**Meeting Transcript**March 22, 2025

**[0:00 – 2:00]**

Bill:
“Alright. Let’s get started. Thanks for making the time—especially on a Monday, when I know everyone’s inbox is already full and you’re trying to play catch-up. But I asked for this meeting for a reason.”

Bill:
“There’s pressure from the top. Some of you have probably felt it more directly than others, but I’ve been getting pinged weekly—sometimes more. The message is consistent: we need to cut costs, yes, but we also need a clear plan for growth. Both. Not one, not the other. And frankly, our current strategy doesn’t answer that ask.”

Bill:
“I know some of us are tired of hearing the word ‘strategy’—like it’s become a placeholder for ‘fix everything’—but this isn’t abstract. It’s become clear that what we’re doing right now... isn’t working well enough.”

Bill:
“I’m not expecting silver bullets today. I’m also not asking for a five-point plan. What I do want is honesty. What are we missing? What have we stopped doing? What have we never done, but should’ve?”

Bill:
“This isn’t a blame meeting. I want to make that really clear. If you think there’s a gap, say it. If something isn’t working and we’re pretending it is—call it. We’ll sort through the noise later. But today, we need to name the gaps, even if it’s uncomfortable.”

Becky:
“I appreciate that. Honestly? This is the first time in—what, six months?—that someone’s even said the word ‘growth’ without immediately walking it back. Usually, it’s like—‘we want to grow, but responsibly’—which is just code for, ‘we’re not doing anything new.’ So... yeah. I’m in.”

Bill:
“I figured you might be. I know this kind of thinking energizes you. I also know we’re all coming from different angles on this. Sanjay, I can already tell you’ve got thoughts.”

Sanjay:
“I do. Look, I get where this is coming from. I hear the pressure too. But let’s not kid ourselves—there’s a reason we haven’t been talking about growth. We’ve been in pure defense mode. For months. The budget’s been shifting. Priorities keep getting pulled down and reshuffled. We’ve been just trying to keep operations from getting bottlenecked.”

John:
“I mean, he’s not wrong. Feels like every time we stabilize one thing, something else breaks.”

Becky:
“Sure, but you can’t cut your way into relevance either. I get that the money’s tight, but if we’re just reacting to every cut without a bigger picture, we’re gonna miss the moment entirely. We’ll be lean and irrelevant.”

Sanjay:
“But being lean is exactly what got us through Q3. And Q4, frankly. It’s not nothing.”

Bill:
“Totally. I’m not discounting the triage we’ve done. You’ve all helped hold this thing together. But I think we’ve gotten so good at reacting that we forgot how to plan forward. And I don’t just mean revenue forecasts—I mean actual direction.”

John:
“Honestly, I don’t even know what our direction is anymore. Like, if someone outside the company asked me what we’re building toward, I’d have a hard time answering. A year ago? I would’ve said platform leadership in mid-market. Now? I don’t know.”

Becky:
“Exactly. There’s no story anymore. No shared sense of what we’re aiming for. It’s just survive, stabilize, hold the line. That’s not strategy—that’s just... stalling.”

Sanjay:
“Okay, but it’s not like we had the luxury to do vision work. We’ve been moving backlog items just to hit basic delivery.”

Bill:
“I get that. I’m not blaming the team. I’m saying we can’t stay in this pattern much longer. We’ve cut a lot. But how do we know we’ve been cutting the right things? Have we been thoughtful—or just reactive?”

John:
“There’s a bunch of stuff I used to bring up in check-ins that I’ve just stopped even mentioning. Because I already know the answer’s going to be ‘we don’t have capacity.’ So... I stopped asking. And maybe that’s part of the gap too.”

Becky:
“Yeah. People have gone quiet. Even the ones who used to push. We’ve trained the team to stop asking questions. That’s not cost-saving—it’s playing dead.”

Bill:
“Alright. That’s where we’ll start. This isn’t about fixing everything today. It’s about looking under the hood and getting honest. I need us to act like owners again. And owners ask hard questions.”

**[2:01 – 4:30]**

Bill:
“So let’s stay with that thread for a minute—this idea that we’ve gone quiet. John, you mentioned not bringing things up anymore. That’s important. I’m not asking for examples to point fingers—I’m asking because if that’s happening across the org, then we’ve got a real cultural block.”

John:
“Yeah. It’s not even about fear exactly. More like... I just don’t expect traction. We’re spread thin, and it’s easier to keep your head down than pitch something that’ll get tabled.”

Becky:
“That’s a huge red flag. If our product lead doesn’t feel like it’s worth raising ideas, we’re literally capping our own future.”

Sanjay:
“Okay, but let’s slow down here. We can’t greenlight every idea people have. Not all of them make sense. Not every risk is worth taking.”

Becky:
“That’s not what I’m saying. I’m not saying everything should be funded. I’m saying people should at least *believe* their ideas will get a fair hearing. If we’re preemptively shutting ourselves down, we’re filtering innovation before it even has a shot.”

Bill:
“And that filtering isn’t always visible, right? It’s not policy. It’s just... this slow internal shift. People stop bothering. They convince themselves they’re helping by not speaking up.”

John:
“Exactly. Like, I’m not upset. It’s just the pattern. You get the same feedback enough times and eventually, you self-edit.”

Sanjay:
“But part of that is knowing how to filter your own ideas. There’s a difference between something interesting and something strategic.”

Becky:
“Sanjay, that’s part of the problem. You’re framing those as opposites. Strategic *can* be interesting. We act like unless something has a projected ROI in a spreadsheet, it doesn’t count.”

Sanjay:
“Because we’re not playing with house money here. We’ve got limits. That’s not pessimism. It’s accountability.”

Bill:
“Okay. Hold on. I think you’re both touching something important. It’s not either/or. We can hold standards *and* encourage ideas. What we can’t do is keep creating an environment where people assume their thinking isn’t valuable unless it’s perfectly formed.”

Becky:
“Exactly. And if we only encourage ideas when they’re safe and calculated, we’ll never see the truly transformative ones.”

John:
“There’s also a bandwidth issue. Even if someone’s got a good idea, they look around and think—who’s going to run with this? Who’s going to sponsor it? And if no one comes to mind, they shelve it.”

Bill:
“So we’ve got three signals so far:
One—people are editing themselves before sharing.
Two—there’s no clear path for ideas to get explored, even informally.
And three—we’ve put so much weight on justification that it’s crowding out curiosity.”

Becky:
“Boom. That’s the culture gap. That’s it right there.”

Bill:
“Let’s write that down. Cultural gap: low safety, low bandwidth, high friction for new ideas.”

Sanjay:
“Just make sure we don’t turn this into a therapy session. We still need results.”

Becky:
“Cool. Let’s talk about the results we’re *not* getting because people are afraid to challenge the plan.”

Bill:
“Let’s pause there. That might be worth unpacking next.”

**[4:31 – 7:00]**

Bill:
“Let’s stay on this. Becky said something earlier that keeps echoing. That people feel like they can’t challenge the plan. I want to pause on that because... if that’s true, then even a perfect plan would rot.”

Bill:
“So I want to ask—when’s the last time you disagreed with a strategic assumption out loud? Not a feature request, not a resource shift... but the actual direction?”

Becky:
“I’ll go first. I’ve danced around it a bunch of times, but I haven’t really *said* it. I don’t believe the current customer segmentation model is helping us anymore. It used to. It made sense a year ago. But right now? I think it’s limiting the kinds of moves we can make.”

John:
“You mean like targeting mostly enterprise and neglecting mid-market?”

Becky:
“Yes. Exactly. And I’ve hinted at that a few times in go-to-market syncs, but it never gets picked up. People nod, then we move on.”

Sanjay:
“Because we can’t pivot without knowing what the actual payoff would be. It’s not just about the idea—it’s the follow-through. We’d have to rebuild portions of our infrastructure to properly support mid-size clients. That’s not small.”

Becky:
“I get that, but we’re making assumptions without real data. That’s what bugs me. No one’s saying, ‘Here’s why it wouldn’t work.’ They’re saying, ‘We don’t have time to talk about it.’ That’s not the same.”

Bill:
“Okay, let’s slow down. You’re both right, and you’re naming different things. Becky’s pointing out a cultural silence—that even raising a question feels like extra work for everyone else. And Sanjay’s saying we need structure to move forward if we *do* explore something. Both of those are fair.”

