Session for Directors and Supervisors

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Adding more to your plate…

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"I'm sending you to a seminar to help you work harder and be more productive."

Communication is Key!

"What if, and I know this sounds kooky, we communicated with the employees."

Session Overview

- Tops, Middles, Frontline and Customers…Creating Powerful Middle Teams

- Overview of the Executive Session…What is the 'Big Idea'

- Questions and Needs

Tops, Middles, Frontlines Experience an Organization Very Differently

- **Tops**—Overall responsibly for a system or piece of a system, shaping the rules and allocating resources.

- **Middles**—Caught between the demands of others, pulled and torn by their conflicting perspectives and priorities.

- **Frontlines**—Feeling straight-jacketed by rules, with no control over the resources you need or want.

- **Customer**—Outside an organization or unit and expecting a service or product from it. Often feel neglected or misunderstood.

Oshry, Barry. ***Middle Power.*** *Boston: Power and Systems, Inc. 1988.*

Within Each of Us are All Four Roles

- A Top can feel and **act like a Frontline** when she gives a speech before the board of directors.

- A Middle can **take up the role of a Top** when he manages his direct reports.

Top — "Sometimes, I'm on top."

Middle

"It feels like I'm at the frontline." — Frontline

Customer
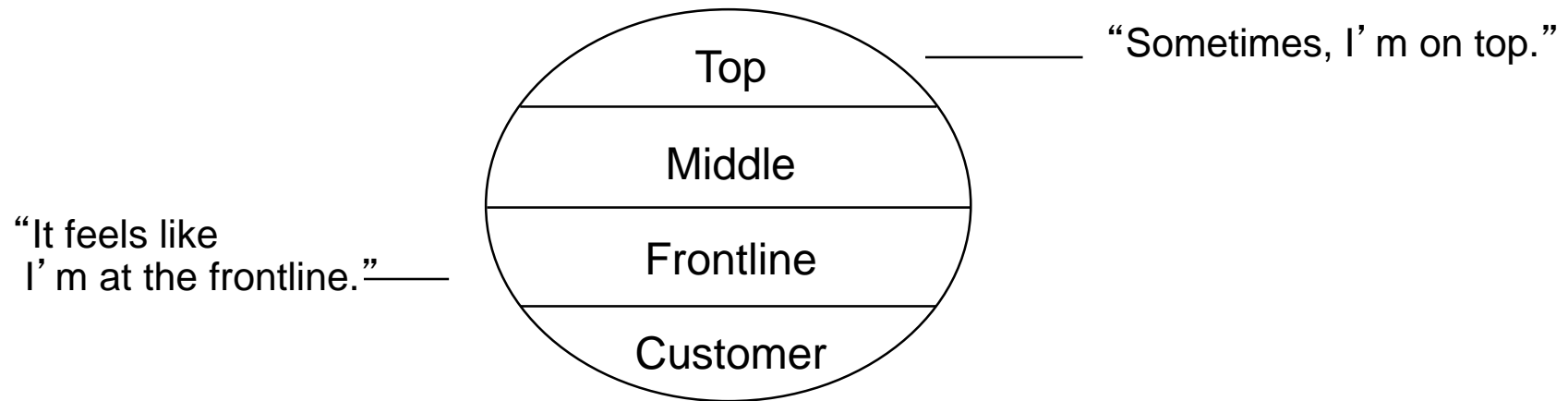
Tops Feel Burdened by Complexity and Responsibility

- There's **too much to do** and not enough time to do it.

- Conditions are fast-moving and **unpredictable.**

- Tops are **working with incomplete information, yet decisions have to be made.** They make decisions, but aren't sure they are right.

- Tops feel a heavy responsibility for the system—**people's fates rest in their hands.**

- Tops look to Middles for support, but **feel they don't get what they need.** Tops can't get their initiatives down through their Middles. They can't get consistent information from their Middles. They feel their middles are too dependent, not entrepreneurial enough.

- Tops **feel isolated and out of touch** with much of the system.

- Tops **wake up at night** worrying about the things they should be doing.

Oshry, 1995.

Middles Feel Torn

- Middles feel **weak, confused and powerless**
- Middles are **pulled between often conflicting needs**, requests, demands and priorities of those above and below.
- Middles are **loners in the system**—not connected with Tops, Frontlines and usually not with each other.
- Middles are often **seen by others as confused and wishy-washy,** as having no firm opinions of their own.
- Middles receive little positive feedback; they are **never doing quite enough for anybody**. In time, many internalize this feeling: "Maybe I'm not as competent as I thought."
- Middles can **burn out** if they try to do it all.

