IDEA ARENA · INTERSEASON SPECIAL

The Ninth Card

Before an Arena exhibit opens, three workers review its 'Eight AI Wins' card. They want the final message to tell the truth about what the tools did—and did not do.











Original dramatic voices inspired by historical perspectives; not historical quotations. The companies and workplace cases are fictional composites.

01 · The Display



Before the exhibit opens, three workers from separate companies challenge an 'Eight AI Wins' headline. The Host asks what a visitor should believe when they leave.

HOST
Tomorrow a visitor may spend five minutes here and read only this card. I want to know what they will believe when they leave.

WALT
That the work can change. I would come through the door for that.

HOST
So would I. The printer wants an answer tonight.

MARA
Then tell the printer to wait. At my company, a briefing tool said a customer booking was ready. It used an equipment instruction that had been withdrawn. I noticed it before we called the customer. The tool did not catch its own mistake.

HOST
Mara leads service at Larkfield. Beside her is Eli, a new returns clerk at Morrow Supply. And this is the coordinator who kept Bellwether's scheduling assistant working. They are meeting here for the first time.

ELI
My screen said I had completed a return correctly. The customer was still waiting for an answer.

COORDINATOR
Mine said the next day's schedule was ready. It didn't show the checks I did before it could say that.

WALT
Each tool also did something useful, or none of you would still be using it.

COORDINATOR
Yes. That is why I came. I don't want this to turn into a story about throwing the tools away.

FOLLETT
And Mara does not want the card to turn one caught mistake into eight proven successes. Those are different objections.

HOST
Fair. I invited you to check the card, not to endorse it. By the end of tonight, I need a better account of what helped, what did not, and what would make each gain last when you are not there to rescue it.

02 · The Green Schedule



Bellwether's assistant assembled a schedule, but the coordinator repaired assignments and still needs someone who can cover the work during her leave.

COORDINATOR
Bellwether services commercial equipment. The assistant gathers job notes and proposes which technician goes where. That used to take me much of the morning. Now I can start with a plan instead of a blank page. I would keep that improvement.

WALT
Good. Let us put that on the card.

COORDINATOR
Put the next sentence beside it. One proposed assignment matched the technician's recorded qualification. The supervisor knew the machine had been modified and the technician would need experienced support. I corrected the assignment and the equipment record. Then an older job turned up under the machine's previous name, so I fixed that link too.

ELI
How many places did the same correction have to go?

COORDINATOR
Enough that the screen looked calm only after I had chased them. Green meant the plan had no open exception. It did not mean the assistant had made a good first assignment.

WALT
I can see the difference. Still, the prepared plan saved time.

COORDINATOR
It saved assembly time. I want to know where that time went. When I asked who would cover the assistant during my leave, my manager said it ran by itself. His first idea was to send urgent questions to my phone.

FOLLETT
Then he had a plan for the software and no plan for your absence.

COORDINATOR
Exactly. We proposed a paid handover: let a deputy run a real schedule while I am at work, see where the records fail, and make the supervisor responsible for answering the questions only a supervisor can answer. It has not been tested yet.

MARA
What would convince you it worked?

COORDINATOR
The deputy can release a sound schedule without reading my private notes or calling me. I can take a week off, leave my phone at home, and return to a job that has not piled up a week of hidden repairs.

HOST
I had written “the assistant gave the team time back.” I cannot write that yet.

COORDINATOR
You can write “it saved assembly time.” The rest is a question for Bellwether to answer.

03 · The Waiting Customer



At Morrow, Eli followed the returns assistant correctly while a customer waited for a supervisor's answer.

ELI
Morrow sells building materials. A customer brought back an opened box and said the contents were damaged when he picked it up. I was new. Our assistant found the opened-item rule, drafted an explanation, and told me to ask a supervisor for an exception. I sent the request exactly as trained.

HOST
And the screen marked your part complete.

ELI
Yes. The man was still there. He needed to know whether he could take a replacement back to his job. I could show him that I had sent a request, but I could not tell him when an answer would come.

