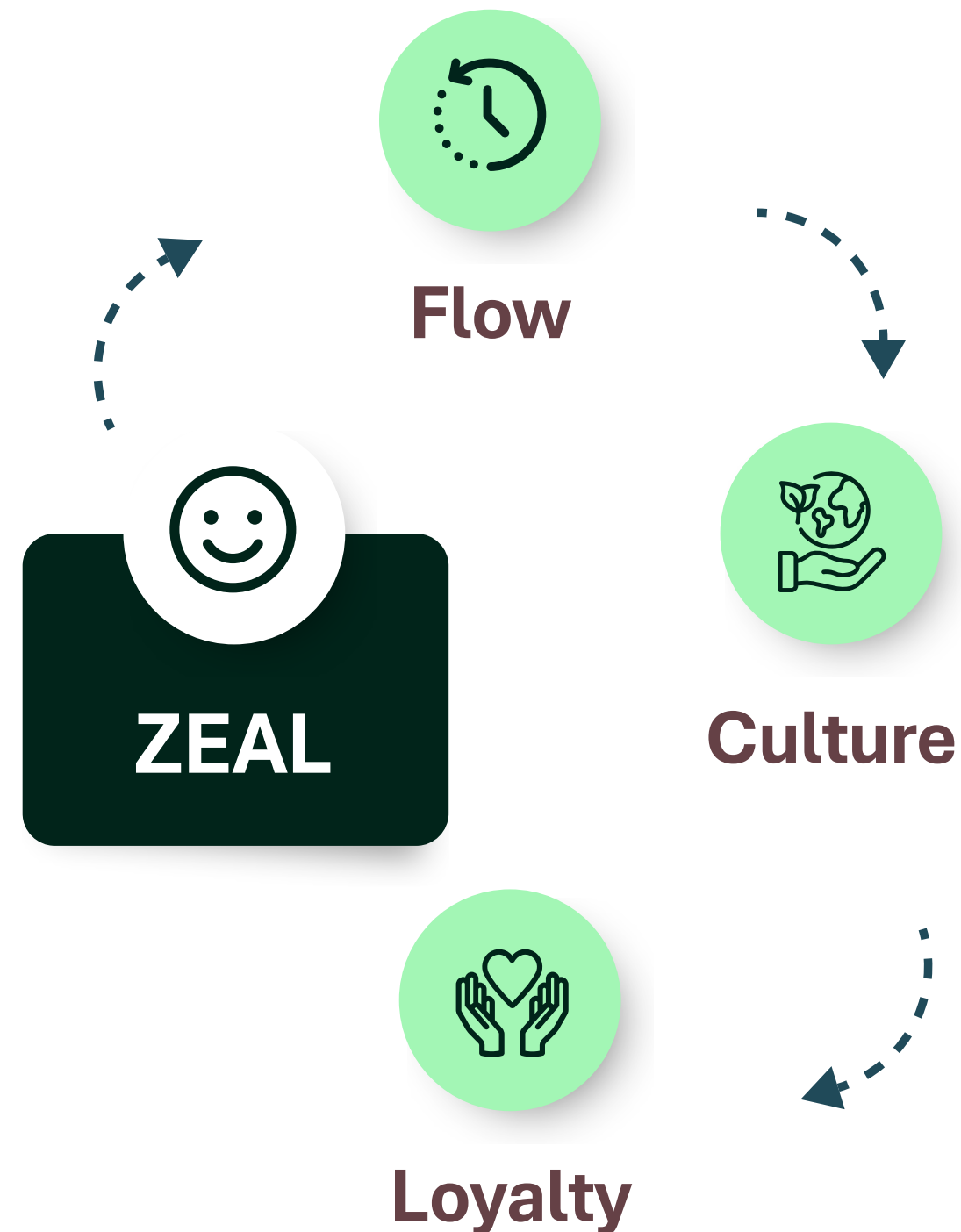
Renee's Garden Seeds founder Renee Shepherd built her business around a passion for heirloom seeds. Even research-backed, her enthusiasm fuels customer loyalty and keeps the catalog exciting season after season.

HOW ZEAL GETS LOST OVER TIME

- ⚠ Burnout
- ⚠ Decision fatigue
- ⚠ Family conflict
- ⚠ Trying to be everything to everyone
- ⚠ Busy seasons + no time to reset

At Sheridan Nurseries (Ontario), a staff survey in 2019 revealed spring symptoms of burnout when energy wasn't replenished—so leadership added mid-season “pause days” to restore team zeal and retention improved.en.wikipedia.org

Managers lose Zeal when they're told to enforce but not included in vision. Include them in what excites you.



ZEAL FUELS FLOW

Flow is that state where you lose track of time — and love it.

Zeal is your entry point to flow.

Local IGC Western Gardens (Utah) empowers staff to spend 15–30 minutes daily in the display garden, enhancing flow and connection. Employee satisfaction surveys showed a 20% increase in spring season vs. the year prior. gardencentermag.com

Zeal → Flow → Culture → Loyalty.

“Flow is the secret to happiness.” – Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONE OF ZEAL

LEVEL OF ZEAL	OWNER IMPACT	MANAGER IMPACT	FLOOR-LEVEL IMPACT
Too Little	Burnout, drift, indecision	Confusion, low morale	Customers feel transactional
Just Enough	Clear direction, contagious energy	Empowered, confident delegation	Enthusiastic staff, longer dwell time
Too Much	Shiny object syndrome, burnout risk	Whiplash, unclear priorities	Confused customers, erratic changes



THE 3 ZEAL QUESTIONS

**Write your personal answers to these three questions.
One answer per person.**

- 1. What part of the business gives you the most energy?**
- 2. What could you talk about all day — and still want more?**
- 3. What lights you up that your staff might not even know?**



WHAT THEMES SHOWED UP?

Quick Share (5 minutes)

- Share your answers with someone from your own business (or pair with another if you're solo)
- What patterns or overlaps did you notice?

“Where your deep gladness and the world’s hunger meet, there lies your calling.” – Frederick Buechner

WHAT IS EXPERTISE IN A GARDEN CENTER?

Expertise is the reliable, repeatable knowledge that earns customer trust.

