

Sharon Cox

Enough already...

Start doing what works
at work!



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Editorial Director: Theresa Steltzer

Author: Sharon Cox, MSN, BSN, RN

Editors: Kim Gasda, Cynthia Laufenberg

Production Director: Leslie Caruso

Managing Editor, Production: Erika Fedell

Creative Director: Larry Pezzato

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Dedication

For the late Don Cabaniss, a gifted therapist, and my husband Jim, whose partnership has made all the difference.

Acknowledgments

For my cherished friend, Amy Brennan, who first challenged me to write this book, and to Kay Hunt, who has listened for hours on end and been a steadfast support—my deepest gratitude. The unwavering faith of Theresa Steltzer, my editor, and her patience over these last several years has allowed this book to come in its own time. Mary Jenkins, a trusted colleague, played a key role in giving me a piece of the puzzle just when I was ready for it, changing the lens through which I better understood life in organizations. The countless friends who routinely asked how the book was coming and who believed my message was useful provided a steady flow of energy that sustained me over the years it took to birth this book. Finally, a special word of thanks to those who have sat in my workshops, shared their stories and emails of their progress, and nudged me to get this work into print—you have my heartfelt thanks.

Introduction

Enough Already . . .

Start Doing What Works at Work!

Several years ago a consultant friend shared with me a line from a guru in organizational development, Peter Block. He said, “Those of you ready to create a future different from the past, let’s get on with it. Everyone else, keep doing what you have been doing and try harder.” Little did I know that his line planted the seeds for my writing this book years later.

For too long now I’ve watched managers around the country “try harder” in their efforts to keep people happy, keep their best people, or keep using systems that waste their time. With the idea of “evidence-based practice” becoming the norm, the timing for *evidence-based management* practices has never been better. Regardless of how long we’ve been doing something or how steeped in conventional wisdom or tradition it might be, if it doesn’t work we need to follow the evidence for better outcomes.

My purpose in writing this book is to provide you with evidence that’ll change your thinking about management styles and practices, with a central theme of shifting from parent to partner. From a personal perspective to changes at the group and organizational levels, my message is simple: We can start doing what works at work and create a future that’s different from the past. In the chapters that follow, I describe what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like to shift from parent to partner. I trust that the evidence offered will change your thinking, and, ultimately, change your workplace.

The options outlined in this book require only three things. First, you must be sick and tired of doing what doesn’t work and be open to new approaches. If you picked up this book and were intrigued by the title, you’ve probably met that first requirement. Second, you must be willing to take a good look in the mirror and take ownership of your own behavior change. This isn’t a series of seven steps to make those around you behave better—this is about *you*. You’ll need to consider doing things you’ve never done before and be willing to step outside of your comfort zone. As you explore options for letting go of “how we’ve always done it,” you’ll need to follow the evidence and trust the process.

I want this book to motivate you to see things through a different lens and rewire your thinking. Changing long-held beliefs can be a little daunting at first, and you may wonder where to begin. First, I’ll give you a front-row seat in a three-day “management retreat” with a representative group of managers as they explore the process of rethinking their approach to management. This group is a composite of the many management teams I’ve worked with over the last 25 years. Hopefully, you’ll identify with the issues they raise and their insights into the process of culture change. An opportunity for self-assessment and reflection is included to assist you in using these ideas in your own workplace.

Then, the theme of rewiring your thinking continues, with the focus moving from changing personal management styles to more of a group and organizational focus: changing how decisions are made and several broader culture codes that influence the work climate.

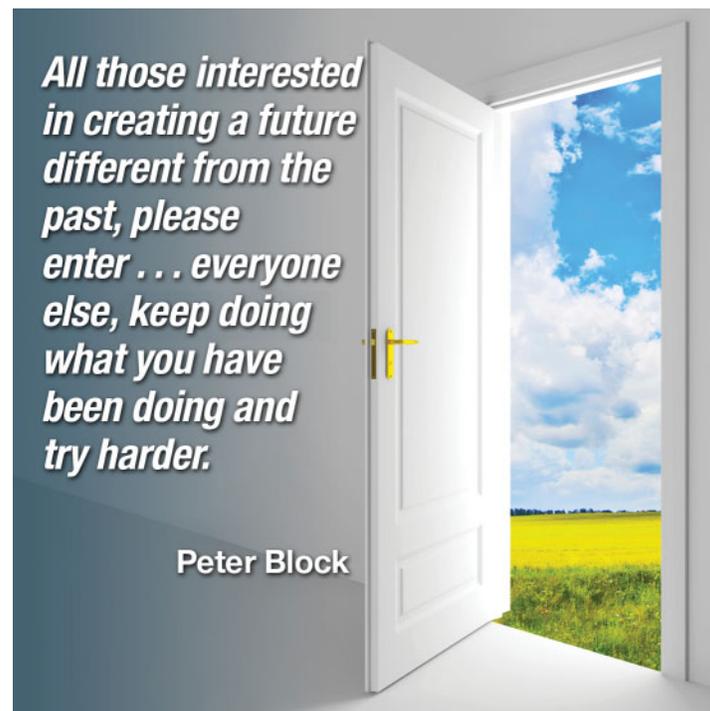
Finally, we’ll focus on the management practices that need to change so they’re grounded more in partnership than in parenting. Nothing speaks louder about the culture of an organization than how disciplinary issues are handled. Moving from an approach that originated in the 1950s is a prime example of the need for evidence-based management practices. Again, in an effort to take these ideas from

concept to reality, I've provided sample policies and resources you'll need as you partner with Human Resources to update your management practices.

Going farther into the arena of "performance management," I'll make the case for a more common-sense approach to the employee evaluation process and share the wisdom I've gained by working closely with Mary Jenkins, author of the management bestseller *Abolishing Performance Appraisals: Why They Backfire and What to Do Instead* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002). I clearly recall picking up this book a few years ago and having my thinking changed in such a way that I had to completely rework the content I'd been using in my workshops. She rewired my thinking, and hopefully this book will do the same for you.

It's important to shed some light on managing group change in the conclusion of this journey, with the intent of providing practical advice to enhance the application of these ideas. I want you to benefit from my lessons learned with ideas for managing the process so it's not all trial-and-error. While the intent of this book is to change your thinking, I also want you to envision your next steps and feel confident that these ideas can become a reality in your workplace.

Think of this introduction as an open door that you chose to walk through. As you follow my train of thought, you'll find new perspectives, a lens through which to see things differently, assuming that you're tired of "trying harder." Perhaps Peter Block's line that's stayed with me can also be an impetus for you. If you're ready to start doing what works at work, consider his challenge paraphrased below and come along.



Chapter 1

The Iceberg Metaphor

The Visual Trumps the Verbal

Sitting in a coffee shop one morning before presenting a three-day workshop, I overheard a conversation that sounded all too familiar. A group of managers (we'll call them Sue, Donna, and Mark) chatted about how hard it was to be in that great land of in-between known as middle management. Sue was saying, "Sometimes I think I should just take the title 'Manager' off my name tag and put 'Mama' there instead. Dealing with my staff is just like dealing with my teenage kids." Donna chimed in. "I know how you feel," she said. "I'm having another heart-to-heart with my low performer tomorrow. He'll rebound for about two weeks and then he'll be back in his 'on-the-job retired mode.'" Mark shook his head and said, "Speaking of one-to-one meetings, I have 40 evaluations to do in the next month, and I rarely see some of these people. It's a huge waste of time over getting a one- or two-percent increase." They sat there for a minute shaking their heads and then Sue said, "I was listening to a TV show I'd taped while I did the dishes last night. Thinking about how tired I am of being Mama at home and at work, I heard this psychologist asking, 'Well, is it working for you?' That hit me right between the eyes. I wanted to say, 'No way is it working for me!' I've just about had enough. If it wasn't for the little bit of extra money every month, I'd get out of management altogether." Mark summed up the sense of resignation they were feeling as he tossed their cups in the trash and they headed across the street. "Well, it is what it is and there isn't much we can do about it. I've been in management for over 15 years in three different organizations and it's always been this way. I sure hope this workshop isn't a waste of time ... I've got a lot of evaluations to write!"

I was grateful for the insight into how these managers were feeling and glad I happened to sit just a few tables away from them. Knowing that a certain amount of frustration is necessary for any real behavior change, they seemed primed for the ideas I was about to offer at my workshop. Perhaps you, too, are ready to move away from the same old management practices that lead to frustrating team behaviors. You may also be thinking, "I hope this book isn't a waste of time, with six steps to a happy workplace that seldom match the reality in which I work." I join you in feeling frustrated with outdated management systems, and that's why I chose the title I did for this book. I promise you up front that the ideas presented here are time tested, reality based, and worth your effort.

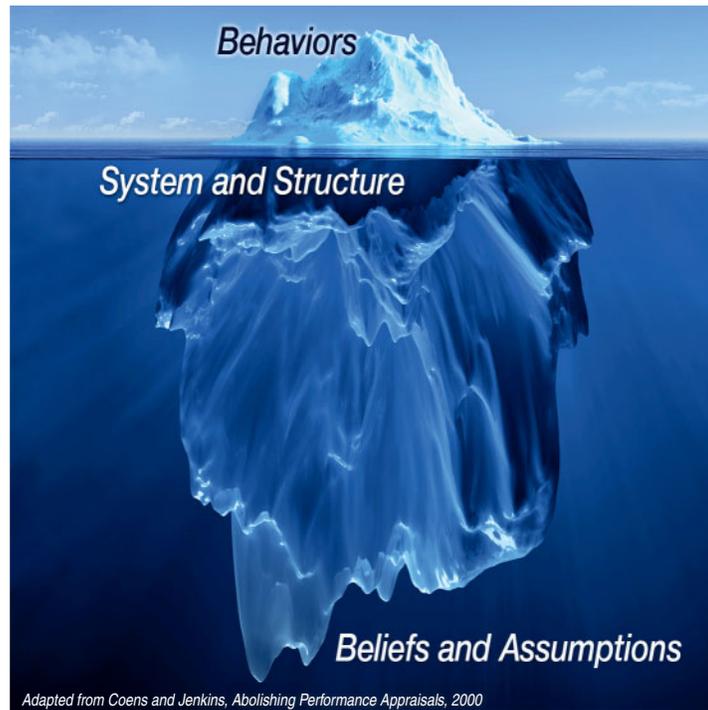
A picture always comes to mind as I write on this topic, and I want to share it with you. Glance at the iceberg on the next page for a moment and take in the beauty of this magnificent photograph. I'll use this powerful image as a metaphor and offer you a roadmap for creating a workplace that's different than "how things have always been."



One of the things I've learned over 25 years of training managers is that we're visual learners. If we see it, we get it—basically, the visual trumps the verbal. Having heard the phrase “a picture is worth a thousand words,” you know there have been times when you better understood an idea after you saw a flow chart, decision tree, or process diagram. My hope is that this picture and this metaphor will stay with you for years to come, since it's a perfect place to begin the process of changing your thinking ... which is also what this book is all about.

Why is it so important to change our thinking? Because how we think determines what we see and what we get in our work lives, not the other way around. Take a moment to mull that over. How does what we think determine what we see in the culture of an organization? What we think—our basic beliefs and assumptions—become the basis for the management practices and systems we put in place. From those systems and practices, people in the organization learn to behave a certain way. They learn what works, and thus the culture in the organization develops over time. Using the iceberg as a metaphorical image for organizational life, the behavior norms are like the tip of the iceberg—what we can see. Think of the middle of the iceberg as the systems, management practices, and structure we put in place to get things done. We don't “see” these systems, yet they create the behaviors we *can* see. They're below the waterline and out of sight but very much a part of the whole picture. Let your eyes follow the bottom of the iceberg and see how deep it goes; such are the beliefs we have about how people should be managed or how an organization should be run. These deeply held beliefs may not be visible, but, like the solid ice at the deepest end of the iceberg, they're foundational to everything else.

A great deal of time and money is spent each year in organizations to better manage relationships or improve behaviors that influence morale and productivity. But we only focus on a small part of the real issue—the tip of the iceberg. Looking at this massive structure, it's easy to see that the bigger issue is the belief systems that give rise to the policies and structure we use to make things happen, to show a profit at the end of the day. So our guiding principles, basic beliefs, and conscious or unconscious assumptions about people are what drive the culture we have. What we think determines what we see, not the other way around.



A consultant friend of mine challenged a group of managers to think about their unspoken assumptions and basic beliefs. She asked them to look at the extent to which their policies and management practices reflected a lack of trust, leading them to behave like parents with children instead of managers with a group of adults. To their credit, they took the challenge and formed a task force to review their policies and the underlying assumptions on which they were based. They reviewed their policy on bereavement leave and found that it clearly reflected a lack of trust in the people they worked with. Reading through all the definitions they had for what constituted immediate or extended family, and the number of signatures required and days allowed in each case, was embarrassing to them. They decided to change the two-page policy in favor of one sentence: “When there is a death in your immediate family or your extended family, talk with your supervisor about the time you need.” They went from two pages of legalese to one sentence. A year later, taken bereavement time decreased 43 percent because employees felt respected and trusted to make their own decisions. The managers changed their basic beliefs, and that meant a change in policy, which then resulted in a change in behavior. Can you see the iceberg as you follow this train of thought?

Understanding the iceberg metaphor will challenge you to rethink a lot of things. Instead of putting energy into how to get others to change and do what we need them to do—putting all the focus on behavior—perhaps we need to look at the systems and structure we have in place that result in the behavior we complain about. As we look at our management practices, it often becomes clear that they’re not based on what we actually believe, but are instead based on what we’ve always done. In fact, they’re *contrary* to what we believe.

I doubt that any manager would say if you treat people worse and worse their behavior will get better and better, yet that’s exactly the underlying belief in the system we call “progressive discipline.” We issue verbal warnings, written warnings, and then suspension, and wonder why they don’t come back with a good attitude. Progressive discipline is built on beliefs that we’d find embarrassing and dated if we actually took the time to examine them.

On the other hand, some of our management practices are based on what we really *do* believe. It’s just that what we believe is dead wrong, outdated, or completely at odds with all we’ve learned from research

in the field of organizational development and the social sciences. Perhaps we strongly believe that a hierarchical structure and attention to the chain of command is the best way to get work done. On the other hand, we know that Generation Y has no patience with hierarchy and no appreciation for following this chain of command. Attracting the best and the brightest in this generation means doing some work at the bottom of that iceberg and rethinking how best to move from a hierarchy to a team-based work environment.

This idea of rethinking our basic beliefs and getting more in sync with research findings from the social sciences is the challenge given by Daniel Pink in his bestseller *Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us* (Riverhead Books, 2011). He challenges organizations to reconsider motivation, moving away from the old “carrot and stick” approach that worked well in the 20th century. He uses four decades of research to support that external motivators don’t work in the long run. He makes a good case for focusing on autonomy, mastery, and meaningful work as the way to foster engagement and top-performing companies. He’s passionate about bridging the “gap between what science knows and business does” and retooling how we think about work in the 21st century.

Rewiring our thinking is where we must begin—at the bottom of the iceberg—because everything else we do stems from those foundational beliefs. The intent in the chapters that follow is to get you thinking, challenge the status quo, and shed some light on the bottom of that iceberg. Sometimes rethinking basic assumptions is uncomfortable, and other times it’s liberating. But this is what we have to do to attain substantive change instead of quick fixes.

The iceberg image often pops into my mind when I listen to conversations like the one I overheard in the coffee shop. Listening to Sue talk about her frustrations in dealing with children both at work and at home, I thought about the voice that likely runs through her head about what it means to be a good manager. This voice dictates what she does day in and day out, even when she knows that her frustration is building to the breaking point. Changing that voice in her head and replacing it with a new one is the beginning of changing the behavior of her colleagues. Later, I’ll offer ways to rewire your thinking, as well, because far too many good managers get caught in the same set of frustrations and leave management altogether.

