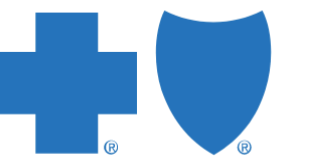




MASSACHUSETTS

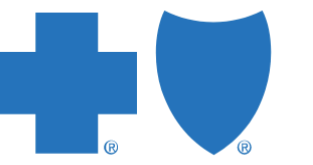
writer round table

EXECUTIVE TAKE-AWAYS | MAY 2024



the ask

Use Erica's maternity time to evaluate writing talent and work toward raising our standards.

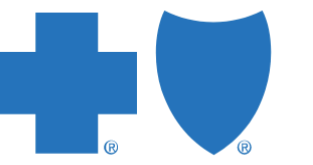


why
we
need it

Our mission is to show up for everyone like they're the only one.

And we can't do that without writers who show up to serve the audience. . .

. . .not just the requestor.



what it's for

Complex and medium-level work, and certain BAU work that does not fit the criteria for the upcoming Production Pod.



today

DO WE NEED
BETTER
WRITING?

OR DO WE
NEED BETTER
WRITERS?

How much of this
is fixable with the
team we have?

AGENDA

- **Our Key Limitation** — what's blocking improvement?
- **Our Process** — what's limiting quality?
- **Our Writers** — who's limiting quality?
- **The Solve** — fast-tracking our team to improvement

our key
limitation



OUR KEY LIMITATION

our quality is only
as good as our
our accountability

And accountability is lacking. Improving the quality of our writing will only be successful if we foster accountability and create measurable standards. Good news: it wouldn't take much to make some fast progress.

the accountability deficit



MASSACHUSETTS

- 1** Poor and incomplete inputs are constantly dropped on writers, with no indication the briefing process will ever improve.
- 2** Writers don't have a way to push back, so they get complacent.
- 3** A 'pile on' approach to input and revisions means writer lose even more control over their work, and individual accountability across the team is rendered invisible.
- 4** This dynamic forces each writer's energy toward managing rewrites, vs the real job of creating and advocating the best work.
- 5** The result is writers who are task masters, whose talents for partnership, problem-solving, and compelling work remain untapped... and whose true talent is impossible to fully gauge.

executive summary

Our process



PROCESS BARRIERS TO BETTER WRITING

5 factors

NO GLOBAL STANDARDS FOR PRODUCT MARKETERS

WRITERS HAVE NO MECHANISM TO PUSH BACK

GROUP THINK FOSTERS INDIVIDUAL COMPLACENCY

WRITERS WRITE, BUT DON'T SELL ENOUGH

LOW EXPECTATION: WRITE VS LEAD

1 For their part, our product marketers have no global standard for quality inputs, and no means of measuring their ability to deliver. Lack of standard practice + monitoring/mentorship means each person creates their own standard.

2 Writers could help us improve input standards but they have no means of tracking the quality of the inputs, briefs, and feedback they receive. Hard data on each project over time would make our weak spots visible and actionable. Without it, mediocrity stays invisible and unaddressable.

3 We perpetuate a collective culture of critique in which all voices and inputs are equal. The "group" can degrade quality by '1000 cuts' with none of the individuals involved being accountable for the end results. 'Invisibilized' responsibility, makes us collectively complacent about improvement.

4 Our writers are not well versed in selling and negotiating stakeholder feedback. The brief is rarely a tool of reference. Drafting the selling points is a crucial troubleshooting step for writers that can prevent subpar work from getting into meetings

5 Our collective team doesn't see writers as partners. They are at the end of an assembly line. This means the collective benchmark for writers is set too low. The unwillingness to leverage their institutional and member knowledge and instincts is an opportunity cost reflected in the work.

Our writers



CREATIVE TEAM BARRIERS TO BETTER WRITING

**our writers are not
hard on their work**

They need to hold themselves accountable as gatekeepers of quality.

These are senior players who have set the bar for themselves too low.

We need to raise it higher with ongoing mentoring, coaching, and consequences.



