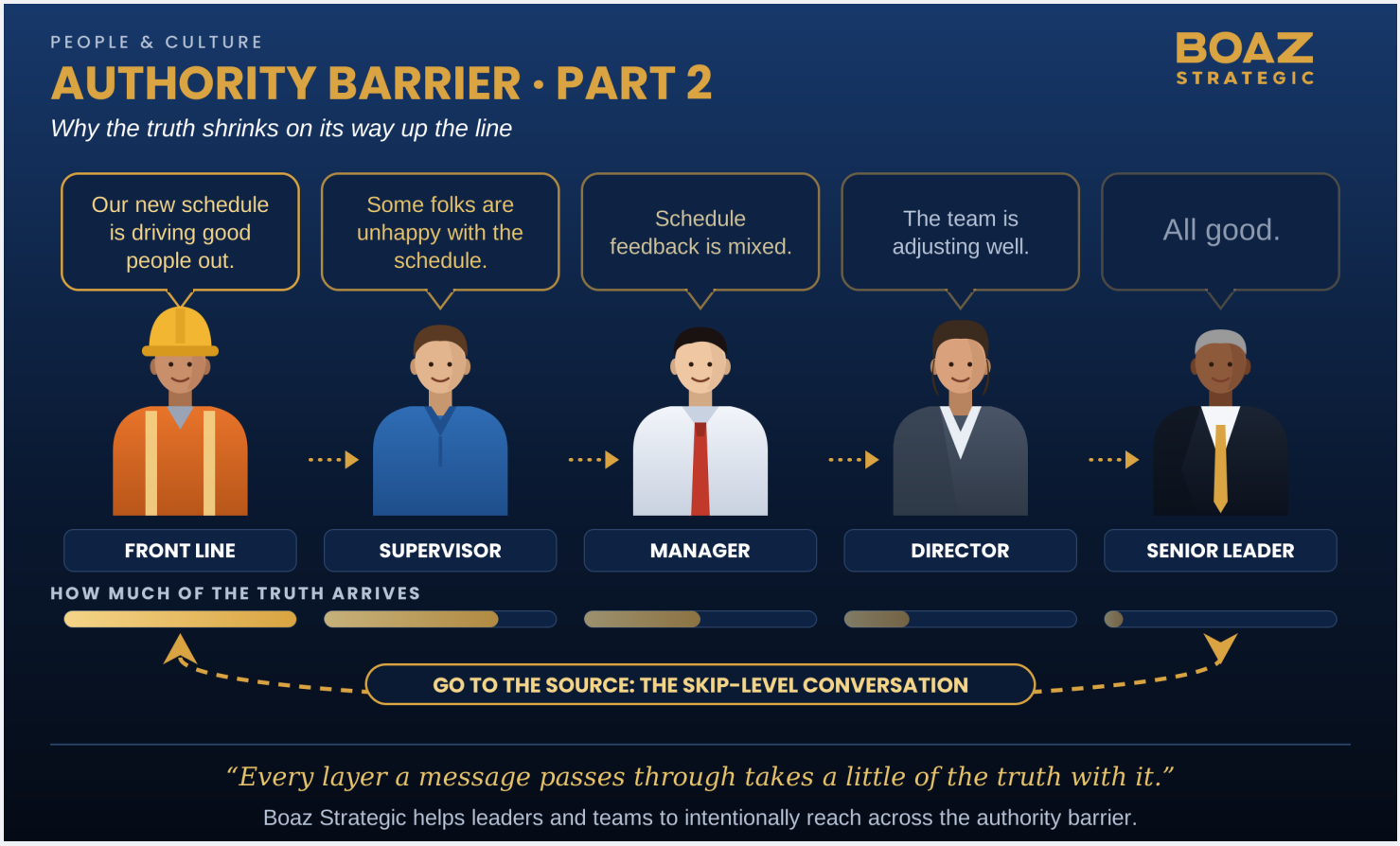



# Truth gets edited *on the way up.*

> *The truth rarely reaches the top unedited.*

In one of our first Leadership Insights, we introduced the "Authority Barrier" insight: where rank quietly distorts honest communication. Fear keeps people quiet: in one study, 34 of 40 professionals had felt unable to speak up.

**The barrier multiplies.**

The further you go below a leader, the lower the barrier. A front-line employee often speaks plainly to a senior leader who doesn't control their pay. The trouble is the route.

Remember telephone? Organizations play it in reverse. At each layer, someone softens or reframes what they heard, often with good intentions. "This schedule is driving good people out" unintentionally, slowly progresses to the top as "all good."

Research agrees. O'Reilly and Roberts found role-playing managers passed up about 72 percent of important information, and that was one step. Yoshida's "iceberg of ignorance" claimed top managers knew 4 percent of front-line problems. His figures are hard to verify but point to a valid concern.

**Go to the source.**

Leaders who seek out people below them build rapport and gain clarity. A skip-level conversation removes the middle: a senior leader meets people levels down, without their manager in the room. SHRM notes a manager's presence can hinder honest feedback. Be open about it: tell managers why you are doing it. The goal is not to bypass them but to hear what the filters miss, and to learn what your people need from you.

**Try the Skip-Level Exercise.**

This month, engage one or two people three levels below you in conversation. Ask: What should we stop doing? What gets in your way? Then consider their feedback and act on it where needed.

**Boaz Strategic helps leaders and teams to reach across the authority barrier.**



Milliken et al., 2003; O'Reilly & Roberts, 1974; Yoshida, 1989; SHRM



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