



March 20-24, 2023
San Francisco, CA

Effective Feedback for Game Writers, Narrative Designers, and Collaborators

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#GDC23



Lis Moberly

Avowed
Hogwarts Legacy
Cursed to Golf
We Went Back
Recovering academic

Alexa Ray Corriea

Middle-earth: Shadow of War
Bugsnax
Aztech: Forgotten Gods
Call of Duty: Vanguard
Call of Duty: Warzone Pacific



We're curious...

Goal of Talk

- Healthier teams
- Stronger feedback loops
- Growth mindset





What is Feedback?

- Method of iteration
- Meant to be helpful
- Grows craft
- Learn communication skills
- Makes the game better

Feedback...

CURRENTLY is coworkers trying
to find a vision of the game
that everyone loves

SHOULD be coworkers finding
a vision of the game
that everyone is proud of

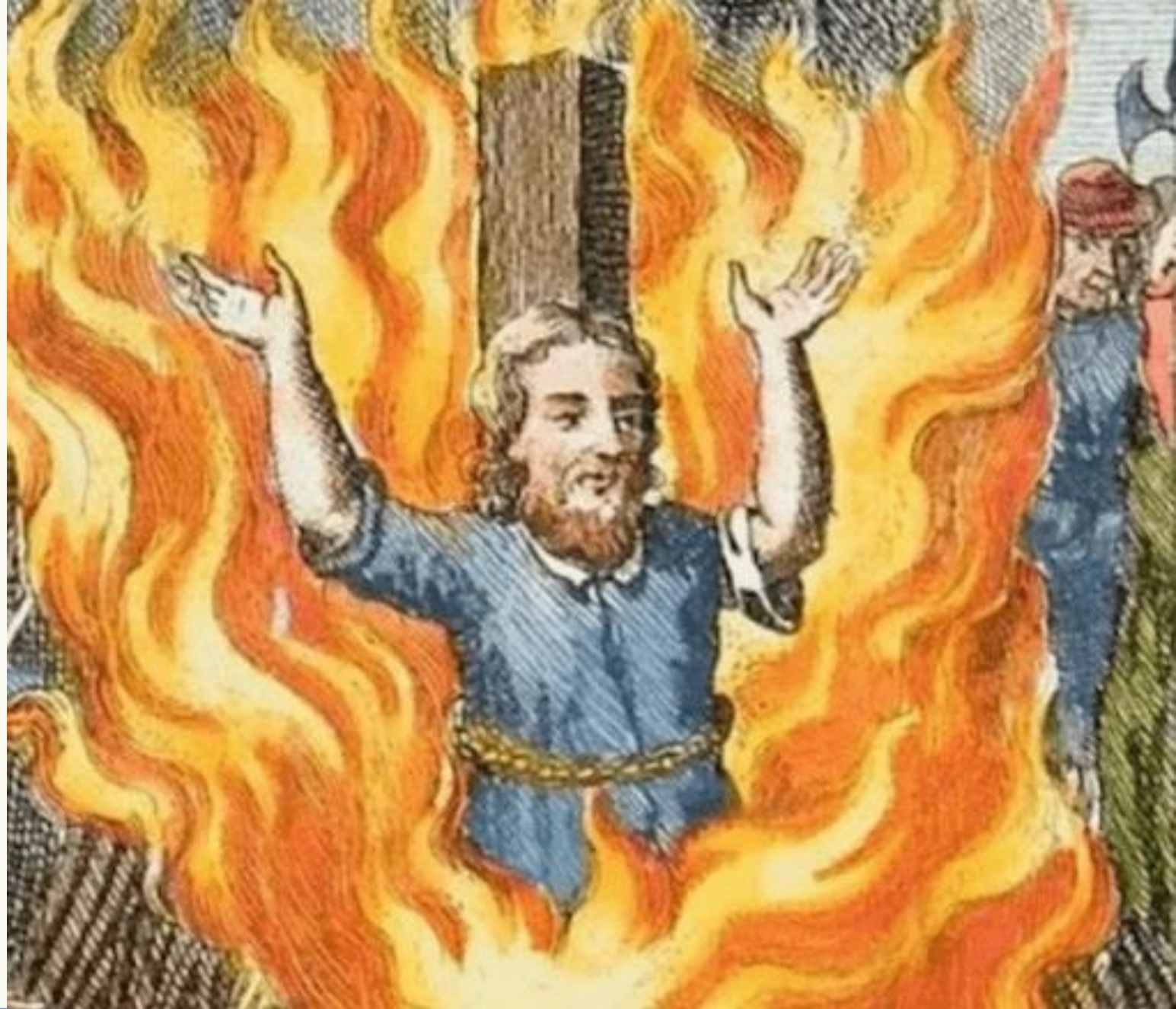


Feedback Breakdown

- Status
- Certainty
- Autonomy
- Relatedness
- Fairness

Burnout Factors

- Lack of control
- Insufficient rewards
- Breakdown of community
- Absence of fairness
- Value conflicts
- Work overload



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Staff... Warning Signs!

- Game's goals feel like a moving target
- Secrets and withheld information
- Backchannel shitposting
- Frequent mandates
- Leaders rewrite your work
- Resent your leader's choices
- Avoid conversations with leadership
- Leadership has no meaningful accountability

Leaders... Warning Signs!

- Don't know the staff member's goal
- Don't know feedback they seek
- Resorting to mandates
- Resorting to rewrites
- You resist talking to staff members
- Think your staff have egos