FINDINGS

writing
hygiene
must get
better

OUR WORK CASES SUPPORT A FOCUS ON THESE OPPORTUNITY AREAS:

- **Words-first bias — responding to the request vs probing for the problem**
Writers default to rewrites vs design to solve revision requests (Bluebikes)
- **Lack of curiosity about 'how' and 'why' of projects**
What is the context of the piece? (Gene Therapy; Kidney care provider leave-behind)
- **Overwriting of copy**
Not enough scrutiny around excising unnecessary words (Pregnancy site page)
- **Under-exploring concept / headline options**
(Boston Magazine Sarah Iselin ad)
- **Burying the lede — news isn't surfaced**
(Virtual Primary Care mailers)
- **Discomfort with criticality**
"I don't want to focus on the negative"; "I am uncomfortable expressing what I need"
- **Only measuring quality against an internal standard**
Celebrating small wins is fine, but not if they're the only wins
- **Not using the Brief as an intake tool vs a creative tool**
Briefs tend to disappear after kick-off, never to be seen again



OUR WRITING RESOURCES

keep, start, stop

CHRIS O'DONNELL

KEEP bringing engaging humanity in the voice of his work

STOP phoning it in. Go deeper and explore more headline options

START embracing criticality and see it as constructive vs negative

Chris is a sleeper — his talent is there, but gets buried under the weight of the process. He could be a secret weapon, but we need to spark his spirit and get him feeling supported and fired up.

MIKE MITCHELL

KEEP your always-conscientious advocacy for the member / audience

STOP suffering in silence when you have to invent strategy or content

START getting more curious about how & why projects get side-tracked

As a writer, Mike combines institutional knowledge with a strong empathy for his audience. We need to give him better ways to flag issues so he comes across as constructive vs cantankerous. He does heavy lifting that seems taken for granted by his marketing partners.

JUAN ROCHA

KEEP advocating for insights and pushing for allyship

STOP working outside the guidelines vs expanding on them creatively

START getting alignment around what your role and value

Juan needs a role where he can be fully successful. One of Juan's strengths is he is hugely strategic and a change-maker. He knows how to lay out a case, sell it, and sees the big picture. In a writing/translation role, his leadership skills are underutilized. But as a creative who can fight for insights, he could be a huge boon to the quality control of brief inputs.

TOM DOHERTY

KEEP honing those leadership skills and amplifying your voice in the process

STOP being timid about giving critique to the teams — be constructive but direct

START being more critical of your own work — don't get happy too soon

Tom is seen as a go-to creative because he's fast, professional, dependable, a solid writer, and has a high tolerance for chaos without projecting negativity or apathy. As he emerges as a leader in the team, his next step is to settle less easily, and push harder to get from 'okay' to 'good', and from 'good' to 'great'.

