

Ten Principles, One Culture

Reading Hacker Ethics Through Burning Man

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$ man burning-man

What Burning Man is

- A temporary city in the Nevada desert, built and removed every year
- A culture of art, participation, and gifts
- A year-round network of 100+ official regional events, including one in Conesville, Iowa
- Run by a nonprofit, the Burning Man Project





$ cat MISCONCEPTIONS.md

What Burning Man is not

- A music festival. No lineup, no headliners
- A marketplace. You can’t buy your way through it
- A spectator event. There is no audience
- Just one week in Nevada

$ whoami

Who's talking

ON THE PLAYA

- 10 burns since 2007, and more regionals than I can count
- DMV Bosun, Black Rock City (2 years)
- Event Coordinator: Hearths o' Phyre and Flaming Cheese (2 years each)
- Cabin Radio camp lead at TTATC (4 years)

IN THE HACKER COMMUNITY

- Security practitioner for 25+ years
- DEF CON Goon, Contests & Events
- RSA Conference volunteer
- Speaker: GSX (3x), SANS Blue Team Summit





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$ git log --reverse
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From a beach to a network

1986

Larry Harvey and Jerry James burn a wooden man on Baker Beach, San Francisco

1990

Police stop the burn. The Cacophony Society takes the Man to the Black Rock Desert

1997

Burning Man pilots volunteer Regional Contacts

1998

Burning Flipside in Austin becomes the first official regional

2004

The Regional Network launches. Larry Harvey writes the Ten Principles

$ diff burners hackers

Written down after the fact

“…not as a dictate of how people should be and act, but as a reflection of the community’s ethos and culture as it had organically developed.”

Burning Man history, on the 2004 Ten Principles

Hacker culture grew the same way. It never got its list.

MAPS | IT'S COMPLICATED | BREAKS





PRINCIPLE 01 / 10

IT'S COMPLICATED

Radical Inclusion

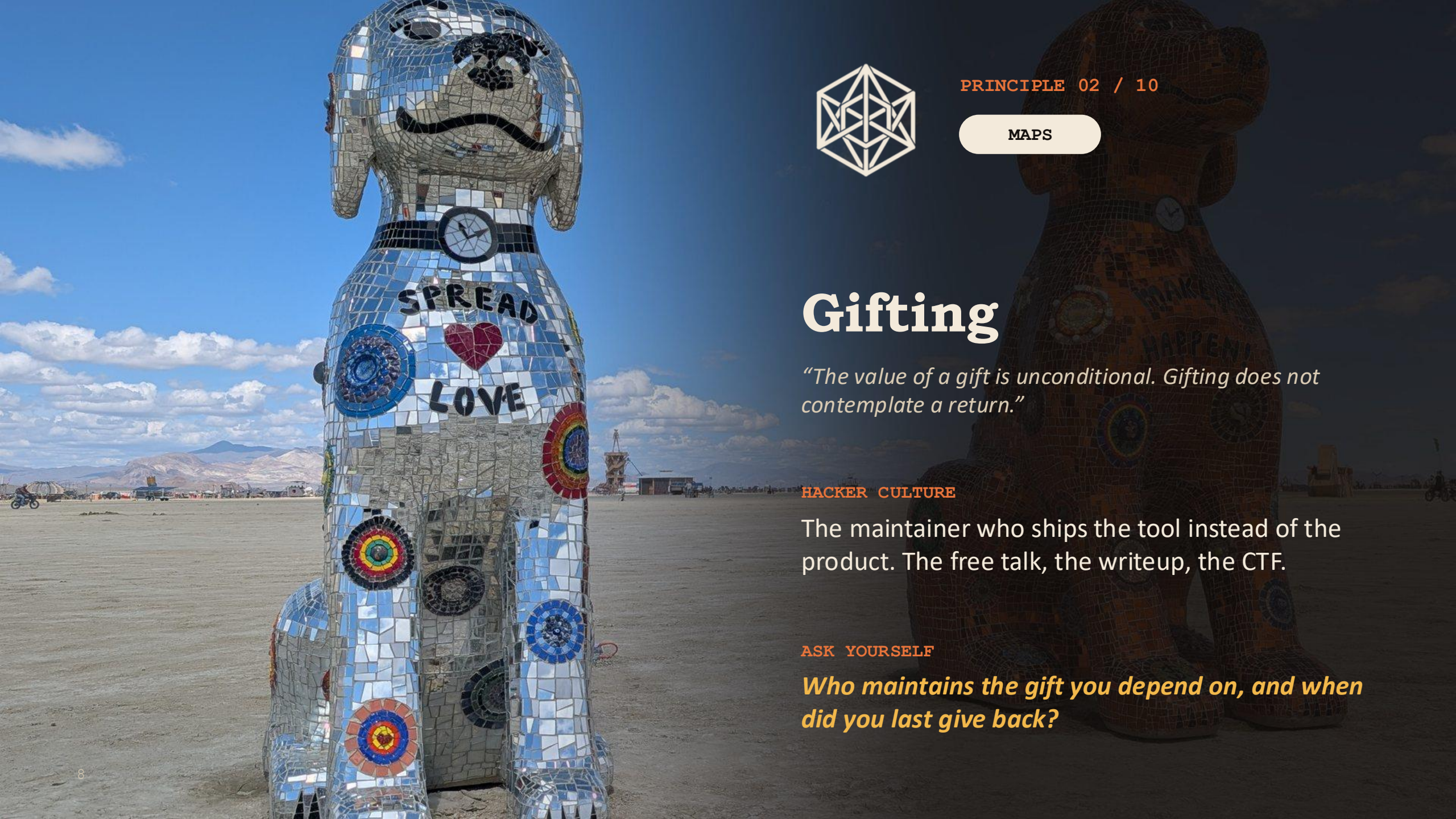
"Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger."

