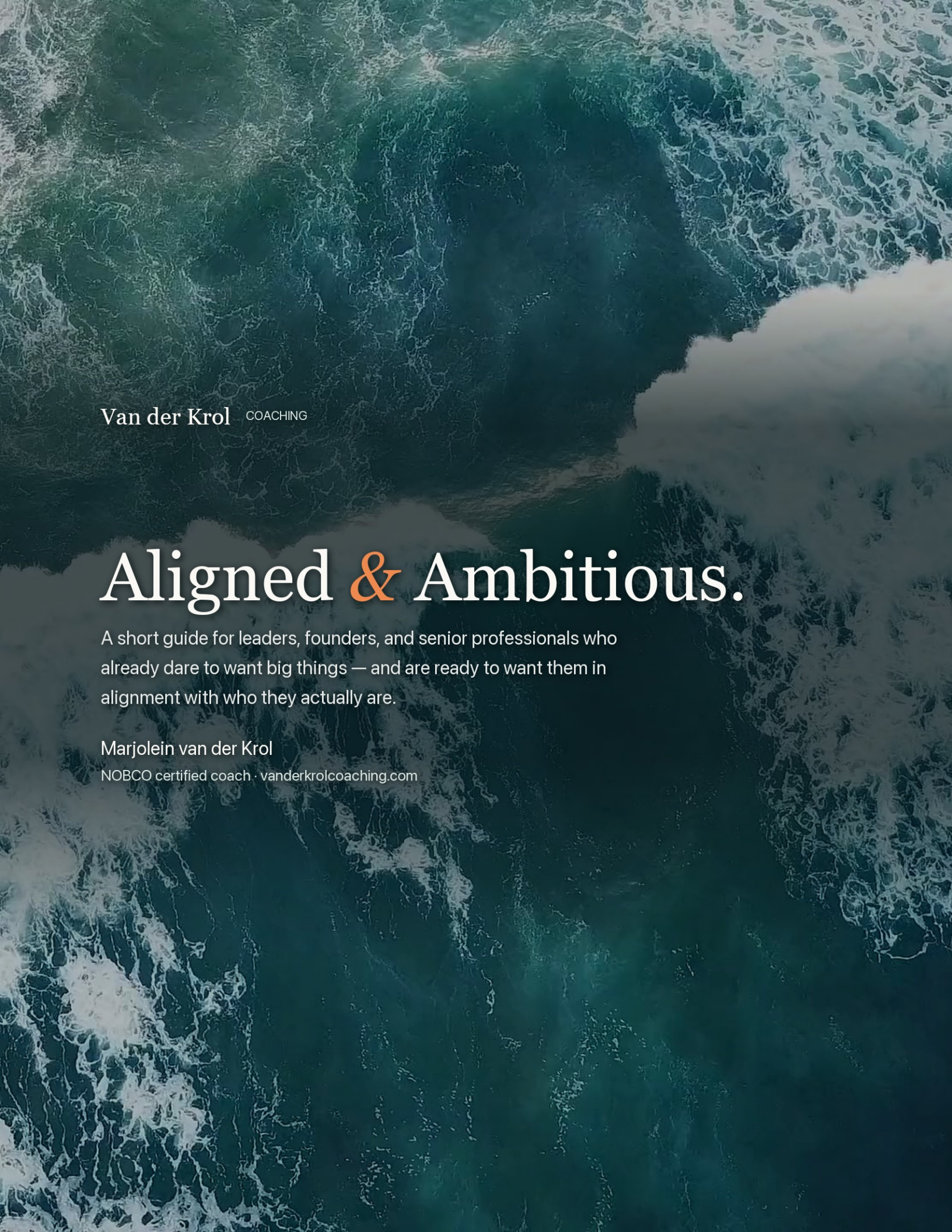




Van der Krol COACHING

Aligned & Ambitious.

A short guide for leaders, founders, and senior professionals who already dare to want big things — and are ready to want them in alignment with who they actually are.

Marjolein van der Krol

NOBCO certified coach · vanderkrolcoaching.com

FOREWORD

What this book is for

I think we're all looking for the same thing, even though we rarely say it that plainly. When we think about what we actually want, we usually picture something concrete: the job, the number in the bank account, the next title, the size we want our company to grow to. Those are real things to want. But underneath them, what we're actually chasing is a feeling, not the thing itself. And that's the part we almost never talk about.

You can function perfectly well without ever naming that feeling. You can go after the ambition, build the company, move steadily up the ladder — and from the outside, once you get there, that's it, you made it. But there's a part of you that didn't catch up — not because anything went wrong. The feeling you thought would be there isn't, and the real outer progress never quite filled with that energy.

This book is about what alignment actually means. It's about how you cultivate it, and protect it, while you keep striving, building, going after what you want. So that success doesn't have to feel hollow. It can go hand in hand with actually feeling great, the whole way through.

Alignment is the foundation on which success is built.

I hope it's not just interesting to read — I hope it moves something in you, and helps you take a step forward. Alignment isn't something you arrive at once and keep. It's something you keep having to make work of, again and again. But when you do, the success you build from there fulfills you from the inside too, in a way that doesn't depend on anyone witnessing it. It makes you feel alive and excited, naturally moving forward in what you do. That's essentially what I wish for everyone, and what I want to help people build.

Our job is to keep calibrating: moving forward toward what you want, while staying rooted in who you are. That's the compass.