- Plant ID, zone and bloom cycle knowledge
- Pest diagnosis and integrated solutions
- Container design principles
- Local soil, weather, and microclimate knowledge
- Hardgoods application (e.g., what fertilizer when?)
- Merchandising for seasonal flow
- HR, staffing, POS, vendor management

“An expert is a person who has made all the mistakes that can be made in a very narrow field.” – Niels Bohr





EXPERTISE BUILDS TRUST — AND REVENUE

79% of consumers say knowledgeable staff is their #1 reason to shop at local stores. (Source: National Retail Federation, 2022)

Sweetwater Garden (Wyoming) hires curious lifelong plant learners—they tap knowledgeable customers as new staff—which ensures customers always get expert advice, boosting loyalty.

Great managers build expertise into onboarding. Even a cashier with seasonal plant knowledge becomes a differentiator.

EXPERTISE MAKES YOU MEMORABLE

When You Teach, You're Trusted.

When You're Trusted, You're Remembered.

This is why scaling expertise across your team matters. It's not about one guru. It's about making your entire store feel like a guide, not a warehouse.





INVISIBLE EXPERTISE — AND HOW TO SPOT IT

Expertise isn't always loud. It hides in:

- Reordering without overbuying
- Diagnosing plant diseases quietly
- Sensing when a staff member is near burnout
- Designing a display to sell out before the long weekend

Sheridan Nurseries in Ontario quietly breeds hardy plant varieties; many customers don't know the scale of their expertise, but it powers their brand dominance in cold climates.

You don't need to “scale yourself” — you need to spot and share the genius already around you.

THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONE OF EXPERTISE

LEVEL OF ZEAL	OWNER IMPACT	MANAGER IMPACT	FLOOR-LEVEL IMPACT
Too Little	Reactive leadership, repeated errors	Constant questions, low confidence	Frustrated customers, mistakes
Just Enough	Delegation flows, trust builds	Skill ladders, cross-training works	Confident staff, improved retention
Too Much	One “expert” bottlenecks decisions	Jealousy, knowledge hoarding	Customers only trust one person



THE 3 EXPERTISE QUESTIONS

Take 5–7 minutes to write your responses. Be honest, not humble.

1. What do you know better than almost anyone else in your business?
2. What do others come to you for help with?
3. What do customers always thank you (or your team) for?



SPOT THE THEMES

Share your answers with someone from your business (or a solo buddy).

- **What common expertise did you name?**
- **Any surprise differences?**
- **Is your expertise being used and noticed?**

WHAT IS PROFIT, REALLY?

It's what's left after everything else.

Revenue – COGS – Overhead – Wages – Waste – Discounts = PROFIT

Groovy Plants Ranch (featured by Garden Center magazine) sells specialty succulents—unique varieties that customers can't find elsewhere—to maintain plant-margin of 40–60%, ensuring strong annual bottom lines.gardencentermag.com

“Revenue is vanity. Profit is sanity. Cash is king.” – Unknown





WHY MARGINS MATTER SO MUCH

Small increases in margin → huge increases in profit

Discounting is the fastest way to erase it

Steve Bailey (Garden Center magazine) advises: optimal margins in IGCs are 40–60%. One owner's pivot toward fewer hardgoods and more perennials boosted margins by 5% in one season.
gardencentermag.com

EMPOWERING THE TEAM TO DRIVE PROFIT

Give context, not just commands

Train staff to:

- Know add-ons and upsells
- Recommend higher-margin alternatives
- Avoid over-discounting
- Spot waste or theft



At BLOOMS by BladeWorks (Iowa), training emphasizes upselling higher-margin local-grown ornamentals over generic imports—a strategy that increased per-transaction margin by 8% during peak season.gardencentermag.com

TRANSACTION A		TRANSACTION B	
ITEM		POT SOIL FERTILIZER	
TOTAL		TOTAL	
\$25		\$42	



PROFIT ISN'T GOUGING. IT'S STEWARDSHIP.

Some of you need to hear this: charging fairly for your expertise and products is not greedy. You are not a charity. You're running a business that supports families — including yours.

When you consistently undercharge, you model burnout for your whole team.

Profit is how you create a stable, inspiring workplace.

“A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business.” – Henry Ford

But a business that makes no money? That's a closed business.



THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONE OF PROFIT

LEVEL OF ZEAL	OWNER IMPACT	MANAGER IMPACT	FLOOR-LEVEL IMPACT
Too Little	Chronic stress, no growth funds	Confusion, reactionary planning	Staff hours cut, stockouts
Just Enough	Confidence, reinvestment ability	Strategic hiring and buying	Predictable hours, higher morale
Too Much	Staff burnout, customer pushback	Overemphasis on upsells, guilt	Transactional feel, lower loyalty



THE 3 PROFIT QUESTIONS

Write your answers honestly. Don't try to look good — try to be clear.

1. What part of your business is most profitable — and do you know why?
2. What's one area you know you're undercharging for or over-discounting?
3. What's one way your team could help improve profit if they had better tools or info?



PROFIT THEMES

Share with your business team or a partner:

- **Where are your healthiest margins?**
- **Where do you feel uneasy about pricing or discounting?**
- **How could you start training your team around this?**

WHAT IS MEANING (IN A GARDEN CENTER)?

Meaning is the purpose behind the work. It's the “so that...” that comes after the sale.

“Meaning is the positive difference your business makes in people’s lives — and how you experience that, too.”

**“The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful.” –
Ralph Waldo Emerson**





HOW GARDEN CENTERS CREATE MEANING DAILY

Offering life skills (growing food, creating beauty)

- 🏡 Supporting life moments (memorials, weddings, milestones)
- 👨👩👧👦 Connecting generations
- 🌍 Supporting sustainability and local economies

Wingard's Market (Washington state) significantly increased native plant offerings to support pollinator habitats. Their customers responded by purchasing more native plants—and reported feeling empowered to create wildlife-friendly lawns at home.

