

Simplifying the Complex

THE SIFT STORY

BY  Sift



Hi, I'm Sean.

I'm fascinated by the
challenge of organizing
complex information
and making it easy to
access and use.



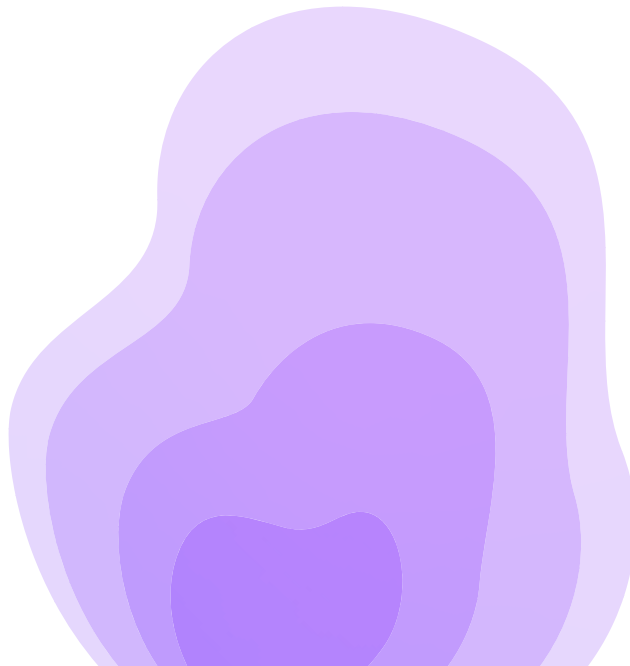
During my time with the Marines,

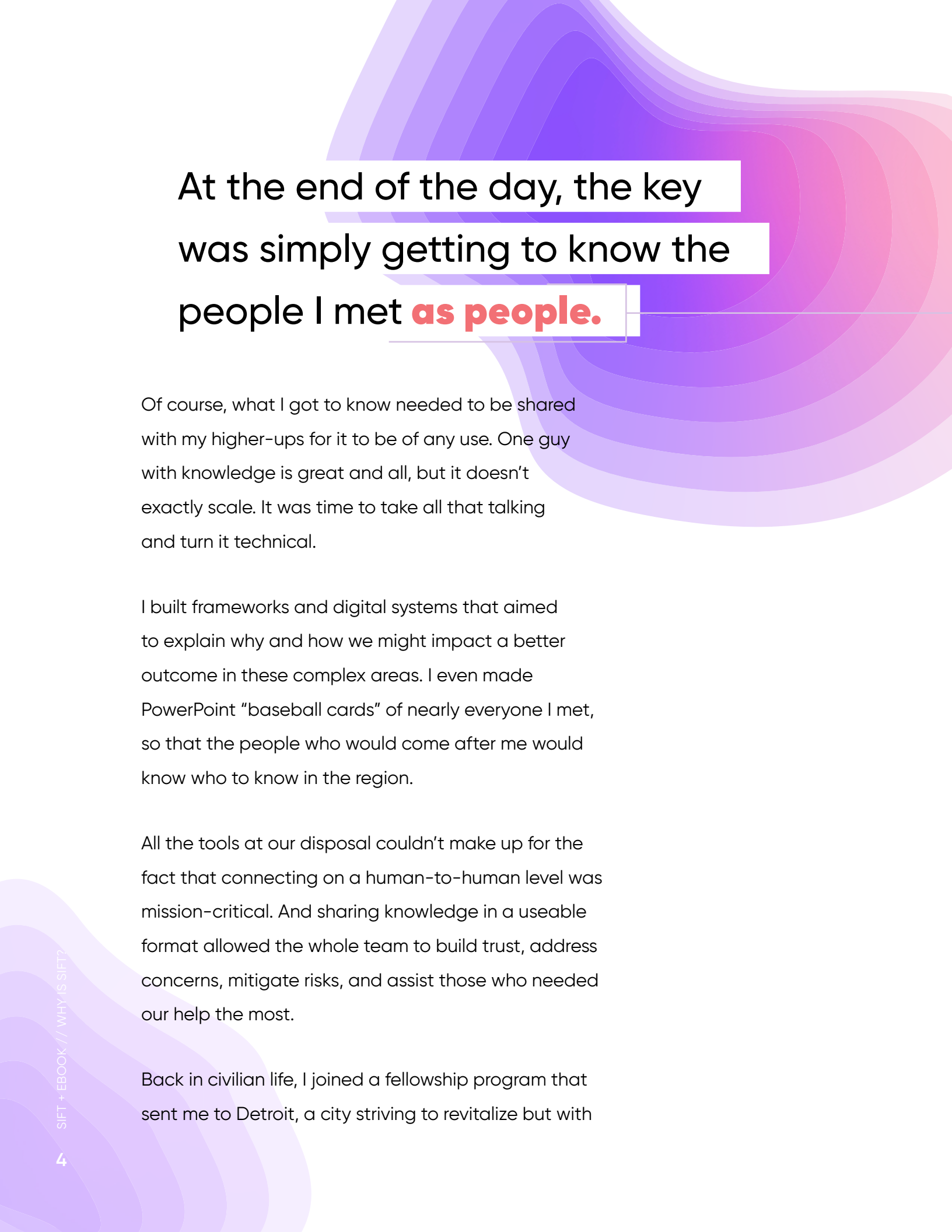
many of my missions were focused on disaster response and economic development. It was my job to help our teams understand the people that lived and worked in the areas we entered, so that we could provide medical support, build schools, and help communities become more resilient.