John:
“I think it’s also bandwidth. Like, I don’t challenge direction often because I’m usually doing mental math: ‘If I bring this up, and we do decide to explore it, I’ll probably be the one building it. Do I have six hours to prototype this? No. Then forget it.’ So... I don’t speak up.”

Becky:
“Right. And if John’s not speaking up, that’s a problem. He’s not reckless. If he thinks something has potential, we should be encouraging it—not making it feel like a burden.”

Sanjay:
“But that’s exactly my point. There’s no surplus capacity for unvalidated experiments. Every hour we spend trying something unproven is an hour we’re not fixing known problems.”

Bill:
“I think that’s a key tension, Sanjay. Not just whether an idea is good—but whether the system is built to *let* us try it without tanking delivery. And right now, it’s not. So instead of asking, ‘Is this idea good?’ we’re asking, ‘Can we afford to even talk about this?’ And that’s a dangerous filter.”

Becky:
“Super dangerous. It means only the most politically safe ideas get airtime. And we all know those aren’t the ones that shift anything.”

John:
“And it’s not like anyone’s saying it out loud. It’s just... understood. Like background noise. We all feel it.”

Bill:
“Which means it’s time to make it visible. That’s what we’re doing here. We’re pulling these assumptions up into the light.”

Sanjay:
“But making things visible isn’t the same as acting on them. We need to be careful not to just make a list of pain points and call that progress.”

Becky:
“Then let’s act. Small. Right now. What would it look like to try one thing—to give one team some protected time or a carve-out to explore a strategic shift?”

John:
“Even like... one afternoon a week. Give people a window where they can work on something speculative. If it goes nowhere, fine. But at least we’d start to signal that it’s allowed.”

Sanjay:
“Who decides what counts as ‘strategic,’ though? You give four people a Friday sandbox, and suddenly you’ve got four side projects with no alignment.”

Bill:
“We don’t need total alignment at first. We need signal. Signal that curiosity isn’t punished. Signal that not everything has to be bulletproof before it’s voiced.”

Becky:
“And that failure doesn’t equal fallout.”

Sanjay:
“I’m not saying we punish failure.”

Becky:
“You don’t have to. If people feel like there’s no room for it, they won’t go near the edge. They’ll stay safely inside the lines, even if what we need is a whole new playbook.”

Bill:
“Okay. Let’s write this one down clearly. Gap: No safe or visible path for challenging strategic assumptions. Result: silence, stagnation, risk avoidance. We need to fix that.”

John:
“We could test it in product. Quietly. Internal-facing ideas first. That way we don’t scare anyone upstairs.”

Becky:
“And we track what’s tried. Even if it fails. Especially if it fails. Otherwise we won’t learn anything.”

Bill:
“I’ll take that on. I’ll talk to legal and HR about what kind of protection we’d need around it. Even if it’s just language right now.”

Sanjay:
“And I’ll help shape criteria. If we’re going to let people experiment, I want at least one line of clarity around what gets greenlit and what doesn’t.”

Becky:
“Deal. As long as it’s not five pages of criteria.”

John:
“One page max.”

Bill:
“Good. Let’s call that our first real step today. One small, structured opening for curiosity. That’s the beginning of repair.”

**[7:01 – 10:00]**

Bill:
“Okay. Let’s keep building on this. We’ve talked about the cultural blockers—about how ideas get filtered before they ever leave someone’s head. Now I want to talk about how we *frame* new ideas when they do show up. How do we actually treat them when they’re voiced?”

Becky:
“I mean... half the time, they get buried under ‘we don’t have time for that right now.’ Even if no one *says* that directly, that’s the message. It's always, ‘Interesting—but let’s stay focused.’ And then poof—it disappears.”

Sanjay:
“Maybe because some of those ideas aren’t actionable. That’s not disrespect. It’s triage.”

Becky:
“It *feels* like disrespect. Even if it’s not meant that way.”

John:
“Yeah. It’s not always about whether the idea is good. Sometimes it’s just about tone. If the first reaction is resistance or nitpicking, people learn not to bring stuff up again.”

Sanjay:
“Or maybe people should learn how to present ideas in a way that respects everyone’s time. I’m not trying to nitpick. I just don’t want to waste cycles talking about things that were never viable to begin with.”

Becky:
“Wow. Okay. So we’re back to filtering based on polish instead of potential. Cool.”

Sanjay:
“No, we’re talking about standards. Not everything tossed out in a brainstorm deserves a follow-up. I’m not going to apologize for asking people to do basic thinking before floating something.”

Bill:
“Let’s pause there. That right there? That tension is *exactly* the point. This isn’t about right or wrong—it’s about what happens *between* the idea and the outcome. And right now, that in-between space feels... charged.”

John:
“Honestly? It’s easier to let ideas die quietly than risk them getting shot down in front of the group. That’s the atmosphere we’ve created. And nobody decided that—it just kind of... happened.”

Becky:
“I don’t think we even notice we’re doing it. Like, remember that offhand comment during the last all-hands about ‘staying in our lanes’? That wasn’t subtle.”

Sanjay:
“That was about clarity. Everyone was working on everything. We had six cooks in one kitchen.”

Becky:
“Maybe. Or maybe it was about control.”

Bill:
“Let’s stay focused. We’re getting close to something important here. It’s not just about shutting down ideas—it’s about *how* we shut them down. What’s the tone? What’s the pattern? Who gets listened to and who doesn’t?”

John:
“Honestly, it depends who says it. Like—if Becky throws something out, people either get excited or annoyed. But if Sanjay says it, it’s seen as ‘official.’ If *I* say something, it’s usually, ‘That’s interesting, we’ll circle back.’ Which... never happens.”

Becky:
“Wow, yeah. That’s real. And it’s not even malicious. It’s just... power dynamics.”

Sanjay:
“Okay, now we’re talking about power?”

Becky:
“I mean—yes? Why wouldn’t we? You have the final say on anything that touches Ops. You don’t think people adjust their language around that?”

Sanjay:
“I think people need to stop pretending that responsibility is the same thing as control.”

Bill:
“Hold on—this isn’t about calling anyone out. It’s about seeing what’s *really* happening. If we don’t name the dynamics in the room, we’re not going to shift anything.”

John:
“Feels like we’re finally being honest.”

Becky:
“Feels like we should’ve been honest three quarters ago.”

Bill:
“Look. I know this isn’t comfortable. It’s hard. But it’s better than the quiet, polite meetings we’ve been having where nothing really shifts. I’ll take messy and real over calm and stuck.”

Sanjay:
“Just make sure messy doesn’t become directionless.”

Becky:
“Trust me—what we’ve been doing hasn’t exactly been visionary.”

John:
“Okay. Can we agree on something here? Can we agree that part of our strategy gap is *relational*? It’s not just about customers or tech or the roadmap. It’s about us.”

Bill:
“Yes. Thank you. Let’s say that clearly: Relational gap. Uneven dynamics in who gets heard. High cost to speak honestly. Low follow-up on feedback. That’s a gap.”

Sanjay:
“Fine. Then add one more. Gap: unclear process for vetting and prioritizing new ideas. Because we can’t fix this if we don’t change the system.”

Becky:
“I actually agree with that.”

Bill:
“Great. Now we’re getting somewhere.”

**[10:01 – 12:30]**

Bill:
“Alright. Let’s shift gears slightly. We’ve talked about internal blockers—culture, assumptions, uneven access to influence. Now I want to bring up something external that keeps coming up from leadership, and from clients: AI.”

(Short pause.)

Bill:
“They’re not asking if we’re becoming an AI company. They’re asking why we don’t seem to have any position on it at all.”

Becky:
“Yup. I’ve been waiting for this. Honestly, I’m shocked we’ve avoided the conversation this long.”

John:
“I’m not. It’s been radioactive. No one wants to put their name on it in case it turns into a time suck—or worse, a black hole.”

Sanjay:
“Because it *would* be a time suck. Let’s not pretend otherwise. We don’t have the architecture, the team, or the use case depth to do anything meaningful there.”

Becky:
“That’s not true. And also—not the point. We’re not trying to invent new AI. We’re trying to avoid looking like we’re asleep at the wheel. Everyone else is experimenting. We’re... drafting LinkedIn posts about last quarter’s uptime.”

John:
“It’s embarrassing, honestly. And the irony is, we *do* use AI. Just not in a way we’re proud to talk about. A couple of our internal tools already rely on GPT. We just never packaged it.”

