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Radical Candor

Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

From the time we learn to speak, we're told that if you don't have anything nice to say, then don't say anything at all. While this advice may work for everyday life, it is, as Kim Scott has seen, a disaster when adopted by managers.

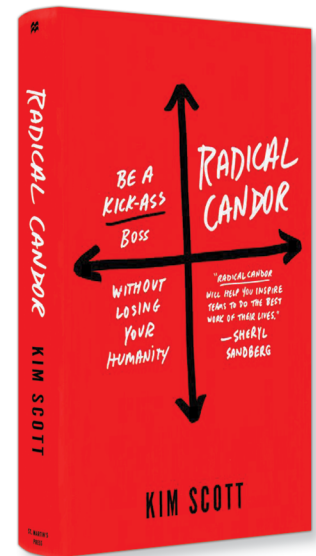
Scott earned her stripes as a highly successful manager at Google and then decamped to Apple, where she developed a class on optimal management. She has earned growing fame in recent years with her vital new approach to effective management, the "Radical Candor" method.

Radical Candor is the sweet spot between managers who are obnoxiously aggressive on one side and ruinously empathetic on the other. It's about providing guidance that involves a mix of praise as well as criticism — delivered to produce better results and help employees achieve.

Great bosses have strong relationships with their employees. *Radical Candor* offers a guide for those bewildered or exhausted by management, written for bosses and anyone who has a boss.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to build radically candid relationships with your team members.
- How to get, give and encourage guidance.
- Techniques for avoiding boredom and burnout on your team.
- Things you can do to get stuff done together — faster.
- Understand why radically candid relationships with your employees will allow you to get the results you want.



by Kim Scott

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: RADICAL CANDOR

by Kim Scott

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PART I: A NEW MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY

Build Radically Candid Relationships

Bringing Your Whole Self to Work

We undervalue the emotional labor of being the boss. But this emotional labor is not just part of the job, it's the key to being a good boss. Many people feel they aren't as good at management as they are at the "real" part of the job. Often, they fear they are *failing* the people who report to them. Ultimately, though, bosses are responsible for results. They achieve these results not by doing all the work themselves but by guiding the people on their teams.

Relationships, Not Power, Drive You Forward.

There is a virtuous cycle between your responsibilities and your relationships. You strengthen your relationships by learning the best ways to get, give and encourage guidance; by putting the right people in the right roles on your team; and by achieving results collectively that you couldn't dream of individually. Of course, there can be a vicious cycle between your responsibilities and your relationships, too. When you fail to give people the guidance they need to succeed in their work, put people into roles they don't want or aren't well suited for, or push people to achieve results they feel are unrealistic, you erode trust. Your ability to build trusting, human connections with the people who report directly to you will determine the quality of everything that follows.

Radical Candor. There are two dimensions that, when paired, will help you move in a positive direction. The first

dimension is "Care Personally." The second dimension is "Challenge Directly." "Radical Candor" is what happens when you put "Care Personally" and "Challenge Directly" together. When Radical Candor is encouraged and supported by the boss, communication flows, resentments that have festered come to the surface and get resolved, and people begin to love not just their work but *whom* they work with and *where* they work. When people love their job, the whole team is more successful. The resulting happiness is the success beyond success.

Care Personally. Part of the reason why people fail to care personally is the injunction to "keep it professional." That phrase denies something essential. We are all human beings with human feelings, and even at work, we need to be seen as such. In addition to the obsessive devotion to "professionalism," there's another, less virtuous reason why people fail to care personally. When they become bosses, some people consciously or unconsciously begin to feel they're better or smarter than the people who work for them. There are few things more damaging to human relationships than a sense of superiority. Of course, if you are a boss, there is some hierarchy involved. Just remember that being a boss is a *job*, not a value judgment. Caring personally is the antidote to both robotic professionalism and managerial arrogance.

