

Individualizing Your Management Style



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Hello! Today we're here to talk about individualizing your management style.

My name is Mercedes Bernard. My pronouns are she/her. And I'm an engineering manager with a digital consulting firm in Chicago called Tandem.

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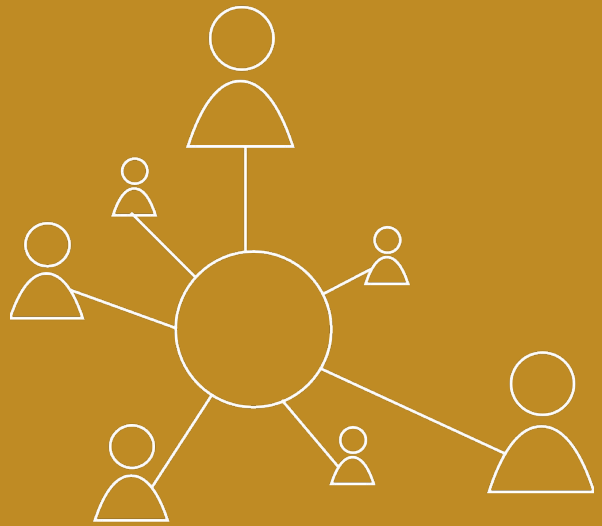


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I normally provide live captions during my talk but since this is all offline, if you are someone who would find captions helpful I've uploaded my slides with my speaker notes here. And I'll try to stick as close as possible to what I've written out :)

Introductions



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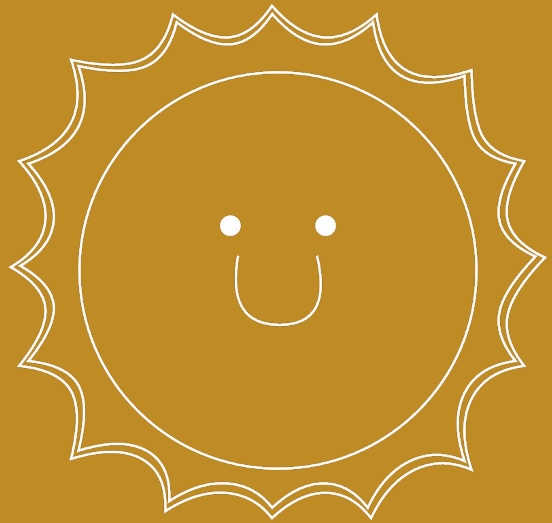
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While we're talking about management, you can't be a manager without a team. So I'd like to take a few minutes to introduce you to a couple of my team members.

Sasha

- Our ray of sunshine in the office
- Gives the most thoughtful peer feedback in performance reviews
- Mayor of our local neighborhood



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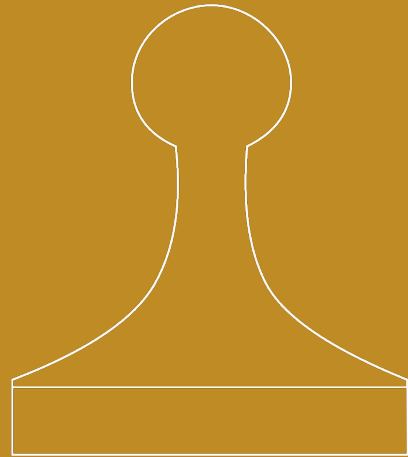
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First up is Sasha. Sasha is our ray of sunshine in the office. Everyone looks forward to their pairing sessions with her because of her positive attitude. She gives the most thoughtful peer feedback in performance reviews. She often writes me 5 paragraph essays describing all the growth a teammate has made toward their professional development goals. We also joke that she is the mayor of Bucktown, because she knows all the servers and bartenders and hooks us up with the best table at lunch.

Pooja

- Will drop everything to help a team member
- Appreciated by team for direct, concise communication style
- Hosts a board game night every month in our office



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Next is Pooja, one of our most supportive team members. She will drop everything to help someone get unstuck even if she's not familiar with what you're working on. She's the first to volunteer to troubleshoot Docker issues or help you figure out how to connect to a client's remote environment. She's appreciated by our team for her direct and concise communication style. And she hosts a board game night in our office every month.

Shamyle

- Celebrates every team member and makes sure they feel included
- Finds joy in constructive feedback from peers
- Always documenting our office life in his Instagram stories



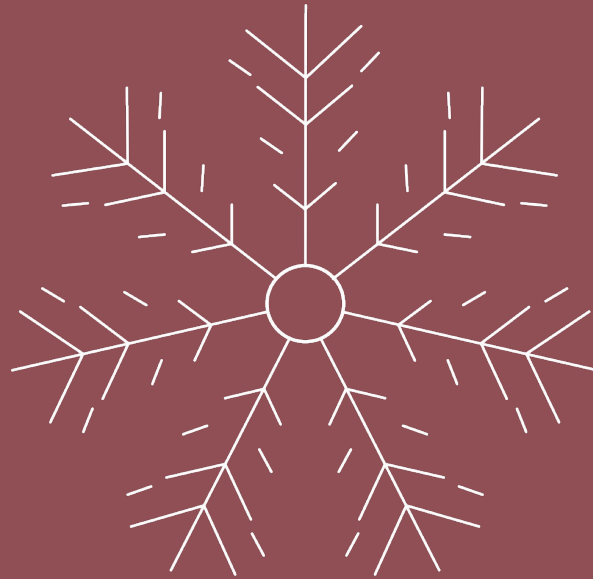
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Shamyle is everyone's friend and celebrates what makes each person different. He makes sure everyone feels included no matter what we're working on. He finds true joy in constructive feedback from his peers and looks forward to his performance reviews to learn how he could be improving. And it's common to find Shamyle taking pictures of your food because he's always documenting our office life in his Instagram stories.



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This is only a few of my team members but each one is unique and brings something special to the table. Without each and every one of them, my team would not be what it is.

So to be a successful manager, I need to manage each of them according to what makes them different.

