



The Signal Field Guide

A one-page reference to the early signs a good person is checking out.

First, tell two things apart

A performance problem is a cannot, a skill or training gap. A disengagement signal is a used-to-and-stopped: the ability is intact, the effort is what changed. You cannot train your way out of disengagement, and you cannot have a caring conversation to fix a skill gap. Spotting starts with telling them apart.

The three signals to watch

- They go quiet. The person who used to speak up stops, withdraws from the social parts of the work.
- They stop reaching. They do exactly the job and nothing more, and let the harder, optional work pass.
- Their output slips, for the first time. A steady performer starts missing what they never used to.

The trap: but the work is still good

Effort fades weeks before output drops on paper. By the time the work clearly suffers, the person has often already decided. The signal is in the behavior, early, not in the results, late.

Why you cannot just ask

Never ask someone directly if they are thinking about leaving. It corners them, makes the moment feel like an exit interview, and can plant the idea. Reframe forward instead: ask what would make the work better, what they want more of, what is getting in their way.

Make it a rhythm, not a reaction

Once a week, run your eyes down your team and ask one quiet question for each person: are they still showing up the way they used to. A change that holds across more than one check-in is a signal. One bad week is not.