

Title: Radical Candor and Other Communication Strategies

Presenter Names:

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**Description:** Newer theories of management of interpersonal and group dynamics provide dynamic opportunities to intervene effectively with challenging clients, team conflict and practice group functioning and growth. Advanced practitioners need to continue to hone their skills, and practice groups are struggling everywhere as the pioneers age out of the work community. We propose to utilize these three management theories to teach methods of addressing each of these issues. All three theories present options for use when people are stuck --- stuck with the clients, stuck with team members, stuck as an organization. We believe that by teaching these ideas and practicing utilizing them, we can assist IACP practitioners positively impact on their individual and group dynamics.

#### **BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF PRESENTERS:**

KATHRYN S. LAZAR, ESQ. , a divorce lawyer, collaborator and mediator for over 40 years, is one of the founders of the Mediation and Collaborative law movement in the Hudson Valley, having set up a mediation center in 1982 and having helped establish an interdisciplinary practice group in 2002. Kathryn is a past President of the Mediation Center, Dutchess County, and past co-chair of the Hudson Valley Collaborative Divorce and Dispute Resolution Association. She has provided Basic Mediation Training, Basic Interdisciplinary Training and Advanced Interdisciplinary Training in the Hudson Valley, in New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Maryland. Kathryn has been on the faculty of numerous national conferences since 1983, including presentations at IACP Forums, AFM and ACR, and at the European Collaborative Conferences in Edinburgh, Scotland in June 2012 and in Amsterdam in June 2016.

ALLISON J. BELL, Psy.D. has a doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology from Yeshiva University and a Master's degree in dance/movement therapy from Hunter College. She has been in private practice since 1987. Dr. Bell was trained in Collaborative Practice in 2004. She is a member of Collaborative Practice Associations in New York and Massachusetts, serving as Divorce Coach and Child Specialist. She is a Collaborative Divorce Trainer in the Hudson Valley, NY, and has lectured at many annual IACP Forums on child development, neuroscience, and gender bias in negotiation.

## HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH EACH OTHER

### Introduction

In our work, we face each other's different roles, different professions, different personalities and different styles. Under the intense pressure this work generates, we are bound to run into conflict with each other and/or face disappointments. In order to work well with each other, we have to find ways to discuss these conflicts and disappointments both so that we can support each other and so that our work can be effective. A conflicted team cannot work effectively with a divorcing couple.

This may be your first effort at having a difficult conversation using the following structure. Please know that this takes time to learn well. You will make errors. Give the structure a try, even if it feels confining. It is confining, but it provides a structure that can be useful to both members of the conversation.

### The Rules for Difficult Conversations

- **Safety first. We do better when the atmosphere is benign.**
- **Know with whom you need to have the conversation. The person you are troubled by may or may not be the person you need to talk with.** For instance, when you cannot get through to someone on the phone, it is not the secretary who is the problem. If your client is irritating, is the problem because of the client or because someone on the team is applying pressure?
- **Allow enough time.** In our discomfort and busy lives, we tend to rush through hard conversations. Limited time usually worsens the situation by looking like a conversation but not allowing any progress.
- **Prepare for the conversation: creating a system for listening and responding.** Verbal people tend to think that we just need to talk. In fact, the reasons that some conversations are hard is because we cannot just talk about some difficult things. So, we need to create a system that allows and guides such discussion.
- **We tend to resent and feel confined by the very formalized structure you will see.** It will feel like kindergarten, but it works. The only reason to do such a silly thing is because it works.
- **There are two parts to preparing.**
  - A) You need to have some idea of your own contribution. Was it a bad day? A hard case?
  - B) A specific structure helps make the conversation work. This is a guide to one such structure.

### Step one: Individual Task

Imagine a colleague needs to discuss a complaint about you. How would you like that person to raise it with you?

- a. What attitude would you prefer?
- b. How would you like them to approach you?
- c. What mode of communication would you prefer?
- d. Would you want to know ahead what the question is?

We assume it is a bit difficult both for you and the other person. Knowing what will work for you helps make it easier for the initiator to start the conversation with you.

### Step 2-9

The following is a structure that creates safety and clarity for the people in a difficult conversation. It is designed to increase the likelihood that you will be heard and that your concerns can be addressed. It, likewise, increases the chances that you will hear accurately and can address the issues people need to raise with you.

"The Initiator" is the one who asked to have the conversation. The other person is called "the Recipient".

**THE INITIATOR**, the person who asks to have a difficult conversation.

#### 1) Empathy

- Know how the recipient prefers to be approached.  
(You need to let the person know that you have something difficult to discuss and ask them how they like to go about it. This alerts them both to a difficulty and that you are concerned that it be comfortable for them, too.)
- Follow their instructions as best you can. Initiate the conversation in the attitude and mode requested by the recipient.

#### 2) Clarity, specificity, behavior not character

- Be as specific as possible about the incident or the behavior or communication. Do not appraise personality or character.
- Indicate what your own difficulty with the behavior was. Were you confused? Were you annoyed? Were you embarrassed? Offer this information by declaring: "I am ....." or "I was .....", **not** "You did ....." or "You made me ....."

#### 3) Know what you are looking for

- Be clear about what you are looking for from the recipient.  
Usually, a conversation is difficult because we often seek more than a simple solution or a specific change. We either want some acknowledgment or acceptance ourselves or want the person to be different in a way that will either hurt their feelings or be impossible for them to do. These factors often confound discussions because they are emotional.  
What are you hoping for in your raising this with the other person? What do you need to have acknowledged? If you want a change, what change do you seek? Do not ask for the change before you are understood clearly.
- Do not move to solution finding before your position is understood by the recipient

## THE RECIPIENT:

### 1) Listen carefully. Do not jump to reply.

- Read or listen to the issue being raised by the Initiator.
- Is it clear? Before you respond, get clarification so that you know what is being said.
- Is there any information you need about the context or the situation?
- Are you clear about what the initiator seeks? If not, ask.

### 2) See if you have heard correctly

- Do not move to solution finding before understanding is established.
- Share your understanding of what the initiator has said, so paraphrasing is a good first step.
- Check to be sure the initiator feels that you got the message right. The initiator is the only judge on this. If you did not get it right, try again.

Before replying, consider your response with the following in mind.

### 3) Private Self Perspective

- Has the initiator identified a situation you can recall or a behavior you are familiar with in yourself?
- Have you known others to have the same reaction as the initiator?
- Was your behavior usual for you or unusual? Why?
- Was your behavior acceptable to you?

### 4) Begin with the Positive

- Affirm what is correct about the initiator's observation. It may be that you only agree that the event occurred and that it was unpleasant. You can affirm that.
- If others have reacted to you the same way, affirm that.
- If you can understand how the initiator could react that way, affirm that.

### 5) Open self reflection: sharing your view of yourself in the incident

- Do you still think that your behavior or reaction was appropriate? If there was a confrontation, did you behave in the way you prefer? There is no need to defend a behavior that is you at your less than best. So, don't. Simply affirm that you were not at your best and why.
- If you do think your behavior was appropriate, what contributes to your feeling that your behavior was called for. Offer this as a different point of view, appreciating that the initiator may have felt and may still feel differently.

### 6) Empathy

- Whether your behavior was appropriate or not, whether it is your best or not and whether it was a general way you behave that others accept, can you see how it may affect the initiator in a negative way.

**7) Self presentation**

- Was the initiator's understanding of you accurate? Do you understand your behavior differently? Even if you were not at your best, you may have a different understanding of what you said or did. You are the expert on you. So, offer your understanding. This forms the basis for better understanding. That is, your perspective on what you said or did is different from the initiator's. The initiator has been offered your point of view on what you said/did, and you have learned how it affects him/her. You still get to represent yourself in ways that are congruent with your understanding of yourself.

**8) Come back to what the initiator was asking for**

- Did the initiator get what they hoped for?
- If you both agree that you want this to change in the future, proceed to #9
- If more is needed so that you might agree to change this interaction, what would you want? More time? A third party?
- How will you arrange for that?

**9) If you can agree that you understand enough and are now ready to move towards improving communication between you and your partner, answer the following together.**

- How could the initiator avoid this impasse? This is for the initiator to say.
- How could the recipient avoid this impasse? This is for the recipient to say.
- Would this really work? This is for both to say.

## ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

PERMISSION

THE COURAGE TO ACT

TIME AND STRUCTURE

FOLLOW UP

1) Practice Group Norm: It is normative to do so. WE do this sort of thing.

If your group does not have the norm, you can establish a personal norm: I do this sort of thing.

2) Let your discomfort help you find the courage to ask for such a conversation.

3) Time and serious preparation

This is not a quickie. The set up is essential.

Getting yourself out of the angry mode or the hurt zone.

Knowing what your own contribution might be

Knowing what you want to say and saying it succinctly. Do you need practice? Notes?

Appreciating their willingness to meet with you

Letting the other respond. Do they need time to think? Do they need to reschedule, now that they know what the issue is?

Do you know how to listen? Being sure you understand what they are saying.

