

What does a Staff
Engineer do?



Ambiguity

I HAVE NO
IDEA WHAT
I'M DOING



Relatively new



GOING STAFF

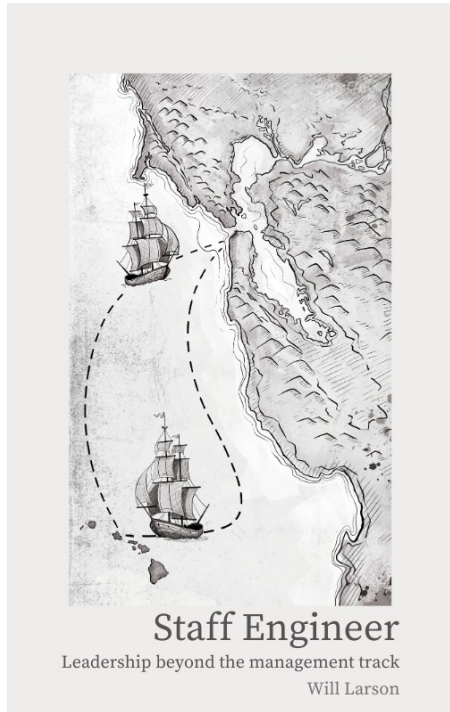
A “new” path

Tobi(as) Pfeiffer

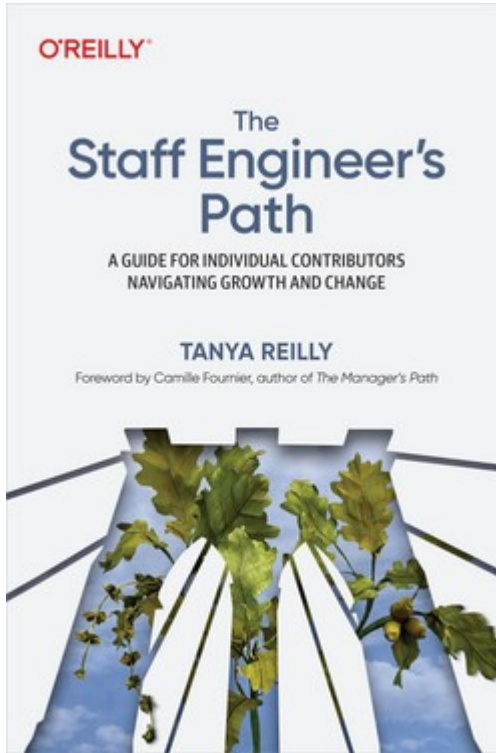
[@PragTob](#)

[pragtob.info](#)

Senior Staff Engineer @ Unemployed



+



+



*So, what does a
Staff Engineer
do?*

TECHNICAL LEADERSHIP

**INDIVIDUAL
CONTRIBUTOR**

disservice

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR



sarajo

@SaraJChipps



What is the difference between a Staff level engineer and a Manager?

-
-
-
-
-
-

One of them thinks they code for a living.

9:02 PM · Sep 3, 2021

*“If you want to
stay coding...”*

*“If you want to
stay ~~coding~~...”*

*“If you want to
stay technical...”*

“This doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll write a lot of code. At this level, **your goal is to solve problems efficiently**, and **programming will often not be the best use of your time**. (...) let others handle the programming. Staff engineers often take on **ambiguous, messy, difficult problems** and do just enough work on them to **make them manageable by someone else**.”

Tanya Reilly – The Staff Engineer’s Path

*“What matters is that the **problems get solved,**
not how.”*

Tanya Reilly – The Staff Engineer’s Path

So, *what* does a
Staff Engineer
do?

