SYNERGY DEVPARTNER CONFERENCE 2026

How Do You Eat an Elephant?

Inside Our Biggest Migration Yet



Rosanne Brill, Professional Services Consultant,
Former VP Software Development

Where Do You Even Start?

OpenVMS

Decades of business-critical behavior



DBL

C

RMS files

OpenVMS-specific dependencies

Mountains of data

Decades of assumptions

.NET on Linux

New platform with the same application expectations



How *Do* You Eat an Elephant?

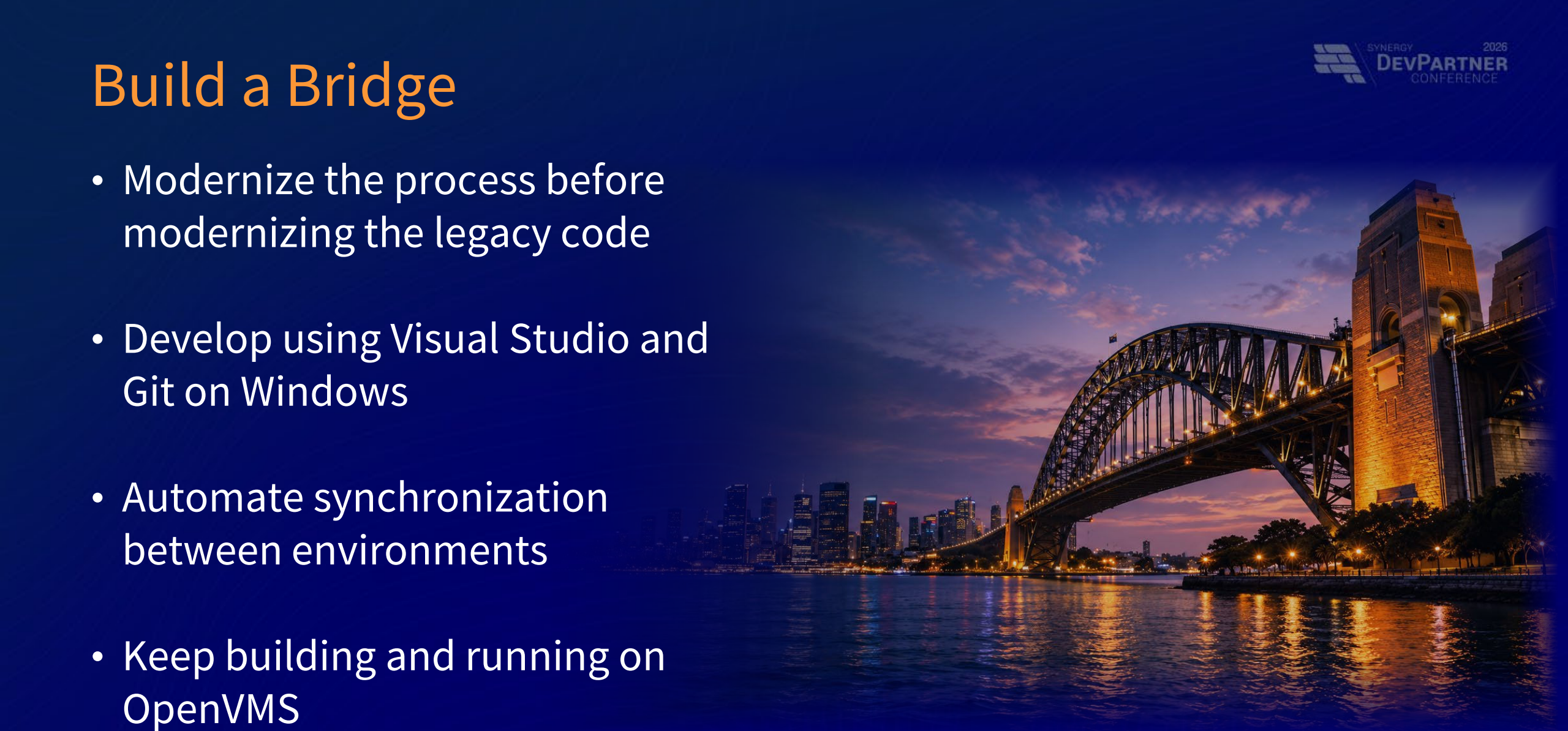
One Bite at a Time

Break it into smaller problems you can understand, test, and solve — one at a time.

