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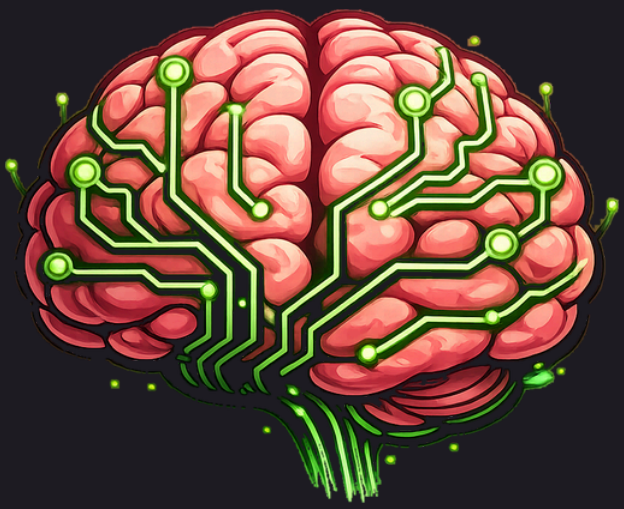

Fix It at the Base

Find the crack, then fix it where the work starts.

A companion to Everything Is Words

Brian Baskin

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Find the crack, then fix it where the work starts.

A companion to *Everything Is Words*.

Draft, November 2026. Free to read. Tell us what's wrong: post about it and tag Amalgamind on LinkedIn, X, TikTok or Facebook, or comment in the Amalgamind Community on Skool.

By Brian Baskin.

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Pat, Robin, Lou, Jordan, Sample Mechanical, and everyone around them in this book are invented. Any likeness to a real business or person is chance.

AI apps change their menus, their plans and their names often. Where this book talks about an app's settings, check your own app, and ask your AI where things are.

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How to read this book

This book picks up where *Everything Is Words* leaves off.

In that book you took apart how your work really runs, saw where a decision actually gets made, and looked for the place where things leak and get stuck. The crack. If you did that, you already have one: a spot in how the work runs where time, money or patience keeps draining away.

This book is about what to do with it. Not a bigger rule. A fix at the base.

It has two readers: you, and your AI.

You read each chapter to understand it. Your AI reads the part at the end, headed *For your AI*, to know what to do with it. Every chapter ends with something you can do today, and each of those is a card.

How to use it

- One chapter, one card. Do the card before you read on, if you can.
- You can stop any time and pick up later.
- Everyone in the examples, Pat, Lou, Jordan, Robin, Ellis Supply and Sample Mechanical, is invented.
- You don't need to have read *Everything Is Words* first. It helps, and chapter 1 tells you what you need.

The one sentence to say

> I want to use my words. Read these files, and let's start on the first card.

Chapter 1: You already found the crack

Every way of working has a crack. It's the place where things keep slipping through: a job that goes wrong the same way, a message that never arrives, a decision that waits for someone who isn't there.

If you've been through *Everything Is Words*, you've been close to yours already. You took your work apart, you saw where the decision really sits, you looked at where the time and money leak. That's the crack.

What a crack is, and isn't

- **It's in the system, not in a person.** "Jordan cut the pipe wrong" is not a crack. "A job change doesn't reach the crew until they're on site" is. Name the system, never the person. People can't fix a person; they can fix a system.
- **It happens more than once.** One bad day is a bad day. A crack shows up again.
- **It's one sentence.** If it takes a paragraph, it's two cracks. Pick one.

If you don't have one yet

Think of the last thing that went sideways at work. Ask: what in the way we work let that happen? Say it as a sentence about the system, not the person.

A small example

Pat runs Sample Mechanical, a pipe-fitting shop. Pat's crack, in one sentence:

> *When a customer changes the job, the crew finds out when they're already on site.*

Not "Robin forgot to tell them." Robin tells whoever she can reach. The crack is that there's no single place the change lands before the crew leaves the shop.

Pat, Robin and Sample Mechanical are invented.

Do this today

Write your crack in one sentence, about the system, with no names in it. If you have more than one, pick the one that costs you the most. That's card 1.

For your AI

- This chapter serves card 1, *Your crack in one sentence*.
- If the person has a crack from *Everything Is Words*, ask for it and say it back. If not, ask: "What was the last thing that went sideways, and what in the way you work let it happen?"
- Write one sentence about the system. If the person names someone, ask what in the system let it happen, and write that. Never write a person as the crack.
- Don't suggest a fix. Chapter 4 does that.

Chapter 2: Say what went wrong

Before you fix anything, say what happened. Out loud, plainly, once.

What to say

Two things, in your own words:

1. **What happened.** The facts, in order. No excuses, no "I should have". Just what.
2. **What you wanted instead.** Not what you'd like to blame. What should have happened.

