



# RUGGED

## OPTIMIST

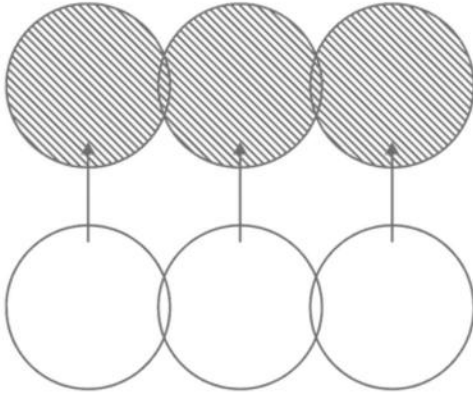
speaking | training | coaching

### INSIDE:

- core values
- testimonials
- our difference
- services
- founder bio

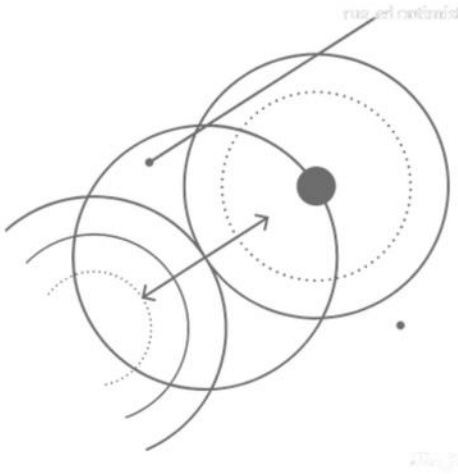


# CORE FOUR



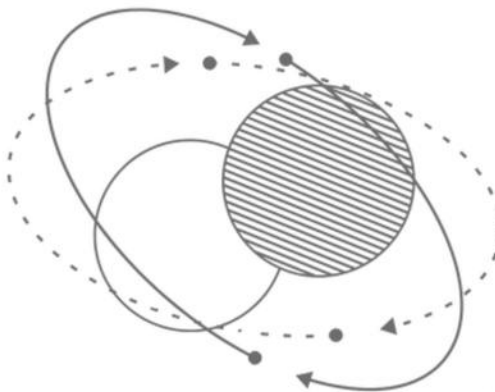
## EXTRACT OPPORTUNITY EVERYWHERE

A RUGGED OPTIMIST recognizes that every situation contains the raw materials for improvement. Rather than waiting for better circumstances, they develop the clarity to see opportunities that others miss. They understand that lacking hope is typically a consequence of lacking vision.



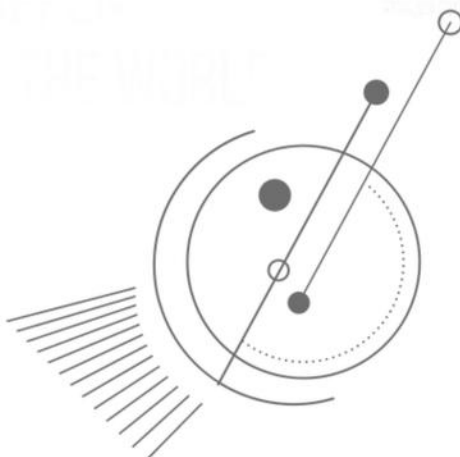
## DISMISS NOTHING TO MISS NOTHING

A RUGGED OPTIMIST sees nothing as wholly irrelevant, knowing that minor connections and counterintuitive elements often reveal overlooked insights. They understand that opportunities missed through dismissal cost as much as those lost through misunderstanding, so they remain wary of the narrowness of their own vision.



## HARNESS CONFLICT TO FORGE GROWTH

A RUGGED OPTIMIST acknowledges conflict doesn't just happen *sometimes* but is present in all situations as the motive force of development and change. Rather than avoiding or suppressing opposing forces - in life, work, or ourselves - they refine accurate understanding to secure overlooked opportunities and avoid getting blindsided.



## HAPPEN TO THE WORLD

A RUGGED OPTIMIST doesn't passively wait for or reflexively react to change—they create it. They understand they are active agents in a moving world: not helpless, not on autopilot, and not all-powerful. By showing up with intention, they shape outcomes and contribute to the world that is, in turn, shaping them.

