

THE CHANNEL KEEPS IT · CHAPTER EIGHT

The Field Manual: Thirteen Weeks

Chapter Eight of The Channel Keeps It

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Chapter Eight of The Channel Keeps It. The whole book, with every chapter, is at business.hautelumiere.life/library/the-channel-keeps-it (DOI https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23989022).

A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

This work is offered for education and leadership development. It is not legal, financial, accounting, investment, medical or psychological advice; take the advice of a qualified professional who knows your circumstances. Companies and events are described from the public record as the author understands it; characterisations are the author's analysis. Examples are illustrative, and no particular outcome is promised to any reader.

ABSTRACT

Everything in the earlier chapters can be done in any order, and most leaders who read them will be tempted to start with the part that interests them most: a new recognition scheme, a pay review, a conversation with the team. This chapter argues for an order, and the order matters for a reason the evidence has already given. A gift economy is easily damaged by clumsy intervention. The Haifa fine, the bonus that teaches people to wait for a bonus, the sanction that falls on the generous: each was an intervention made before anyone had looked at what was already moving. The sequence below is built so that nothing is changed until it has been seen, nothing is designed until the people who give most have been heard, and nothing is measured in a way that tells people they are not trusted. It takes thirteen weeks, a quarter, because a reciprocal system is read over seasons and not rounds, and a quarter is the shortest season most organisations keep.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Field Manual: Thirteen Weeks

Why a sequence

Everything in the earlier chapters can be done in any order, and most leaders who read them will be tempted to start with the part that interests them most: a new recognition scheme, a pay review, a conversation with the team. This chapter argues for an order, and the order matters for a reason the evidence has already given.

A gift economy is easily damaged by clumsy intervention. The Haifa fine, the bonus that teaches people to wait for a bonus, the sanction that falls on the generous: each was an intervention made before anyone had looked at what was already moving. The sequence below is built so that nothing is changed until it has been seen, nothing is designed until the people who give most have been heard, and nothing is measured in a way that tells people they are not trusted. It takes thirteen weeks, a quarter, because a reciprocal system is read over seasons and not rounds, and a quarter is the shortest season most organisations keep.

The manual is written for a team or a department of between eight and about eighty people, led by one person with authority over its budget and its rules. A larger organisation runs it unit by unit, starting with one, and Chapter 9 explains how to compare them. A household runs a shortened version, built on Chapter 11 and set out in the workbook at the back of the book.

The roles

Four roles are needed. In a small team one person may hold two of them; the sponsor should never hold the steward's.

The sponsor. The leader with authority over pay, rules and budget for the unit. The sponsor makes the decisions in weeks five, eight and thirteen, protects the time the work needs, and does one thing that is harder than it sounds: refrains from announcing anything until week six.

Two stewards. The people who run the sequence week to week. One should be someone the sponsor regards as a natural organiser. The other should be, by the team's own reputation, one of its most generous givers: the person who stays late, covers shifts, answers questions nobody else will. The second steward is

chosen because she can see the gift economy from inside it, and because the sequence's first findings will usually be about people like her.

The sceptic. One person, named openly, whose job is to ask at every step what could go wrong, what the evidence will not bear, and what the team will hear in each proposal. The sceptic reads Chapter 3 before week one. Making scepticism a role, rather than a mood, keeps it from turning into opposition.

The listeners. Two or three people, not in the unit's management line, who conduct the private conversations in weeks three and four. They may be from a neighbouring team, from human resources, or from outside. What matters is that people can speak to them without wondering whether it will reach their manager attached to their name.

Weeks 1 and 2 · See

The aim. To make the existing gift economy visible to the people running the sequence, without changing anything.

Week 1. The stewards and the sponsor each complete the Three Obligations Audit from Chapter 2 separately, for the relationship between the team and its management, and for the relationship between the team and one neighbouring team it depends on. They do not compare notes until the end of the week. When they do, the most useful finding is usually the difference between the sponsor's list and the generous steward's. The sponsor typically lists fewer gifts in the *Give* column and more in *Return*. The steward typically lists more gifts and fewer returns. Write down the difference. It is the first measure of how much of the team's giving its leader cannot see.

