

# Communications Through an Asset Lens

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Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qEDFy94zhU>



Give yourself / your team / your org  
the gift of an expanded lens.

Bring patience and gentleness.

Wait!

What do you mean  
by **asset** and **deficit**?

# Outline

What are asset and deficit lenses?

How do they look in practice?

How do we apply an asset lens?

How do we advocate for an asset lens?

**What is an asset lens?**

“An approach that focuses on **what is working well** to support the growth of individuals and communities. It is a perspective based on the assumption that people have existing **competencies and resources** for their own **empowerment**. It assumes that people are capable of **solving problems** and **learning new skills**, that they are a **part of the process** rather than just being guided by a professional.”

*Ex: creativity, entrepreneurship, GED/High School diploma holders*

**What is a deficit lens?**



“An approach that tends to focus on **needs and problems** in people or helping people **avoid risks** associated with **negative** outcomes.”

*Ex: dropout students; at-risk students; unemployment; did not attend college*

**Why does this matter?**

As a communicator, you wield power to shape narratives.

You have power to influence how stakeholders and the public understand history, how the world works, and what is possible.

**Power & responsibility**

# Ethics

# Accountability

# Financials

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# **Are emotive appeals effective in persuading people to give to charity?**

Charities are often told that to attract attention they need emotive appeals, but guilt-tripping can have the opposite effect



# Negative storytelling doesn't work in the long term

Saturation point

Short-term attention cycles

A feeling of powerlessness

# Why does this matter *to you*?

Let's have a conversation.


How does asset-based communication look in practice?



Christian  
**Children's**  
**Fund**  
of Canada

**1-800-971-5870**  
[www.SponsorMe.ca](http://www.SponsorMe.ca)

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YsxjzNyGR18>



What feeling does this  
leave you with?



Christian  
Children's  
Fund  
of Canada

**1-800-971-5870**  
[www.SponsorMe.ca](http://www.SponsorMe.ca)




Maria // 2:11

It's about time mama.  
Send it over ;)

Text: MAMA to 501501

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BZGCv3rcHw>

A woman with a joyful expression, wearing traditional Maasai beaded jewelry and a red garment, stands in a vast, open savanna landscape. The image is semi-transparent, serving as a background for text and a text message bubble. The text message bubble is a light blue speech bubble with a white border, containing the text 'Mama 7:2:11' and 'It's about time mama. Send it over ;)'.

What feeling does this  
leave you with?

Mama 7:2:11  
It's about time mama.  
Send it over ;)

Text MAMA to 501501



# Before:

Imagine fighting daily  
for your children's survival  
with no hope for their future.



NO ACCESS TO  
FOOD & WATER



NO EDUCATION



NO MEDICAL  
CARE



NO WORK  
OPPORTUNITIES



Glorious



# After:

## Glorious

Glorious partners with local leaders to build **sustainable** communities and sustainable **prosperity**. We have impacted **thousands of lives** in Guatemala and Tanzania.

MAMA HOPE



INGRID VILLASEÑOR

Meet Ingrid, our fearless leader in Guatemala, the founder of El Árbol del Niño. She has created a safe environment and quality education for underprivileged children.



ALICE MATTHEW

Meet Alice, the ambitious founder of Glorious in Arusha, Tanzania. Her entrepreneurial projects have provided a stable home and education for hundreds of children.

How do we  
apply an asset lens?

# Language

Connection to reality

Negative or positive

Emotion

Local measures

Voice

# Images

Diversity

Connection to reality

Visual communication

Problem or solution?

Local measures

Emotion

Behind the image

Dignity

Are people portrayed with  
dignity in your stories?