Our
solve

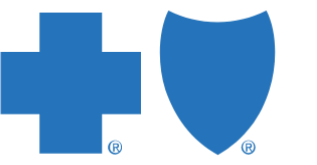


A FAST-TRACK TO IMPROVEMENT

we must operationalize
better writing

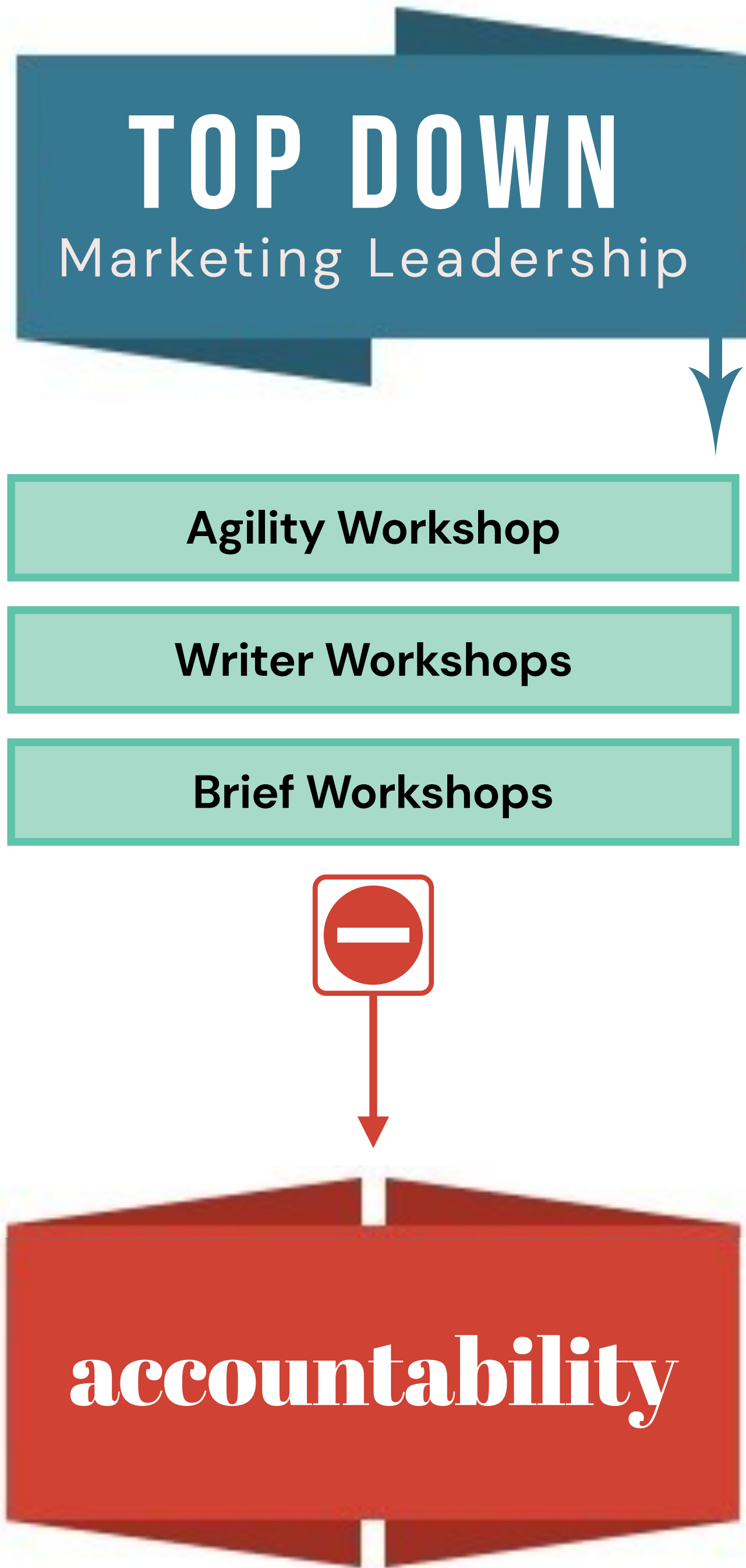
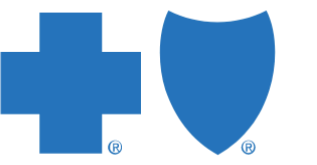
Mediocrity is 'invisiblized' in our process. We will never inspire 'better' if we can't see what and who needs our attention.