IT DEPENDS

Your Company

IT DEPENDS

Your Company

Your Answer

IT DEPENDS

Archetypes

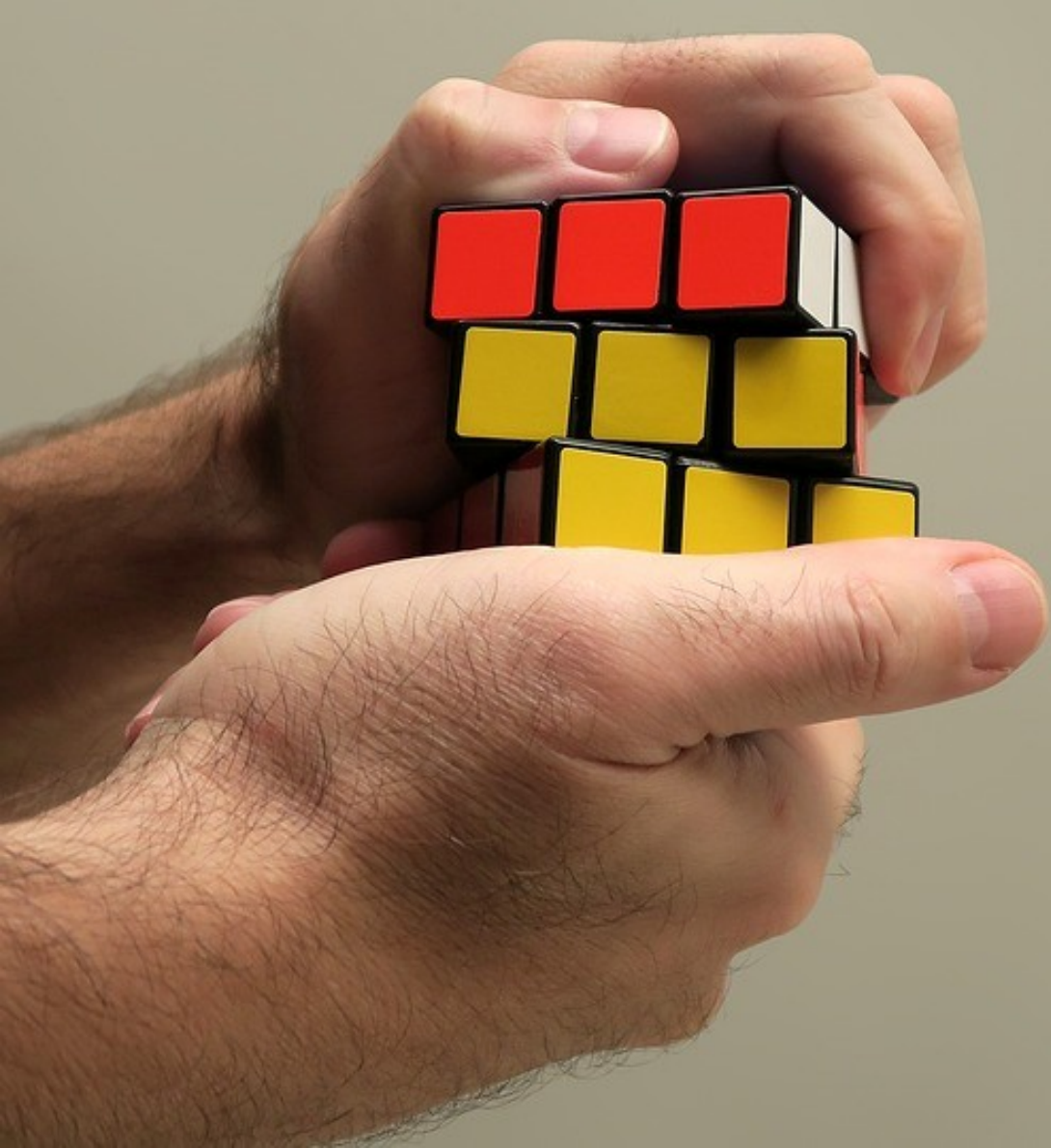


Tech Lead



Architect





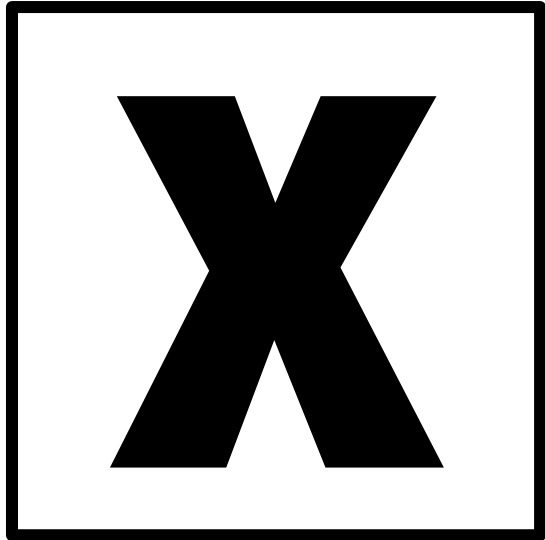
Solver

Right Hand



Senior 3





All of the
above

VP



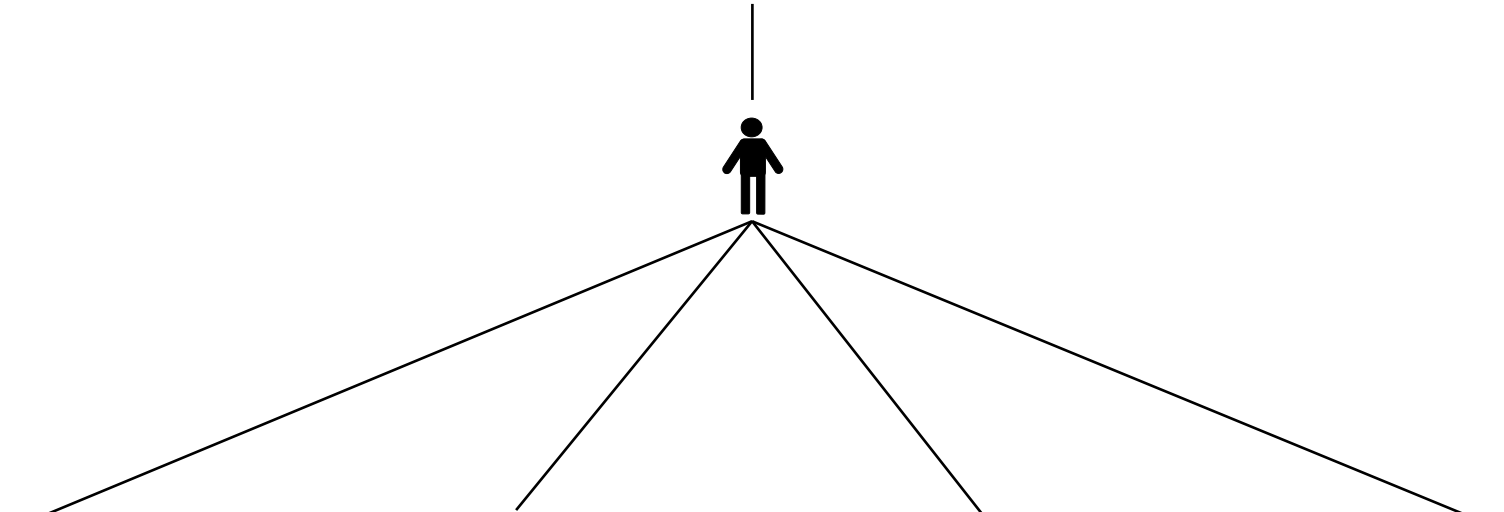
ENGINEERING
MANAGER



TEAM LEAD



DEVELOPERS



SLIDES:

Being



Tanya Reilly
@whereistanya

Being Glue

You know that thing where everyone on a software engineering team turns up and just writes code for eight hours a day and then later the project is successful? No you don't. Projects don't work like that!

Of course coding is an important skill in a software engineering team. But there are a ton of **other skills** that we need to bring to work every day. Skills that can mean the difference between a project that succeeds and one that fails.



What skills do you need on your team?

Like noticing when other people in the team are blocked and helping them out. Or reviewing design documents and noticing what's being handwaved or what's inconsistent. Or onboarding the new people and making them productive faster. Or improving processes to make customers happy.



Convince People

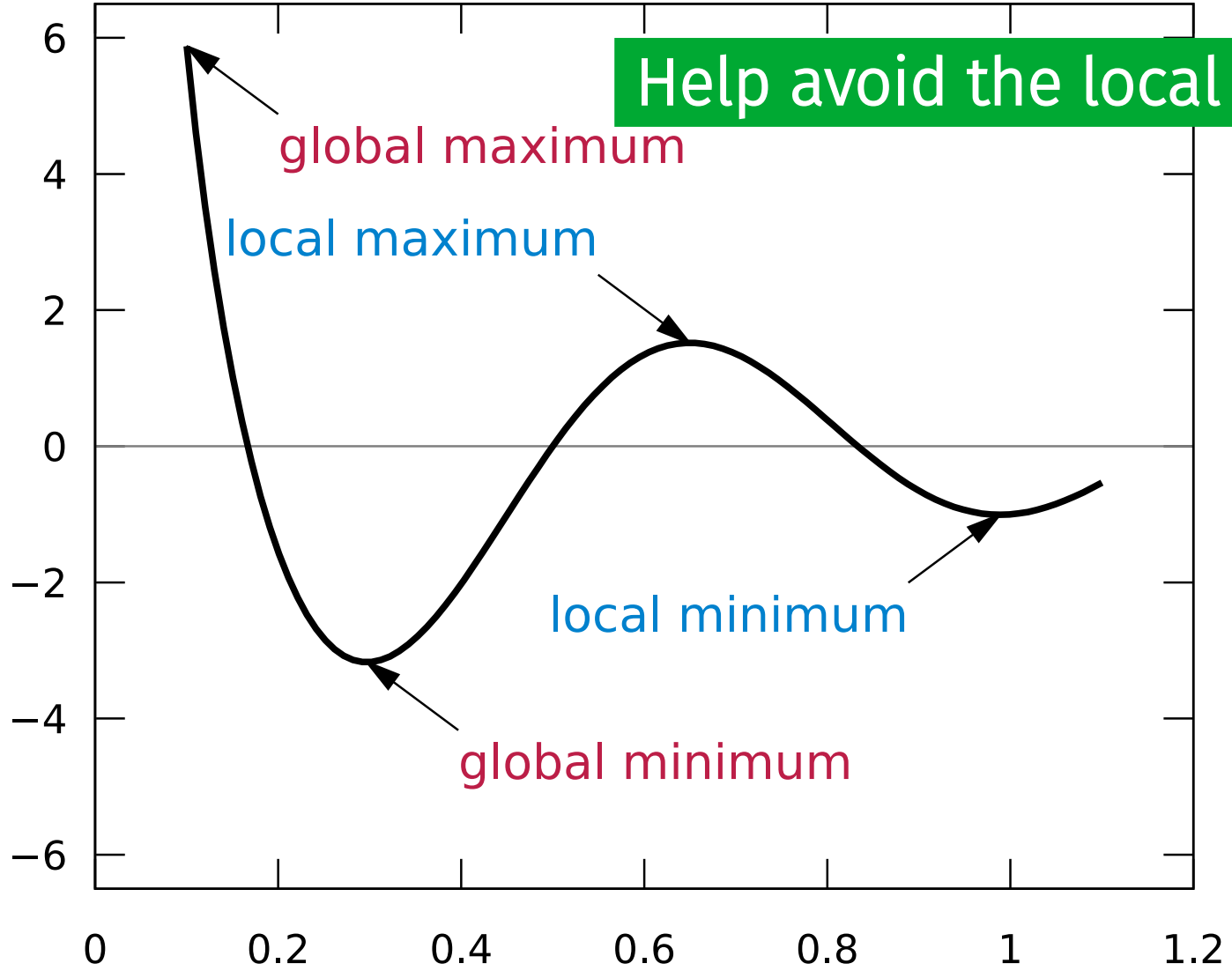
Challenging Comms

A group of people are gathered around a table in a workshop or meeting. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a white shirt and a red scarf, is focused on drawing on a large sheet of paper with a yellow marker. The table is cluttered with various items: a green mug, a container of markers, a pair of scissors, and some colorful fabric strips. Other people are visible in the background, some sitting on a ledge, engaged in conversation or looking at their phones. The overall atmosphere is collaborative and creative.