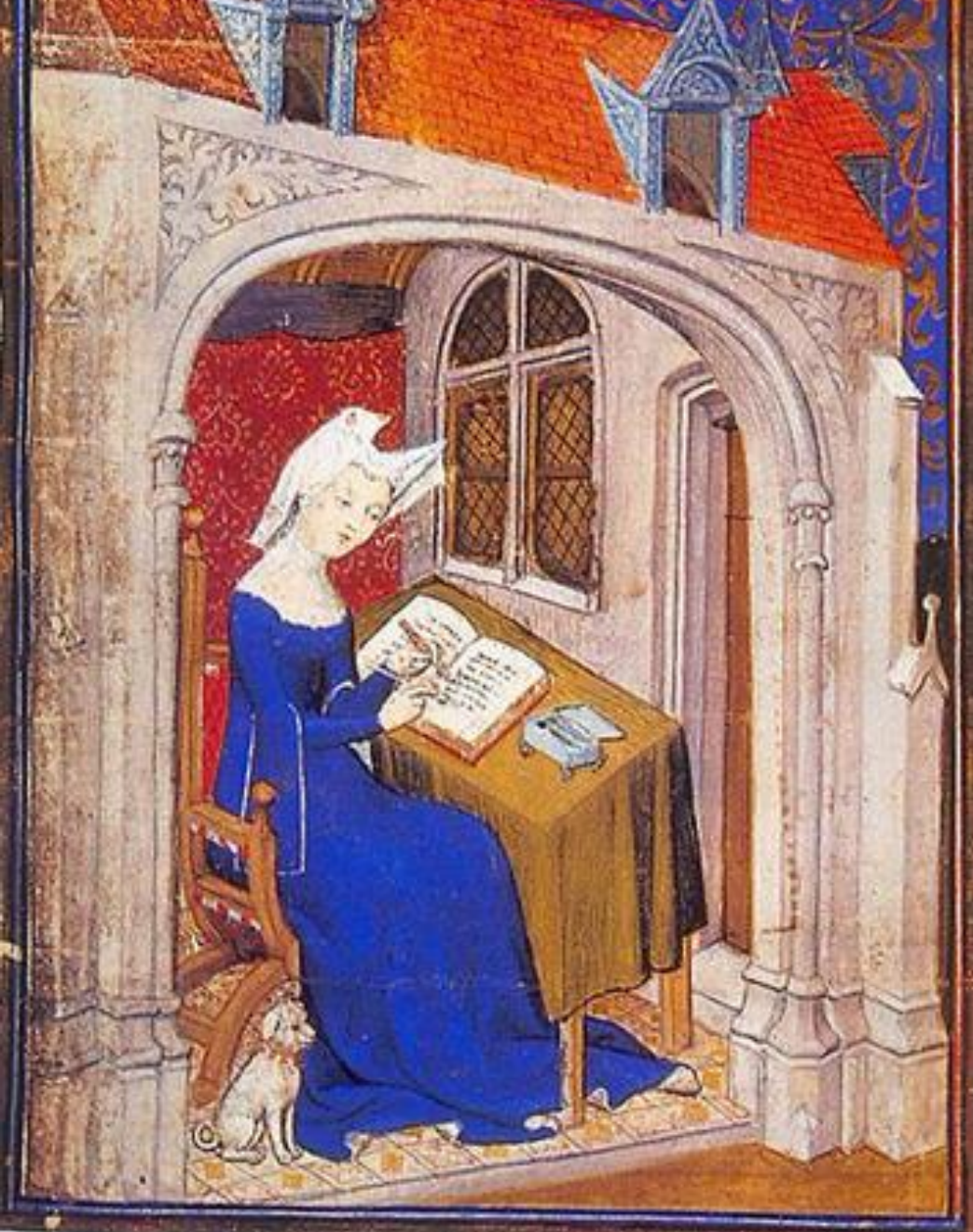




Result

You start villainizing one another

So, we asked for your thoughts...