4) Follow up

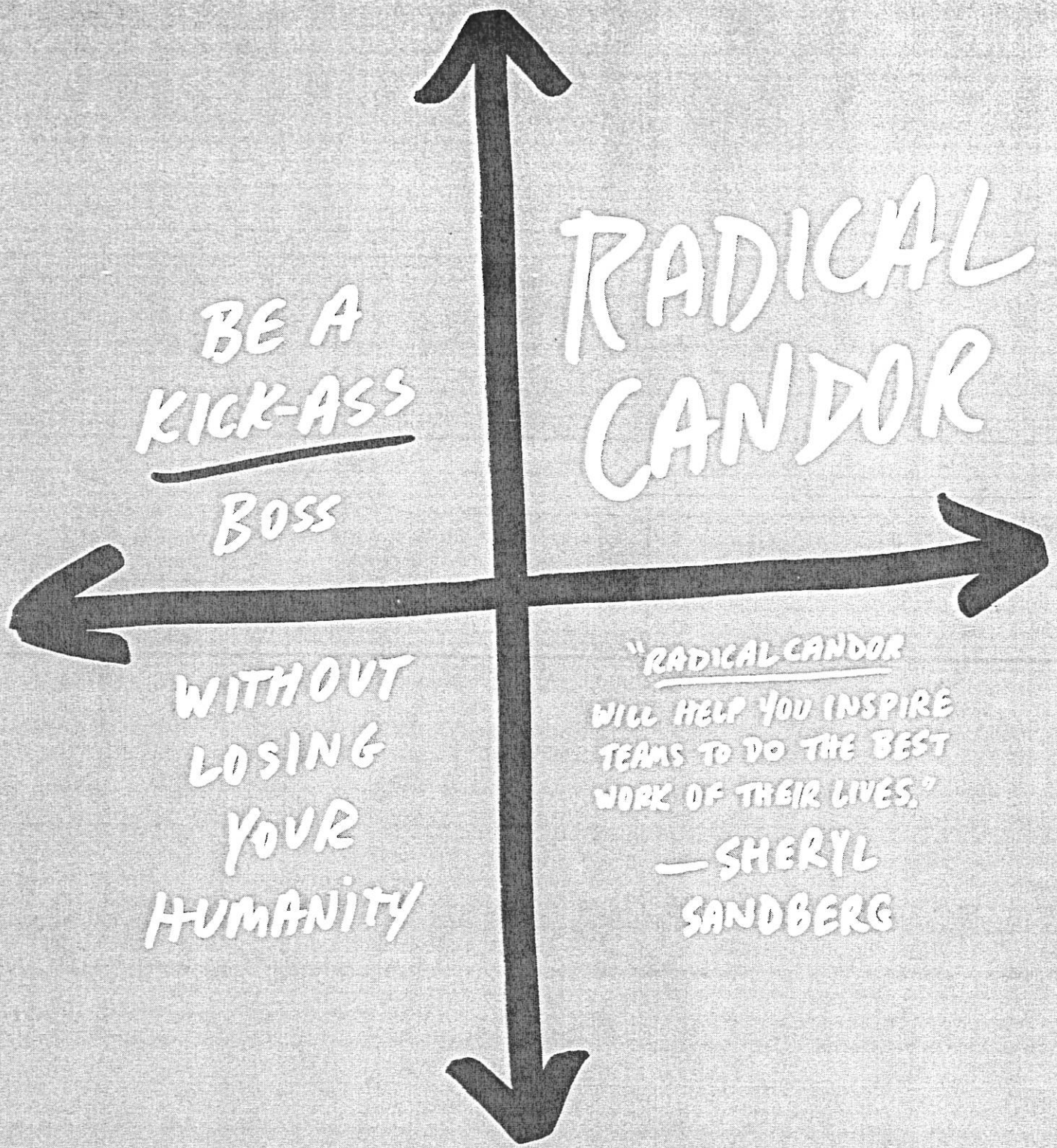
Did they respond

Did the conversation have a good effect? Bad effect?

5) Next step

GOOD: Appreciating their response and taking your concern seriously

BAD: Needing another one: something went wrong



BE A  
KICK-ASS  
BOSS

RADICAL  
CANDOR

WITHOUT  
LOSING  
YOUR  
HUMANITY

"RADICAL CANDOR  
WILL HELP YOU INSPIRE  
TEAMS TO DO THE BEST  
WORK OF THEIR LIVES."

—SHERYL  
SANDBERG

KIM SCOTT

2.

## GET, GIVE, AND ENCOURAGE GUIDANCE

*Creating a culture of open communication*

### THE "UM" STORY

SHORTLY AFTER I joined Google, I gave a presentation to Google's CEO and founders on the performance of AdSense. Despite the fact that AdSense was doing great, and even though my boss was sitting next to me in a show of support, I felt nervous. Luckily, we had a good story to tell: the business was growing at an unprecedented rate. As I looked around the room, I caught the eye of CEO Eric Schmidt, whose head had snapped out of his computer when I'd declared how many new customers had signed up in the past month. I'd distracted him from his email—a triumph! "How many did you say?" he asked. I repeated the number, and he almost fell out of his chair.

I couldn't have asked for a better reaction. After I finished, I felt that mix of euphoria and relief that follows a successful presentation. My boss was waiting for me by the door and I half expected a high five. Instead, she asked if I'd walk back to her office with her. I got a sinking feeling in my stomach. Something hadn't gone well. But what?

"You are going to have an amazing career here at Google," Sheryl began. She knew how to get my attention—I had three failed start-ups under my belt and badly needed a win. "And your ability to be intellectually honest about both sides of an argument, not just your own, bought you a lot of credibility in there." She mentioned three or four specific things I'd said to illustrate her point. I'd been worried that I wasn't arguing my points vehemently enough, so this was welcome news to me. "I learned a lot today from the way you handled those questions." This didn't feel like mere flattery—I could tell from the way she stopped and looked me in the eye that she meant it. She wanted me to register that something I'd been worried about being a weakness was actually a strength.

This was interesting, but I wanted to file it away to think about later. That nagging feeling persisted in my stomach. There was an axe waiting to fall here. What I really wanted to know was, what had I done wrong? "But something didn't go well, right?"

Sheryl laughed. "You always want to focus on what you could have done better. Which I understand. I do, too. We learn more from failure than success. But I want you to focus for a minute on what went well, because overall it really *did* go well. This was a success."

I listened as best I could. Finally, she said. "You said 'um' a lot. Were you aware of it?"

"Yeah," I replied. "I know I say that too much." Surely she couldn't be taking this little walk with me just to talk about the "um" thing. Who cared if I said "um" when I had a tiger by the tail?

"Was it because you were nervous? Would you like me to recommend a speech coach for you? Google will pay for it."

"I didn't feel nervous," I said, making a brushing-off gesture with my hand as though I were shooing a bug away. "Just a verbal tic, I guess."

"There's no reason to let a small thing like a verbal tic trip you up."

"I know." I made another shoo-fly gesture with my hand.

Sheryl laughed. "When you do that thing with your hand, I feel like you're ignoring what I'm telling you. I can see I am going to have to be really,

really direct to get through to you. You are one of the smartest people I know, but saying 'um' so much makes you sound stupid."

Now *that* got my attention.

Sheryl repeated her offer to help. "The good news is a speaking coach can really help with the 'um' thing. I know somebody who would be great. You can definitely fix this."

## "OPERATIONALIZING" GOOD GUIDANCE

THINK FOR A moment about how Sheryl handled that situation. Even though the overall talk had gone well, she didn't let the positive result get in the way of pointing out something I needed to fix. She did so immediately, so that the problem didn't hurt my reputation at Google. She made sure to point out the positive things I'd accomplished in the presentation, and what's more, she did so thoroughly and sincerely—there was no attempt at "sandwiching" the criticism between bogus positives. Her first approach was gentle but direct. When it became clear that I wasn't hearing her, she became more direct, but even then she was careful not to "personalize," not to make it about some essential trait. She said I "sounded" stupid rather than I *was* stupid. And I wasn't in this alone: she offered tangible help. I didn't feel like an idiot with defects, but a valuable team member she was ready to invest in. But it still stung a little bit.

This conversation was extremely effective on two counts. First, it made me want to solve my "um" problem immediately; after only three sessions with a speech coach, I had made noticeable improvement. Second, it made me appreciate Sheryl and inspired me to give better guidance to my team. The way she gave praise and criticism got me thinking about how to teach other people how to adopt this style of management.

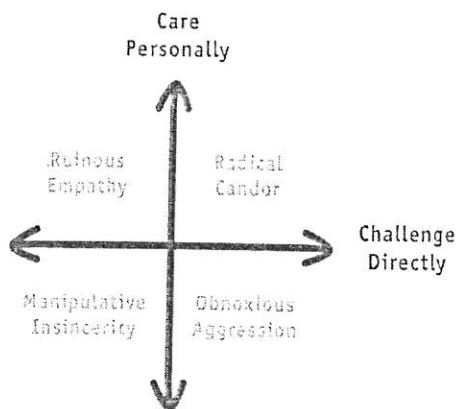
All this from a two-minute encounter.

WOW. HOW MANY times have you tried to give feedback that totally falls flat? How can you, like Sheryl, give guidance in a way that confronts a specific situation *and* creates ripple effects that change how everyone communicates?

I have spent the decade since that encounter coaching the next generation of Silicon Valley leaders to change their approach to guidance—both praise and criticism. It's surprisingly simple. Anyone can learn it. There are two dimensions to good guidance: care personally and challenge directly.

As discussed in chapter one, when you do both at the same time, it's Radical Candor. It's also useful to be clear about what happens when you fail in one dimension (Ruinous Empathy), the other (Obnoxious Aggression), or

both (Manipulative Insincerity). Being clear about what happens when you fail to care personally or challenge directly will help you avoid backsliding into old habits too common to all of us.



Many of the people I coach have found this framework helpful in being more conscious of what kind of guidance they are getting, giving, and encouraging. Another essential thing I stress with my clients: it's vital to remember that very important lesson

from the "um" story—don't personalize. The names of each quadrant refer to *guidance*, not to *personality traits*. They are a way to gauge praise and criticism, and to help people remember to do a better job offering both. They are *not* to be used to label people. Labeling hinders improvement. Ultimately, everyone spends some time in each of the quadrants. We are all imperfect. I've never met anyone who is *always* Radically Candid. To repeat, this is not a "personality test."

