Meaning Reset

Facilitator guide · rebuild the connection between the daily work and why it matters

Your job: you're running this for a team that has gone flat. Your job is **not** to tell anyone why their work matters — that never lands, however true it is. Your job is to create the conditions in which each person rebuilds their own connection: one real task, one real person it helped, one real thing it made possible. The experience is shared; the answer belongs to each individual. You do your own trace too.

The one line: burnout is often meaning-loss, not overload.

THE RULE THAT KEEPS THIS ALIVE

Every trace must end at a **real, named person**. Not "customers", not "the business", not "stakeholders" — those are categories, and a category can't reconnect anyone to anything. When someone writes "users", your only job is to ask: **"who, specifically?"** Keep asking until a person appears. This single rule is the difference between a session people remember and a pleasant hour that changes nothing.

· WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

GOOD FIT

- The team has **gone flat** — energy, care and belief have drained away, though the work hasn't obviously changed
- People describe the work as pointless, invisible or thankless
- You've already tried workload and process changes and the flatness stayed
- The team is still delivering, but nobody seems to care whether it lands

USE ANOTHER TOOL

- The team is **genuinely overloaded** → fix the load first with a **capacity tool**. This tool won't fix too much work
- Something dramatic happened — a failed launch, a lost deal — and they've stopped believing they can recover → **Momentum Rebuild**
- The work is understood and valued, but people rarely hear it → that's recognition, which is a different thing from meaning

The distinction worth holding: Momentum Rebuild is for when *something dramatic happened*. This is for when *nothing dramatic happened* and the work quietly stopped feeling worthwhile.

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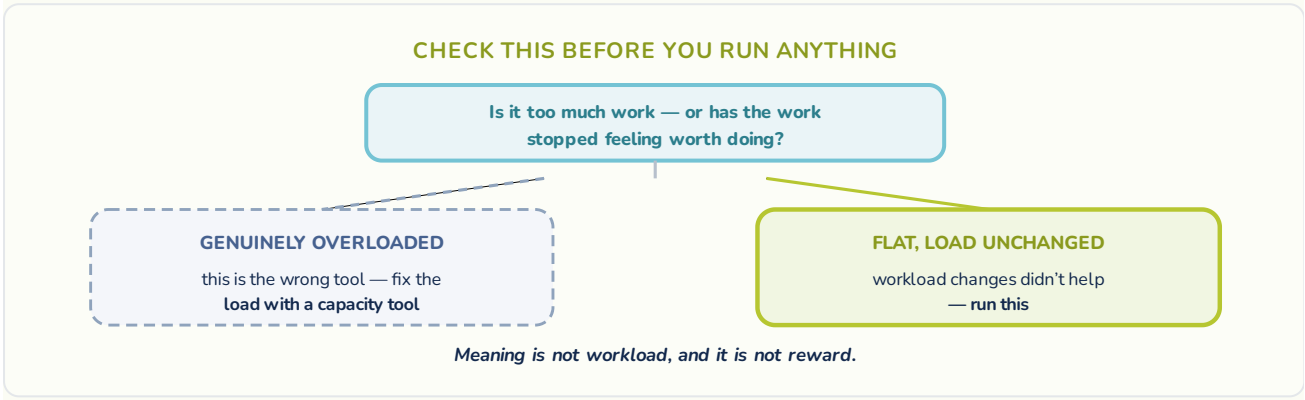
PART 1 DIAGNOSE

before you run anything

1 · IS THIS THE RIGHT PROBLEM?

Meaning, or load?

Ask the team plainly, before you begin: **“Is this too much work — or has the work stopped feeling worth doing?”** Teams that have lost meaning almost always reach for structural fixes first — more people, better tooling, a reorganisation — and stay flat afterwards. If the load is genuinely the problem, stop here and fix that instead; running this on an exhausted team will feel dismissive, because the real problem hasn’t been solved.



2 · WHAT IS THIS REALLY DOING?

The one idea

THE ONE IDEA

People stay connected to work when they can see who it helps. In most delivery work that connection is long and indirect — you ship something, and the person it helps is several steps away and invisible to you. When it disappears, the work carries on but the reason fades, and the flatness gets mistaken for tiredness or too much work. **The line was always true; it had just gone invisible.**

3 · WHAT DO I NEED?

What you’ll need

What	Why it’s there
One real task each, from this week	Something ordinary each person actually did — not a job description, not their most impressive achievement. Recent and specific beats important and vague.
A real, named person (the core rule)	Someone specific at the end of each trace. If a person can’t be named, trace one step further out and ask who is on the other end.
The trace sheet	Where each person records the task, the person it helped, what it made possible, and the change that will keep it visible.
A facilitator who stays out of the meaning	Usually the team lead. You run the session and hold the standard for specificity — you never supply anyone’s reason. You do your own trace alongside everyone else.

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PART 2 TRACE & PROTECT

the reconnection, and what keeps it

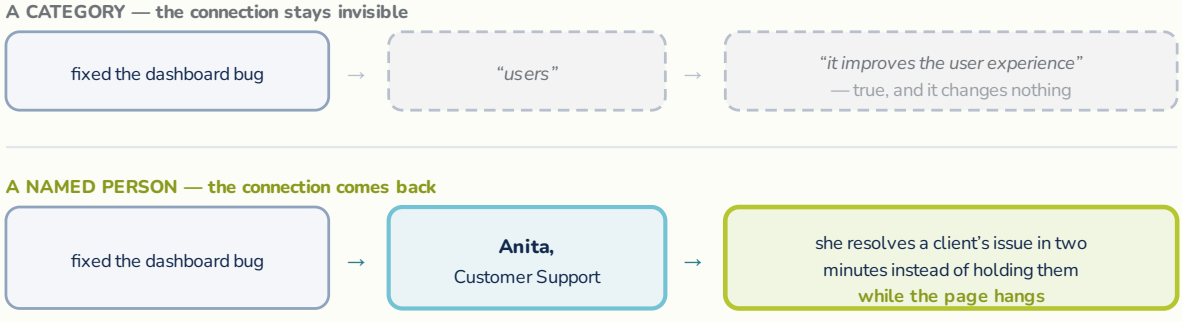
4 · HOW DO I RUN IT?