Challenging Directly. Challenging others and encouraging them to challenge you helps build trusting relationships because it shows 1) you care enough to point out both the things that aren't going well and those that are and that 2) you are willing to admit when you're wrong and that you are committed to fixing mistakes that you or others have made. In the end, caring personally about people even as you challenge them will build the best relationships of your career. ●



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Get, Give and Encourage Guidance

Creating a Culture of Open Communication

“Operationalizing” Good Guidance. There are two dimensions of good guidance: care personally and challenge directly. It’s useful to be clear about what happens when you fail in one dimension (ruinous empathy), the other (obnoxious aggression) or both (manipulative insincerity).

Obnoxious Aggression. When you criticize someone without taking even 2 seconds to show you care, your guidance feels obnoxiously aggressive to the recipient. When bosses belittle employees, embarrass them publicly or freeze them out, their behavior falls into this area. This Obnoxious Aggression sometimes gets great results short-term but leaves a trail of dead bodies in its wake in the long run. 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.

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, think they can gain some sort of political advantage by being liked, think they can gain some sort of political advantage by being fake, or 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. When you are overly worried about how people will perceive you, you’re less willing to say what needs to be said.

Ruinous Empathy. Most people want to avoid creating tension or discomfort at work. 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. Ruinous Empathy can also prevent a boss from asking for criticism. Needless to say, this strategy does not build trust on either side.

Moving Toward Radical Candor. When developing a culture of Radical Candor, start by asking for criticism, not by giving it. 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. You’ll learn a lot — few people scrutinize you as closely as do those who report to you. 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. 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*.
- Balance praise and criticism: Worry more about praise and less about criticism — but above all be sincere.
- Understand the perilous border between Obnoxious Aggression and Radical Candor. ●

Understand What Motivates Each Person on Your Team

Helping People Take a Step in the Direction of Their Dreams

Rethinking Ambition. To keep a team cohesive, you need both rock stars and superstars. Rock stars are solid as a rock. They don’t want the next job if it will take them away from their craft. Superstars, on the other hand, need to be challenged and given new opportunities to grow constantly. For many bosses, distinguishing between the two means rethinking ambition. Centering questions around growth trajectory can help you discover what motivates each person much better than a set of questions about “potential” or “talent” could. These questions will help remind you that trajectories change, and you shouldn’t put permanent labels on people. They will help you build stable teams that achieve astounding results.

Growth Management. Shifting from a traditional talent management mindset to one of growth management will help you make sure everyone on your team is moving in the direction of their dreams and ensure that your team collectively improves over time. The most important thing you can do for your team collectively is understand what growth trajectory each person wants to be on at a given time and whether that matches the needs and opportunities of the team.

Understanding What Matters and Why. To be successful at growth management, you need to find out what motivates each person on your team. You also need to learn what each person’s long-term ambitions are and understand how their current circumstances fit into their motivations and life goals. “Steep growth” is generally characterized by rapid change: learning new skills or deepening existing ones quickly. “Gradual growth” is characterized by stability.

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The Problem with Passion. Insisting that people have passion for their job can place unnecessary pressure on both boss and employees. Your job is not to provide purpose but instead to get to know each of your direct reports well enough to understand how each one derives meaning from their work, to recognize the significance of what you hear and to create working conditions that allow everybody to find meaning in their own way.

Excellent Performance. Keep your top performers at the top of your mind. Be a partner, not an absentee manager or a micromanager. You must take the time to help the people doing the best work to overcome obstacles and make their good work even better. Managers often devote more time to those who are struggling than to those who are succeeding. Moving from great to stunningly great is more inspiring for everyone than moving from bad to mediocre.

Excellent Performance/Gradual Growth Trajectory. We all have periods in our lives when our professional growth speeds up or slows down. For too many bosses, recognition means promotion. But in most cases, this is a big mistake. Promotion often puts these people in roles they are not as well suited for or don't want. The key is to recognize their contributions in other ways. Part of building a cohesive team is to create a culture that recognizes and rewards the rock stars.

Excellent Performance/Steep Growth Trajectory. The best way to keep superstars happy is to challenge them and make sure they are constantly learning. It's vital not to squash these people, so allowing transfers is important. Management and growth should not be conflated. When management is the only path to higher compensation, the quality of management suffers and the lives of the people who work for these reluctant managers become miserable.