It's easy to worship the result itself, instead of who it actually let you become. Honoring the achievement was never the point. Honoring who it let you become, and how it let you show up and show who you are — that's where the inner fulfillment actually lives. That's what alignment means: success that's aligned with who you are, not only with what you can point to.

And sometimes it's the reverse. You're not stuck chasing the result — you're hyper-focused on staying aligned with who you are. But somewhere in that focus, you've quietly been playing it safe and small, because you're not moving boldly enough toward the bigger things you actually want. You've made peace with what's already there, and somewhere along the way you gave up some of the creativity and audacity it takes to build something that genuinely excites you. Not because you're unambitious by nature. Because you stopped asking for more.

It would be a genuine shame to keep succeeding without ever really feeling it, and just as much a shame to keep yourself small. This book addresses both. It's practical, and it's also a deeper nudge about how you spend the one life you have.

And you might notice, reading this book, that it's not only about ambition and alignment. It's also about becoming someone who revitalizes themselves instead of feeling numb and depleted. It's about going from victimhood to ownership of your life. It's the courage to deviate from the norm, and from the shoulds. And on a more spiritual level, it's the journey of becoming a soul-led person.

I hope this book gives you plenty to sit with, and plenty of real, practical guidance along the way. And if any of it stirs something — I'd truly love to hear about your own experience with it. Feel free to reach out and tell me.

— *Marjolein*

PART ONE

Foundations

Why you want what you want, permission to want it fully, and the shape of the struggle you're about to name.

Desire is not the enemy

We have always had this. The desire to make something of our life. To build something that matters, to leave something behind that reflects who we are and what we came here to do. It's an old desire, maybe the oldest one there is, and it's a beautiful one, if you know how to navigate through it.

There's a teaching about two forces inside every person: ego and soul. We tend to hear "ego" and think of something to overcome — vanity, selfishness, the small self, the thing our best growth is supposed to shrink. But many ancient cultures describe it differently: ego is the part of you that carries desire. And desire itself is not the problem. We rely on desire for our will to move forward in life, and to manifest results.

Neither is dimming yourself down the answer. Playing small is just as out of alignment with your soul as unchecked desire is. You were invited to want big things. To dream loudly. The task was never to want less. It's to make sure the ego never wins from the soul.

That's the whole game, really. The bigger your desire, the more your soul has to grow to hold it. Skip that growth, and your ego starts controlling you: you get more selfish, more disconnected from your own values, and at some point you're not the one steering anymore. You're controlled by what you want, instead of choosing it.

The soul's job is to fill your desires with meaning. You feel it the moment you reach something and it actually lands — that quiet, specific gratitude that only shows up when what you built was truly yours to build, when it was aligned with something your soul wanted to express through you. And you know the other version too. You chase something, you get it, and it's hollow. Somewhere along the way, it stopped feeling like your desire. Maybe it was society's. Maybe someone else's idea, borrowed without noticing. Or you just got so focused on reaching the goal that you lost the thread of why you wanted it in the first place.

How to recognise your own desire

Desires that are truly yours, that come from your own soul, feel like recognition.

A quiet, whole-body yes, closer to peace than to urgency. It also tends to reach beyond just you — connected to a bigger picture, to the people around you, to the world, rather than serving only yourself. Desires that aren't really yours tend to feel like lack, instead: the sense that you need to add something to yourself in order to finally be enough, wrapped in a low hum of hope and fear. It's the ego asking for validation.

Your job is to learn to tell the two apart. The work of aligning with yourself is, in practice, a job of distinguishing these two — and choosing to act only from your true desires, in a process that honors who you are.

So here's what I hope for you, and it's really the whole premise of this book: that you keep dreaming big, your entire life. Dare to want more, always. And while you do, anchor into alignment with yourself — so that whatever you manifest comes from something real, something with heart in it, something your purpose actually had a hand in. So that when you get there, you feel it — the results don't feel hollow, but are filled with energy that makes you feel good and fulfilled. And you can share that fulfillment with the people around you.

What deserves applause isn't the results someone manifests in the world. It's the consistency of tapping into their alignment every day, and committing to action from there. That's the real power.

Once you accept that dreaming big is allowed, and even a part of your purpose, you get a clearer picture of what your true, big desires actually are. Desire tends to come more easily than alignment does.

The inner work is harder to see, and harder to be rewarded for. Staying in touch with yourself while you're achieving. Still asking does this actually feel right. Letting your gut guide your decisions, even when it costs you an opportunity or someone else's approval. It also asks you to face resistance that, more often than not, comes from inside you rather than from anyone else. That resistance, and what's actually on the other side of it, is what the rest of this book is about.

What your true desire feels like

If you want to know whether a desire is truly yours, follow the feeling it gives you. Here's why that matters: chase a desire that isn't truly yours, or set an ambitious goal that doesn't align with who you are, and it won't fulfill you — no matter how well you execute. Achieving it will still feel hollow, unsatisfied.

Follow a true desire on an aligned and ambitious journey instead, and what it gives you has a name: aliveness. That vibrant, energetic, engaged, excited feeling you get when what you're doing is both exciting and truly aligned with who you are.

Aliveness is both the compass and the destination of an aligned and ambitious path.

It's the feeling of being so vibrant and buzzing with energy about what you do that you're not just giving energy away — you're also receiving it back, through joy, fulfillment, and inspiration. This feeling of aliveness helps you understand that this ambition, this desire, is truly yours. It's confirmation that you're on the right path.