Case study

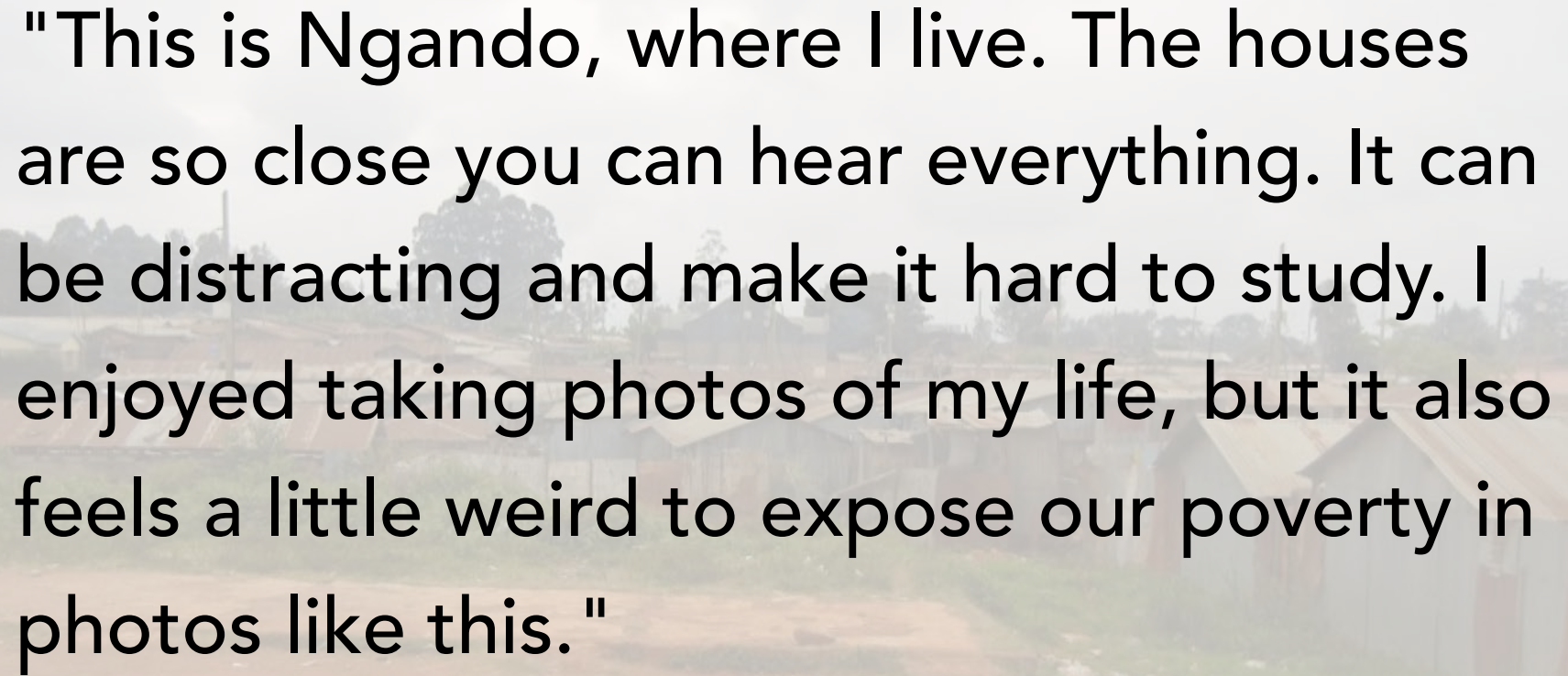
Derrick took these photos.



Lucy took this photo.







"This is Ngando, where I live. The houses are so close you can hear everything. It can be distracting and make it hard to study. I enjoyed taking photos of my life, but it also feels a little weird to expose our poverty in photos like this."



How can you honor the  
dignity of people in the  
stories you tell?

Let's have a conversation.

# Step 1: Do a story audit

	<i>Story A</i>	<i>Story B</i>	<i>Story C</i>
Who			
Topic			
Message			
Tone			
Language			
Image			

Source: Inspired by and shared with permission of Vanessa Chase Lockshin of The Storytelling Nonprofit

Think about a story your organization recently shared or is planning to share.