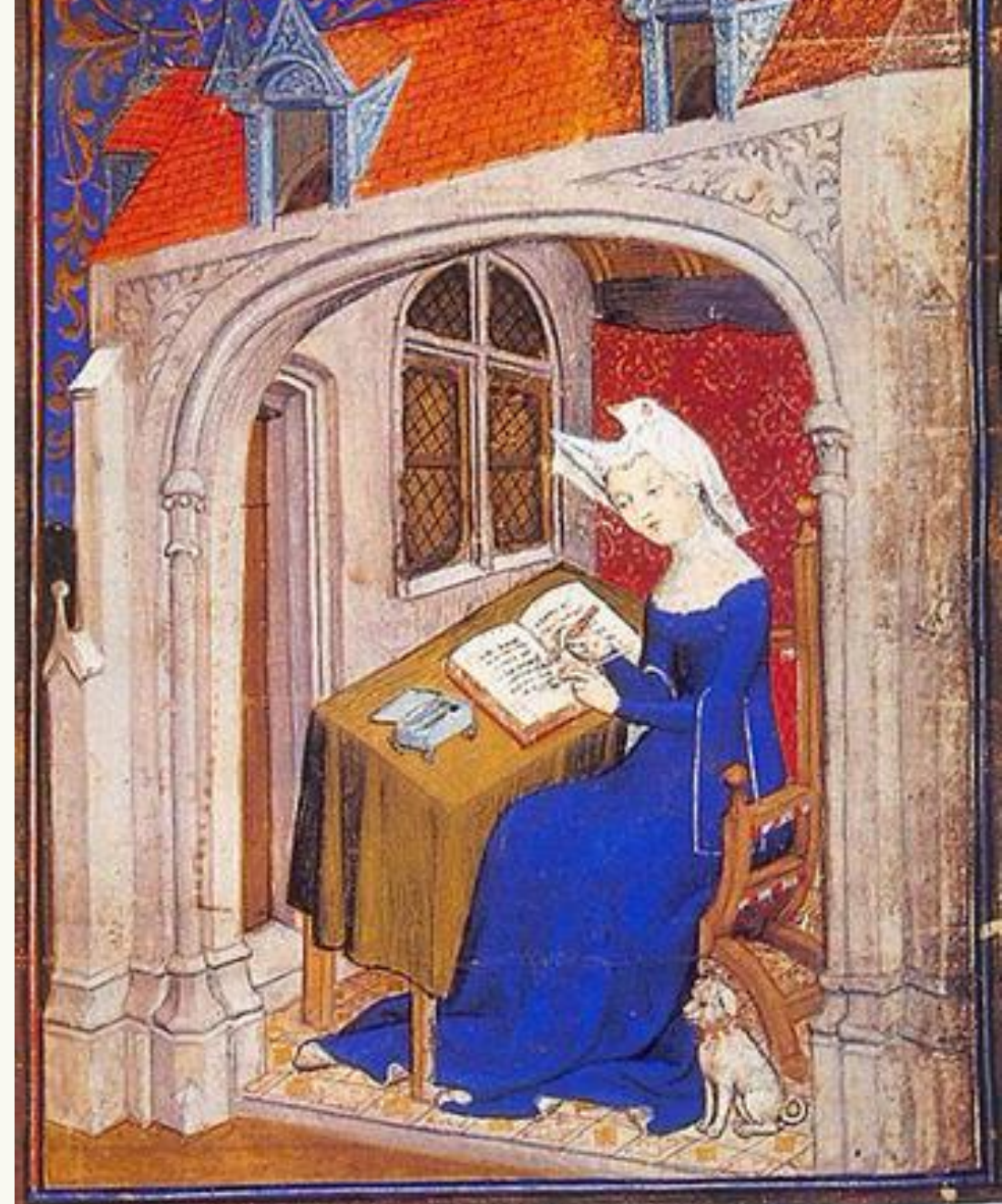


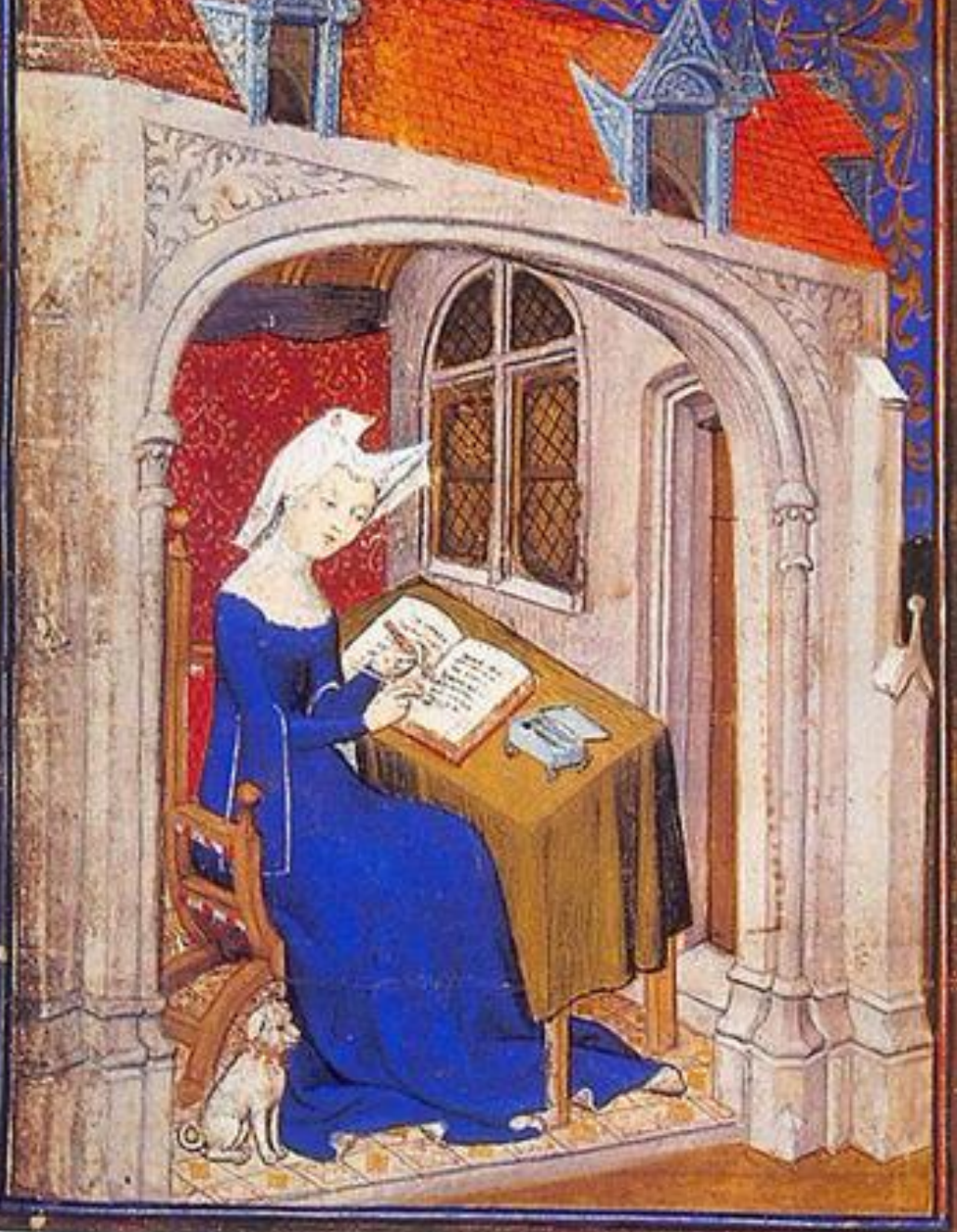
Problems Staff Have...

- Subjectivity
- Sense of failure
- Undefined expectations
- Leads rewriting their work

Problems Leaders Have...