The system used for disciplinary issues that Donna complained about is a great example of using a process that we know doesn’t work because we think it’s our only option. We do it because it’s been the norm in business for 60 years, and I know if I’d talked to Donna she would have said she was just doing “what we’ve always done.” She knows that her colleague is playing games with her. She dreads having to talk with him again, and they both know they’re locked in a dance of sorts that can go on for a long time. However, I couldn’t just hand her a policy based on “positive discipline” and encourage her to use this nonpunitive approach without also spending time on the basic beliefs she has that the “punishment needs to fit the crime.” As Eric Harvey, a well-known consultant in the field of organizational development, has said, “If you change the policy without changing the belief system underlying the policy, it is just like putting a Mercedes emblem on the front of a Pinto.” It doesn’t work. If you’re ready to move beyond discipline needing to be about punishment, this book highlights a highly effective approach used in numerous organizations; it reflects a very different mindset than “what we’ve always done.”

As I listened to Mark talk about “doing 40 evaluations in the next month,” it was easy to recognize another management dilemma: using systems based on outdated assumptions. Mark knows as he evaluates someone he rarely sees that it’s a charade of sorts. They’re just going through the motions of what we’ve always done, knowing full well that it’s a waste of time and, in some cases, more damaging than helpful. Performance evaluation is flawed; dozens of surveys indicate that most companies are dissatisfied with what they’re doing and readily agree that it doesn’t yield desired results. Ready to rethink your approach to employee evaluations, like Mark? Pay close attention to the later chapters of this book, which provide an overview of the work of Mary Jenkins, a friend and colleague who’s written a bestselling

book on the process of employee evaluations. Mary extensively addresses this topic and consults with a number of global organizations that have stepped out of the proverbial box and retooled their thinking on this issue.

Now that you're familiar with the iceberg metaphor for the work still needed in organizations, consider this idea as the framework for subsequent chapters as we explore new ways of thinking about key issues in our work lives. I've chosen to write about the issues of leadership and management styles, the disciplinary process, and the system of employee evaluations because I feel they play a key role in determining an organization's culture. How we handle our role as leaders and managers and how we go about a disciplinary process or an evaluation speaks more about our culture than anything we might say.

The key focal points in the chapters that follow are universal in their application. The basic belief systems we'll examine are found in churches, banks, hospitals, and universities. If we take that image of the iceberg and use it as the basis to rethink management practices in any of these arenas, the conversations will be similar. Perhaps as you consider the conversation I overheard in the coffee shop, you see yourself in all three of those people. You likely identify with their frustration. You may have even said to yourself, "I get this, but I wouldn't know how to change any of it."

We start the process of doing something about it by going to the bottom of that iceberg and shedding light on basic assumptions, conscious or unconscious beliefs, and things we've learned over the years. How we think really does determine what we see in our work lives, not the other way around. The iceberg is the beginning, and hopefully it will stay with you long after you read this book. Maybe that magnificent image will reappear when setting up orientation for new managers, rewriting policies, rethinking organizational structures, or even interviewing candidates for a leadership role. Basic beliefs and assumptions really do matter, and if that iceberg comes to mind, a picture really will be worth a thousand words.

Chapter 2

Shifting From Parent to Partner

Icebergs and Assumptions: The Process Begins

Managers sometimes find themselves at the bottom of that metaphorical iceberg, rethinking their underlying assumptions because they realize that what they've been doing isn't working. I remember a woman in one of my workshops named Lynne, who came to this realization in an interesting way. At the first break she walked up and in a sheepish voice said, "I got a Mother's Day card from my staff last month, and at first I thought it was thoughtful of them. But now I think it may mean that I need to take a good look in the mirror and change my ways." As I listened to her I thought about that old adage, "A certain amount of discomfort always precedes real change." She was in a perfect place to begin rethinking some of her underlying beliefs, and she wasn't the only one.

Lynne shared the story of her Mother's Day card with her peers as the meeting reconvened, and it was easy to hear her defensiveness as she explained that she was just doing what she thought was expected of her. She said, "We all know that the unwritten rule for managers is to keep the staff happy." She went on to explain that this was easy for her since she'd been a peacemaker in her family for years. She was the oldest of six children and had been more like a mother than a sibling to her younger sisters. She was good at "running things and maintaining order." When a management position came open in her department, she jumped at the chance because she felt like a natural fit for the role and responsibilities as she saw them.

I could tell that several managers in the room were identifying with Lynne's assumption that management was about keeping the peace and making staff happy, so I encouraged some group discussion about "unwritten rules for managers." Someone quickly chimed in with the unwritten rule in his area, which was "to run a tight ship." Another said, "We know it's about staying on top of things and being in control of the situation." Another manager added, "To be honest, I think I'm always trying to keep people happy so I get a decent evaluation and can keep my job. The little extra pay we get helps." One of the others who had just been listening spoke up and said, "Listening to all this, I realize I've never thought about my basic beliefs about the management role. I'm just doing what I've seen done by the managers I've had over the years."

I wanted to make the most of this reflective conversation. Knowing that "if they see it they get it," I asked the group to use the flip charts around the room for a group activity. I asked them to draw a group picture of "what it looks like and feels like to be a manager." In no time they were in small groups brainstorming ideas and taking turns drawing how they saw the management role. There was lots of laughter as each group reviewed what they'd drawn. Someone said that it looked as if one person drew all the pictures because they were so similar.

The first picture had a manager with a head that swiveled and six arms and legs going in different directions. There was a line of people at his office door and an inbox overflowing with evaluations waiting to be done. His boss was pictured in an "ivory tower," barking orders and looking furious. The second one had the manager pulling her hair out, with dark circles under her eyes, standing in the middle of an intersection. She had a fearful look on her face, as a train representing nonstop change was coming at her and staff approached with lists of needs, while the word "budget" loomed large on the other side.

A third picture showed the manager as a mother hen with all her chicks gathered around waiting to be spoon-fed. The final sketch showed a manager at his desk, which was piled high with papers. The clock nearby showed 9:00 PM and the wife of the manager was in the corner of the picture waiting for him to get home, while his kids were already asleep.

The shared sense that what they'd been doing wasn't working became even more apparent when we moved to a group discussion of the themes in their pictures. It didn't take long for us to identify the "middle manager crunch," feeling caught between their staff on one hand and their boss on the other, and the pressure this created. They found it interesting that in all the images, people with whom they worked were pictured as demanding children. The theme of crisis management figured prominently, leaving managers feeling like victims. There was a sense that work was all-consuming, with no time for any kind of home life. This discussion provided a perfect opportunity to take the group deeper into their self-reflection. I knew we needed to revisit the bottom of that proverbial iceberg to identify their basic beliefs, which was the real issue in these pictures.

The useful question "How did we get here?" surfaced, an ideal time to take these managers through a self-assessment process I developed after witnessing these behaviors in hundreds of organizations over the years. These form the basis of the "all things to all people" management approach, and I jokingly call this the "Mama (or Papa) Manager Syndrome." These behavior patterns are natural because they're so common, and often, we consider them normal.

Blind Spots in the Management Role

I've culled many of these behavior patterns from my own experience in management roles, as well as insights gained from a life-changing book I read in 1987, *Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Taking Care of Yourself*.¹ In this classic bestseller, author Melody Beattie helped me put names to my experiences as she highlighted ways in which we function in the parent/child dynamic. Perhaps you can catch a glimpse of your own management style as you read through the list below. Over the years I've found that there are no real gender differences with these behaviors, nor are they different among generations. My experience has been that they're relatively universal in nature, and I invite you to self-assess as you read the next few pages. I've opted to describe four broad themes that characterize managing as a parent, and a brief description to illustrate how these play out in our everyday life. These include caretaking, high-control needs, people pleasing, and lack of self-care.

Caretaking

Any time we're doing things for other people that they could, should, would, or need to do for themselves.

- **Making ourselves indispensable**

This has been taken to new levels with email, cell phones, and social media. We're always available to whoever might need us. Being tethered to our devices is often a status symbol of sorts to let others know how important we are. I mentioned this years ago when talking about beepers, and a woman in the audience told me later that her husband felt bad when he went to their neighborhood barbeque because he didn't have a beeper to wear—so he wore his garage door opener!

- **Thinking, speaking, or doing for others without being asked**

I remember when I first started consulting and was on a flight with a connecting stop. An older woman got on the plane and sat a few seats away from me. I watched her for a few moments and could tell she was cold, so I got up and found a pillow and blanket for her. As I handed it to her, the woman sitting next to me asked, "Are you a nurse by any chance?" The issue wasn't about taking care of this woman but rather the fact that it never dawned on me to ask her if she was cold or wanted a blanket.

- **Feeling compelled to solve problems for others**

A manager in a conference in Albuquerque had a great visual for this. She said a therapist had helped her better deal with her teenage son when he told her, “You’re getting in his hula hoop. You need to step out!”

- **Playing the martyr**

You’re often listening to a martyr when you hear, “If you want it done right just give it to me, I’ll do it. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I can handle it.” A variation on this is, “If you want it done right just do it yourself!” The pattern is usually taking on more and more in hopes that something will be given in return. This is sometimes called “giving to get.”

- **Making excuses for others**

I call this the “Bless Their Heart Syndrome.” “Bless her heart . . . she tries hard, or means well, or she’s been with us a long time.” I recently heard a department director making excuses for one of her most disliked managers by saying, “He really knows his stuff, he’s smart as a whip . . . it’s just that nobody wants to work with him . . . bless his heart.” A similar take on this came from another manager defending a staff member with this line: “I think her heart is in the right place but she just doesn’t come through with the outcomes we need.”

High-Control Needs

These include running things, being the go-to guy, and always being in charge.

- **Having a hyper sense of responsibility**

If it moves or breathes it’s probably our responsibility. Many of us remember a voice that we carry in our heads from childhood: “If you don’t do it, it won’t get done or no one else will do it.” While you could divide the world into those who have this voice in their heads and those who don’t, it’s easy to see this playing out at work with multitasking and the compulsion to be productive. This is easily recognizable at home where one person has to be doing four things at once and can’t just sit, while another person has no problem just sitting.

- **Having difficulty delegating or letting others make decisions**

If we’re honest, the difficulty in delegating is often due to our reluctance to relinquish control. This is masked by ideas like, “If I ask for help I’ll be seen as not doing my part,” and the ever-present guilt from feeling like we’re “dumping” instead of delegating. A corollary to this is difficulty letting others make decisions. We seldom admit to that, though, and simply ask that they “run decisions by me before you actually do anything.”

- **Having difficulty playing or relaxing**

The need to be productive is ever present, so it’s not easy to just relax. Years ago my husband and I were on a fly-fishing vacation. After showing me how to cast, he was packing up to move downstream and said, “Now just relax and watch for the fish. You’re doing fine.” I realized I couldn’t just stand there in the stream all day, so in my backpack I had a camera, wide-angle lens, and tripod in case I saw any good shots. I also had a bird book so I could name the birds I was taking pictures of, and a wildflower identification book so I could at least learn something while I was standing there. I couldn’t get anything else in my backpack, so in my waders I’d stuffed a nursing journal and a paperback book, along with an apple and candy bar. If those fish didn’t bite, I intended to do something useful!

- **Displaying obsessive behaviors**

Just watch managers with their lists, smartphones, and tablets. We have lists of our lists so we can remember what list we put things on! If we do something that’s not on our list, we put it on our list so we can draw a line through it.

- **Displaying perfectionist behaviors**

This time the voice in our heads is demanding that we do it right and do it right the first time, or that those around us do things the way we feel they need to be done. It's taken me the better part of 40 years to get my husband to fold towels the right way!

People Pleasing

Easily deferring to the needs of others as if our self-worth depended on what they think; our motto is, "Be nice."

- **Using indirect communication**

I grew up with this and at an early age learned to decipher the "real message." I remember my mother would say, "I haven't heard from your brother," which meant for me to call him and tell him he needed to call home.

- **Avoiding conflict**

We often avoid conflict by using triangled communication, meaning when A has a problem with B she automatically seeks out C instead of dealing directly with B. We're convinced that there's nothing good about conflict and it should be avoided whenever possible. Needless to say, this paves the way for passive-aggressive behavior and manipulation.

- **Lacking boundaries**

An example includes being overly empathetic in that whatever is going on with you might as well be happening to me. If I get around you when you're sad, soon I'm sad or angry or lonely; whatever you feel, I feel. I heard a manager say, "I was having a perfectly good day until I went to that team meeting!"

- **Creating an artificial sense of self-worth from rescuing others**

Keeping those around us dependent allows us to feel needed. Ben Zander, the well-known orchestra leader, talks about a famous conductor in Europe who would jump in a cab after a performance and yell to the driver, "Quickly driver, get moving!" The cabbie would say, "Fine sir, but where to?" The conductor would then shout, "It doesn't matter, they need me everywhere!"

Lack of Self-Care

When the focus is on taking care of everyone else, self-care seldom makes the "to-do" list.

- **Being disconnected and unaware of how we feel or what we need**

Have you ever worked right through lunch or realized on the drive home that you had quite a headache all day long?

- **Swallowing how we feel to meet the needs of others**

Have you ever found yourself saying yes when you really mean no? Or better yet, have you heard yourself saying, "No problem" when inside you are wondering how you are ever going to get everything done?

- **Being a workaholic**

This familiar pattern is reflected in working long hours, taking work home, working on weekends, failing to take a vacation or time off, and keeping one eye on emails so as not to miss anything. A department director shared with me a comment made by his teenage son. He said, "Dad, I know you think you're home, but your head is still at work."

Quite often I review this list with managers and ask them to check the behaviors they recognize in themselves. Someone in the group will say, "What if you see yourself in more than one of these categories?" There's usually a lot of laughter with this question, and the sense in the room is that everyone can see themselves in these typical behavior patterns that characterize the parental approach to management. At this juncture, though, you may well be wondering how these behaviors are so universal in the workplace.

The behaviors I've described as the "parental approach to management" may find their origins in any number of ideas or theories. Some would say that our management styles are influenced by our birth order. If we're the oldest child in the family, we may have a hyper sense of responsibility. Others would

say that these behavior patterns are characteristic of codependency, first described by Melody Beattie in the book I mentioned earlier about codependency. Still another point of view on the origins of these typical behavior patterns is offered by Roger Martin, Dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. In his book *The Responsibility Virus: How Control Freaks, Shrinking Violets, and the Rest of Us Can Harness the Power of True Partnership*, he writes that the fear of failure is at the root of how we choose to handle responsibility.² The fear of failure causes some people to assume total responsibility for success, and for others that same fear of failure causes them to assume minimal responsibility and blame others when things go wrong.

It's not my intent to trace the origins of these behavior patterns or make any diagnosis or assumptions of a clinical nature. Instead, I want to use these behavior patterns as descriptors for what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like when we view the management role as similar to parenting.

I began this chapter by referring to the value of rethinking our basic beliefs about the management role. It's clear from this discussion of the parental approach that this way of thinking about management leaves us tired, frustrated, and weary enough to want to do something else. It fosters entitlement in the staff we work with and creates a "we/they" mentality that's anything but collegial and conducive to teamwork. I often ask management teams at this point in our conversation, "Is this working for you?" The resounding answer is "No!" Clearly our basic assumptions need to change for behavior change to be sustained over time. These patterns are deeply ingrained and all too common; they only change when we gain insight into another way to see the management role, making the shift from parent to partner.

Three Voices We Have in Common

In his classic book *Games People Play*, Eric Berne gave us a new vocabulary to talk about behavior patterns and relationships. His ideas about the different ways we behave in relation to each other is based on the premise that we relate to others in three primary ways: as a child, a parent, or an adult. These are three sides of our personality or voices that we use as we deal with each other.³ These voices can be quite positive, such as being spontaneous or supportive and loving to someone in need. While there is a time and place for these different sides of our personality, it's problematic when they're used inappropriately at work. This is what we often see in the work setting:

Child voice. When we function in the child mode we're dependent and largely reactive. We're "takers" in the sense that we take our cues from others as to what to feel, think, or do. In this reactive mode, typical behaviors include:

- Victim thinking/having a losing attitude
- Being defensive
- Blaming/whining
- Exhibiting learned helplessness/being passive.⁴

A child voice sounds like: "Don't blame me, I just work here." "They said we had to..." "We're just stuck; there's nothing we can do about this." "This is just awful."