# TESTIMONIALS

I would work with James again in a heartbeat. He is a very natural leader and people-person.

He solves problems quickly and provides clear guidance, time and time again.

**Working with him has been a highlight of my career."**



**MALLORIE HURST**  
Vice President of Operations  
*TempStars*

The first time I saw James speak at a conference, he modeled what a dogged belief in achievement should look & feel like. He fortified business owners' connection to what they do and why they do it.

**James did what James does best:**  
He learns what drives people, understands their personal *why*, and invests himself in their success."



**ERIN BARLOWE**  
Manager of Client Success  
*CareerPlug*



# A DIFFERENT APPROACH

for workplace relations

Others try solving workplace problems  
but only treat the *symptoms*.

## UNPRODUCTIVE CONFLICT

### THE ISSUE

Organizations either *avoid* conflict or *react* with "conflict resolution" when tensions finally erupt. Both approaches miss opportunities to harness conflict's creative power and avoid disruptions.

### THE UNDERBELLY

Organizations erroneously treat conflict as something that *incidentally* arises, rather than recognizing and leveraging its constant presence. What commonly gets called "conflict" is often the eruption of unaddressed, longstanding tension.

### OUR SOLUTION

We empower teams to find comfort with conflict as a constant creative force, showing how to uncover both common ground and tactical alignment opportunities within opposing views. By embracing tension, organizations can avoid disruption and harness growth.

## CONTROL-STYLE "LEADERSHIP"

### THE ISSUE

Micromanagers damage trust and diminish all of leadership's influence with employees. Companies don't see the loss in *potential* revenue, so the severity gets miscalculated.

### THE UNDERBELLY

Companies can have outdated ideas of what micromanagement looks like, often rationalizing it as necessary. Instances get seen as disconnected, and companies miss institutional patterns. When unaddressed, it can only naturally escalate.

### OUR SOLUTION

We leverage expertise in behavioral dynamics to identify organizational gaps and leadership development deficits that enable and incentivize micromanagement. We clarify how to stop the cycle before it damages teams and revenue, using prevention and proactive identification techniques.

 FOR OTHER WORKPLACE APPLICATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY, GO TO



# A DIFFERENT APPROACH

HOT TOPICS 2025-2026

## **RUGGED OPTIMIST** targets the human patterns at the *root*.

### AI AVERSION & MISAPPLICATION

#### THE ISSUE

Without proper insight or guidance, employees *actively avoid* or *passively accept* AI and its output. Both responses stem from misconceptions leading to missed opportunities and missteps.

#### THE UNDERBELLY

People tend to misunderstand AI as either *threatening* or *infallible*. Independent of a company using AI, its employees do, or they come into increasing contact with it. However, AI training remains sparse.

#### OUR SOLUTION

We equip teams to move past both fearfulness and reliance. We deliver guiding principles for partnering with AI to sharpen human decision-making. We develop company frameworks for AI *collaboration* that amplifies human expertise, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

### GENERATIONAL TRANSITIONS

#### THE ISSUE

Organizations struggle to retain and motivate Gen Z employees, failing to grasp their workplace expectations and values. This results in talent loss and risks reduced contemporary relevance.

#### THE UNDERBELLY

Companies lack contextual knowledge of Gen Z's work values and priorities. Leaders get frustrated when traditional management approaches don't translate and miss opportunities to leverage their strengths.

#### OUR SOLUTION

We clarify Gen Z's intrinsic motivators and communication preferences, showcasing their rationale and unprecedented generational skillset. With their collaborative strength and technological intuition, building effective bridges between generational working styles and expectations is vital.

**RUGGEDOPTIMIST.COM OR TEXT 512.636.6288 TO GET A FREE CONSULTATION.**



# SERVICES

## Speaking & Keynotes

When professionals feel immobilized by conflict or constraints, James shows how to turn obstacles into opportunities. From domestic violence intervention to COVID-era hiring crises, he's helped people find value in difficult situations. Audiences learn to spot options they missed before and leave with practical tools they can immediately apply to their specific challenges.