Make a map



Help avoid the local maximum



global maximum

local maximum

local minimum

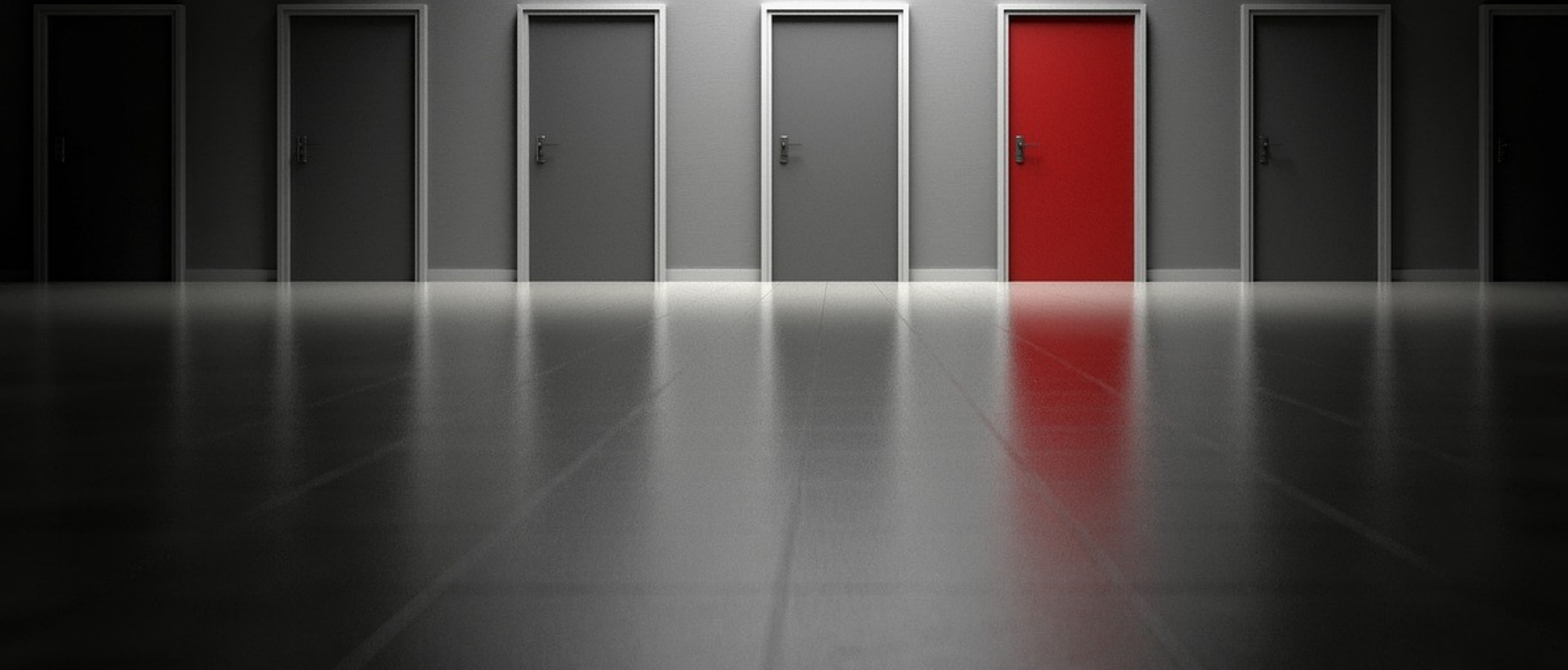
global minimum

A lion with a thick, golden-brown mane is the central focus, wearing an ornate golden crown with a cross on top. The lion is lying on a large, weathered log. The background is a dark, atmospheric savanna scene with a body of water reflecting the sky and silhouettes of trees. The lighting is dramatic, with a bright light source behind the lion, creating a halo effect.