Parent voice. The flipside of the child voice is the parent voice, which is the "giver" because the parent is the "decider" and offers permission, security, and criticism... the fount of all wisdom, if you will. We all know about the critical parent voice in our head that often creates shame and guilt. Typical parent-like behavior includes:

- Being controlling/authoritative
- Being judgmental/critical
- Being punitive
- Acting as a caretaker.

The parent voice sounds like: "You should always..." "That's stupid." "Never mind what you think, just do as you're told." "If you fail to do as I say, there will be a price to pay."

As I write this, I remember a manager I worked with who really got what I meant as I was explaining this model. She was a former military commander, so it was easy for her to get into what she called her “commanding general mode.” She asked her staff to give her a little salute when she was in her parent mode and not recognizing it. They had fun with this, and she was able to catch herself falling into parent mode more often. I was doing a follow-up session with her group about a year later and when I asked how she was doing staying in adult mode instead of parent mode, she said, “Ever since you left here I’ve been working every day to just stay off that seesaw!”

I love the “aha moments” I hear from managers when they grasp the dynamics of the parent/adult/child model. They often look at the pictures they’ve drawn and clearly see the parent/child lens through which they’ve been operating. I remember one manager who said, “As I think about these three sides of my personality, I can see myself moving easily from the parent voice with the staff who report to me and then to the child voice when I’m called to the boss’s office.” She was being very honest, and her peers sitting nearby were all nodding their heads in agreement. It’s easy to get on that proverbial seesaw and go from parent to child depending on the situation.

Again, we’re seldom conscious of this, and under the pressures of the work setting these voices can become second nature. A department director totally frustrated with her direct reports said, “If they’re going to behave like a bunch of children, I’m just going to have to lay down the law around here!” As I reflected back to her what she’d just said, she caught herself and realized that by moving into that parent voice she was creating the very dynamic that was frustrating her. It was her natural kneejerk reaction, but it wasn’t helping anything.

Another manager had her work group laughing in recognition as she humorously described how she moved into a childlike voice as soon as she came into work each day. She said, “I don’t understand how this happens! I’ve done all kinds of things in my life that you’d expect of an adult. I’ve raised three kids, lived through two divorces, sold four houses, and moved across the country by myself. Yet when I leave the parking lot and come into my office, I revert to child mode and feel the need to please and a reluctance to say how I really feel about anything.”

It’s easy to see in both of these examples that either end of that proverbial seesaw isn’t where we want to operate. We’ll talk more about how to get off the seesaw and change these patterns in the next chapter. However, the key concept at this juncture is to stay with that self-reflection and recognize the patterns that we’ve started calling normal.

Whether your self-assessment has you more aware of your high-control needs, your people-pleasing behaviors, or a combination of categories I described, the key insight here is to see that this isn’t what effective management is all about. We may laugh as we see ourselves in some of the descriptions I offered, but under that laughter is often the recognition that these behavior patterns we’ve grown comfortable with are undermining our effectiveness as managers.

Going back to that group of managers in one of my workshops, I remember Bill, who was working on his MBA, as he asked a question that most folks at the table were thinking. “We’ve spent the morning being very candid about the realities we see in the management role,” he said, “and now I see why we need to move out of this pseudo parenting stuff. But I don’t have a clue where to start in changing what feels like second nature to me. I checked about six things on that list you gave us and most of them were in the ‘high-control needs’ category, and I bet my wife will laugh when I tell her about this.”

Picking up on his point as we began the afternoon session, I asked the group if, after taking a good look in the mirror, any of them were ready to move from talking about what wasn’t working to doing something about it. They all laughed when one manager said, “If I don’t leave here today doing something differently I will be dead or divorced, so let’s get on with it!”

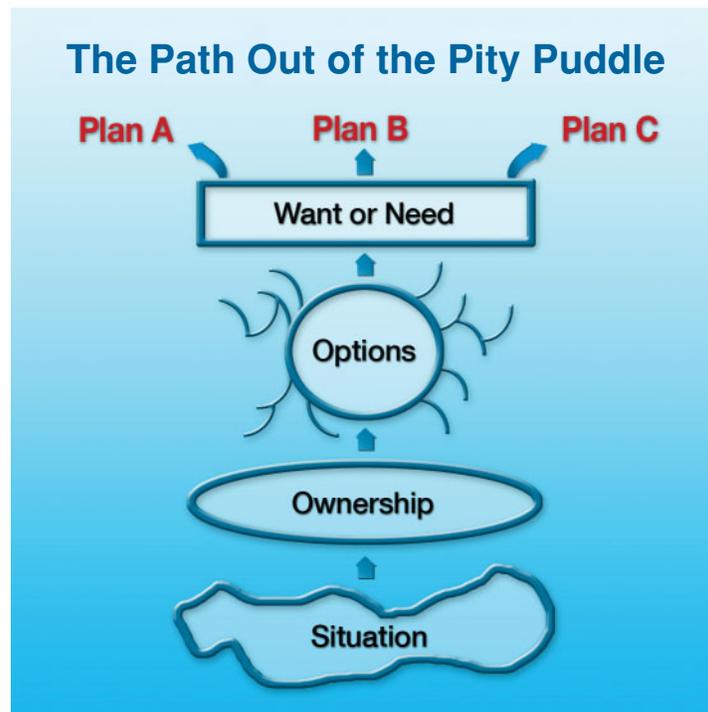
What Part of This Is Mine to Own?

Without realizing it, the group had come to a pivotal point in their process of changing management styles. Having watched hundreds of managers reflect on the craziness in the pictures they drew and then think about what they considered normal, I knew that moving out of entrenched patterns and victim thinking would be a challenge for some. Knowing that “the visual trumps the verbal,” I opted to draw a process on the flip chart so they could see a way to move from reactive to proactive thinking.

As I drew a figure to represent a mud puddle, I asked the group to think about the situations reflected in their pictures and how easy it was to get into “victim thinking.” I jokingly called the puddle I’d drawn a “pity puddle” and asked the group to tell me how it felt when they were in that victim mode. In just a few moments, we filled that pity puddle with feelings of being overworked, unappreciated, stuck, depressed, angry, used, frustrated . . . just to name a few. You could feel the energy getting lower and lower in the group, and one person said, “I’ll be glad when we get through with this part because this makes me want to resign and be done with it!” Sensing they were ready to move on, I asked the all-important question: “What part of this is ours to own?” Another way to frame this pivotal question is, “How are we helping this happen?”

You could have heard a pin drop in the room when I mentioned ownership because it’s not where we naturally go when we’re paddling around the proverbial pity puddle. As I watched those managers ponder the question, I couldn’t help but think about the first time *I* heard “What part of this is yours to own?”

Years ago when I was a pediatric nurse on an oncology unit, we lost four children in one week with some form of leukemia. I went into a depression, and on the advice of a good friend I saw an excellent therapist for several months to help me get through this experience. In the later months of our time together, I was complaining to him about some “soap opera” going on at work. He looked me right in the eye and said, “Now what part of all that is yours to own?” I had no clue what the question meant, much less the answer, so I just played the victim role and said, “I guess I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.” I was obviously trying to avoid taking ownership for any role I may have played, and he would have no part of that. In subsequent sessions he stayed with that question until I finally got his point. I began to see that while I was complaining about being taken advantage of I was also swallowing how I felt and failing to express my feelings in an assertive way. Instead of having a crucial conversation when the situation required me to level with someone, I’d beat around the bush and then call him or her clueless when they didn’t pick up on my needs. My therapist used to say, “You’re always helping it happen or it wouldn’t be happening.” When I finally began to claim the part I played in different situations, I realized I always had the option to stop shooting myself in the foot. Maybe I couldn’t change anyone else in the situation, but I could at least change what I was doing that made things worse. It was a real “aha” moment when I began to see how freeing it was to claim my role and then find ways to respond differently. I came away from that experience with what I later framed as four steps up and out of the pity puddle.



Taking ownership for my own contribution to a situation wasn't easy at first, nor has it been easy for the leaders I've worked with. As the managers in the room with me that afternoon stayed with that all-important question, one of them pointed to the pictures and said, "It's easy to see in these pictures that we view ourselves as victims with no options if we have a mortgage to pay. But then I look at things I checked on this list of behaviors and I can see how my high-control needs contribute to my long hours and difficulty delegating." "I helped draw the picture of the mother hen," another manager said, "and it's clear to me that by my opting for the parent role the staff can easily move into the child mode, and I've created what I don't want." To their credit, most of these managers were able to make the connection and take ownership for ways in which they needed to change. They weren't comfortable with this at first, but the more they talked, the more honest they were.

As we explored several options, I enjoyed watching them develop plan A and plan B or C and seeing the energy it created in the room by mid-afternoon. This is usually my litmus test for whether or not a critical mass in a group of managers actually makes this shift from reactive to proactive thinking: If the energy is greater in the afternoon than it was in the morning. Moving from the downward spiral of victim thinking to options and game plans always fosters group energy. Everything hinges on taking ownership and being honest with that question, "What part of this is mine to own?"

I don't mean to imply that everyone is able to follow the four steps out of the pity puddle. Those who would rather not take that look in the mirror and be honest with themselves will often find ways to justify their need for the status quo. As is often the case, about a third of this group found ways to sidestep the idea of ownership for changing their own behavior. I usually think of these folks as the "yeah but (ers)" and the "what if (ers)." Their comments typically sound like this:

- "What you're saying makes sense, but this is really going to be hard."
- "I get this, but it'll never work unless my boss supports it and he's not big on change."
- "If I stop being the parent and keeping the peace, I may lose some people."

- “Some of your options are uncomfortable for me and I don’t need the stress right now.”
- “I have a few long-term staff members who have a real sense of entitlement, and I don’t think anything is ever going to change that.”

While others may be in a “wait and see” mode with these ideas, I can usually count on a little more than a third of the group who are engaged in the process and ready to do whatever it takes to be more effective. I think of this group as the “critical mass” because they can make a real difference in any workplace. This process of personal accountability is where it all starts. Taking some time with the question of ownership is time well spent.

As we closed the first day of this three-day program for managers, I gave them an overnight assignment to continue their self-reflection. I asked that they give some thought to the pictures they drew, to the notes they took throughout the day, and to think about the kinds of things they complained about at their dinner tables at night. As they mulled over those things, I asked them to stay with a few key questions and we’d continue the discussion the next morning.

Take a moment to think about the questions I asked participants:

- What are your basic assumptions about what being a manager is really all about?
- Would the associates you work with every day characterize your style of management as more like a parent or a partner?
- In thinking about the things that frustrate you the most about being a manager, how would you answer the question, “How am I helping this happen?”
- If you were to rethink the things you do as a manager and choose to make a change, what would be the most fundamental change you’d be willing to make?

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Chapter 3

Chipping Away at the Iceberg

Tired of Old Patterns

I walked into the workshop with Lynne and Bill the next morning and they were laughing about the conversations they had with their families the night before. “My wife wants to come by at lunch today and meet you,” Bill said. “She loved hearing me talk about ‘what part of this is mine to own?’” Lynne added, “I decided I’m going to keep that Mother’s Day card in my desk, and every time I see it I’ll remember this conference when I began the shift from ‘parent to partner.’”

As the second day of the workshop began, I couldn’t help but think how often I hear the same comments all across the country.

“I felt relieved yesterday when I realized that I wasn’t the only one so frustrated with the way we’re doing things,” Jerry said. “We all work in our own little silos and we don’t get together often enough like this to listen to each other and problem solve. What we did yesterday helped me see that we have some real talent in this room and we should reach out to each other more often.”

“After looking at our pictures and thinking about how I helped this happen, my expectations about this workshop have shifted,” Deb said. “I came in yesterday with some people in mind who were bugging me, hoping to get some ideas on how to change them. Now I see that the real issue is changing what *I’m* doing. I took away two key lines from yesterday and I’m going to put them on my bathroom mirror: ‘You get what you tolerate’ and ‘It’s never what anyone else is doing, it’s how we respond to what they’re doing.’”

“I’m amazed at the importance of our visual diagrams,” Paul said. “I can talk about getting out of victim thinking now or moving away from parent/child ways of dealing with each other, and now I have a way to explain it in a staff meeting that will stick with people. When I make a change in how I manage, my staff deserves some sense of why I’m doing what I’m doing.”

As the group listened to the impressions of their peers, I noticed that they were applying the content in several different ways. “Speaking of the different styles we have and the idea of ‘getting off the seesaw,’ I have to say that this model was totally new to me,” Bob said. “I’ve been to a lot of management workshops and I’ve never thought about looking at things through that filter. I need to remember it during meetings with my vice president. We have our own version of a parent/child relationship. I just never realized it before.”

I captured takeaway ideas on a flip chart for follow-up and asked the group to give me its initial responses to the questions I asked the day before. Knowing that the introverts in the room appreciated that additional time to process their thoughts, I wasn’t surprised when one of the more quiet men in the group, Richard, a seasoned manager, spoke up first.

“Yesterday when we started this workshop, you asked us how we would characterize our culture,” he said. “I wouldn’t have thought about it then but after we talked about the pictures we drew, I’d have to say our culture is all about parent/child ways of doing things. As I looked at those questions last night I could sum up my thinking on all of them with that parent/child seesaw you drew for us. I’ve grown up in hierarchy, and that fits perfectly with a parent/child approach to managing. I’ve been helping it happen

by micromanaging and ‘running a tight ship,’ as they say, and I’ve lost some good people because I didn’t involve them in decisions. I didn’t see that at the time but I can see it now. The most fundamental change I have to make—and I think our organization needs to make—is getting out of the parent/child way of doing things.” Several heads nodded. “Maybe we can teach an old dog some new tricks,” someone said.

“I think you put your finger on exactly what needs to happen,” Jim said. “This parent/child pattern we have with our staff is pervasive, and we’ve perpetuated what we don’t want. No wonder we complain about the culture of entitlement we have. It’s one thing to see the pattern we’ve been in, and it’s quite another to begin changing that pattern. Maybe we need to have a goal for the management team to examine all the ways we function as parents with our staff or children with our vice presidents and work on changing that this year. We could call it our year of getting off the seesaw!”

“I think the timing is good for us to move in this direction,” Bill added. “Our new CEO keeps talking about creating a culture of accountability, and she’s the reason we’re at this workshop, so we should make the most of the investment they’re making in us as a management team.”

It was gratifying to see this group take ownership of its behavior. When Bill mentioned their new CEO, I thought about the conversation she and I had over dinner a few weeks before: I was a consultant for another organization where she previously worked. That organization went through a successful culture change over a three-year period and she wanted to replicate that process with this organization. I remembered her comment as we agreed on the overall approach she wanted. “I need you to get the motor running in this group,” she said. “I’ll work with the senior team to help them come around, and as you have debriefing meetings with us after each session, I think we can get a shift allowing us to move into this century!”

Listening to the managers that morning reflecting on the changes in their thinking and taking ownership for the things they could influence, I saw a core group beginning to gel and decided that the process was, in fact, under way. I opted to spend some time making a business case for shifting from parent to partner with the hope of adding to the “critical mass” of managers who were getting it. I also wanted to dispel the notion that “it could never happen here” by highlighting the best management practices this group had experienced.