Bill:
“Exactly. We’ve got scattered usage. But no story. And no alignment. That’s the gap.”

Sanjay:
“We’re not in the business of telling stories. We’re in the business of building things that work.”

Becky:
“That mindset *is* the gap, Sanjay. You think ‘story’ is spin. It’s not. It’s strategy. If clients can’t see what we’re doing, it might as well not exist.”

Sanjay:
“And who’s supposed to own that? Because marketing sure isn’t getting developer insights fed in any usable way. That’s not just a mindset issue—it’s a broken pipeline.”

Bill:
“Okay, good. Let’s name both: we’ve got a tech-marketing disconnect *and* a misalignment around messaging ownership. And underneath that, a value judgment about whether storytelling even matters.”

Becky:
“Thank you. That last part is what’s been driving me up the wall.”

John:
“If we want to look even semi-credible, we need at least three clear examples of where we’re applying AI—even small ones. Doesn’t matter if they’re internal tools or customer-facing features. Just give people something.”

Sanjay:
“Three examples? Okay. And who maintains them? Who owns support? What happens when a client starts asking for custom integrations based on something we put in a blog post?”

Becky:
“Then we say no. That’s what boundaries are for. Just because we mention a tool doesn’t mean we’re promising full-service build-outs.”

Bill:
“We don’t need a roadmap right now—we need visibility. This is reputational. People want to see that we’re not ignoring the biggest shift in the industry in the last five years.”

John:
“And also—we need to know ourselves. We keep treating this like a press problem, but it’s a product and culture problem too. We don’t know what we’re doing with AI because we haven’t decided who we want to *be* in this space.”

Becky:
“That’s it. That’s the real question. Are we just users of the technology, or are we willing to make it part of our product philosophy?”

Bill:
“I’m hearing a few different things here. Let me try to recap:

1. We have some AI use cases, but no narrative.
2. We don’t have a clear position on what kind of company we are in relation to AI.
3. And our internal structure doesn’t support cross-functional communication around this, which kills momentum.”

Becky:
“Exactly. And if we don’t pick a lane soon, we’re going to look like we missed the wave entirely.”

Sanjay:
“Or like we were smart enough not to chase hype.”

John:
“Depends on who tells the story first.”

Bill:
“Let’s mark that down as a major strategic gap: Unclear AI identity. Internal misalignment. External silence. It’s affecting credibility.”

**[12:31 – 15:00]**

Bill:
“Alright. So we’ve named the AI gap. Now comes the hard part—ownership. If we agree this is a credibility issue, then it can’t sit in limbo. Someone needs to take point, even if it’s just a lightweight framing of what we *are* and *aren’t* doing.”

Becky:
“I can help draft something on the positioning side. Just enough to stop the bleeding. It won’t solve the problem, but it’ll give us something to point to. A direction.”

John:
“I’ll dig through the tools we’re already using. If I can pull together two or three real examples, even if they’re not flashy, that’s something.”

Sanjay:
“Fine. But we need parameters. Someone has to define what gets shared externally and what stays internal. Last thing I need is Becky posting something on LinkedIn that triggers a client call asking why their dashboard doesn’t do what the post said.”

Becky:
“I’m not winging it, Sanjay. I’m trying to move us forward.”

Sanjay:
“And I’m trying to avoid operational chaos.”

Bill:
“You’re both doing your jobs. But this isn’t just about brand or ops—it’s about *ownership*. So let’s be clear. Who owns defining our strategic position on AI?”

(Silence.)

Bill:
“I’ll take it. For now.”

Becky:
“Wait—why? You already have twelve things on your plate.”

John:
“He always takes it.”

Sanjay:
“Well, he *is* the team lead.”

Bill:
“Right. But that doesn’t mean I’m the only one who can own strategy. If I’m the default for anything difficult or vague, then we’re just reinforcing the same problem we keep trying to fix.”

Becky:
“Yeah. That’s fair. We all want transformation, but we quietly push it back onto you when it gets messy.”

John:
“I don’t even think it’s conscious. It’s just... safer to let you absorb the fallout if it doesn’t land well.”

Bill:
“I know. And honestly? I’ve let that dynamic happen. I’ve tried to protect the team from that pressure, but it’s starting to break things. Quietly. And I think we feel it more than we talk about it.”

Sanjay:
“So what—now we’re doing a trust circle?”

Becky:
“No, we’re being grown-ups. Acknowledge that we’ve offloaded the hard parts and that Bill’s been carrying it.”

John:
“If we want the strategy to actually change, it has to stop being *his* strategy. Or the execs’ strategy. It has to be *ours*.”

Bill:
“Exactly. That’s what I’ve been trying to get to. This isn’t about me having all the answers. It’s about us having the courage to name what’s broken and then *co-own* what happens next.”

Becky:
“Okay. Let’s stop saying that and actually do it. Let’s assign names to each of these gaps we’ve outlined. Not ‘someone should’—names. And if we need to co-own, let’s pair up.”

Bill:
“I’m all for that.”

Sanjay:
“Alright. Then I want to co-own the AI framing piece—but with guardrails. I’ll work with Becky. She handles message, I handle feasibility.”

Becky:
“Deal. We’ll draft something small. Clear. No fluff.”

John:
“I’ll take internal AI usage examples. I’ll loop in a few of the devs on the quiet pilot stuff we’ve already been doing. Might as well make it visible.”

Bill:
“Great. And I’ll hold the structure around it—connect the parts. Frame the narrative in a way we can build on.”

Becky:
“So... a real plan, not just a list of complaints. I like this.”

Sanjay:
“Let’s just make sure we actually follow through. Strategy’s easy in a room like this. Harder out there.”

John:
“Then let’s build a feedback loop for ourselves too. If we’re serious about co-owning, we need to hold each other accountable.”

Bill:
“Let’s do it. And let’s make the next hour count.”

**[15:01 – 17:30]**

Bill:
“Alright. Before we lose momentum, let’s keep going with the gap ownership. We’ve got AI positioning and examples covered. What’s next?”

John:
“I think the product modularity thing Becky brought up earlier—about expanding beyond enterprise—is another gap. We’ve built everything around our top-tier clients, but there’s no path for smaller orgs to engage with us.”

Becky:
“Yeah, we’ve priced ourselves out of flexibility. That’s a big one. We’ve said ‘not our market’ for years, but that market’s getting bigger.”

Sanjay:
“Because those clients take up support time and deliver half the margin. That’s why we avoided them.”

Becky:
“Sure, *used to*. But they don’t all need full-service onboarding now. The tech has evolved. And so have their expectations.”

John:
“Exactly. If we modularize what we already have—slice off components that don’t need customization—we could tap into new revenue without massive lift.”

Bill:
“And who would own exploring that? Even just at the feasibility stage?”

Becky:
“I’ll do it. I’ve already got some comps from competitors. Some of them are killing it with mid-market clients we used to ignore.”

John:
“I’ll tag in if we get into product structure questions. It overlaps with stuff we’re mapping anyway.”

Bill:
“Perfect. That’s a strong lead.”

Becky:
“And hey—remember that one client we had in like, 2019? The small HR tech company that tried to run our full enterprise package and almost imploded?”

John:
“Oh god. Yes. They thought they needed the whole analytics suite and then called us a month later saying they couldn’t figure out how to log in.”

Sanjay:
“Didn’t they also have, like, a two-person IT team? And they scheduled a four-hour onboarding that no one showed up to?”

Becky:
“Exactly! And then we had to reschedule it three times because their CTO was also their office manager.”

Bill:
“I forgot about that. And we *still* gave them priority support for some reason.”

John:
“That was the year we said ‘no more small accounts’ for the third time.”

Becky:
“And here we are... full circle.”

Sanjay:
“Well, at least now we know better. Hopefully.”

Bill:
“Maybe. But we also have better tech now. And a chance to do it differently.”

John:
“Alright. Back on track. What else is on the gap list?”

Bill:
“We’ve covered culture, experimentation, strategic voice, AI, and product strategy. What haven’t we touched?”

Becky:
“I’d add something on decision rights. There’s confusion around who actually gets to approve what. Half the time, I’m waiting on signoff and no one knows who’s supposed to give it.”

Sanjay:
“That’s not a gap. That’s people not reading the RACI chart.”

Becky:
“Come on. When was the last time *you* looked at that chart?”

John:
“I don’t even know where it lives.”