WALT
Would a clearer estimate on the screen have helped?

ELI
Only if someone had agreed to answer within that time. The supervisor was helping another customer at the loading desk. Ruth, the experienced clerk, knew when to go over and ask. I did not know whether I could interrupt or whose customer came first.

FOLLETT
So the missing step was not another button. It was a decision about who could interrupt whom, and when.

ELI
I did not want to make Ruth leave her customer because I could not handle mine. I also did not want the man at my counter to think a correct form was an answer.

COORDINATOR
That is familiar. The tool finishes a piece of work, and somebody has to connect that piece to the rest of the job.

MARA
Do not let the company call that your failure to use the assistant. You used it as they asked.

ELI
I know. I still want it. It helped me find the rule instead of guessing. I want it to show me why Ruth would choose a different route, and I want a real person available when that route needs authority I do not have.

WALT
That is more interesting than replacing the clerk with a faster explanation. The tool could help you become a better clerk.

ELI
Maybe. But I do not want a training promise on a poster. Try the next disputed return with a new clerk. Watch what happens to the customer, and watch how much of Ruth's time the answer takes. Then tell me if we improved the desk.

HOST
We have not run that comparison. On this card, “request sent” cannot stand in for “customer helped.”

04 · The Old Instruction



At Larkfield, Mara stopped a booking built from a withdrawn instruction. The next dispatcher may not know what she knows.

MARA
Larkfield arranges and maintains equipment for customers. This brief would have told a dispatcher we could send a crew under an exception we no longer use. Service had withdrawn it after a change in the work. The current rule existed in our dispatch record. The old note still existed in an archive, and the briefing pulled it back.

HOST
You stopped the booking before anyone promised the customer a visit.

MARA
Yes. That is good. It is not proof that the briefing is safe for the next dispatcher. A new person could read READY and make the call I stopped.

WALT
When we first looked at this booking, I suggested better search. You showed me that search could still find an old note that nobody had marked withdrawn. I should not offer the same fix twice. Who can mark it obsolete?

MARA
Service owns the rule. Dispatch decides whether a booking can go out. Systems can make the withdrawn note visible as withdrawn. What we had not settled was how those three jobs meet before the next dispatcher reads READY.

FOLLETT
Do they have time to keep eight pilots current? That was the question Larkfield faced when it counted them.

MARA
I don't know that they do. I would keep summaries that save retyping. I would narrow the briefing until someone owns its corrections. More search is not the first repair I need.

WALT
Then the first promise is smaller and more useful: a dispatcher can trust the correction before making a customer promise. I still want to see what you can build once that works.

ELI
That sounds less exciting on the wall than “eight wins.”

MARA
It should sound better to a dispatcher about to call a customer.

HOST
Three green screens: a schedule assembled, a request sent, a booking prepared. Each mark told the truth about a step. None told the whole truth about what happened to the person depending on it.

FOLLETT
Then the card should show both facts. The tools helped with steps. The companies still have to make the whole job work.

05 · What The Saved Hour Is For



The room asks who gets the saved time, who pays for handover and learning, and who chooses what better work could follow.

WALT
I have heard what these systems failed to do. I do not want the exhibit to end with everyone staring at three forms. Suppose the companies make the changes you described and prove they work. What would you do with the time they give back?

COORDINATOR
First, take a week off. That is not a joke. My manager wanted the assistant to free dispatchers to help customers. If I have to stay on call so it can do that, our gain has been bought with my evenings.

WALT
I take the point. After the week?

COORDINATOR
I would look at the assignments we keep repairing. If I can change the record and the handoff during my regular hours, the next week might be easier for the whole team. Right now I spend that time making tomorrow possible.

ELI
I want time to learn the counter. Ruth can tell when to refund, when to ask a supplier, and when our own promise to a customer was poor. I do not learn that judgment by sending the same kind of request away faster.

MARA
And Ruth cannot teach you if helping you counts as falling behind on her own work.