Making the Case for Change

When I asked the managers to recall their experiences working at the staff level and the best managers they remembered, it was easy for them to identify key characteristics that made these managers stand out in their memory. This list included:

- Trusted me to do the right thing and use my head
- Treated me as an equal and listened to my ideas or points of disagreement
- Gave me the latitude to decide how to do things as long as the goal was met
- Let me decide what I needed to improve on and provided support for meeting my goals
- Included me in all decisions that impacted my area
- Encouraged me to take on new things I wasn’t sure I could handle
- Allowed me to learn from mistakes rather than being punitive
- Helped me see my strengths and work on my rough edges
- Made sure I had what I needed to get the job done right

The discussion then moved to what these managers felt as they experienced this adult/adult approach to management from their past experiences. One of them said, “I grew personally and professionally working with this guy and was sad to see him relocate to another city.” Another said, “She was such a good role model that it made me feel like I could be a good manager someday.” Lynne summed up this discussion when she said, “Working with him was so motivating I would’ve walked over hot coals for

him.” Richard had been listening to the discussion and, in his typical sage-like fashion, identified the crux of the issue. “I think what made me want to work with this guy was that he really meant it when he said we were partners in getting the work done. He wasn’t into power and being the ‘big cheese.’ You asked us in the homework last night to think about a fundamental change we were willing to make, and if we’re serious about getting out of this parent/child pattern we have to share the decision-making.”

His comment was a perfect segue for my next question: “Why does it make good business sense to move decision-making out into the organization?” Bill quickly responded, “Top companies that excel in customer service make their employees responsible for keeping customers happy, whatever it takes.” He mentioned Ritz-Carlton, Southwest Airlines, and Nordstrom.

I shared an experience I had with a Nordstrom clerk a few years ago. I was in the Mall of America store and noticed a pair of expensive shoes that I’d seen in a catalog in my hometown of Nashville. I decided to try them on to see if they were really worth the money, and a clerk commented that they looked nice and he’d be glad to wrap them up for me. I hesitated for a moment and told him that I’d just wait and order them when I got back home to Nashville. He asked why and I explained that I’d seen them in a catalog for \$30 less than the price they were asking. He said, “No problem, I’ll just take \$30 off of our price and you can take them now.” As my jaw dropped I asked him, “Can you really do that?” I was incredulous at his response because in my experience you’d have to have at least two approvals, a signature or two, and more than likely a meeting before this kind of thing could happen. In that moment as I gathered my things and headed to the register with him, I could clearly see the culture I’d grown up in and the one he was working in.

The value of moving decision-making closer to the point of service is that the decisions made are often better ones. I love the story I heard at a conference years ago about a consultant who worked with a management group that owned several country clubs in California. As they gathered for an annual meeting and reviewed various reports about the company, they found that an issue had come up in all the clubs related to people walking out with bottles of shampoo. Realizing that they were losing money, the managers suggested that dispensers be installed in all the showers to deal with this problem. The consultant suggested that they check with one of the most popular members of the housekeeping staff, Ben, to see what he thought. Ben was the go-to guy everyone knew at the club and had been with the company for years. When asked what his solution would be he quickly said, “I’d just take the top off all the shampoo bottles. No one will take them home if they don’t have a top!”

The managers laughed as I related this story and gave me a few more stories about how money could be saved if they consulted with the frontline people who had great ideas.

I wanted to continue to bring this discussion close to home for the group so I asked them, “Why would it make good business sense for your organization to redistribute decision-making to those closer to the real work?” In just a few minutes the group offered several examples of how the organization could benefit with this change. The list they made on the flip chart that morning mirrored what you’ll find in business literature and business practices of progressive organizations. As you read through the list they made below, think about how you might make the case for this change in your organization.

Moving decision-making out into the organization makes good business sense in that it allows us to:

- Improve retention of top performers and “do more with less”
- Improve response to change initiatives, promoting commitment rather than just compliance
- Enhance customer service efforts and responsiveness to each customer
- Reduce workarounds and cost because decisions at the point of service are better decisions
- Deal with issues in a more timely fashion when staff is accustomed to problem solving and taking ownership instead of just waiting to be told
- Become the employer of choice in a competitive environment
- Increase our ability to hire Generation Y employees who want to feel like they make a difference

- Develop emerging leaders, which gives us more “bench strength” when we have openings for new managers so we don’t lose them to the competition
- Improve staff engagement and reduce the need for “mental health days” and sick time.

While the managers made a good business case for changing their culture, they also gave me a “teachable moment” I couldn’t pass up. That last comment about mental health days allowed me to share a principle with the group that’s the underpinning of so much of what we were discussing. Moving from a parental approach to partnerships in how we manage is fundamentally about creating a balance between responsibility, authority, and accountability.

I like to begin this process by defining the terms I just mentioned and using the analogy of a carpenter’s tool called a level. Imagine that the level has three gauges that reflect whether or not something is balanced. The first gauge represents *responsibility*, defined as aspects of a job for which you’re able to respond . . . *Response-ability*. The second gauge represents *authority*, defined as the latitude to make decisions. The third gauge represents *accountability*, defined as a willingness to answer for results and learn from mistakes. I usually make a point of defining this because accountability in many organizations is a euphemism for “gotcha!” and is often viewed as punitive. As long as accountability is seen as a way of deciding who needs to be punished, real accountability will never happen. (We’ll discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 5.)

I use the idea of three gauges in a level to reflect the fact that responsibility, authority, and accountability need to come together as a package deal. They need to be equal and balanced with each other. Each time I say that in a group of managers, a groan usually goes through the room because they’ve grown accustomed to that level not reflecting a balance. How often have you had responsibility for something (in your job description) and accountability (will be evaluated) for something over which other people make decisions? Have you seen someone excused or rescued so there was no accountability for making poor decisions? Have you been given responsibility and at the same time been micromanaged so your decisions were second-guessed or overruled? This basic principle of management is so often ignored that we’re used to things being just the “crazy way things are around here.” Perhaps that carpenter’s level with three gauges doesn’t pop into your mind as it does mine when you find yourself needing a mental health day, but as with anything that’s out of balance, there’s usually a price to pay. As we continue to reexamine basic assumptions and principles at the bottom of that proverbial iceberg, getting things back in balance is absolutely essential.

Peter Block writes about this in his classic book, *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest*: “Partnership is critical . . . it balances responsibility and is a clear alternative to parenting.” He underscores the fundamental nature of redistributing decision-making in the organization when he says, “If the issues of real power, control, and choice are not addressed and renegotiated, then our efforts to change organizations become an exercise in cosmetics.”¹

Heads nodded in the room as I read that line. Almost everyone had experience with not having the authority they needed to make a decision that impacted outcomes for which they were responsible. They talked about being held accountable for a budget, but having no control over charges made. They mentioned signing on for committee work in which they thought they had responsibility for some decisions, only to find that those decisions had already been made.

They also mentioned a former CEO who was big on “participative management.” This was in response to my question as to whether or not they’d experienced cosmetic changes in their work environment. “He was all about changing our culture so it wasn’t so top-down,” Paul said. “We had all these task forces to work on issues he thought were important and it took a lot of time and money over an entire year. When it was all said and done it was clear that he chose some of the issues because he already knew what he wanted done. We went through the motions of thinking we were going to decide some things and in the end all he wanted was the input that supported his decisions. It was a real charade.” When you stop to

think about it, participative management implies that while others can participate in a decision, the actual decision-making authority lies elsewhere. There's no real balance of power in this relationship, and a balance of power is what partnership is all about.

Four Requirements for a Partnership

I often use Peter Block's ideas for real partnership when I'm working with managers who use the words but may not grasp the reality of this approach. I do this so management teams can begin to see the difference in partnership and their experience on either end of that parent/child dynamic. These four requirements are another way of defining what an adult/adult work environment looks like.

First and foremost, partnership means employees at all levels have a discussion about their purpose as an organization. Rather than top management "enrolling" the rest of the organization in the vision they create, everyone has a voice in the organization's vision.

I had the pleasure of watching this process in a suburban hospital years ago, and it was fascinating to see how the staff responded. Meetings each shift involved members of the executive team and all staff of a particular department, during which participants discussed organizational challenges and solutions for using resources to meet these challenges. I listened to members of the executive team when this process ended, and they described a gold mine of generated ideas. One of them said that the benefit of those meetings far exceeded expectations.

The second principle that Block mentions is just as important and is often the test of a real partnership. He refers to this as the "right to say no." If I relinquish my right to disagree and voice a differing point of view, I've effectively moved into the child seat on that seesaw. As adults involved in complex organizational life, there are bound to be times of honest disagreement, and whether or not a real partnership exists depends on how this is handled. I like the way Peter Block defines this balance of power between adults in different roles. He says the boss will have 51 percent of the decision-making power and the subordinate will have 49 percent. As he reminds us, "Partnership means that you may lose your argument but you never lose your voice."

The third principle that Block outlines is joint accountability—or shared accountability—because each person is responsible and accountable for the role he or she plays in the work environment. The outcomes in a given unit or department are everyone's responsibility. Whether or not a meeting goes well is everyone's responsibility. This means the manager is no longer the "keeper of staff morale," nor should she be targeted when customer service scores drop. With the mutuality of partnership comes mutual accountability.

Lastly, Peter Block identifies the all-important need for honesty. Just as honesty is essential in a marriage, the ability to be truthful with each other is a deal-breaker for partnerships. Patrick Lencioni, in his bestseller *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, emphasizes this when he says that if we really care about the team, we owe each other our honesty. To be less than honest with each other is a fundamental betrayal of trust and undermines teamwork.²

Block also emphasizes the importance of those closest to the work having real ownership and responsibility. He refers to these staff members as the "touch labor," those on the front line for improving quality, customer service, or business results. Partnership as he defines it is "the willingness to give more choice" to these all-important people on the front line—not total control, just something more equal. When we opt to get off the parent/child seesaw and relate to each other as adults, we have, in fact, created something more equal.

"I really like 'something more equal,'" Lynne said. "I think we should use that when we meet with our executive team on Friday to talk about our ideas following this workshop. I've spent a lot of time thinking about how I want to relate differently with my staff, but listening to you I realize that I also want to be

treated differently by my vice president. Maybe he can hear me when I say I want ‘something more equal’ in how we relate to each other. I have to find my voice and stop swallowing how I feel in fear of upsetting him. Now I’m really coming out of my comfort zone!”

Paul laughed along with her when she said that and added, “I think it would really help if collectively we found our voice as a management team and shared with the VP group why we think this culture-change effort is worth it. I think the business case we made for this is right on, and I don’t see how they could argue about fostering more ownership and accountability in the organization. We can’t just do this in our silos, though. We need to speak with one voice when we meet with them on Friday.” As heads nodded around the room it seemed clear that a critical mass was forming in this team.

As the group left for lunch I saw the light in their eyes, and it was fun to feel the energy shift from the preceding morning. They now identified what wasn’t working in their work environment. They recognized what was theirs to own . . . their thinking started to shift. (I hope that the iceberg is coming to mind as you follow their progress.)

As the group returned from lunch, I drew the iceberg on a flip chart to reflect the process they’d begun. For several in the group who were visual learners, this diagram made sense. “This helps me see how I can begin to get my head around how this process of culture change really works,” Paul said. “In so many other programs the content about culture change has been theoretical, but this captures a process that we can use to make it a reality.” Knowing that the process begins at the bottom of that iceberg in changing our basic assumptions, I used Paul’s comment to frame a key question for the group. I had two flip charts at the front of the room. I wrote the word *Then* on one chart and *Now* on the other. I asked the group to reflect on this question: “What were your assumptions about the management role prior to this program, and how has your thinking begun to shift with our discussions?” The chart below shows the answers to that question generated by the group.

Then	Now
Management is about being a strong leader.	Management is about allowing other people to be strong.
Managers know best.	Those closest to the work know best.
Managers are “over” the staff reporting to them.	Managers “work with” the staff who report to them.
Management is about staying on top of things.	Management is about developing staff to deal with things.
Managers decide/staff implement.	Strategy and implementation are not separate processes.
Managers identify problems and decide solutions.	Managers sell the problem and elicit solutions from staff.
Effective managers “run a tight ship.”	Managers are measured by what happens in their absence.

The list generated an animated discussion and, as one person commented, having this written in front of them really helped frame the conversation they needed to have with the executive team later that week. My reason for spending the morning shedding light on the beliefs, values, assumptions, and unwritten rules at the bottom of the iceberg was all about the fact that this discussion is essential to have more than just a “workshop high.” Taking the time to do the Then/Now exercise was time well spent. Granted, the list they developed was just the beginning of the shift in thinking that would come in this process, but it was where they needed to start.

I could sense the group beginning to see the implications of what they'd written as a way of "creating a future different from the past." Bill summed this up when he said, "It looks like we have to move decision-making out into the organization and not treat our staff as if someone died and left us in charge. At the same time, we have to renegotiate our relationships with the vice presidents so they move decision-making to us as well. Maybe the timing is good with this new CEO, since she comes from a really progressive organization."

Lynne, ever pragmatic, said, "I'm just speaking for myself, but it's one thing to get this with our heads and another thing to see real change a month from now. I remember you saying yesterday that 'culture change begins one conversation at a time,' so I need some help in what it would sound like and look like and feel like if we made the things on that right-hand chart our 'new normal.' Maybe if I can get some practical approaches for this whole idea I can see myself giving up motherhood at work!"

Lynne had perfectly framed the question that was hanging in the air that afternoon: "This makes sense, but how do we go from talking about it to doing it?" Beginning to answer this question was the next logical step for the group to maintain momentum for the changes they envisioned. The group opted to call this work for the following day "putting together a tool kit," and again I gave them some questions to consider overnight to prime the pump for our discussions the next day.

Take a moment to think about the questions I asked them:

- What have the "payoffs" been for you as you've been in the parent or child role?
- Have the payoffs been worth it?
- In reviewing the list of blind spots we discussed the first day, what three things are you willing to stop doing to create more of a partnership with others at work?
- What three things are you willing to start doing to develop something a little more equal in how you get the work done in your department?
- What do we need to do as a management team to foster a more equal relationship with our vice presidents?
- If we've created a "culture of entitlement" in this organization, how did we let that happen?

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Chapter 4

That Was Then and This Is Now

Developing Guiding Principles

As we stood around the coffee pot on the final workshop day, I chuckled when Paul walked in with a two-foot long, bright yellow carpenter's level. "I decided that since we were putting together our tool kit for culture change, I'd donate my level to the cause . . . so that whatever we do today keeps that basic principle in mind."

Starting the collective tool kit with guiding principles was exactly where I hoped to begin the day. We put his carpenter's level on the podium at the front of the room and I couldn't help but notice their energy as the day began. Lynne said, "I think we've been like gerbils on a wheel for so long that just the thought of going back to work with a different attitude next week feels really good. It's about time we all shifted to a more proactive mind-set . . . I think that should also be a guiding principle for us going forward . . . staying out of the pity puddle!" I opted to go with the flow I could sense in the group and asked them to develop a list of guiding principles that would inform their management practices and begin the culture change process. They gathered around flip charts in the room and developed the list below.

Guiding Principles of the Leadership Team

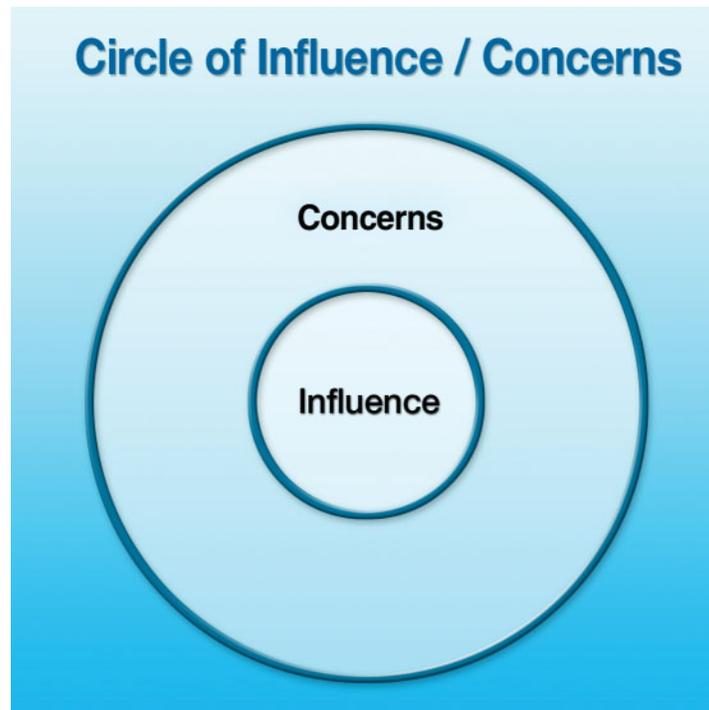
- Make every effort to have responsibility, authority, and accountability; be equal and balanced as we deal with issues and decisions.
- Stay proactive rather than reactive and keep asking, "What part of this is ours to own?"
- Move from hierarchy and silos to teams and horizontal relationship building.
- Be intentional about taking ownership and accountability and move away from victim and entitlement thinking.
- Develop relationships based on partnering as an alternative to parenting.