HOW MEANING DIFFERENTIATES IGCS FROM BOX STORES

Big Box: Transactional

IGC: Transformational

During Cultivate'23 in Columbus, garden center operators learned that IGCS can become people's "third place"—a casual, friendly environment like a café or community club—not just retail locations
gardencentermag.com+1simplespring.com+1





MAKING MEANING TANGIBLE – REAL PRACTICES

- 📷 Story Walls — customer photos and success stories
- 📄 Tags or signs with “Why This Plant Matters”
- 🎤 Staff storytelling during onboarding
- 📅 Meaningful events (memorial planting days, gratitude weeks)

Many garden centers now feature “Plant with Purpose” tags—highlighting eco-friendly plants or explaining pollinator benefits. For instance, Evergreen of Johnson City clearly tags pollinator-supporting plants to educate and engage customers evergreenofjc.com

“People don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it.” – Simon Sinek

THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONE OF MEANING

LEVEL OF ZEAL	OWNER IMPACT	MANAGER IMPACT	FLOOR-LEVEL IMPACT
Too Little	Disconnected, transactional fatigue	Struggles to inspire staff	Staff apathy, low loyalty
Just Enough	Anchored motivation, long-term view	Culture-building, values-led hiring	Customers connect emotionally
Too Much	Overidealism, undercharging	Difficulty balancing mission & margin	Confused priorities



THE 3 MEANING QUESTIONS

Reflect and write for 5–7 minutes.

1. What meaningful impact does your business have on customers or your community?
2. What personal meaning do you find in the work?
3. What part of your business reminds you why you started in the first place?



MEANING THEMES

In your table group or business team:

- **What are the most common meanings you each identified?**
- **Is that meaning visible in your store — or just internal?**
- **How could you bring it out more clearly?**

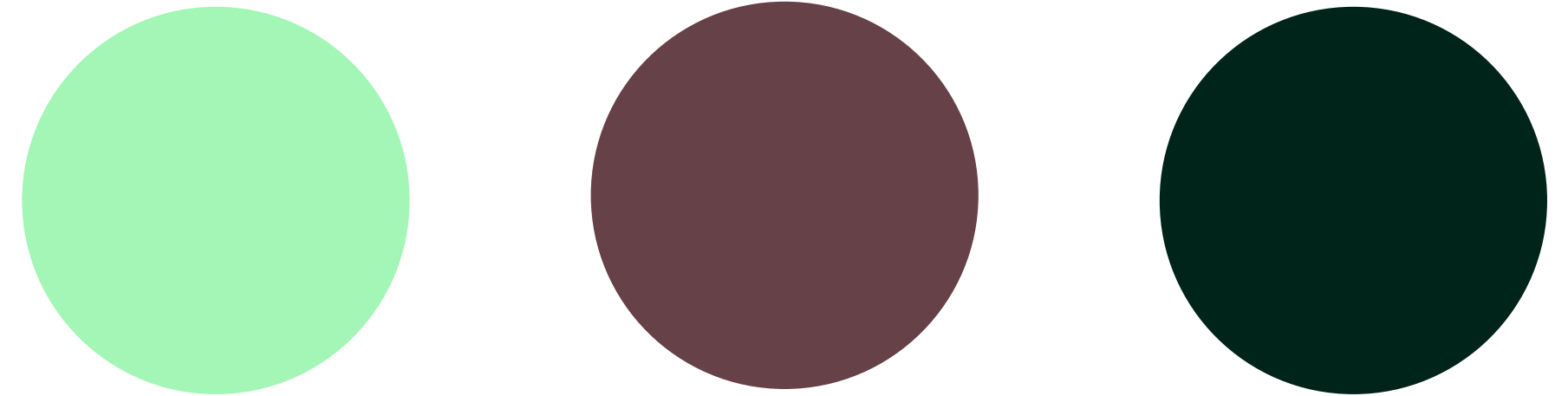
WHAT THEMES ARE ALREADY EMERGING IN YOUR BUSINESS?

At your table or with your team:

- Compare answers from Zeal, Expertise, Profit & Meaning
- What shared patterns are you seeing?
- Where are your voices aligned? Where do they diverge?



SPOTTING THE THREADS



As a group, pick out:

- 2–3 repeating words or themes
- 1–2 areas where perspectives differ — and why
- 1 thing that surprised you

Write your answers on your team sheet — we'll use them soon.

Garden Center Tip:

If you're here alone, partner with another solo attendee. Sometimes it's easier to recognize your patterns when someone from outside your business reflects them back to you.



WHY THIS STEP MATTERS

Vision without conversation is just a daydream.

🔄 Reflection → Pattern recognition → Strategic focus

🌱 Shared vision roots a business in reality

🧩 This is the bridge into synthesis: Passion, Niche, Function, Mission

Wingard's Market's deeper mission to support pollinator ecosystems led them to start workshops and create visible signage—rooting their culture in purpose, not just profit



"Culture eats strategy for breakfast." – Peter Drucker

WHAT IS PASSION IN A GARDEN CENTER CONTEXT?

Passion is what you love that you're also truly good at.

Passion is the “spark zone” —

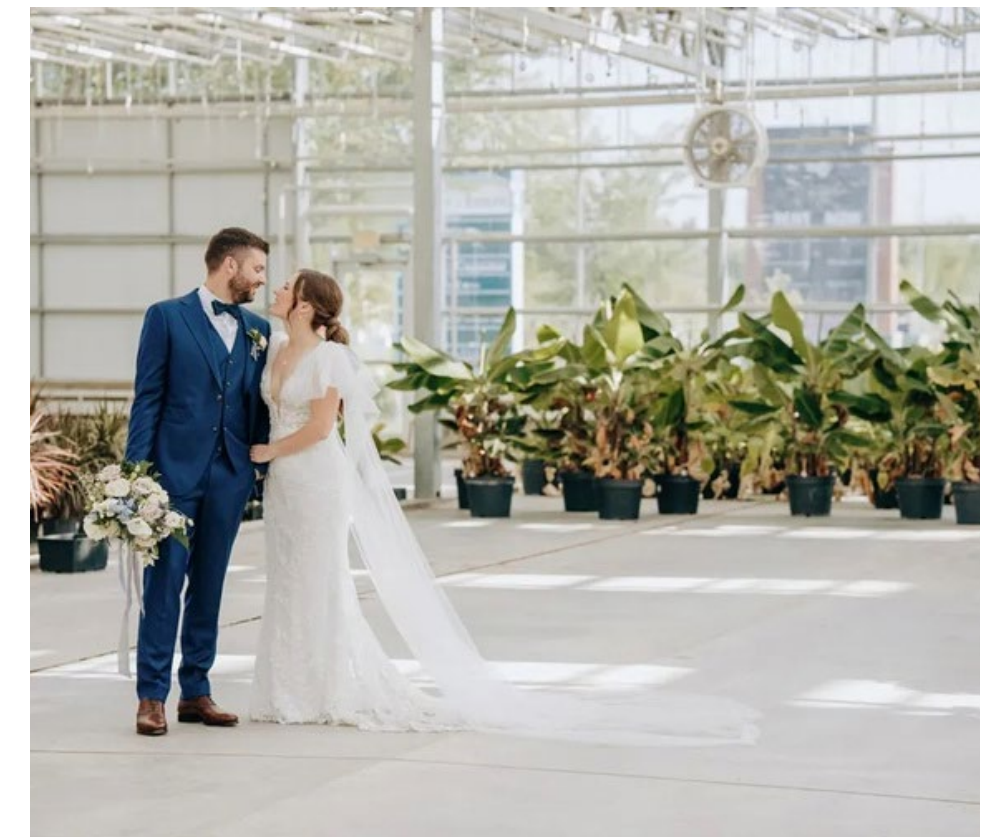
- 🌟 What excites you
- 💪 What you excel at
- 🌱 What customers feel when they walk in