★ *Previous speaking includes events across all continental time zones for companies like PostNet, Window World, Shine Window Care, and digital events for State Farm agents, Pink Zebra Moving, CareerPlug and others, plus classrooms in California and North Carolina.*

## Lunch & Learns

Unleash your workforce from the constraints of conventional sugar-rush “motivational” speakers. These focused sessions tackle workplace realities like unproductive conflict, a lack of resilience and stifled problem-solving. Using our CORE FOUR values, each 45-minute session delivers one immediately applicable tool your team can begin using that day.

★ *Popular topics include:*

- *Developing Proactive Gratitude*
- *Reframing Conflict to Harness Momentum*



**SCAN TO  
SCHEDULE  
YOUR FREE  
CONSULTATION**

## Training

Go deeper than typical team building. These ongoing engagements tackle your specific workplace problems with hands-on practice and regular feedback. Teams learn resilience and critical thinking methods that actually work in real situations. Specialized modules available for leadership challenges like micromanagement and generational transitions.

## Mindset Coaching

Because mindset *is* the starting-place for everything else. Individual and small-group development focused on building situational awareness to extract value from difficult circumstances. The goal isn't subjective positivity. It's renewed clarity that reveals a broader range of actionable opportunities that are hiding in front of you.

★ *Specialized tracks available for:*

- *Leadership development*
- *Intimate partnership health & dynamics*

**In-person & virtual  
options available.**





# FOUNDER BIO

To be honest, **James Saunders** never wanted to be an *optimist*...

He believed *that* would require rose-colored glasses and willful ignorance of the world's suffering. Before his career, he'd become the first national qualifier of his high school's speech and debate team and learned deep skepticism toward feel-good platitudes.

It would be many years before he realized he'd conflated optimism with idealism.

As Helen Keller wrote in her essay on optimism, a *true optimist* soberly observes the challenges of life and uses them for *tools* to overcome future obstacles. Rather than shy away from ugly truths, they find hope from within adversity itself.

Turns out Keller used *other words* for those who fit the popular definition that James had known: words like "useless," "dangerous," and "phony."

This distinction resonated with him long before getting an explanation for the accumulating and seemingly disconnected symptoms. Doctors eventually identified the incurable, neurodegenerative disease that had been developing for a decade already: Multiple Sclerosis.

Uncertainty was soon his *only certainty*. Collegiate ambitions had been halted before he could even *name* the cause.

It only took one year for regular 3-mile jogs to be replaced by short, unsteady attempts at walking. And it only took one, brief medical leave for his

years of cross-functional achievement to get redefined as *urgently disposable*.

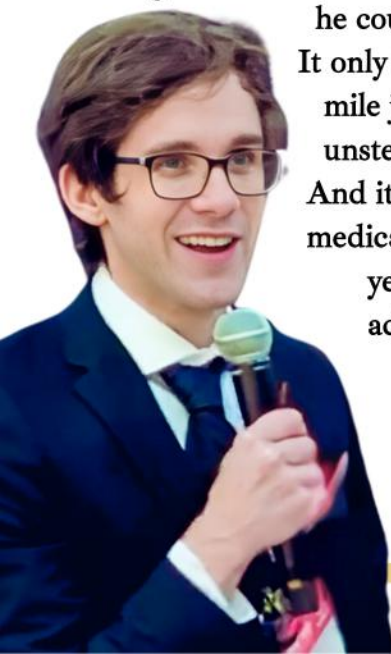


Yet much would go *accordingly* despite little going *according to plan*. How?

Over more than 10 years of working in domestic violence intervention, COVID-era hiring consultation, and corporate partnership management, a common thread emerged for James: equipping others to find obscured pathways through seemingly impossible situations. His ability to convert mystery to mastery became the lynchpin of his personal brand. He had unconsciously begun laying the groundwork for an approach that worked across radically different contexts (even his own).

The emergent framework would take James across all continental time zones as an invited speaker for business networks, corporate leadership teams, and high school classrooms alike. Whether addressing seasoned executives or teenagers, the same systematic approach proved effective.

This became foundational to **RUGGED OPTIMIST**'s methodology: a crusade against cliché; a muzzle on sugar-rush "motivation"; a source for hope from *clarity*, not promising that good things will *always* come, but demonstrating how good things can always be *made* to happen. 🍊





**BRING  
THE BAD.**  
*GET THE GOODS.*



**Schedule  
your free  
consultation  
today.**