Let's walk through the quadrants.

## RADICAL CANDOR

**GUIDANCE DOESN'T JUST** come at work. Every so often, a stranger offers some Radical Candor, and it can change your life if you're listening. This happened to me shortly after I adopted a golden retriever puppy named Belvedere. I *adored* Belvedere and spoiled her utterly. As a result, she was completely out of control. One evening we were out for a walk, and Belvy began to tug at her leash as we waited at a crosswalk, even though cars were speeding by only a few feet in front of us. "Come on sweetie, sit," I implored. "The light will be green in a second." Despite my reassurances, she yanked even harder on the leash and tried to lunge into the street.

A stranger also waiting to cross looked over at me and said, "I can see you really love your dog." In the two seconds it took him to say those words, he established that he cared, that he wasn't judging me. Next, he gave me a

really direct challenge. "But that dog will die if you don't teach her to sit!" Direct, almost breathtakingly so. Then, without asking for permission, the man bent down to Belvy, pointed his finger at the sidewalk, and said with a loud, firm voice, "SIT!"

She sat. I gaped in amazement.

He smiled and explained, "It's not mean. It's clear!" The light changed and he strode off, leaving me with words to live by.

Think for a second about how this might have gone down. The man could have easily said something judgmental ("you have no right to own a dog if you don't know how to take care of one!") and thus left me defensive and unwilling to take his simple but essential advice.

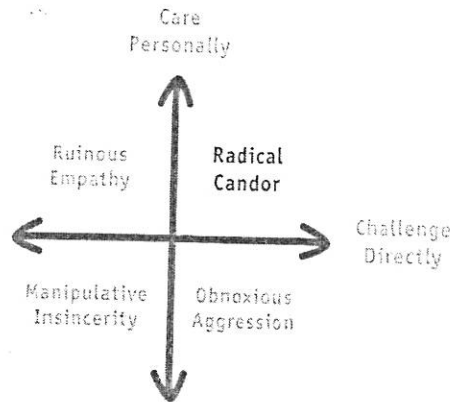
Instead, he acknowledged my love for the dog, and explained why his recommendation was the right way to go (not mean, clear!). There was a decent chance I would tell him to go to hell and mind his own business, but he didn't let that stop him. He was, in his own way, a leader—and I suspect that he's a good boss in his day job. Granted, I didn't form a relationship with him. But if I'd worked with him instead of just bumping into him on the street, this little interaction would have been the seed from which a relationship could grow.

I hope I've never spoken to a person like a dog, but I'll never forget the stranger's words. "It's not mean, it's clear!" has become a management mantra, helping me to avoid repeating the mistake I described in the Introduction, which was not telling Bob when his work wasn't good enough. My efforts to be nice ended with my having to fire him. Not so nice after all. That brief incident at the crosswalk taught me that I don't have to spend a lot of time getting to know a person or building trust *before* offering Radically Candid guidance. In fact, a great way to get to know somebody and to build trust is to offer Radically Candid praise and criticism.

### Radically Candid praise

*"I admire that about you"*

Recently my cofounder Russ and I were filming a video tip for giving Radically Candid praise. Russ was talking about why giving really specific



praise is important, and he gave an example from coaching Little League. "I really admire that you are a Little League coach," I said, offhandedly. I had been meaning to tell him this for a while, and it just popped into my head in the moment. He said, "Thank you." Usually, that would've been that. But I realized later that my compliment had not been specific—I hadn't told Russ *why* I admired that he was a coach. I mentioned the irony to Russ. He replied, "Well, the real problem is that I don't think you meant it—you hate sports." Now, I realized, it was even worse than I'd thought. It wasn't just that I'd been vague and unhelpful. He knew I cared about him, but he thought my praise was insincere.

There we were, giving people advice on giving good praise, and here I was, totally screwing it up! And it should have been easy, I was talking to Russ, my cofounder and a person I'd known for years. Giving meaningful praise is hard. That's why it's so important to gauge your guidance—to find out how it lands for people. Now that I knew how Russ felt, I tried again.

"The other day I gave you a hard time about leaving early for practice, and I then felt bad about it," I began. "Because in fact I really admire that you are a Little League coach. You do as good a job integrating your work and your life as anyone I know. I always wonder if I'm spending enough time with my kids, and the example you set by coaching helps me do better. Also, the things you've learned from the Positive Coaching Alliance have been enormously helpful in our work."

This time, the comment was contextualized, far more personal, and specific. And, this time, Russ said, "Now *that* was Radically Candid praise!"

### Radically Candid criticism

*To keep winning, criticize the wins*

Andre Iguodala, the swingman for the Golden State Warriors, explained why being willing to challenge the people you work with is so important to success. The secret to winning, he said, is to point out to great players what they could have done better, even when they have just won a game. *Especially* when they have just won a game. The problem with living at the top of a hill is that you always have to walk uphill just to get back home. Of course, Andre's teammates weren't always happy to hear his Radically Candid criticism. They sometimes accused him of Obnoxious Aggression. But, as we will see in the next section, Obnoxious Aggression looks and feels very different.

## OBNOXIOUS AGGRESSION

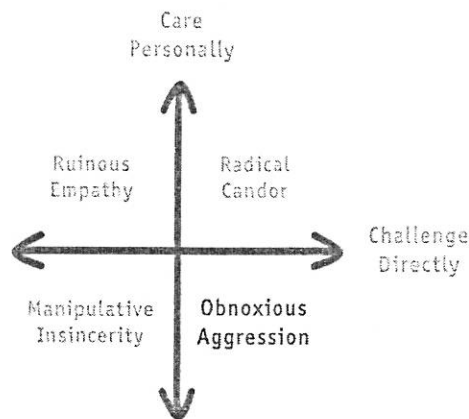
WHEN YOU CRITICIZE someone without taking even two seconds to show you care, your guidance feels obnoxiously aggressive to the recipient. I regret to say that if you can't be Radically Candid, being obnoxiously aggressive is the second best thing you can do. At least then people know what you think and where they stand, so your team can achieve results. This explains the advantage that assholes seem to have in the world.

Let me be clear. I refuse to work with people who can't be bothered to show basic human decency. I want you to keep your humanity intact. If more people can be Radically Candid, there will be less reason to tolerate Obnoxious Aggression.

But here's a paradox of being a good boss. Most people *prefer* the challenging "jerk" to the boss whose "niceness" gets in the way of candor. I once read an article that claimed most people would rather work for a "competent asshole" than a "nice incompetent." This article was a useful expression of the Catch-22 that worried me about being a boss. Of course I didn't want to be incompetent. Nor did I want to be an asshole.

Fortunately, the "asshole or incompetent" thing is a false dichotomy: you don't have to choose between those two extremes. Time and again, I have seen that it was kinder in the long run to be direct, even if articulating my criticism caused some momentary upset. ("It's not mean, it's clear!") Furthermore, it's the fear of being labeled a jerk that pushes many people toward Manipulative Insincerity or Ruinous Empathy—both of which are actually worse for their colleagues than Obnoxious Aggression, as we'll see in later sections.

Still, Obnoxious Aggression is debilitating, particularly at the extreme. When bosses belittle employees, embarrass them publicly, or freeze them out, their behavior falls into this quadrant. This Obnoxious Aggression sometimes gets great results short-term but leaves a trail of dead bodies in its wake in the long run. Think about the Anna Wintour-inspired character



played by Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*. Or Bobby Knight, the Indiana basketball coach who had a winning record but was reported to have thrown chairs and choked a player and was ultimately fired. When bosses criticize others to humiliate them rather than to help them improve, or permit personalized attacks among team members, or discourage praise as "babysitting people's egos," their behavior feels obnoxiously aggressive to the people around him.

The worst kind of Obnoxious Aggression happens when one person really understands another's vulnerabilities and then targets them, either for sport or to assert dominance. I once had a boss who really knew how to push my buttons—he possessed what I thought of as "cruel empathy." Almost nothing will erode trust more quickly than using one's insights into what makes another person tick to hurt them.

It happens all too often that bosses view employees as lesser beings who can be degraded without conscience; that employees view their bosses as tyrants to be toppled; and that peers view one another as enemy combatants. When this is the toxic culture of guidance, criticism is a weapon rather than a tool for improvement; it makes the giver feel powerful and the receiver feel awful. Even praise can feel more like a backhanded compliment than a celebration of work well done. "Well, you got it right *this time*."

### Obnoxiously aggressive criticism

#### *Front-stabbing*

Let's take the example of criticism offered by a former colleague whom I'll refer to as "Ned." Ned organized a party for his global team and asked people to come in their national costumes. The culture of the company was whimsical, and everybody came dressed in goofy outfits. Ned, who was new to the company, came in an expensive tux. I guess he felt silly being so absurdly overdressed for his own party, and to cope with his own insecurities he went into belittling mode. He strode up to a friend of mine, one of his new direct reports, who had dressed as a leprechaun for the party. In front of a large crowd, Ned bellowed at my friend, "I said to dress in your national costume, not to dress like a fool!"

It's tempting to dismiss Ned as a jerk, but this is exactly the kind of attribution error that Radical Candor teaches us to avoid. Blaming people's internal essence rather than their external behavior leaves no room for

change. And why had Ned never changed? Because nobody ever bothered to challenge his behavior, and so he never had to learn. His obnoxiousness just escalated.

I'm not proud to admit that I was a silent party to this. I was standing right there when Ned told my friend that he looked like a fool, and I didn't say anything. Nor did I say anything later to Ned in private. Why? Because I had already dismissed Ned as an asshole, and therefore deemed him not worth talking to. So I was making the fundamental attribution error, and my behavior was "manipulatively insincere." I'm still ashamed of that. If ever anyone needed a dose of Radical Candor, it was Ned.