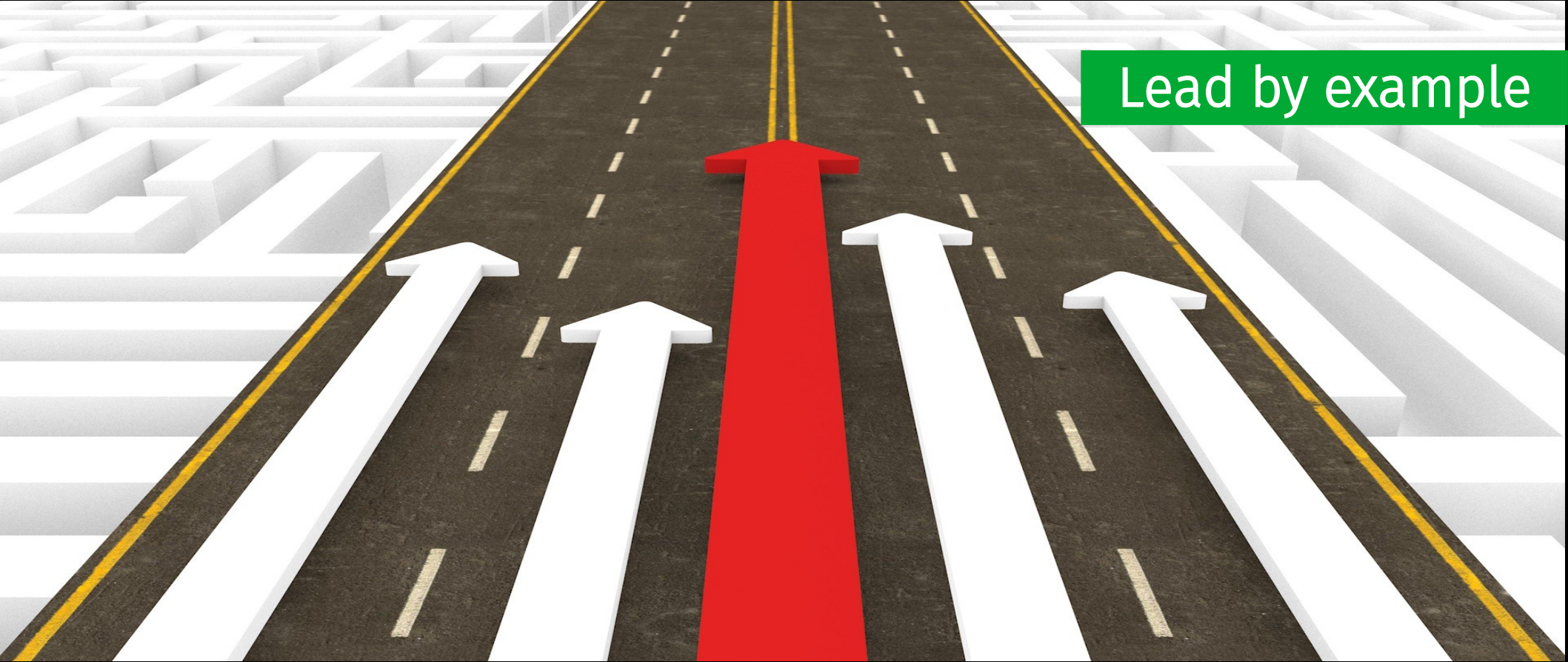
Context is King

Context

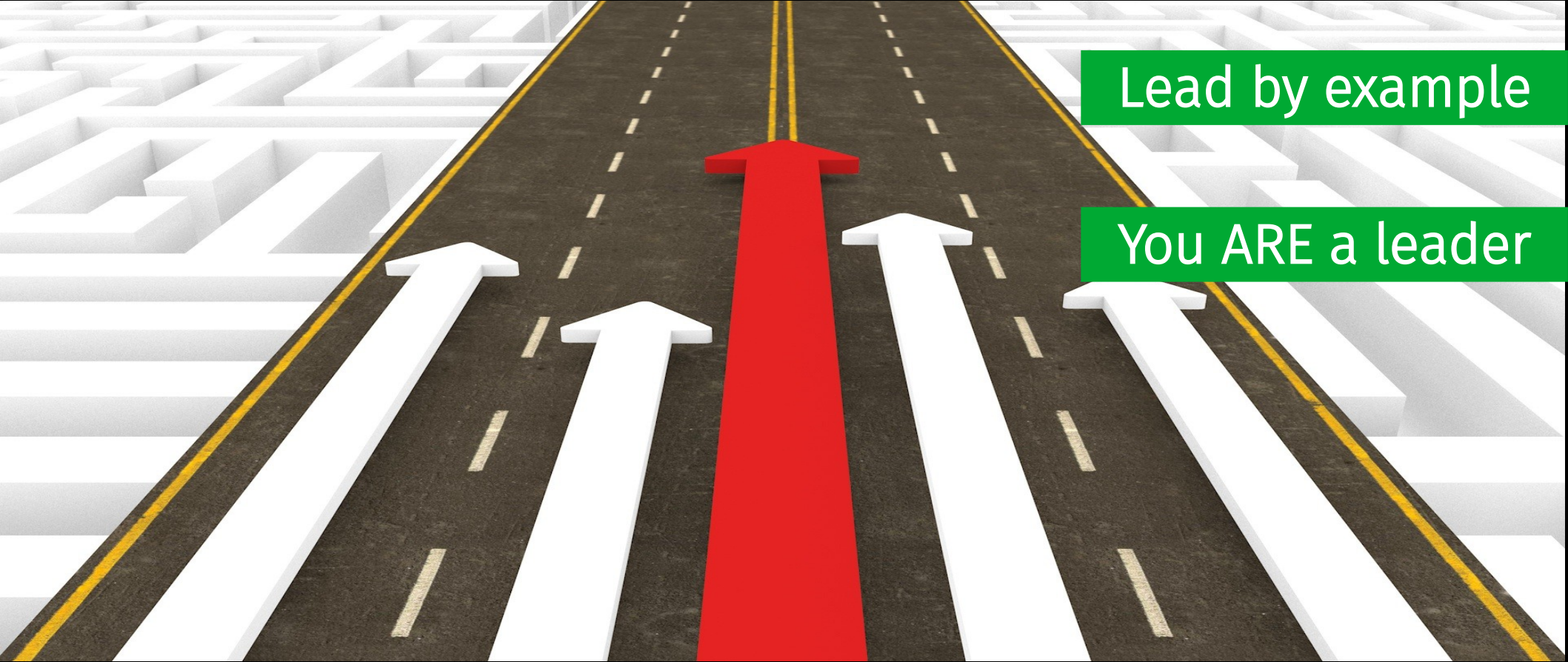
80/20 decisions



Lead & influence,
but without direct
power

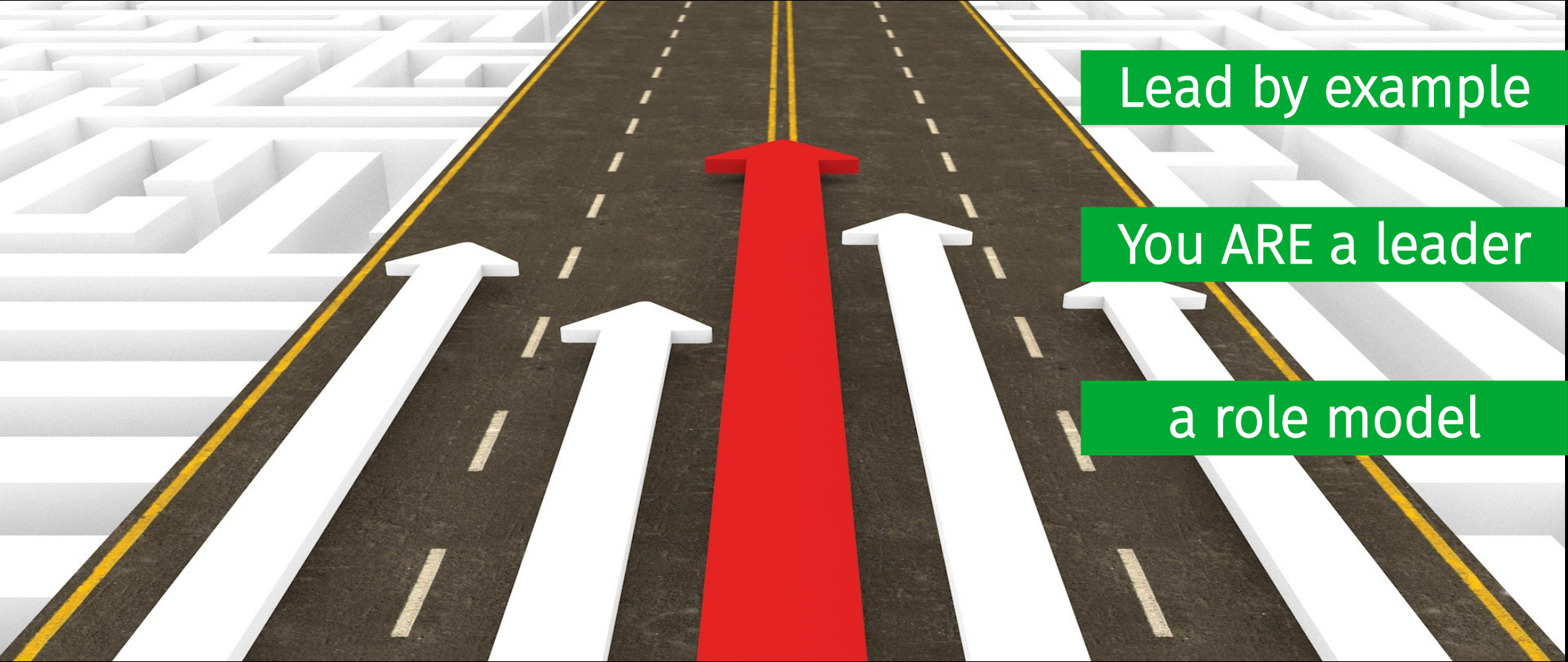


Lead by example



Lead by example

You ARE a leader



Lead by example

You ARE a leader

a role model

Introduction to a domain





Introduction to a domain

Introduce Background Job System



Introduction to a domain

Introduce Background Job System

#flaky-tests



Introduction to a domain

Introduce Background Job System

#flaky-tests

Elixir Training Camp

A seat at the table





GOING STAFF?