Jerry was mostly quiet that morning, but finally spoke up. "As I listen to this discussion, I have to wonder how we sustain the energy for this much substantive change," he said. "After we all come down from the 'workshop high,' how do we stay focused?" Clearly this group was beginning to feel the gravity of what they'd been discussing, and the reality started to sink in that they'd need to take ownership for managing this process. Lynne responded, "I think the answer to that is in the second guiding principle we've written, 'Stay proactive rather than reactive.' I know that the more I stay focused on the things I can do something about, the more energy I have. And it looks like we have a plate full of things we could do something about." Making the connection between energy levels and feeling proactive was exactly the issue, and once again the group handed me a teachable moment.

Staying Focused on Our Circle

In his book from the late 1980s that remains on the bestseller lists, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey highlights this idea when he lists the first of the seven habits as "be proactive."¹ He uses the illustration of two circles, a smaller circle inside a larger one, to reflect how we spend our time and energy (see Circle of Influence/Concerns on the next page). He suggests that the larger circle be called the "circle of concerns" in which we put the things we spend energy on that we don't have any control over (e.g., national

debt, world peace). However, there are things we put energy into that are very much within our control, directly or indirectly, and he refers to those as “the circle of influence.” Within that circle of things we can do something about might be our health, our relationships, our financial issues, and so forth. One of the points he makes with this illustration and admonition to stay focused on your “circle of influence” is that putting your energy into things you can influence builds your energy because it’s proactive. When you put energy into things you can’t impact, you become reactive and de-energized. If you’ve spent any time in a meeting that was basically a gripe session, you know about a lack of energy and feeling reactive. The key to sustaining energy both personally and as a group is to stay focused on the things you can influence.



From *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey (Simon and Schuster, 2013). Reprinted with permission.

One group I worked with years ago developed code language to help them get back in their circle of influence. When their energy dropped and they were on a slippery slope into that circle of concerns they had no control over, someone would simply say, “Come on, that’s not in our circle.” Everyone knew that when one of their peers used that line, it was time to get back to the things they could influence if they were going to have any energy. An easy way to do this is for someone to ask, “What part of this is ours to own or how are we helping that happen?” Taking ownership and considering options then rekindles the spark of “we can do this” and energy returns. Whether you use the steps “up out of the mud puddle” from Chapter 2 or you use the “circle of influence” from the work of Covey, the point is that staying proactive will sustain energy over the long haul ... and that’s key insight, both personally and professionally.

Considering the question “What part of this is ours to own?,” I asked the group to identify in broad terms how they’d respond to that question relative to the culture change they had envisioned. Deb said, “I think our time would be well spent if we focused on changing our responses so our relationships are more adult/adult rather than parent/child, changing how we go about making decisions, and changing how we get work done as a management team across departments.” Bill added, “I think it would be helpful to spend time on outcomes we expect to see. How we are going to know if this is working?” We had guiding principles and a plan for how to build the tool kit—now the real fun began. It was time to see what it

would look, sound, and feel like when those guiding principles played out day-to-day in the real world. As they took a morning break, it was easy to see by the light in their eyes that we had, in fact, found that “critical mass who get it.”

It's Not About What Happens... It's How We Respond that Matters.

I wrote this one-liner on the flip chart while the group was on break, and as they drifted back in the room I was interested in their comments when they read it. One of them smiled and said, “I’m going to have some entitled folks pretty upset when I stop the caretaking I’ve been doing.” Another nodded in agreement and said, “On behalf of our top performers who are the backbone of the place, I think it’s high time we stopped rescuing some folks, the ‘bless her heart’ types as you called them.” It was good to hear these managers taking ownership for the culture of entitlement they had created. Entitlement is always the outcome when managers function in a caretaking way.

As the remainder of the group came in, I asked them to pull out the checklist I had called “blind spots” in the manager role and discuss the behaviors they had in common with each other and those they intended to take ownership for changing. Susan, one of the newer managers in the group, was laughing as she looked over her list. “I have something checked in almost every one of these categories,” she said, “and I just can’t figure out how to get a handle on this.” I decided to share with the group what I’ve called “The Three Commandments for a Healthy Workplace” as a starting point for dealing with those blind spots. I’ve used these for years and find them universally helpful.

1. Send the mail to the right address.
2. Ask for what you need; it ups the chances you might get it.
3. Be true to how you honestly feel and trust your intuitive sense.

As I listened to them talk about difficulty delegating, workaholic behaviors, avoiding conflict, and lack of self-care, I could hear the patterns recognizable in my workshops all across the country. The names and faces change, but the issues stay remarkably similar. Over the years I’ve included this content in workshops and addressed some of these patterns myself, and I’ve learned a few things about behavior change. First and foremost, it helps to name and claim the behavior we want to change. I’ve found that writing down my intended changes helps, and saying them out loud to a friend or family member augments my intentions. If I write it down, say it out loud, and buddy up with someone who holds me accountable, I triple the chances I’ll actually do it. It helps to be very specific about intentions. I often use a Lily Tomlin quote to make this point: “I always wanted to be somebody. Now I realize I should have been more specific.”

Up Close and Personal

I asked these managers to identify three behaviors they wanted to change and to choose an accountability partner in their peer group with whom they’d routinely meet with for follow-up. I encouraged them to choose a peer partner who was good at some of the skill sets they’d be working on (e.g., delegation, assertiveness, self-care) and to decide how they’d check in with each other over the next few months. Behavior change is likely to be more successful in partnerships; doing it in isolation is next to impossible. When you hear someone say he’s overcommitted and needs to leave some committees and then you watch him impulsively sign up for another task force, an elbow or knowing look can work wonders in helping him stay on track with his commitment.

I’ve also learned that changing ingrained behavior takes time. Under stress we all regress, so you can expect to do better on some days than others. A manager I worked with years ago told me, “I used to catch myself and realize I had reverted to an old pattern as I drove home and processed the day’s events. Then I got to the point of catching myself an hour or two after a slip up. Now I can usually catch myself just before the old responses leave my lips!” Celebrate small victories and give yourself a pat on the back when you opt to use a tough love approach rather than rescue someone who normally plays you like a violin.

When you delegate tasks to those who can learn from them rather than falling into the “it’s easier to do it myself” trap, rewarding yourself by leaving a little early for an afternoon walk can be a good thing.

Another tip I learned the hard way is to not get caught up in how others might react when you choose a different response than they’ve grown accustomed to hearing. Working to change a culture of entitlement isn’t an easy task. Those with an entitled mindset are prone to making the manager the issue in conflicting situations. Remember the line, “Just because they throw it doesn’t mean you have to catch it?” Those who’ve counted on you to speak for them, think for them, and do for them will be very frustrated when you look at them and say, “It will be interesting to see how you work that out.” If you fall into the trap of gauging their responses before you actually do what’s needed in the situation, you’ll likely wear yourself out. The therapist I worked with years ago had a description of this “disease to please.” He said, “You simply need to honor your intuitive sense and act on what you know to be true. Getting caught up in how the other person might respond is like trying to throw a ball and catch it, too. You can do one or the other—send or receive—but throwing the ball and catching it too never works.”

What works is being clear about what you want to do differently, building a support system of friends who will celebrate with you and also hold you accountable, then trusting the process. In effect, this is moving from the need to please and control to a healthy sense of detachment, knowing that each person is responsible for himself or herself. As you relinquish the role of a caretaker, camp director, chief problem solver, or referee, you can expect a certain amount of push back. Consider that a good sign and remember another old adage I love: “Weaning is a noisy process!”

I used that line with the managers that morning, since several of them commented on shifting out of the parent mode. Bill said, “I work with people who are always using the phrase ‘they owe me,’ and that really gets old.” In a nutshell, Bill captured the motto of the entitlement culture. As heads nodded around the room, there was also the acknowledgement that the management team helped this happen, and that it had been this way for years. One author called this “organizational codependency” in that the employee sees the organization much like a parent and expects to be taken care of and have the organization meet her needs.²

This conversation provided a perfect time to remind the group of a phrase we used the day before: “That was then and this is now.” This was a pivotal moment for the group to recognize that culture change and getting off the parent/child seesaw are fundamentally about making choices. This group of managers was making the choice to stop doing what wasn’t working and to find their voice as a management team. In turn, as they move to create a work environment that fosters empowerment, the people they work with will also make choices to step up and be a team player—or not.

As these managers took ownership of their behavior, they also decided how they’d talk about it with their staff members, an essential step in building that tool kit for culture change. Just as the guiding principles would help them be consistent, the discussions in staff meetings would set the tone for the staff to better understand in a practical way what culture change looks like. The managers’ decision to be transparent would also go a long way in fostering trust and a sense of partnership.

Whenever I’m asked about the process for culture change, I always say that taking ownership for personal change is step one. In his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni emphasizes the value of being honest, candid, and vulnerable as a means of building trust, an important step in developing teamwork. As we think about partnering with our colleagues, let’s turn to the concept of team agreements.

From Working “Over” to Working “With”

I reminded the group that I was scheduled to come back for the second part of this program in three months, so perhaps we could use that time as phase one in this “work in progress” and talk over what needed to happen in that time frame. They agreed to use the next three staff meetings to cover the “what, why, and how” of culture change and to use a conversational approach rather than a student/teacher style

in meetings with the staff. Lynne said, “Let’s look at the ‘what and the why’ in the first meeting and then invite them to share with us what the ‘how’ could look like in the last two meetings.” The group agreed with this approach and once again gave me the perfect segue for adding to their tool kit.

The idea of working as adults in partnership with each other hinges on managers getting out of the hierarchical mindset that you’re “over” a group of people. Instead, view it as working “with” a group, each with a part to play, each with its own unique skills and talents, and each needing to commit to the greater good. One way to foster this shift in thinking is to use team agreements. You may have heard this called a code of conduct, or shared expectations. I’m not attached to any particular phrase, but the concept is essential in developing a team. Team agreements need to be real, written, and regularly reviewed. I mention that they need to be real because this process needs to address current reality, not personality traits (e.g., kind, dependable, trustworthy), however important those might be. Television talk show host Dr. Phil McGraw often says, “We teach people how to treat us.” The question then becomes, “What are we teaching each other?” I also believe these agreements should be written, since “bless her heart” is going to say that no one ever told her what was expected of the team. These agreements need to be reviewed periodically and revised as things improve so new ones can be added. Three to five team agreements usually work well and allow people to remember them without having to refer to notes or a chart in the manager’s office. An easy way to frame this discussion of team agreements is to ask, “What do I need from you and what do you need from me for us to work well together?” Listed below are some of the team agreements I’ve seen groups use; reference this list as you think about your own responses to your team.

- If you have a problem with me, I’ll be the first one to know it.
- We have zero tolerance for chronic negativity.
- Work out relationship issues with each other and come to me only for advice on how to best go about doing that.
- If you bring me a problem, also give me your best ideas on how to deal with it.
- Give each other the benefit of the doubt and check things out rather than assuming or gossiping.
- Praise in public and criticize in private.
- Our disagreements will be discussed in the meeting rather than the parking lot.
- We’ll talk out our differences rather than act them out.

Now, there are always people who will test things and attempt to be exempt from expected group norms. I shared a story about a group of managers who anticipated this happening in their own peer group and decided to add an agreement to their list to deal with it. The agreement they added was, “Whoever is impacted by it deals with it.” They’d talk with that person and simply say, “What happened here doesn’t seem to match what we all agreed on.” If that didn’t get the needed behavior change, two peers also impacted by the behavior would address it the same way and say, “This isn’t what we agreed on; what do you think needs to happen to get things back on track?” If that still didn’t work, they agreed to bring the issue up in a staff meeting for the group to resolve as a whole.

Knowing that dealing with conflict or difficult behavior wasn’t a strength of these managers, I added a tool I’ve used for years to frame the discussion. I asked, “How many of you have ever talked with someone about a needed change and then discovered a few weeks later that it was as if the person you talked with was deaf—she hadn’t heard a word you said, and nothing really changed?” Heads nodded around the room. I wrote the word *DEAF* as an acronym for the group to use when they had to have one of these crucial conversations.

Describe the behavior that’s problematic. (Don’t attack the person.)

Explain the impact of that behavior. (Be honest rather than just skimming over the issue.)

Ask for what you need in the way of a different behavior.

Follow up with a thank-you or follow-through by revisiting the issue and sharing the consequences if the needed behavior change doesn’t happen. The follow-through can also involve the use of a third party for insight or mediation.

Watching how the managers responded to this discussion, I opted to have them work at their tables on a particular behavior they found problematic and then decide how they'd use this acronym to respond differently than in the past. Lynne said, "I found that if I forced myself to be really honest about the impact of the behavior by saying I was embarrassed or disappointed or felt let down or undermined, the whole conversation had more impact. If I just said something mild like 'it really bothers me,' the whole conversation seems like I'm just going through the motions." Lynne hit a key point: The more honest you are about the impact of the behavior that needs to change, the more likely you are to get behavior change. The more you talk in generalities, the less likely you are to have any real lasting change from this conversation. We're all prone to use "weasel words" (e.g., if you could sorta, maybe, kinda try to at some point) instead of being specific and honest, so this takes some practice. I urged the managers to use this idea at home until they developed some confidence with it rather than taking on their "barracuda" the next week. As the group went off to lunch Paul said, "This may be just what I need to better deal with my 16-year-old son. Thank you!"

Shared Decision-making

I took the bright yellow carpenter's level Paul had brought in and made that the focal point for our afternoon discussion on changing how decisions are made in the organization. Susan set the tone for the work to be done when she said, "While we have spent time on how to deal with the entitled staff we have, I am really pleased to focus on changing how we make decisions. I think this is not only going to allow us to make better decisions by tapping the wisdom in our frontline people, but it will also help us keep our top performers who want to be more autonomous and use their heads. Our staff engagement scores will likely improve and it will surely make my life easier when I can delegate some decisions to where they really belong."

Picking up on the point to move decisions where they belong, I suggested that the group consider what they would do differently if they moved decision-making out into the organization and allowed the staff to make decisions about the things they were responsible and accountable for. The key question to keep in mind is, "Who has to make this work?," knowing that they're the ones who need to be involved in decisions about the work. The authority also needs to be commensurate with the responsibility and accountability, so the more they're responsible and accountable the more authority they need for decision-making. The list of things they developed (see below) was a good start in allowing staff to have more autonomy in their work environment, and it may also serve to jump-start your thinking along these lines. In reality, this is where the rubber meets the road as the shift is made from parent to partner.

Moving Decision-making Out into the Organization

- Compliance with standards and regulations
- Use of best practices
- Process improvement, quality issues
- Customer service issues
- Interface with other departments
- Input in preparation of operating budget and capital equipment budget
- Idea generation for cost-cutting or revenue generation

Richard was looking at this list and said, "I can see how the staff in different departments might gravitate to different issues, so we could share this list in each of our staff meetings and get their ideas on what their priorities would be." Lynne added, "We could ask the staff to tell us who they would like to see on a staff action team and arrange for this group to meet and decide what they want to work on. My guess is that the folks in my area would opt for customer service issues because our latest scores aren't great." Deb

was quietly taking in this conversation and then touched on an important point. “I can see putting a team together and having them choose some issues to work on,” she said, “but how do we make sure we’re not going to inadvertently create some loose cannons with groups going off in different directions? We need to be clear about the authority that these groups have and set boundaries to manage this.” Watching the group grapple with relinquishing authority I was reminded that this is often the most difficult part of the process of sharing decision-making and dealing with staff as partners in a process.

