TED Talk: Margin of Agency Inside the Shift

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Pitch line: Paradigms don't shift in one move. They shift because enough small decisions built a movement big enough to ignite change.

The Concept: As practitioners inside the technology and communication systems intentionally built to mislead, harm, and distract — we are uniquely positioned to do better for our audiences. Whether it's a social media series, an ad for a new car, or a public health alert about an emerging threat, what are we asking of them? And what is the real cost? And where is our margin of agency in making better choices? For some, the margin is wide if, say, you own your own firm. For others, the margin is near to non-existent. So, what do we do when that's the reality?

Having a "margin of agency" mindset brings hope to the fight for humane technology and design for those of us on the ground level. It gives those of us who carry that gut check with us every time we create a new place to start from. Am I contributing to the greater good? Or the greater harm? Our decisions as practitioners could be the impetus for bigger paradigm shifts, made from the inside, and from the start. When we shift our awareness, our intention — we shift ourselves.

The Center for Humane Technology maps intervention points on a scale — from design tweaks which are low leverage, and easiest to change — up through business model and economic goals, to operating paradigm shifts. Those are the highest leverage, and the hardest to move, because it requires changing core beliefs and norms, not just features.

Individual practitioner awareness — the kind of shift The Inside Shift is asking for — sits closer to the lower-leverage point, not the paradigm end. It's real leverage, but not the biggest lever available. However, if enough individual, small-leverage shifts are made consistently by enough practitioners, it can ignite a paradigm shift. Paradigms don't change in one move; they change because enough smaller decisions accumulate into a new norm.

This is why our margin of agency matters even when it feels small — it's not the whole leverage point, but real and a place we already have access to.

Who It's For: This talk is for those who have brushed up against the edges of their ethical comfort zone, or have always wanted to do better, but don't know how and where to start. It's for practitioners, such as designers, marketers, public health communicators, content creators, and AI practitioners — who question their work's impact.

Format: The talk will run around 15 minutes and be more of an introduction to the Inside Shift philosophy and framework. It will feel like a personal narrative and a hopeful rally cry and call to action. It will be practical, warm, and humanly approachable and accessible.

Why Now: TED Talks tend to have respect and gravitas, giving a larger voice to something that may feel small and insignificant. It puts practitioners on the map as wanting to join the fight for humane tech and design. It will feel approachable because it's coming from me — a practitioner currently inside the work, ambling my own way through this shift as I build the platform. It shows humility in that I don't have it all figured out, but that together we are better.