That's all. If you can say those two, you can fix it. If you can't, you're not ready to fix it yet.

Why out loud

When you write it, you tidy it. When you say it, it comes out in the order it really went, with the part you'd have skipped. That part is usually the crack.

And when someone says what went wrong without blame, the room relaxes. Nobody has to defend anything. The team can look at the system.

It's okay if it's your fault

Sometimes the honest version is "I didn't say it clearly enough." Say that. It isn't a confession. It's a fact about the system: the way you said it didn't work. Your words weren't good enough that time, and you can make them better.

A small example

Pat said it into a phone while driving back from a job:

> *The customer moved the valve to the other wall on Tuesday. Robin put it in her email. Lou was already at the shop loading the truck and left at seven. Jordan cut to Monday's drawing. We lost most of a day. What I wanted: Lou and Jordan know about the valve before they leave the shop.*

Pat read it back. It was ten lines, and Pat hadn't noticed the part about Lou loading the truck until it was said.

Pat, Robin, Lou, Jordan and Sample Mechanical are invented.

Do this today

Think of the last time your crack showed up. Say what happened, and what you wanted instead, in about two minutes. That's card 2.

For your AI

- This chapter serves card 2, *Say what went wrong*.
- Listen. Ask only: "What happened, in order?" then "What did you want instead?" Say it back.
- Write it in their words. Don't soften it, and don't add blame or excuses. If they say it was their fault, write that.
- Never fill a gap. Mark it *to be confirmed*.

Chapter 3: Don't dress it up

When something goes wrong, there's a pull to fix it with something new and impressive. A rule, a policy, a meeting, a system with a name.

It feels good. It usually changes very little.

What dressing it up looks like

- **A new rule on top.** "From now on, everybody reads every email before they leave." It sounds firm. It adds a step nobody has time for, and it puts the work on the people, not the system.
- **A new name for the old thing.** A "protocol," a "checkpoint," a "touchpoint." Same thing, now with a label.
- **A rule for the one time.** It fixes Tuesday's problem and does nothing about next Tuesday's.
- **A meeting about it.** A meeting is a way of feeling like something happened.

You can spot a dressed-up fix by one test: *if the same thing went wrong next week, would this stop it, or would we just have a rule we broke?*

What it looks like when you catch yourself

You hear yourself say "magic." As in, "if we just had a rule that said..." A rule is not magic. It only works if it's part of how the work actually runs.

If someone tells you your fix is dressed up, don't defend it. Say "you're right," and look underneath.

A small example

Pat's first fix for the valve problem was a rule: *every morning, everyone checks Robin's email before leaving.* Lou said, "I'm loading a truck at six-thirty. I'm not reading email."

Pat said, "You're right. I dressed it up as a rule. The problem isn't that people don't read. The problem is that the change doesn't land anywhere the crew looks."

That was the real crack, said a different way. Pat wrote it down, and scrapped the rule.

Pat, Robin, Lou and Sample Mechanical are invented.

Do this today

Write down your first fix, the one you reached for. Then ask the test question: if it went wrong again next week, would this stop it? If the answer is "not really," you've found a dressed-up fix. That's card 3.

For your AI

- This chapter serves card 3, *Find the dressed-up fix*.
- Ask for the first fix, in their words. Then ask the test question. Say back the answer.
- Don't tell them it's dressed up. Ask. If they say it wouldn't hold, write that, and keep the original fix in the file, dated.
- Never delete the first fix. Keep it, marked *set aside*.

Chapter 4: Fix it at the base

Now the fix. The real one, underneath.

What "the base" is

Every job runs on a plan, even if the plan is in someone's head. The base is that plan, the thing the work starts from. If you change what's at the base, the fix is already there every time the work runs. Nobody has to remember it.

A rule on top asks people to do something extra. A change at the base changes what the work is.

How to find it

Go back to your crack, and to what happened. Ask one question:

> **Where in the plan does this belong, so that it happens without anyone having to remember?**

- If the crack is "the crew doesn't know about changes," the base is **the page the crew reads before they leave**. Not an email. Not a rule about email.
- If the crack is "decisions wait for someone who isn't there," the base is **where the rule is written**, in words, where the person on the job can read it.
- If the crack is "the same question comes every week," the base is **the answer, written once, where the question comes in**.

Then write the one change. One line: *the plan now says...*

What it looks like

The fix is usually small. A line on a page. A step moved earlier. A place where something now lands. If your fix is a big new thing, go back: you're probably dressing it up.

A small example

Pat's base was the **job page**, the one page the crew reads before they load the truck. The change, in one line:

> *When a customer changes a job, Robin puts the change on the job page the moment she hears it, with the date, before she does anything else.*

Lou's already reading that page. Nothing new to remember. The change lands where the crew looks.

Pat wrote it on the page itself, as the first line of "how this page works."