I was the “guy on the ground,” and connected our team with local leaders and government in places like Afghanistan, Haiti, and the Philippines. I sought to understand the complex and unique social realities in areas where I was ultimately a stranger.

How did I face this **daunting** challenge?

A lot of talking, as it turned out. It took building relationships, one at a time, day by day, month by month. Sometimes this looked like a Scooby-Doo chase, trying to find the one guy or gal in the village who knew everyone else and had all the answers.





At the end of the day, the key was simply getting to know the people I met **as people.**

Of course, what I got to know needed to be shared with my higher-ups for it to be of any use. One guy with knowledge is great and all, but it doesn't exactly scale. It was time to take all that talking and turn it technical.

I built frameworks and digital systems that aimed to explain why and how we might impact a better outcome in these complex areas. I even made PowerPoint "baseball cards" of nearly everyone I met, so that the people who would come after me would know who to know in the region.

All the tools at our disposal couldn't make up for the fact that connecting on a human-to-human level was mission-critical. And sharing knowledge in a useable format allowed the whole team to build trust, address concerns, mitigate risks, and assist those who needed our help the most.

Back in civilian life, I joined a fellowship program that sent me to Detroit, a city striving to revitalize but with


more than its fair share of complex issues. One of the biggest challenges was the epidemic of blighted homes throughout the city, which caused unsafe neighborhoods and dangerous situations for local firefighters. The Detroit Blight Removal Task Force knew it was a massive problem, but had no way of knowing just how many properties were succumbing to blight.

Another complex challenge in need of a **simple solution.**

We developed an app that empowered everyday Detroiters to help us catalog every single property in the city.

We turned that information into an easy-to-use interactive map, and put it online for anyone who wanted to use it.

With this data in hand, nonprofits and local government could clearly see for the first time exactly how many blighted structures existed (78,506 as it turned out). This data showed which areas needed the most intervention, and presented a way forward to create economic opportunities and fight the blight.



We called it the Motor City Mapping project. Like any big project, we needed to build a team of talented folks with a wide range of skills, from property law to data processing to AI. Fortunately, we were connected to a large Family of Companies full of talented people.