A REFLECTION

Get specific

- *What's your true desire right now — this week, this quarter, longer term?*
- *What's desire that isn't really yours?*

Giving yourself *permission*

Before any of what follows makes sense, there's a permission you have to give yourself first: to want both success and feeling good at the same time, without one having to wait for the other. There's nothing stopping you. You don't need to be further along, more certain, or more qualified than you already are. Allow yourself not just to want it, but to go for it now.

Giving yourself that permission releases the energy behind it: the second-guessing, the waiting to feel ready, the holding back, finally flowing into action. Prioritizing both alignment and ambition, refusing to just be carried along by whatever society rewards, takes real courage. It's you taking ownership of what you want to create, and how you want to show up while you create it. You deserve to applaud yourself simply for being willing to go there.

It's worth saying plainly why any of this is worth the effort it asks of you: to step into your own vision instead of everyone else's expectations, to build something that actually means something to you, and to let your work fulfill you on every layer, not only the one other people can see.

Permission and courage aren't a one-time decision. You'll need to grant yourself the first, and find the second, over and over, every time you're about to say the true thing or ask for the bigger thing. The rest of this book gives you the tools to do exactly that.

A REFLECTION

What you're actually giving permission for

- *What's the first concrete thing you'd do differently, starting today, if you gave yourself full permission right now?*
- *Name one small way people around you would actually notice you showing up differently this week.*

The origins of this *quest*

When people can't find alignment in their work, the first thing they conclude is that something is wrong with them: that they're ungrateful, or restless, or bad at being satisfied. Almost none of that is true. Three things have happened, and none of them are about you.

A few generations back you became what your father was, or what your village needed. There was no question of *is this aligned with me* — the calling was assigned, not searched for. And the work answered for itself: a goldsmith's hands and brain worked as one loop, the metal resisted or it yielded, and the answer arrived that day, in the body, out of that kind of tight, immediate feedback. Knowledge work broke that loop. A slide deck, a strategy, a decision in a meeting: the result is delayed, filtered through other people's opinions, if it comes back at all. For almost all of history you could see and feel what your work produced. Now nothing in the work itself closes that loop for you.

That source of fulfilment wasn't replaced by nothing. It was replaced by something harder: whether the work expresses who you are. The goldsmith never had to decide if the work was good; the work told him. Nothing in a strategy tells you *this was yours*. The only place that answer can come from is you, noticing whether the energy came back or only went out.

The feedback didn't disappear. It moved inside, and it became much harder to read.

That's what alignment is: closing the loop yourself, by hand, every day, because the answer changes as you do and nothing outside you will confirm it. Which makes one skill worth more than any other: hearing yourself clearly enough to know what fits.

Modern life runs on an immense amount of information that isn't your own voice, telling you what to feel, what to chase, what a good life looks like. Once that was a tribe, a few voices alongside your own, and time to hear yourself think. Now it's millions,

continuously, and the noise pulls in one direction: doing over resting, input from outside over inspiration from within, the safe move over the daring one.

Rest, inwardness and risk are the exact conditions under which the inner signal can be read at all.

Going with the flow doesn't leave you neutral. Drifting has a direction. Balance is no longer the default; it's only available if you build it on purpose.

There's a third thing, too: long before you asked what fulfils you, you were handed a picture of what should. Good grades, the right education, the prestigious role, the title, and built into it a promise: *when you get there, you'll feel it*. It doesn't work that way. Some people arrive at the whole picture and it's like falling through something, surrounded by success, realising it isn't what they had in mind. That picture doesn't fade on its own, either. Modern life rewards what's visible, and nobody gets applauded for *I got more aligned with myself this year*. So the borrowed picture stays lit and your own stays dark, which is why most of the resistance you'll meet comes from inside you.

Part of this work isn't discovery, then. It's sorting: telling what's genuinely yours from what was installed before you could evaluate it. Most people find that freeing once they see it. A surprising amount of what they thought they wanted turns out to belong to someone else.

Good news

So yes, harder than it looks, and harder than it was. Be generous with yourself about that. But these are modern conditions, and conditions can be worked with once you can see them, which, now, you can. People find their own answer to what fulfils them, and build working lives that feel like an expression of who they are, in the same noisy world you're in. Stepping into alignment follows a shape almost nobody warns you about. That's where we go next.

PART TWO

The journey of *alignment*.

How the shift actually begins: waking up to the misfit, moving through the cocoon, and learning the terrain of what alignment actually feels like.

Waking *up*

Sooner or later, you reach something you wanted, and it doesn't feel the way you thought it would. If the fulfillment and your feeling of aliveness are missing once you've reached it, that's the sign: you got there, and there's no alignment in it. That's when things start moving. You've probably had this experience yourself, maybe years ago, maybe recently — sensing that there's more to it than the ladder and the picture in your head, and that alongside moving toward something, you need an inner awareness of how it actually feels while you move, and a willingness to use that feeling as a compass at the center of your decision-making, not just as a milestone to reach at the end.

A CASE

Anna made partner at thirty-four. The dinner, the announcement, her name on the door — everything she'd pictured since business school. She remembers sitting in her new office that first Monday, coffee going cold, waiting to feel it. It didn't come. Not sadness exactly. More like arriving at a party and realizing you don't actually know anyone there. She didn't quit. She started asking a different question in every meeting after that: not what does this role need from me, but does this still feel like mine.

Choosing alignment

The moment you start choosing alignment is the moment you start learning something else entirely: how to deviate from the norm. You begin prioritizing your own inner vision over the expectations of the people around you — a completely different skill than the one that probably got you this far. It usually starts with a feeling more than a decision: something in you starts asking to be taken seriously, whether or not it's convenient.