“Let the beauty of what you love be what you do.” – Rumi



REAL PASSION IN ACTION — GARDEN CENTER EXAMPLE

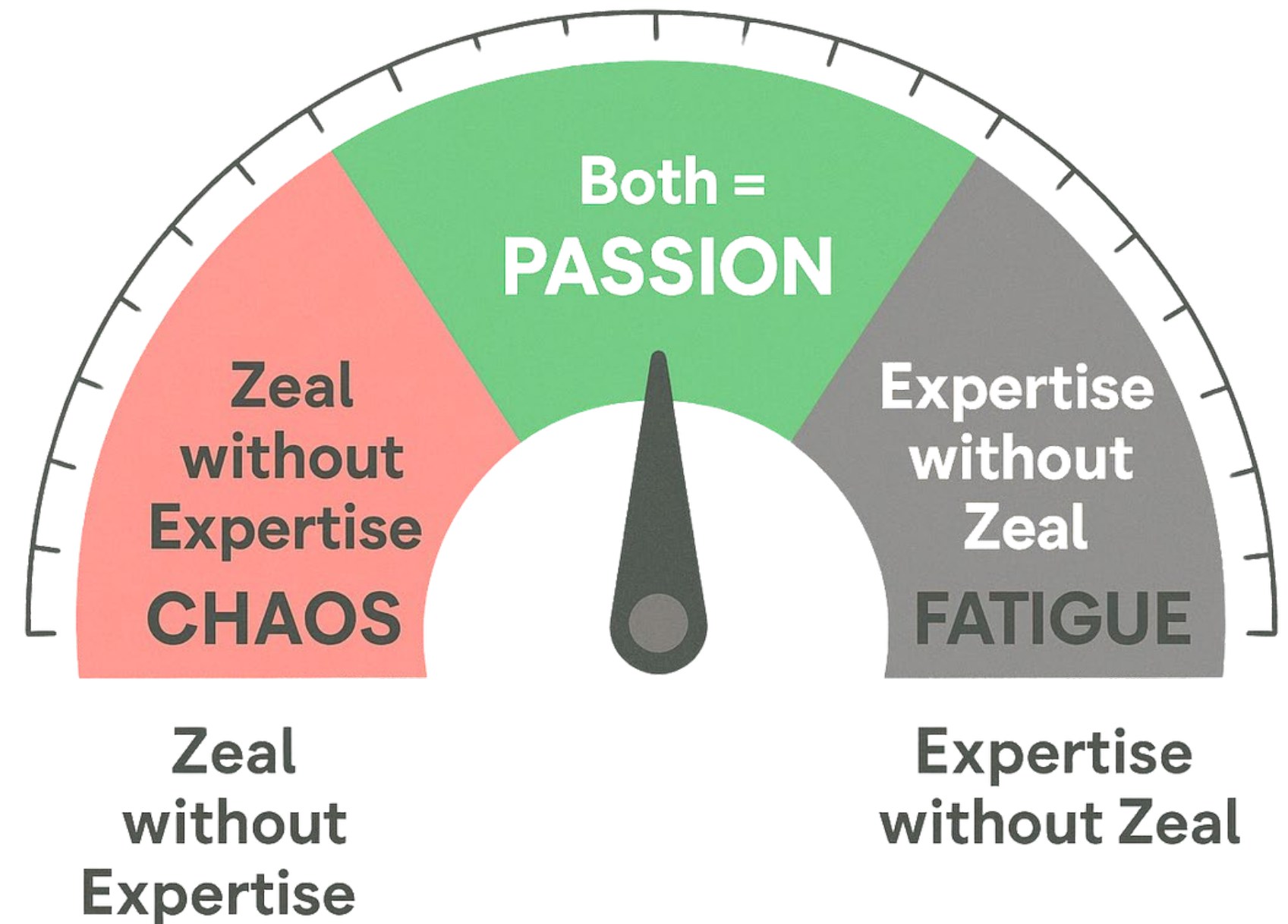
Where Zeal meets Expertise, people light up.



WHEN PASSION IS MISSING OR MISALIGNED

- 🙄 You feel flat or forced
- 📉 Customers feel it — even if they can't name it
- 🌀 You overwork to compensate for misalignment

Sometimes we're excited about something but don't have the systems or skills to deliver it well.



THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONE OF PASSION

LEVEL OF ZEAL	OWNER IMPACT	MANAGER IMPACT	FLOOR-LEVEL IMPACT
Too Little	Burnout, low morale, questioning direction	Lack of vision for the team	Staff going through motions
Just Enough	Inspiring leadership, high energy culture	Staff engagement and pride	Customers feel excitement, refer others
Too Much	All heart, no systems	Chaos, lack of clarity	Confusion, inconsistency on the floor



SYNTHESIZING ZEAL + EXPERTISE

Reflect for 5–7 minutes:

- 1. What part of your business lights you up and you're really good at?**
- 2. What do your customers come to you for — where passion and skill align?**
- 3. Where could you better align your team's energy with your team's talent?**



PASSION THEMES

In your table group or business team:

- **Share where Zeal and Expertise connected for you**
- **What common themes showed up?**
- **What gaps or mismatches are you noticing — and how could you resolve them?**



PASSION AS STRATEGIC FILTER

Use your Passion Zone to say Yes — and No.

- ✓ Say YES to initiatives that build both energy & expertise
- ✗ Say NO to distractions, trends, or projects that lack either



PASSION LEADS TO CULTURE

What you're passionate about becomes what you're known for.

Passion isn't just personal — it's cultural.

"Culture is what you celebrate, reward, and repeat." – Andy Stanley

WHAT IS A NICHE (IN OUR INDUSTRY)?

