

11

THE **FUNDAMENTAL**
QUESTIONS

A Guide to a Better Story by **Aaron Mendelsohn**

THE BEST TIME TO ASK (AND RE-ASK) THE 11 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS IS WHEN YOU'RE...



Considering a script or book idea

Breaking a story

Creating a pitch

Outlining your project

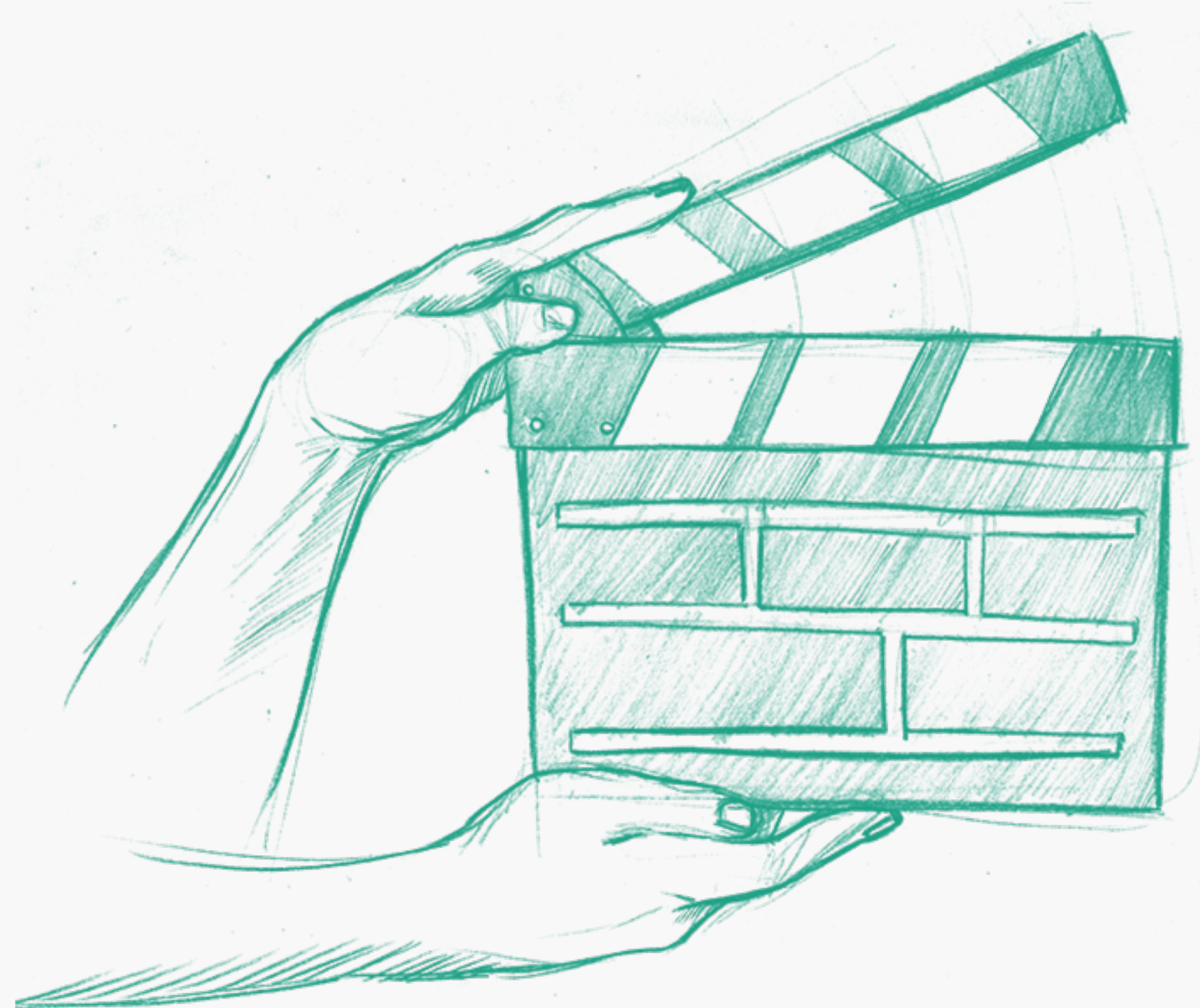
Writing your project and hitting a wall

Starting a rewrite

About to begin production

THE 11 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

WORK FOR...