IT DEPENDS

Getting a Staff
promotion is **hard**

VP



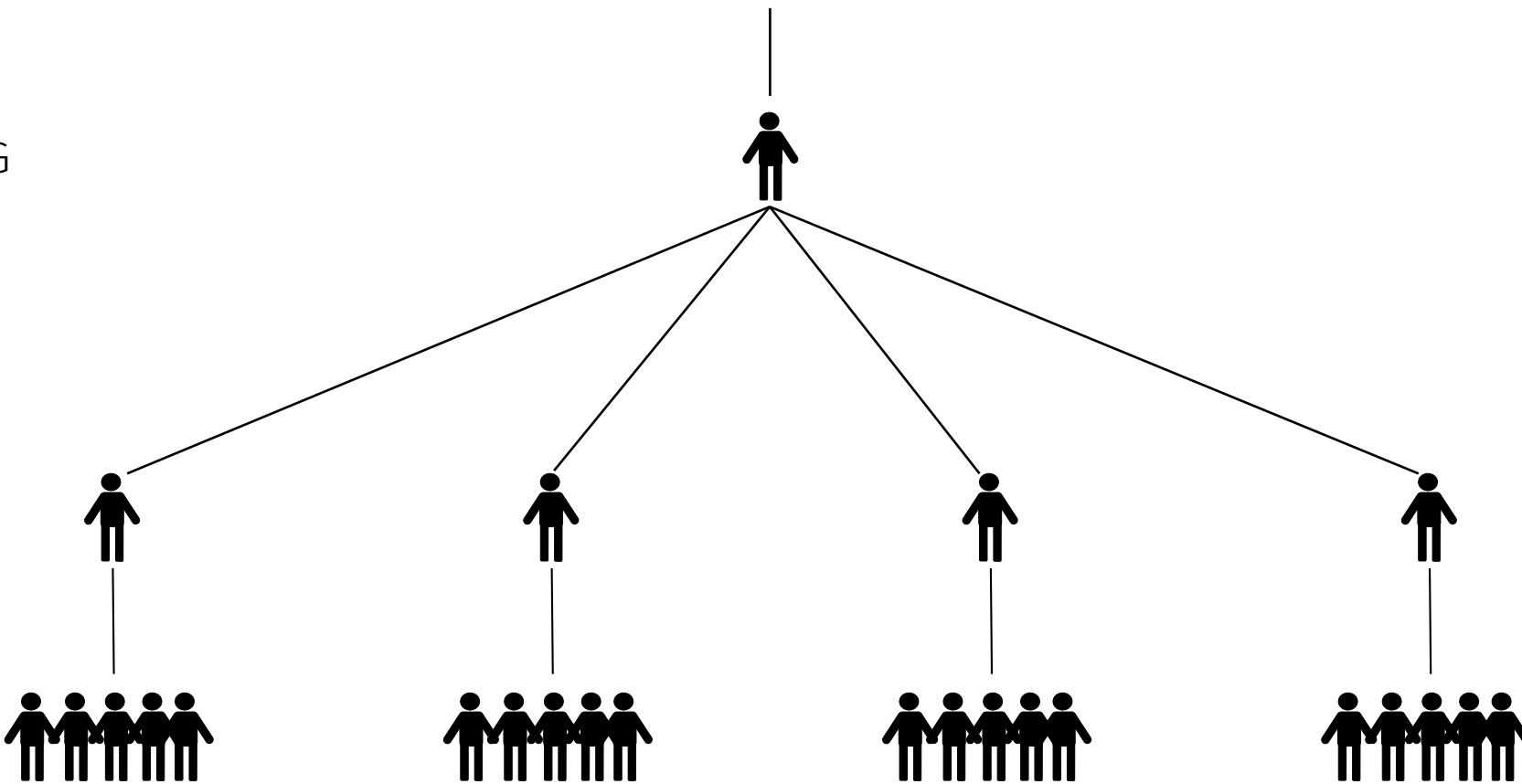
ENGINEERING
MANAGER



TEAM LEAD



DEVELOPERS



New Team

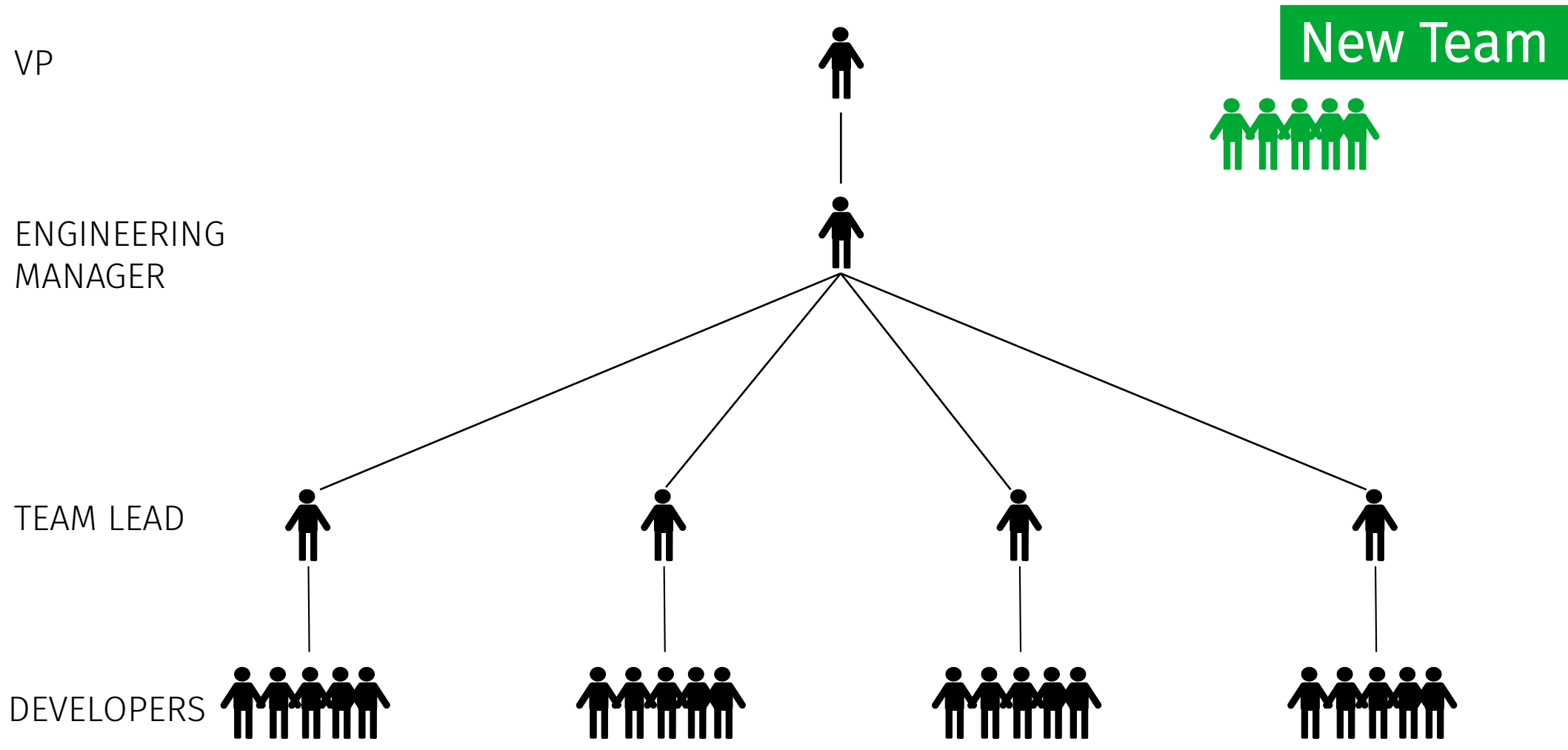


VP

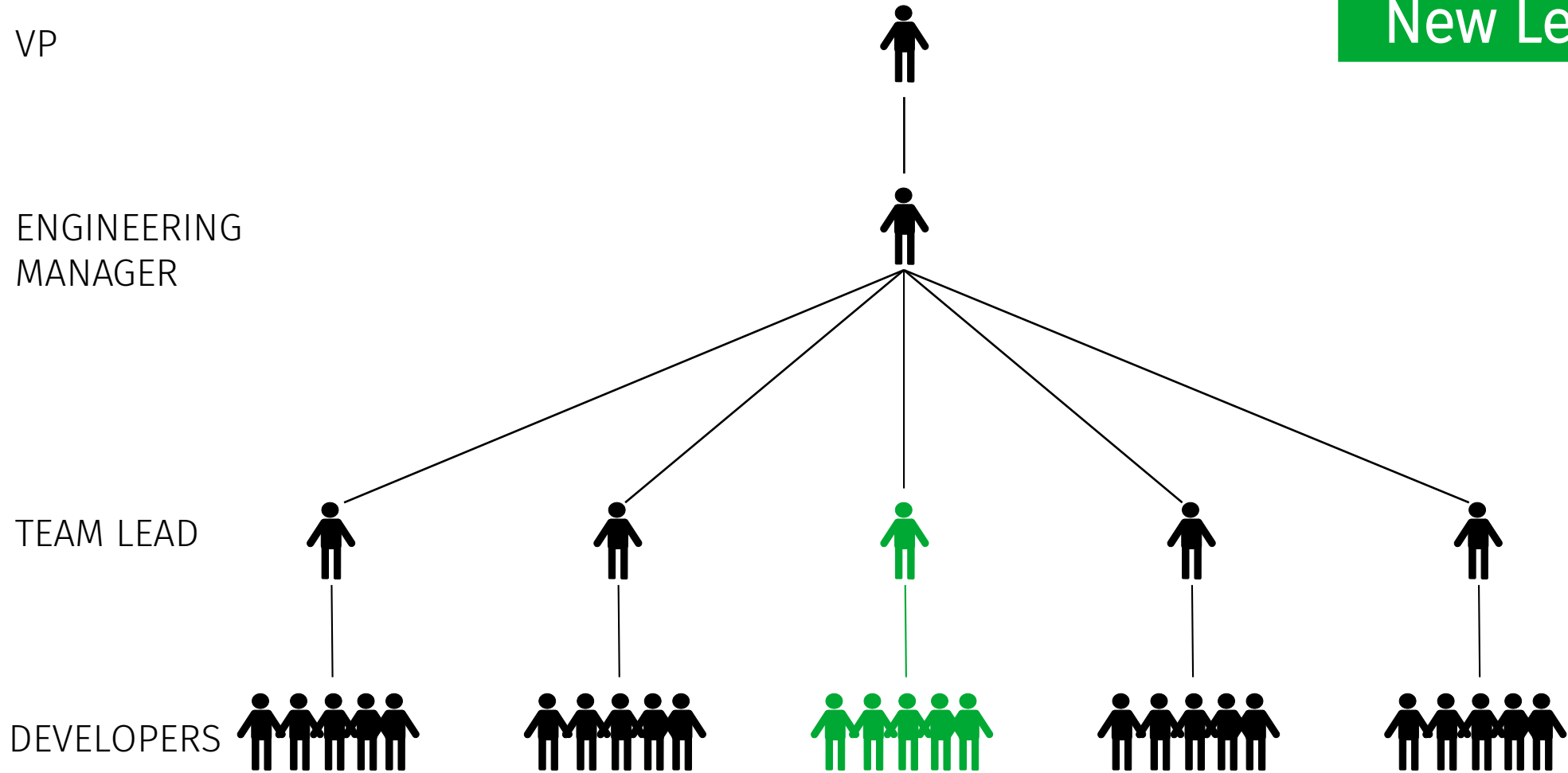
ENGINEERING
MANAGER

TEAM LEAD

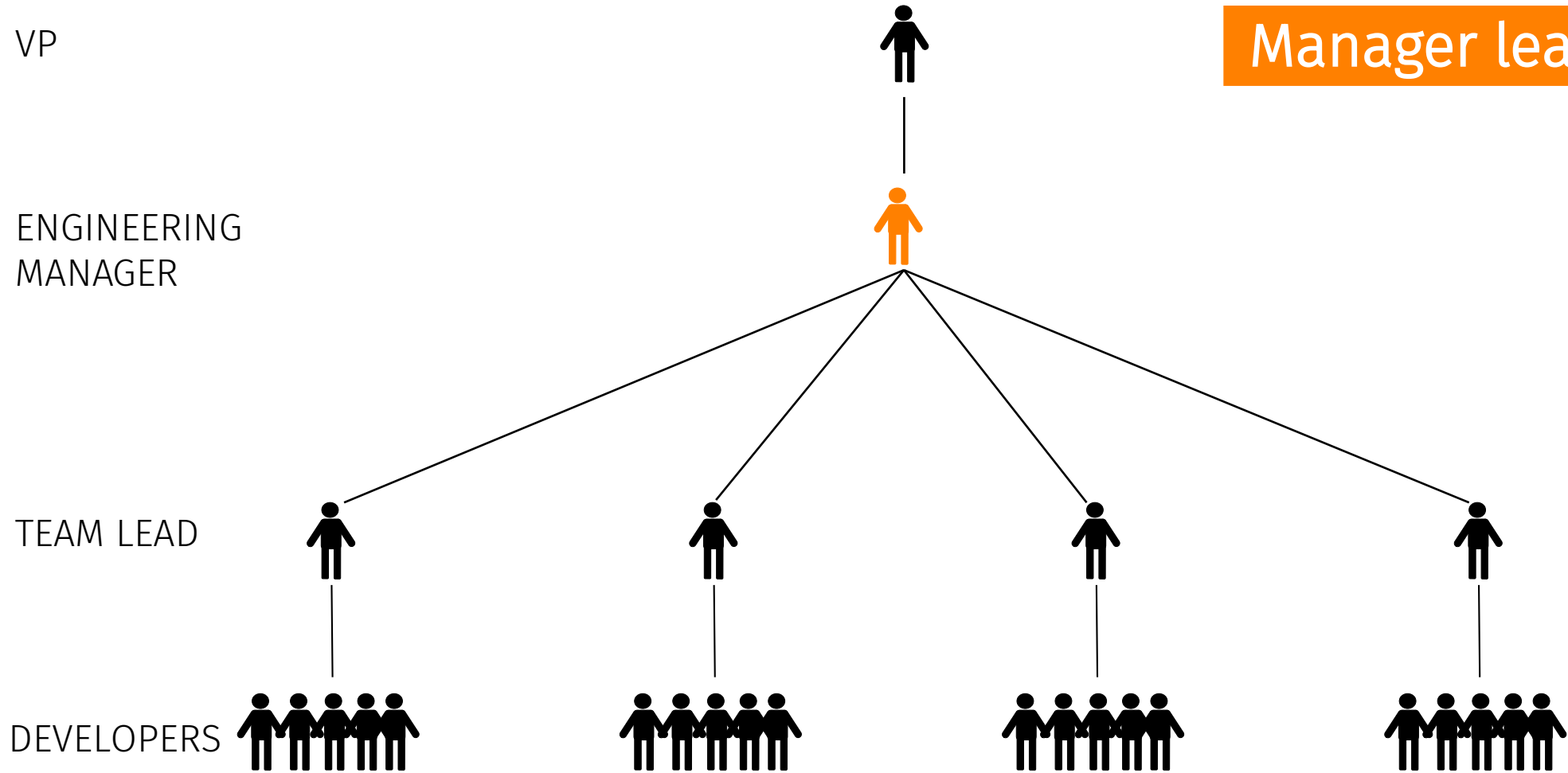
DEVELOPERS



New Lead



Manager leaves



VP

ENGINEERING
MANAGER

TEAM LEAD

DEVELOPERS

VP



Manager leaves

ENGINEERING
MANAGER



TEAM LEAD



DEVELOPERS



VP



Manager leaves

ENGINEERING
MANAGER



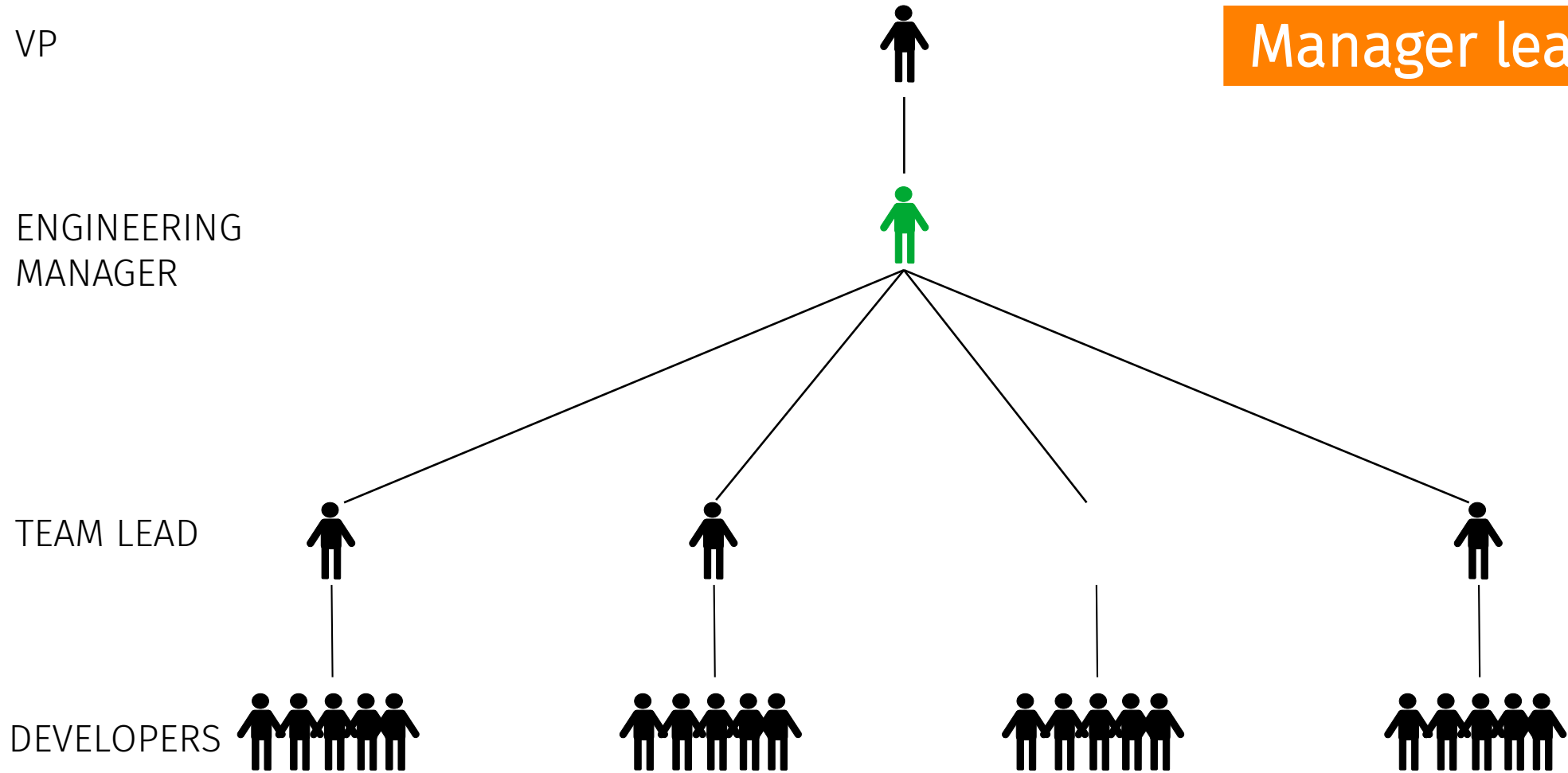
TEAM LEAD



DEVELOPERS



Manager leaves



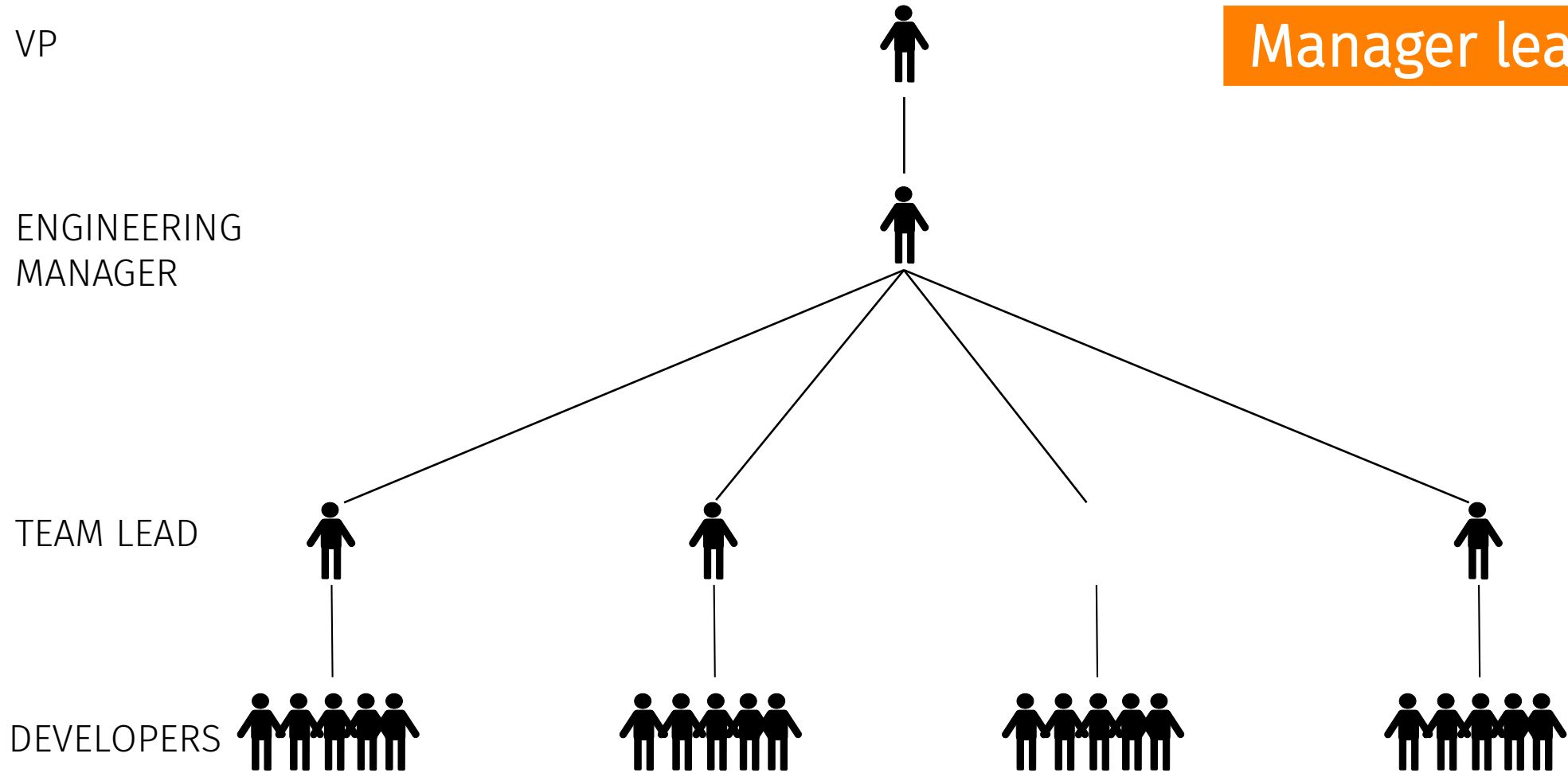
VP

ENGINEERING
MANAGER

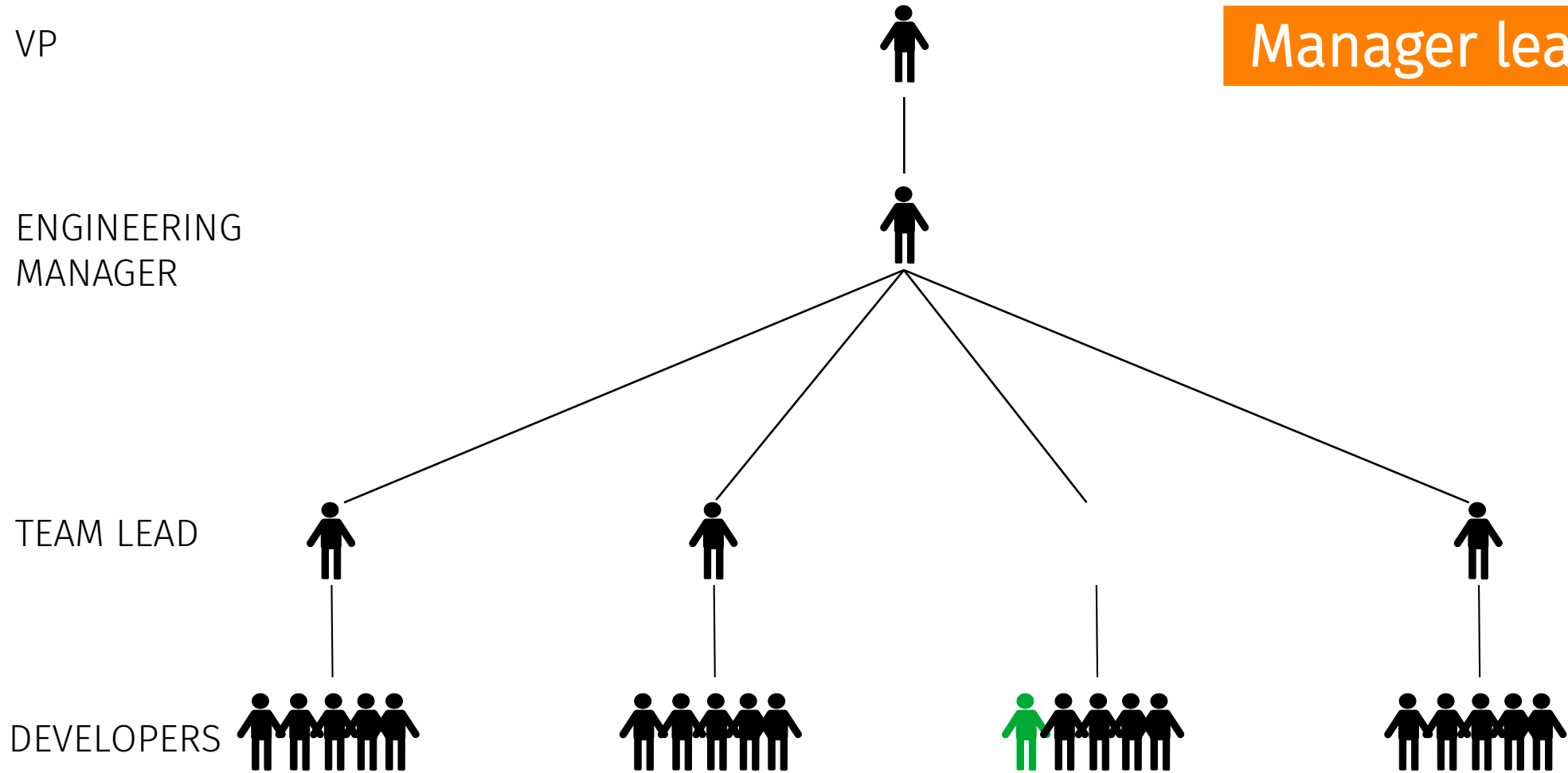
TEAM LEAD

DEVELOPERS

Manager leaves



Manager leaves



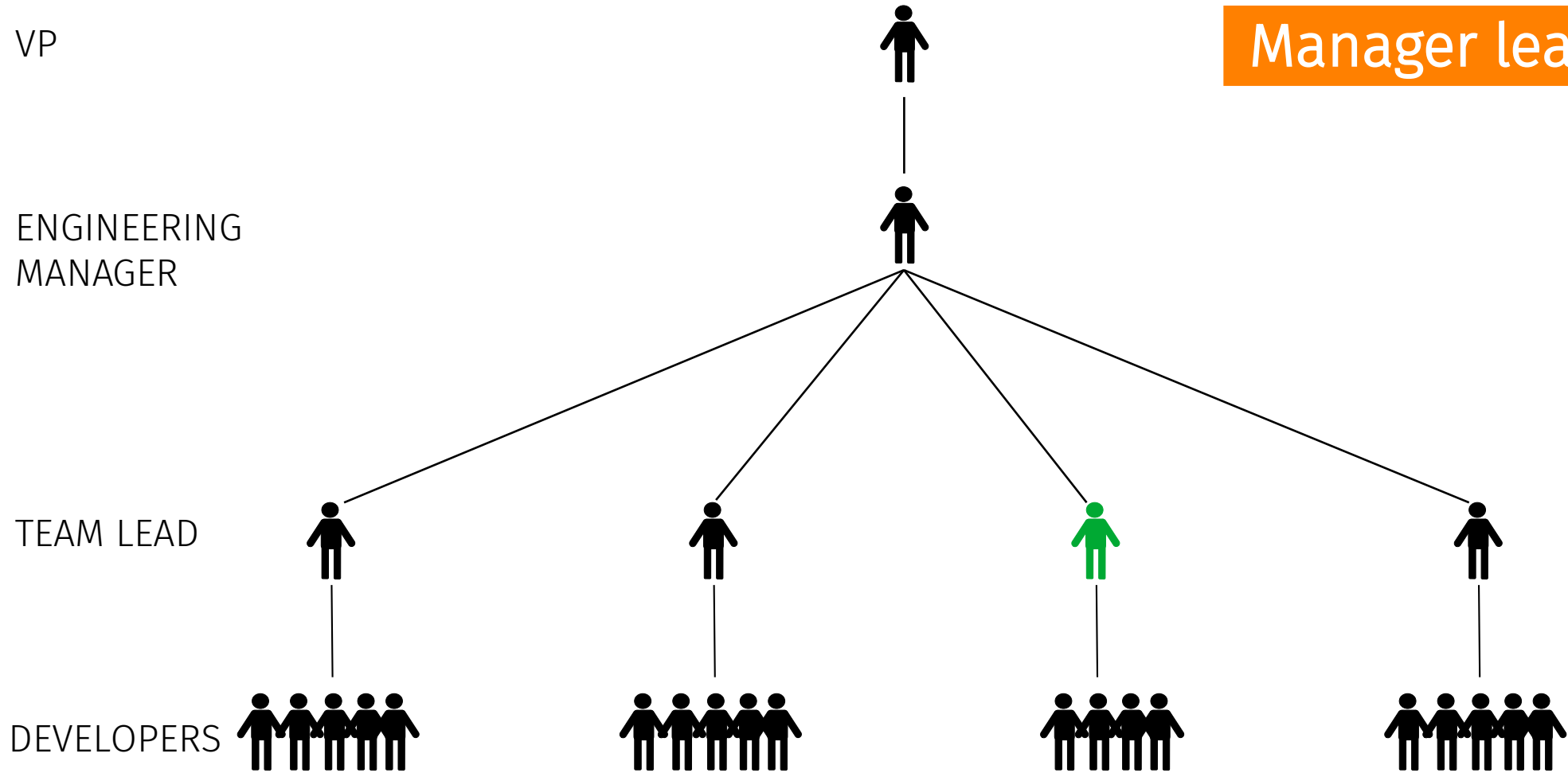
VP

ENGINEERING
MANAGER

TEAM LEAD

DEVELOPERS

Manager leaves



#managers = f(employees)

```
manager_promo_need =  
f(attrition + new hires)
```

#staffs = f(???)

staff_promo_need = f(???)

Expected to already do the work

Getting a Staff
promotion is **hard**