Managing the Middle. Sadly, a lot of people never find work they are truly excellent at because they stay in the wrong jobs for so long that any change would require a step or two backward. Assuming that people who are not thriving are therefore mediocre and can't do any better is both unjust and unkind. Allowing them to continue down that path might be the worst case of Ruinous Empathy that managers regularly display and is a great source of wasted possibility. Everybody can excel somewhere. And to build a great team that achieves exceptional results, everybody needs to be doing great work.

Poor Performance/Negative Growth Trajectory. When somebody is performing poorly and, having received clear communication about the nature of the problem, is showing no signs of improvement, you must fire that person. How do you know when it's time to

fire somebody? Here are three questions to consider: Have you given Radically Candid guidance? How is this person's poor performance affecting the rest of the team? Have you sought a second opinion, spoken to someone whom you trust and with whom you can talk the problem through? The way you fire people really matters, and to do this hard job well, it's important not to distance yourself from the person you're about to fire.

Low Performance/Steep Growth Trajectory. One of the most perplexing management dilemmas is when a person who ought to be taking on more and more and getting better every day is instead screwing up or just doing a lousy job. There are four reasons this can happen:

- Wrong role
- New role; too much too fast
- Personal problems
- Poor fit

No Permanent Markers. It's tempting to see certain people as fit only for a certain role or having a certain set of skills/weaknesses that will never change. The truth is, people really do change. It is important for the team member and the boss to be clear about what is driving the degree of trajectory at each juncture so that both the team member and the company can benefit. Make sure that you are seeing each person on your team with fresh eyes every day. ●

Drive Results Collaboratively

Telling People What to Do Doesn't Work

The Art of Getting Stuff Done Without Telling People What to Do. It is possible to achieve spectacular results without a purely autocratic style. The process, which the author calls the "Get Stuff Done" (GSD) wheel, is relatively straightforward. But the key, often ignored by people who think of themselves as "get stuff done" people, is to avoid the impulse to dive right in. Instead, you have to first lay the groundwork for collaboration. When run effectively, the GSD wheel will enable your team to achieve more collectively than anyone could ever dream of achieving individually.

Listen. You have to find a way to listen that fits your personal style and then create a culture in which everyone listens to each other so that all the burden of listening doesn't fall on you. Figure out how to listen to give the quiet team members a voice without weirding out their louder colleagues. It's hard enough to get yourself to listen to your team members and let them know you are listening; getting them to listen to one another is even

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harder. If you can build a culture in which people listen to one another, they will start fixing things that you as the boss never even knew were broken.

Clarify. Once you've created a culture of listening, the next step is to push yourself and your direct reports to understand and convey thoughts and ideas more clearly. As the boss, you are the editor, not the author. Take the time to help your direct reports explain what they mean so that they can do something about fixing the problem or pursuing the opportunity rather than just complaining about it. It's not just important to understand new *ideas* clearly, it's equally important, and often more difficult, to understand the *people* to whom your team will have to explain the ideas clearly.

Debate. Debate takes time and requires emotional energy. But lack of debate saps a team of more time and emotional energy in the long run. Here are some ideas that can help you keep debate going without grinding everyone down too much:

- Keep the conversation focused on ideas not egos
- Create an obligation to dissent
- Pause for emotion/exhaustion
- Use humor and have fun
- Be clear about when the debate will end
- Don't grab a decision just because the debate has gotten painful

Decide. Kick-ass bosses often do not decide themselves but rather create a clear decision-making process that empowers the people closest to the facts to make as many decisions as possible. Not only does that result in better decisions, it results in better morale. The decider should get facts, not recommendations. Facts come inflected with each person's particular perspective or point of view, but they are less likely to become a line in the sand than a recommendation is. When you are the decider, it's really important to go to the source of the facts. The more often you can do that, the more empowered your whole organization feels.

Persuade. Now that a decision has been reached, it's time to get more people on board. This isn't easy, and it's vital to get it right. Expecting others to execute a decision without being persuaded that it's the right thing to do is a recipe for terrible results. Explaining the decision is not enough. You must establish that the decider, whether that's you or somebody else on your team, has credibility if you expect others to execute the decision.

