LEADERSHIP LABS: CASE # 3
ROLE B: CREATIVE DIRECTOR

THE SITUATION IN BRIEF

You’re the Creative Director at a small consumer software company. You were hired into this role last year by the VP of Product Development, although you know that you were recommended for the job by company’s CEO and founder, who you worked with at a previous company. The Product Development team sometimes feels caught between requests from Marketing and resistance from Engineering, but your VP has addressed these challenges by creating a mutually supportive culture within the team.

The company has enjoyed modest but steady growth in recent years, and Product Development has done an adequate job of creating practical, functional services that meet 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’re aware that this initiative put pressure on the VP of Product Development to enhance the team’s capacity to create services for younger users, and hiring you was a key step in that effort. You feel strongly that younger users have a distinct set of needs, and you’ve spent your career working to serve that particular market. You were impressed by the CEO’s commitment to this initiative, but you had concerns about the Product Development team’s ability to change course. You decided to join the company, while recognizing that you might have to push the team to do things differently.

The past year has been successful but also difficult. You’ve been able to win approval for a number of your ideas, but the Product Development team has often been slow to change their approach, and you’ve had to push harder than you wanted to at times. You’re aware that there’s been some friction between you and other members of the team, but you believe that your
advocacy has helped the team make some tough decisions, and you feel that your relationships with your colleagues are intact.

However, things have gotten more heated than usual in several recent meetings. You’re concerned that a complex new product is going to fail if your colleagues in Product Development aren’t willing to be more innovative, and you’re determined to shake them up.

You have had several meetings with the VP of Product Development during the past year about disagreements you’ve had with other members of the team. You appreciate the VP’s desire to maintain a harmonious team, but you’re concerned that their efforts to minimize all conflicts are stifling the team’s creativity and undermining the company’s ability to tackle this new market challenge.

The Challenge

The VP of Product Development has asked to talk, and your goal for the conversation is to reach an agreement that gives you confidence that they will support a more innovative approach. There are several potential strategies you can employ in this conversation:

- Ask them to be more supportive of your efforts to drive change.
- Question whether their collaborative management style has made the team too conflict-averse.
- Threaten to go over their head to the CEO.
- Jointly explore other options.