Remember, Obnoxious Aggression is a *behavior*, not a personality trait. Nobody is a bona fide asshole all the time. Not even Ned. And *all* of us are obnoxiously aggressive some of the time. This includes me, unfortunately. I will assert that I am not usually a jerk, but here's a time when I behaved like one:

A couple of months after joining Google, I had a disagreement with Larry Page about his approach to a policy. In a fit of frustration, I sent an email to about thirty people, including Larry, which said, "Larry claims he wants to organize the world's information, but his policy is creating 'clutter sites,' muddling the world's information." I went on to imply that he was recommending the policy because he was focused on increasing Google's revenue rather than doing the right thing for users.

If Larry had worked for me instead of the other way around, I would never have sent such an arrogant, accusatory email. I would have asked him privately why he was proposing a policy that seemed to be in violation of Google's mission. If I agreed with his rationale, that would have been that. If I disagreed, I would have explained—again, privately—that he seemed inconsistent and tried to understand his rationale. I didn't do any of that with Larry, though. If I had, of course, I would have learned that he was not just fifteen, but more like 115 steps ahead of me. I simply didn't understand how things worked yet.

Why did I behave this way? Partly because I believe there's a special place in hell for those who "kick down and kiss up." At least I wasn't making *that* mistake. And yet my mistake was simply the other side of the same coin. I wasn't really thinking of Larry as a human being. I saw him as a kind of demigod whom I could attack with impunity. Fundamental human

decency is something every person owes every other, regardless of position. And it wasn't as though Larry was shut down to criticism, as I had seen in his conversation with Matt Cutts. He'd given me no reason to be so strident.

The incident with Larry is a good example of how criticism can be obnoxiously aggressive if you don't care personally. I probably thought I was being Radically Candid—"speaking truth to power"—but I wasn't. It was a clear-cut case of "front-stabbing." Better than backstabbing, but still really bad.

The first problem with my email was that it wasn't humble. I had just joined the company, and I didn't understand much about how Google's systems worked. Nor had I bothered to find out why Larry might be taking the stance he was taking. Instead, I just made a bunch of assumptions and concluded—wrongly, as it turned out—that Larry was more concerned with making money than he was with Google's mission. Furthermore, my suggestions were not at all helpful because I didn't fully understand the underlying issue that Larry was trying to address. My other miscalculation was criticizing Larry in a public forum, rather than in private, which would have been the respectful thing to do. And worst of all, I personalized. I should have been talking about the AdSense policy, but instead I attacked Larry's character, implicitly accusing him of being greedy and hypocritical. As I would see over and over in the next six years at Google, Larry was certainly neither of those things. He was fair and consistent. But the point here is that I shouldn't have been talking about Larry's character, either positively or negatively. I was personalizing.

#### Obnoxiously aggressive praise

##### *Belittling compliments*

Praise can be obnoxiously aggressive, too. Consider this email that a boss at a legendary Silicon Valley company sent out to his team of about six hundred people, seventy of whom had just gotten bonuses. I've removed the names to avoid embarrassing these people further:

From: JohnDoe <JohnDoe@corpx.com>

Date: April 27 at 11:53 AM

Subject: Bonus Winners!

To: giantteam@corpx.com

Dear Giant Team,

In Q3 there was a number of you that really excelled and went above and beyond the rest of us to deliver significant impact to Corpx. These team members and their accomplishments have been recognized with the Q3 spot bonus attributed by the Management Team. I want to take this opportunity to share who these extraordinary people are and provide you an overview of their accomplishments in the list below.

--John

John Doe

Vice President, Giant Team

Worldwide

- **Person 33:** level 5 seller, he drove the highest QTD revenue of any display seller: \$7.5M in Q3. His comp at \$70k base and OTE of \$116k is 50% below market; retention risk.
- **Person 39:** she has done all of the dirty work in getting XYZ off the ground with endless spreadsheets, updates, legal calls, and has done a great job (well above her level 3 status).
- **Person 72:** exceptional effort in the past 4+ months. Additional responsibility covering John Doe.

Imagine how Person 33 felt when he saw that his private compensation information had been sent out to six hundred people. I doubt it made him feel better to learn that he was being paid half of what he should have been and that his boss thought he was probably looking for other jobs!

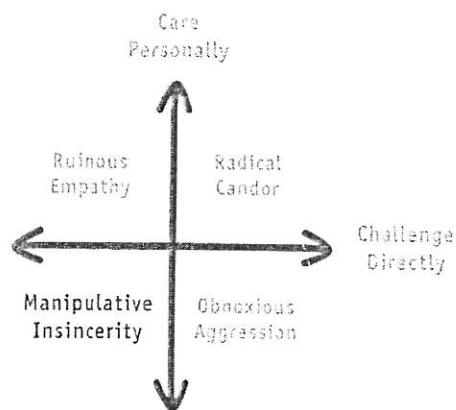
Just think how motivating it must have been for Person 39 to learn that she did all the "dirty work." I doubt it was any consolation to learn she was "well above her level 3 status." At least there was some comedy in the fact that Person 72 had to be given a bonus for "covering John." In other words, John Doe was such a jerk that the company had to pay people a bonus if they worked closely with him.

Even if you give John Doe the benefit of the doubt and assume he was simply lazy and/or tin-eared rather than intentionally hurtful, it's indubitable that he was not demonstrating that he cared personally about his people.

He had obviously gathered this information by asking all the managers who worked for him to send him a justification for the bonus. But he cared so little about the people he was praising that he didn't even bother to read the justifications. He just copied and pasted them into a new email and fired it off. It's not easy to pay people a compliment backed up by a big bonus and make them feel worse rather than better, but John Doe's email pulled that off.

### MANIPULATIVE INSINCERITY

MANIPULATIVELY INSINCERE GUIDANCE happens when you don't care enough about a person to challenge directly. People give praise and criticism that is manipulatively insincere when they are too focused on being liked or think they can gain some sort of political advantage by being fake—or when they are just too tired to care or argue any more. Guidance that is manipulatively insincere rarely reflects what the speaker actually thinks; rather, it's an attempt to push the other person's emotional buttons in return for some personal gain. "He'll be happy if I tell him I liked his stupid presentation, and that will make my life easier than explaining why it sucked. In the long run, though, I really need to find someone to replace him."



tion, and that will make my life easier than explaining why it sucked. In the long run, though, I really need to find someone to replace him."

Apple's Chief Design Officer Jony Ive told a story about a time when he pulled his punches when criticizing his team's work. When Steve Jobs asked Jony why he hadn't been more clear about what was wrong, Jony replied, "Because I care about the team." To which Steve replied, "No, Jony, you're just really vain.

You just want people to like you." Recounting the story, Jony said, "I was terribly cross because I knew he was right."

That's why Colin Powell said leadership is sometimes about being willing to piss people off. When you are overly worried about how people will perceive you, you're less willing to say what needs to be said. Like Jony, you may feel it's because you care about the team, but really, in those all-too-human moments you may care too much about how they feel about you—in other words, about yourself. I've been there, too. We all have.

Give a damn about the people you challenge. Worrying about whether or not they give a damn about *you*, however, is not “caring personally” about them, and it’s likely to push you in the wrong direction on the “challenge directly” axis. That’s not going to help your team achieve great results, or take a step in the direction of their dreams. Let go of vanity and care personally. But if you don’t care, don’t waste your time and everyone else’s by trying to fake it.

Unfortunately, conventional wisdom and a lot of management advice pushes bosses to challenge less, rather than encouraging them to care more. Generally, the resulting praise and criticism feels to employees like flattery or backstabbing. Needless to say, this doesn’t build trust between boss and direct report.

### Manipulatively insincere praise

#### *The false apology*

Let’s go back to my obnoxiously aggressive email to Larry Page. After it went out, a couple of people called me up and asked me why the hell I’d sent it. I realized I’d been unbelievably rude, and I felt ashamed—and a little scared. What had I been *thinking*?

I *still* didn’t understand why my assessment of Larry’s new policy was wrong, but now I was more concerned with keeping my job. So the next time I saw Larry, I stopped him and said, “I’m sorry about that email, Larry. I know you are right.” Now, there would have been nothing wrong with apologizing for the tone I’d taken, but instead, without explanation, I abruptly reversed my intellectual position. My insincerity was obvious, and it was exactly the wrong move. Larry had a finely tuned BS meter, and I’m not a very good liar. He said nothing, but his look of disdain spoke volumes. As Larry walked away, a colleague standing nearby smiled in sympathetic solidarity and muttered to me, “He likes it better when you disagree with him.”

When you behave badly and get called out for it, an all-too-natural response is to become less genuine and more political—to move from Obnoxious Aggression to a worse place, Manipulative Insincerity. It would’ve been better to have said nothing than to move in the wrong direction on the “challenge directly” axis. Better yet to have moved up on the care personally axis—to have taken the trouble to understand Larry’s thinking and then come up with a solution that addressed his concerns and mine. In that

context, admitting that I had behaved badly would probably have been better received.

## RUINOUS EMPATHY

THERE'S A RUSSIAN anecdote about a guy who has to amputate his dog's tail but loves him so much that he cuts it off an inch each day, rather than all at once. His desire to spare the dog pain and suffering only leads to more pain and suffering. Don't allow yourself to become that kind of boss!

This is an extreme example of what I call Ruinous Empathy. Ruinous Empathy is responsible for the vast majority of management mistakes I've seen in my career. Most people want to avoid creating tension or discomfort at work. They are like the well-meaning parent who cannot bear to discipline their kids. They are like me with my dog Belvy.