Niche is the profitable expression of what you love most.

Your niche is:

- Where your energy meets the margin
- What your customers think of *first* when they hear your name
- What you do *best and profitably*

“The riches are in the niches.” – Jim Collins





NICHE IN PRACTICE – A REAL GARDEN CENTER EXAMPLE



Example

Rockledge Gardens (Florida) carved a niche by featuring a “Market at Rockledge” with locally sourced plants, regional artisans, and seasonal events. This focus on local partnerships increased foot traffic by 25% and reinforced their identity as a community hub.

 Source:

WHAT NICHE AS STRATEGY LOOKS LIKE

- 📦 Tighter inventory
- 🎯 Sharper marketing
- 🧠 Easier staff training
- 💰 Better margins
- 🔔 Clear brand recognition

When you embrace your niche, you stop trying to be all things to all people.



SAYING NO IS A STRATEGIC ACT

- ✗ To vendors who don't fit
- ✗ To products you're not excited about
- ✗ To services that drain team morale

Gardener's Supply Company (VT) deliberately removed general gardening décor lines to focus on eco-friendly, plant-centric products. This allowed them to deepen their expertise and lean into sustainable values, reinforcing brand clarity.

"Strategy is deciding what not to do." – Michael Porter



THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONE OF NICHE

LEVEL OF ZEAL	OWNER IMPACT	MANAGER IMPACT	FLOOR-LEVEL IMPACT
Too Little	Exhausted, reactive, no brand cohesion	Impossible to train or plan well	Customers confused, staff unsure
Just Enough	Energized, focused, clear messaging	Clear product strategy, confident team	Strong customer loyalty, higher AOV
Too Much	Risk of stagnation or niche fatigue	Limited growth paths	Missed sales outside tight scope



SYNTHESIZING ZEAL + PROFIT

Reflect for 5–7 minutes:

1. What part of your business is profitable and energizing for you?
2. What do customers see you as “the go-to” for?
3. What should you stop offering or scale down to stay focused?



NICHE ALIGNMENT

In your table group or business team:

- Where did Zeal and Profit align for you?
- What were some of the “No’s” you realized?
- What surprised you about your niche — and what excites you?



YOUR NICHE SHOULD BE...

...narrow enough to stand out, and wide enough to sustain you.

Your Niche is your lens. Your lane. Your reputation.

WHAT IS FUNCTION? (IN PLAIN LANGUAGE)

Function is how your business serves a real need in your community, sustainably.

Function =

- What the world needs from you
- What you're great at doing
- What can be done profitably and at scale



WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS FROM GARDEN CENTERS

In an overwhelmed world, you offer grounding.

The world needs:

- 🌱 Real places of peace
- 🌱 Accessible plant knowledge
- 👨👩👦 Third spaces for families and elders
- 🌸 Connection to beauty and growth

Morning Glory Community Garden (NYC) became a mental health oasis during the pandemic by offering free harvest boxes and outdoor family workshops—serving as more than plants, but as vital community space.



A GARDEN CENTER AS A HAVEN

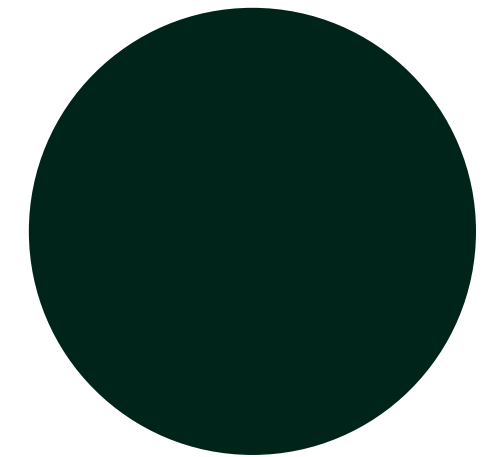
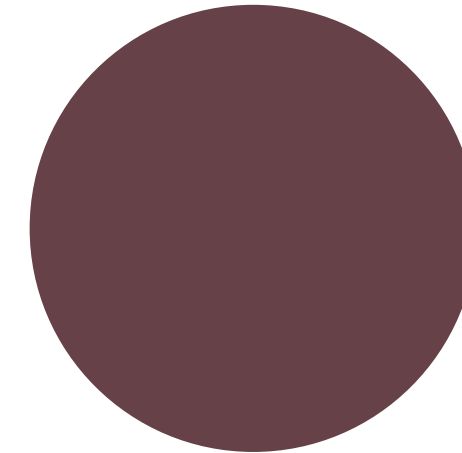
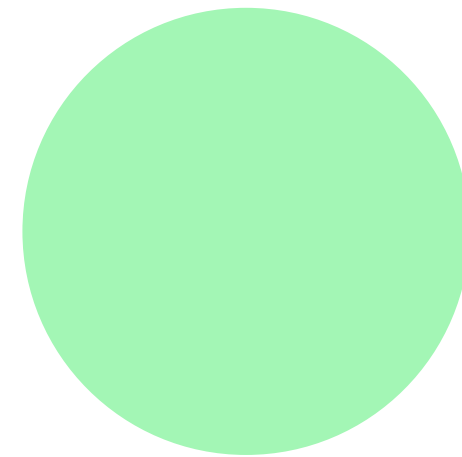
Your store can be a sanctuary from the noise.

Function isn't always loud — it can be soft, calm, healing.

Hulme Community Garden Centre (Manchester, UK) transformed a derelict urban space into a peaceful public garden and café, winning multiple "Green Flag" awards and offering calm city sanctuary.



FUNCTION GROUNDS THE TEAM



A clear function aligns everyone — from owners to weekend cashiers.

- 🧠 Know the mission
 - 🎯 Understand the customer
 - 🔄 Repeat consistent excellence
 - 💬 Tell the same story
-
- Repeat your purpose in huddles
 - Tie team wins to community service
 - Hire people who believe in it



THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONE OF FUNCTION

LEVEL OF ZEAL	OWNER IMPACT	MANAGER IMPACT	FLOOR-LEVEL IMPACT
Too Little	Feels disconnected, hard to scale	Training lacks depth or direction	Staff feel like sales clerks, not guides
Just Enough	Anchored leadership, sustainable momentum	Clear expectations, easier to coach	Customers feel value beyond the purchase
Too Much	Resistance to pivot or evolve	Creativity stifled, burnout	Inflexible service, poor adaptation



SYNTHESIZING EXPERTISE + PROFIT

Reflect for 5–7 minutes:

1. What do customers consistently come to you for — and are willing to pay for?
2. What makes your expertise valuable outside your walls?
3. What unique role does your garden center play in your local ecosystem?