# Step 1: Do a story audit

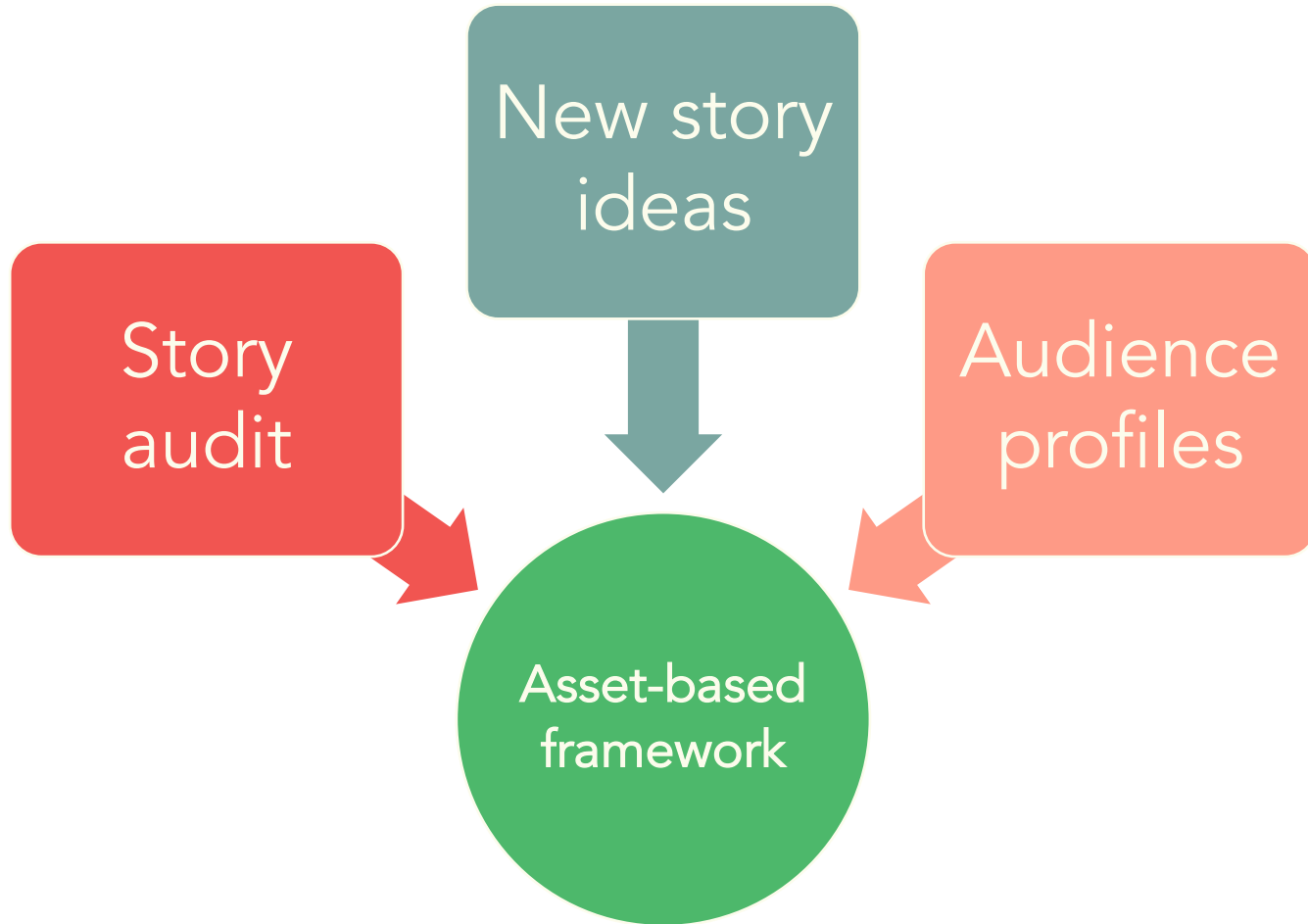
	<i>A story from YOUR organization!</i>
Who	
Topic	
Message	
Tone	
Language	
Image	

## Step 2: Brainstorm new message and story ideas

What is missing from your audit?