One minute management



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As leaders, we've probably all read the management books and heard of the fads. But these are too simple and prescriptive. They don't take into account the differences between teams and organizations. What works for your team at a large company may not work at a small startup and what works for a small, colocated team at your company may not work for a large distributed team working on a different part of the business.

One minute management

Matrix management



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One minute management

Matrix management

Servant leadership



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One minute management

Six Sigma

Matrix management

Servant leadership



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One minute management

Six Sigma

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Business process reengineering

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One minute management
Six Sigma
Matrix management
Stack ranking
Business process reengineering
Servant leadership



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One minute management
Management by objectives
Six Sigma

Matrix management
Stack ranking
Business process reengineering
Servant leadership



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One minute management
Management by objectives
Six Sigma
Management by walking around
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So I think it's valid to say that one size fits all management strategies suck. They don't fit anyone quite right.

Management is NOT a process



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Management is not a process. It's not a checklist that you can cross off.

Management is a relationship



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Successful management is a relationship. And like any relationship, you treat it differently. I know I don't treat my parents the same as my siblings, or my siblings the same as my friends.

This is because we all want to be heard, supported, and valued according to what makes us unique. We don't like to be generalized or put in a box.

Individualization is important in any relationship.

From the medical community...

Individualized Patient Care
(IPC)



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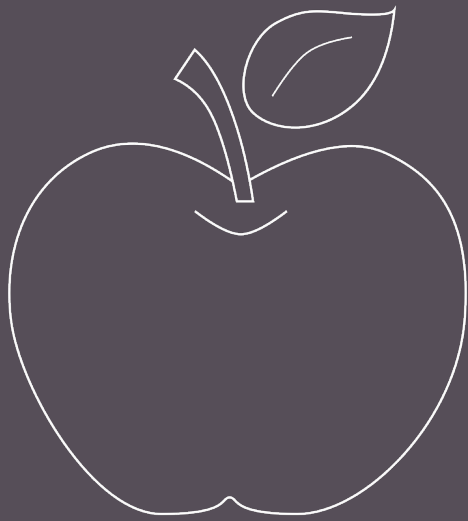
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And I'm not the only one who thinks so. For the last decade, the medical community has been emphasizing Individualized Patient Care (IPC). IPC encourages health professionals to understand the context, priorities, and anxieties of the patient and incorporate that into the patient's health plan.

Making the patient feel heard leads to a less stressful healthcare experience and less stress means better long term health.

For example, if a patient with asthma comes in having difficulty managing their symptoms, the first recommended step is to increase their dosage. But a doctor using IPC may uncover that the patient is experiencing financial difficulty and can't afford to refill their prescription as often as they should. Increasing the dosage won't help and the doctor may choose to find a cheaper alternative or connect the patient with services to help them pay for their meds.



To our education systems

Differentiated learning,
individualized learning,
personalized learning



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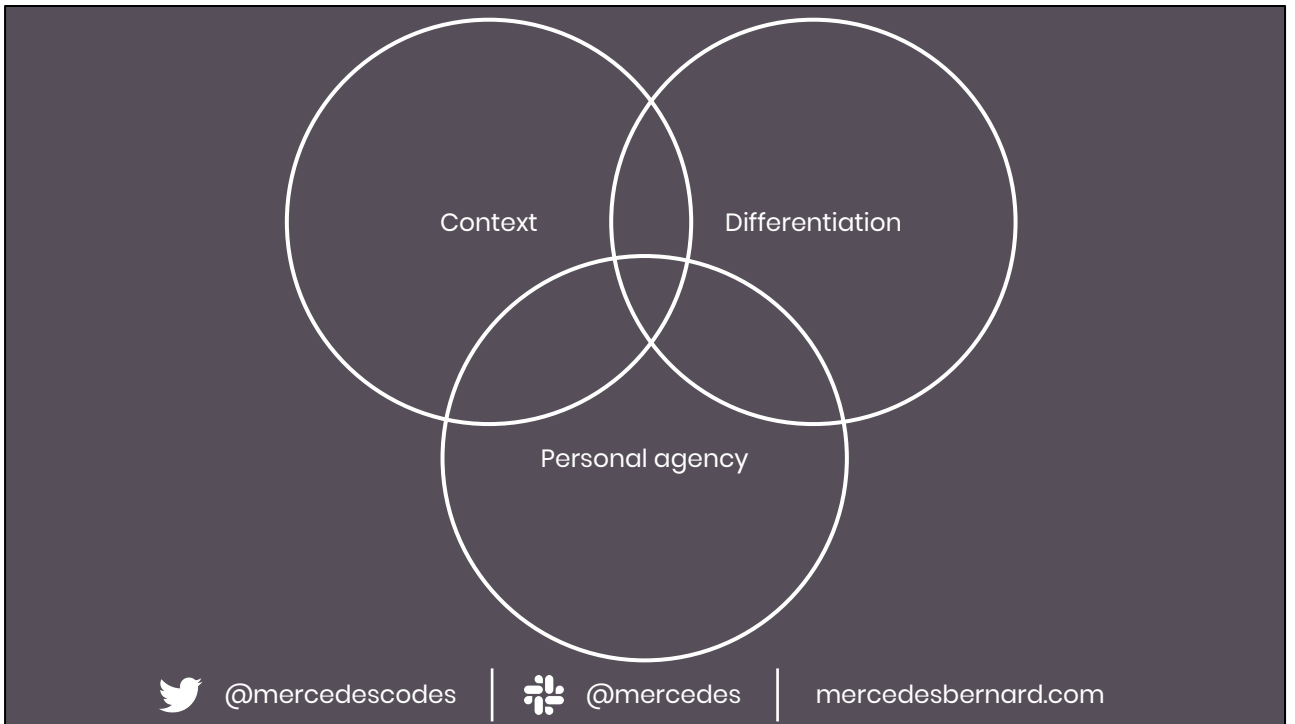
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And educators have been embracing many forms of individualization. If you care for children or are passionate about education, you may have heard these terms. The Department of Education defines subtle differences between each, but they all strive to meet the student where they are by adapting to different learning styles, needs, and speeds.