Bosses rarely *intend* to ruin an employee's chance of success or to handicap the entire team by letting poor performance slide. And yet that is often the net result of Ruinous Empathy. Similarly, praise that's ruinously empathetic is not effective because its primary goal is to make the person feel better rather than to point out really great work and push for more of it. These were the painful mistakes I made in the story from the Introduction with Bob, whom I didn't criticize and then had to fire.

Ruinous Empathy can also prevent a boss from asking for criticism. Typically, when a boss asks an employee for criticism, the employee feels awkward at best, afraid at worst. Instead of pushing through the discomfort to get an employee to challenge them, bosses who are being ruinously empathetic may be so eager to ease the awkwardness that they simply let the matter drop.

When bosses are too invested in everyone getting along, they also fail to encourage the people on their team to criticize one another for fear of sowing discord. They create the kind of work environment where "being nice" is prioritized at the expense of critiquing, and therefore, improving actual performance.

Bosses often make the mistake of thinking that if they hang out in the Ruinous Empathy quadrant they can build a relationship with their direct reports and *then* move over to Radical Candor. They're pleasant to work with, but as time goes by their employees start to realize that the only guidance they've received is "good job" and other vaguely positive comments. They know they've done some things wrong, but they're not sure what,

exactly. Their direct reports never know where they stand, and they aren't being given an opportunity to learn or grow; they often stall or get fired. Not such a great way to build a relationship. On the flip side, when Ruinous Empathy prevents bosses from *soliciting* criticism, they have no idea anything is wrong until a person quits. Needless to say, this strategy does not build trust on either side.

#### Ruinously empathetic praise

*"Just trying to say something nice"*

A friend of mine told a cautionary tale about "just trying to say something nice" as a leader. Wandering around at 2 A.M. the night before a launch, he bumped into an engineer, "Anatoly," and asked him about a particular feature. Anatoly answered his question, and told him about several important aspects of the feature. A couple of days later, when celebrating the launch, my friend congratulated Anatoly on his excellent work on the feature in front of the whole company.

Problem was, Anatoly was only one of a handful of strong engineers on the project. All the other engineers who had worked on it now thought that Anatoly had claimed credit for the feature himself. Embarrassed, Anatoly sent out an email to the whole company, listing all the people who had worked on the project with him.

My friend realized he had been ruinously empathetic. He was just trying to make Anatoly happy by praising him, but he'd accidentally thrown him under the bus. My friend's suggestion to managers who worked at his company: when giving praise, investigate until you really understand who did what and why it was so great. Be as specific and thorough with praise as with criticism. Go deep into the details.

### MOVING TOWARD RADICAL CANDOR

OFTEN WHEN I talk to people about developing a culture of Radical Candor, they agree with the idea but feel nervous about putting it into practice. My advice is to start by explaining the idea and then asking people to be Radically Candid with *you*. Start by *getting* feedback, in other words, not by dishing it out. Then when you do start giving it, start with praise, not criticism. When you move on to criticism, make sure you understand where the perilous border between Radical Candor and Obnoxious Aggression is.

Start by asking for criticism, not by giving it  
*Don't dish it out before you show you can take it*

There are several reasons why it makes sense to begin building a culture of Radical Candor by asking people to criticize you. First, it's the best way to show that you are aware that you are often wrong, and that you want to hear about it when you are; you want to be challenged. Second, you'll learn a lot—few people scrutinize you as closely as do those who report to you. Maybe it will prevent you from sending out ill-conceived emails like the one I sent to Larry. Third, the more firsthand experience you have with how it feels to receive criticism, the better idea you'll have of how your own guidance lands for others. Fourth, asking for criticism is a great way to build trust and strengthen your relationships.

Bosses get Radically Candid guidance from their teams not merely by being open to criticism but by *actively soliciting* it. If a person is bold enough to criticize you, do *not* critique their criticism. If you see somebody criticizing a peer inappropriately, say something. But if somebody criticizes you inappropriately, your job is to listen with the intent to understand and then to reward the candor. Just as important as soliciting criticism is encouraging it between your team members. (You can find specific tools and techniques for soliciting and encouraging guidance from your employees in Part II, Chapter Six.)

When I worked at Google, it was often the people on the team in Dublin who'd come out with the most memorable criticism for me. These zingers were enormously helpful, once I got over the momentary sting. David Johnson once said to me after I'd sent out a particularly ill-advised email, "Kim, you're awfully fast to hit Send!" To this day, I still hear the warning voice of David before I hit Send. And even though I haven't seen him in years, he continues to save me almost weekly from sending a note I'll regret.

Another time I delayed the start of a meeting with the team in Dublin because I didn't want to cut short my morning hour with my newborn twins. I thought everyone would understand, but a young father on the call fired back, "Ya know, Kim, we have children, too!" I'd unthinkingly pushed the meeting into their dinner hour. I was deeply ashamed but, once I'd gotten over feeling defensive, also grateful to him for pointing it out.

The key to soliciting criticism from the Dublin team was not to react

defensively. The difficulty in soliciting criticism from the team I worked with in Japan, however, was enduring the silence. I'll never forget my first meeting with the AdSense team in Tokyo. My plan was to hold regular meetings with them to ask for suggestions, concerns, improvements. My previous experience in such meetings in other countries had been that if I asked a question like, "Is there anything I could do or stop doing that would make your lives better?" and then counted to six in my head, somebody would say *something*. I counted to ten. Crickets. I asked a different way. Still, crickets. Finally, I told them a story about Toyota that I'd learned in business school. Wanting to combat the cultural taboos against criticizing management, Toyota's leaders painted a big red square on the assembly line floor. New employees had to stand in it at the end of their first week, and they were not allowed to leave until they had criticized at least three things on the line. The continual improvement this practice spawned was part of Toyota's success. I asked my team what they thought: did we need a red box? They laughed, and, fearing I might just paint a red box somewhere, somebody opened up just a tiny bit. It wasn't much, frankly—a complaint about the tea in the office—but I rewarded the candor handsomely. I thanked the person publicly, I sent a handwritten note, I approved funds to make sure there was better tea, and I made sure everyone knew that there was better tea now because somebody had complained about it in the meeting. Later, more substantive issues got raised.

### Balance praise and criticism

*Worry more about praise, less about criticism—but above all be sincere*

We learn more from our mistakes than our successes, more from criticism than from praise. Why, then, is it important to give *more* praise than criticism? Several reasons. First, it guides people in the right direction. It's just as important to let people know what to do more of as what to do less of. Second, it encourages people to keep improving. In other words, the best praise does a lot more than just make people feel good. It can actually challenge them directly.

Some professionals say you need to have a praise-to-criticism ratio of 3:1, 5:1, or even 7:1. Others advocate the "feedback sandwich"—opening and closing with praise, sticking some criticism in between. I think venture capitalist Ben Horowitz got it right when he called this approach the "shit sandwich." Horowitz suggests that such a technique might work with

less-experienced people, but I've found the average child sees through it just as clearly as an executive does.

In other words, the notion of a "right" ratio between praise and criticism is dangerous, because it can lead you to say things that are unnatural, insincere, or just plain ridiculous. If you think that you *must* come up with, say, two good things for every bad thing you tell somebody, you'll find yourself saying things like, "Wow, the font you chose for that presentation really blew me away. But the content bordered on the obvious. . . . Still, it really impresses me how neat your desk always is." Patronizing or insincere praise like that will erode trust and hurt your relationships just as much as overly harsh criticism.

In the case of criticism, most people are nervous about hurting someone's feelings, so they often say nothing. In the case of praise, some people are eager to please those around them, so they always say something—sometimes inane things. Other people just aren't in the habit of giving praise. *If I'm not firing you, it means you're doing fine.* That's not good enough. Andy Grove told me he realized it was time to get better at praising people when somebody put a laminated plaque reading SAY SOMETHING NICE! in his cubicle.

When I am criticizing, I try to be less nervous, and focus on "just saying it." If I think too much about how to say it I'm likely to wimp out and say nothing. And when I am praising, I try to be at least *aware* of how praise can go wrong, and put more energy into thinking about how to say it. Karen Sipprell, a colleague at Apple, asked two questions that were instructive: "How long do you spend making sure you have all the facts right before you criticize somebody? How long do you spend making sure you have all the facts right before you *praise* somebody?" Ideally you'd spend just as long getting the facts right for praise as for criticism.

### Understand the perilous border between Obnoxious Aggression and Radical Candor

*"Your work is shit"*

Radically Candid criticism is an important part of the culture at both Google and Apple, but it takes very different forms at the two companies. Google emphasizes caring personally more than challenging directly, so I'd describe criticism there as Radical Candor with a twist of Ruinous Empa-

thy. Apple does the opposite, so I'd describe its culture of criticism as Radical Candor with a twist of Obnoxious Aggression.

In the Introduction, I described briefly a documentary in which tech journalist Bob Cringely interviews Steve Jobs and asks what he means when he tells people "your work is shit."<sup>\*</sup> It's worth reading the transcript to explore the perilous border between Obnoxious Aggression and Radical Candor.

CRINGELY: What does it mean when you tell someone their work is shit?

JOBS: It usually means their work is shit. Sometimes it means, "I think your work is shit. And I—I'm wrong."

Saying "your work is shit" is generally not OK. It's deep in the "Obnoxious Aggression" quadrant. But later in the interview with Cringely, Jobs clarified his thoughts about what he said.

JOBS: The most important thing I think you can do for somebody who's really good and who's really being counted on is to point out to them when they're not—when their work isn't good enough. And to do it very clearly and to articulate why . . . and to get them back on track.