None of this is likely brand new. You've probably already learned to trust your gut to some degree, already done some of the work of sorting what's truly yours from what isn't. What changes here is the scale: this book is about stretching that same capacity further, and having the courage to actually let it out into the world — not just keep it to yourself.

Feeling the misfit

You might already have grown quite a strong sense of who you are, and what wants to express itself outward in the world. And then you woke up to the fact that your surroundings, the culture, the people you're surrounded by, don't actually reflect your own values. Misalignment in the DNA of the environment itself, not in you. That's what makes you want to move toward an environment that actually has room for the way you want to show up from alignment — one that can hold it, instead of asking you to shrink it.

It can also show up the other way around: you already prioritize alignment, and you know it. But you've been playing it small with it — staying aligned has quietly become a reason to stay safe, instead of a reason to go bigger. And somewhere along the way, you started leaving real impact on the table: everything you could actually build, say, or lead, if you let that same alignment show up at full size.

Either way, it's the same wake-up call: a misfit between where you are and who you actually are, asking to be closed.

Start moving into alignment

Before you assume you need to change course drastically (new job, new company, a whole new life), it's worth checking something first: how much room is actually available to you right where you are. There's often more space there than it looks like from the outside — and sometimes what looks like a ceiling is really just the discomfort of doing the harder, less visible work of expressing more of yourself where you already are. It's worth being honest with yourself about which one you're actually facing.

A CASE

Daniel had been telling himself for a year that he'd outgrown his role, that the only real fix was to leave. What he actually tried first, almost as an experiment, was saying what he really thought in one meeting a week — the read he'd normally soften or keep to himself. Nothing exploded. His input started getting requested by name. Six months later he was doing a version of the job he'd been quietly hunting for elsewhere, inside the one he already had.

But if you test that honestly, and the ceiling turns out to be real, that's when it becomes a question of which of three moves to make — to start bringing your ambition and alignment into the same place.

- Move up, to a position with enough influence to change the system from within. It's hard, and it takes real willingness, but it's possible.
- Move sideways, to a similar role inside a different culture — one that's actually closer to what you value.
- Step fully out, and build it yourself — either the same thing, on your own terms, or you become the expert on alignment itself, advising from outside: helping other people, or other organizations, close the exact gap you once stood in.

Wherever you land, this is the moment you start stepping more fully into alignment. And it's going to get more vulnerable from here, not less.

A REFLECTION

Where are you waking up?

- *Is your misfit a value gap with your surroundings, or have you been playing your alignment too small?*
- *Of the three roads (move up, move sideways, step fully out), which one feels closest to true for you right now?*

The *cocoon*

We're usually confident, at least on the competence side of what we do. We know our lane, we're good in it, it feels like we're in our element. Then alignment asks something different of you: not just to bring your skills, but to show up from who you actually are and how you actually feel. You get more visible. You have to say, out loud, this is what I stand for. And your ego doesn't always like that. It produces shame. Guilt. Resistance. Fear.

The commitment to change usually arrives at the exact moment your ambition turns out to be hollow. Not just I want to chase this, but I want to chase this while staying in alignment. You need to feel that gap, that pain, before you actually commit to it.

That commitment is the spinning. Here's the image I keep coming back to: the caterpillar starts building its cocoon — slowly, literally closing itself up, in order to rise into something else. That's why the detachment makes sense: as you spin, you get less from the environment you're in, energetically, in exactly the same way. That's not failure — that's literally the cocoon forming.

Here's the part that surprises people: once the cocoon is finished, you're usually not happy yet. You wanted change, badly, and the change hasn't arrived. You're just sealed in, in between.

Two kinds of vulnerability show up here. First, inward: admitting the sadness, the grief, the sense of not fitting anymore. Second, outward: stepping out with the new message, visible for the first time.

And here's the turn that matters most: expressing what's true for you is how you actually come to know it. You already carry it inside you. You only truly make contact with it the moment you say it out loud, in the world, where it can be seen.

It helps to know why this matters. Not the vague version — the real one: alignment is what turns your ambition into something that actually nourishes you, instead of quietly

hollowing you out as you go. Ambition without alignment doesn't stop moving. It just moves you further from yourself with every win, until the wins stop meaning what they used to.

Why this is worth it

It's worth naming plainly: this whole process (waking up, spinning the cocoon, stepping out sealed and uncertain) is a vulnerable one. That discomfort isn't a sign something's wrong. It's asking something real of you.

The good news is staying with it tends to generate more fulfillment, and more energy, than avoiding it ever could.

I can tell you this from my own experience, not just as something I've observed in others: things started changing for me when I started to 'live a little' — to take some risk, and step out of the addictive comfort and safe zone I was in.

And then there's more: the impact you have on your team and your organization is real. We'll come back to this later in this book. When you let yourself be seen still figuring it out (still in the cocoon, still stepping out sealed and uncertain), it doesn't read as weakness to the people watching. It reads as permission.

A REFLECTION

Where are you in the cocoon?

- *Where are you in this process right now — still spinning the cocoon, sealed in and waiting, or already starting to emerge?*
- *What is this phase actually asking of you?*

Stepping into *new territory*

The caterpillar doesn't come out already knowing how to fly — it emerges with wings it's never used, into air it's never moved through. That's where we are now. Chances are this isn't your first cocoon, but this transformation is bigger, or different. You've spent years building a reputation for moving fast, deciding well, having the answer — and now something different is being asked of you.