Books

Film

Pilots and television series

Short Stories

Short films and videos

Web series

Plays

True stories and biographies

Comics and graphic novels

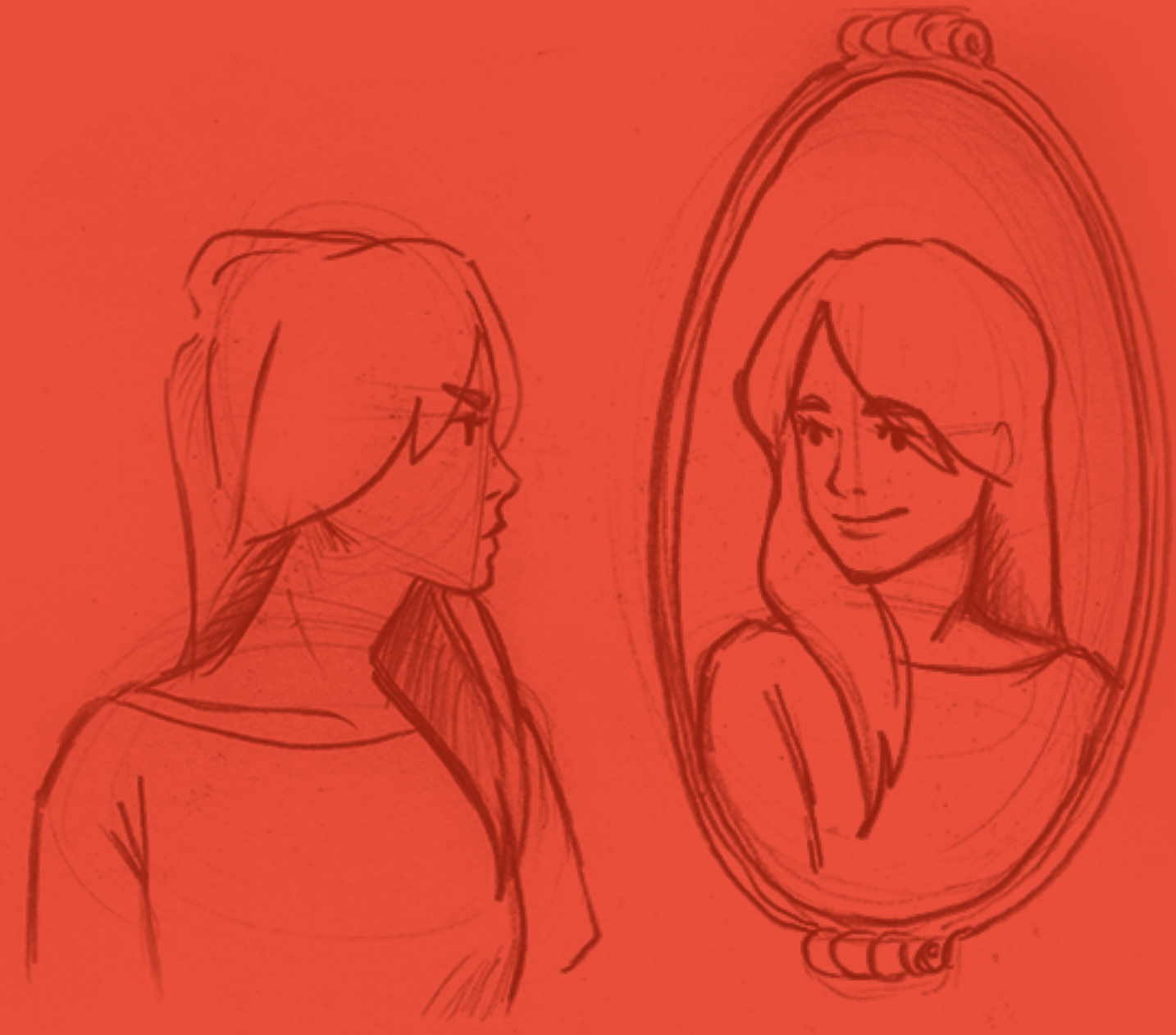
Any kind of story

THE 11 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

TEST THE **STRENGTH** OF YOUR **STORYTELLING**

The key is to **accept the answers** and **incorporate them into your story** even if it means **changing your outline, book or script**.





WHO IS THE
CENTRAL
CHARACTERS (S)

& WHAT IS THEIR
CONSCIOUS
& UNCONSCIOUS
DESIRE?

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Who is the central character(s) and
What is their conscious and unconscious desire?

THE 11 FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

THE CENTRAL CHARACTER
**IS THE PERSON OR PEOPLE
THE STORY IS ABOUT.**
ON THEIR OUTWARD OR
INWARD JOURNEY,
**THEY EITHER CHANGE OR
THE WORLD CHANGES**
AROUND THEM.



CONSCIOUS DESIRE

What the Central Character(s)
thinks they want.