- **Emotion:** You might have a strong emotional connection to a decision, but if you fail to take into account your listener's emotions, too, you won't be persuasive.
- **Credibility:** Part of credibility is knowing your subject and demonstrating a track record of sound decisions. But it also requires a third component — humility, which is sometimes in short supply.
- **Logic:** Sometimes, the logic may seem self-evident to you, so you fail to share it with others. Show your work. Don't just describe an idea, share how you got to it.

Execute. Part of a boss's job is to take a lot of the "collaboration tax" on themselves so that his or her team can spend more time executing. In order to balance these responsibilities with the work you need to do personally in your area of expertise: Don't waste your team's time, keep the "dirt under your fingernails" by staying connected to the actual work that is being done and block time to execute.

Learn. It's obvious that good bosses learn from mistakes and successes alike and keep improving. And yet, denial is actually the more common reaction to imperfect execution than learning. There are two enormous pressures that tempt a boss to quit learning: pressure to be consistent and burnout. ●

PART II: TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Relationships

An Approach to Establishing Trust with Your Direct Reports

Here, the author talks about staying centered, staying on an equal footing with the people who report to you and the art (and dangers) of socializing at work.

Stay Centered. Managers who create a stable foundation for themselves are invariably more effective at building teams on which people can do the best work of their lives. The essence of leadership is not getting overwhelmed by circumstances.

Free at Work. Think about how to give your team a sense of autonomy and agency so that they, too, can be centered and bring their best selves to work. The first rule of building the kind of relationship with people that will make them feel free at work is to relinquish unilateral authority. Relationships are more effective and more satisfying.

Master the Art of Socializing at Work. You already spend a lot of hours every day with your colleagues and direct reports. Use *that* time to build relationships. For the

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most part, it's better to use the time after work to keep yourself centered than to socialize with work colleagues. When you do organize a social event at work, bear these warnings in mind: Even nonmandatory events can feel mandatory, and booze can land you in dangerous territory.

Respect Boundaries. Building radically candid relationships requires you to walk a fine line between respecting other people's boundaries and encouraging them to bring their whole selves to work. You'll need to negotiate boundaries differently with each person you work with. Do this by building trust, sharing values, demonstrating openness, navigating physical space, recognizing your own emotions and mastering your reactions to others' emotions. Building relationships with your direct reports takes time and real energy. ●

Guidance

Ideas for Getting/Giving/Encouraging Praise and Criticism

Guidance is the "atomic building block" of management, but it is profoundly uncomfortable for most people. In order to build a culture of Radically Candid guidance you need to get, give and encourage both praise and criticism.

Soliciting Impromptu Guidance. What are the things you can do to get criticism from your team? It's not so easy, because when you are the boss people really do not want to criticize you or tell you what they really think. That's why, when you become the boss, it's important to work so hard to earn your team's trust. If you can listen to the criticism and react well to it, both trust and respect will follow. Here are some tips/techniques to get the conversation flowing: You are the exception to the "criticize in private" rule of thumb; have a go-to question; embrace the discomfort; listen with the intent to understand, not to respond; reward criticism to get more of it; and gauge the guidance you get.

Giving Impromptu Guidance. If you don't have the courage to give Radically Candid guidance, the people who report to you won't believe you really want to get it from them. And if you don't lead by example, the people on your team are unlikely to guide each other. When delivering Radically Candid praise and criticism, remember the following:

- Be humble
- Be helpful
- Give feedback immediately
- Deliver it in person (if possible)

- Praise in public, criticize in private
- Don't personalize (caring personally is good, but personalizing is bad)

Gauge Your Impromptu Guidance, Get a Baseline, Track Your Improvements. Visual cues that make you aware of when you're moving toward Radical Candor or away from it are invaluable. One of the most effective ways to become more Radically Candid is to explain the framework to your team and then ask them to gauge your guidance each week. The most important thing is figuring out how others experience your guidance.