HACKER CULTURE

Gatekeeping on certs and pedigree. And yet DEF CON is a genuinely safe space for LGBTQ+ and trans hackers.

ASK YOURSELF

We welcome who people are. Why do we still question what they know?



PRINCIPLE 02 / 10

MAPS

Gifting

“The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return.”

HACKER CULTURE

The maintainer who ships the tool instead of the product. The free talk, the writeup, the CTF.

ASK YOURSELF

Who maintains the gift you depend on, and when did you last give back?



PRINCIPLE 03 / 10

BREAKS

Decommodification

“Social environments unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising.”

HACKER CULTURE

An industry that turns our culture into a booth, and “hacker” into a marketing word.

ASK YOURSELF

Is the booth serving the community, or is the community serving the booth?

PRINCIPLE 04 / 10

MAPS

Radical Self-reliance

“Discover, exercise and rely on your inner resources.”



HACKER CULTURE

The home lab. Reading the source before you file the issue.

ASK YOURSELF

Is “RTFM” teaching self-reliance, or excusing us from helping?



PRINCIPLE 05 / 10

MAPS

Radical Self-expression

“Arises from the unique gifts of the individual. It is offered as a gift to others.”

HACKER CULTURE

Handles, hardware badges, and the entire badge scene.

ASK YOURSELF

Does our expression still respect the people receiving it?

PRINCIPLE 06 / 10

MAPS

Communal Effort

“Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration.”



HACKER CULTURE

A CTF team, an incident bridge, a village build. Structurally the same thing.

ASK YOURSELF

Do we reward the team, or just the name on the CVE?



PRINCIPLE 07 / 10

IT'S COMPLICATED

Civic Responsibility

"Assume responsibility for public welfare... in accordance with local, state and federal laws."

HACKER CULTURE

Coordinated disclosure and safe harbor, from a culture that also taught us to mistrust authority.

ASK YOURSELF

When the law lags behind, do we act like citizens or like tourists?