Differentiated learning customizes instruction to the learning preferences of small groups of students. The goals are the same but the methods might be different such as writing a paragraph vs drawing a picture.

Individualized learning refers to the pacing of the instruction allowing some students to move more quickly or slowly through topics depending on their learning needs.

And personalized learning includes both differentiation and individualization while also including the learners specific interests in the lesson plans.

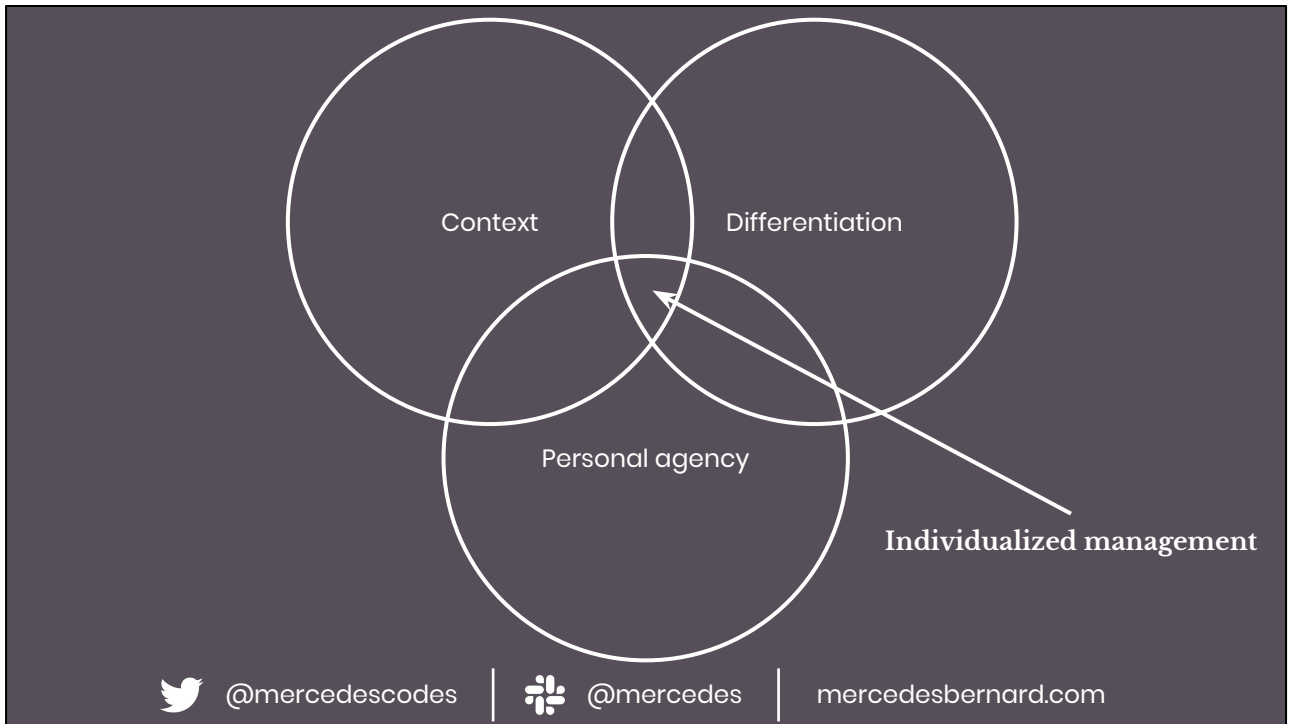


Borrowing a little bit from the medical community and a little bit from the education sector, we can find a human approach to management that places the individual at the center.

Let's take the concept of context from IPC and remember to take the time to understand our team member's career path up to this point and what outside pressures they may be facing.

We can use the idea of differentiation to set clear expectations for the different roles in our organization and offer different support for our early career team members than our senior team members or our individual contributors than our managers.

And we should incorporate each person's own goals, priorities, and values into their professional development plans.



If we do these all of this, I think we can find that sweet spot in the center for individualized management.

Developing an individualized management relationship



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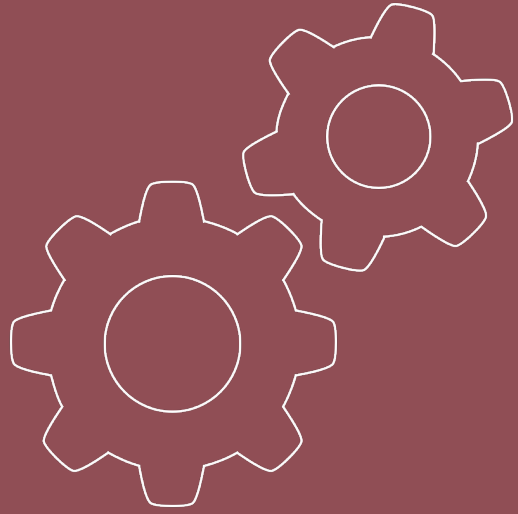


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That all sounds great right? But where do we begin?

Figure out logistics



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It takes time to develop a relationship so we start with the simple things.

What kind of conversation environment do they like?



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What kind of conversation environment does your team member like? We want to create a space where they feel comfortable and supported so that a relationship can develop.

Conversation environment

- What kind of 1:1 cadence do they like?
- In the office or out of the office?
- Sitting down or moving around?