DEFINING FUNCTION TOGETHER

In your table group or business team:

- What words came up again and again?
- What do you provide that's bigger than the transaction?
- Where do your team and community lean on you?



FUNCTION FUELS PURPOSE

When your Function is clear, your people know what they're part of.

Function answers the question: Why does this place exist?

“People want to be part of something larger than themselves. You give them that.” – Simon Sinek

WHAT IS MISSION?

(GARDEN CENTER CONTEXT)

Mission is the heartbeat that keeps your business going — even in a snowstorm.

Mission is:

- 🌱 Your soul, systemized
- 💰 Your values, profitably delivered
- 💡 Your north star when plans change



EXAMPLES OF MISSION

Delaware Center for Horticulture

The Delaware Center for Horticulture (DCH) has a clear mission: “to inspire individuals and communities through the power of plants.”

They do this through tree planting initiatives in urban neighborhoods, community gardens that address food insecurity, and volunteer-led educational programs serving underserved communities. They maintain over 15 miles of urban streetscape plantings and engage more than 700 active volunteers annually.

 Source: [Delaware Center for Horticulture - Wikipedia](#)

Cedar Valley Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

Cedar Valley Arboretum in Iowa’s mission is to “enhance the quality of life for people in the Cedar Valley through horticulture.”

They host public events like Family Fun Days, offer children’s gardening programs, maintain accessible walking paths, and offer educational programming to connect people of all ages with the natural world. Their focus on inclusivity is reflected in their welcoming, community-oriented policies.

 Source: [Cedar Valley Arboretum & Botanic Gardens - Wikipedia](#)

Mission Garden (Tucson, AZ)

Mission Garden describes itself as “Tucson’s living agricultural museum.”

Their mission is to preserve and share 4,000 years of Sonoran Desert agricultural heritage. They grow heirloom crops, offer free educational tours, and host cultural events celebrating Indigenous and Hispanic agricultural traditions. Their work connects visitors to place, history, and sustainability through plants and food.

 Source: [Mission Garden - Wikipedia](#)

WHY MISSION MATTERS (ESPECIALLY IN MAY)

☁️ Snow in May

📉 A flat Mother's Day

👥 Staffing crises

= **You need more than numbers to carry you**

During its Chapter 11 restructuring, Gardener's Supply Company refocused its mission on employee empowerment and community support—maintaining morale, retaining 220 staff, and continuing philanthropic work.

📄 Source: en.wikipedia.org



HOW MISSION FEEDS CULTURE AND STAMINA

It's easier to weather the storm when your team believes in the purpose.

At Murphy's Community Garden (Bronx, NY), their mission-driven model of "food, education, and community" led to a flourishing volunteer base that grew over 40,000 lbs of produce in 2020 alone, creating culture through consistent purpose.



WHAT MISSION LOOKS LIKE IN INDEPENDENT GARDEN CENTERS

Box stores have value statements. You have lived purpose.

- ✓ IGCs build trust through relationships
- ✓ Staff share plant stories, not just prices
- ✓ Mission is felt in how we walk the floor, not read on the wall



1. Delaware Center for Horticulture: Mission to “inspire individuals and communities through the power of plants”, guiding their free urban farm and volunteer-led education files.eric.ed.gov
2. Cedar Valley Arboretum: Stated aim to “enhance quality of life through horticulture”, which drives community events, educational outreach, and inclusive access policies en.wikipedia.org
3. Mission Garden (Tucson AZ): A “living agricultural museum” dedicated to reclaiming traditional agriculture and connecting people to place and heritage through food plants, hosting heritage crop events and cultural festivals en.wikipedia.org

THE GOLDBLOCKS ZONE OF MISSION

LEVEL OF ZEAL	OWNER IMPACT	MANAGER IMPACT	FLOOR-LEVEL IMPACT
Too Little	Drifting priorities, fatigue	Difficult to make decisions	Customer experience feels transactional
Just Enough	Daily motivation, resilience under pressure	Purpose-driven leadership	Customers feel meaning in the purchase
Too Much	Resistant to change, blind to market shifts	Hard to adapt strategy	Messaging becomes outdated or stale



PROFIT + MEANING = MISSION

Reflect for 5–7 minutes:

1. What's the purpose of your business that makes the struggle worth it?
2. How does your work change lives in small but real ways?
3. What story do you want your team and community to feel every time they enter?



DISCOVERING YOUR MISSION

In your table group or business team:

- **What key themes emerged?**
- **What gives your work a sense of bigger meaning?**
- **How can you weave that into operations, hiring, training, and design?**



WRITING YOUR MISSION STATEMENT

Now write your mission in one or two sentences.

- ✓ Clear
- ✓ Emotional
- ✓ Actionable
- ✓ Repeatable

EXAMPLES OF MISSION STATEMENTS (REAL GARDEN CENTERS)



“We help people grow joy through gardening.” — Auburn Pointe Greenhouse, OH

“To connect our community with plants, beauty, and purpose.” — Bedner’s Farm & Greenhouse, PA

“We nurture well-being through plants, design, and service.” — Gardenworks, BC

THE POWER OF WHY

- **Why is your guiding star**
- **Customers connect to your “why,” not just your inventory**
- **Your “why” drives culture, morale, loyalty, and long-term success**

Apple: “To challenge the status quo and think differently.” Everything they do—from sleek product design to minimalist stores—flows from that.

Disney: “To create happiness.” This isn’t about movies—it’s about emotional experiences, which informs everything from the parks to customer service.

Gardener’s Supply Company (VT): “To help people grow their own food and become better stewards of the Earth.” This drives their product line, their blog, and their philanthropic outreach.



“People don’t buy what you do. They buy why you do it.” – Simon Sinek

WHY MATTERS MOST TO GARDEN CENTER OWNERS

Why keeps you steady when the storm comes.

- **Why gets you out of bed in March**
- **Why helps you say no to misaligned opportunities**
- **Why bonds staff beyond tasks**

Cedar Valley Arboretum (Iowa) uses its why as a driver—“enhance quality of life through horticulture”—to guide decisions on free admission for SNAP recipients and community educational events



WHAT A GREAT WHY STATEMENT LOOKS LIKE

Simple. Memorable. True.