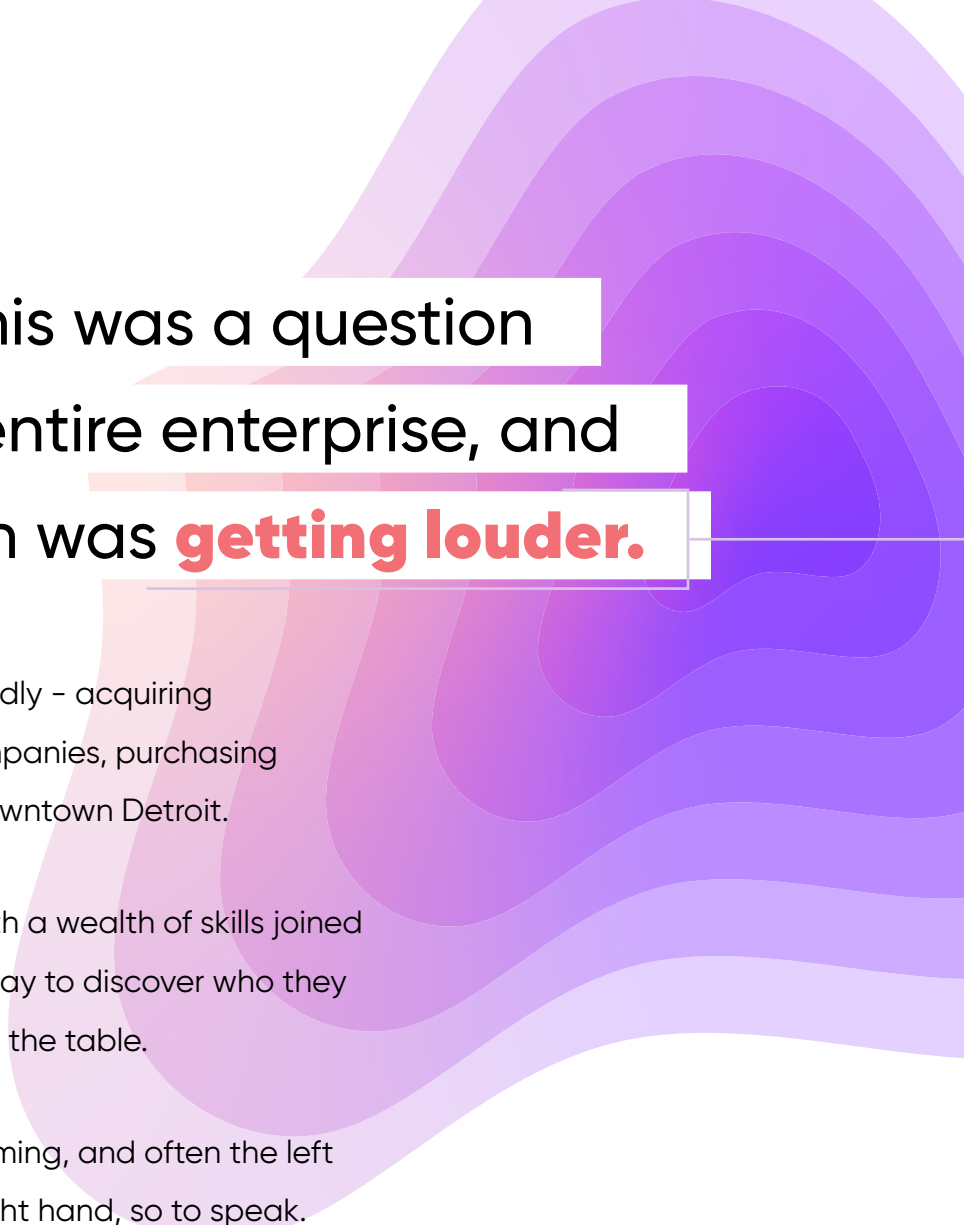
Still, there was the question:

How do we **find the right people**
and get their help?

We turned to an outdated tool: a company-wide email. We literally emailed 30,000 people to ask for help with the Motor City Mapping project.

We were fortunate – there were a lot of volunteers, and we got the help we needed.

But it got me thinking: What if we hadn't been so lucky? What if we hadn't been working on such a public, large-scale project? What if we'd just needed some help across departments? Would we have been able to find it?



Turns out, this was a question across the entire enterprise, and the question was **getting louder.**

Our FOC was expanding rapidly – acquiring companies, forming new companies, purchasing upwards of 70 buildings in downtown Detroit.

Tons of smart new people with a wealth of skills joined our ranks, but there was no way to discover who they were or what they brought to the table.

More and more silos were forming, and often the left hand wasn't talking to the right hand, so to speak. Parallel teams at sister organizations would work on the same problem, not knowing that the other was doubling their efforts.

We had thought we were doing all the right things, to be honest. Company culture was placed front and center, and we had invested in every communication technology we could find.

Still, too many team members felt disconnected, unseen and underutilized. Lost in a sea of faces and

titles, not sure who to talk to. Not really understanding what anyone did or who they were.

It was time to face facts. Our “connected culture” **wasn't scaling.**

What was missing?

We had employee profiles, of course; lots of tools have profiles. But they didn't share much more than a name, job title, and a phone number of questionable accuracy. They didn't help our team members know who that person was, what their skills were, how to best reach them, and how they could help.

When people needed to find someone or solve a problem, the strategy was, shall we say, low-tech. They'd walk into the kitchen and ask anyone they came across by the coffee machine, “hey, do you know anyone who works on X?” If they were lucky, maybe someone knew where to point them. Most of the time, though, they ended up turning to Google

to try solving the problem themselves. Either that, or spend a bunch of time looking for an external expert to throw gobs of money at.

We needed our own company search engine. Our own “map” of the enterprise. A way to easily find the people information we knew was out there, and to discover the talent within our own pool we hadn’t yet tapped.

We needed a simple tool that everyone could use to solve a bunch of complex problems.

So we built one.

For a simple tool, Sift does a lot for us.

It’s the fastest way to find and discover anyone in the enterprise. There’s no better way to identify exactly the person you need, before you even know their name.