Step out, and what's waiting for you isn't a finish line. It's new territory — open, unmapped, more spacious than anything the cocoon allowed. This is the field where you actually get to express yourself instead of perform a role. Where you experiment instead of execute. Where you try the version of yourself you haven't tried yet, instead of the one you already know works.

New wings in open air wobble before they hold you. That's not failure — it's just what learning to fly looks like. Showing up this way, choosing differently, more from who you actually are, can leave you feeling exposed sometimes: unsure, vulnerable, not fully yourself yet. That's normal, not a warning sign. The next part of this book is where you get the actual tools for it: how to read your own signals, protect your energy, and keep choosing alignment now that you're actually out here, not just when you decided to jump.

PART THREE

Your alignment *equipment.*

What alignment asks of you day to day: the discomfort nobody names, listening to your energy, and making room for it to actually happen.

The discomfort *nobody names*

Most of this book has been about the destination: is what you're building an expression of who you are, does it resonate, is it truly yours. But that's only part of it. You can get the destination completely right and still arrive out of alignment. Because alignment is never a decision you make once, at the start. It's a decision you keep making, at every step.

Your inner compass doesn't retire once you've picked the destination. Every micro-step along the way is its own decision point, asking the same question again — and that same compass is what tells you when the destination itself needs to change. Time passes, life happens, and the ambitious, aligned goal that once excited you might not look the same today. That's not a failure of commitment. It's just you, evolving.

And then there's how you move toward that goal — whether your alignment shows up not just in what you build, but in how you carry yourself getting there. Are you actually listening to your body, your energy, your rhythm — or overriding all three to hit the mark? Your ambitious desire was never only a result. It's also a feeling, one you have to keep cultivating, not one that simply arrives once you do.

The emotional undertow

Cultivating it comes with something most people don't expect: an emotional undertow nobody really talks about. Aligning your ambition with who you actually are can stir up more inner friction than you'd expect, not because something is wrong, but because you're not used to deviating from the norm: to choosing or expressing something differently, in order to be more uniquely attuned to who you actually are. That's where shame, guilt, and a quieter fear tend to show up, often dressed up as something else entirely.

Shame shows up as staying quiet in the meeting instead of naming what you actually think, because it doesn't sound as sharp as what you're known for. It's the flush of heat when you say I don't know yet, in front of a team used to you having the answer. It's rehearsing a boundary three times before you say it out loud, sure it'll make you look softer, slower, less senior.

There's also a type of shame that is more inward: not about being seen, but about not doing justice to what you meant to say. The deeper trap is over-identifying with what you make — tying your worth to how well one piece landed, so a version that didn't quite work leaves you ashamed instead of just informed. Remember here that creation is closer to play than to proof. The moment you need it to prove something about you, you've made it heavier than it needs to be.

Guilt shows up as turning down the opportunity everyone assumed you'd take, because it doesn't actually pull at you — and feeling, underneath the relief, like you're letting people down. It's protecting your evening while your co-founder is still answering emails at midnight.

Fear is often what's underneath both: if you're not instantly decisive, if you hold out for total certainty, replay a decision, wait to feel completely sure before you commit, you worry people will stop trusting you to lead. That fear makes sense; certainty is what got you here. But here's what that promise from a few chapters back actually looks like: leading from what's true for you, even uncertain and unfinished, gives the people around you permission to do the same — to answer a little more from their own inner truth, too. What reads as exposure to you usually reads as permission to them.

Stepping into alignment is, in a real sense, active resistance — against other people's expectations of you, against the norm, against whatever's easiest to keep doing. That resistance is exactly where the vulnerability lives.

Patience and understanding

It helps to know why this feels so disproportionate to what's actually at stake. You're wired for safety. That's not a flaw — it's the oldest system you have, older than language, older than ambition itself. But it means anything unfamiliar registers as risk, whether or not it actually is one, and prioritizing your own alignment is unfamiliar to a nervous system that spent years rewarding the opposite. So it will sometimes feel vulnerable, even frightening. That isn't a sign you're off track. It's evidence you're doing something you've genuinely never done before.

This takes real courage — not the loud kind, the unglamorous kind that nobody applauds because it doesn't look like much from the outside. If you don't normalize these feelings, you'll comply with your own resistance and call it judgment, instead of recognizing it for what it is.

The equipping move is simple, if not easy: when you notice the heat, the hesitation, the urge to soften what you actually think — pause and ask, is this real signal, or is this just unfamiliar? Most of the time, it's the second one. Let it be uncomfortable, and do the thing anyway.

And all of this will make you impatient, because doing it differently after years of doing it the other way takes real effort for a while. Judge each step by what it meant to you, not by how it looks from outside: one honest conversation, one public stance, one piece of writing that says what you actually think, can be the biggest step you've taken, even though it looks small. If the gap between where you are and where you're going suddenly feels bigger, not smaller, that's not a bad sign. It usually just means your vision sharpened.

A REFLECTION

Notice what's showing up

- *Where have you been softening what you think, out of shame, guilt, or fear?*
- *Where has impatience crept in — might it mean your vision got clearer?*

Listening to your *energy*

Stepping back into the body

This part of the book is about your alignment equipment: what it takes, day to day, to stay attuned to your own energy and signals. That starts with something simple — actually feeling, actually being present in your body, instead of living one level up, in your head.

The biggest modern threat to that is overthinking. One large study of 1,300 adults found that well over half regularly get caught in it, replaying decisions long after they've already been made. Why is this a problem? Because when you're overthinking, you're under-feeling.