Notice that Jobs catches himself. He's careful not to personalize the criticism—not to say "when they're not good enough." Instead, he says "when their work isn't good enough." It's an important distinction. Jobs is struggling with a common problem that arises when criticizing another person: the fundamental attribution error, which highlights the role of personal traits rather than external causes. It's easier to find fault in that person than to look for the fault within the context of what that person is doing. It's easier to say, "You're sloppy" than to say, "You've been working nights and weekends, and it's starting to take a toll on your ability to catch mistakes in your logic." But it's also far less helpful.

Saying "your work is shit" is way better than saying "you are shit," but it's still totally obnoxious. What Jobs says next is key, though: for criticism

<sup>\*</sup> You can see the outtakes of the interview for the PBS documentary *Triumph of the Nerds*, in *The Lost Interview*.

to be effective, it's crucial "to do it very *clearly* and to articulate *why* . . . and to get them *back on track*." [My italics.] In other words, "your work is shit," even stated less aggressively, is not enough. The boss needs to explain *why*; that is, be invested in helping the person improve. Toward the end of the interview, Jobs offers some explanation of why he chose the words he did.

JOB S: You need to do that in a way that does not call into question your confidence in their abilities but *leaves not too much room for interpretation* . . . and that's a hard thing to do. [My italics.]

"Your work is shit" certainly doesn't leave any room for interpretation, but I expect for most people it might also call into question confidence in their ability. Far be it for me to justify this word choice, but there are a couple of reasons why it might not be as bad as it sounds to say such a thing. First, the nature of the relationship is key. In the Introduction, I told a story about a time I called a guy on my team a dumbass. I'm not advocating you do the same. I'm just saying that because of the relationship we had, I knew that he knew I admired him tremendously and that I only used those words to get his attention. Second, it might be the case, particularly when you're dealing with highly accomplished people, that you have to go to some extremes to break through their tendency to filter out critical messages.

Jobs *does* articulate why guidance often involves walking a knife's edge. I have always found it enormously difficult to reassure people that I have confidence in their abilities while simultaneously making it clear that I think the work is not good enough. Being extremely clear about the quality of the work can sometimes feel like you're just being mean.

How do you criticize without discouraging the person? First, as I described in Chapter One, focus on your relationship. Also, as I described in the previous two sections: ask for criticism before giving it, and offer more praise than criticism. Be humble, helpful, offer guidance in person and immediately, praise in public, criticize in private, and don't personalize. Make it clear that the problem is not due to some unfixable personality flaw. Share stories when you've been criticized for something similar. (For more tips, see Chapter Six, which details giving impromptu guidance.)

A leader I worked with at Apple described how he would help new employees learn to take criticism in stride. He'd been at Apple for many years

and had a godlike reputation. After their first design review, he'd show new employees two binders he kept in his office. One had ten sheets of paper in it. The other had more than a thousand. "This is my 'yes' file," he explained, pointing to the slim binder. "The design ideas that got approved." Then, he'd pick up the fat binder and drop it for effect. "And this is my 'no' file. Don't let the criticism discourage you."

Everyone must find their own way to criticize people without discouraging them. Steve Jobs's guidance style is certainly not for everyone, but it's worth understanding where he was coming from.

**JOB:** I don't mind being wrong. And I'll admit that I'm wrong a lot. It doesn't really matter to me too much. What matters to me is that we do the right thing.

In my experience, people who are more concerned with getting to the right answer than with being right make the best bosses. That's because they keep learning and improving, and they push the people who work for them to do the same. A boss's Radically Candid guidance helps the people working for them do the best work of their lives.

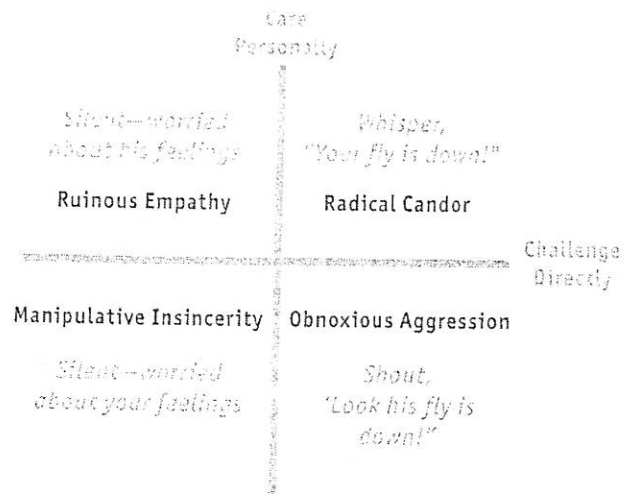
### Think of a simple example

#### *"Your fly is down"*

As the "your work is shit" example shows, it can be harder than you might think to decide if you are being Radically Candid or not. One way to solve a hard problem is to think of a simpler but similar one, recall how you solved it, and then apply that technique to the harder problem. You can use the same approach with emotional situations. When you're faced with telling a person something that will be extremely hard to hear, pretend you're just saying, "Your fly is down," or "You have spinach in your teeth." These less-fraught scenarios can help you approach bigger problems more straightforwardly.

To see how to apply the Radical Candor framework to giving guidance, imagine a simple scenario: a colleague, Alex, has walked out of the restroom, fly down, shirttail sticking out the front. What do you say?

Let's say you decide to overcome the awkwardness and speak up. You know Alex will be embarrassed when you point out the zipper, but if you



say nothing, ten more people will probably see Alex looking ridiculous. So you pull Alex aside and quietly say, "Hey, Alex, your fly is down. I always appreciate when people point it out to me when I've done the same thing. I hope you don't mind my mentioning it." Your behavior is in the Radical Candor quadrant—both caring personally and challenging directly.

If on the other hand you point out Alex's fly loudly in front of other people, trying to be funny by intentionally humiliating Alex, your behavior is in the Obnoxious Aggression quadrant. However, that's not the worst possible scenario from Alex's perspective, since you gave her the chance to fix the problem.

If you know Alex is shy and will be embarrassed, maybe you decide to say nothing and hope Alex notices the fly without your saying anything. This behavior puts you in the Ruinous Empathy quadrant. In this scenario, ten more people see Alex's fly down with the ridiculous white shirt sticking out of the front, and by the time Alex notices, it's obvious her fly has been down for a really long time. Now Alex is even *more* embarrassed than if you'd said something immediately—and probably wonders why you didn't have the courtesy to mention it.

Finally, imagine you decide not to say anything because you're thinking about your own feelings and reputation. You're silent not because you're concerned for Alex, but because you want to spare *yourself*. You care deeply about being liked, and you're worried Alex won't like you if you say some-

thing. You're also worried if people overhear you saying something to Alex, they will judge you. So you walk on by and say nothing. If you're really shameless, you might whisper to the next person who comes along to go check out Alex's fly. Congratulations—your behavior is in the worst quadrant: Manipulative Insincerity!

It's tempting to think that Radical Candor should be reserved only for people you know well, like your friends and family. Tempting to think that if you hung out in Ruinous Empathy or Manipulative Insincerity while you got to know Alex, then one fine day it would be easy to say, "Hey, Alex, my friend, your fly is down." But the need for honest communication doesn't always wait until you've built a close personal relationship, and even a near-stranger's silence invites more awkwardness and mistrust than saying, "Hey, your fly is down," would have. Next time Alex sees you, there's going to be some awkwardness at the memory. Why didn't you say anything? The seeds of mistrust are sown in your reticence. That's why Kim Vorrath, a leader on the iOS team at Apple that built the software for the iPhone, gave this simple advice about criticism: "Just say it!"

This framework is easy enough to keep in mind in the heat of the moment, and it can help you see when you're moving in the wrong direction. Then next time you spot a metaphorical fly down and are tempted not to say anything, imagine where that puts you on the framework: Ruinous Empathy or Manipulative Insincerity? The little jolt might just move you toward Radical Candor.

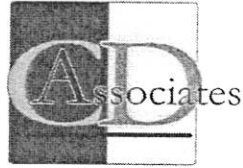
When confronted with somebody who is really upset, really angry, or shutting down, most people retreat to Ruinous Empathy. A few hold their ground but defend themselves against this onslaught of emotion by ceasing to care, and therefore become obnoxiously aggressive. Even really well-intentioned people are sometimes tempted both to give ground and to quit caring, retreating to Manipulative Insincerity.

If you imagine what you're about to say and see that it's going to land in one of these bad quadrants, it will almost certainly move you toward Radical Candor. You already know how to be Radically Candid because you know how to care personally and to challenge directly.

From the moment you learned to speak, you started to challenge those around you. Then you were told some version of "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Well, now it's your job to say it. And if

you are a boss or a person in a position of some authority, it's not just your job. It's your moral obligation. *Just say it!*

You were also born with a capacity to connect, to care personally. Somehow the training you got to "be professional" made you repress that. Well, stop repressing your innate ability to care personally. *Give a damn!*



Appreciative Inquiry Interview Guide  
For  
Collaborative Practice

We are only beginning to understand the potential of Collaborative Practice to make huge differences in the lives of divorcing families. This inquiry is to discover the positive core -what is working best in this practice group. Practice groups are the foundation of good teams. When a Collaborative Practice team engages clients in the most effective way as part of their team working together they achieve exceptional results. The teams create an environment which promotes a good transition for both clients that allows them to recreate a positive and different relationship as they move toward separate lives. To do this requires that the practice group promote excellence in the skills and attitudes necessary for such results.

Please take notes as you interview your partner as you will need the information

**1. What Attracted You**

To begin, think back to when you first decided to join Collaborative Practice, What attracted you?

What were your initial excitements and impressions?

What keeps you keeps you engaged?

**2. High Point Experience**

During your professional life, I'm sure you've had some ups and downs, some peaks and

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925-254-3606 or 925-246-5604 or skype- pthompson1

valleys, some high points and low points. I'm like you to reflect for a moment on a high point experience, a time when you felt most alive, most engaged, most proud of your involvement.....tell the story.