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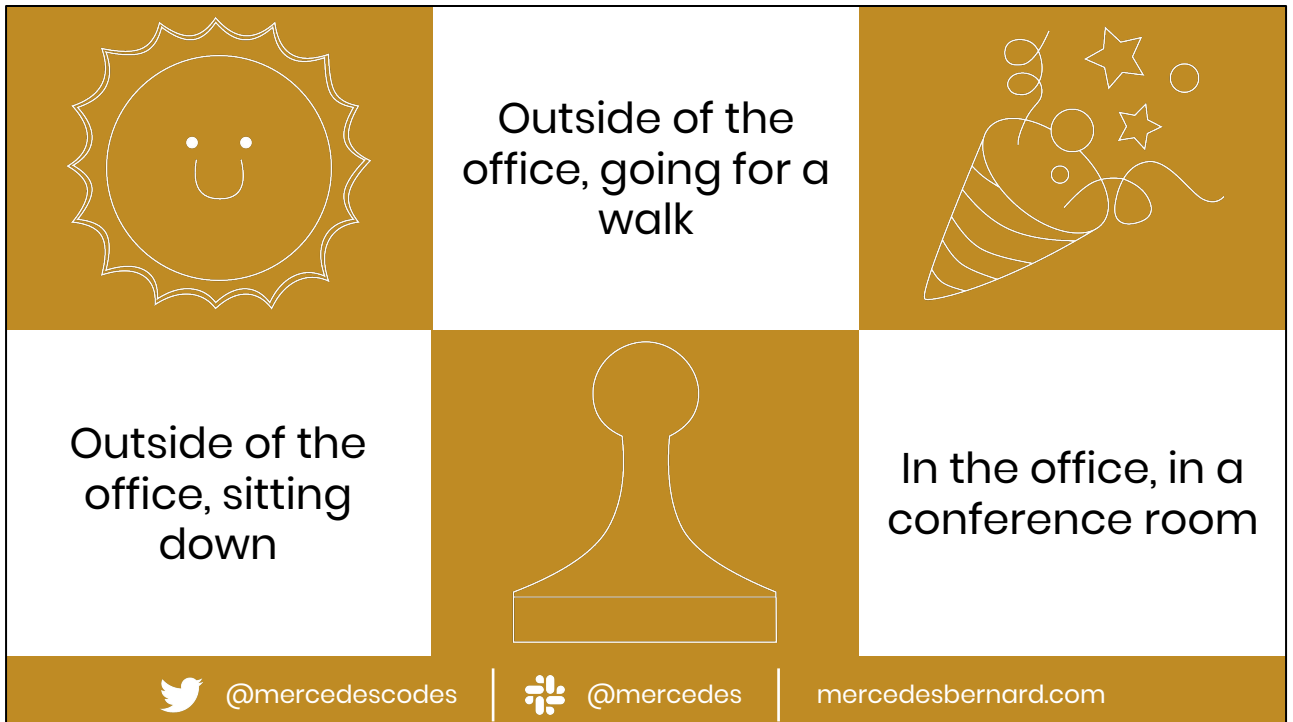
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Think about what kind of meeting cadence each of your team members prefers? Do they like to have these meetings in the office or in a different context? Do they like to be sitting down or do they prefer to get up and move around?

Some people feel like they can have more candid conversations in a neutral space while others may need to take notes to help their focus so they prefer to meet in a conference room.

Just because your company has “a way we’ve always done 1:1s” doesn’t mean that’s the only way.



For the team members that you met earlier, Sasha likes to meet outside of the office but we often grab a spot in a coffee shop to chat.

Pooja also prefers to get out of the office but she would rather go for a walk if the weather is nice.

And Shamyle would rather grab a conference room so he can plug in his computer or take notes if necessary.

How do they prefer to use 1:1 time?



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After finding their preferred conversation environment, we can dig into what they feel is a valuable use of their 1:1 time.

How do they prefer to use 1:1 time?

- Progress check-ins
- Goal setting
- Problem solving
- Getting feedback on deliverables
- Learning something new
- Relationship building



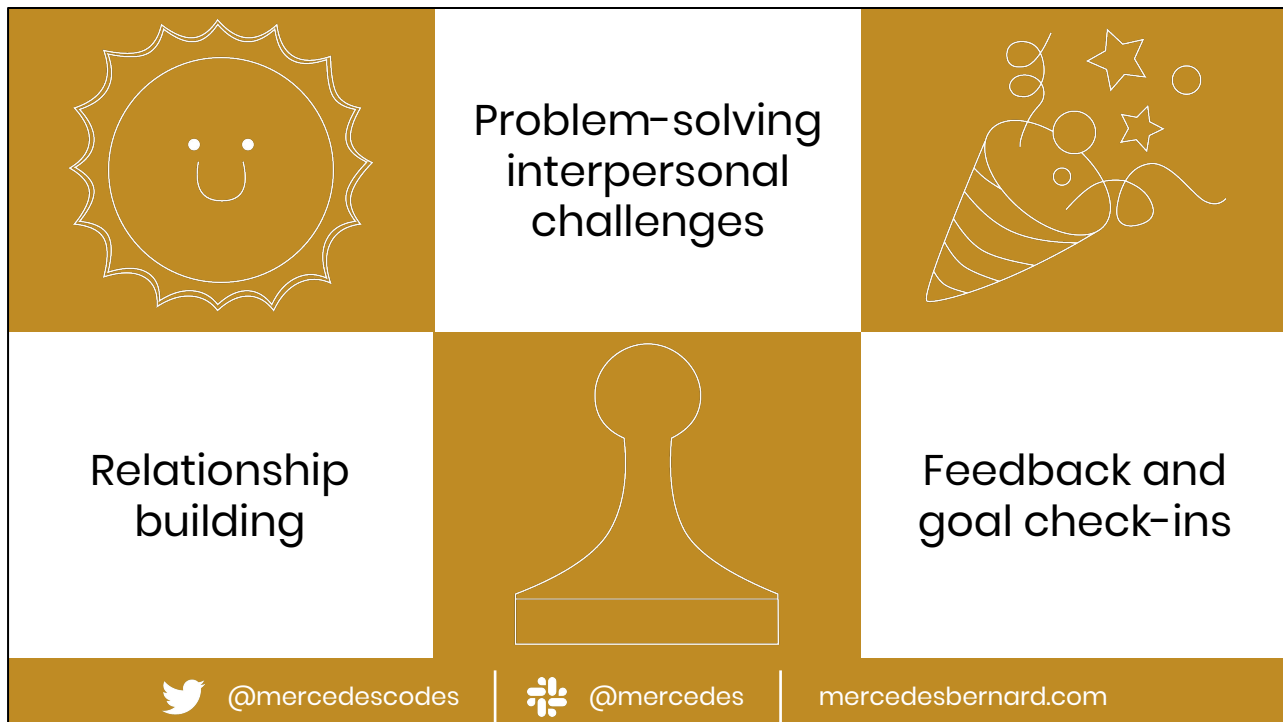
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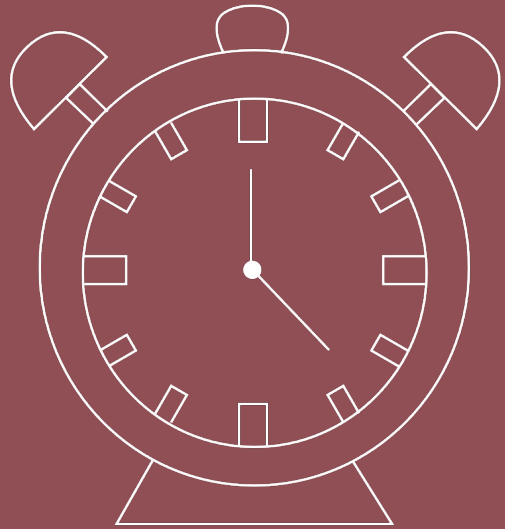
These are a few of the different ideas for how to use 1:1 time, but I think every one of my team members has a different combination preference of these. Some really enjoy checking on their goals while others are always setting small goals to achieve before the next time we meet. Some like to use the time to problem-solve current challenges they are faced with while others like to get feedback on something they're working on, whether that's code they've written or speaking proposals they're putting together. Some like to learn something new together and others just like to use the time to talk and get to know each other better.