Being Radically Candid with Your Boss. If you are not in a position of authority, I do recommend that you try being Radically Candid, but proceed with caution. Start by asking for guidance before you give it. Next, ask permission to give guidance. The ability to be Radically Candid with your boss is crucial to your success. A strong leader has the humility to listen, the confidence to challenge and the wisdom to know when to quit arguing and get on board.

Gender and Guidance. Gender differences make guidance harder to give for both men and women, but in very different ways. Both bias and "gender politics" can foil efforts to be Radically Candid with someone of a different gender. The pervasive atmosphere of anxiety surrounding gender issues has everybody walking on eggshells and avoiding important truths. Criticism is a gift, and you need to give it in equal measure to your male and female direct reports. When bias plays out over a whole organization, the impact on female leadership is profound.

Formal Performance Reviews. If your company doesn't do formal performance reviews, it's especially important to double down on impromptu guidance. However, if your company does do performance reviews, don't dismiss them out of hand. If handled correctly, they offer an important opportunity to improve your guidance.

Prevent Backstabbing. One of the most important ways to create an environment in which Radical Candor trumps political b.s. is to never let one person on your team talk to you about another behind his or her back. Instead, insist that they talk directly to each other, without you.

Peer Guidance. A good way to get people talking to each other is to explain the Radical Candor framework to your team. Encourage them to gauge their peer guidance. Having a shared vocabulary will help your culture move toward Radical Candor.

Speaking Truth to Power. One of the most important things any manager of managers can do to foster a culture of guidance is to have so-called "skip level meetings." In these meetings, which need to happen only once

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a year to be effective, you will meet with the people who work for your direct reports, without your direct reports in the room, and ask what they could do or stop doing to be better bosses. The best way to lower the barriers that hierarchy puts between us is to admit that it exists and think of ways to make sure everyone feels they are on an equal footing at a human level despite the structure. To make sure everyone feels free to “speak truth to power.” ●

Team

Techniques for Avoiding Boredom and Burnout

Ideally, you want everyone on your team to achieve exceptional results. But you don't want 100 percent of them to be gunning for the next job - or to be content with their current role. Instead, you want a balance, so that you have both people who push for change and those who offer stability. And to understand what motivates the different people you work with, you need to have Radically Candid relationships with each.

Career Conversations. To understand a person's growth trajectory, it's important to have career conversations in which you get to know each of your direct reports better, learn what their aspirations are and plan how to help them achieve those dreams. These conversations are your single biggest opportunity to move up on the care personally axis of the Radical Candor framework. In fact, they are the first thing you should do when rolling out Radical Candor on your team.

Growth Management. Once a year, you need to put together a growth-management plan for each person on your team. Take a look across your whole team and make sure that you understand how each individual's aspirations and growth trajectory are lining up with the collective needs of the team.

Hiring: Your Mentality and Your Process. Your hiring process is important; it's a vital part of building a great team. What follows are the basic elements of a hiring process that is as rigorous as possible without being overly onerous:

- Job description: define team “fit” as rigorously as you define “skills” to minimize bias.
- Blind skills assessments can also minimize bias.
- Use the same interview committee for multiple candidates to allow for meaningful comparisons.
- Casual interviews reveal more about team fit than formal ones.

- Make interviews productive by jotting down your thoughts right away.
- In-person debrief/decision: if you're not *dying* to hire the person, don't make an offer.

Firing. It's hard to fire people, but it's hard to quit, too. Sometimes, it's your job as the boss to be Radically Candid when something's just not working. Firing people is not easy, either emotionally or legally. But if you do three things, you can make it far, far easier on the person you are firing as well as on yourself and your team.

- Don't wait too long.
- Don't make the decision unilaterally: Once you've identified performance issues, take the time to get advice from your boss, to calibrate with your peers (if appropriate) and to get help from human resources.
- Give a damn: You have a relationship with the person you're about to fire. When you have to fire people, do it with humility.