Week 2. The two stewards draw the Circulation Map from Chapter 4 for the whole unit, together. They mark the pools, the people with many arrows leaving and few returning, and the saplings. They also complete the Crowding-Out Check from Chapter 3 in reverse: not for a proposed incentive but for every incentive, metric, fine, bonus and tracking system the team already lives under. For each, they write the sentence it says without saying it.

Decision for the sponsor at the end of week 2. None. The sponsor reads the map and the reverse check and asks questions. Nothing is announced. This is the hardest instruction in the manual for most leaders, and the most important. An announcement in week two, before anyone has been heard, is a gift designed by the giver, and Chapter 5 showed where that leads.

What can go wrong. The map turns into a performance review. The defence is to write no judgements on it, only flows, and to keep it between the stewards and the sponsor. The sceptic checks the map at the end of the week and strikes out any label that reads as an assessment of a person rather than a description of a flow.

Weeks 3 and 4 · Listen

The aim. To hear from the people at the pooling points, and from a sample of everyone else, what they see about giving and returning in the unit.

Week 3. The listeners hold a private conversation of about thirty minutes with every person the map shaded as a pool, and with a further sample of at least a third of the unit, chosen to include new members, long-serving members and anyone the sceptic suggests. Three questions are asked, in this order, and the listener writes the answers in the person's own words:

1. "Where does what you give here, beyond your job, feel returned, and where does it not?"
2. "Is there anything the team or its management does, or measures, or rewards, that makes it harder to give?"
3. "If there were a sum of money or time available to make your work better, what would you want it spent on? It does not need to be for you."

The third question is a version of the one Maren asked in Chapter 5, widened to time as well as money, with a last sentence she did not use. That sentence matters. It invites the answer that Mellström and Johannesson's donors gave when they were allowed to: redirect the gift.

Week 4. The listeners group the answers without names, and present them to the stewards and the sceptic. Three lists come out of the session: the places where giving is not returned, named as places rather than people; the incentives and rules that people say make giving harder; and the things people would want a budget spent on, with the number of times each was mentioned.

Decision for the sponsor at the end of week 4. One, and it is small. The sponsor chooses whether to share the grouped findings with the whole unit in week six. The recommendation of this manual is yes, in summary, without names. A team that has been asked and then hears nothing has been given a reason to stop answering.

What can go wrong. People say what they think the sponsor wants to hear. The defence is the listeners' independence, and the third question, which is easier to answer honestly because it is about what one would want, not about what is wrong. If the answers seem uniformly positive, the sceptic says so, and the listeners hold a second round with a different sample.

Weeks 5 and 6 · Correct

The aim. To close every gap between what people are owed and what they are paid, before anything is offered as a gift.

Week 5. The stewards and the sponsor, with whoever holds the payroll, complete Part A of the Gift Design Sheet from Chapter 5 for every role in the unit. Three comparisons are made: pay against the local market

for the same work, using a named and dated source; pay and conditions against the commitments the organisation has made, written or spoken, including promotions promised, reviews delayed and overtime unpaid; and pay and conditions between people doing comparable work inside the unit. If the sponsor has not done so, the True Cost of a Wage from Chapter 6 is run at the same time, so that the cost of any correction can be set against the cost of the turnover it may reduce.

Decision for the sponsor at the end of week 5. The corrections. Every gap found is closed or scheduled to close, through the contract, on a stated date. The sponsor decides the order if the budget will not close them all at once, and records why.

Week 6. The corrections are made, and the unit is told what was found and what was done, plainly and without ceremony. This is the first announcement of the sequence. It contains three things: a summary of what people said in the listening, without names; the corrections, described as corrections and not as gifts; and the next step, which is that the remaining budget will be spent on what people asked for, and that the stewards will come back with a proposal.