## Step 3: Create audience profiles





# Center for Economic Inclusion

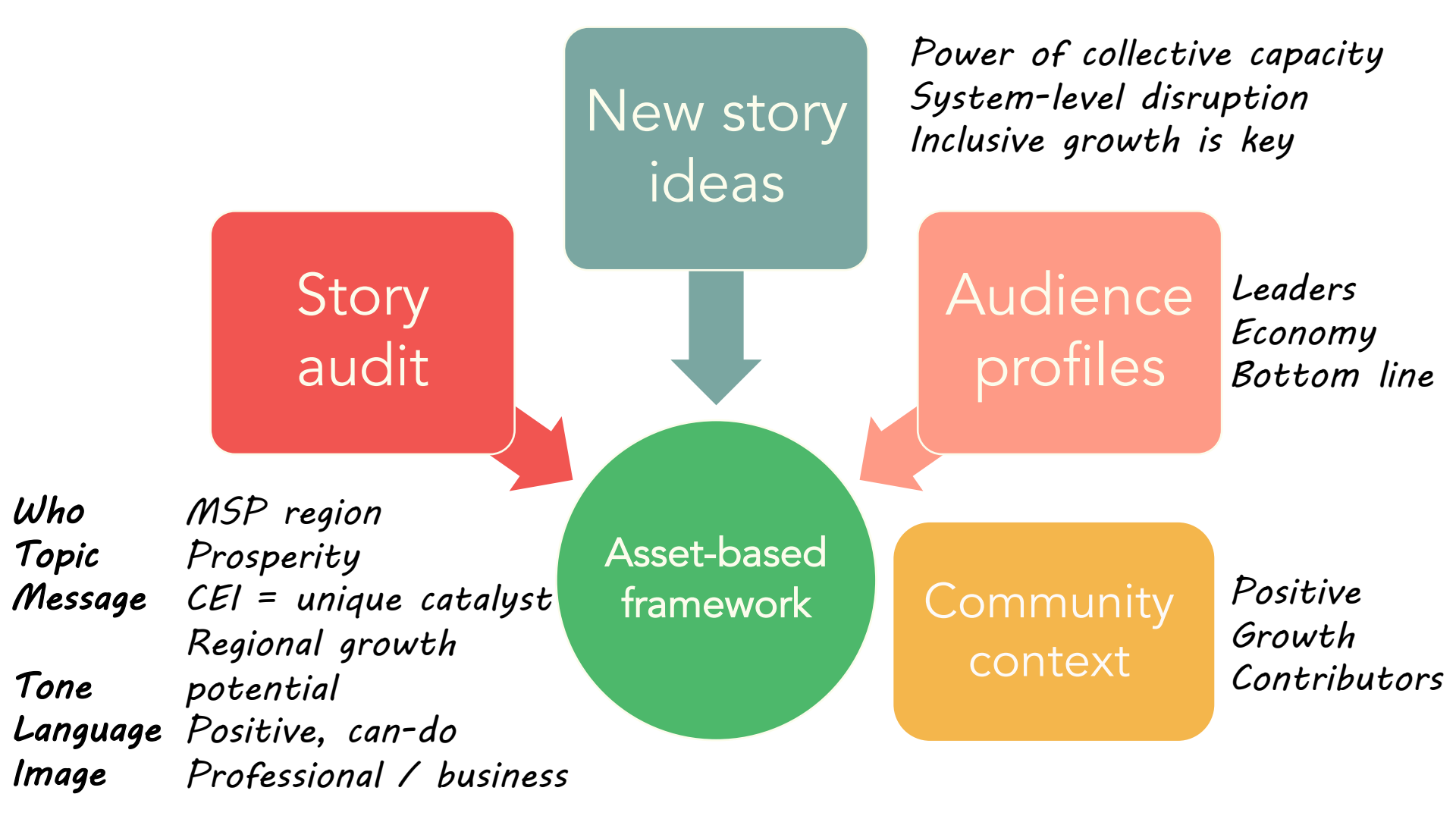
*Let's examine this local organization's asset-based story.*



**CREATING AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE.**



The Center for Economic Inclusion is the nation's **first** organization dedicated exclusively to advancing **inclusive growth** to achieve regional **prosperity**. We are a cross-sector organization committed to **strengthening** the Minneapolis-St. Paul region's civic infrastructure and **collective** capacity to disrupt systems and influence market forces to **catalyze shared prosperity** and an inclusive economy.