Sasha tends to use her 1:1 time for relationship building while Pooja prefers to use the time problem-solving interpersonal challenges that can be tricky and may not have a right answer.

And Shamyle loves to check-in on his goals and get feedback on things he's working on, like a new talk proposal he just put together.

Get to know what makes them tick



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Once you've taken the time to create a comfortable space for your team and show that you value them, you can get to know what makes each of them tick.

What motivates them?



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What motivates them?

What motivates them?

- What do they get excited about at work?
- What kinds of tasks and projects do they enjoy the most?
- What types of things do they spend their downtime learning?
- When asked to do something, what instills a sense of “I better get this done?”



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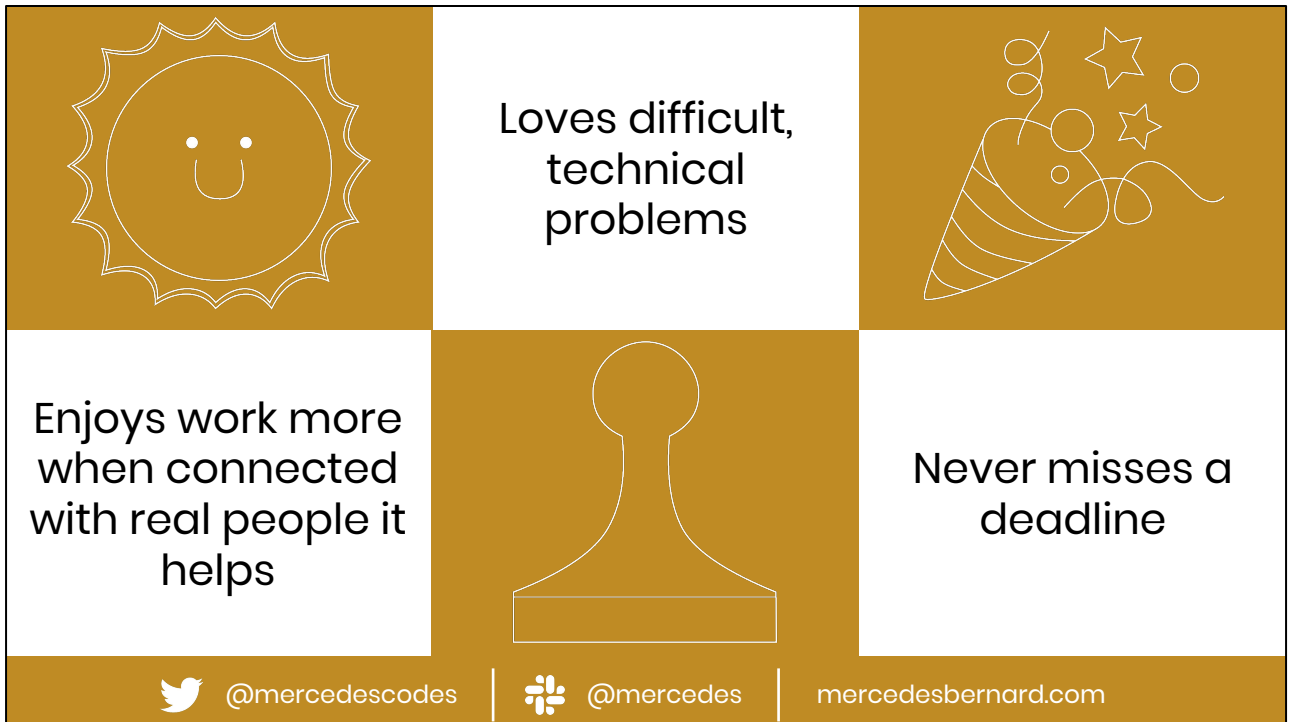


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What do they get excited about? What type of work do they enjoy? What types of things do they choose to learn? And what makes them feel like “I better get this done?”

The more you know about your team, the easier you may find it to answer these questions, but it's always good to check in with them and ask. You want to be careful about making assumptions.



Sasha enjoys her work most when she's connected with the real people it's helping.

Pooja thrives on difficult, technical problems.

And Shamyle is super motivated by deadlines.

How do they like to receive feedback?



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How does your team like to receive feedback? We all know that feedback is a necessary part of management but taking the time to understand how they prefer their feedback packaged means you will be more successful having your feedback heard and incorporated into work.

How do they like to receive feedback?