mm



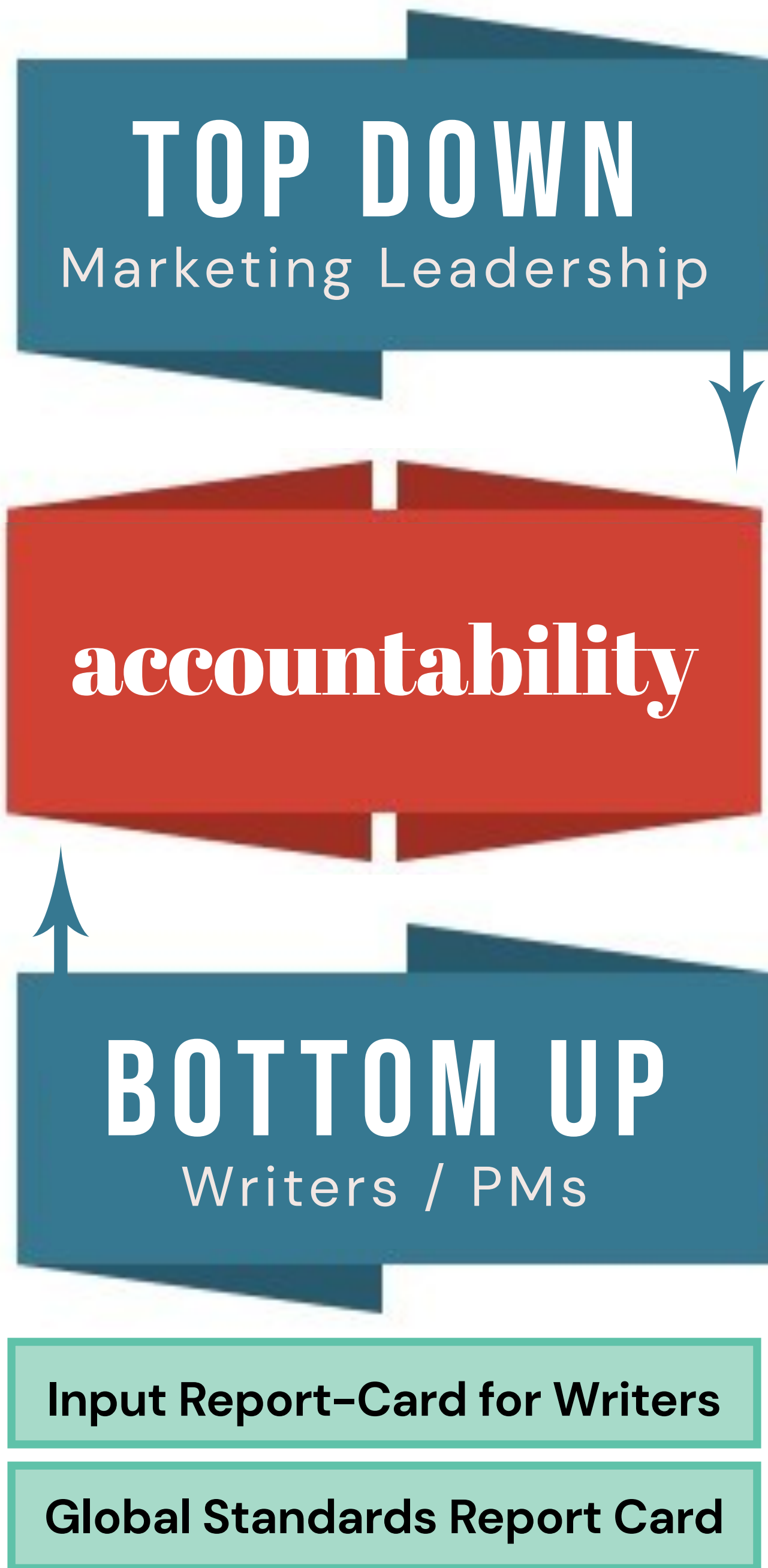
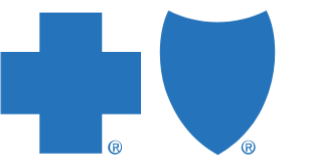
changing how we enforce change

Like many companies, we've relied on a top-down approach to inspiring change.