Bill:
“That says a lot right there.”

**[17:31 – 20:00]**

Bill:
“So let’s stay on that last point—decision rights. If there’s confusion about who signs off on what, then that’s not a workflow issue. It’s a trust and clarity issue. And it slows everything down.”

Becky:
“It doesn’t just slow things down—it creates these weird bottlenecks where no one wants to move until someone else says go. We lose whole days to approval limbo.”

Sanjay:
“And that’s because too many people are trying to move pieces they don’t own. I’ve seen it happen again and again—teams stepping outside their lane because they *think* they’re being proactive.”

John:
“Or because no one’s in the lane to begin with.”

Becky:
“Exactly. It’s not overreach. It’s a vacuum. And people fill vacuums because someone has to keep momentum.”

Sanjay:
“Until something breaks. Then it’s, ‘Why did you touch that?’”

Bill:
“Right. So the gap here is twofold: lack of clear ownership *and* lack of real-time visibility. We assume someone else has it, or no one’s sure who the decider is. By the time it gets to me, it’s already a fire.”

Becky:
“I’ve seen you pulled into stuff you should never have had to weigh in on. Internal decks. Feature copy. Partner pricing. It’s like, if no one else feels empowered to decide, it defaults to Bill.”

John:
“I’ve done it. I’ve routed things through you just because I didn’t want to deal with the back-and-forth that usually happens when no one’s clearly in charge.”

Bill:
“Yeah. And I let it happen. I mean, I’m trying to keep things moving—but I’ve become a decision catch-all. And I don’t think that’s sustainable.”

Sanjay:
“Well, the org chart exists for a reason. We’ve got team leads. Directors. RACI matrices. This shouldn’t be that hard.”

Becky:
“Except people don’t make decisions based on org charts. They make them based on behavior. And the behavior right now is: wait, escalate, then wait some more.”

John:
“Or just act quietly and hope it doesn’t blow back.”

Bill:
“Neither of those is healthy. We’re either too cautious or too rogue. There’s no shared understanding of when a decision is okay to make without checking five boxes.”

Becky:
“We need to normalize small, fast decisions. And make escalation feel like a last resort—not the default.”

Sanjay:
“So... how? What does that look like in practice?”

John:
“It could be simple. Maybe we adopt a rule: if the decision affects less than two teams and costs less than $10K, it doesn’t need escalation.”

Sanjay:
“I don’t hate that. But we’d need thresholds defined *and* documented. Otherwise people will play fast and loose with what counts.”

Becky:
“Then define it. Document it. But don’t use that as a reason to delay change. We’ve done that too many times.”

Bill:
“Okay. Let’s test it. Sanjay, can you draft a first version of that threshold guide? Even just a rough framework?”

Sanjay:
“Yeah. I’ll pull something together by Friday. But I want input before it gets used.”

Bill:
“Of course. And I’ll look at how we socialize it—so it doesn’t just live in a folder no one opens.”

Becky:
“And I’ll do a sanity check with marketing leads. See where the bottlenecks show up most. That way we know where the pain is.”

John:
“I’ll review product requests. We’ve had more than a few small asks die in approval hell.”

Bill:
“Perfect. Let’s call this one ‘decision flow clarity.’ That’s our sixth major gap today.”

Becky:
“Six gaps. In under twenty minutes. We’re crushing it.”

Sanjay:
“Or we’re admitting we’ve got bigger problems than we thought.”

John:
“Both can be true.”

Bill:
“Either way—we’re seeing it. That’s the first step to actually fixing it.”

**[20:01 – 22:30]**

Bill:
“Alright. Six gaps in, and we’re not even halfway through the hour. That says something. Not just about where we are, but about what we’ve been carrying without naming it.”

Becky:
“It also says we’ve been avoiding some of this for too long. None of these are new problems. They’re just problems we’ve stopped looking at because they’re exhausting.”

Sanjay:
“Or because we assumed someone else was already handling them.”

John:
“Or because no one wanted to risk opening up another thing that might turn into a mess.”

Bill:
“That part. That right there. I’ve felt it. Every time I think about raising one of these issues, I go through this internal checklist—‘Can we absorb this right now? Will it make things worse before it gets better?’ And too often, I’ve decided to let it go.”

Becky:
“But that’s not really letting it go, right? It just leaks out later. In project delays. In backchannel Slack threads. In meetings where everyone’s half-engaged because they’re tired of pretending we’re aligned.”

John:
“Yeah. It’s weird. We act like naming the problem is the disruption, when really, *not* naming it is what’s been doing damage.”

Sanjay:
“I get it. But there’s also a cost to constantly interrogating everything. At some point, we need to ship. We need to deliver.”

Becky:
“No one’s arguing with that. But if we don’t stop to ask *why* we’re shipping what we’re shipping—or *how* we’re doing it—then we’re just producing output. Not value.”

Bill:
“Let’s be honest: we’re tired. This team has been carrying contradictions for months. And I think we’ve gotten used to the discomfort. Like it’s normal to feel stretched, unheard, and vaguely responsible for stuff we don’t even own.”

Becky:
“That last part. The ‘vaguely responsible’ feeling? That’s spot on. I feel like I’m holding things together that aren’t even officially mine.”

John:
“Same. Like I’m on the hook for outcomes I can’t influence because the decision-making’s happening elsewhere—or not happening at all.”

Sanjay:
“And then when something goes sideways, everyone looks at each other like, ‘Well, someone should’ve caught that.’”

Bill:
“Which is another form of silence, right? We don’t say what’s not working because we’re afraid it’ll turn into blame. So we stay quiet, and that just makes things worse.”

Becky:
“It also isolates everyone. We’re all carrying different pieces of a puzzle we’ve never really looked at together.”

John:
“That’s why today feels different. Because for once, we’re not trying to spin it. We’re just saying what we see.”

Bill:
“And what I see is that we’ve built a system where initiative and caution are constantly in tension. Where people want to lead, but they’re not sure if it’s safe—or worth it.”

Sanjay:
“So then how do we rebuild trust in the system? Because if people don’t trust the process, then no framework’s going to matter.”

Becky:
“We start by acknowledging that trust has eroded. Not because people are bad at their jobs, but because we haven’t had the structure—or the space—to align.”

Bill:
“And maybe we rebuild trust by doing exactly what we’re doing right now. Saying the things that are hard to say. Owning our part. Listening without defensiveness.”

John:
“I think we also need more moments like this. Not once a quarter. Not just when it’s urgent.”

Becky:
“Regular air-clearing. No slide decks. Just... space to reflect, realign, and reset.”

Sanjay:
“You’re basically describing group therapy.”

Becky:
“Not therapy. Hygiene. This is hygiene. We shower every day—doesn’t mean we’re broken.”

Bill:
“I’d be happy with once a month. Something recurring, protected. Not reactive.”

John:
“And short. No 90-minute marathons. Just enough to surface the weird stuff before it builds up.”

Sanjay:
“If it stays focused, I’m in.”

Bill:
“Good. I’ll take the first pass at designing that cadence. And we’ll adjust as we go. But let’s protect the time.”

Becky:
“And protect the tone. If it turns into another status meeting, people will bail.”

Bill:
“Agreed. And if I start turning it into a lecture, someone call me out.”

John:
“Noted.”

Becky:
“Gladly.”

Bill:
“Alright. That’s one structural solution we just created. Let’s log that as a concrete outcome from today.”

**[22:31 – 25:00]**

Bill:
“So, we’ve surfaced six major gaps, and we’ve got a few action paths forming. But I want to check—do we actually feel aligned on what we’re walking away with? Or are we just saying the right things out loud and hoping the follow-up sorts itself out?”

Becky:
“Fair question. I feel aligned on AI ownership and the need for experimentation space. But the product modularity piece still feels... vague.”

John:
“Same. We’re treating it like an obvious opportunity, but we haven’t really touched the risks.”

Sanjay:
“There’s a reason we dropped the mid-market push in the first place. It wasn’t just bandwidth. The margins were thin, and the support requirements were unpredictable.”

Becky:
“But the market has changed. Our model hasn’t. That’s part of the problem.”

Bill:
“Okay, so this is still unsettled. Maybe we don’t walk out of here with a yes or no—but can we agree that we’ll do a discovery sprint on it?”

Sanjay:
“What’s the scope?”

Becky:
“Market scan. Feature viability. Basic revenue modeling.”