What happened?

What were the forces and factors that made the experience possible?

A. What was it about *you* that made it a peak experience?

B. Who were significant **others** and what was it about *them* that made this a high point?

C. What was it about the organization that made it a high point for you (e.g., purpose, principles, systems, structures, strategies, people, leadership, and relationships, other...)?

### 3. What You Value Most

Next, I want you to think about some things you value deeply.

First, without being bashful or shy, what do you value most about yourself as a person (at home, at work, with friends, in the community, and so on)?

Let's imagine we had a conversation with **people who know** you well and we asked them to share: **what are the 3 best qualities they see in you?** What would they say?

Second, when it's at its best, what do you value most about your work?

Third, what do you value most about your CP group?

#### **4. Core Factor**

What is *the* core factor that gives life and vitality to your CP group (without it the organization would cease to exist)?

#### **5. Images of the Future**

Let's assume that tonight, after our conversation here today, you go into a sound sleep and when you awaken, it is 10 years into the future. The year is 2017....and you see the world has change Collaborative Practice and your Practice Group all have become what you have wished and dreamed they might be. What has happened? How are they same and how are they different?

A. Now you awaken. You go out into the world and get a panoramic view. You are happy with what you see. It's the kind of world you most want to be part of. Please share highlights of what you see. **What is happening that is the same?**

**What is new? Better? What has changed? How do you know it is better?** Give as much detail as you can.

B. As you look at your organization, how do you see it contributing to your vision of a better world? What do you see? What does it look like? What's going on around you? What's happening that's new and different? What do you see in terms of purpose, values, systems, people, ways of working, fiscal performance, others?

#### **6. Three Wishes**

If you could develop or transform your Practice Group in any way, what three wishes would you make to heighten its overall health and vitality in order of priority?

## **Appreciative Inquiry and Collaborative Practice**

**By Peggy Thompson**

"When I dream alone, it is just a dream.

When we dream together, it is the beginning of reality. When we work together, following our dream, it is the creation of Heaven on Earth "

..... Adapted Brazilian Proverb

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a positive action oriented method that is the key to the evolution of *Collaborative Practice (CP)*. AI, according to one of its founders, is in significant part "the art and practice of asking unconditionally positive questions that strengthen a system's capacity to grasp, anticipate and heighten its potential." Holistic in nature, it is also an action oriented and collaborative method for working with large and small groups. It increases the ability of those who learn it to make changes that lead to greater collaboration in a democratic manner. This is accomplished through focusing on the elements in any system that have value and are life giving. AI's aim is wholeness: the inclusion of all stakeholders, the talents and experiences as part of the system. It energizes the potential of the entire group to pool diverse talents and potential to achieve a shared dream. It creates a synergy that makes what seems impossible possible. It is a method that, if integrated into Collaborative Practice on an individual and group level, will transform our abilities as collaborative professionals and expand our capacity as an organization to influence the societal views.

Collaborative Practice, while still in its infancy, continues to evolve at a rapid pace. With evolution come challenges and opportunities as we continue to grow. The collaborative community often struggles with similar issues, the integration of new members, working with different professions, the newness of working in teams, and the overall paradigm shift from adversarial to Collaborative Practice. Appreciative Inquiry offers Collaborative Practice a systematic method for harnessing the tremendous power and commitment of its members. It gives us a practice and method that fosters the safety and openness necessary to raise collaboration to higher level. AI creates a framework for the questions to be asked, conversation, to be had and whole system action to be taken

By Peggy Thompson, Ph.D. from adaptation of Appreciative Inquiry books, Appreciative Inquiry Handbook, by David Cooperrider et al, The Power of Appreciative Inquiry by Diana Whitney, et al and The Appreciative Inquiry Summit by James D. Ludema, et al

so the pull is to focus on what is not working. AI asks us to make a paradigm shift and turn our focus to what is working, what are our strengths, what is exceptional and study that.

The third principle is the *Anticipatory Principle*. This principle asserts that all changes start with active images of the future; the more compelling the future image the more it will influence present actions. This principle is easy to see in action in sports where it has been proven over and over that imaging physical techniques is a powerful method of improving overall performance. Imagine the golfer saying to herself, “ ‘I will hit the green’, rather than ‘don’t hit the trees,’ ” bringing her focus onto the desired results. In Collaborative Practice this principle can be applied to what we might imagine ourselves, our groups, and our work to be like if it was at its highest level; what impact it would have on our society if all family cases were handled in a collaborative way. These images influence how we interact with each other and our clients. The discussions we have about our ideal practice begin to be realized in the very discourses about our images of what can or might be in Collaborative Practice. The important message of this principle is that our imaginations are powerful and create actions toward the imagined.

The fourth principle is the *Positive Principle* that flows from the first three, stating that, the more positive and life giving the question the deeper and more lasting the change. This is the foundation for inquiry, part of AI, and the reason so much time and thought goes into the questions used in the process. The focus of AI is always to discover through open and curious questions what gives life and energy to a system. This is the process used to discover the positive core of a group or organization and beginnings of positive future change. In Collaborative Practice it is this principle that should be foremost in our mind when we consider what we ask our selves, our clients, our teammates, our organizations. The importance of framing the question can’t be over stressed.

The fifth principle is the *Wholeness Principle*. The experience of wholeness is when one understands the whole story. This is achieved when people can have conversations with each other about their differences in views of their perspectives and interpretations of shared events. Since each individual experiences an event in his or her

### **The Interview**

AI is based on the interview and the four D cycle whether used one on one or in a group. Once learned the process can be used in many ways and at many levels within the organization-- at the level of the local practice group or within teams preparing to work with a case.. The approach can be used it various forms. It is a way of thinking and being as well as a method. As people become engaged in the AI approach even in a single interview it begins to change all interactions that take place. As individuals become more aware of their positive strengthens and abilities, who they are at their best, subtle and not so subtle, changes occur. Once learned, AI can be applied daily at work and at home to foster any agenda. The method described for the large group process, addresses in a systematic way all of the basic steps needed to create a high functioning committed system focused on achieving a specific shared dream.

### **The Summit**

The form described below is the *Summit* approach used in groups, and is the perhaps the most powerful way to bring about change especially if it engages the whole system. The full Summit needs a minimum of three days and preferably four depending on the number of people involved. Smaller summits are best done in sustained periods of time such as weekend retreats, but can also be used in shorter time periods or stretched over a period of time.

### **Discovery**

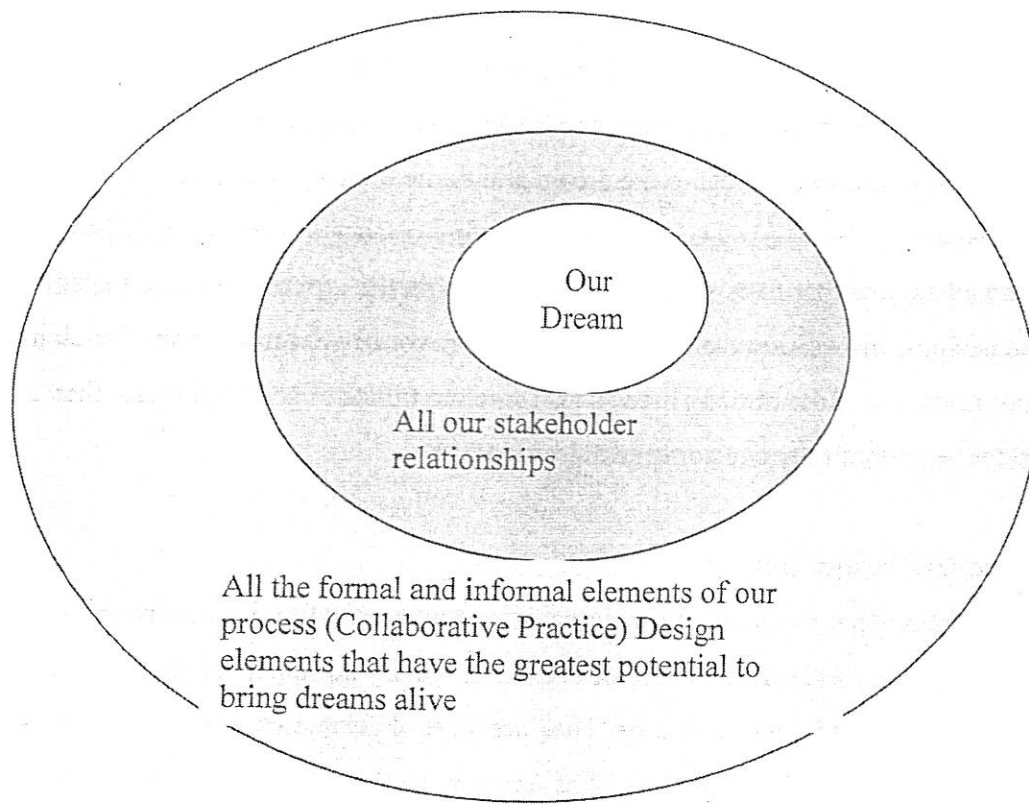
AI, in what ever form, always starts with an interview. It is the key to discovery and is focused on the particular topic that a group wants to study, increase and develop. It draws out the depth of the group's high points and life giving experiences. The group reveals it's deeply held values and creates energy for achieving excellence. The topic of the inquiry needs to be relevant, clear, and compelling. The interview is critical to the success of a meeting and needs to be carefully crafted by a representative planning group of the organization or by the consultant in collaboration with the group. The discovery is finding the best in people and links the energy of the positive core directly to any change

keeper, a scribe and a reporter. Each story and interview is mined for the feature of exceptional of the topic for example collaboration or teamwork. What are the values, practices, attitudes, actions etc. that lead to exceptional collaboration and or team work at any time? These generalized features from each story and interview are then discussed and distilled. Taking the time to discuss the high point stories and articulate the features that each contributed, allows each member of the group to participate in the discovery. This process increases the individuals and groups understanding of the experiences around the chosen topic (*Wholeness principle*). This process in itself builds a relational foundation between individuals, increases their shared knowledge about collaboration and teamwork, and generates new ideas between improbable pairs, from which the possibility of uncommon action is created. After articulating the key features within the group, the group proceeds to create a visual depiction of the features and select their best, most compelling story. Then each group shares their story and their visual of the core values and features of exceptional collaboration and teamwork. These stories and features become the positive core and are placed on the wall as the foundation for creating the dream results.