# Social Impact Strategies Group



GROW YOUR BUSINESS  
**& Your Impact**

## **Investing in ALL of our Community**

We elevate and leverage talent of folks from UNDERESTIMATED communities—  
People of color, immigrants, Native Americans, LGBTQ+, rural (white and non-white) Minnesotans and the 23 neighboring tribal nations—  
to create healthy and sustainable communities

Every story has a hero.  
Every hero encounters a challenge.

When it comes to your stories...

Who or what is  
the hero?

What is  
the challenge?

# East Metro Pulse survey

Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundations

## MEASURING CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

Data can reveal many things about a place. But the way a community functions is more nuanced than numerical. Do all of our neighbors experience the same connections and engagement within their community? Statistics show us one layer of connection. When we dig deeper and look at how East Metro residents feel about their community schools, how many of us know our neighbors, and how some of us feel about our economic stability, interesting trends emerge.

How do we bring this lens to our organizations?

Commit to a cycle  
of reflection.

Start where you can.



# Identify where you can have a lever

Organization's strategy and MVV



Project-level strategy



Communications framework



Communications plan

# Identify where you can have a lever

Resources, roles, timing



Implementation



Curation and engagement

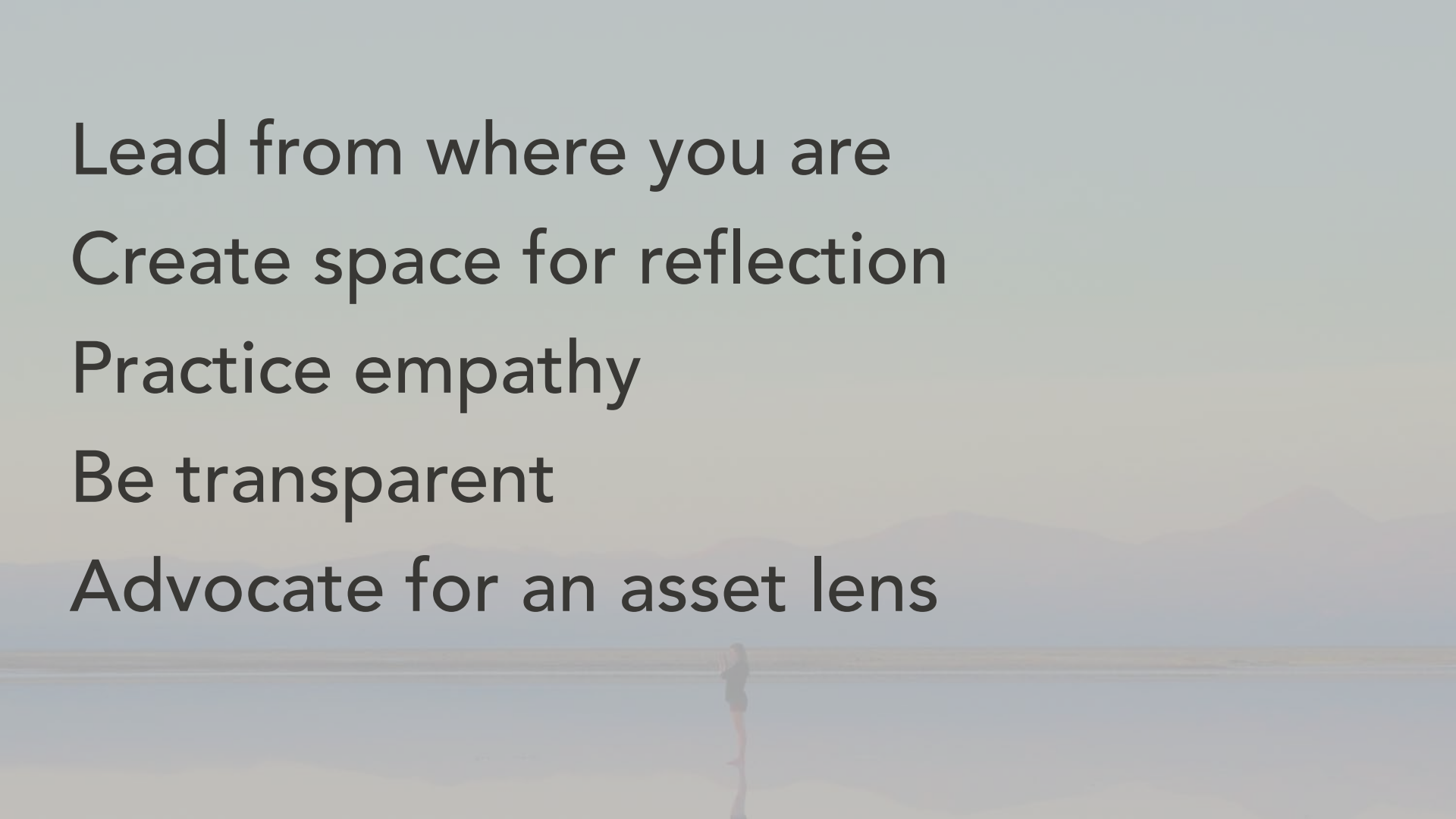


Assessment

# The lens of a leader

How does *where you're from*  
influence *how you do your work*?

# **The qualities of a leader**

A person is standing on a beach, looking out at the ocean. The background shows a range of mountains under a clear sky. The person is wearing dark clothing and is standing on the sand. The ocean is calm, and the mountains are in the distance.

Lead from where you are  
Create space for reflection  
Practice empathy  
Be transparent  
Advocate for an asset lens

# How do we advocate for an asset lens?

Find exemplars