Promotions. Few things can create a sense of injustice on a team like having a boss who promotes based on favoritism or a manager who promotes people much faster than the manager sitting in the next office. You can confer with your peers, or if you're a boss of bosses, you can require all your reports to calibrate their promotion plans with one another before any promotions get approved. Announcing promotions breeds unhealthy competition for the wrong things: documentation of status rather than development of skill. Focus on the work the people are doing, not the status they've achieved in the company for doing it. Praise the things you want more of: high-quality work, mind-boggling innovation, amazing efficiency, selfless teamwork and so on.

Avoid Absentee Management and Micromanagement. One of the best ways to keep the people on your team engaged is by partnering actively with them. ●

Results

Things You Can Do to Get Stuff Done Together — Faster

One of your most important responsibilities to keep everything moving smoothly is to decide who needs to communicate with whom and how frequently. This means meetings.

One-on-One Conversations. One-on-ones are your must-do meetings, your single best opportunity to listen, really listen, to the people on your team to make sure

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you understand their perspectives on what's working and what's not working. The purpose of a one-on-one meeting is to listen and clarify – to understand what direction each person working for you wants to head in and what is blocking them.

Staff Meetings. An effective staff meeting has three goals: It reviews how things have gone the previous week, allows people to share important updates and forces the team to clarify the most important decisions and debates for the coming week. Your job is to establish a consistent agenda, insist that people stick to it and corral people who go on for too long or go off on tangents.

Think Time. In addition to all these regularly planned meetings, people are going to want to talk to you about this or that; urgent matters will arise that you must deal with. When are you supposed to find time to clarify your own thinking or help the people who work for you clarify theirs? You need to schedule in some think time, and hold that think time sacred.

“Big Debate” Meetings. “Big debate” meetings are reserved for debate, but not decisions, on major issues facing the team. The sole product of the debate should be a careful summary of the facts and issues that emerged, a clearer definition of the choices going forward, and a recommendation to keep debating or move on to a decision. They serve three purposes:

- They lower tension
- They allow you to slow down key decisions when appropriate
- They foster a larger culture of debate

“Big Decision” Meetings. “Big decision” meetings typically, but not always, follow a big debate meeting. They serve two important roles. The first is obvious: to make an important decision. The second, though, is subtler. It can be hard to figure out when to stop debating and start deciding. It's important that the decisions are final, otherwise they'll always be appealed and will really be debates, not decisions.

All-Hands Meetings. If you have a team of 10 or fewer people, you probably don't need to schedule a separate meeting to make sure everyone is persuaded that the right decisions have been made. However, as your team gets bigger, you need to start thinking about how to bring everyone along. If your team is 100 or more people, a regular, all-hands meeting can really help to get broad buy-in on the decisions being made — and also to learn about dissent.

Execution Time. If you're not careful, meeting proliferation can indeed bring to a grinding halt your ability to

execute both as an individual and as a team. Being ruthless about making sure your team has time to execute is one of the most important things you can do as a boss. One effective solution is to block off time in your calendar to be alone and execute.

Walk Around. Listening to the people who report directly to you is relatively straightforward even if it requires time and discipline. But if you are a manager of managers, listening deep in your organization is much harder. Schedule an hour a week of walking-around time. Notice the things you don't notice when you're buried in work at your desk or racing, head down, from one meeting to the next. Find small problems and treat them like “the universe through a grain of sand.”

Be Conscious of Culture. A team's culture has an enormous impact on its results, and a leader's personality has a huge impact on a team's culture. Who you are as a human being impacts your team's culture enormously. The most amazing thing about a culture is that once it's strong, it's self-replicating. Even though you've taken a number of conscious actions to impact it, you'll know you've succeeded when it truly is no longer about you. ●

Getting Started

Radically Candid management takes serious time, but it also leaves you time to pursue your own area of expertise and to deal with the unpredictable. Mostly, it requires you to be conscious and bring your full humanity to work with you.

Remember, *once you build Radically Candid relationships with the people who report to you, you will eliminate a terrible source of misery in the world: the bad boss.* You will achieve results you never imagined possible. You will create an environment in which you and the people who report to you can love work and working together. Perhaps most surprisingly, you'll find that the way you work ripples out into the rest of your life and enriches all your relationships. ●

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