Sanjay:
“And who’s doing that modeling? Because I’m not opening up my team’s backlog unless we’re serious about this.”

Bill:
“Let’s not assign it right now. Let’s frame the sprint first—Becky and John, can you sketch out what needs to be looked at by next week?”

Becky:
“Fine. But I’m flagging now—if we drag our feet again, I’m going to take it straight to Rachel.” *(referring to their VP)*

Sanjay:
“Why would you escalate something we haven’t even decided on?”

Becky:
“Because I’ve seen this dance before. We say we’re exploring something, then it dies from neglect. Not this time.”

John:
“Okay, hang on. Let’s not throw grenades. If we’re exploring, let’s just explore. No one’s committing to a shift yet.”

Bill:
“Let’s park that. Clearly some heat there. We don’t have consensus yet, and that’s fine. We’ll treat it as an open thread, not an action item. Agreed?”

Sanjay:
“Agreed. For now.”

Becky:
“...Sure.”

Bill:
“Great. That’s real progress, even if it doesn’t feel clean. Let’s keep going.”

**[25:01 – 27:30]**

Bill:
“Alright. Let’s pivot back for a minute. Earlier we mentioned experimentation—creating space for low-stakes testing. We agreed in theory. But we didn’t define *how* it would work, or who would own it.”

Becky:
“I’m still a fan of carving out time. Something structured, but not bureaucratic. Like a standing block for innovation, once a sprint. One person from each function participates. Rotate it every few weeks.”

Sanjay:
“Nice in theory. But who’s covering for those people when they’re off sandboxing?”

Becky:
“Same people who cover when someone’s out sick or in back-to-back meetings. We adapt. We always do.”

Sanjay:
“I’m not being difficult, I’m being honest. We’re already tight on resourcing. If this becomes just another aspirational thing, it’s going to frustrate the team.”

John:
“What if we start smaller? Pilot the block with one team. Not company-wide. Just product or dev. No promises, just a test.”

Becky:
“I’m good with that. Better than spending another month debating rollout structures.”

Bill:
“Alright. Let’s try it. John, do you want to run point on the pilot? See what shape it could take?”

John:
“I can sketch something, but I’m not signing up to own it long-term. I’ll map out version one. Someone else can evolve it.”

Sanjay:
“And I’d want to review it before anything launches. Just to sanity check capacity.”

Becky:
“You mean approve it.”

Sanjay:
“Review it. Let’s not get caught up in semantics.”

Bill:
“Okay, okay—this is fine. Tense, but fine. We’re navigating through resistance, not around it. That’s progress.”

John:
“I’ll share a rough model by Monday. If it’s garbage, we toss it. If it works, we build on it.”

Becky:
“That’s literally what experimentation *is*. Glad we’re catching on.”

Sanjay:
“Funny.”

Bill:
“Alright. Logged. Small-scale experimentation pilot. Owner: John. Reviewer: Sanjay. Tone coach: Becky.”

Becky:
“Perfect.”

John:
“I already regret saying yes.”

Bill:
“You’ll be fine. And you won’t be alone. That’s the whole point.”

**[27:31 – 30:00]**

Bill:
“Let’s tackle one more big one before we break into smaller themes. Revenue expansion. Not in theory, but specifically—where do we see actual, actionable growth opportunities?”

Becky:
“Well, we already touched on mid-market. That’s one.”

Sanjay:
“Which is still under review, not a go.”

Becky:
“Right, but it’s still a lever. Whether we pull it or not, it’s there.”

John:
“There’s also pricing structure. We haven’t revisited bundling in... what, two years? It’s clunky. There’s no flexibility.”

Sanjay:
“Flexible pricing usually equals lower margin. That’s why we haven’t touched it.”

Bill:
“But customer feedback keeps pointing to it. ‘Too rigid,’ ‘doesn’t scale with usage,’ ‘more expensive than competitors’—we’ve heard this across sectors.”

Becky:
“Especially in renewals. That’s where we’re bleeding. Clients love the product. They hate the packaging.”

Sanjay:
“We can’t rebuild pricing from scratch every time someone complains.”

John:
“No one’s saying rebuild it from scratch. But we can’t keep assuming the structure works just because it used to.”

Bill:
“Maybe this is another pilot moment. Identify one segment—say, logistics or fintech—and test a more modular model with a few willing clients.”

Sanjay:
“If you want to test it, test it. But I’m not walking our whole pricing strategy into a spreadsheet exercise without knowing what the upside is.”

Becky:
“Then let’s measure it. Test a version with a few clients, track upsell, retention, NPS. Give it a quarter.”

John:
“We could do it quietly. No marketing, no splash. Just call it a beta tier.”

Bill:
“I like that. Quiet test, no big swing. Just enough to learn.”

Sanjay:
“I’ll review the test scope once it’s written. And I want finance looped in.”

Becky:
“Fine. But if finance turns it into a two-month modeling exercise, I’m out.”

Bill:
“So we’re... aligned-ish?”

John:
“Call it functional alignment, philosophical disagreement.”

Bill:
“I’ll take it. John, you okay drafting the scope?”

John:
“Sure. I’ll pull something by next Wednesday.”

Becky:
“I’ll handle client outreach—get us three candidates.”

Sanjay:
“And I’ll keep the finance team from panicking.”

Bill:
“Sounds like a plan. Sort of.”

Becky:
“It’s a start.”

Bill:
“Alright. Another experiment, another unresolved philosophical divide. On-brand for us.”

**[30:01 – 32:30]**

Bill:
“Okay, let’s shift to something that’s been showing up in bits and pieces—how we track and measure progress. Not project KPIs. I mean actual progress. Strategy. Culture. Gaps like the ones we’re surfacing today. Because let’s be honest—we name things in meetings like this, but what happens after that is...”

Becky:
“...a long wait, a new priority, and a folder no one opens again.”

John:
“Or a deck. A beautifully formatted deck that sits untouched.”

Sanjay:
“Because it’s no one’s job to own the follow-through. That’s the root of it.”

Bill:
“Exactly. So let’s talk plainly. If we don’t build a way to track what we’re committing to in meetings like this—without turning it into a second job—then we’re not actually doing strategy. We’re just narrating dysfunction.”

Becky:
“So then what are you suggesting? A dashboard? A tracker? A shared doc we never update?”

John:
“What if we treated our gaps like product features? Each one gets an owner, a status, a definition of done. Doesn’t have to be perfect—just a living thing.”

Becky:
“That’s... weirdly brilliant. I like that.”

Sanjay:
“But who maintains it? Who actually updates it? If it’s just one more artifact for Bill to manage, we’re back in the same trap.”

Bill:
“I’m not managing it. Full stop. I’ll facilitate the first draft, sure. But ownership needs to be distributed. It’s not a report—it’s a living commitment.”

Becky:
“So then every gap we name today becomes its own card? Like... status: exploring, testing, blocked?”

John:
“Exactly. Lightweight. Not perfection. Just visibility.”

Sanjay:
“Then let’s keep it off the main systems. Last thing I need is someone asking for Jira access just to see if Becky followed up on a revenue beta.”

Becky:
“Relax. I’ll make a Notion board.”

John:
“I vote low-maintenance. Just a space where we can see where things *are*, not where we wish they were.”

Bill:
“Okay. That’s what we’ll do. I’ll create the structure. Each of you takes the cards tied to what you’ve already agreed to explore. Ownership lives with the person closest to the issue.”

Sanjay:
“And we review it when?”

Bill:
“Monthly check-ins. Short, 20 minutes. Just status and blockers.”

Becky:
“Feels almost too simple.”

John:
“Which means we might actually do it.”

Bill:
“Exactly. Let’s not overbuild it. Let’s just build *something*.”

Becky:
“I’ll draft some cards tonight. At least the gaps I’m touching. Sanjay—you cool linking yours?”

Sanjay:
“Sure. I’ll review what we’ve named so far and pick the ones that tie to ops or financial impact. But don’t expect me to chase status updates from three different teams.”

John:
“And we’re not trying to turn this into a performance tool, right? Like—we’re not scoring anything?”

Bill:
“Nope. It’s not evaluative. It’s for clarity. Nothing more.”

Becky:
“Well. That’s new.”

Sanjay:
“It’s also risky. Someone’s going to see the board and ask why half the cards say ‘blocked.’”

Bill:
“Then maybe that’s the most honest report we’ve ever given.”

John:
“I’ll take that over fake green dots any day.”