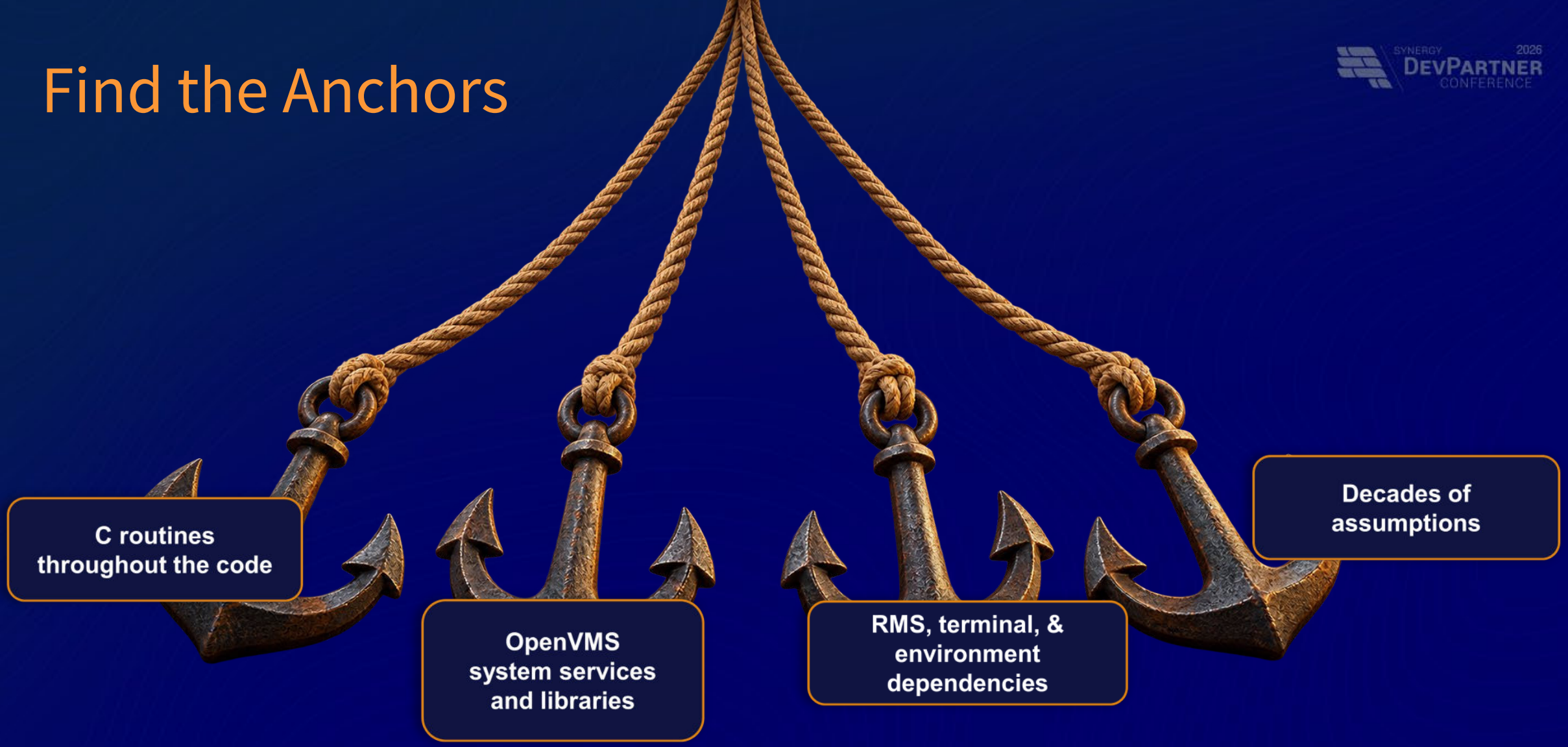


Build a Bridge

- Modernize the process before modernizing the legacy code
- Develop using Visual Studio and Git on Windows
- Automate synchronization between environments
- Keep building and running on OpenVMS