You can't notice your body, your sensations, your actual state, while you're up there analyzing it instead. So every time you catch yourself having been up in your head for weeks, recognize what's actually happening: you're already sabotaging your own journey, one overthought decision at a time.

The body is the one instrument that will tell you the truth: this meeting feels right, that one doesn't. That's not in your head. It's a bodily response, underneath the analysis, and it matters that you catch it before you talk yourself out of it.

And presence in the body is presence in the now. If you're always living in the future, or replaying the past, you won't be fulfilled when you finally reach the goal, because you never learned how to actually be there for it, once you arrived.

Awareness of your mental tendencies

Alignment isn't only about your voice. It's also about your energy: not just what you say, but how you do it. You can be running your business well, leading clearly, and still be out of alignment with what your energy is actually telling you.

When the desire to manifest something aligned is strong enough, it becomes its own drive, and the moment you get attached to the outcome, specifically to seeing it shaped and finished, you start compromising yourself in a much quieter way: in your energy.

You want to cut corners; I'll finish this, and this, and this, while your body is already telling you something else: today, I actually need to rest. You push through bursts of productivity, then hit the hour where your mind feels genuinely fried, and keep going anyway.

Here's a simpler way to put it: burnout isn't a productivity failure. It's what happens when what you're pouring into your life outgrows what you've built the capacity to hold. The fix isn't to pour less forever — it's to grow the container, and catch it before you overflow. Nothing generative shows up in a space that's already full.

A CASE

Tom was three weeks from launching the company he'd wanted to build for a decade, running on five hours of sleep and pure adrenaline, and he knew, clearly, that he was about to override his own limit again. He'd done it before and paid for it after. This time he closed the laptop at 9pm two nights before launch and went for a walk instead of a final review. The pitch he gave two days later was better for it, not despite the rest.

What's easy to miss: alignment was never only about the outcome. Even a dream business, built by you, exactly as envisioned, isn't proof you were aligned in getting there. If you arrived at it half burned out, having overridden your own signals the whole way, the outcome can look aligned from the outside and still not have been. It's the process where you actually live.

Honoring your own rhythm

By now the pattern is clear: listening to your body and your energy is the compass. Feeling energetic, vibrant, inspired, engaged is the sign you're actually on your aligned, ambitious path. When it isn't there, that's the signal too — time to change something. Honoring your own rhythm is what keeps you on track, so you don't lose yourself in the process and end up unfulfilled the moment you actually reach the goal.

Think of the two kinds of week you already know, even if you've never named them. One takes everything out of you and gives nothing back: you arrive at Friday empty, and the weekend becomes about recovering from the week, not living in it. The other is just as demanding, arguably harder, and you arrive at Friday still buzzing, already thinking

about what's next. Same effort, completely different result — and that difference is exactly the signal: vibrant and energized means you're building something aligned, drained and empty means something needs to shift.

Getting more in control of creating that feeling starts with experimenting: getting to know your own best rhythm, your own way of working, the signals that tell you what's working and what isn't. That's crucial both for honoring your rhythm and for staying aligned and ambitious. A few things that actually help:

- Track your energy for a week, not your time. Notice when you're naturally sharp and when you're not. Most people already know this pattern and override it anyway.
- Protect recovery like you'd protect a meeting: block real time for it in your calendar. If rest doesn't have a slot, it doesn't happen.
- Treat two 'no's' in a row from your body as data, not weakness. Tired, foggy, resistant: that's your system asking for something different, not asking you to push harder.
- Shape your day around your actual rhythm where you can. If mornings are when you're sharpest, block them for concentrated work. If you hit an afternoon dip, take a walk instead of pushing through — you'll get the clarity back faster than by forcing it.

Your body already knows what it needs — trust that, and treat it as navigation, not self-care. If you're moving hard toward what you want and you don't feel alive doing it, that isn't the price of ambition. That's the signal. Choosing to take care of yourself first, and keeping the process itself energizing instead of just chasing the finish line, is what keeps you both aligned and ambitious — aliveness is both the compass and the destination of that path.

AN EXERCISE

Calibrate the instrument

Before you can trust what your body tells you in the moment, it helps to know what aliveness actually feels like in yours, specifically. This takes about five minutes.

- *Recall a moment you felt truly alive — ideally one at work, slightly outside your comfort zone.*
- *Step back into it: where were you, who else was there, what were you actually doing.*
- *Then ask yourself: what was that version of you feeling? Where does it live in your body — warm, cold, tingling; belly, chest, head, legs? What emotions are underneath it — joy, vulnerability, pride?*
- *Come back, and write down what you noticed.*

There's no universal answer — for some it's a buzz in the body, or a full acceptance of where you are right now, even though it isn't perfect. Whatever yours turns out to be, that's your own reference point, in your own body, to recognize when you're aligned with your path, and when you're not.

Self-love, doing the actual work

Aligned, ambitious work asks for a lot of self-love. Not once, but continuously — cultivating it where it's already there, and deliberately nurturing the parts of yourself you're not loving as well yet. That's also the real beauty of choosing this path: it was never only a career project. It's you working on your personality, your personal fulfillment, on growing as a human being and rooting deeper into the ground so you can actually hold more success when it comes. Some form of detachment belongs here too — not detachment from the ambition, but detachment from needing the outcome to prove anything about you.

Making your *calibration windows*

Creating the space

Creating space is what makes aligned, ambitious action possible: room to consciously calibrate your movement with your alignment, to check that what you're building, and how you're building it, still matches who you actually are and where you actually want to go. These calibration moments are the magic ones. They take real time: time to reflect, time to step outside your daily routine long enough to actually hear yourself think. That's exactly the tool this chapter is built around: create the space.