Oshry, 1995.

Frontlines Feel Oppressed

- **Others make decisions** that affect their lives in ways large and small.

- Frontlines **feel unseen** and uncared for.

- Frontlines **feel isolated** in the system—they don't have the big picture; there's no vision they can commit to; they don't see how their work fits.

- Tops are invisible to Frontlines except for ceremonial acts, **which seem patronizing.**

- Frontlines **feel that Middles add little value**—they are uninformed; they may be well meaning but they are powerless; they are inconsistent and uneven.

- Frontlines **feel vulnerable**; anything can happen.

- Frontlines are **angry at "them," frustrated by "them."**

Oshry, 1995.

Customers Feel "Done To"

- Customers are stunned to find the **system treats them more as problems** than as opportunities.

- Customers feel ignored and not well attended to—**promises broken, explanations, delays, excuses.**

- Customers see the **system as focused more on itself** than on them.

- Customers feel frustrated, angry, betrayed, **powerless, done-to.**

  Oshry, 1995.

Blame is Freely Shared—But We Rarely See our Own Part in Creating the Situation

- Frontlines blame their condition on **insensitive, callous, uncaring, out-of-touch higher-ups**

- Tops blame their condition on the complexity of the world they are dealing with, the **lack of initiative from Middles and the intransigence of Frontlines.**

- Middles blame their condition on the **ping-pong demands** of the middle job.

- Everyone feels justified, but **no one sees their own part** in creating any of this.

Oshry, 1995.

Leading from the Middle

Middles are Buffered by Others' Agendas

- Tops and Frontlines are each trying to **move their own agendas forward through Middles.**

- Tops and Frontlines become **less and less responsible** for resolving their own issues and conflicts.

- **Middles can never do enough.** Tops and Frontlines feel unsupported.

"I just don't get the help I need."   **"If only I were more competent."**   **"Why can't you get simple things done?"**

| **Top** | → | **Middle** | ← | **Frontline** |
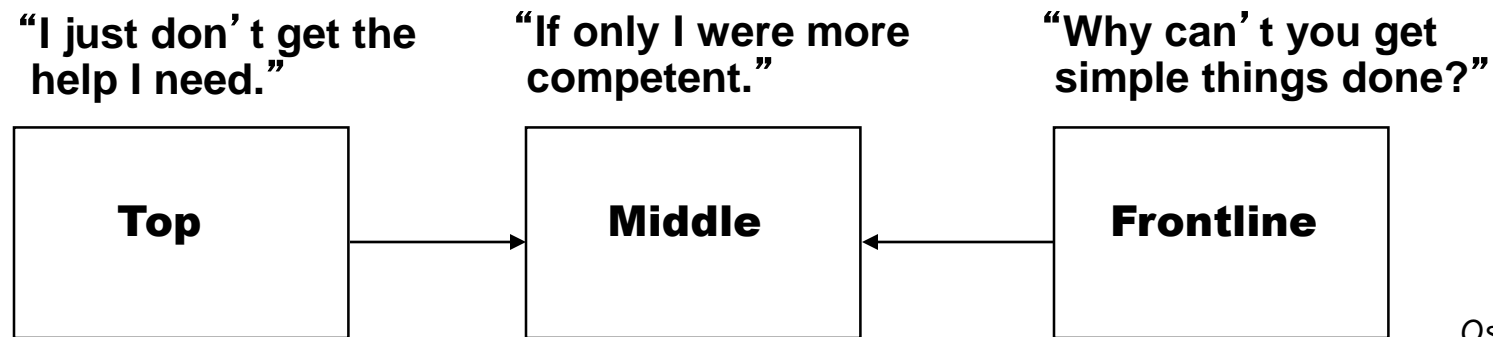
Oshry, 1995.
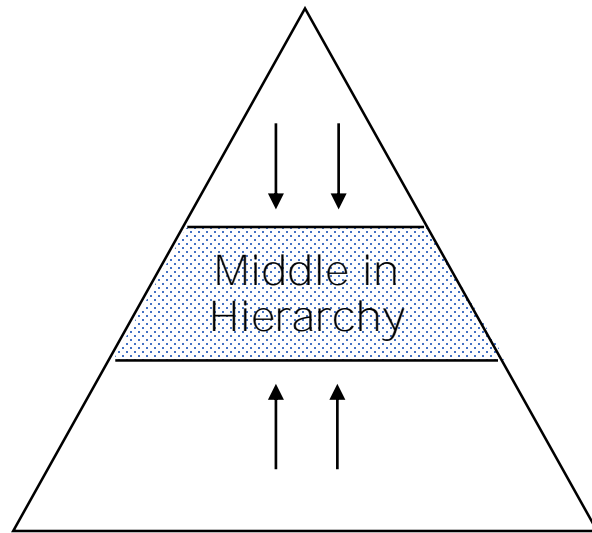
Yet Sometimes We Cling to What We Complain About

- Middles **enjoy being so central,** so needed by all sides.