PRINCIPLE 08 / 10

BREAKS

Leaving No Trace

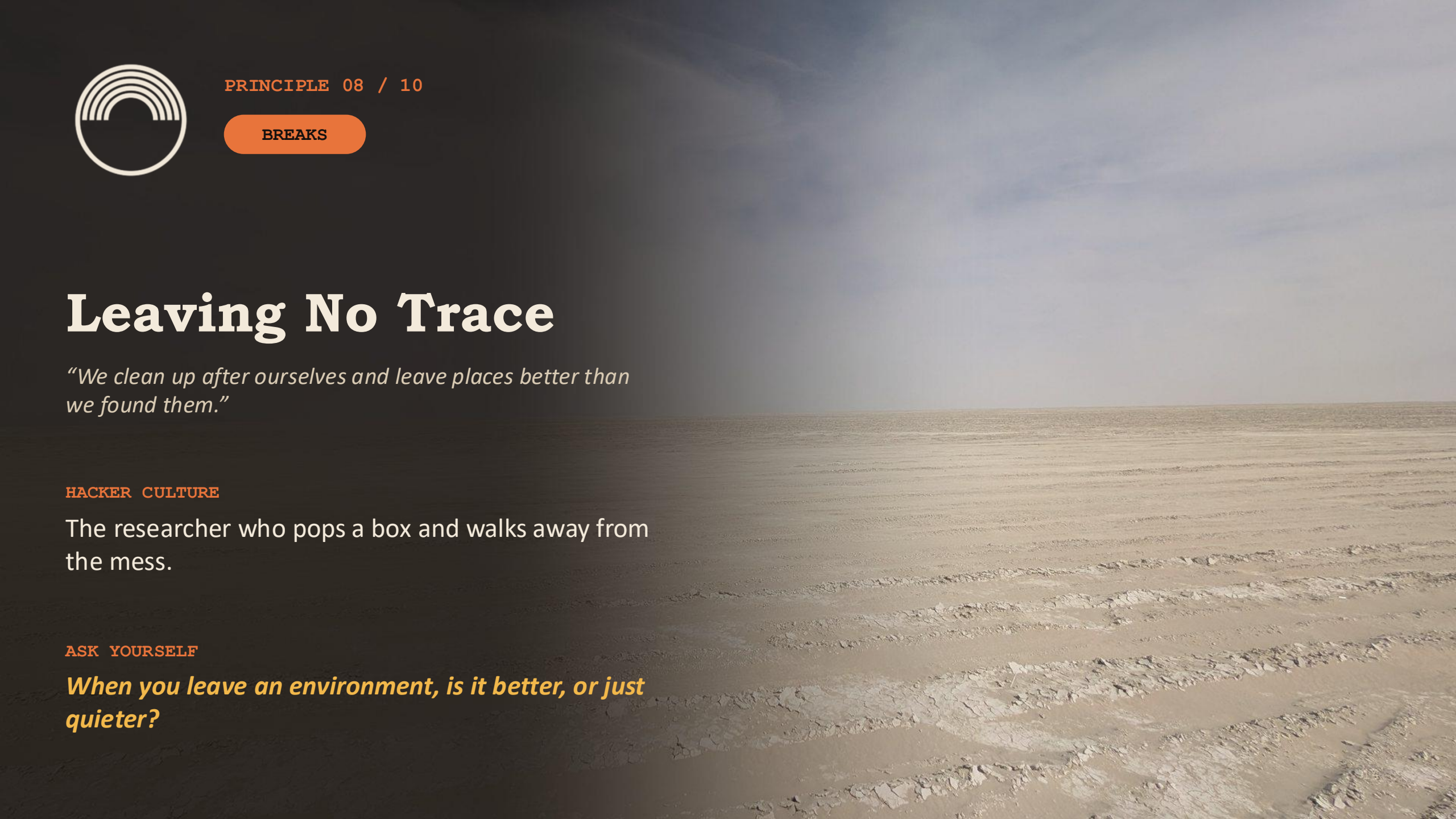
“We clean up after ourselves and leave places better than we found them.”