- Time, time, time
- Staff pushback
- Stuck between stakeholders



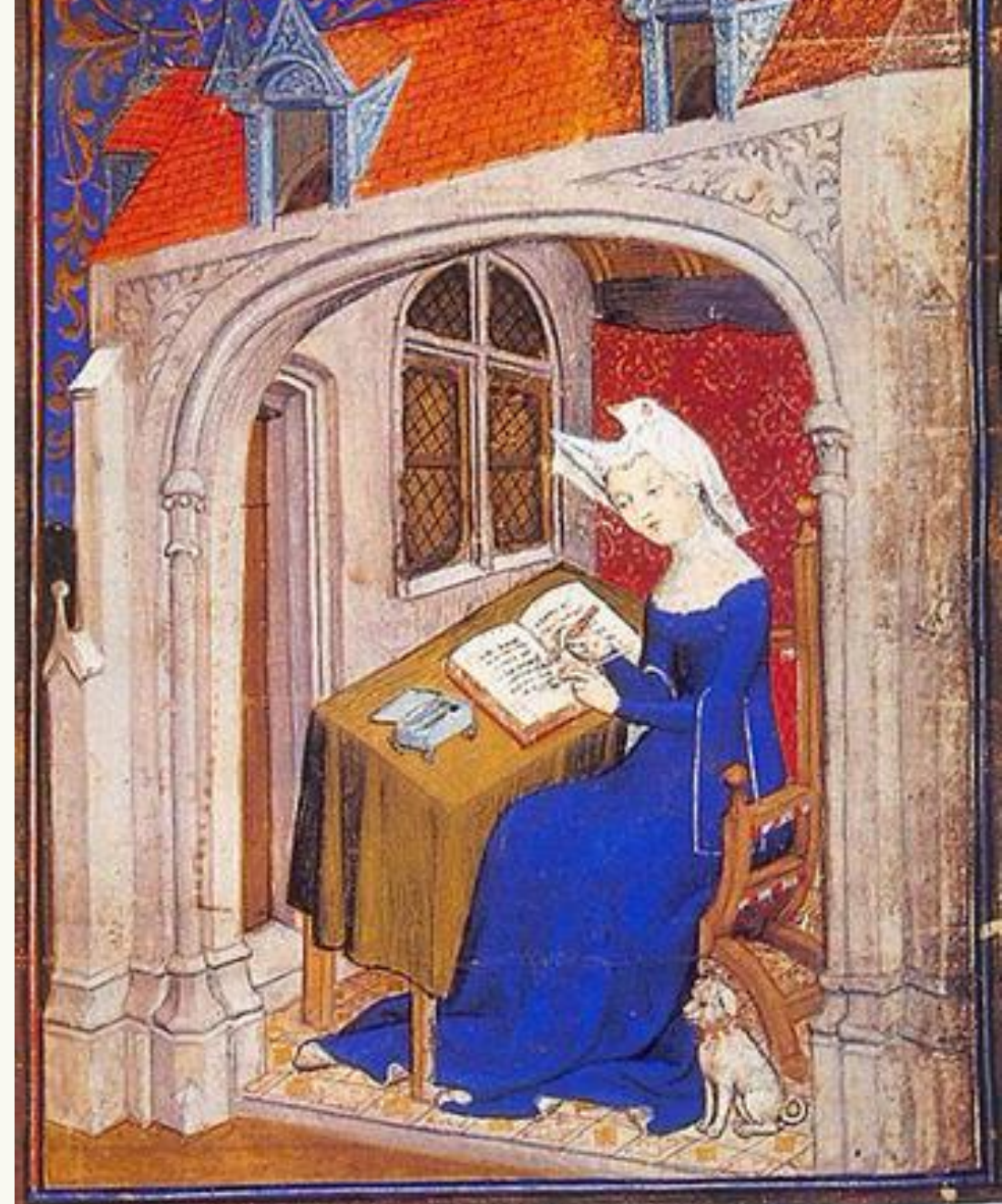


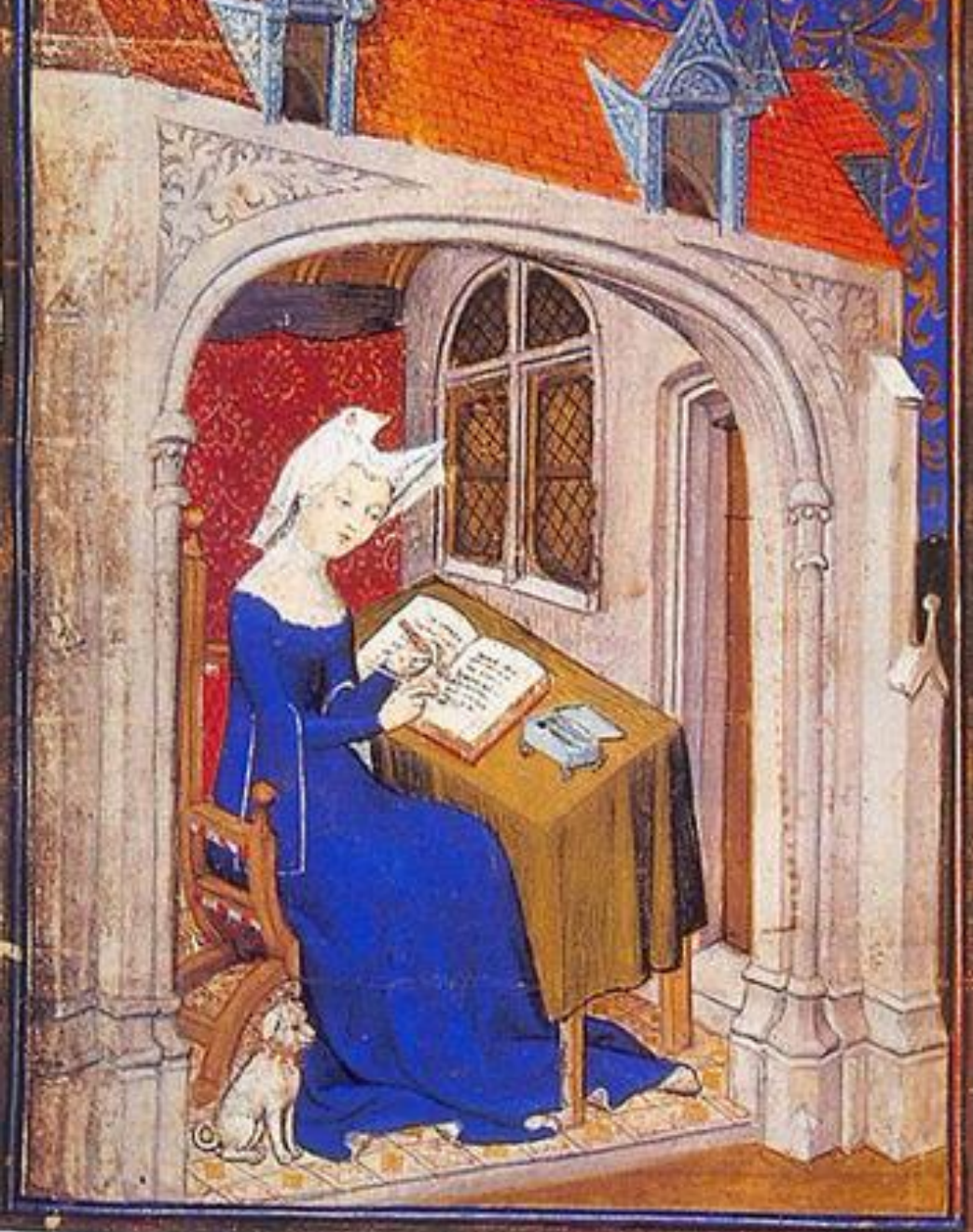
Feedback Staff Prefers

- One-on-ones
- Group playthroughs

Feedback Leaders Prefer

- In-line comments
- End notes



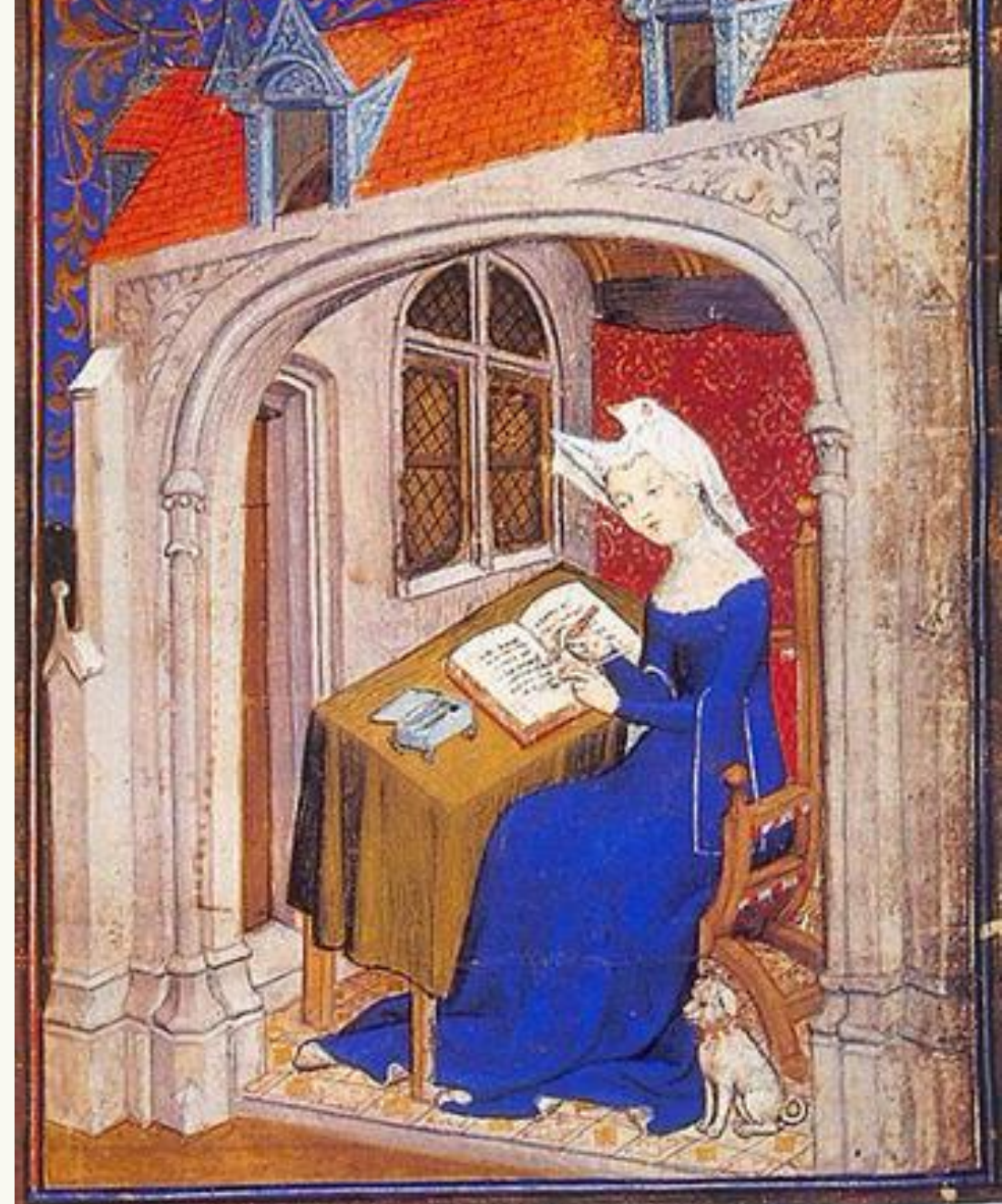


What Staff Wants...