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Do this today

Take your crack and ask the question: where in the plan does this belong? Write the one change, as one line, starting "the plan now says". Don't announce it yet. That's card 4.

For your AI

- This chapter serves card 4, *The one change to the base*.
- Ask: "Where in the plan does this belong, so it happens without anyone remembering?" Say back what you heard. Write the one line in their words.
- If the answer is a new rule on top, ask the test question from chapter 3 again, once. Then write what they decide.
- Don't change the plan yourself. You write the line. The person puts it where it goes.

Chapter 5: If this, then that, written ahead

A fix at the base covers the usual way the job goes. But jobs don't always go the usual way. What about the day the plan hits a snag?

Write the snags into the plan

Before the work starts, you write down what happens if it goes off the usual path. Not a long list. Just the few that you already know about.

Each one is two halves:

- **If this:** the thing that can happen.
- **Then that:** who does what, in order.

That's the oldest trick there is, *if this, then that*, and it works in plain words. You don't need software for it. You need a sentence.

What changes

When the snag comes, nobody has to invent a response. The plan already says. A handoff in the middle of a bad day is just the plan running.

And it takes the pressure off the person who knows. They said it once, ahead of time, when they had a clear head.

Keep them short

- Three or four, not twenty.
- One person named for each "then."
- If you can't say who does it, the line isn't done.

A small example

Pat wrote three for the job page:

> *If a change comes after the crew has left the shop, then Robin calls Lou, Lou says it to the crew on site, and Robin puts it on the page right after.*
>
> *If Lou can't be reached, then Robin calls the site's second number, and the crew stops at the next step until they hear.*
>
> *If the change would mean new material, then Robin tells Pat before anyone orders anything.*

Three lines, one page. Pat read them to Lou. Lou said, "That's what I do anyway. Now Robin knows it."

Pat, Robin, Lou and Sample Mechanical are invented.

Do this today

Write three "if this, then that" for your fix. One person named for each "then." That's card 5.

For your AI

- This chapter serves card 5, *Three if-this-then-thats*.
- Ask one at a time: "What's a snag that could happen?" then "Who does what, in order?" Say each back.
- Write them in their words, with one person named for each "then." If the person can't name one, mark it *to be confirmed*.
- Never add a snag of your own. If you think of one, ask.
- Don't spend anything or contact anyone as part of a "then." You write it down.

Chapter 6: Who carries what

A plan with the right fix and the right snags can still fall apart if nobody knows whose turn it is.

One page, up front

Before the work starts, write down, in one place:

- **Who carries each step.** One name per step.
- **How long each step should run.** Roughly. "Ten minutes," "by noon."
- **When you come back in.** If you're stepping away, say when and where. If you're handing the whole thing to someone, say so.

That's it. It's not a project plan. It's the answer to "whose turn is it?" before anyone has to ask.

Why it works

Most handoff trouble isn't a bad fix. It's a gap: the step where each person thought the other had it. Naming one carrier for each step closes the gap.

And when you step away on purpose, with a plan written, nobody has to guess. "Take it from here" isn't a magic rule. It's already in the plan, because you wrote the handoff in before you needed it.

A small example

Pat's one page for a job change:

Step	Who carries it	How long
Hear the change, put it on the job page	Robin	right away
Say it to the crew	Lou	before they leave the shop, or by phone
Read it back	Jordan	at the first step
Anything about material or money	Pat	before anyone orders

Pat is out of the picture until the money line. The page says so.

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Do this today

Write your "who carries what" on one page, with a name for each step, a time, and when you come back in. That's card 6.

For your AI

- This chapter serves card 6, *Who carries what*.
- Ask for each step, one at a time: who carries it, how long, and what comes next. Say it back.
- Write one name per step. If a step has two names, ask which one carries it. If none, mark *to be confirmed*.
- Don't assign anyone. You write what the person says. Don't send the page to anyone without their yes.

Chapter 7: The three questions

The fix is written. The snags are in the plan. Someone carries each step. Now you do the job, and when it's done, you ask three questions.

The three

1. **Did it go to plan?**
2. **Did we hit any of the snags?**
3. **If we did, how did they work?**

That's the whole debrief. Five minutes, out loud, with whoever carried the job.

Why only three

You could measure a lot. How long each step took, how many corrections, what the dead time was. Most of it is extra work nobody needs. If the debrief feels like homework, nobody does it, and then you've lost the one habit that makes the fix last.

Three questions are enough to tell you if the base held. If it did, leave it. If it didn't, you know which question to look at, and you've got your next crack.

What you write down

One line per question. In the plan, under the job, with the date. Next time, the plan is a little better than it was.

A small example

Two weeks after the job-page change, Pat sat with Lou and Robin for five minutes after a job:

> *Did it go to plan? Yes. Any snags? One: a change came at six-forty, after the truck left. How did it work? Robin called Lou, Lou said it on site, Robin put it on the page. Nobody lost time.*

Pat added one line under the date. The base held.