Find the Anchors



Shrink the Elephant

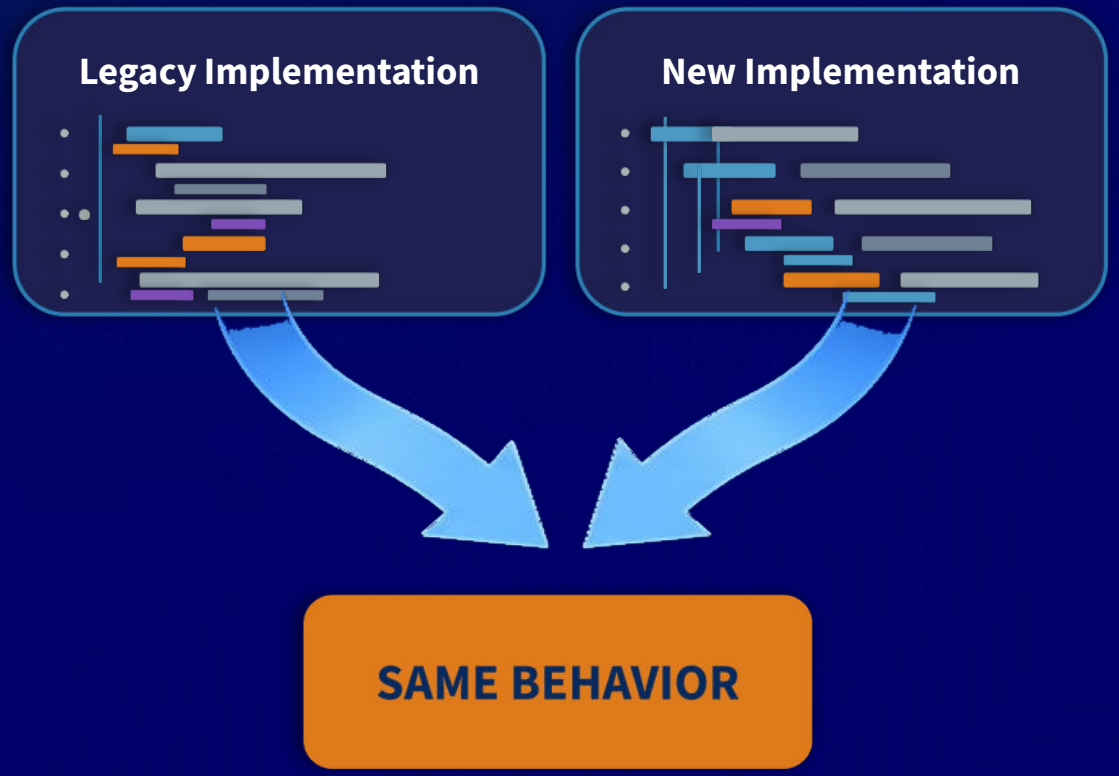
- Question everything before you migrate it
- Remove dead weight — and the false dependencies that come with it
- Less to understand means less to search, test, migrate, and support
- Use modern tooling to expose what the legacy environment hides



Replace Behavior, Not Code

- Understand what the old code actually does
- Reproduce that behavior exactly in the new code
- Preserve compatibility first; improve later

Expect hidden assumptions and edge cases!



