LEADERSHIP LABS: CASE # 3
ROLE A: VP OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

THE SITUATION IN BRIEF

You’re the VP of Product Development at a small consumer software company. You were hired into this role three years ago by the company’s CEO and founder, and you’ve been personally responsible for building the Product Development team during that time. Your team sometimes feels caught between requests from Marketing and resistance from Engineering, but you have addressed these challenges by creating a mutually supportive culture within the team.

The company has enjoyed modest but steady growth in recent years, and you take pride in your team’s ability to consistently create practical, functional services that meet your users’ needs. However, last year the CEO decided to launch a new set of services aimed at younger users, with the expectation that tapping this new market would increase growth. You supported this new initiative, but you were also determined to prevent your team from feeling overwhelmed by it.

At that time the CEO encouraged you to bring on some new staff with expertise in designing services for younger users, and specifically recommended a Creative Director they had worked with at a previous company. You were highly impressed by the Creative Director’s vision and determination, but you also had some concerns about how their strong personality would fit within your tight-knit and collaborative team. You ultimately decided to accept the CEO’s recommendation, while recognizing that the new Creative Director could pose a management challenge for you.

The past year has been successful but also difficult. The Creative Director has been a tremendous source of innovative ideas that have helped your team meet the needs of the CEO’s new market initiative, but at the same time the Creative Director has been a source of friction for some of your team members. Recently this issue has come to a head in a series of contentious meetings...
regarding the development of a complex new product. You’ve been told that the Creative Director has been so aggressive in advocating for their ideas that some meetings have felt like “shouting matches” (although you haven’t personally observed them shout at anyone).

You have had several meetings with the Creative Director during the past year about how they handle disagreement with other members of your team. You respect the Creative Director’s contributions and don’t want to lose them, and you’re also aware that they have a relationship with the CEO, so you don’t feel entirely free to fire them. At the same time, you’re concerned that these continued disruptions are undermining morale and increasing stress levels on your team.

**The Challenge**

You’ve decided to talk with the Creative Director again, and your goal is to reach an agreement that gives you confidence that they will be able to collaborate effectively with the rest of your team. There are several potential strategies you can employ in this conversation:

- Ask (or order) them to modify their behavior yet again.
- Threaten to fire them if they fail to make the necessary changes.
- Jointly explore additional solutions.