- How direct do they like feedback delivered?
- Would they prefer in-person or written?
- How timely would they like feedback after interaction? (for non-performance related feedback)



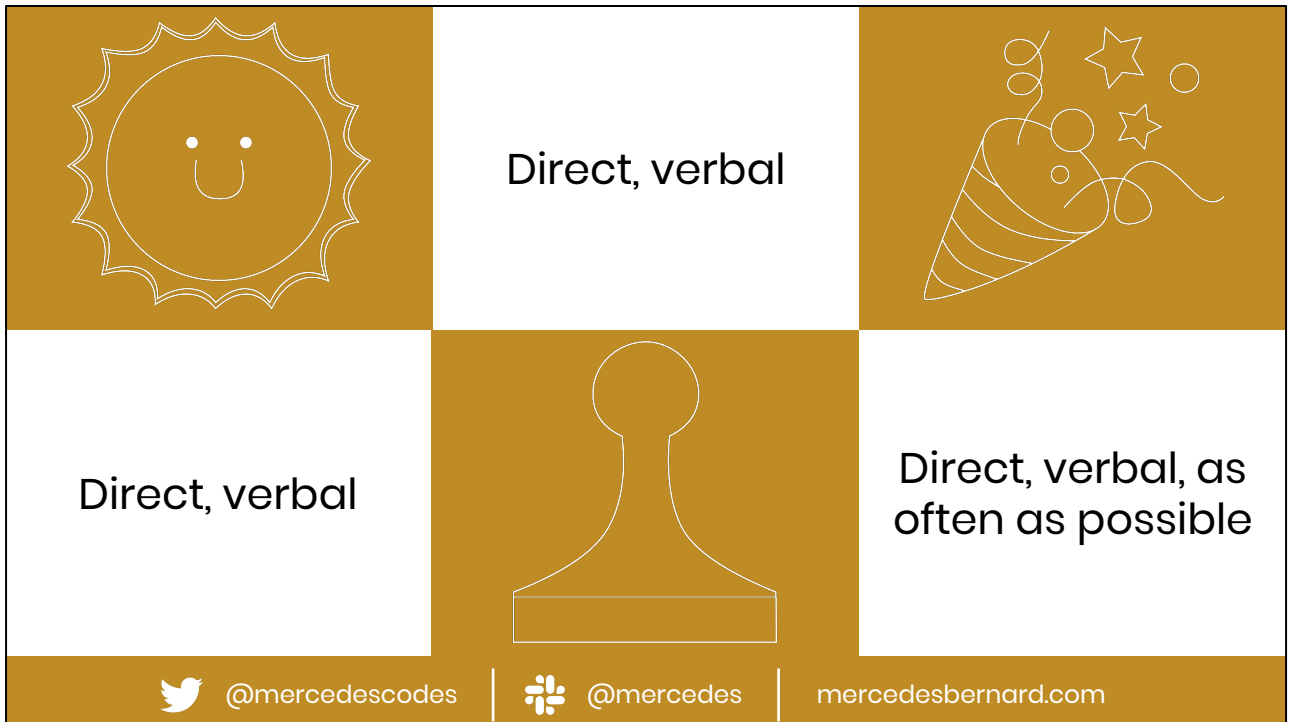
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How direct do they like their feedback? Would they prefer in-person or written? Some folks need time to process things and do better seeing it written down. And for non-performance related feedback, like public speaking or meeting facilitation, how timely would they like the feedback? Some like it directly after the event while others are fine discussing it in their next 1:1.



Sasha, Pooja, and Shamyle all prefer direct, verbal feedback. And Shamyle likes to get feedback as often as he can.

How do they like to be recognized?



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And on the flip side of feedback, the best part of management in my opinion, is recognition. How does your team like to be recognized? We should all be putting more effort into recognizing and celebrating our team members' achievements.

How do they like to be recognized?

- In-person or virtually (Slack, email, etc.)?
- Publicly or privately?




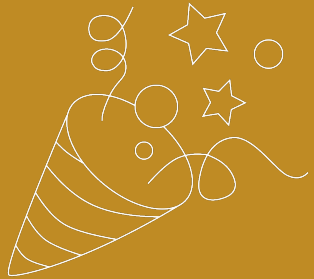
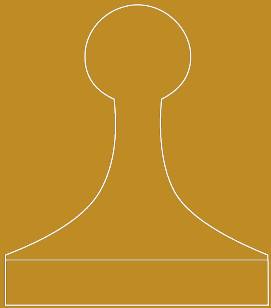


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Do they prefer in-person or virtual recognition? And would they like it shared publicly with other team members or privately with just themselves? When I ask my team about their preferred recognition style, I often volunteer that I like in-person, public recognition because they may feel uncomfortable asking for public recognition.

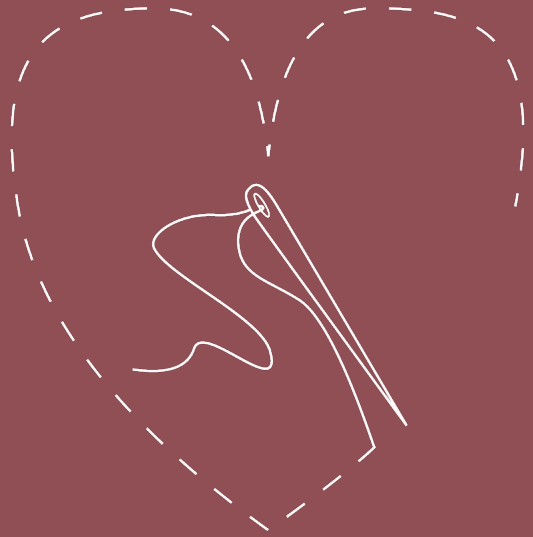
	<p>Private Slack messages or low-stakes public shout-outs</p>	
<p>Shared recognition with pair or team</p>		<p>In-person, public</p>
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Sasha dislikes personal recognition and prefers to share it with her pair or her team.

Pooja likes private Slack messages or low-stakes shout-outs in retro or standup.

And Shamyle likes his in-person, public recognition.

Tailor your approach



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Once you know what motivates your team, you can tailor your management approach to each of them.