Tests Change Everything

- Unit tests provided initial validation of converted routines

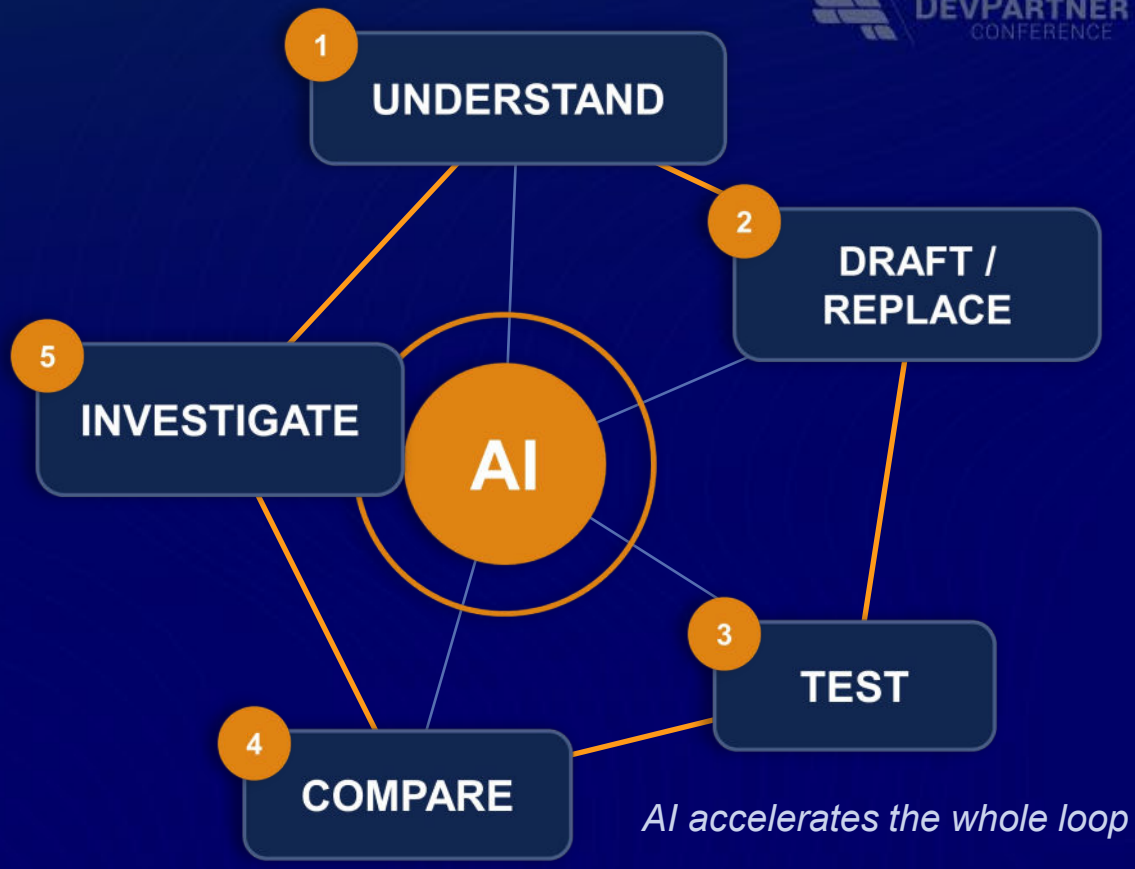
- Application testing revealed blind spots in our unit tests
  - Visual inspection revealed subtle differences
  - The environment can change the result too (permissions, logicals)

- The existing system became the behavioral reference
  - Run same inputs and edge cases against the original
  - Turn every surprise into a new test
  - Tests became a specification for code that never had one

AI as an Accelerator

- Understand unfamiliar APIs and behaviors
- Generate first drafts of source code
- Create unit tests and edge-case test data
- Compare implementations and investigate differences
- Original behavior and verified tests remain the authority

CAVEAT: AI can be *confidently* wrong!



AI accelerates the whole loop

Eating the Elephant Without Standing Still

- Existing product must continue moving forward
- Modernization ships with normal product releases
- Preserve OpenVMS compatibility as long as possible
- Eventually, branch the final OpenVMS-compatible release



Don’t Take My Word for It

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> **What does this change look like from the inside? And what would you tell another manager whose team is considering something similar?**

Manager, MDS Development Team

One Bite at a Time

- Don’t try to migrate the whole system
- Build bridges so old and new can co-exist
- Identify and work through the dependencies
- Preserve behavior first. Improve it later
- Use tests to make unknown behavior known
- Use modern tools to move faster



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