Several years ago I worked with a colleague at a consulting firm in which we assisted managers in putting together staff action teams. We developed a framework for managing issues related to authority, which we called the Four Levels of Authority. This system helped clarify what the boundaries were in sharing decision-making. I’ve listed these in a chart (below) to reflect increasing levels of authority for decision-making. Obviously different levels of authority would be appropriate in different situations in order to keep a balance between responsibility, authority, and accountability.

Four Levels of Authority

Level One: The authority to collect data and research an issue, gathering information; this is presented to the person or group making the decision.

Level Two: The authority to gather data and make a recommendation that’s presented to the person or group making the decision.

Level Three: The authority to gather data, make a recommendation, and offer a plan of action; this plan must meet agreed-upon parameters (e.g., budget neutral, sign-off by HR) and is implemented with tracking of results.

Level Four: The authority to use independent action in which a person or group gathers information, decides on a course of action, and implements a decision. They may or may not report back to the person who granted the authority depending on the situation.

There are a number of reasons to use these levels of authority in the process of moving decision-making out into the organization. First and foremost, agreeing on the level of authority at the time a project is undertaken makes the expectations clear. Second, putting this in the minutes of a meeting minimizes the possibility of the authority changing as the problem solving is underway. This approach necessitates managers being very clear about the parameters for a project before the project gets underway. It’s not really fair, for instance, for a group to be working on a set of assumptions about the parameters or guidelines they need to meet and then have them change halfway through the project. I’ve found that the more teams or task forces have level three and four authority, the more engaged they are in their work environment. By noting the level of authority with projects in the minutes of meetings, it’s possible to track over time if managers are really walking the talk and letting those closest to the work make decisions about the work.

As I reviewed the levels of authority with this management team, they could easily see that being clear about authority would keep them from falling in old traps of the right hand not knowing what the left hand meant and task forces proceeding on false assumptions. “I’d love to have my group do their own work schedules with parameters that they establish,” Deb said. “This would be level-four authority, since they’re responsible and accountable for getting the work done.” Lynne added, “If our staff action team opted to deal with customer service issues, I could see where level-three authority would fit. They’d have access to all the customer feedback data. I think that using a structure like this would also go over well with our vice presidents, since they’ll see that we’re not going from one extreme to the other in this process of sharing decision-making and partnering with our staff.”

There’s a valid need for those involved in the staff action teams to have training on the various skill sets necessary for moving from the dependent ways they’ve functioned to taking initiative and becoming more autonomous. We discussed ways in which this training could be done in cross-functional groups,

with everyone involved getting the tips and tools they'd need at the same time. "Since I'm representing human resources," Deb said, "I'll be glad to talk with our director of staff development to set up some sessions when we want to get this organized. We could offer content on conducting effective meetings, group problem-solving, reaching consensus, and so forth, and this would be more cost-effective than each manager doing this individually."

"Speaking of group problem-solving," Lynne said, "I'm really looking forward to getting this staff action team together so we can go from griping about things to actually being proactive and problem-solving issues. I like the model we used on our first day together because it was very simple and straightforward, and the work we did only took about an hour. We had a step-by-step process and a timekeeper and we came up with good ideas. I can see my staff being very creative with this."

Lynne was referencing the process of moving from reactive to proactive thinking that I had used with the group that first afternoon. Using this as a problem-solving model involves getting a group of five to nine people together and deciding on an issue they want to problem-solve. The process is outlined below and is usually completed in less than an hour.

Group Problem-solving Process

Step One: Identify the issue and write it on a flip chart as well as the level of authority for the issue.

As the problem statement is being written, the group can agree to deal with the issue and not just symptoms of the issue.

Step Two: On a second flip chart page, write the question, "How are we helping this happen?" The responses to this question often include: "We haven't sent the mail to the right address," "We've done workarounds instead of solving the issue," or "We've talked about this in the parking lot but have never addressed it as a group."

Step Three: On a third flip chart page, brainstorm options in dealing with the issue and reach consensus as to those that would work as Plan A or B, or those that would work in a short-term or long-term way.

Step Four: On a fourth flip chart page, develop an action plan that encompasses (a) who will do what and by when; (b) the expected outcomes; and (c) who needs to know our plans or be involved in this process?

As I put this four-step process on the flip chart, the group reflected on how useful it had been to them on that first day to actually use a process with a timekeeper rather than processing the issue to death or making a knee-jerk response. "It's helpful to use this model for problem-solving," Paul said, "and to keep it in our thinking when we're talking to someone who could benefit from what you call 'getting up out of the pity puddle.' Either way we use it, I think it helps us all to learn this way of shifting our thinking, and with just four steps I don't even need to use my notes!"

Richard challenged the group with an interesting idea as he listened to this discussion. "We did have a good time using this model that first day we were all together, and we came up with some action steps we could definitely use," he said. "It seems to me that we need to form a peer group ourselves, an operations team we could call it, to continue working on issues that need our group involvement. As we work on streamlining a system or better managing a change process, we could move into more of a sense of partnership with our senior team." Heads nodded around the room as the group commented on how beneficial it had been to spend time together getting to know each other out of their usual silos. They elected officers for their operations team and agreed on an agenda for their first meeting. They decided to focus on some policies that needed more consistency across departments and some quality issues that impacted the group as a whole. I was particularly pleased to see the management team opt to meet monthly and tap into their creativity as a group, because this is a real learning curve when the pattern has been to function in silos. It was vital for this group of managers to have their own experience with building teams and reaching consensus or

problem-solving a key issue. As the saying goes, “You can’t teach something you haven’t experienced.” If they were going to be coaches for their staff, they needed to learn for themselves what it’s like to reach consensus or deal with resistance to change. Functioning in a peer group is in itself a learning curve.

As the group came back from the afternoon break, it was clear that we had a critical mass in the group to maintain momentum. They had a light in their eyes and were energized by the thought of doing some things differently. Lynne commented that she’d never seen the group have so much energy at the end of a three-day workshop. “When we meet with our senior team tomorrow I’m going to make a note to say a word of thanks to our new CEO for the time and money to do this training,” she said. “It couldn’t have come at a better time since we’re moving into a challenging year with more competition and the ever-present need for high quality and low cost. We need everyone’s best thinking, and I think these teams might well unleash some much needed energy and creativity.”

While I appreciated Lynne’s enthusiasm and optimism, I opted to pick up on her comment about unleashing energy. The point was for this group to know how to sustain energy over time rather than succumbing to their old pattern of a “workshop high.”

Pacing the Process

Framing this last phase as “pacing the process” for change, I asked the group to develop the talking points they wanted to use with the senior team the next day when they got together for a debriefing. I had met with this senior team before the workshop and outlined the content I’d be covering and the major themes in the program. I knew there was consensus in that group on the need to engage the management team to a greater extent in day-to-day operations so the senior team could be more strategic in their meetings. I also knew that some members of that team would be more willing to relinquish control than others and that they would need time to process the ways they had helped to foster a culture of entitlement and top-down management styles. Having worked with the CEO, I was confident in her ability to guide this process so “the middle wouldn’t get ahead of the top,” as the saying goes. Being intentional about pacing the process would be time well spent.

As a starting point, I reminded the group of Gandhi’s famous line, “You must be the change you want to see in the world,” and I asked that they review with their accountability partner the three behaviors they intended to change to make the shift from parent to partner. As they completed this at their tables, I also asked that they identify how they would know if their personal work were successful. The point in all this is that culture change efforts simply involve enough people changing how they think and respond so as to create a “new normal.” They opted to call this first step “up close and personal,” and it was fun to listen to ways they knew this would impact their personal and professional lives when they made these changes.

As a second step, the group developed talking points for the debriefing with the senior team the next day. I asked them to listen to what the takeaway ideas were for the senior team following my meeting with them earlier in the week and to share their own takeaways at the end of these three days. I asked that they decide within each group what their next steps would be going forward.

The next steps for the senior team often include reviewing the items that need to come off their agendas and move to the operations team. The senior team may decide to read some of the books I use in the course so they can operate off the same information as their managers. I routinely ask that each vice president meet with his or her direct reports and develop team agreements with time frames and scheduled check-ins. As senior teams begin to utilize the talent in the middle of the organization, they’ll often opt to have the chairs of the operations team attend their meetings periodically to improve linkage. Several senior teams have opted to invest in more training for their managers along the lines of Six Sigma, Lean concepts, or quality improvement skill-set training.

On occasion, I've seen senior teams change the dynamics with the Board of Directors to whom they report, as they recognized the need to move from a parent/child mode of operation to one that was more of a partnership. Recently, I worked with a senior team that had been at odds with its Board for quite some time. I was intrigued to see how members responded to the question, "How are we helping this happen?" There was a pregnant pause in the room. Like the managers who reported to them, several seasoned executives in that room had honestly never thought of looking at the issue through this lens. As they considered their options to do some things differently, they developed a plan to be better prepared for board meetings and more proactive in handling issues. The shift in their energy as a senior team was significant.

Next steps for the management team typically involve developing talking points for their staff meetings or staff workshops in which they share an overview of the content that's meaningful to them. It's vital to be as consistent as possible and to offer staff options about how they can get involved with a staff action team, a journal club, or a process improvement team. The development of team agreements between the manager and staff also takes place during this time. Aim to complete the process of developing all team agreements within the first three months.

How Do We Know If This Is Working?

I'm often asked this question at the end of a management workshop, and there are a number of answers that shed light on the all-important need to "create a future different than the past," to quote Peter Block once again. Managers know they're moving in the right direction if they find time for personal lives again. In the work environment, the learning curve is headed in the right direction when:

- managers talk less in staff meetings and staff members contribute to the agenda for staff meetings or run the meetings, giving managers time to provide an update.
- staff meetings involve reporting from team members working on different issues or a report from the staff action team.
- managers no longer have an office door covered with notes when they return from a day off.
- issues that involve day-to-day operations of the department are handled in staff action teams or process improvement teams rather than being the sole responsibility of the manager.
- the department functions in a routine way when the manager is on vacation.
- managers ask questions rather than always feeling they have to have all the answers.
- staff members talk with each other when there's a conflict and come to the manager only when they're unable to resolve the issue.
- staff meetings are well attended because staff members are engaged in tracking outcomes and take initiative for things in their "circle of influence."
- staff elect a staff action team with some members who've been naysayers but then emerge as cheerleaders for an idea they helped develop.
- staff may bring an issue to the manager for discussion, but they also have in mind what needs to happen to better manage the situation.
- it's not uncommon to hear staff say, "We help that happen when we ... and we need to take ownership for that."
- issues are dealt with before they escalate, and there are fewer situations of "crisis management."
- staff action teams with level-three authority for an issue implement an action plan despite any manager skepticism.

As managers work together in a cross-functional operations team, they get to know each other and often become more empathetic about the work of another department, or see ways in which they impact each other as they deal with process issues. Realizing the value of a peer group, they can use each other as sounding boards or resources. Things are progressing in the right direction when "we" is used more often

than “I.” This process of horizontal relationship building also allows the group to tap into its creativity and synergy, and it’s always a positive sign when the attendance is good at peer group meetings. Quite often, the operations team will positively impact cost savings and quality, and its influence in the organization grows as members demonstrate their effectiveness. Typically, they work on building consistency across silos in terms of policy implementation or change management. Process improvement is clearly a central concern in most organizations, as well as compliance issues. Issues related to HR, including the onboarding process, talent management, or training for new managers, also cut across all departments and may well be a part of this team’s work. Benchmarking and the use of best practices allow the group to broaden its perspectives and develop networks with other organizations.

One of the things I watch for in management peer groups is the extent to which they can make a decision for the greater good of the organization, even if they get some push back from their own departments. If managers are more aligned with their individual departments, they can’t act in the best interest of the organization as a whole.

Speaking of team development, when that workshop came to a close, it was interesting to see the managers reflect on their newfound sense of teamwork as they gathered up the flip charts and made plans for their meeting with the senior team the following day. Spontaneously, they began to talk about “the one thing they were going to most remember” about the workshop. “I’ll be forever grateful for that parent/adult/child model,” Lynne said. “It felt like you turned the light on in the room with that one.” Jerry said, “I’m just glad to finally have an operations team that can deal with system issues instead of blaming people when things aren’t working.” Paul added, “I’m going back next week with a sense of optimism because these ideas are so practical I can teach them to my staff, like how to get out of victim thinking. I think this is going to be something we can sustain with the structure we’ve put in place, and hopefully it will be more than just another workshop and manual on my bookcase.” “I think my biggest take away from these three days,” Susan said, “is that iceberg you used on the first day. That really captures this experience for me. We changed our thinking about what management is all about, and that led us to change the way we operate as a management team. Hopefully, we’ll see some lasting culture change. It’s all there in the iceberg.”

Lynne asked me, “You’ve watched this process many times with many different groups, so I want to know how you describe all this in one sentence. In a big-picture perspective, how would you frame the process we’re launching?” There was a ripple of laughter in the room, since they all knew by now that it was difficult for me to say anything in just one sentence! In my best effort to be concise I said, “In a nutshell, this leadership team is choosing to opt out of a dependent mode (read “victim”) and function more independently (to find their voice) so they can ultimately operate interdependently for the greater good of the organization.” In unison I heard them say, “Let the process begin!”

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Chapter 5

It's All About Sustainability

Making Personal Changes

At one time or another, we've all read a book, started a diet, been to a workshop, and committed ourselves to doing things differently. We've learned that follow through is essential, and there are things we can do to help ourselves or ways we can self-sabotage. Sustainability is a deal breaker in whether or not anything you've read to this point makes any difference a year from now.

Hopefully this book has already offered you new perspectives on relationships at work and why the controlling, caretaking, and top-down decision-making we've done for so long doesn't work. The three essential shifts in thinking that will help you start doing what works at work are:

1. Adult/adult partnerships are a prerequisite for a productive workplace.
2. Decentralized decision-making is essential to sustain partnerships.
3. Rethinking basic beliefs and assumptions about management is fundamentally important and the only way more progressive management practices can be sustained.

The “gravitational pull” of how we've always done things is incredibly strong and can be overpowering unless we shine a light on the bottom of that iceberg and dismantle the culture codes we've lived by for so long. No matter how well planned our efforts for substantive change might be, if we don't make fundamental changes in our personal beliefs, that gravitational pull will overpower the best of intentions.

Now, let's consider what it looks like when you want to make personal changes that form the basis for doing what works at work. Some managers take this content and make significant personal change, and these changes stick. Others not only make these personal changes but also invest considerable time and effort in building relationships horizontally that reinforce and expand what they've learned. This chapter reviews tips and lessons learned so you'll have a clear sense of what it looks like and sounds like as this process unfolds at a personal level and within your department. You may even find that a kind of code or shortcut language develops as you use this material: “staying off the seesaw,” “getting out of the pity puddle,” or “sending the mail to the right address.” Each of these phrases stems from a key concept, and using this language helps reinforce your efforts to start doing what works and let go of old patterns. The shortcut language you use indicates that you have an instant picture in your mind's eye of a key concept and an idea of what to do next to stay on track. When you “stay off the seesaw,” using “I” statements and moving to an adult/adult partnership approach is your next step. When you “get out of the pity puddle,” you recall those four steps of acknowledging where you are in a situation, taking ownership, developing options, and forming a game plan—moving from reactive to proactive. Whenever you “send the mail to the right address,” you're choosing to stay out of triangled communication. If you're like many visual learners, a triangle will pop into your mind so you don't get caught playing C between A and B.