The run sheet

Keep the pace gentle and the answers specific. Every push you make is toward **more concrete**, never toward more profound.

1 · Check it's meaning, not load	**5 min**	Ask the question openly and listen to the answer. *If the honest answer is "there's just too much work", stop and use a capacity tool instead.*
2 · Pick one real task each	**5 min**	Something you actually did this week. *Ordinary is better than impressive — a small real task traces further than a big vague one.* Everyone writes silently, including you.
3 · Name the person it helped	**10 min**	A specific human being, by name where possible. *When you see "users" or "the business" on a sheet, ask "who, specifically?" and wait.* This is the facilitator's most important job.
4 · Say what it made possible	**10 min**	Each person reads out their trace, in their own words. *Don't improve anyone's wording, don't add to it, and don't explain why it matters — just let each one land.*
5 · Name one protecting change	**10 min**	One concrete thing per person that keeps the connection visible. *A demo with the person who uses it · a message from them read at stand-up · a monthly visit.* Specific, small, still true next month.

THE SAME TASK, TRACED TWO WAYS



A category can be agreed with. Only a person can be felt.

The line was always true — it had just gone invisible.

THE RECOGNITION — LET IT ARRIVE, DON'T ANNOUNCE IT

Somewhere in step 4, someone usually realises that the fixes the team reached for — the workload conversations, the tooling, the reshuffle — were aimed at a different problem

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from the one they actually had. **Do not say this yourself, and do not say it early.** Told, it's an opinion the team can debate. Arrived at, it changes how people understand their own experience. If it doesn't surface, that's fine — the traces still did their work.

5 · WHAT IF IT GOES WRONG?

Common mistakes

What you'll see	The fix
The trace ends at a category	The main failure. "Users", "customers", "the business" — ask "who, specifically?" and keep asking. A category produces a platitude; a person produces a reconnection.
You supply someone's meaning for them	Tempting, especially when someone struggles. But a borrowed reason doesn't hold — it lasts about a day. Ask another question instead and let them find it.
It drifts into a morale pep talk	The moment it becomes encouragement, it stops working. Stay on the trace: one task, one person, one thing that became possible.
Everyone leaves feeling good, nothing changes	That's meaning-theatre. The protecting change is the guard — nobody leaves without one, and it needs to be concrete enough to still be true next month.
Someone genuinely can't find a person	Trace one step further: who receives what they hand over, and who does *that* person help? Almost every task reaches a human within two steps.

Before you close the session, check:

- ✓ Every trace ends at a person with a name — no categories survived
- ✓ Each reason is in that person's own words, not yours
- ✓ You did your own trace alongside the team
- ✓ Everyone has one protecting change, concrete and dated
- ✓ You didn't announce the recognition — you let the room reach it

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6 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS STICK?

Take it back to work

THE HABIT

Once a month, ask the team one question: “who was better off because of something we did this month — and how do we know?” If nobody can name a person, the connection has started to fade again. That’s the early signal, long before the flatness returns.

Check the protecting changes at the next month’s session. The ones that held are the ones that were concrete; the ones that quietly lapsed were probably intentions rather than changes — make those more specific rather than abandoning them.

Appendix a worked run · where this sits

7 · A WORKED RUN

One trace, start to finish

The situation: a platform team that has been flat for months. They’ve had two workload conversations and a reshuffle. Nothing changed. The work is steady; nobody cares about it.

Stage	What happened in the room
The check	“Is this too much work?” A pause, then: “…no. It’s not more than last year. It just doesn’t seem to matter.”
The task	An engineer writes: *fixed the dashboard loading bug*. Ordinary, recent, unglamorous.
The category	First answer: “it helps users.” The facilitator asks: “who, specifically?” A long pause.
The person	“…Anita, in Customer Support. She’s the one who calls me about it.”
What it made possible	“She can resolve a client’s issue in two minutes now, instead of putting them on hold while the page hangs. She used to apologise to them for us.”
The protecting change	Anita comes to the team’s demo once a month. Booked before anyone left the room.

The lesson, not stated but felt: nothing about the work changed during the session. The dashboard fix had always helped Anita — the engineer had simply never seen it. Someone said, near the end, that the reshuffle had been solving a problem they didn’t have.

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8 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

Three different things can make a team look flat. They need different tools:

Tool	What it's for
Meaning Reset	**Nothing dramatic happened**, but the work stopped feeling worthwhile. Rebuild the connection between the daily work and who it helps. (This tool.)
Momentum Rebuild	**Something dramatic happened** — a failed launch, a lost deal — and the team stopped believing it could recover.
Capacity tools	**There is genuinely too much work.** A real overload problem, fixed by changing the work — not by finding meaning in it.

The line worth holding: meaning is not workload, and it is not reward. Recognition adds motivation from outside — useful, but different. This tool restores the reason from the inside, which is why each person has to find their own.

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