The language of the announcement matters more than its length. A correction presented as generosity is read, correctly, as an attempt to be thanked for paying what was owed. The book's own warning is the right one to keep in mind: "you can't make an unjust system transparent and expect positive results." The announcement says what was unjust, says that it has been fixed, and stops.

What can go wrong. The budget is too small to close the gaps. That is a finding, not a failure, and it is reported as one. A sponsor who cannot close the gaps should not proceed to design gifts. A gift laid over an uncorrected unfairness is read as part of it. The sequence pauses at week six until the corrections are funded, and the sponsor says so.

Weeks 7 and 8 · Design the gifts

The aim. To spend what remains on what people asked for, in forms they can refuse, with no conditions.

Week 7. The stewards complete Parts B and C of the Gift Design Sheet, using the listening findings as Part B. For each candidate gift they fill in the line: recipient, gift, why it was chosen for them, whether it can be declined without cost, and whether any condition is attached. Any gift that cannot be declined, or carries a condition, is rewritten or moved to the contract line. The sceptic reads every line aloud and asks what the person receiving it will hear.

Three kinds of gift tend to emerge, and the stewards should look for all three. The first is time: rotas fixed further ahead, a protected afternoon, a day for development. The second is choice: control over something that is currently decided for people, such as which van, which shift pattern, which training. The third is removal: taking away something that makes giving harder, often a report, a metric or an approval step that people named in week three.

Week 8. The sponsor reviews the proposal with the stewards and the sceptic.

Decision for the sponsor at the end of week 8. Which gifts to make. The sponsor should resist two temptations. The first is to replace what people asked for with what the sponsor would have preferred to give. The second is to add a condition at the last moment, usually in the form of a reporting requirement: "we will fund the development day, and we would like a short report afterwards." That sentence turns a gift into a contract with a deliverable. If a report is genuinely needed, it belongs on the contract line, and the day should be described as work.

What can go wrong. Some people asked for things that cannot be given. The defence is to say so, specifically, to the person who asked, with the reason. A request that is declined with a reason is a received request. A request that disappears is a refused gift, and Chapter 2's audit counted those.

Weeks 9 and 10 · Remove the prices, build the immune system

The aim. To take out, or redesign, the incentives that crowd out giving, and to give the team a way of answering broken obligations that is local, public, fast, proportionate and owned.

Week 9. The stewards return to the reverse crowding-out check from week 2, now with the listening findings beside it. For every incentive, metric or rule that people named as making giving harder, and that fails Bowles's four questions on two or more counts, they propose one of three things: remove it; redesign it so that the reward can be redirected or so that it measures the group rather than the individual; or keep it, with a written reason the team can read.

At the same time, the stewards run the Community Immune-System Check from Chapter 7 with three or four members of the team. They choose one repair.

Week 10. The changes are made and explained. Removing a metric is explained as plainly as a correction: "We were counting this. You told us it got in the way of the work. We have stopped." The repair to the immune system is introduced with the team, not to it: if the repair is a standing slot in a weekly meeting where anyone can raise an obligation that was not kept, the team decides how the slot will run.

Decision for the sponsor at the end of week 10. Which incentives to remove and which to keep. The sponsor should know that removal does not instantly restore what an incentive crowded out. The Haifa parents did not return to their old punctuality when the fine was lifted. Expect a slow recovery, and do not reintroduce the incentive because the recovery is slow.

What can go wrong. Someone senior insists that a metric is essential. Often it is, for a purpose other than motivation: compliance, safety, billing. The defence is to separate the purposes. A metric needed for compliance can be collected without being displayed as a ranking, tied to a bonus or used in a conversation about effort.

Weeks 11 and 12 · Receive

The aim. To practise Mauss's second obligation, the one leaders neglect most, until it becomes habit.