### **The Dream**

The process then moves to the dream phase of the cycle as a group returning to the interview and considering at what the group wants to look like as an organization and what their best hopes and dreams are for the results of their achievement. At this point it is important to look over the interview questions and the different dreams for the future, and ask the question: what do they have in common? What are the qualities of work life? What are the interactions and relationships like between professionals and between clients and professionals? What has changed? What is the same? What does everyone know? How do they structure cases? What is different about clients?

For a Collaborative Practice group this might include describing in vivid and compelling language the dream interactions between collaborative professionals on a case and the results for the clients. Or they might describe the ideal practice group to produce the client results that they have described. Defining three wishes individually at first, then bringing them to the group helps to provide even more ideas and images. Sharing those



### Design

Now that each group has created a possibility map through discussion it is time to look at the results and to vote. The vote is a way to stimulate dialogue about the various elements in relation to the dream. Each person has a marker, one person stays at the group's table to answer questions and explain the thinking of the group about the elements they have, and the others visit three other tables. Each person gets three votes at their own and at three other tables for the design elements that they think have the greatest potential to bring the dream to life. ("If this element is accomplished then other things fall into place.") Someone returns to the table to take over the responsibility of answering questions so that person can vote. When everyone has voted, everyone is invited to visit three other tables and see how others voted. All then returns to their tables and listens to the impressions of the larger group about what they saw in their tour the tables. The purpose is not to rank order the elements but to hear the larger group's impressions and excitement, and expand the conversation.

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board and describing the ideal approach to training and begin to write it out in vivid and clear prose.

Design elements are those seen by the group as critical to attaining the dream. They are parts of a social and organizational architecture that need to be developed with the dream in mind. The goal is to redesign the organization in such a way that it allows the changes needed for the dream to become reality. Diana Whitney put it this way, "organizational transformation is much more than the critical mass of personal transformation. It requires macro level changes in the very fabric of the organization, the social architecture." Each individual design element found in the inquiry is mined for features that are important to the end result. Each member of the team then writes a provocative proposition alone when the individuals are finished they each read their proposition to their design group and as a group pull together and word smith one proposition that they feel best describes the actions needed on that element to attain the dream. These should include culture, human resources, shared value, organizational purpose and structure. Each of the design elements is then described in a clear and inspiring way. The design is not a set of rules or mandates but a clear, shared purpose about the qualities of relationship and interaction that are so compelling that they empower the whole organization to act in a dynamic, self organized manner to build the desired future.

#### Enriching the Provocative Proposition

Each design features a provocative proposition that is read and the group makes appreciative comments and suggestions, there is a discussion about the potential of the element to create the desired change. Once the appreciative discussion has been completed the design teams can do a revision of their proposition. And the final versions are presented. By the time this phase is complete if the process is well done it becomes evident

#### Destiny

The Destiny phase consists of the detailed planning for taking the concrete actions to make the changes to reach the dream. It is empowering the system to learn, adjust, and improvise as they put the design into action. At this point the group should to

dialogue of the along the road map that creates a whole system understanding of the path to the future and presents a tangible step by step process that brings the goal into sight. It is the responsibility of the summit planning team to follow up after the summit and make sure that the innovation teams have the support they need.

### *Destiny Lived*

Destiny is a long term process that starts in the summit and is carried out in the following months or years. Since life is full of changes and unexpected events, the teams are encouraged to remain flexible and improvisational. As the teams move into this long term phase it is the summit planning team that helps keep projects supported and on track.

### **Commentary**

The AI summit form described here is for large groups (30 -3000 people) approach and it is the most powerful use of AI. However the philosophy and principles can be applied in any number of ways both professionally and personally. The AI process starts with being aware of the questions we ask and the things we choose to focus on, whether in the self talk we have going on in our head or in what we say to friends and family. The more we as professionals become appreciative of ourselves and our community the easier it will be for us to work in an appreciative way with our clients. Many of the elements of AI are already in the awareness of the collaborative community, For example we are conscious of language, we know that the stories are important and can be shaped by the questions; we know that future focus is important. AI gives us a method for discovering the great richness of our groups and organizations by studying what has value, what is the best, most life giving, in our groups and organization. As you have seen AI is about the question and learning to ask the questions that bring out the best in people. It is also about learning about our differences, and understanding and appreciating our diversity so that it becomes our strength rather than our liability. An AI summit is the ultimate networking process for the whole organization.

The structure of the Summit enhances all of the aspects of AI and assists a community in learning together to take the positive approach. The Four D Cycle can work just as well with an individual who wants to move forward out of the divorce or to

tap the rich resources of the individuals and groups that compose the larger community. We have the diversity to create powerful synergy and engage that creative power to create positive social changes in many areas. We are young and vibrant and need AI to assist us to self organize around a shared vision. To engage the whole community in a network that is living and learning from one another about are our best practices, our most life giving collaborative processes. Whether it is in the local groups, state level , regional, national or international level, engaging all stakeholders in our evolution will create rapid positive changes beyond our expectation. We want to engaged the whole community in our dreams if we do they will become reality in a powerful and effective way.

## David Brooks: KINDNESS IS A SKILL

I went into journalism to cover politics, but now I find myself in national marriage therapy. Covering American life is like covering one of those traumatizing Eugene O'Neill plays about a family where everyone screams at each other all night and then when dawn breaks you get to leave the theater.

But don't despair, I'm here to help. I've been searching for practical tips on how we can be less beastly to one another, especially when we're negotiating disagreements. I've found some excellent guides — like "Negotiating the Nonnegotiable" by Daniel Shapiro, "The Rough Patch" by Daphne de Marneffe and "The Art of Gathering" by Priya Parker — and I've compiled some, I hope, not entirely useless tips.

**The rule of how many.** When hosting a meeting, invite six people to your gathering if you want intimate conversation. Invite 12 if you want diversity of viewpoints. Invite 120 if you want to create a larger organism that can move as one.

**Scramble the chairs.** If you invite disagreeable people over for a conversation, clear the meeting room, except jumble the chairs in a big pile in the middle. This will force everybody to do a cooperative physical activity, untangling the chairs, before anything else. Plus, you'll scramble the power dynamics depending on where people choose to place their chairs.

**Tough conversations are usually about tribal identity.** Most disagreements are not about the subject purportedly at hand. They are over issues that make people feel their sense of self is disrespected and under threat. So when you're debating some random topic, you are mostly either inflaming or pacifying the other person's feeling of tribal identity.

You rigidify tribal identity every time you make a request that contains a hint of blame. You make that identity less inflamed every time you lead with weakness: "I know I'm a piece of work, but I'm trying to do better, and I hope you can help me out." When tribal

differences are intractable, the best solution is to create a third tribe **that** encompasses both of the warring two.

**The all-purpose question.** "Tell me about the challenges you are facing?" Use it when there seems to be nothing else to say.

**Never have a meeting around a problem.** If you have a problem conversation you are looking backward and assigning blame. If you are having a problem conversation you're saying that one episode — the moment the government shut down — was the key to this situation, rather than all of the causes that actually led up to the episode. Instead, have a possibility conversation. Discuss how you can use the assets you have together to create something good.

**The best icebreaker.** To start such a gathering, have all participants go around the room and describe how they got their names. That gets them talking about their family, puts them in a long-term frame of mind and illustrates that most people share the same essential values.

**Your narrative will never win.** In many intractable conflicts, like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, each side wants the other to adopt its narrative and admit it was wrong the whole time. This will never happen. Get over it. Find a new narrative.

**Never threaten autonomy.** People like to feel that their options are open. If you give them an order — “Calm down” or “Be reasonable” — all that they will hear is that you’re threatening their freedom of maneuver, and they will shut down. Nobody ever grew up because an angry spouse screamed, “Grow up!”

**Attune to the process.** When you’re in the middle of an emotional disagreement, shift attention to the process of how you are having the conversation. In a neutral voice name the emotions people are feeling and the dynamic that is in play. Treat the hot emotions as cool, objective facts we all have to deal with. People can’t trust you if you don’t show them you’re aware of how you are contributing to the problem.

**Agree on something.** If you’re in the middle of an intractable disagreement, find some preliminary thing you can agree on so you can at least take a step into a world of shared reality.

**Gratitude.** People who are good at relationships are always scanning the scene for things they can thank somebody for.

**Never sulk or withdraw.** If somebody doesn’t understand you, not communicating with her won’t help her understand you better.

**Reject either/or.** The human mind has a tendency to reduce problems to either we do this or we do that. This is narrowcasting. There are usually many more options neither side has imagined yet.

**Presume the good.** Any disagreement will go better if you assume the other person has good intentions and if you demonstrate how much you over all admire him or her. Fake this, in all but extreme cases.

As you were reading this list, you might have thought the real problem was other people’s obnoxiousness, not your own. But take an honest look at yourself. You just read all the way to the end of a piece of emotional advice written by a newspaper columnist.

Sad.

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