That's exactly why it needs structure. Not the hope that insight will strike if you're lucky, but an actual channel you return to on purpose. Without one, the calibration simply doesn't happen — not because you don't care, but because nothing in a normal day creates the space for it on its own. Building that structure isn't optional self-care. It's the mechanism that keeps you on both the aligned and the ambitious path at once.

Breaking the dream into actionable steps

Part of creating that space is noticing a specific tendency of the mind: it loves to hyperfocus on the big, distant vision, and quietly skip over the small, tangible action sitting right in front of you, right now.

Once you have a clear picture of what alignment looks like for you, that picture becomes almost addictive. It should — it's the engine that pulls you forward when the work gets hard. But your brain releases more reward chemistry from anticipating a big outcome than from actually reaching it, so you can end up quietly trained to keep investing in the future picture instead of what's actually happening today. You start living for the promise instead of living in the only place you ever have real influence: now.

That's a hard current to swim against — the instinct is to stay future-minded, because dreaming and refining the big picture feels like progress. But the real progress happens somewhere smaller: in today, in this hour, in this one decision — call it the present-moment war zone. So the discipline isn't dreaming smaller. It's translating the size of

the dream into something small enough to act on today. Notice when you're choosing to sit with the big picture instead of doing the next small thing it actually requires — that preference can feel like commitment, but it's just as often avoidance wearing commitment's clothes.

Different ways to create space

A proven way to create space is by taking a walk — sometimes an hour, no calls, nothing scheduled, just walking until the thoughts arrive. It helps to talk to yourself out loud and ask real questions, not rhetorical ones: What does it look like if I show up more in alignment? What lesson do I need to learn right now? Where am I letting my ego take over? Where do I want to bypass the discomfort instead of feeling it? Show me what's real and what isn't, and give me the strength to see the difference and act from alignment, not from fear.

There's real research behind this, not just habit. A Stanford study found creative output rose by roughly 60% while walking compared to sitting, with the effect lingering for a while after you sit back down. The insight doesn't usually arrive at the desk. It arrives on the way there.

A CASE

Elena used to solve problems at her desk, aggressively, until she solved nothing and just felt worse. Now, when something's stuck, she leaves her phone behind and walks the block around her office, no destination, no podcast. Most days nothing happens. Once or twice a month, halfway around the block, the actual answer arrives, fully formed, in a way it never did staring at the screen.

A few things can help you get more out of it, on the walk or off it:

- Voice memos. When something lands, talk it out loud instead of writing it down — hearing your own voice say the real thing gets past the version of you that edits everything before it's even out.
- Prayer. However that word lands for you — a genuine address to something bigger than your to-do list still works, because it puts you in the posture of asking instead of pushing.

- An inspiring podcast, sometimes. Though what's usually more effective is the opposite: no input at all, just quiet space for thoughts to surface on their own. Life is already full of input, so silence is often the rarer, more valuable one — experiment to see what actually works for you.

Not every reset needs a walk, either. A quick physical reset between meetings or work sessions does something similar: stretching, shaking the body loose, whatever gets you out of your head, puts you back in your body and back in touch with what you're actually feeling and needing. Two ways in:

- Heart-coherence breathing. Slow, even breathing while you deliberately bring your attention to your heart (techniques like the ones HeartMath has researched for years) measurably shifts you out of head-only thinking and into a state where your gut and body can actually be heard.
- Grounding. Feet on the floor, or on the actual earth if you can get there. A minute of it before a hard decision changes what you're capable of noticing.

Either way, timebox it: schedule these things into your calendar on purpose, so they actually happen instead of getting planned over by whatever else fills your day.

A REFLECTION

Build your own window

- *Which of these already feels like yours?*
- *When, this week, will you actually use it?*

Recognize the voice of the ego

There's a specific voice that will try to talk you out of all of this: I need to keep going. If I stop now, if I take the space instead of pushing through, I'm not doing enough, and I'll fail. That's the ego stepping back in — and it's exactly the thinking that keeps you from ever actually creating the space you just read about. Whatever heavy emotion, whatever quiet lack of self-appreciation follows that thought, is the signal. It's a sign there's work still to do there. And if that work doesn't get done, it won't just sit quietly — it will keep sabotaging you.

Underneath that voice is usually fear, and a longing for control and success, both pulling you to keep going no matter what. That drive isn't wrong in itself — it's part of what got you this far. But noticing it is what gives you an actual choice: recognizing that pushing through isn't automatically the right move, and creating the space anyway.

Calibration like this doesn't run on your usual operating system — the fast, confident, get-to-the-answer intellect that's carried you this far. It runs on attunement instead: noticing what's actually in front of you, how it resonates in you, and only then acting from that instead of from reflex. It can feel uncomfortable at first, especially if quick answers are what you built your reputation on. Sitting with a question longer than usual, saying I don't know yet, I'll get back to you — none of that is a bad sign. It's the space you need to actually hear yourself.

A CASE

In a board meeting, someone asked Priya for her read on a restructuring plan, and for the first time in a decade she didn't have an instant answer. The silence felt like ten seconds too long. I want to sit with this properly before I give you something half-formed. I'll come back to you by Thursday. Nobody blinked. She'd expected the room to read it as weakness. Nobody had.