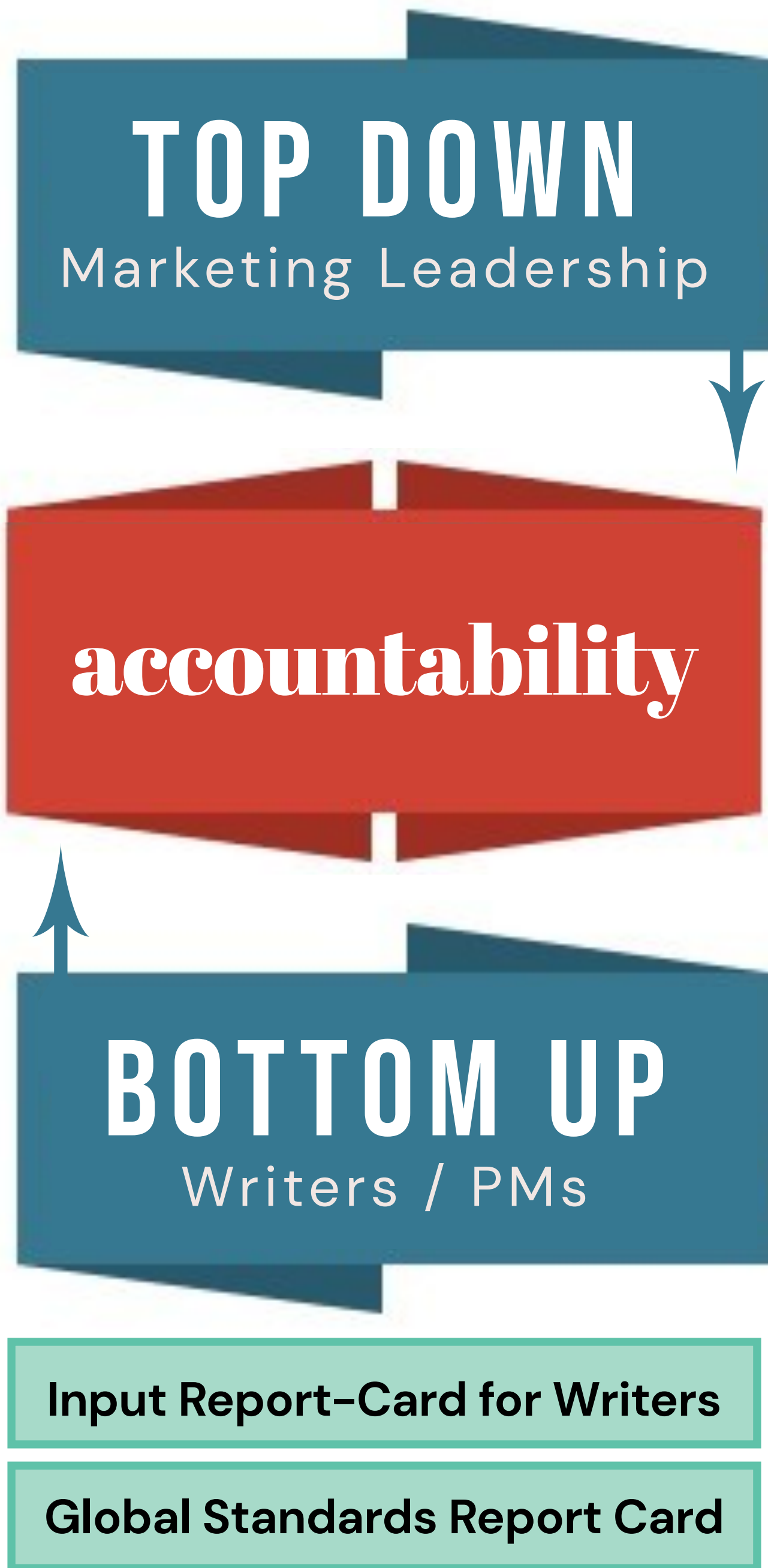
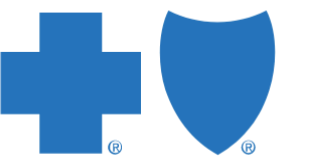
changing how we
enforce change

But this hasn't always lead to adoption
of change, because metrics have not
been attached.



changing how we enforce change

Adding accountability mechanisms to our team creates a bottom-up feedback loop...

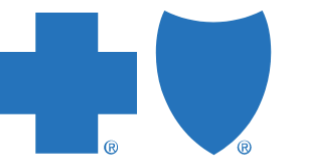


DATA-BACKED
BEST PRACTICE
RECOMMENDATIONS

changing how we
enforce change

...so leadership can endorse specific
recommendations for change
that are data-based.

by operationalizing accountability we will...



change
now
enforce
change



OPERATIONALIZING BETTER WRITING

we're all accountable

METRICS



This doesn't have to be hard, or complicated to implement. Progress, not perfection.

MENTORSHIP



Make this level of coaching a permanent layer of career development, in addition to the weekly triage of the work

GLOBAL STANDARDS



Give our PMs and MMs a voice outside of the storm — and help them learn a universal standard.

SELLING & SELF-CRITICALITY



In order to sell a narrative, you need to have one first. Developing the presentation skill set will help our team be more self-critical.



MASSACHUSETTS

thanks

marketing
magnet