- *Not a corporate slogan—keep it human*
- *Should reflect the emotional or social reason you exist*
- *Often rooted in Zeal + Meaning overlap*

The Delaware Center for Horticulture's mission—"inspiring individuals and communities through the power of plants"—is simple, inclusive, and guides their decisions on community gardens and volunteer programs en.wikipedia.org



THE IMPACT OF A CLEAR WHY

A strong “Why” changes everything.

- *Improves staff retention and morale*
- *Sharpens decision-making*
- *Deepens customer loyalty*
- *Inspires brand storytelling*

At the Delaware Center for Horticulture, centering their work around community engagement through gardening led to over 700 active volunteers and consistent educational programs benefiting underserved neighborhoods en.wikipedia.org



WORDSMITHING YOUR WHY

- *Review your 4 overlap statements*
- *What common themes emerge?*
- *What sentence would you proudly hang on the wall?*

Write. Cross out. Rewrite. Craft something that gives you goosebumps when you say it aloud.



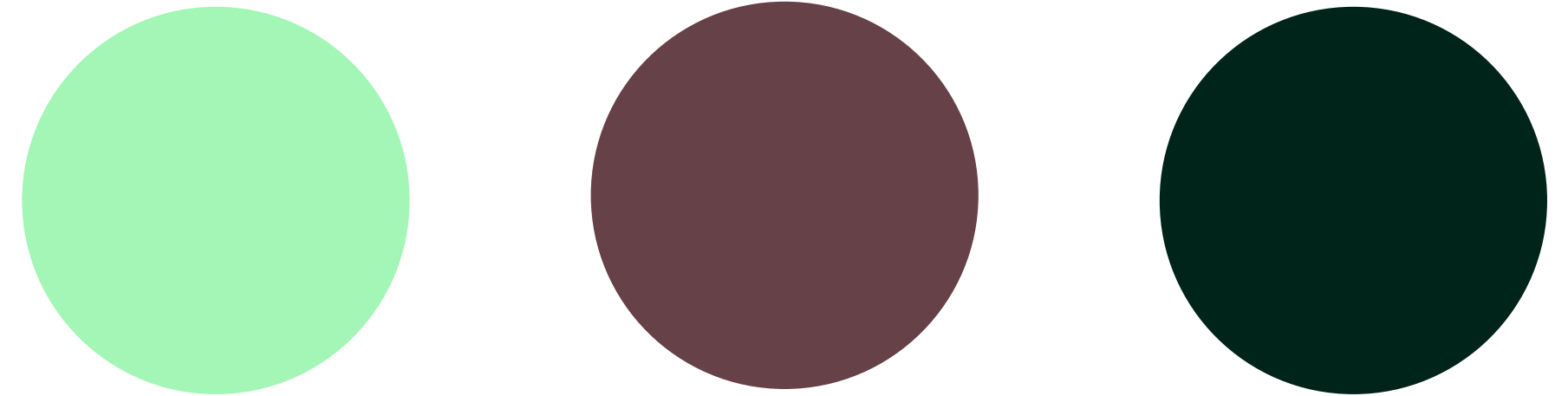
WRITING + TEAM SHARING

Write it down. Then say it aloud.

- Each participant writes their Why statement
- Share with your team and refine
- Solo participants pair with another solo attendee