Becky:
“Agreed. Let’s make it real or not at all.”

Bill:
“Alright. I’ll have the first version of the board up by end of day. Becky, send me your draft cards. John, yours too. Sanjay, just flag what you’re in for.”

Sanjay:
“Copy. Just don’t expect emojis.”

Becky:
“Oh, I’m adding emojis.”

Bill:
“You two can fight that one out on Slack.”

**[32:31 – 35:00]**

Bill:
“Alright, so we’ve got a shared board in the works, monthly check-ins, and owners for most of what we’ve surfaced. That’s more alignment than we usually walk out of these with.”

Becky:
“Which is both encouraging and deeply sad.”

John:
“Could be worse. We’ve had strategy meetings that ended with fewer ideas and more pizza orders.”

Sanjay:
“Still not over the one where we spent ninety minutes arguing about whether to call something a ‘platform’ or a ‘suite.’”

Becky:
“Oh my god. That was peak existential branding crisis.”

Bill:
“Let’s not go back there. I still have anxiety dreams about that whiteboard.”

John:
“Same. I can still see the words ‘ecosystem vs. solution stack’ burned into my eyelids.”

Becky:
“Okay—but also, I stand by ‘ecosystem.’ It had potential.”

Sanjay:
“And yet, here we are—just trying to get through a backlog without six dependencies falling over.”

Bill:
“Alright, alright—we’re drifting. Let’s pull it back. Here’s what I need from each of you before next week’s follow-up:
One—status updates on the items you’ve taken ownership of.
Two—what support you need to move them forward.
Three—any blockers that aren’t already on the table.”

Becky:
“Do you want that in the board, or in a separate doc?”

Bill:
“In the board. If it’s not in the board, it doesn’t exist.”

Sanjay:
“Noted. I’ll try to be... minimally expressive.”

Becky:
“Can’t wait to see your section. Just bullet points and quiet resentment.”

Sanjay:
“That’s my brand.”

John:
“I’ll fill in the internal AI pilot status and the pricing test framework. Both are still early, but I’ve got a structure.”

Bill:
“Good. And anything that’s in ‘blocked’ or ‘unclear’ status—just flag it. Don’t worry about making it look good. This isn’t a performance review.”

Becky:
“Can we add a ‘ghosted’ column for all the ideas we floated that nobody followed up on for two months?”

Sanjay:
“We’d need an entire second board for that.”

John:
“Maybe a graveyard board. ‘Here lies Smart Sync Dashboard Tiering—died of neglect.’”

Bill:
“Okay, that’s actually not the worst idea. Graveyard column for deprioritized ideas. Might help us remember what we’ve tried before.”

Becky:
“And why we buried them. That part matters.”

Bill:
“Exactly. Let’s do that. One person owns the graveyard. Becky?”

Becky:
“Absolutely. I already have names in mind.”

John:
“This is either going to be extremely helpful or deeply petty.”

Bill:
“Maybe both. I’m fine with that if it helps us stay honest.”

**[35:01 – 37:30]**

Bill:
“Okay. Let’s take a breath and look at where we are. We've got structural ideas in motion: experimentation pilot, strategic board, pricing test, AI positioning... that’s more than enough for one cycle.”

John:
“Agreed. But I’ll be honest—I’m not sure we’ve clarified visibility. We’ve said we’re tracking progress, but what does *visible* actually mean here? Who’s seeing what, and when?”

Becky:
“Yeah, because if it’s just us looking at the board, that’s fine. But if it becomes one of those ‘let’s show leadership how thoughtful we’re being’ dashboards, people are going to start polishing data instead of telling the truth.”

Sanjay:
“No one’s asking for that.”

Becky:
“Not yet. But you’ve been in enough review meetings to know how fast it happens. Someone sees a red dot and suddenly we’re in damage-control mode.”

Sanjay:
“Because red means blocked, and blocked costs money. It’s not cosmetic.”

Becky:
“It’s not just the data. It’s the reaction to the data. If red leads to pressure instead of support, then people start gaming the colors.”

John:
“Which defeats the whole purpose of surfacing anything in the first place.”

Bill:
“So maybe the real issue is—how do we create psychological safety *inside* visibility? How do we keep the transparency honest without turning it into exposure?”

Sanjay:
“By being adults. If something’s red, we fix it. If it stays red, we ask why. That’s not pressure. That’s... accountability.”

Becky:
“You say accountability, I hear consequence. It’s not the same for everyone.”

Sanjay:
“And that’s not my fault. If people take visibility as personal threat, that’s on culture, not reporting.”

Bill:
“Okay. Time out. This is exactly what I don’t want to happen. We’re circling the same drain we’ve circled before: ‘Why are things stuck?’ turns into ‘Who dropped the ball?’ and then suddenly we’re debating tone instead of fixing systems.”

John:
“Maybe we just don’t show status colors in early cycles. Keep it all neutral until we’ve built some muscle around this.”

Becky:
“I love that. No red, green, yellow. Just... working, paused, or needs attention. Human language. Not risk flags.”

Sanjay:
“I still want timelines attached. Otherwise it turns into open-ended ‘we’ll get to it eventually.’”

Becky:
“Then let’s include timeframes. But call them what they are: guesses. Provisional timelines. Not ultimatums.”

Bill:
“That’s a fair compromise. No color-coding for now. Clear status labels, owner, and rough timeframe. No one gets dinged for being honest.”

John:
“I’ll revise my draft to follow that. Shouldn’t be hard.”

Sanjay:
“I’ll test it with ops and finance before you finalize. If it doesn’t map to their review structure, we’ll need to rethink.”

Becky:
“Again, not everything we do needs to map to ops and finance.”

Sanjay:
“And not everything lives in marketing imagination land either.”

Bill:
“Alright. Let’s pause here before we slide off the rails.”

John:
“Too late.”

Bill:
“Seriously. Let’s pause. Take two minutes if you need to refill water or stretch.”

Becky:
“I’m not moving. This is too much fun.”

Sanjay:
“Speak for yourself.”

**[37:31 – 40:00]**

Bill:
“Alright, let’s get back into it. We’ve got twenty minutes left. Let’s use them wisely. We’ve covered structure, progress tracking, decision bottlenecks, and a couple growth paths. But before we move into wrap-up, I want to name something we’ve been dancing around all meeting.”

John:
“Which is?”

Bill:
“Influence. Who gets to shape direction around here. Who gets listened to. And who doesn’t.”

Becky:
“Oh boy.”

Bill:
“Yeah. I know. But we’re not going to build a shared strategy if we keep pretending influence is evenly distributed. It’s not.”

Sanjay:
“So what, now we’re ranking each other?”

Bill:
“No. But I think we need to be honest about who gets traction when they speak—and who doesn’t. Because if that dynamic stays invisible, it keeps shaping decisions in ways we can’t track.”

Becky:
“I’m glad you said it. I’ve been sitting on that since the last roadmap review. I watched two ideas get ignored until someone else repeated them with a different tone. Then suddenly, they were ‘strategic.’”

John:
“That happens more than we admit. And it’s not always intentional, but it still shifts the room.”

Sanjay:
“I’m not denying that dynamic exists. But are we actually saying it’s intentional bias? Or just an outcome of how fast things move?”

Becky:
“Intent doesn’t matter as much as impact. If I’ve got to spend extra energy packaging something so it sounds like it came from you or Bill just to get it heard, that’s not strategy. That’s politics.”

Sanjay:
“And sometimes politics is how things get done. I don’t like it either, but pretending we can work in a vacuum is naïve.”

John:
“I think the problem is we’ve never agreed on how decisions *should* get made. So we default to whoever’s loudest, or whoever’s least likely to get pushback.”

Bill:
“That’s what I’m trying to surface. Not to shame anyone—but to make it visible. Because we can’t grow a strategy if the power dynamics underneath it are murky.”

Becky:
“And if we don’t deal with it, it’ll just keep breeding resentment. I’m already noticing it across teams. People think certain voices always win. Doesn’t matter what the idea is.”

Sanjay:
“I’d argue that what wins is what’s executable. Not whose voice it came from.”

Becky:
“You can argue that, but I’ve got six months of examples that say otherwise.”

Bill:
“Okay. Let’s slow it down. This doesn’t need to turn into a fight. But we do need to be real. So let’s try something simple. In the next strategy cycle—whatever we explore next—let’s rotate who presents. Not the most senior person. Not the person who built the deck. Someone else.”