Ask questions

Get more advocates

## WHY ARE WE MAKING THIS SHIFT?

Because our girls are at the center of what we do. They hear, read and see how Step Up talks.

**An emphasis on risk or deficits communicates a sense of failure and helplessness and often results in the following outcomes:**

- Labeling, which may lead teens to lower their expectations of themselves
- Obscuring the recognition of each girl's unique capabilities and strengths
- Focusing on the "can'ts" as opposed to the "cans"
- Prescribing "fixes" and "interventions" instead of the space, time, attention, exposure, and opportunity for girls to create their own visions and paths

**Conversely, an emphasis on assets:**

- encourages a growth mindset
- reinforces resilient behaviors
- communicates a sense of hope
- establishes expectations for success within a girl's capacities
- promotes empowerment and independence
- sets in motion forces for improvement



# SO WHAT'S NEXT?

You'll see Step Up shifting the way we talk about our work in our emails, social media, on our website, during mentor training, in videos and more.

We've already begun this shift, and additional communications will be updated over the coming year.

Step Up looks forward to working with you on this asset-based approach to communicating our work. Because, **WORDS MATTER!**

With the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say, we have done this ourselves.

- Lao-tzu

# Reflection

What is one thing you learned?

What's a question you have?

What action will you take now?

# Resources

Are emotional appeals effective in persuading people to give to charity?  
(The Guardian)

Digital storytelling for social impact  
(Rockefeller Foundation)

Frameworks Institute

“Helpful DO’s and DON’Ts”  
(The Development Element)

How to tell compelling stories while avoiding exploitation  
(Abesha Shiferaw, Rainier Valley)

Radi-Aid Research and Golden Radiator awards

The Storytelling Nonprofit  
(Vanessa Chase Lockshin)

Yes Magazine

# Thank you!

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