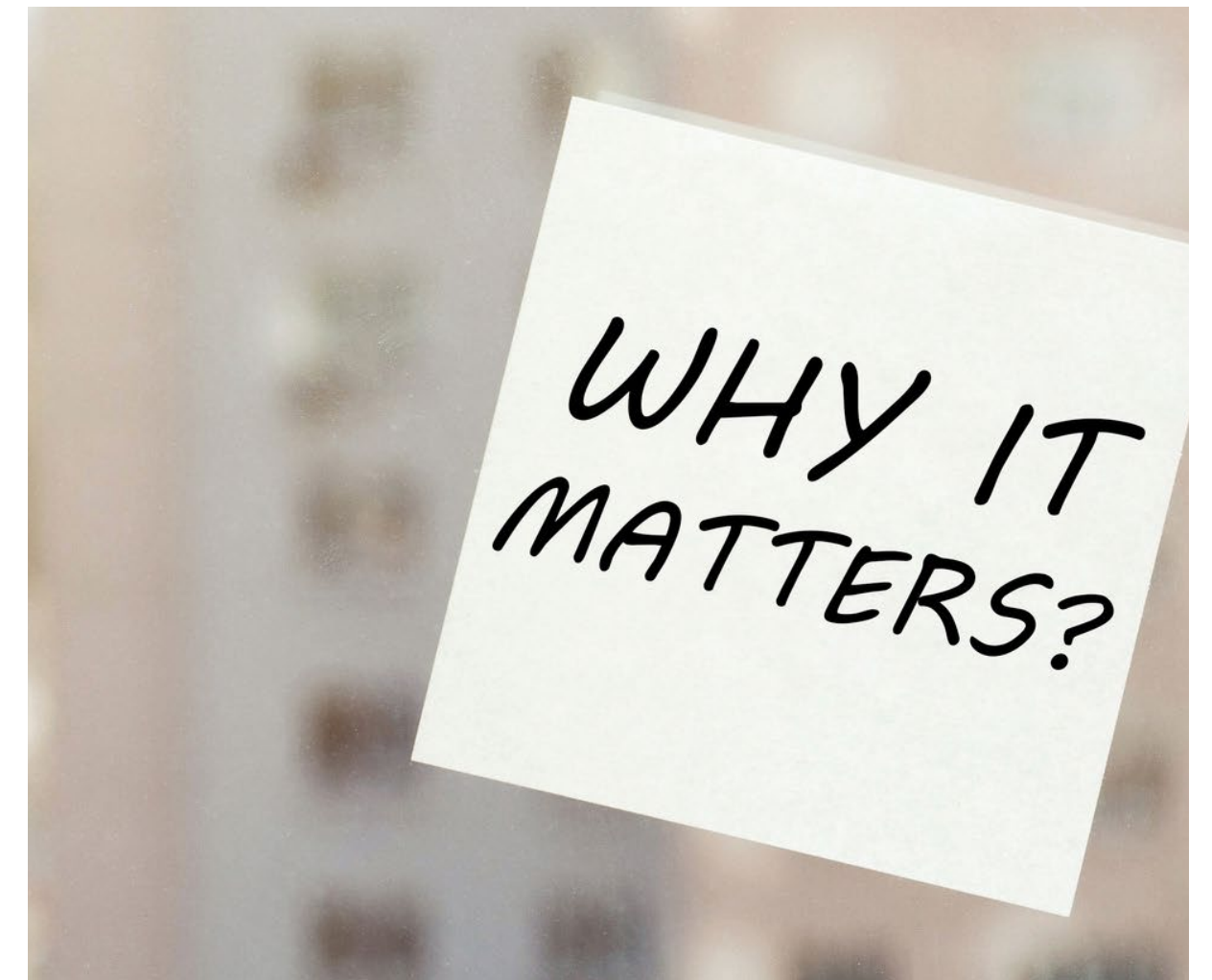
FROM WHY TO HOW: VALUES MAKE VISION WORK



- **Your Why is the heart.**
- **Your Core Values are how the heart beats through daily decisions.**
- **Values turn intentions into habits—and habits into culture.**

Apple's Why is "We challenge the status quo." One of its values is simplicity. You can see it in product design, in packaging, and even in how staff greet customers at the Genius Bar.

If your Why is about "connecting people to the joy of growing," a value might be: We start every interaction with a question, not a pitch.





WHAT ARE CORE VALUES?

“Culture isn’t what’s written on the wall. It’s what people whisper when the owner isn’t around.”

- **Core values define how we do things here**
- **They shape decisions, behaviors, and team morale**
- **Every garden center has values—whether they’re chosen or accidental**

OWNER-LED CULTURE IS CONTAGIOUS

You're not just growing plants—you're growing values.

- Staff will copy what they see in ownership and leadership
- Values are taught more by behavior than by slogans
- Owners must embody the values daily, even under pressure



THEY'RE ALREADY THERE—
YOU JUST NEED TO NAME THEM.

Ask:

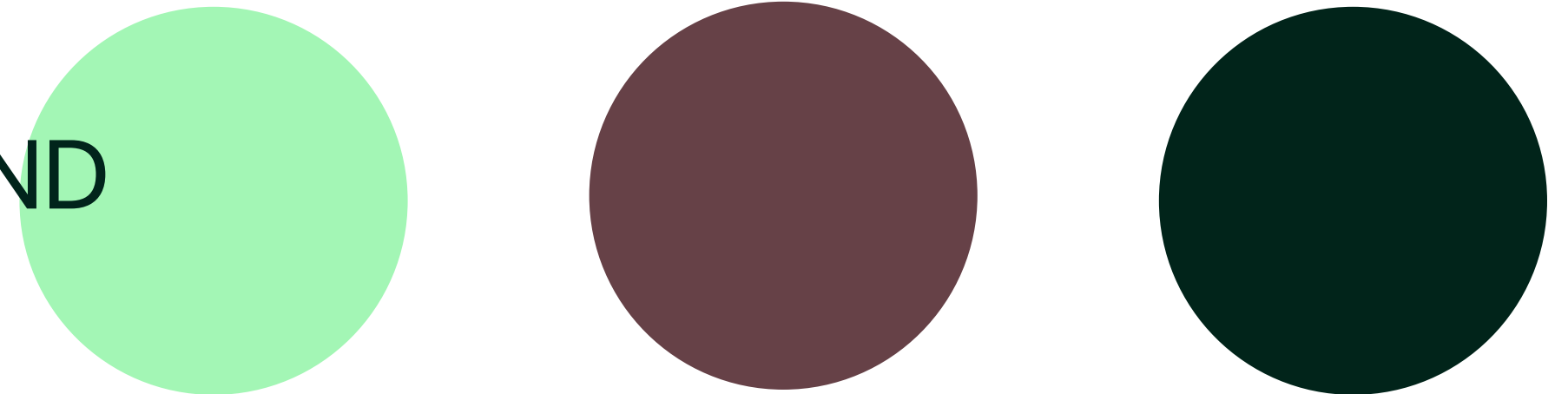
- What behavior gets rewarded here?
- What do we celebrate?
- What are the non-negotiables?

Keep it to 3–5 values. Any more than that and it becomes a list no one remembers.



Purpose: To emphasize the importance of purpose-driven business — showing that a strong “why” is what truly inspires customer connection, internal culture, and brand loyalty.

MAKING CORE VALUES VISIBLE AND ACTIONABLE



If it's not on the floor, it's not a core value.

- Values must be part of training, onboarding, and check-ins
- Reinforce in team huddles and performance reviews
- Print them, post them, and live them

Use interview questions like: “Tell me about a time you solved a problem in a way that made someone’s day better.” You’ll learn if compassion is in their wiring.





FIRING AND HIRING THROUGH CORE VALUES

Hire for attitude, fire for misalignment.

- **Hire people who share your values—even if they're new to plants**
- **Let people go who violate values, even if they sell well**
- **Fit matters more than skill**



WRITING YOUR VALUES INDEPENDENTLY

What do **YOU** think we stand for?

- Everyone from the same business: write down 5 values *on your own*
- Use short, simple words
- Don't worry about matching yet—go with your gut



FIND THE OVERLAPS—THAT’S YOUR CULTURE’S DNA

- Compare your lists with your team
- Look for values that show up across team members
- Choose 3–5 shared values and write a sentence for each



YOUR GARDEN CENTER'S VISION FRAMEWORK

- ✓ Defined your Zeal, Expertise, Profit, and Meaning
- ✓ Explored your Passion, Niche, Function, and Mission
- ✓ Crafted your Why
- ✓ Identified your Core Values



WHEN THE OWNER HAS CLARITY, THE WHOLE TEAM FEELS IT

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” – Proverbs 29:18

- **Clarity gives confidence**
- **Confidence builds culture**
- **Culture drives customer experience**



FROM VISION TO PRACTICE

- **Hold a team meeting to present your Why + Core Values**
- **Use the 4 Virtues framework in 1:1s, huddles, and hiring**
- **Schedule time to revisit your Mission & Function quarterly**
- **Need support? Let's talk.**

THANK YOU FOR THE WORK YOU DO

-  You grow more than plants
-  You grow community
-  You grow people

“Leadership is not about being in charge. It is about taking care of those in your charge.” – Simon Sinek



KEEP GOING—YOU'RE NOT ALONE IN THIS



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You already wear too many hats. But stepping back to ask, “Why do we do what we do?”