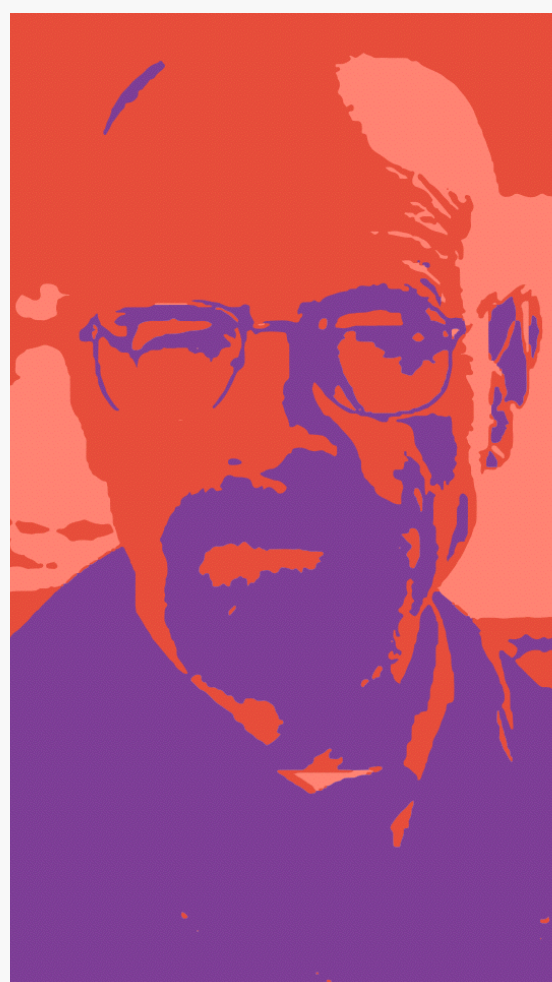
Often this is a **selfish goal**.

The Conscious and Unconscious
Desire **can be the same thing**,
and **what changes is how the
Central Character achieves it**.

UNCONSCIOUS DESIRE

What the Central Character(s) **learns**,
during their journey, that they really want.

Often this is a **selfless goal**.



BREAKING BAD:

Central Character: Walter White

Conscious Desire: To provide for his family after his death.

Unconscious Desire: To reclaim his lost manhood.

Examples:

THE MATRIX

Central Character: Neo

Conscious Desire: To know the truth about the Matrix.

Unconscious Desire: To accept that he is the One.

THE AVENGERS

Central Characters: The superheroes

Conscious Desire: To be the Hero.

Unconscious Desire: To be part of a team.

THE X FILES

Central Characters: Mulder and Scully

Conscious Desire: To solve cases for the FBI involving paranormal phenomena.

Unconscious Desire: To find the truth about what happened to Mulder's sister.

BOND MOVIES

Central Character: James Bond

Conscious Desire: To save the world from evildoers.

Unconscious Desire: None.

THE GRADUATE

Central Character: Benjamin Braddock

Conscious Desire: Mrs. Robinson (sex)

Unconscious Desire: Elaine (love)

YOU'VE GOT MAIL

Central Characters: Kathleen and Joe

Conscious Desire: Joe, to dominate the local book market. Kathleen, to stop Joe from destroying her store.

Unconscious Desire: To find out their email pen pals are their perfect match.

WHAT IS THE
CENTRAL CHARACTER'S
FATAL FLAW?

05



THE **FATAL FLAW** IS THAT ASPECT OF THE CENTRAL CHARACTER'S PERSONALITY THAT IS **PREVENTING THEM FROM ACHIEVING THEIR UNCONSCIOUS DESIRE** (OR CONSCIOUS DESIRE IF IT'S A GOOD THING).

In **GRAVITY**, Ryan's fatal flaw is her lack of will to survive. How does this nearly prevent her from getting home?



Film Examples:

STAR WARS: Luke's youthful impatience.

THE MATRIX: Neo's refusal to believe he's the One.

BIRDMAN: Riggan's insecurity as an actor.

THE AVENGERS: The superheroes' egos.

INSIDE OUT: Joy's disdain of Sadness.

THE KING'S SPEECH: King George's inability to be vulnerable (his speech impediment is actually an antagonistic force).

TV Examples:

MAD MEN: Don Draper's shameful past.

HOMELAND: Carrie's bipolar disorder.

THE SOPRANOS: Tony's depression.