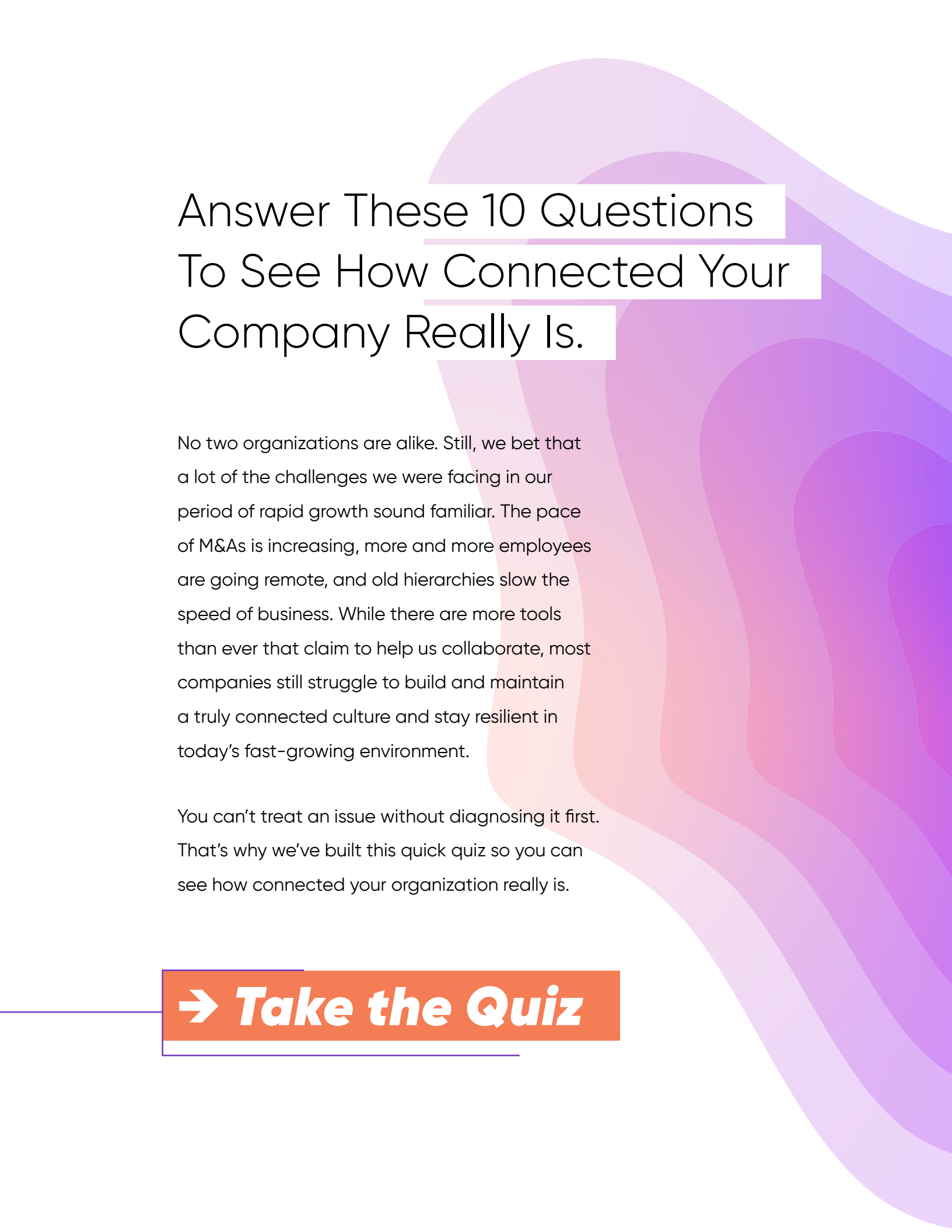
It smashes silos and supercharges our internal mobility and collaboration. Team members share skills and talents, opening the door to rapid problem solving, vibrant career paths, and stronger job fulfillment.

And on top of professional skills, each team member can showcase their interests and a bit of their personality, and see the same from each of their teammates.

For the first time, people can find
their way around, **and be found.**

We built Sift as a bridge to not only connect to the whole enterprise, but also an avenue for each employee to share a more human side of themselves. To put themselves out there and bring their whole self into the enterprise.

Because at the end of the day,
when we all work together,
we all work better.



Answer These 10 Questions To See How Connected Your Company Really Is.

No two organizations are alike. Still, we bet that a lot of the challenges we were facing in our period of rapid growth sound familiar. The pace of M&As is increasing, more and more employees are going remote, and old hierarchies slow the speed of business. While there are more tools than ever that claim to help us collaborate, most companies still struggle to build and maintain a truly connected culture and stay resilient in today's fast-growing environment.

You can't treat an issue without diagnosing it first. That's why we've built this quick quiz so you can see how connected your organization really is.

 **→ Take the Quiz**