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Do this today

After your next job, ask the three questions out loud with whoever carried it. Write one line for each. That's card 7.

For your AI

- This chapter serves card 7, *The three questions*.
- Ask the three, one at a time, and write each answer in one line, in their words, dated.
- Don't add questions. Don't measure anything the person didn't mention.
- If a snag was hit, ask how the "then" worked, and write what they say. If it didn't work, write that, and keep the old line, dated.

Chapter 8: Dry-run it

You've written the fix, the snags, and who carries what. Before the real job, try it once on paper.

What a dry run is

You walk through the written plan out loud, with the people who'll carry it, as if it were happening. Nobody does the real work. You just say each step, in order, and see where it breaks.

It's cheap. Fifteen minutes, no tools, no risk. It's also where the rough spots show up, while they still cost nothing.

How to run one

1. **Pick a pretend job.** "A customer moves a valve." Make it specific.
2. **Walk it step by step.** Each person says their step, out loud.
3. **Throw in one snag.** "It's six-forty and the truck is gone." See if the plan has an answer.
4. **Write down every place someone paused.** A pause is a gap.
5. **Fix the page.** Change the words, not the people.

What you'll find

Almost always, one thing. A step with no name on it. A snag nobody thought of. A line that makes sense to you and not to the person reading it. All of those are good to find now.

A small example

Pat ran it with Robin, Lou and Jordan, standing around the shop table. The pretend job: the customer moves the valve at six-forty, truck's gone.

Robin said her step. Lou said his. Jordan said, "What if I'm the one the customer tells?" Nobody had written that. Pat added a line: *if the customer tells the crew on site, the crew calls Robin, who puts it on the page.*

Fifteen minutes. One new line. Cheap.

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Do this today

Run a fifteen-minute dry run of your plan with the people who'll carry it. Write down every pause, and fix the page. That's card 8.

For your AI

- This chapter serves card 8, *A fifteen-minute dry run*.
- Help them pick a pretend job and one snag. Take notes: for each step, who said what, and where anyone paused.
- Write the pauses as a short list. Propose a wording change for each, in their words. Don't change the plan yourself; they decide.
- This is practice. Don't contact anyone, change any real record, or send anything.

Chapter 9: Your first fix

You've got the whole method. Here it is as a week.

The week

One small thing a day, twenty minutes at most.

- **Monday: Your crack.** Card 1, in one sentence, about the system.
- **Tuesday: Say what went wrong.** Card 2: what happened, what you wanted instead.
- **Wednesday: The base.** Cards 3 and 4: check for the dressed-up fix, then write the one change to the base.
- **Thursday: If this, then that, and who carries what.** Cards 5 and 6.
- **Friday: Dry-run it.** Card 8, fifteen minutes, with the people who'll carry it.

Then run the real job. After it, ask the three questions (card 7).

The look back

A week later, one line each:

1. **Did the fix hold?**
2. **What snag did we hit that we hadn't written down?**
3. **What's the next crack?**

If the fix held, leave it alone. If not, you know where to look. Either way, you've got a little better plan than you had a week ago.

A small example

Pat ran the week over lunch at the shop table. By Friday the job page had its new first line, three "if this, then that," and one more line from the dry run.

A change came the following Wednesday, at six-forty. It went through Robin to Lou to the site, and Jordan read it back at the first step. Nobody lost time.

At the look back, Pat wrote three lines. The third: *next crack: material orders that don't match what's in the truck.* Pat didn't start on that one. Pat wrote it on the page and went to lunch.

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Do this today

Put the week on your calendar, one slot a day for the next five days you're working, and say who you'll do it with. That's card 9.

For your AI

- This chapter serves card 9, *Run the week*.
- Help them put the slots on their calendar. Draft the entries. Add nothing to anyone else's calendar and send no invitations without their yes.
- At the end of the week, ask the three look-back questions, one at a time, and write each answer in their words.
- Don't start the next crack for them. Ask, and wait.

Where to go next

If you did the week, you've fixed one crack at the base, written the snags into the plan, and tried it once before it counted. That's a real start.

Next

- **Take the next crack.** The one from your look back. Same method, a little faster.
- **Read *Everything Is Words*.** It's the book this one picks up from: taking your work apart and finding where it leaks. It's free to read.
- **Read *Amalgamind Expert*.** It's the companion on getting what one expert knows onto the page, in their own words.
- **Tell us what's wrong.** This is a draft, and it's free. If something here is wrong or says it badly, post about it and tag Amalgamind on LinkedIn, X, TikTok or Facebook, or comment in the Amalgamind Community on Skool. Your words make it better.

You didn't add a rule. You changed what the work is.