- Personal growth
- Collaborative relationships
- Work they're proud of
- Seeing their work in the game

What Leaders Want

- Ability to execute project vision
- Control and hierarchy
- Final product quality
- Managing consistency and standards



**How do we save time without
crushing our souls?**



The Solve

- One-on-ones
- Group playthroughs
- Best practices

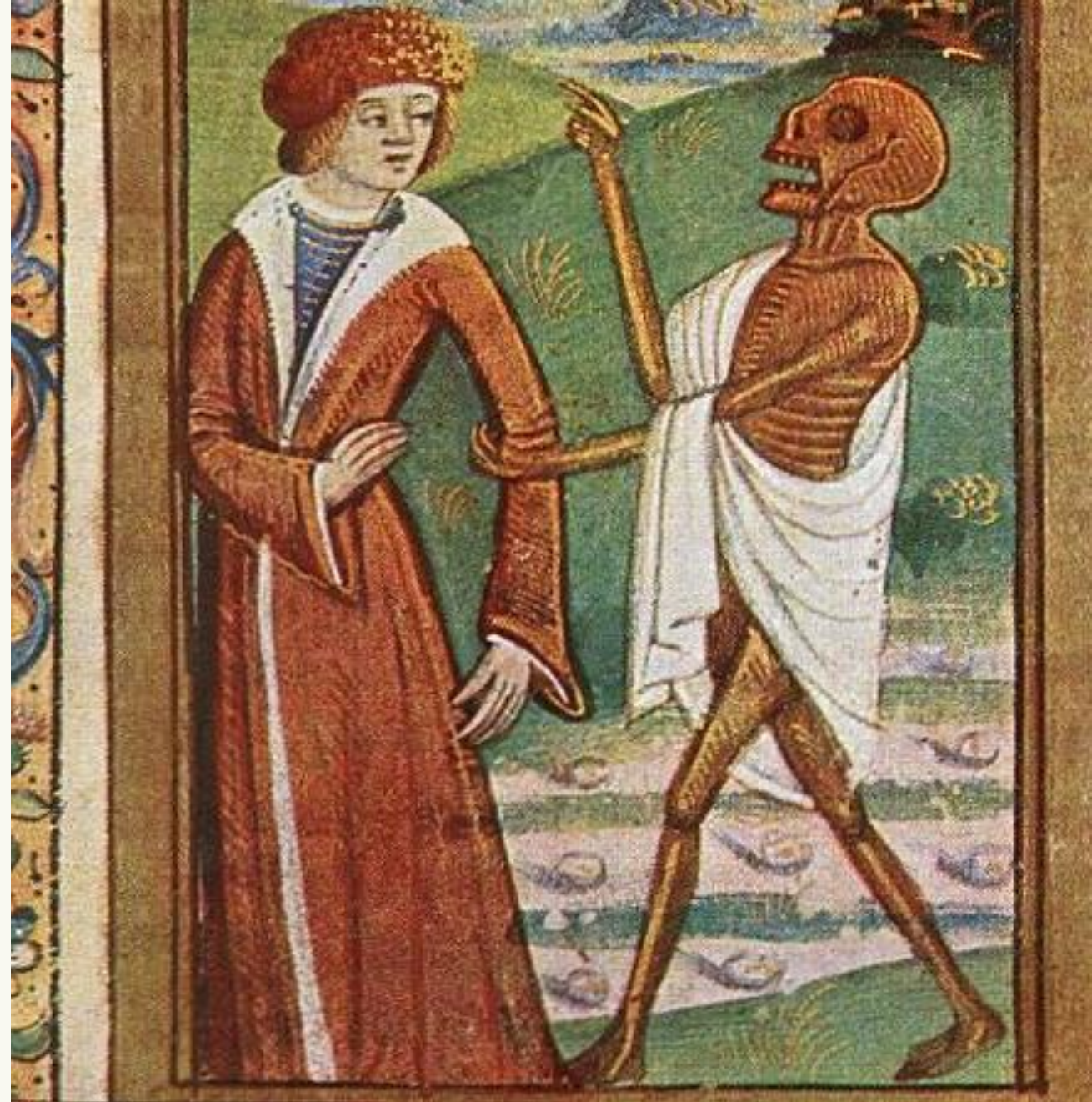




One-on-Ones

Benefits

- Saves times
- Encourages collaboration
- Good practice space
- Knowledge share
- Counters isolation



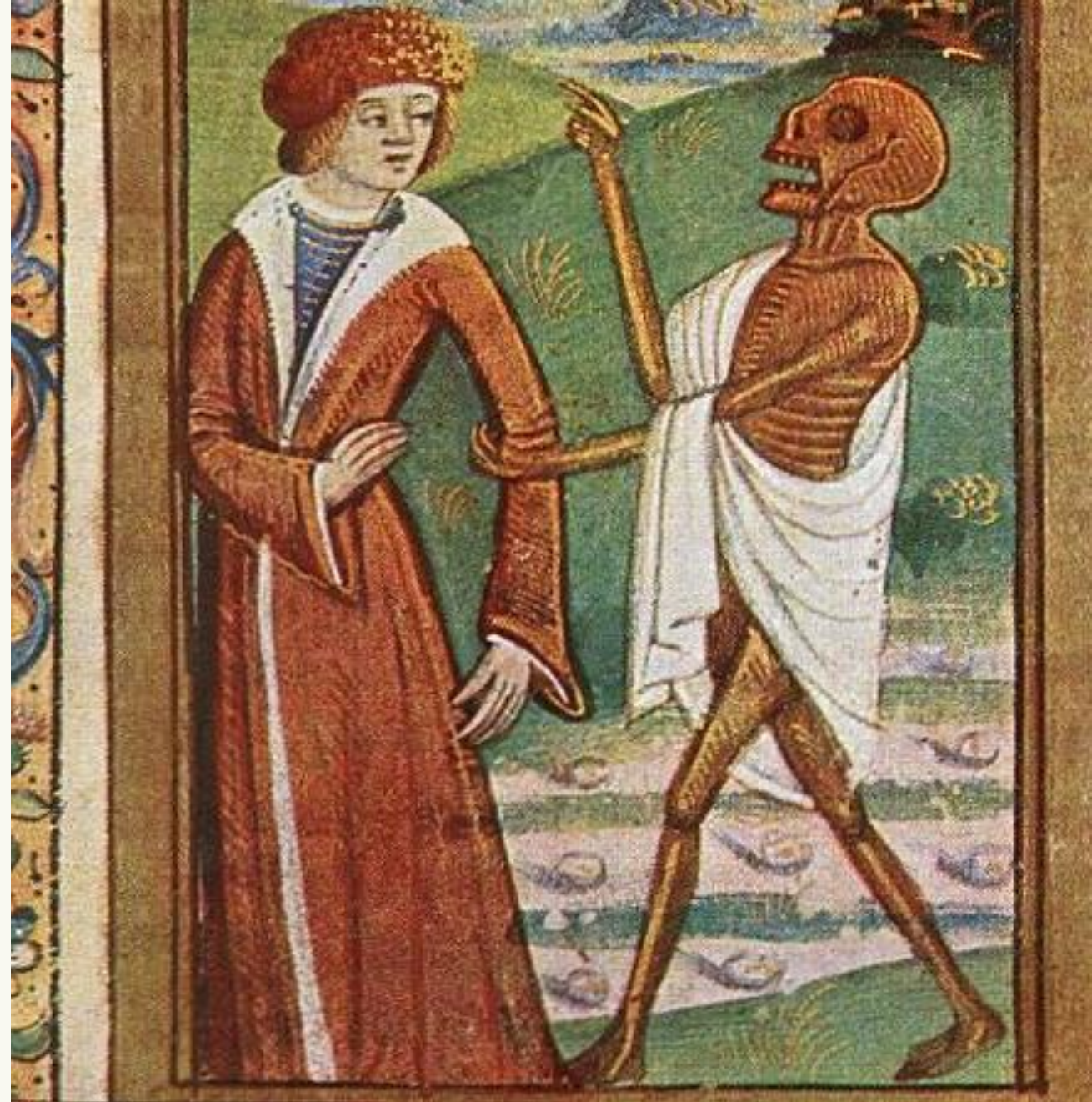


Problems

- Goals are not shared
- Everyone is nervous
- Sense of failure before you even start
- Same conversation, different takeaways