Week 11. The sponsor, the stewards and any other managers in the unit begin the Weekly Reciprocity Ledger from Chapter 12. Every Monday, each lists three gifts received in the previous week that were not owed, and writes one specific sentence of acknowledgement for each, to be said that day, to the person, naming exactly what they did and what it made possible. "Thank you for all your hard work" does not count. "The draft you sent on Tuesday meant we could move the order before the price changed" does.

The gifts themselves are made this week, each with one sentence naming what was noticed, as Part E of the Gift Design Sheet sets out. Nothing is asked for in return. The gift is not mentioned again.

Week 12. The stewards return to the people at the pooling points identified in week two and ask one question: "Since we last spoke, has anything changed in whether what you give here feels returned?" They write the answers down.

Decision for the sponsor in weeks 11 and 12. None. The work of these weeks is practice, not decision.

What can go wrong. Acknowledgement becomes a ritual, delivered to everyone at the same meeting in the same words. The defence is specificity. An acknowledgement that could be given to anyone has been given to no one.

Week 13 · Read the season

The aim. To read what happened honestly, decide what to keep, and set the next season.

The stewards and the sceptic prepare a short report for the sponsor using the reading framework in Chapter 9. It has four parts: what was changed, and when; what was measured before and after, with every source; what else changed in the same quarter that could account for any difference; and what the team now believes, what it cannot tell, and why. The stewards redraw the Circulation Map and set it beside the first one. They repeat the Three Obligations Audit for the same relationships and count the items in *Return*.

Decision for the sponsor at the end of week 13. Three decisions. What to keep. What to stop. And whether to run the sequence again in the next quarter, with the same team or with a neighbouring one.

The report is shared with the team in summary. A team that took part in a season and never heard what it amounted to has been asked to give and then not received.

A note on scale and on gain

At the scale of a single team, the sequence works almost entirely on the gift line and the contract line: what people are owed, and what is given beyond it. At the scale of a whole organisation, a third line appears, which is what happens to the gain that the discretionary effort helps to produce. Chapter 6's warehouse figures are, among other things, an account of a gain that the firm kept as operating profit per worker.

The history of gainsharing (*The Gain Was Always Shared*) and the evidence on employee ownership (*Owning the Work*) follow organisations that decided to share that gain with the people who produced it, and what the research found when they did. The principles of this book apply to those arrangements with full force: a shared gain is received as a gift only if people can see how it was produced and have a say in the work that produced it. A leader who has run this sequence once is in a much better position to design one, because she will know where her organisation's gift economy runs, and what it is sensitive to.

The sequence on one page

WEEKS	AIM	TOOLS	SPONSOR DECIDES
1–2	See	Three Obligations Audit; Circulation Map; reverse Crowding-Out Check	Nothing. No announcement.
3–4	Listen	Three questions, asked privately by listeners	Whether to share findings (recommended: yes)
5–6	Correct	Gift Design Sheet Part A; True Cost of a Wage	Corrections, through the contract, dated
7–8	Design	Gift Design Sheet Parts B and C	Which gifts, with no conditions added
9–10	Remove prices; build immune system	Crowding-Out Check; Community Immune-System Check	Which incentives to remove or keep
11–12	Receive	Weekly Reciprocity Ledger; Gift Design Sheet Part E	Nothing. Practice.
13	Read the season	Chapter 9's reading framework; redrawn map; repeat audit	Keep, stop, run again

The Tool: The Sponsor's Commitments

A one-page commitment the sponsor signs in week one and the stewards keep. It exists because the sequence fails, most often, by the sponsor acting early.

I will:1. Make no announcement about this work before week six.2. Read every finding before I decide anything, and ask questions before I offer views.3. Close every gap between what people are owed and what they are paid before I offer anything as a gift, or pause the sequence and say why.4. Make no gift that cannot be declined, and attach no condition to any gift.5. Remove, or justify in writing, every incentive the team tells me makes giving harder.6. Practise the Weekly Reciprocity Ledger myself from week eleven, and keep it for at least a further quarter.7. Share what we found in week thirteen with everyone who took part.

Signed: __ Date: _*Stewards: Sceptic:* ___

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