John:
“I’m into that.”

Becky:
“Love it.”

Sanjay:
“I’ll go along with it as long as the content doesn’t suffer. Presenting badly doesn’t help anyone.”

Becky:
“People can step up if you give them the mic.”

Bill:
“That’s the point. If we want shared strategy, we have to share the voice. Even if it’s messy.”

John:
“Honestly, messy might be better. At least it’s honest.”

Bill:
“Alright. We’re naming this one too. Strategic voice concentration. It’s a gap. And rotating presentation ownership is our first step.”

Becky:
“Feels like therapy again.”

Sanjay:
“Feels like friction with better branding.”

Bill:
“Friction’s not the enemy. Silence is.”

**[40:01 – 42:30]**

Bill:
“So, with about twenty minutes left, I want to start mapping out what’s actually moving forward in the next two weeks. We’ve floated a lot. Some of it’s actionable. Some of it needs more air.”

John:
“Let’s start with the easy ones. AI pilot—we’ve got three small use cases. Becky and I are on that.”

Becky:
“Already reaching out to clients for the messaging test. That’s in motion.”

Sanjay:
“And I said I’d review the pilot structure. As long as we’re aligned on scope, that’s fine.”

Bill:
“Great. That’s moving. The experimentation carve-out?”

John:
“I’m drafting the pilot model. Becky’s giving input. Sanjay’s reviewing for capacity. We’ll keep it to product for now.”

Becky:
“And I’ll loop in marketing leads once we have the prototype. Keep the circle tight until it’s proven.”

Bill:
“Perfect. Modular pricing test?”

John:
“I’ve got first-pass models drafted. Becky’s identifying three test clients. Sanjay’s... semi-in.”

Sanjay:
“I’m not a roadblock. But I need to see the financial assumptions before anyone pitches this as viable.”

Becky:
“We agreed it’s an experiment, not a launch. That hasn’t changed.”

Sanjay:
“I just don’t want a test turning into a commitment before we’ve vetted it.”

Bill:
“We’ll stay disciplined. Treat it like a sandbox. Clear boundary lines.”

Becky:
“And if it works?”

Bill:
“Then we decide as a team whether it scales.”

Sanjay:
“Fine. But I want that in writing before anything goes live.”

Bill:
“Noted. Now... the trickier stuff. The influence and trust gaps—are we ready to put anything formal behind that yet?”

John:
“I mean, the rotating presentation idea is something. But it’s not a fix.”

Becky:
“It’s a gesture. Not structural.”

Sanjay:
“Do we really need a ‘structure’ for interpersonal dynamics? This feels like overdesigning a soft issue.”

Becky:
“See, that’s exactly why people don’t raise this stuff. Because it gets called ‘soft’ like it doesn’t matter.”

Sanjay:
“I didn’t say it doesn’t matter. I’m saying not everything needs a process document.”

Bill:
“Okay, let’s split the difference. We don’t formalize anything yet. But we build in recurring reflection—once a month. Thirty minutes. One topic. Rotating facilitator.”

John:
“That I can live with.”

Becky:
“Same.”

Sanjay:
“I’ll join, but don’t expect warm and fuzzy.”

Becky:
“No one’s expecting *you* to be fuzzy.”

Bill:
“Alright. Consider it added to the board. Light structure, rotating lead, no agenda bloat. That’s a move.”

John:
“What about decision rights? That one’s still floating.”

Bill:
“Exactly. That’s a gap we named, but we haven’t resolved yet. I’ll take that one offline with you, John. Maybe loop in Ops next week?”

Sanjay:
“I want to be in that room. That’s not a side conversation.”

Bill:
“Fair. You’re in.”

**[42:31 – 45:00]**

Bill:
“Alright. Let’s recap what we’ve got moving and flag what still needs lift. Then we’ll close with what support each of you needs to make real progress.”

Becky:
“Before we jump there—can we talk about who actually owns delivery on the stuff we’re starting? Like, who’s steering the strategy in between these meetings? Because half the time, people assume you are, Bill. But that’s not... scalable.”

Bill:
“I agree. And honestly, that’s been part of the dysfunction. I’ve tried to guide the work without taking control, but the center keeps collapsing onto me.”

John:
“Probably because no one else feels like they’re *allowed* to drive. Or they’ve tried and gotten pulled back.”

Sanjay:
“Or they’ve driven things into a wall and someone had to clean it up.”

Becky:
“Okay, but that kind of comment is part of the problem. We can’t build ownership if every misstep gets archived as evidence against someone trying.”

Bill:
“Let’s stay focused. The question is: how do we create shared accountability without making it chaotic—or setting me up as the fallback plan again?”

Becky:
“We stop defaulting to you. That’s the first move. If someone commits to a thing, they *own* it. It’s not ‘Bill, can you remind me?’ It’s: own the outcome.”

John:
“I think it also means letting people do things *their way* once they take ownership. Like, we say we want distributed leadership, but then we micromanage or second-guess. It gets weird.”

Sanjay:
“Because not everyone delivers the same way. That’s not second-guessing. That’s trying to maintain standards.”

Becky:
“Sometimes your ‘standards’ feel like a convenient excuse to stay in control.”

Sanjay:
“Or maybe they’re just the reason this company hasn’t imploded.”

Bill:
“Okay. I’m going to step in here. I get that this is charged. And I’m not dismissing it. But we’re slipping back into familiar roles: Becky as the challenger, Sanjay as the gatekeeper, me as the sponge.”

John:
“And me as the neutral guy in the corner hoping we finish on time.”

Bill:
“Exactly. And those roles are real. But we have to challenge them or we’re stuck. So here’s my ask: for every item we’ve flagged today, I want one person who owns delivery and one person who keeps them honest. Not me. Not someone vague. A name.”

Becky:
“I’m in. I’ll take AI messaging. John’s already building the examples, so he can gut-check me.”

John:
“Works for me.”

Sanjay:
“I’ll own the experimentation criteria draft. But I want a sanity check from Product.”

John:
“I’ll take that.”

Bill:
“I’ll keep the board up to date and schedule the reflection sessions, but I’m not chasing status.”

Becky:
“Good. You shouldn’t have to.”

Bill:
“And I won’t. Not this time.”

John:
“Guess we’re growing up.”

Sanjay:
“Let’s see if it lasts.”

**[45:01 – 47:30]**

Bill:
“Alright, last fifteen minutes. Let’s talk about what still feels unclear. We’ve got movement on some big themes, but I want to make space to name anything that’s still stuck, murky, or quietly dying on the vine.”

Becky:
“Okay—modular product strategy. We said we’re testing it, but I’m still not sure who’s running point. I’ve got client contacts. John’s got the structure. But... who’s steering the full thing?”

John:
“I assumed it was you, since you were initiating outreach.”

Becky:
“No—I’m feeding demand signals. I thought *you* were scoping the offering.”

Sanjay:
“I thought we said it was a joint test. So no one’s actually leading it?”

Bill:
“Okay, so we’re in a gray zone. This is exactly what I was worried about. Becky, John—do either of you feel like this is something you *want* to own end-to-end?”

Becky:
“I could, but I’d need help translating the tech constraints. I’m not going to write a product brief in the dark.”

John:
“I could take it, but not if I’m expected to do all the client engagement too.”

Bill:
“Then co-ownership might work. But if we go that route, you have to agree on boundaries up front. Who’s making decisions? Who’s reporting out? Who’s holding the delivery?”

Becky:
“I’ll take the external comms and go-to-market framing. John owns feasibility and packaging. We align once a week.”

John:
“Fine. But if it drifts beyond test scope, I’m flagging it early.”

Bill:
“Good. Name it, don’t carry it. That’s progress.”

Sanjay:
“And we’re logging this somewhere, right? So we’re not back here next month re-asking the same questions?”

Bill:
“Yes. I’ll put it in the tracker today with shared ownership marked and an open status. And I’ll tag you both in the notes.”

Becky:
“There’s still one more thing that feels murky—what counts as a ‘win’ in the next two weeks? Like, what do we actually want to walk into the next strategy review with?”

John:
“Yeah. Is this just a progress update? Or are we supposed to have something... shiny?”

Sanjay:
“If it’s not measurable, it’s just motion. Let’s be clear on that.”

Bill:
“Fair. But it doesn’t all have to be quantifiable either. Some wins are about traction, not finish lines. If a test is scoped, a deck drafted, a tough conversation happened—that counts.”