Reflections

- 3-4 questions
- Gauge the experience writing a draft
- Sent by the leader
- Answered by the staff member





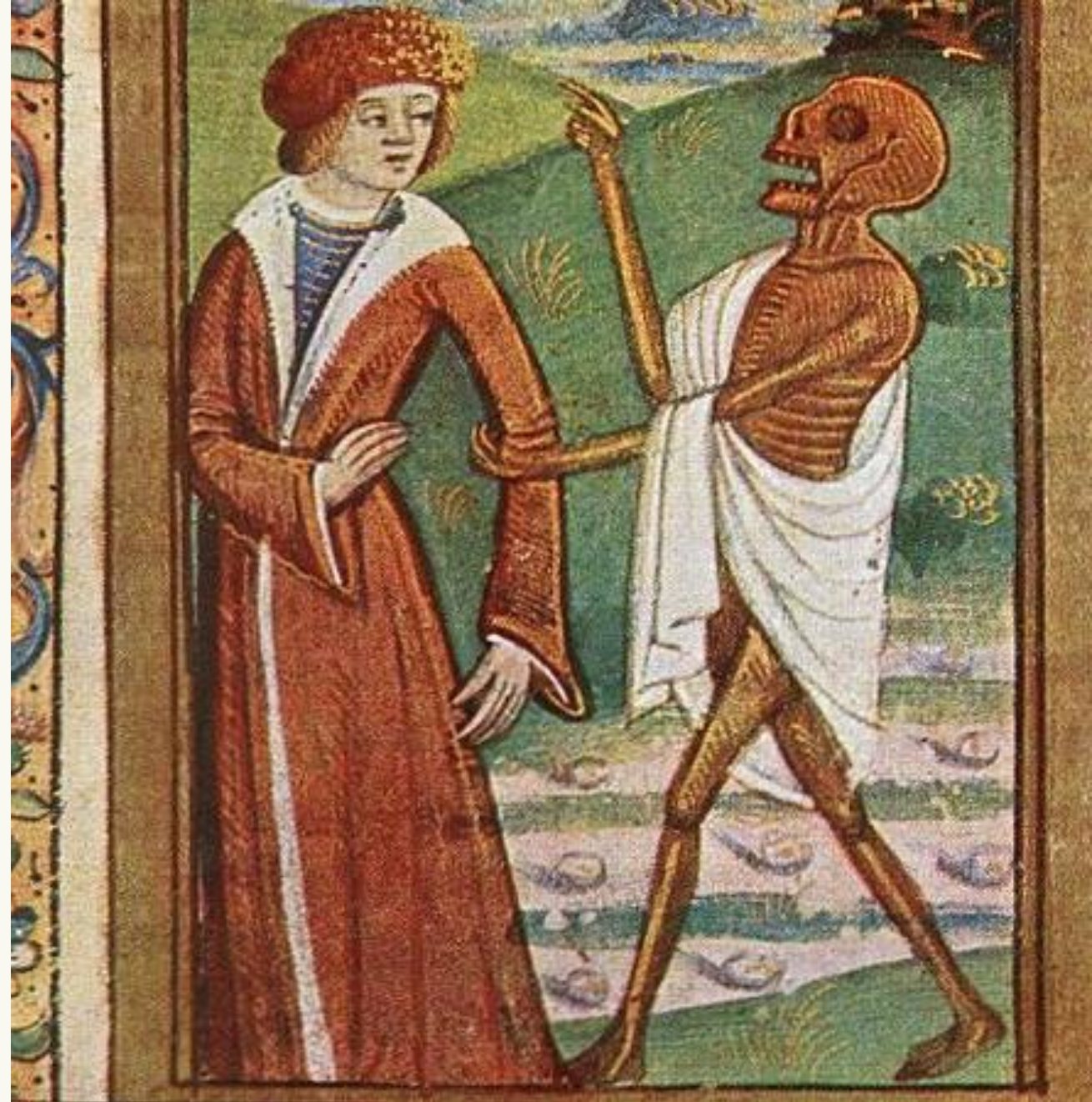
Benefits, Staff

- Conversation before the meeting
- Gives staff more ownership
- Helps leads ask the right questions

Benefits, Leadership

Shows leads the staff member's:

- Goals
- Concerns, blockers
- Feelings
- Strengths



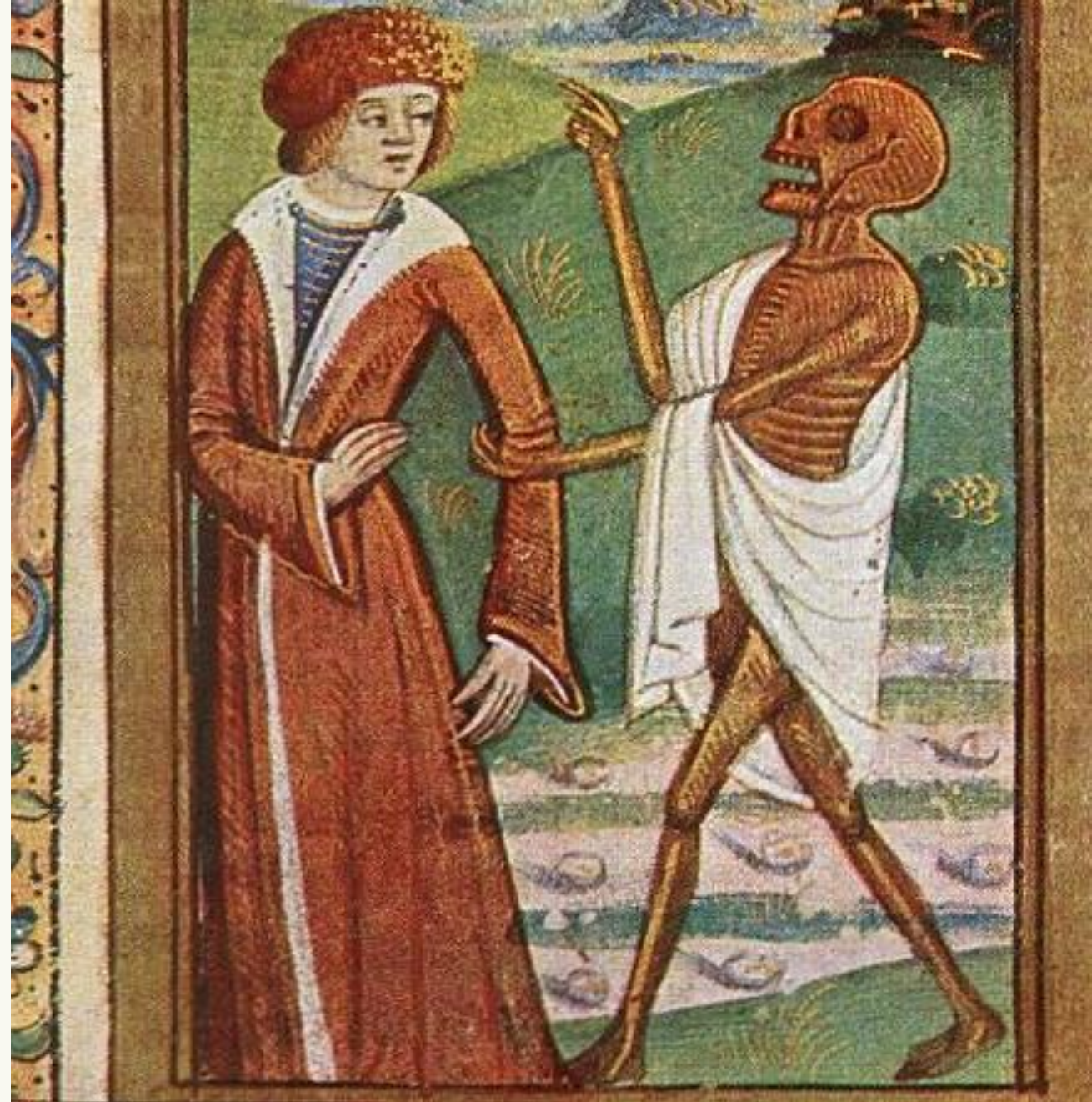


Before, Staff

- Check-in with collaborators
- Write a reflection
- Help set an agenda

Before, Leaders

- Gain context
- Align your feedback with their reflection
- Develop questions based off observations, not assumptions



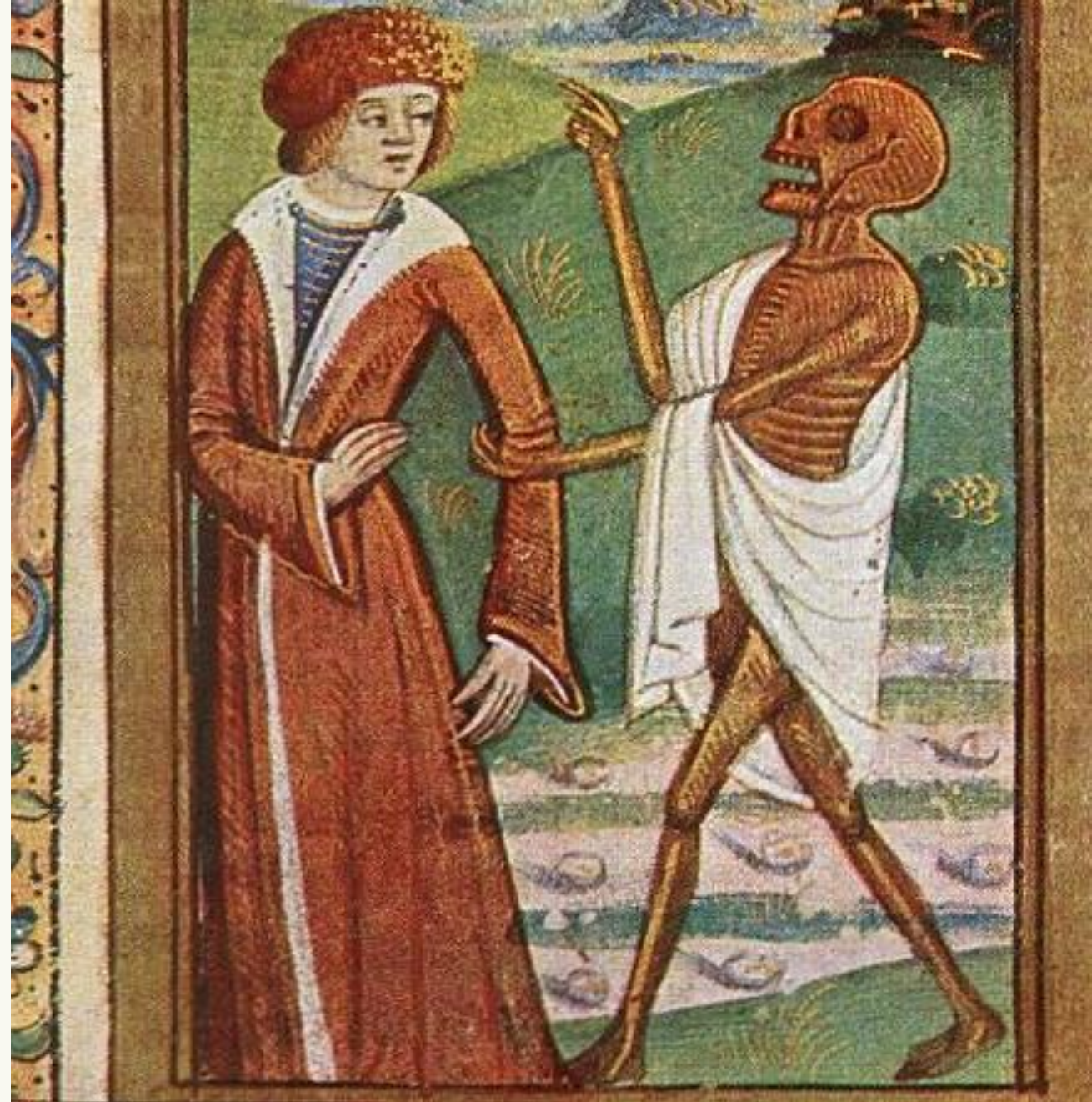


During

- Have a conversation
- Acknowledge reflection
- Praise throughout
- Acknowledge subjectivity
- Ask questions
- Create aligned goals
- Gratitude