Shortcut language also helps you avoid regressing to old patterns. If you're in a “pity puddle” of sorts as you drive to work thinking about the day ahead and a voice in your head says, “Now what part of that is

yours to own?,” you’ll understand what your next steps will be. This idea is reinforced in a popular book on change in which the authors write:

“Change begins at the level of individual decisions and behaviors, but that is a hard place to start because that is where the friction is. Inertia and decision paralysis will conspire to keep people doing things in the same old way. To spark movement in a new direction, you need to provide crystal-clear guidance. That is why scripting is important—you’ve got to think about the specific behavior that you’d want to see in a tough moment . . . you can’t script every moment, but it’s the critical moves that count.”¹

A Look in the Mirror

Change begins at the individual level, so that’s where we’ll start—by looking at ourselves in a mirror. If this is uncomfortable at times, you’re on the right track. Being painfully honest about what hasn’t worked is step one.

Discussing the parent/child dynamic at work and the list of behaviors I call blind spots for managers during a workshop, I watched as a woman checked several of those behaviors on a list I distributed. She sought me out at lunch and said, “You really nailed some things for me with that content this morning, and this workshop couldn’t have come at a better time.” Several weeks later I learned that after that workshop, she filed for divorce, quit her job, and started grad school in a neighboring city! She saw herself in what I was describing and made some serious changes.

I’m often asked about where to start in changing management styles, and the answer is to start with what you know you’re doing that’s not helping a situation. If you’re rescuing a low performer and avoiding an honest conversation or finding it difficult to delegate, these are good focal points to work on as you respond differently. Remember the three commandments for a healthy workplace that give you specific ways to get out of old behavior patterns that you know need to change.

1. Send the mail to the right address and stay out of triangled communication.
2. Ask for what you need since it ups the chances you might get it.
3. Be true to how you honestly feel and follow your intuitive sense.

Notice how each of these behavior changes are the opposite of what you naturally do. Sending the mail to the right address means being direct rather than indirect and finding your voice, honoring what you know. Asking for what you need runs counter to people-pleasing and taking care of everything. Being true to yourself is different from swallowing how you feel and deferring to what others think. When you are intentional about these three commandments, you get traction on personal change that makes you more authentic and at peace with yourself.

Changing your management style to one of partnership rather than parenting is empowering to your colleagues because they’re more involved in decisions that impact them and freeing for you because you’re not carrying the weight of “being all things to all people.” As I’ve watched managers make this shift over the years, here’s a brief list of what I typically see and hear.

- *Creating staff action teams, unit councils, task forces, and so forth to move decisions closer to the point of service.* “I’m amazed at the creativity in the plans they develop and it’s clear to me that people support what they help to create.”
- *Challenging the status quo.* “The moment of truth was when they put a plan together that I never thought would work but I went along with it because I wanted them to know that I trusted their judgment.”
- *Debriefing meetings to learn from mistakes.* “The first time I admitted a mistake and asked for help, you could have heard a pin drop in the room. But we all do better now, reviewing lessons learned and what needs to be different next time.”

- *Putting less emphasis on titles.* “We try to get over titles and just do our part on behalf of the client . . . and sharing the credit for our successes.”
- *Creating ground rules or team agreements.* “Clarity about what we need from each other to make things come together has really helped, and when someone isn’t carrying his or her part of the process, he or she knows a peer will have a conversation and level with them.”
- *Being inclusive in decision-making.* “As decisions need to be made, I ask myself, ‘Who has to make this work? Am I acting like a parent or a partner as I make this decision?’”
- *Understanding accountability.* “I give people the benefit of the doubt, but if I see patterns of behavior that are counterproductive, we have a ‘crucial conversation.’”
- *Delegating appropriately.* “I try to find the different strengths or talents people have and build on those, knowing that the better job I do the less they’re dependent on me.”
- *Being consistent.* “I know that I regress to my old style when I’m really tired or stressed, and I have key people who let me know when that happens in case I don’t catch myself.”

Speaking of regressing to old patterns, you’ll help yourself immensely in personal behavior changes if you identify two or three behaviors that you want to change, discuss them with an accountability partner (often a peer whose judgment you trust), and celebrate your small victories. We’ll discuss dealing with stress levels later in the book, but know that personal changes are always enhanced by involving trusted friends to help you stay on track.

There are a number of ways in which I can recognize managers who treat their colleagues as partners. I can see it easily because they’re often the ones other managers hold up as mentors. They stand out because they:

- are often the last one to speak in a meeting, encouraging differing viewpoints and actively listening (taking notes—and not on their smartphones).
- hold up their end of the partnership by ensuring people have what they need to be effective (equipment, training, priorities, a sense of direction . . . the *why*, not just the *what*).
- ask good questions rather than having the answers. They draw out the “wisdom in the room” with respect for those closest to the work.
- view training as an investment rather than a cost. They want partners to be well equipped in problem solving and process improvement skills and are willing to challenge the status quo.
- have a structure in place that fosters shared decision-making or task forces for process improvement.
- make it easy for people to tell them what they may not want to hear. They routinely make time for real conversations about what’s not working because robust conversations can uncover realities that need attention.
- routinely ask for feedback on ways they could be more effective and are able to benefit from constructive criticism.
- don’t take themselves too seriously and can laugh at their screw-ups and share lessons learned.
- encourage accountability and are willing to make tough decisions when needed.
- don’t ask others to do things they’re not also willing to do themselves.
- are good at maintaining boundaries personally (family comes first) or professionally (use peers for support, not direct reports).

If certain colleagues came to mind as you read through this list, they might well be people willing to provide you with some coaching or even a mentoring relationship to make your learning curve a little shorter.

A Twofold Process

While our discussion is geared toward letting go of a parental approach to management, it’s also important to take note of what needs to happen to move into a partnership with the person to whom you report.

In some respects this is more of a challenge for managers than anything we've reviewed to this point. It's important to see this as a twofold process. Just as many of your direct reports will blossom when you interact with them more as partners, your job satisfaction depends on being treated like a partner, as well. You'll be better off asking for some of the changes you need in this relationship if you frame the discussion in terms of what you need to be more effective and how your boss can be helpful in the process.

Choose two or three things you're doing differently with your staff and work on those, as well, with your boss. For instance, if you're creating team agreements (what we need from each other to work well together) with your staff or peers in other departments, develop these with your boss, too. If you've identified key behaviors you want to change and next steps like "sending the mail to the right address" or doing a better job of asking for what you need, talk with your boss about integrating those things into your relationship. This might be as simple as taking time at the end of a meeting to talk over what you most need to be successful with the issues you've just discussed. This could be anything from a candid conversation about roadblocks you're experiencing, deeper access to information from another department, or a resource person with more expertise in the issue. The point is, whatever you're working to change, make sure you're consistent with staff, peers, your boss, family members, and so forth. Your behavior changes will feel more authentic and your learning curve will be shorter because consistency is your intent.

Disagreeing with your boss is often uncomfortable, and it helps when you're working on team agreements to talk over how to address differences. Being able to push back on an idea or share a real difference of opinion is essential in a successful partnership. Having this conversation when you're not in the heat of the moment can really pay off. In disagreeing, remember to ask permission to offer a different view. ("I see that differently, and I'd be glad to talk with you about my sense of things when the time is right.") Begin with a shared sense of purpose and ways in which you agree. If you're concerned about how your comments may be perceived, acknowledge that. Finish with the point that you know the boss makes the final decision, and you value the relationship and want to keep things honest. You can measure your progress in getting to a greater sense of partnership with your boss by the degree of honesty and candor in your conversations. The more you say what you feel, especially when it requires a behavior change on his or her part, the closer you are to a real partnership.

If the only way to work with your boss is to be dependent and submissive, you may want to seriously consider changing positions. Sooner or later the pattern of staying in an adult mode with everyone except the person to whom you report will drain your energy and reduce your effectiveness. When your requests for change go unheeded, it's time for Plan B. That could be choosing to update your resume, checking job postings, or even opting to "fly below the radar" and doing what you have to do knowing that upcoming changes at the level above you in the organization may work in your favor. The important point is that you're being honest with yourself about the situation and *choosing* how you want to deal with it.

As I was writing this chapter I had a call from Colleen, a long-time colleague, reminding me that this year was the twenty-fifth anniversary of a workshop I did in her organization that resulted in major personal changes on her part. We've remained friends over the years and she was calling with an update about some recent successes. She was working with a vice president who relished the parental style of management. One of her insights about managing as a partner: "Sometimes you just can't get past the parent/child stuff and you have to leave the situation. I tried so hard to get our relationship to a better place, and after a while I had to acknowledge that she had no intention of changing. I realized this was not a failure on my part but simply a situation that couldn't be remedied. I felt so much better after I moved on and just let it go." I might add that Colleen's career has progressed beautifully and she continues to get accolades at the highest levels in her organization for the innovative work she's doing.

Making the Shift from Reactive to Proactive Thinking: It's All About Choices

Whether or not you recognize that you've been in a parent mode with your staff or in a child mode with your boss, I can say with certainty that when you're on that seesaw, you're more than likely in a reactive mindset. Every picture I've seen drawn by weary managers is describable in one word: *reactive*. Common phrases at every level where this approach to management predominates include feeling like a gerbil on a wheel, a puppet pulled in too many directions, or running around putting out fires. I've listened to these phrases from senior executives as they discussed relationships with their board of directors, vice presidents, and mid-level managers.

Being able to turn this around and move to a more proactive place is at the heart of changing management styles. Doing what works at work is all about catching ourselves in old patterns and *making the choice* to self-correct. Don't paddle around in that pity puddle... know what to do to shift gears!

One way to recognize that proverbial pity puddle is that you have no energy, and it never takes long to find others around you to join in. At this point you need to say to yourself, "How am I helping this happen?" When victim thinking is at a full tilt, it's easy to blame others and believe that if it wasn't for this or that we wouldn't have a problem. I remember years ago listening to a radio interview in which a not-so-illustrious governor was defending his state's failing prison system. His point was that the system wasn't at fault—what was needed was just a better grade of prisoner! Every time we convince ourselves that the problem belongs with someone else, we set up a victim mentality. Everything hinges on our ability to be self-reflective and move to the next step of ownership for how we're helping the situation happen.

I mention the ability to be self-reflective because not everyone can do that. Some people honestly believe that life is happening to them and all they can do is live with what they get and muddle through. The idea of being accountable for choices or exploring options is just foreign to them. Those who've always had people around to rescue them or who've gotten mileage out of martyrdom are rarely able to look in the mirror and be honest about their choices. I caution you to not spend energy trying to convince professional victims that they have choices. Just work on making your own choices and know that's the only way you ever have a chance of influencing anyone else.

The more effort you put into developing your ability to be self-reflective, the easier it will be for you to recognize patterns after a while. If you're in the helping professions (nurses, teachers, ministers, social workers, etc.) you may recognize the ease with which you rescue or want to "fix," and you have to be intentional about the choices you make in certain situations. The bottom line: The more we hone our ability to be self-reflective, the more we increase our self-awareness.

As you get more accustomed to giving yourself time to be self-reflective, it helps to ask yourself a few key questions:

- What am I getting out of responding to the situation that way?
- Is this working for me?
- How am I helping that happen?
- What part of all that is mine to own?

As we consider the idea of self-reflection and taking ownership for needed changes, it's important not to take ownership too far and "over own" how you may be helping something happen. For instance, you may have made a poor decision in a situation, and the fact that you weren't given access to information you needed played into that—so, it wasn't all yours to own.

When you recognize victim thinking, take time to reflect on how you helped that happen and brainstorm options to do things differently. You'll know you've made that all-important reactive to proactive shift because you'll feel more energy around the situation. Another way to frame this is that being proactive is all about *choosing* how to respond rather than just *reacting* to a situation. Developing options will simply involve doing the opposite of what you've been doing. Remember the DEAF model discussed in

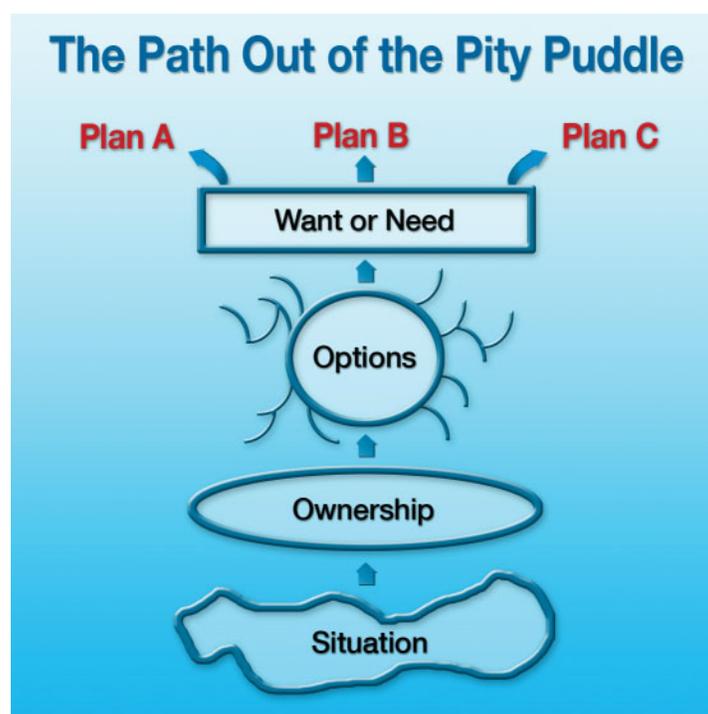
Chapter 4 to help frame this conversation: *Describe* the behavior that's an issue, *Explain* the impact of that behavior, *Ask* for what you need instead, and *Follow* up ... hopefully with a thank-you.

As you think about doing things differently, remember that some of your best options will push you out of your comfort zone. If the option leaves you feeling a little uncomfortable, it's probably right. It also helps to invite ideas from others who have nothing to do with the issue because they may well have a very different and useful perspective. As you work through your game plan and implement your ideas, watch for the tendency to fold too early if things don't go well the first time. Stay proactive, learn from your mistakes, and don't take the option that goes right back into the pity puddle. Don't listen to the voice that says, "This wasn't a great idea and you should've known it wasn't going to fly." Instead, stay positive, reflect on what you need to do differently, and use these insights to develop Plan B. Use positive self-talk and stay intentional so if you need to go to Plan C you can do that, too! Practice reframing the experience in a way that leaves you energized. A line that I use with myself often as I'm regrouping is, "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

Group Level Shifts to Proactive Thinking

I've had the pleasure of watching this shift in energy countless times as managers transitioned from complaining about a situation to creatively developing a plan and often amazing themselves with their success. A group once told me about a problem they were sick of, and as we came up with a game plan, they were amazed at what they had accomplished in less than an hour. Later, they mailed me pictures of the party they had when the plan worked so well. I asked how long they complained about that problem before addressing it. The answer was nine years! Almost a decade of griping and less than an hour to develop a workable solution!

Using a diagram to describe this path in your next staff meeting is a good way to familiarize your team with the usefulness of this model (see The Path Out of the Pity Puddle, below). Remember that the best way to learn something is to teach it. When you're working in partnership, it's incumbent upon you as the manager to share the mental models you rely on with your colleagues. Since the visual trumps the verbal, I'll bet you that coming back to this diagram over and over will decrease the victim thinking in your team.



A vice president told me that it used to take an hour-long session to help someone see that he or she was behaving like a victim. She said, “Now I just hear the code language . . . you’re stuck in the pity puddle . . . and the point is made. They have fun with it, but the group is much less tolerant of the whiners and gripers now and slowly but surely the victims are becoming outliers in the team.”

