THE HUMAN MARGIN SERIES

Entering a strong team.

They've seen leaders arrive.
And seen them leave.

Where leaders rotate every few years, the strongest teams learn to carry on without them. The first challenge for a new leader is becoming relevant to people who are managing perfectly well already.

SWIPE →

ROTATION IS NORMAL

In most large organisations, leaders move every four to five years. In some structures, more often.

The leader changes.
The team stays.

WHAT ACCUMULATES

Each new leader brings a different style, different priorities, sometimes a different culture. The team absorbs every one of them.

WHO STAYS

Over time, rotation does quiet selection work.

People who can't hold their ground often leave with the leader who brought them.

WHO REMAINS

The people who stay are strong enough to carry the function themselves: deep expertise, high standards, and continuity that doesn't depend on whoever sits at the top.

POLITE, AND PREPARED

A new leader arriving in such a team is met with courtesy, and not much more.

They are polite.
And prepared for the new leader to add little.

WHAT THIS ISN'T

Not resistance. Not disrespect. A reasonable expectation, earned by watching leaders arrive with opinions on work the team already knew better.

WHAT THE TEAM IS READING

Strong teams rarely wait for a vision statement. They watch what the leader does when it matters.

The first test is rarely a strategy.
It is the first moment of pressure.

WHAT THEY NOTICE

Whether the leader stands up for them, and whether pressure reaches them as noise, or as clear priorities.

SMALL SIGNALS, CLOSELY READ

For a strong team, respect shows up in practical things.

Clarity on who is needed, and why.
No one held in the room just in case.

AND ONE MORE

Protection from everything becoming urgent, so their expertise goes where it counts.

PRESENT, AND DEMANDING

Strong teams want a leader who is there when a decision is needed.

Available for the decision.
Demanding about the substance.

WHY BOTH MATTER

Presence without demand: a box ticked. Demand without presence: more work, and no decision. Together: the decision rests on their expertise and comes in time to move them forward.

COURAGE, MADE SAFE

Early on, some decisions go against the wind.

A little revolutionary.
Safe at the same time.

WHAT MAKES IT SAFE

Data, information and communication behind the decision, strong enough to stand up to challenge later. For a strong team, this is when courage stops looking like risk.

WHERE THE GAP SITS

A team built on deep expertise is often excellent inside each function.

The strength sits inside the functions. The friction sits between them.

AND THE LONG VIEW

With every rotation, energy goes into adjusting to the new style. Little is left for looking five years ahead.

WHERE A LEADER ADDS VALUE

Such a team seldom needs a leader to know its content better.

It needs altitude,
and doors opened that it can't open alone.

WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE

Translating requirements into the language of other functions. Building the case for change. Holding a longer view of the function and its people.

THE TAKEAWAY

A strong team doesn't need to be led through its work. It needs to be led beyond it.

Teams like this aren't easy. They're strong, opinionated, and a privilege to lead. It may not be a perfect fit, but the opportunity is real: in the space between strong functions, and ahead of them.

IF THIS RESONATED

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