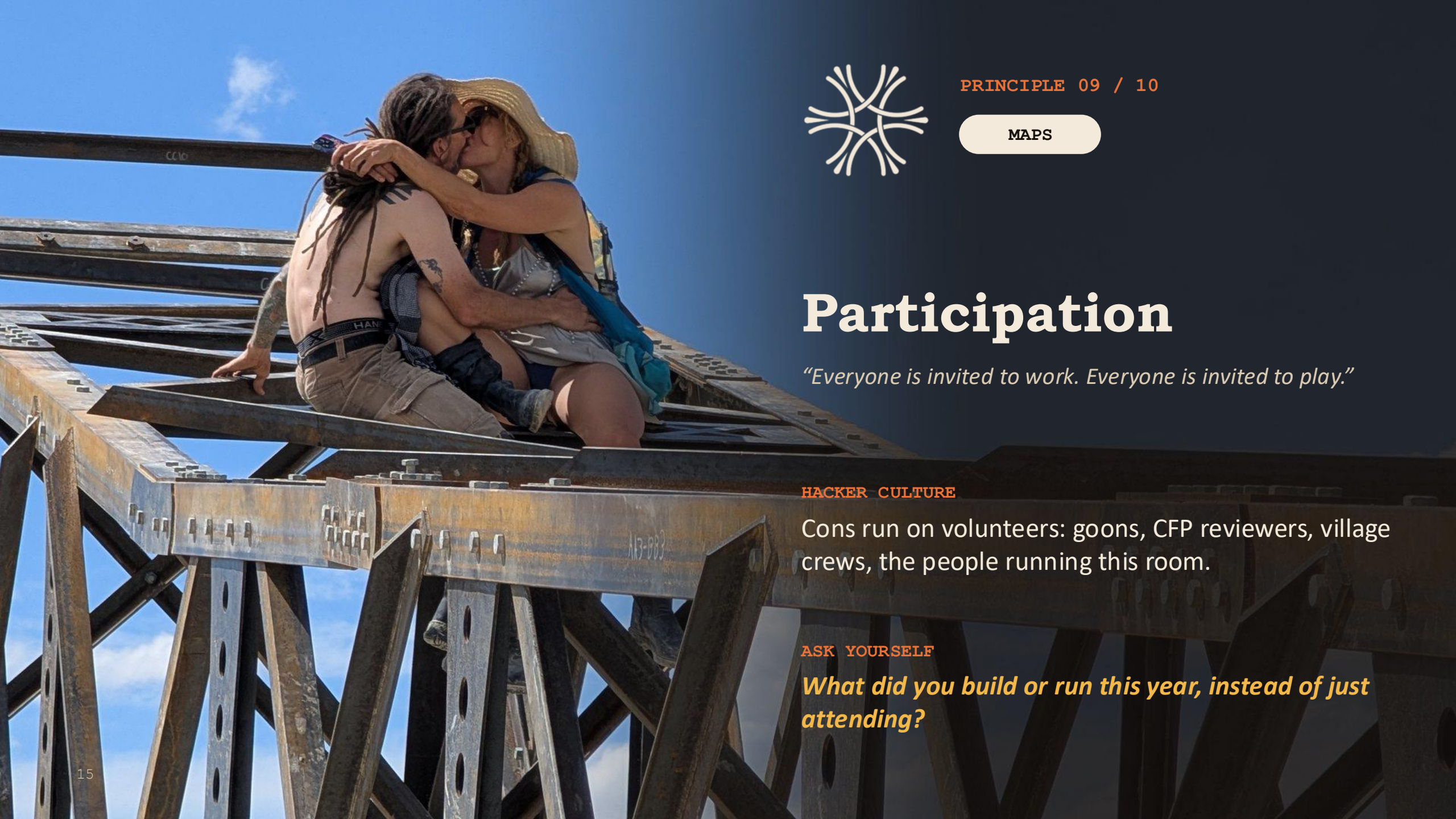
HACKER CULTURE

The researcher who pops a box and walks away from the mess.

ASK YOURSELF

When you leave an environment, is it better, or just quieter?





PRINCIPLE 09 / 10

MAPS

Participation

“Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play.”

HACKER CULTURE

Cons run on volunteers: goons, CFP reviewers, village crews, the people running this room.

ASK YOURSELF

What did you build or run this year, instead of just attending?

PRINCIPLE 10 / 10

MAPS

Immediacy

“Immediate experience is… the most important touchstone of value. No idea can substitute for this experience.”