Create accountability plans that work for them to help them achieve their goals



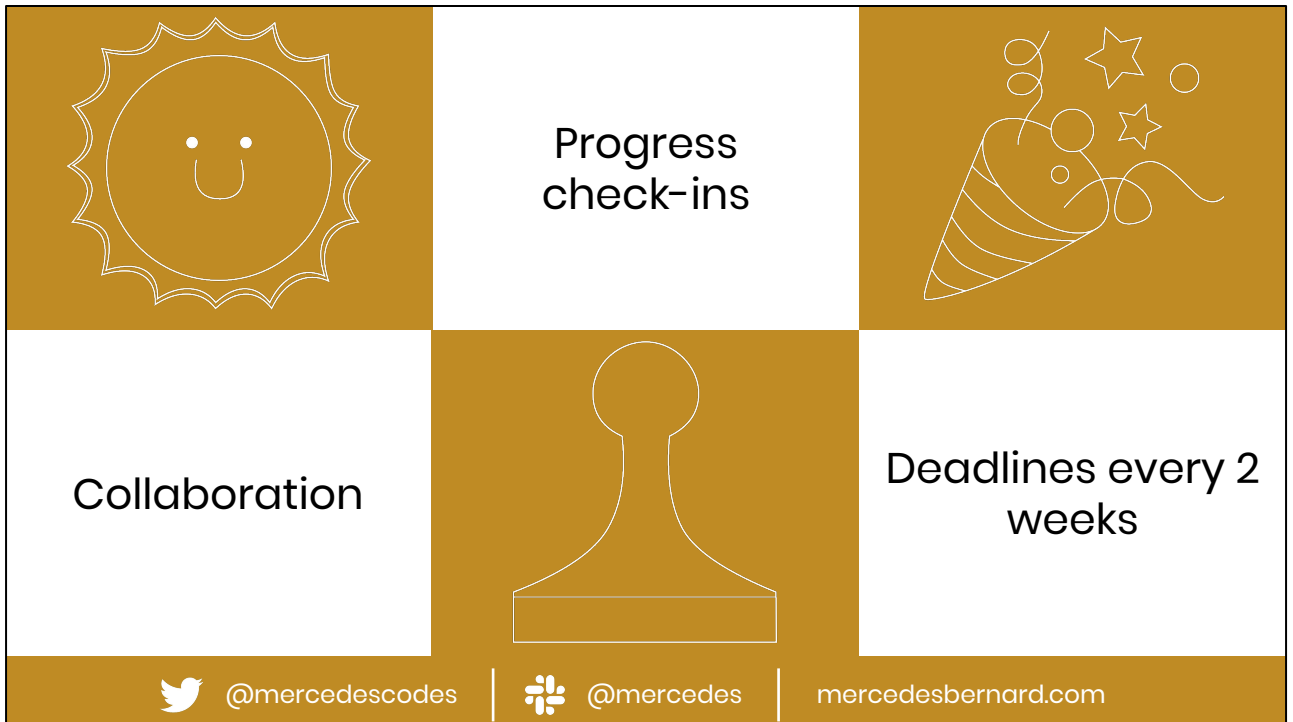
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When you have a better understanding of what motivates them at work, you can help create accountability plans that they'll be successful with.



For Sasha, who is so relationship focused and loves helping others, we find ways to collaborate on tasks and deliverables.

Pooja likes regular reminders and progress check-ins.

And because Shamyle never misses a deadline, we can set small micro-goals every 2 weeks to move him towards his end goal.

Find or create opportunities that align with their goals



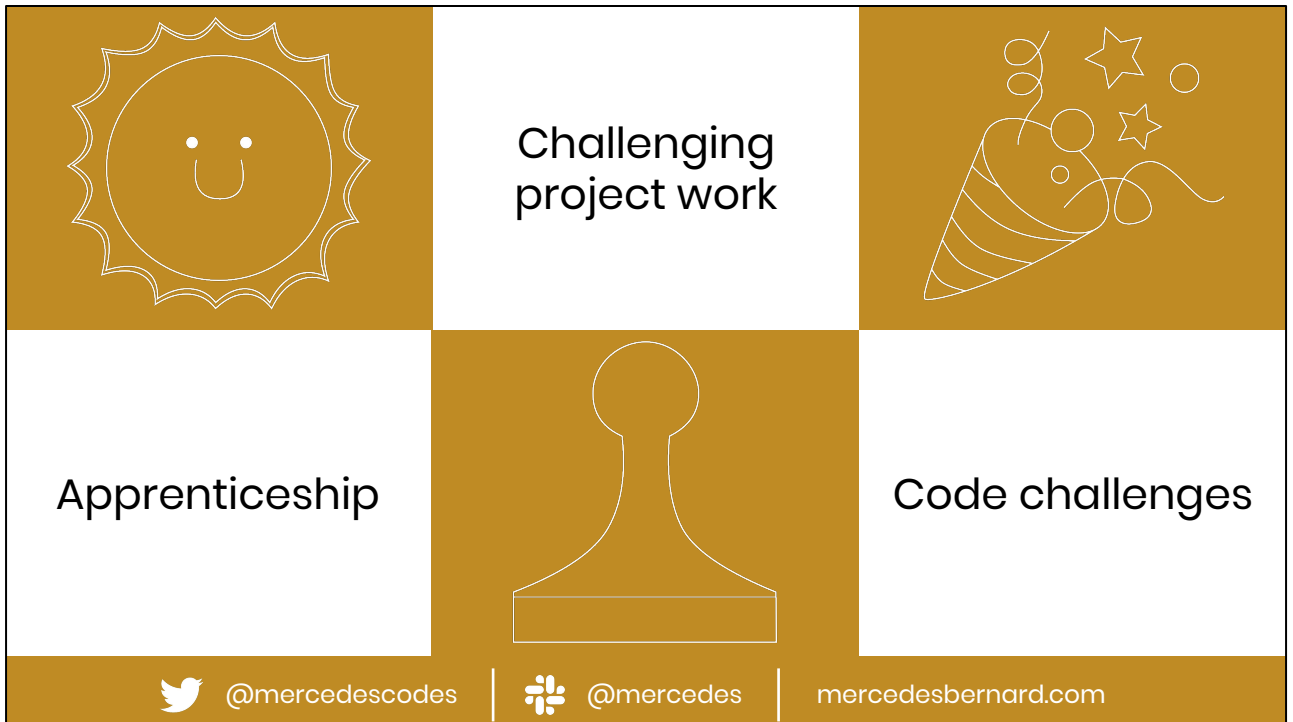
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Use what you know to find ways to leverage your team members strengths.