- Tops and Frontlines like **not having to do the difficult things** for themselves

"What would I be if I weren't in the Middle?"

| Top | → | Middle | ← | Frontline |
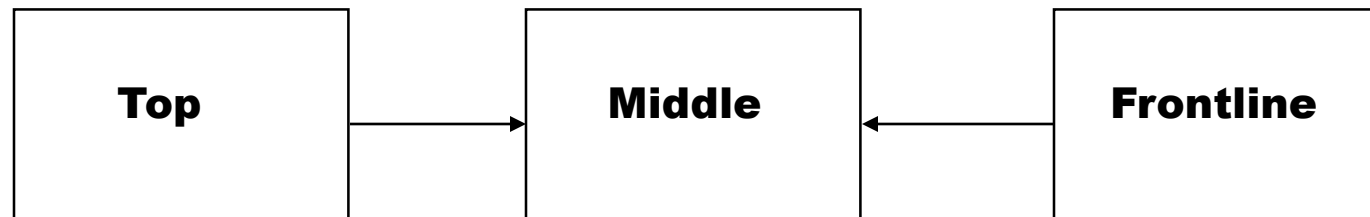
Oshry, 1995.

Leading from the Middle—
Be the System Integrator and Deal Maker

Middle in Hierarchy
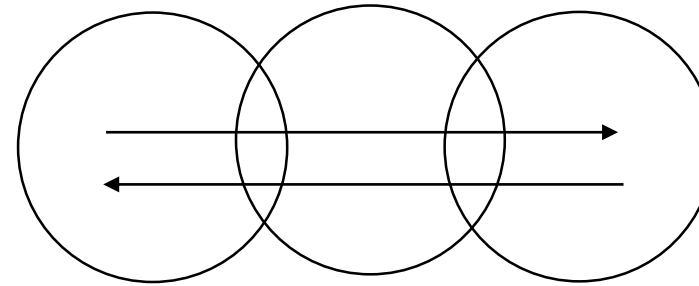
Middle in Network

Middle power lies in **making connections, integrating perspectives, seeing patterns.**
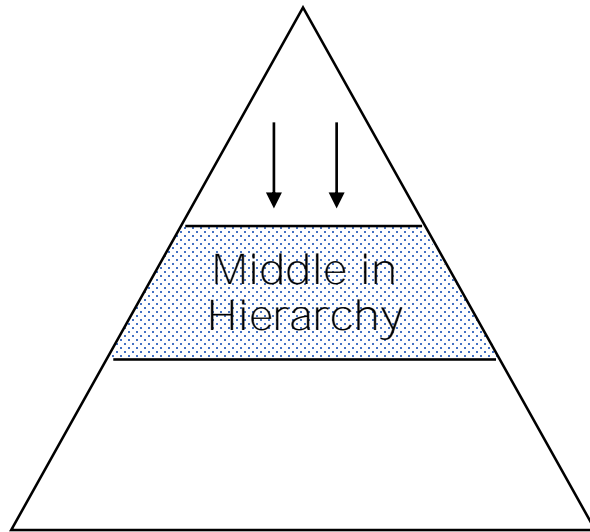
Integrating with other Middles can be most powerful of all.

Leading from the Middle—Act Like a "Top"

- Be the top when you can—and **take the responsibility** of being the top.
- **Notice how often you make yourself a middle** when you could be a top.

Middle in Hierarchy
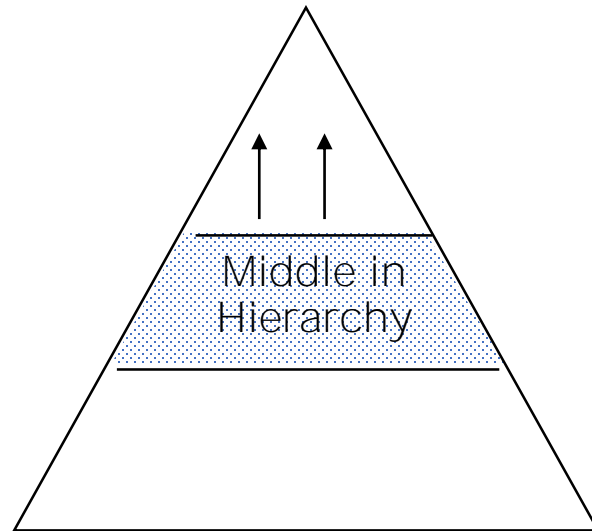
Leading from the Middle—Be the Reality Check

Middle in Hierarchy

"If it looks like garbage, **don't pass it down.** Work it out with the tops; let them know how you see it."