Expected to already do the work

“Staff” project

Getting a Staff
promotion is **hard**

Expected to already do the work

“Staff” project

Getting a Staff

Management “detour”

promotion is **hard**

“We are happy to
announce Rafael’s
promotion to
Principal”





Rafael França 🇧🇷

@rafaelfranca



Congrats!

I also hated titles, but when the company introduced that I always felt I was in the wrong level. I spent 3 years trying to convince people I should be already a Principal, not promoted to. The day I finally got what I deserved was a really great feeling. Enjoy!

2:12 AM · Feb 17, 2022





CHALLENGES

Higher ups are very busy



A photograph showing the silhouettes of three people climbing a rocky mountain peak. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, hazy glow behind the figures. The sky is filled with soft, horizontal clouds. The overall scene is one of teamwork and overcoming challenges.

Higher ups are very busy

Hard to get people on projects

A silhouette of three people climbing a mountain peak at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a golden glow. The people are in various stages of ascent, with one person at the top and two others below, reaching up. The sky is filled with soft, horizontal clouds.

Higher ups are very busy

Hard to get people on projects

Prioritization is hard

The background image shows the silhouettes of three people climbing a steep, rocky mountain. They are positioned in a line, with the person at the top reaching down to assist the person below. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow that illuminates the scene from behind. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds, and the overall atmosphere is one of challenge and teamwork.

Higher ups are very busy

Hard to get people on projects

Prioritization is hard

Alignment is harder

Executive Summaries



The background of the slide features a dramatic sunset scene. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow that filters through the clouds. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of three individuals are shown in the process of climbing a large, craggy rock formation. One person is at the top of the rock, another is in the middle, and a third is at the bottom, reaching up to assist. The overall mood is one of teamwork and overcoming challenges.

Executive Summaries

Create dedicated spaces

The background of the slide features a dramatic sunset scene. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow that illuminates the sky with soft, wispy clouds. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of three individuals are seen as they ascend a steep, rocky mountain slope. They are positioned in a line, with each person reaching out to assist the one above them, symbolizing teamwork and overcoming challenges. The overall mood is one of determination and achievement.

Executive Summaries

Create dedicated spaces

Focus on shipping



My job here is done



But you didn't do anything



GOING STAFF

A “new” path

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Senior Staff Engineer @ Unemployed

GOING STAFF

A “new” path

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LOOKING FOR A JOB

THANKS FOR LISTENING



@PragTob