Avoid

- Focusing on surface level symptoms
- Assigning blame
- Prescribing



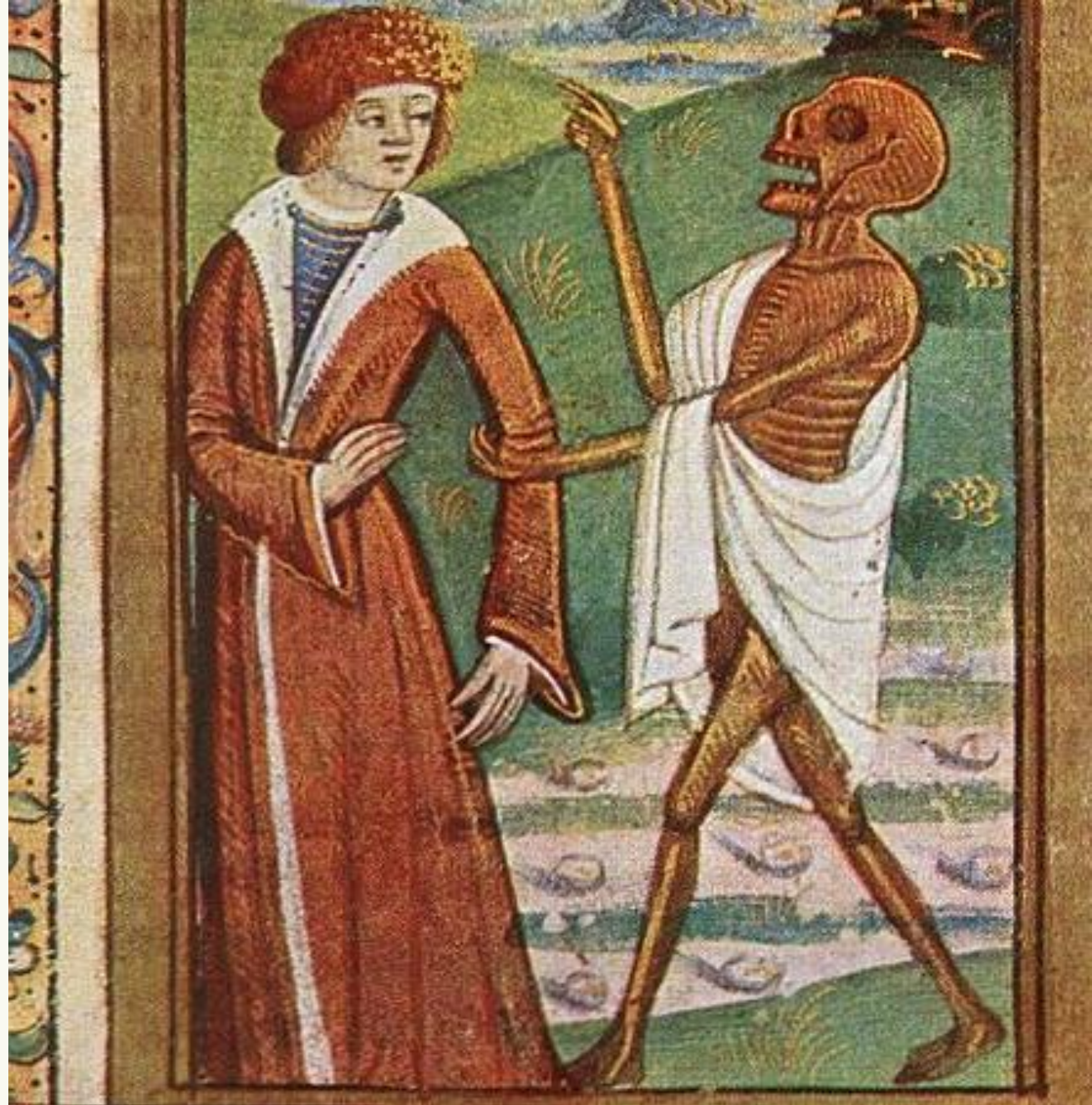


Embrace

- Less is more
- Identifying root causes
- Brainstorming strategies & methods
- Space to practice & fail
- Yes, and... !

Provide

- Staff member's best examples
- Models
- Follow-up





Group Playthroughs

Benefits

- Same page
- Visibility
- Less theoretical, more concrete
- Creates camaraderie





Before

- Rapport first
- Collaborate on rules and rituals
- Staff offers work
- Submitted work is a gift
- Playthroughs shouldn't be punishment
- Set specific goals together

During

- Reiterate goals
- Play content as intended
- Flat structure
- Develop a shared vocabulary
- List of action items
- Let the playthrough wander
- Make sure people are playing!





After

- Post the list of action items for everyone
- Give time to action on feedback

Disagreement?

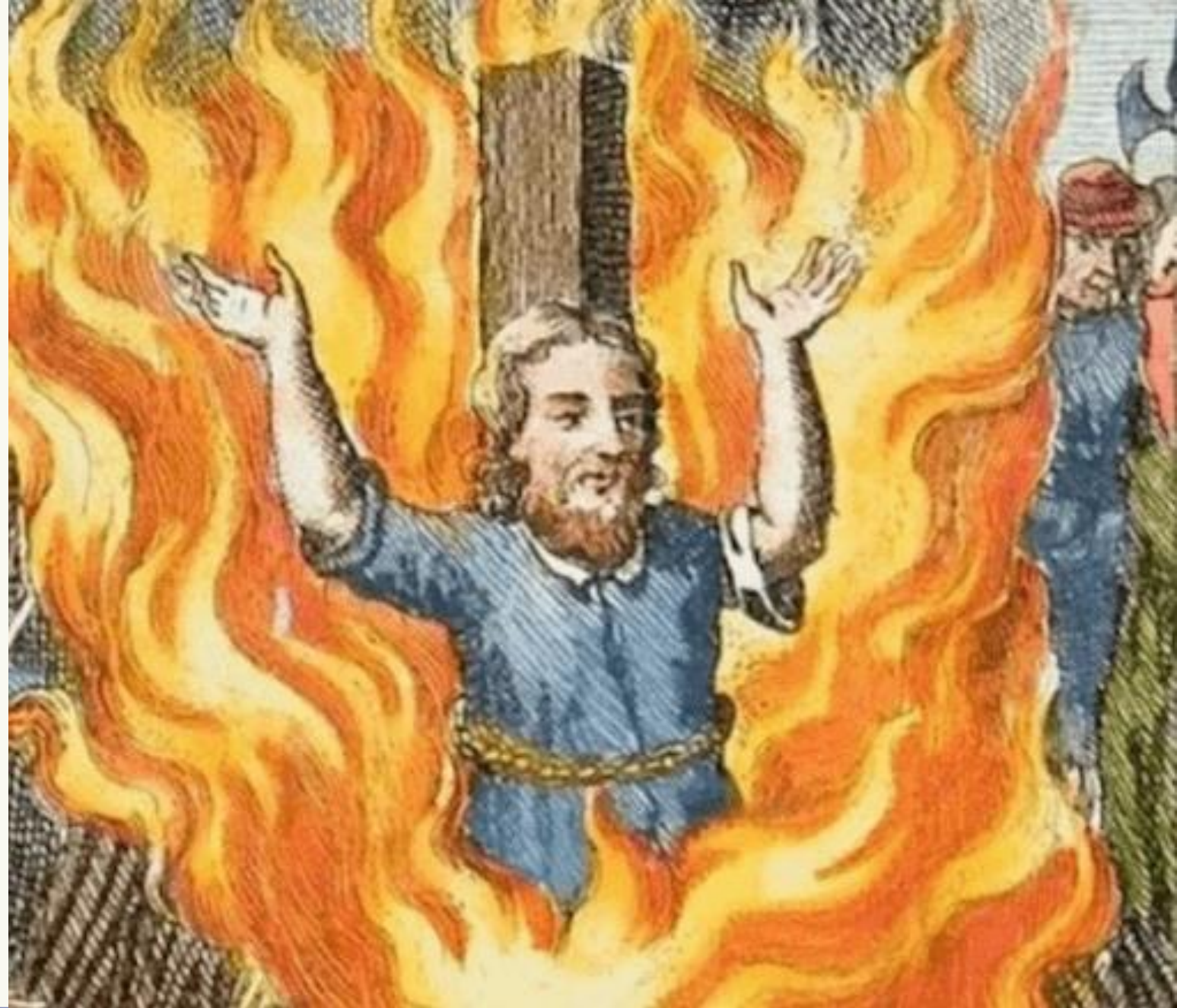


- Side with the person
- Put them in your shoes
- Ask what the biggest challenge is
- State observations
- Identify one step forward
- Offer reassurance
- Thank them

Rewriting

- Accept responsibility
- Transparency
- Apologize
- Discuss strategies to avoid this in the future
- Commit to those strategies

***Writer's rooms: Expectation is set before employment starts*





Praise!!!

- Praised = engaged
- Praise before performance
- Schedule it
- Higher ratios of praise to criticism

Back to Our Goals

- Healthier teams
- Stronger feedback loops
- Growth mindset



Thank you!!



@AlexaRayC



@thewritegame