AN EXERCISE

Yes, no, or not yet

Next time you feel the pull to keep going, check what's actually true in your body before you listen to the voice that says you have to:

- *Notice what a real yes feels like in your body — often an opening, a lean forward, ease somewhere specific.*
- *Notice what a real no feels like — often a closing, a pull back, tension somewhere specific.*
- *And learn to recognize the third one: not quite no, but not yet — a genuine yes to something, just not to this timing.*

That's how you tell a real yes to keep going apart from the ego's fear talking. And the same check works far beyond this one moment: whenever you need to feel what's actually aligned, whether that's knowing when to stop or deciding which direction to take, this is the instrument. It gets less fuzzy the more you practice it, and letting go of needing an instant answer isn't a step down. It's the more advanced move.

Staying in control of your inspiration

Inspiration can feel so good, so energetic, that it's easy to forget to check in with your body at all — you skip the pause, and miss the point where you actually need one. Ironically, inspiration can push you into grinding mode just as easily as ambition can: this needs to come out, I need to keep going. Watch that drive closely. It's usually coming from wanting it finished, and from a quiet fear that otherwise it'll take too long, or never happen at all.

That's healthy, to a point. Past that point, you deplete yourself — and the strange result is that you fall out of alignment precisely because you wanted it so badly. So: open the space. Let the inspiration in. Bring it into action. And then show the restraint to step away, even while some part of you wants to keep going. That pulling back isn't the opposite of creating. It's part of how creating actually works — the pause is what makes room for what comes next.

PART FOUR

Carrying it forward.

What's yours to take with you, how it ripples to everyone watching, and a few last things before you go.

It doesn't stop with *you*

None of this stays private. The moment you start showing up more aligned, you're changing what looks possible to everyone watching, whether that's your team, your co-founder, your kids, or a friend who's been quietly stuck in the same place you used to be.

If you lead people, this shows up fastest and most literally. Your team isn't reading your intentions, they're reading your behavior in real time, calibrating their own permission against it. Push through exhaustion and never admit you don't know something yet, and you've just set the standard. Protect your recovery instead, say I don't know yet, I'll get back to you, and you've just expanded what's safe for everyone watching you.

That's modeling, but it's not the whole mechanism. The other half is what you actually reward. Notice what you praise out loud, and what you let pass in silence, because a team calibrates itself to what gets noticed, not to what's written on the wall. Name the courage it took someone to say the honest thing in a meeting, not just the good decision that followed. That's the difference between a team that performs alignment and one that actually practices it.

Culture isn't a document. It's what a group has quietly learned is safe to do, because they watched someone do it first and nothing bad happened. You're already writing that document every day, whether you intend to or not. The only real question is whether it's the version you'd choose on purpose.

You don't need a title to give someone else permission. You only need to go first, visibly enough that they can see it.

And if you don't lead a team, none of this stops applying, it just moves quieter: the friend who watches you finally say no to something everyone expected a yes to, the colleague who leaves at a reasonable hour and stops apologizing for it, your kid watching you choose something because it's actually yours. That's usually all it takes: people who were quietly waiting for someone to go first.

One last *invitation*

You are the only expert on what alignment and ambition mean for you. I hope this book inspired you — take a moment to reflect on what you're taking from it: the lessons that actually landed, and what will genuinely be helpful going forward. Now I invite you to transform those reflections into your own aligned & ambitious manifesto.

AN EXERCISE

Write your own manifesto

Plan a moment in your calendar to write your own manifesto on alignment, and your path towards it.

How to do it

Do it however actually works for you. Sit and write. Or do what I do: walk for an hour, record your own voice, and let it get structured afterward. This is yours to write, not mine to hand you.

Some questions to get you started — not an exhaustive list

- *What do you truly desire, beneath the ambition and everyone else's expectations?*
- *How do you want to show up, in your work and with yourself?*
- *What calibration windows will you build in, and protect?*
- *Where will this ask the most courage of you?*
- *What do you want to keep reminding yourself of, to stay on course?*

What you end up with is a literal record of your own compass, and your own assignment: what to do more of, and what to do less of, to keep living aligned and ambitious.

Doing this is worth the time it takes. Insight that only ever lived in the moment you read it fades fast — writing it down is what actually moves it from a fleeting thought into something you can act on. It's how a lesson becomes a compass instead of a memory: the difference between knowing something once and actually managing yourself by it, on purpose, as you build your aligned and ambitious path.

One more thing worth building into whatever you write: a running question, not just a one-time answer.

Is my ambition still clear — and does it still excite me?

Sometimes life happens, and your brain stays attached to an old goal long after it's stopped being true. Back then it might have been real — but you evolve, and what excited you two years ago doesn't automatically keep pace. So keep checking whether it still excites you. If it doesn't, it's your job to realign, not to force yourself back into a version of the dream that's already outgrown you.

The point was never that your vision is one fixed thing, written once and filed away. The point is that you keep tuning into it.

A closing word

Here's what genuinely excites me, now that you're at the end of this book: you have a compass, real tools, and an actual shot at building something great without losing yourself to get there. That's rare, and it's worth feeling good about.

When ambition and alignment move together, you get to achieve something great, actually inhabit it once you have it, and feel blessed by it instead of hollowed out by it — a fulfillment you carry for a lifetime, not just for the moment someone else notices what you built.

This was something I wanted to offer, to help you further your own path. I hope it did.



I'm Marjolein van der Krol, a NOBCO-certified coach who helps leaders and founders stay true to themselves. My own path ran through consultancy, through that same competence-close-to-the-norm confidence, before I stepped into this work.

If this resonated, reach out — explore coaching or a workshop for your team. A free call is the easiest first step, no pitch.

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