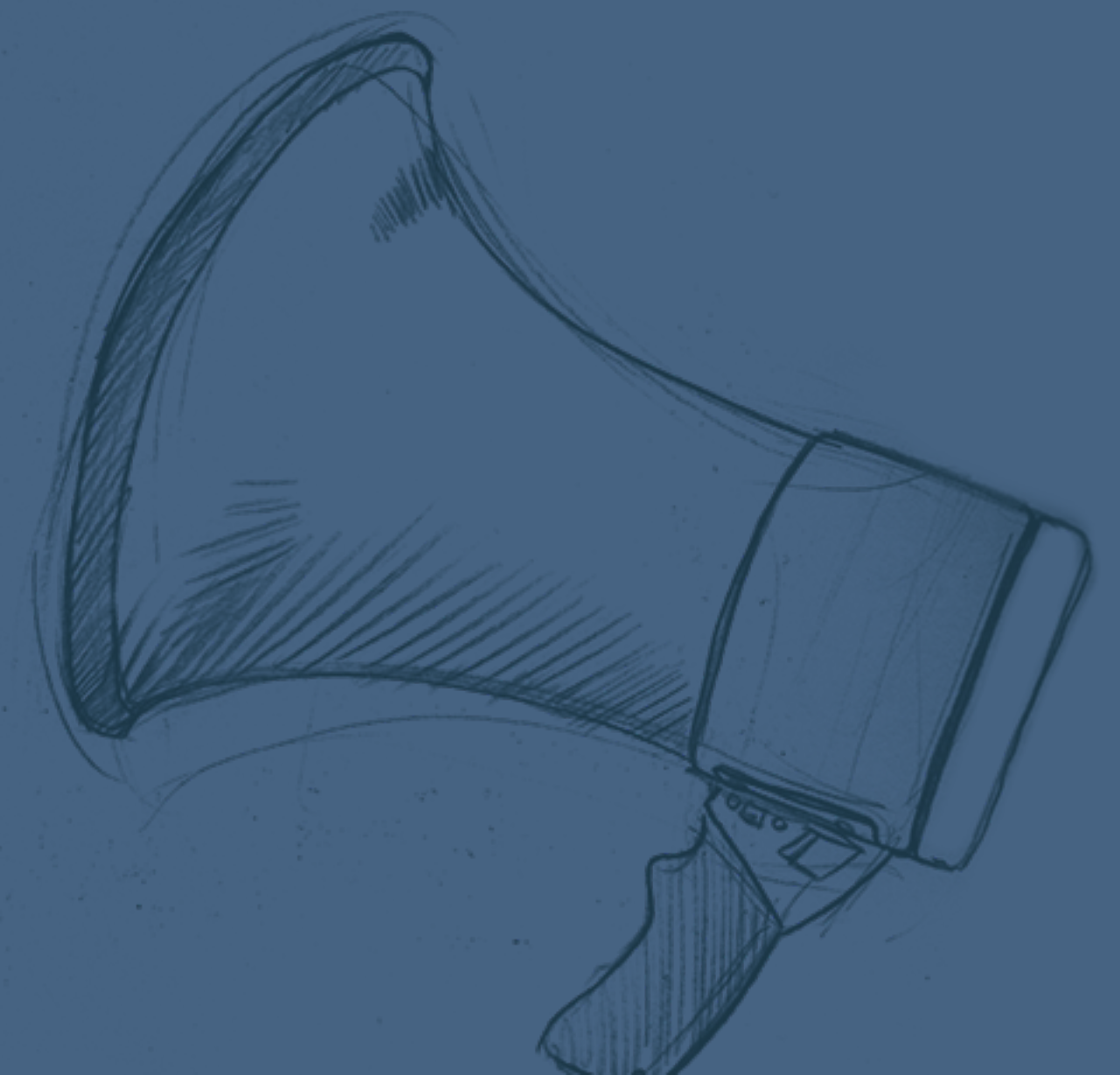
BREAKING BAD: Walter's feeling of powerlessness.

THE ODD COUPLE: Felix is a neat freak. Oscar is a slob.

WHAT IS THE

CALL
TO ACTION?

06



THE **CALL TO ACTION**, ALSO KNOWN AS THE **INCITING INCIDENT**, IS AN EVENT THAT JARS THE CENTRAL CHARACTER FROM THEIR **STATUS QUO** AND DEMANDS SOME KIND OF **MAJOR ACTION**.



In **STAR WARS**, the Call to Action is when Luke sees the hologram of Princess Leia. Does he accept the call right away?

Examples:

GRAVITY: Space debris destroys the shuttle and space station.

BIRDMAN: Riggan's co-star is taken out by a falling light.

THE BIG SHORT: Dr. Burry realizes the housing market is unstable.

LOST: The plane crash.

THE GRADUATE: Mrs. Robinson makes herself available to Ben.

THE AVENGERS: Earth comes under a major threat from Loki.

BREAKING BAD: The doctor tells Walter White he's dying of cancer.

THE HANGOVER: The groomsmen learn that they've lost the groom.