ELI
Exactly. I want the assistant to show me the rule and an example. I also need permission to ask Ruth or the supervisor when the example does not fit, without making the customer stand there while we argue about who is allowed to answer.

FOLLETT
Mara, if the tool truly gave you an hour each week, what would you do with it?

MARA
A correction that outlives me. The next dispatcher should see the current rule, why the old exception was withdrawn, and who can answer if the equipment has changed again. That takes service, dispatch, and systems working together. It is not a prettier archive.

WALT
Those sound like repairs. I am asking about the next possibility. A new service, perhaps. A better way to help customers that nobody could afford to consider before.

MARA
I want that too. But you are already spending time we have not recovered. Who pays for the handover, Ruth's teaching, and the correction work while the new service is being imagined?

WALT
The company should, if it wants the new service to last.

MARA
Put that on a card and I may buy a ticket.

WALT
That was nearly an invitation.

COORDINATOR
It was a budget request. She has a recognizable style.

FOLLETT
Walt is right to ask what could come next. Mara is right that a company cannot spend the same saved hour twice. Who decides whether that hour pays for Ruth's teaching, for better records, or for a new service?

WALT
Not me, standing here with the marker. The people doing the work and the customers receiving it need a say. I came in wanting to announce a future. I would rather help build a new service that still works on an ordinary Tuesday when the experts are busy.

ELI
Can I add a customer to that meeting? He is usually the person missing from the picture once the form is filed.

HOST
Yes. The card has to make room for him too.

06 · The Ninth Card



The ninth card leaves three tests unfinished: can the coordinator take leave, can a customer get an answer, and can a new dispatcher see the current rule?

HOST
I cannot hang this headline. It says eight wins when these stories gave us better questions and unfinished work.

WALT
Do not replace it with eight warnings. Readers should know the tools assembled a schedule, found a policy, and saved retyping. That is real.

ELI
It is real for the step. What about the customer after I click send?

HOST
You are right. A faster task is not automatically a better job or a better answer for a customer.

FOLLETT
How will someone new use the tool without needing one of you to step in?

COORDINATOR
At Bellwether, show that the deputy can run the schedule while I am away, without sending work to my phone.

ELI
At Morrow, show that the next new clerk can get a disputed return to an answer while the customer is still there, without quietly borrowing all of Ruth's time.

MARA
At Larkfield, show that a dispatcher who has never met me can see the withdrawn instruction before promising a visit.

HOST
None of those tests has been completed. I will leave the spaces for their results empty.

WALT
The front still needs to invite someone in. What question would make them turn it over?

ELI
What did we make room for?

HOST
“We” meaning the companies. Not the screens.

FOLLETT
And when a company can fill in those boxes, ask the people who did the work what they want that room to become.

WALT
Then I can talk about invention without pretending it comes free.

MARA
You can talk about it tonight. Just do not charge it to my hours before I agree.

HOST
Here is what I want a visitor to leave knowing. These tools helped with parts of the work. The companies have not yet shown that the help reached a waiting customer, a new worker, or the person who needs to go home. That is what they have to prove before we call the gain a win. After that, they can choose together what to build with the time.

COORDINATOR
If Bellwether fills in my box, I will send you a postcard from my week off.

WALT
Where from?

COORDINATOR
I will tell you when I get home. That is how the test works.

Field Note From The Arena

Season 3 showed why a tool's success cannot be read from a green screen alone. At Bellwether, a schedule looked ready after the coordinator repaired it. At Morrow, Eli finished the required step while a customer waited. At Larkfield, Mara caught an old instruction before a customer promise. Each tool helped with part of the job. The unfinished question is whether that help can reach the customer, a new colleague, and the person whose judgment made the result possible. A faster task becomes a real gain when the benefit survives beyond one expert and the people affected can help decide what to do with the time. That is the question the Arena carries into Season 4.

Discussion prompt: Name one task a tool has made faster. Who still has to finish the surrounding work? What would you need to see before calling the change a win, and who should choose how to use any time it really frees?

When does a faster task become a real win for the people who depend on it?