

What is happening to your team's work

A guide for team leaders whose capable teams are
losing ground

Your team is capable. That's not the problem.

The people doing the work are experienced and committed. They have delivered under pressure before. The problem is not the team.

Work loses ground in one of three ways.

From the start. A project gets underway without a shared, concrete picture of what it should produce. Decisions made in one meeting come back in the next, because no one recorded the reasoning behind them. Progress is hard to point to, because no one said what progress would look like. The team stays busy, but the work does not accumulate. Each cycle starts close to where the last one did.

In motion. The start is clean enough. The outcome is named, and the first decisions hold. But somewhere between kickoff and close, the work loses its shape. Scope grows without anyone deciding to absorb it. The timeline stays fixed while the commitment expands past what the team can finish predictably.

When conditions change. The fundamentals are solid, and the work still loses coherence when something shifts. Someone leaves or joins, and the incoming contributor rebuilds what the team already established. A priority change restarts work that was nearly done. A hard cycle ends, and its learning does not survive into the next.

These are three distinct failure modes. None of them needs a struggling team. They show up precisely because capable people keep compensating for them: a leader re-clarifies direction, a contributor re-sends old context, a team goes back over ground it already covered. The work moves, but not as far or as fast as the effort deserves.

The condition underneath all three is the same. Decisions and outcomes live in people's heads. Scope and commitment live in informal agreements. Context and learning live with the individuals who accumulated them. When those people move, shift attention, or leave, the work loses what they were carrying.

The work depends on the people carrying it rather than on a system holding it.

Why the standard responses do not resolve it

The standard responses to these conditions address the wrong layer.

More status meetings add activity reporting, without changing whether decisions hold or progress accumulates.

- More project tools add places to record information, without changing whether it gets recorded.
- Tighter timelines add pressure, without adding the structure that would make the timeline manageable.
- More documentation produces artifacts no one retrieves, because they were never built to be retrieved.
- More oversight asks more of the leader, without changing what the work does on its own.

Each treats a visible symptom (lateness, drift, unclear status, effort beyond the commitment) without touching what produces it. The work still depends on the people carrying it. Until the system holds what the work produces, the symptoms return.

What the work requires

Each failure mode has a fix, and they build in order.

Memory: for work losing ground from the start. Decisions get recorded with their reasoning and the conditions under which they should be revisited, so they stay settled. Updates report what changed against the expected outcome, so a leader can see where the work actually stands. Work starts with a named outcome, advances through recorded decisions, and reaches a deliberate close: outcomes preserved, active pull on the team ended, residual responsibility released. These changes are observable. A team that installs them can point to the moment the work behaved differently.

Motor: for work that starts well and stalls in motion. Every initiative starts cleanly, with a named outcome, explicit ownership, and clear scope authority. Scope changes through explicit trade-offs, so discovered effort produces a decision rather than silent absorption. Work closes deliberately, releasing the team instead of following people into their next assignment.

Momentum: for work that loses coherence when conditions change. Momentum is what lets the work hold its ground through disruption: when people rotate or priorities shift, the work keeps its shape instead of losing it. Context survives personnel transitions on purpose, so incoming contributors extend the work rather than rebuild it. Scope adjusts explicitly when reality changes, so the team records what shifted instead of absorbing it or restarting. Learning is captured at the end of each cycle, so the next one starts from a higher floor.

Where to start

Right now, one program is running: Give Your Work a Memory. The Motor and Momentum programs are in development. Where you begin depends on your result.

If your result is Memory. This is the program built for you. Give Your Work a Memory installs the three disciplines above on one active initiative your team is running now. It runs across four sessions over four to six weeks. Between sessions, the team applies one habit to one piece of real work, and what surfaces becomes the material for the next conversation. By the end, the team has practiced these habits on work that matters, with a record of what that practice revealed: decisions that held, updates that needed no follow-up, and at least one piece of work that reached a deliberate close. The pilot is open now to a small number of founding teams, who get direct access and a reduced rate in exchange for candid feedback. **[Apply here.](#)**

If your result is Motor. Your memory fundamentals scored solid, so memory is not your team's primary problem. The Motor program, which handles initiation, scope, and deliberate closure as repeatable disciplines, is in development. When it opens, it begins with a refresher: a check that your memory foundation is holding on your live work before anything new is added, because a strong score is not the same as the records and habits running day to day. You can do that check now. It is the Give Your Work a Memory pilot, and it fits its depth to your team: light where your practice is already holding, closer work where the records are not. Doing it now is not a detour. It is the memory work Motor opens with, done early, on work you are running today. **[Apply here,](#)** or **[join the waitlist](#)** to hear when the Motor program opens.

If your result is Momentum. Your fundamentals scored solid across memory and motor, so the diagnostic did not flag either as your primary problem. The Momentum program, which handles context transfer, scope adjustment, and learning capture as repeatable disciplines, is in development. [**Join the waitlist**](#) to hear when it opens. If you want to confirm your foundation is holding on real work before then, the Give Your Work a Memory pilot does exactly that, and for a team scoring where yours did, the confirmation is quick. [**Apply here**](#).

Not sure where your team should start? [**Email me here**](#).