"The buck stops at the top; **the garbage stops at the middle**"

Pitfalls in Leading from the Middle

|	
More Top than Top	Some Middles seek to align themselves with Tops, internalizing their goals and wishes. This **can alienate them from the Frontline.**
Underdog	Some Middles strongly align themselves with the Bottom, identifying with them, championing their causes. **Tops see this as insufficiently "managerial."**
Bureaucrat	Still other Middles bureaucratize themselves, **creating hurdles and hoops** for others to jump through.
Burnout	Some Middles burn out **in their effort to be fair, responsible and evenhanded** with all the conflicting demands.

Oshry, 1995.

Creating Powerful Middle Teams

Is "Middle Team" an Oxymoron?

While Tops fall into turf battles with each other and Bottoms encourage each other's sense of oppression, **Middles become alienated from each other.**
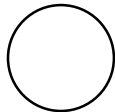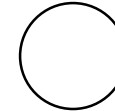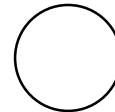
Oshry, 1995.

"I'm different."
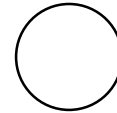
"I don't really like them."

"We have little in common."

"I'm better than they are."

"There's no power in there."
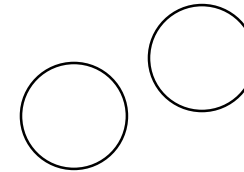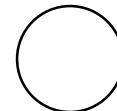
The best-kept secret (from ourselves)—

if middles would integrate, we'd be much more powerful

The Power of Integrating the Middle

When Middles are Isolated	When Middles are Integrated
They are uninformed, surprisable	By sharing with each other, they are **highly informed.**
They are seen by Frontlines as weak, out of the loop, fractured	They are **seen as "having the goods"** and providing leadership
Tops are responsible for system integration	**Middles are responsible for system integration.** Tops are freed up to do Top business.
Tops complain that Middles aren't entrepreneurial enough	Middles **identify and work on needed initiatives.**

Osbry, 1995

First Steps Toward Integrating the Middle

- **Believe that it's Possible**—To connect with each other to become a powerful force in the institution.
- **Get Past the Myths of Alienation**—Learn about each other's interests, projects, passions
- **Support One Another**—In pursuing personal projects as well as group ones
- **Create Regular Mechanisms**—For sharing information, supporting one another, coaching one another
- **Treat Them as Sacrosanct**—Treat these mechanisms as sacred commitments

Oshry, 1995.

Resources on Tops, Middles, Bottoms

- CFAR. "Approach to Tops, Middles, Bottoms and Customers." 1995.

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- Floyd, Steven W., and Bill Wooldridge. *The Strategic Middle Manager: How to Create and Sustain Competitive Advantage*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

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- Schein, Edgar H. "Dialogue, Culture, and Organizational Learning." *Organizational Dynamics*, Autumn 1993, pp. 40 – 51.

- Useem, Michael. *Leading Up: How to Lead Your Boss so You Both Win*. New York: Crown Business, 2001.

By 2020...

- 85% of all youth in Foster Care will be in a family / home environment while in care (currently 73%)

- 50% of all youth in Foster Care will be in a relative/kinship home (currently 11%)

- Onondaga will reduce it re-entry rate into Foster Care to less than 5% (currently 12.9%)

Challenges

- Mental Health and OPWDD 'stressors' to system and permanency
- Juvenile Justice population with Raise the Age...what will impact on re-entry be if services are not there to support timely re-entry, are voluntary agencies prepared for this population?

Upcoming Opportunities

- Reinvesting Institutional Funds to After Care, In-Home, Community Supports
  - Re-Aligning Contracts to support Customized Services and After Care contracts with agencies willing to shorten lengths of stay in Institutions

- Raise the Age– With increased numbers in care for JJ offenses, supporting after care and in-home services that can better marry with Probation Supervision

- Increasing in-home supports for kinship placements

- Aftercare– Increasing investment in after care services for post adopt, post guardianship needs