Becky:
“As long as we don’t start pretending half-done is done.”

Sanjay:
“Or confusing ‘talked about it again’ with progress.”

John:
“So what’s our shared bar?”

Bill:
“Let’s say this: a win is anything that moved from unclear to clear, or from idle to active. That’s what we’re tracking.”

Becky:
“Okay. That’s real enough.”

Sanjay:
“Borderline soft, but fine.”

John:
“Better than ‘not sure who owns this.’ Which has been half our tracker items since Q2.”

Bill:
“Then let’s keep it clean: by next session, we each report one thing that moved—and one thing still stuck.”

Becky:
“Deal.”

John:
“Works for me.”

Sanjay:
“Let’s just not let ‘still stuck’ become the norm.”

Bill:
“Only one way to avoid that.”

**[47:31 – 50:00]**

Bill:
“Alright. Last topic before we close. How are we staying in sync between now and the next strategy session? Not formal updates—just... how do we not lose all of this?”

Becky:
“Can we not do another shared Slack channel? We have like, forty of those already.”

John:
“Agreed. I can’t keep up with five project threads and three ‘alignment’ threads that no one actually checks.”

Sanjay:
“So what’s the alternative? Email? Carrier pigeons? We need something.”

Becky:
“I’m not saying don’t communicate. I’m saying pick one place and stick to it. No cross-posting updates across Slack, Docs, and Notion.”

Bill:
“Okay. Let’s simplify. Weekly check-in thread in the strategy channel. One post per person, end of week. One paragraph: what moved, what’s stuck, what you need.”

John:
“Short, structured. I like it.”

Sanjay:
“Who’s monitoring it?”

Bill:
“No one’s *monitoring* it. We’re not assigning hall monitors. If we’re serious about shared accountability, we don’t need babysitters.”

Becky:
“But we do need expectations. If we say it’s weekly, and people start skipping, it dies.”

Sanjay:
“So what happens if someone doesn’t post?”

Becky:
“We don’t need punishments. Just... name it. Call it out.”

John:
“I can build a lightweight reminder bot if you want.”

Bill:
“Let’s not over-engineer this. If we need a bot to remind us to communicate, the issue’s not reminders.”

Becky:
“Actually... no offense, but I don’t think everyone *will* remember. Not because they’re bad team members—but because the system’s overloaded. A nudge might help.”

Sanjay:
“I’d support that. Quiet reminder. End of day Thursday.”

John:
“Cool. I’ll spin something up that pings once a week in the thread. No tagging. Just a gentle push.”

Bill:
“Alright, I can live with that.”

Becky:
“Also, can we agree not to turn the thread into a debate? It’s for check-ins, not discussions.”

Sanjay:
“Then where do the discussions happen?”

John:
“If something needs deeper back-and-forth, just spin up a thread under your update. Keep the noise out of the main view.”

Bill:
“Love that. Clean check-ins, optional depth.”

Becky:
“So who’s posting first?”

Bill:
“I will. I’ll model the format. Then it’s on you.”

Sanjay:
“And what’s the timing? End of Thursday or Friday?”

Becky:
“Thursday keeps it tighter. Friday’s where updates go to die.”

John:
“Let’s call it Thursday EOD. That gives people Friday to respond if needed.”

Bill:
“Done. Strategy sync thread. Weekly updates. Keep it clean, keep it short, keep it honest.”

Sanjay:
“We’ll see how long that lasts.”

Becky:
“If it falls apart, we’ll build something better. But we have to start somewhere.”

**[50:01 – 52:30]**

Bill:
“Alright—let’s try to close strong. I want to name what’s next, who owns it, and what support they need. Doesn’t have to be perfect, just clear enough to act.”

Becky:
“Okay, so AI messaging: I’m framing the narrative, John’s validating the use cases. I’ll draft by Tuesday. We’ll review next Thursday.”

John:
“Yup. And I’ll get you the internal tools write-up by Monday.”

Sanjay:
“I’ll review that before you send anything to clients.”

Becky:
“Wasn’t planning to go rogue. But good to know you’re watching.”

Bill:
“Alright. Experimentation pilot?”

John:
“Drafting the structure. Becky’s giving input. Sanjay’s reviewing before we greenlight it.”

Sanjay:
“Assuming the model makes sense.”

Becky:
“Assuming we don’t overcomplicate it.”

Bill:
“Okay, next—pricing test.”

Becky:
“I’ve got three clients I’m lining up for soft outreach. John’s model is solid. We’re aiming to test in the next sprint.”

Sanjay:
“Hold on. ‘Test in the next sprint’? We haven’t agreed on the test mechanics yet.”

Becky:
“We don’t need full consensus to learn something. It’s not a rollout.”

Sanjay:
“But it still affects forecasting. You can’t just launch without knowing how it shows up in the books.”

John:
“It’s a beta test with a limited group. Let’s not inflate this.”

Sanjay:
“Then document the scope before anything goes live. I don’t want surprises.”

Bill:
“Okay. Let’s slow down. This isn’t launch mode—it’s prototype mode. But Sanjay’s right. We need clarity on the scope, even if it’s light.”

Becky:
“I’ll write up the boundaries. But we’re not using that as a delay tactic. If we’re still debating this in two weeks, I’m pushing forward.”

Sanjay:
“We’ll see.”

Bill:
“Let’s stay constructive. We’ve had a lot of hard conversations today, and I appreciate that. But let’s not burn the momentum on this step.”

Becky:
“Then let’s be honest: we’re not aligned on the pricing test. Not really. We’re acting like we are, but we’re not.”

John:
“She’s right. It’s still shaky.”

Sanjay:
“Because it’s risky.”

Bill:
“Then let’s not fake the alignment. We flag it. We move forward cautiously. But we move.”

Becky:
“Fine. Flag it. But don’t bury it.”

Sanjay:
“Noted.”

Bill:
“Okay. Anything else unclear?”

(Silence.)

Bill:
“Alright. I’ll take that as a soft yes and a hard ‘we’re tired.’ Let’s take five minutes to reset, then we’ll wrap with final reflections.”

**[52:31 – 55:00]**

Bill:
“Alright. Welcome back. Last five minutes before we start to let go of this. I want to end with something simple: a single takeaway. Doesn’t have to be profound. Just—what’s sticking with you from today?”

John:
“I’ll go. For me, it’s the experimentation carve-out. Even if it’s tiny, it’s something. The fact that we’re actually going to test instead of just talk—that feels new.”

Becky:
“Same. And also... the tension. Like, yeah, we had some friction, but it didn’t derail us. That feels rare. And maybe even... healthy? Weirdly?”

Sanjay:
“Maybe. But it also didn’t resolve much. There’s still too much sitting in the middle of the road.”

Becky:
“Yeah, but naming it is better than pretending. That used to be our thing—smiling through misalignment.”

Bill:
“I agree with both of you. It’s not done. But it’s out. And I’ll take messy visibility over polished silence any day.”

John:
“My only concern is... now what? Like, yeah, we’ve got trackers and threads and owners—but once this meeting ends, real life kicks in again. And the weight of all the other work doesn’t go away.”

Sanjay:
“That’s the part we never solve. Strategy always feels like a side hustle.”

Becky:
“Then maybe it’s time we stopped treating it like one.”

Bill:
“That’s the whole game. Strategy doesn’t live in slides. It lives in what we choose to carry forward after the meeting ends. Whether we defend the space we created today—or let it collapse.”

(Pause.)

Becky:
“I’ll defend it.”

John:
“I’ll try.”

Sanjay:
“I’ll engage. But I’m not carrying it alone.”

Bill:
“None of us are. That’s the point.”

John:
“What time’s the follow-up?”

Bill:
“Same time next Thursday. Shorter check-in. Tighter focus.”

Sanjay:
“Please actually keep it short.”

Becky:
“No breakout rooms. No warm-ups. Just drop in and do the work.”

Bill:
“Deal. One hour. No fluff.”

John:
“I’m gonna drop off—back-to-back calls.”

Becky:
“Same. And I need caffeine.”

Sanjay:
“Good luck with your Notion board.”

Bill:
“Thanks. You’ll love the emojis.”

Sanjay:
“No promises.”

Becky:
“Later, everyone.”

John:
“See ya.”

Bill:
“Thanks, all. Really. This was hard, but necessary. We’ll pick it up next week.”