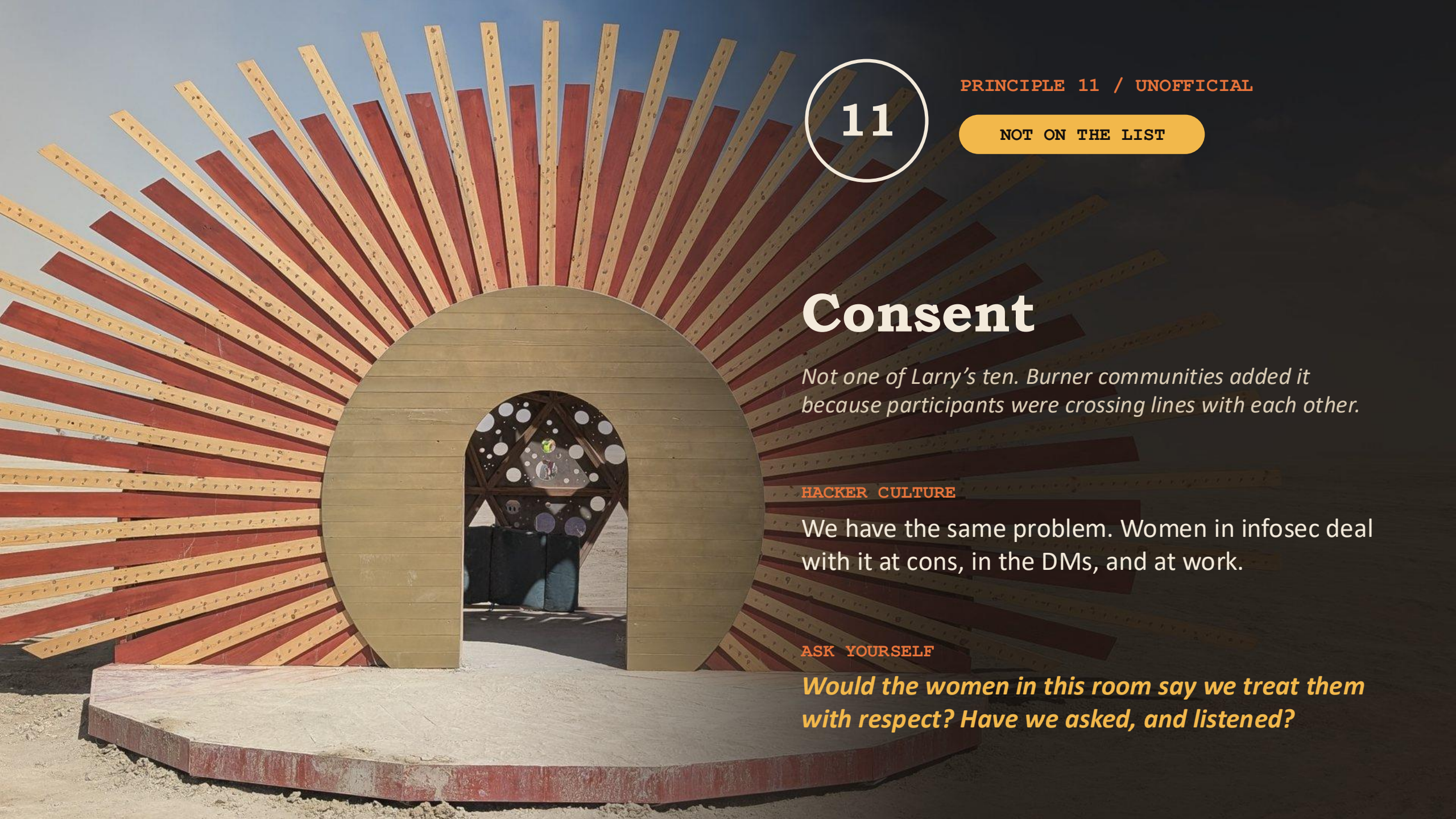


HACKER CULTURE

Nobody learned to hack from a slide deck. We learned by breaking things.

ASK YOURSELF

What's the last thing you learned by breaking it yourself?



11

PRINCIPLE 11 / UNOFFICIAL

NOT ON THE LIST

Consent

Not one of Larry's ten. Burner communities added it because participants were crossing lines with each other.

HACKER CULTURE

We have the same problem. Women in infosec deal with it at cons, in the DMs, and at work.

ASK YOURSELF

Would the women in this room say we treat them with respect? Have we asked, and listened?



$ ./join --local

Come home to Hearths o’ Phyre

- Iowa’s official regional burn, in Conesville, about 30 minutes south of Iowa City
- Held every year in late September
- No experience needed. Volunteers, artists, and first-timers welcome

TICKETS AND VOLUNTEERING

https://hearthsophyre.org/

Or find me after the talk.



```
$ find /midwest -name "*burn*"
```

Burns in the Midwest

InterFuse
Missouri, near Kansas City · May

Lakes of Fire
Michigan · around the third weekend of June

River of Fire
Northeast Iowa, Driftless region · August

Hearths o’ Phyre
Conesville, Iowa · late September

Mosaic
Near Athens, Ohio · first weekend of October

T.E.I.C. and Resonance
Kansas, near Topeka and Wichita

More regionals: burningman.org › Regional Network



```
$ ./play --playa
```

Over a mile of lights, keeping pace with the Earth’s rotation

Black Rock City



```
$ ./play --iowa
```

Camp The Sky brought a hovercraft for anyone to ride. That’s me and my son!

Hearths o’ Phyre, Iowa



$ exit 0

Thank you

Questions?

Richard Noel aka Richy · CornCon