Sasha needed some leadership opportunities to help achieve her career goals and I know how much she loves helping others, so we recently worked together to revamp our apprenticeship program and Sasha will be owning that moving forward.

Pooja is always looking for new challenges so we try to find challenging project work for her in new technologies that she hasn't worked with before.

And Shamyle is an amazing storyteller who really enjoys making people feel included. So when the development team decided we needed new code challenges for our hiring process, it made perfect sense for Shamyle to own rewriting them to be creative and inclusive to all candidates.

Contextualize your asks according to their motivations



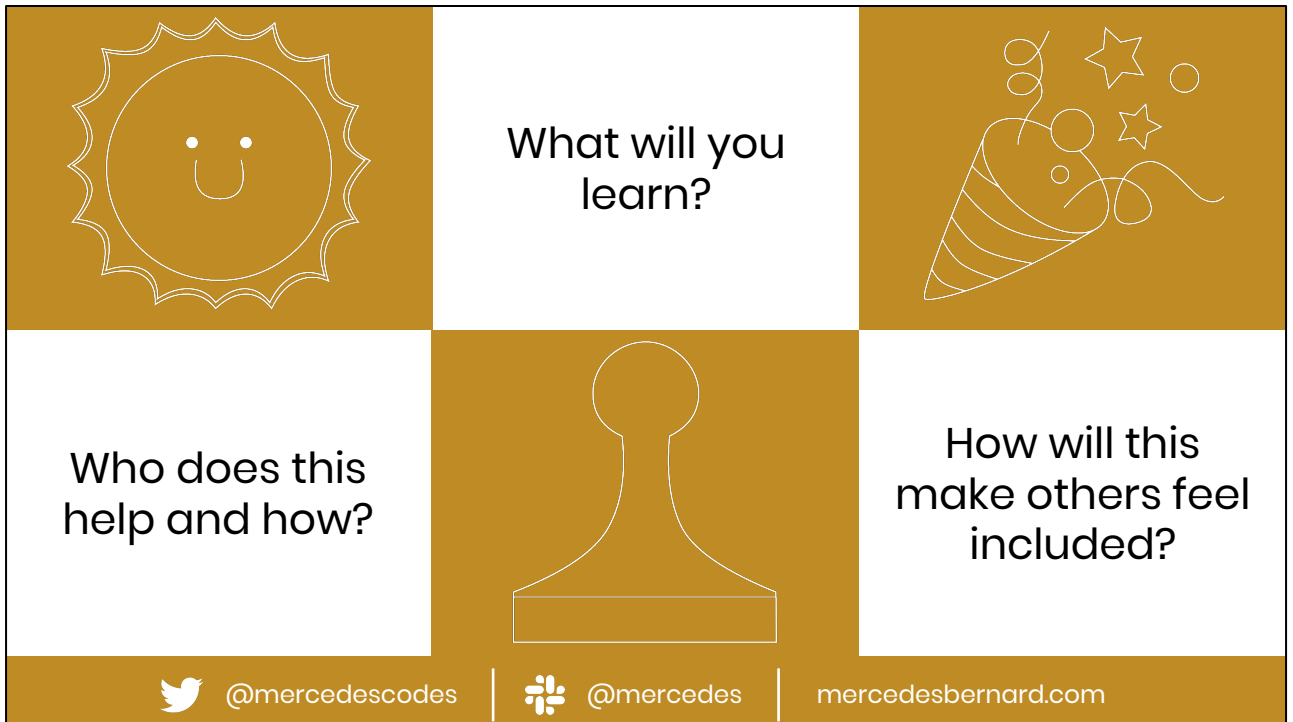
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Finally, contextualize the things you're asking for according to what motivates your team. If you relate your ask to their values and priorities, they'll feel more connected to the work.



With Sasha I try to make sure to answer “Who does this help and how?” describing each of the end users or team members and how their work will be easier because of what Sasha is building.

And for Pooja, I try to outline what she’ll learn from the experience whether it’s a new technical skill or getting the chance to practice some of the squishier consulting skills.

And Shamyle is always thinking about his team so I show how what he’s doing will make others feel included.

This is a lot of work.



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I know that this is a lot of work and I barely scratched the surface of all the ways you can individualize your management style. And this type of management requires more time and more intentional preparation than following a prescriptive checklist found in one of those management books. But I promise it's worth it.

Your team will feel heard,
supported, and that their
self-worth is valued.



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Your team will be more
motivated, productive, and
growth-oriented.

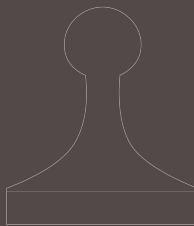
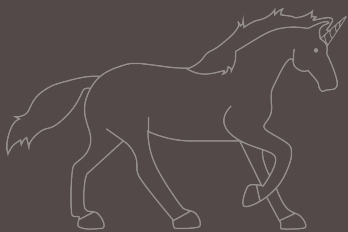


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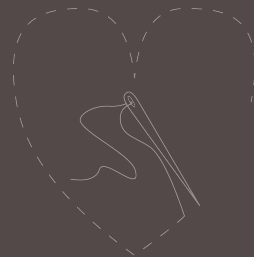
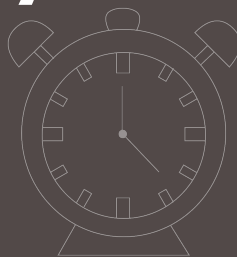


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Thank you



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