I’m often asked for recommendations of books that managers could circulate among their teams to augment this idea of ownership and accountability, and one that comes quickly to mind is by John Miller. *QBQ! The Question Behind the Question* is a quick read and one I wish I had written! John and I have talked about how universal his ideas are, and I think you’ll find they dovetail nicely with many of the points I’m making.²

Dealing with Fallout

One question that always surfaces in workshops as we wrap up the discussion of personal changes and making choices to respond differently is how to deal with the responses you get. This is especially true if your predecessor was a “mama manager.” Those who’ve become accustomed to being rescued will likely be upset when you say, “It will be interesting to see how you work that out.” Those who’ve been coasting under the radar assuming you would be patient with their lack of follow through will be concerned when they hear you say, “Expectations are clear, so decide if you want to meet them or not—the choices you make will determine the choices I need to make.” Those who’ve always swayed you with tears will be taken aback when they hear you say, “I can see you’re upset; here are some tissues and I’ll be back in a moment to finish our conversation.” Your top-performing people will be delighted with a staff action team or task forces that allow them to make decisions that impact their work. A few tips to help you succeed:

- Remember that you break the parent/child dynamic when you stay in the adult mode (use “I” statements, avoid lengthy explanations, make sure body language matches voice tone to be congruent).
- Unhook from the need to control their responses. Just do what you need to do and let them respond however they need to.
- Be consistent in your responses and know you’ll be tested sooner or later, especially by those who are skilled manipulators.
- Getting pushback from your low performers is a good thing because it means the changes you’re making are having an impact. Stay steady and avoid the drama. Don’t get caught in he said/she said situational stuff. Address patterns of behavior (negativity, losing your temper, being late, etc.) because failing to call out difficult behaviors undermines trust levels.
- You’ll be more successful in changing a few responses at a time, staying with it until those are integrated, and then going on to others. Doing a laundry list of things all at once will likely lead to changes that are “a mile wide and an inch deep,” which isn’t what you want.
- Ask for coaching from a peer who functions in a more adult mode, especially when you are under a great deal of pressure.
- Celebrate small victories and use positive self-talk (as you drive home, reflect on the things you did well that day).

As you think of the behaviors you want to change, consider ways to talk it over in a staff meeting so your colleagues have a sense of where you’re coming from and your intentions. The more open you are about the changes you’re making and why, the greater likelihood that the majority of staff will support your efforts. As you put a staff action team in place or develop task forces on issues that impact them, it becomes obvious that “getting off the seesaw” and functioning more as partners is to everyone’s advantage. As staff use the problem-solving model and go from complaining to being creative and working through issues, their group self-esteem improves. They’re being treated like adults and they can feel the difference. Always frame this work as changes you need to make to be more effective in the role, and

include ways they can support you. If they know you're working on getting a better work/life balance for everyone, they can help you leave work at a decent time. If they see you being a better advocate for them and taking on issues that need attention, they can offer support by giving you information, backing up your assessments, or not rescuing a peer. You'll know things are moving in the right direction when you're doing less talking at staff meetings, staff members are engaged in projects that matter to them, and you have more time to do what only you can do.

As I stress the value of partnerships and developing rather than controlling people, I'm reminded of a director of rehabilitation services who was in a management workshop I did years ago. We kept in touch after the program and his career took an unexpected turn. He was very successful in the health-care system in which we met but opted to join a company that provided rehabilitation services at the national level. He was delighted to mention at one point that he had become a "turnaround specialist" with this company, and they sent him to facilities that were underperforming. He said that typically he found a high turnover rate among staff, low morale, a sense of "us and them" with the management team, and below-average quality and patient satisfaction scores. He described his yearlong turnaround efforts in three phases: An assessment process in which he listened to perspectives of different stakeholders and developed priority concerns within key groups; "getting the right people in the right seat on the bus;" and implementing a structure to support shared decision-making. He made it a point to factor in an educational process so people had the skills they needed, and this was a key part of the budget in each project. We laughed at how universal the "path out of the puddle" was in working with staff, physicians, and the senior team. He shared some of the team agreements that had been developed and how gratifying it was to see peers hold each other accountable rather than relying on him to manage their issues. They would often complete this process with a celebration of their successes, and more often than not leaders had emerged to fill managerial roles, allowing him to move on to his next project. He was amazed at how replicating this process in several parts of the country had made him a believer in "shifting from parent to partner and tapping the wisdom in the room." He captured in one sentence the essence of my work, and we both agreed that while much of this is common sense, it's not common practice. He had learned to trust the process, and hopefully you're starting to feel more confident about that, too.

If you're like many of the managers I've heard from over the years, you'll say that getting off that see-saw and becoming more proactive in your role was worth the time and effort. If, like some of them, you manage to save a marriage, get your health back, build a strong team that functions well in your absence, or get a promotion given your skills in developing people, that makes it all the more worthwhile.

Moving from Individual to Group-level Change

You may be thinking, "These changes make sense and could be even more beneficial if our whole management team moved in this direction." If we're going to do what works at work, we get a much greater return on the investment of time and energy if we're working in concert as a leadership team. In the next chapter, I'll review what it looks like when the individual changes we've discussed become the basis for change in the rest of the organization. My experience has been that when the leadership team is unified around the basic beliefs we've discussed, moving to more progressive management practices propels significant culture change. I often think of this shift as moving from "I" to "we," and it's fundamentally important for sustaining meaningful change and doing what works at work. Without this shift, the "gravitational pull" of how we've always done things will win out and high-performing managers will leave. Hopefully, you're in an organization that's open to "creating a future different from the past," as Peter Block noted. Let's move on to the next phase in this process, when the leadership team shines a light on that proverbial iceberg.

Tips for Shared Decision-making at the Departmental Level

Staff Action Team/Unit-Based Council

Purpose: To allow those closest to the work to make decisions *about* their work.

Scope: Decisions about departmental procedures, work flow, schedules, handoffs with other departments, work environment, implementing best practices, problem solving for process improvement, safety, or quality as well as staff retention. This isn't a forum for personnel issues, and minutes should be made available to all staff.

Selection and Size of the Group: Five, seven, or nine is the ideal size, and members are nominated by the staff (list the three people you'd like on the team; names most often mentioned are selected). Having the staff decide who's on the team greatly increases the likelihood they'll support decisions made by the group on their behalf. Generally, team members serve for one to two years, with half the group rotating off after one year.

Agenda and Frequency of Meetings: The agenda is developed by the department staff (list three issues you'd like to have the staff action team address; those most often mentioned are prioritized and form the agenda for meetings). Always begin with the group's "felt need," not with an issue handed down from management. This increases buy-in and allows the group to be self-directed. Meetings are generally held once a month for 60 to 90 minutes, and a report from the team is included on the agenda for staff meetings.

Team Agreements or Ground Rules: Develop team agreements within the team and also between the team and the manager so expectations are clear.

Resources/Skill Set Development: The group will likely benefit from coaching on how to run effective meetings, reaching consensus, developing metrics to measure progress, process improvement skills, and so forth, to enable good decision-making and productivity as a group.

Semi-annual Progress Reports: To demonstrate effectiveness and celebrate successes.

Alternatives to a Unit-Based Council/Staff Action Team

- LEAN Daily Management for ongoing attention to quality and efficiency
- Process improvement teams
- Issue-related task force (e.g., staff recruitment, orientation, retention)

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Chapter 6

You Either Get It or You Don't

What's Really Going On?

How do you see things in your organization today? While it may seem like a simple question, it often leads to an eye-opening discussion. As reflected in the workshop you sat in on earlier in this book, I like to see what's really going on by asking people to draw a group picture in response to that question. I use group pictures because they allow for a certain degree of anonymity and are often worth a thousand words. The pictures are so accurate that sometimes you can hear a pin drop in the room as people use this vehicle to speak their truth.

The pictures that pop into my mind as I think about this experience with middle-level leaders in a variety of organizations include:

- a manager surrounded by tornadoes and erupting volcanoes.
- a picture of a piece of pie (pie in the sky), large lips (giving lip service), and mushrooms (kept in the dark and fed manure).
- a line of men dressed in suits and ties but with no faces; small stick figures below them are running in all directions.
- an ivory tower from which edicts flow across a moat with people in a life raft being told, "Don't rock the boat" and others drowning in the water that's filled with sharks.
- multiple silos in a field with managers at the bottom of a totem pole next to each silo.
- a toll booth at the side of a road labeled "empowerment" leading to a building on a hill; the sign at the toll booth says, "A high price to pay if you go down this road."

Interestingly, when I ask a senior team to draw a picture of how they see things in the organization, the pictures reflect less turbulence and reactivity. Frequently, their perceptions include a sense that progress is being made, with everyone on a train in an upward trajectory, sunshine at the end of a winding road, and often some depiction of a "big-picture scenario" in which puzzle pieces fit into place. I remember one organization in which the senior team drew pictures of a sunny sky and a rainbow over a bridge leading to "brighter days" ahead. I shared the picture that their direct reports had done an hour earlier depicting ships going down in the water, people drowning encircled by sharks, and dark clouds all around. They looked at both pictures side by side and the CEO said, "Looks like the disconnect we have is just as deep as our employee survey showed. We have to deal with this." The visual trumps the verbal every time.

I've found that using group pictures to begin the discussion of what things are really like in an organization provides a vehicle that gets to the heart of the matter in a short amount of time and allows for a deep level of conversation. Having seen hundreds of pictures, certain themes emerge, and I use these themes in a group process that provides an honest assessment of the beliefs and assumptions at the bottom of the iceberg... the underpinnings from which we build a culture. This assessment process becomes the basis to determine if the organization can make the transitions necessary to do what works at work or if it's unrealistic given the present circumstances. If the leadership team can revisit its basic beliefs and coalesce around more progressive culture norms, this work can be transformational. If, however, the executive team is committed to a more hierarchical model, it's not fair to anyone to proceed with cosmetic changes. Thus the appropriate title for this chapter is, "You either get it or you don't."

I've framed this pivotal discussion using a chart that conveys a transition from one perspective to another. I'll stay with the iceberg analogy and ask that you make an honest assessment of where you see your organization along this continuum (see Beliefs Underlying Culture Norms, below).

Beliefs Underlying Culture Norms	
From	→ To
Hierarchy	Team-based environment
Managing as parent	Managing as a partner
Staff wait to be told/reactive	Ownership for "my part to play"/proactive
"Us" and "them" language	"We"/all in this together
Staff viewed as "worker bees"	Training seen as an investment
Those who show up have a job/entitlement	Responsible and accountable for outcomes
Fix the blame	Fix the system
Punish mistakes	Learn from mistakes
"Don't rock the boat"/false harmony	Value differences and healthy conflict
Lack of transparency/silo mentality	Sharing of data for greater good

In the preceding chapters, the discussion was about personal changes and choices you could make. This chapter is about choosing the kind of organization in which you want to work. Once you gain insights about *what* it takes to do what works at work, *where* you work and the degree of alignment between your personal beliefs and the culture of your organization are what I've come to think of as "the rest of the story" in doing what works at work.

As you reflect on these basic beliefs or culture codes, you could easily say that doing what works at work involves making the shift from the norms on the left to those on the right. Many of these themes may be self-explanatory, but I want to drill down on some of them and amplify what you see in an organization that lives out these themes.

Broadly speaking, when I'm in an organization that operates with the beliefs on the left of this chart, I know I'm in a fearful work environment. I remember being in a meeting of off-shift supervisors in a large health system and asking them to describe in a sentence what the culture was like in their organization. One person, who prefaced her remarks by saying she'd been there for 30 years, said, "One thing I know for sure is that you have to be tough to work here." As we finished a discussion of the chart above, I asked them to think of this as a shift from 1 on the left to 10 on the right and to give me a number that fit with where they were in the process. Half the room laughed as they said, "We're not even to square one ... we're off the page to the left!" I knew this was accurate because all week I'd seen and heard:

- Senior leaders acknowledge their focus as "building my service line," even as they saw this negatively impacting other parts of the organization.
- Seasoned managers so controlled by their "chairperson" that she could impact the discussion in the room by rolling her eyes, pushing back from the table, or turning her back on someone who expressed a difference of opinion.
- No routine staff meetings and little, if any, structure for input into decisions at the staff or middle-manager level.

- High turnover rates costing the organization over \$2 million a year.
- Managers admitting that the real value in their monthly meetings was the hallway discussions before and after the meeting because meetings were just to “get their marching orders” or “waiting to see what comes down from on high.”
- A quiet group in meetings but lively discussion in the hallways, restrooms, and parking lot after meetings.
- Expressions of victim mentality, with most managers feeling “it’s best just to keep your head down, mind your own area, and don’t ask questions.”

As problematic situations were discussed, the first response was always, “Who was working when that happened?”

When the pictures drawn by a cross-section of staff, department directors, and senior leaders were reviewed at the close of the week the CEO said, “I want to know who was in those meetings with you!”

You can hear the “critical parent voice” woven through many of these descriptors. Yes, they were “off the page to the left,” and sadly they’d all come to call this normal. Those ten themes that describe deeply held culture codes kept coming to my mind all week. I fully understood why those responsible for orienting new employees felt like there was a revolving door at the front of the organization. Recently, I had a call from three managers there letting me know that they had a new CEO (“who gets it,” they said), and a vice president position had just been filled by a highly respected leader in the organization. I could hear the hopefulness in their voices as they related what a breath of fresh air she was and how much they were committed to helping her succeed. One of them invited me to come back in a year and she said, “Maybe by then we’ll be at least to the middle of that chart!”

A Map for the Journey

I remember a director who thanked me for “the roadmap” as she referred to the chart I’d used as part of a conference on quality improvement. I was conducting a breakout session on culture change with a diverse group of senior leaders from banking, municipal government, healthcare, a startup company, and administrators in higher education. As they sat together and compared notes, they were intrigued by how universal these themes were. A city government official commented that this was the first time he’d ever really thought about the beliefs underlying their management practices and what that said about them as a leadership team. Those from the education sector had multiple examples of ways in which hierarchical decision-making had delayed much needed change. We had a three-hour animated discussion, and it was clear that this was an eye-opener for everyone. So what needs to happen to move in a positive direction with this “roadmap,” and how will we know if we’re making progress? If doing what works at work is fundamentally about rethinking our basic beliefs, how do we know we’re getting traction with this process?

A New Day Dawning

I vividly remember leading a meeting with a large group of mid-level managers who completed their group assessment with this roadmap and decided they were well on their way to a new culture. My title for the program that day was “A New Day Dawning,” and as the day progressed it was clear that that was the case. As I listened to them share examples of their progress, I could feel the difference in what I was seeing and hearing all week compared to what I usually found in organizations. I want to highlight some of the things that caught my attention so you, too, can feel the difference.

At this organization, management team meetings were an opportunity to hear different perspectives, and the chairperson invited these when she said, “That’s an interesting point. I’m wondering, is there a

counterpoint we need to consider?” I noticed easy laughter and affectionate teasing within the group as they tossed around ideas and reached consensus on next steps.

Silence Isn't the Answer

Silence isn't a healthy sign in a management team meeting. Valuing differences and speaking up, even when in the minority, is crucial for a productive team. When differences are expressed in the parking lot rather than in the meeting, we all own that. We all pay for it, too, when those differences sidetrack an agreed upon policy or impede an implementation process. All too often, these differences don't surface and we have what Lencioni in *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* calls “false harmony.”¹ I love what Harriet Lerner writes in her classic book *The Dance of Anger*: “We cannot make another person change his or her steps to an old dance, but if we change our own steps, the dance can no longer continue in the same predictable pattern.”² You've likely seen everyone in a group nod in agreement and then later in the hallway talk about how they know “this will never work and my people won't buy into it.” This is a predictable pattern; failing to take ownership for this pattern creates what Leslie Perlow calls the “silent spiral.” In *When You Say Yes but Mean No: How Silencing Conflict Wrecks Relationships and Companies and What You Can Do About It*, Perlow reminds us that by covering our differences rather than confronting them, we feed a downward spiral of emotions that impact us personally with feelings of insecurity, blaming, and frustration and that undermine trust in our working relationships. This often leads to disengagement, lack of motivation, loss of creativity, and poor decision-making. She rightly argues that the pressure on organizations to go fast is so pervasive that the tendency to swallow what we think or need and move on is even greater. We all just “go along to get along” and falsely believe that the greater good is to “not rock the boat.”³ Actually, perpetuating this pattern is a good way to sink the boat. The way we manage our differences is pivotal in creating a productive team and also a huge factor in our personal job satisfaction.

In addition to inviting different perspectives in a meeting, I also noticed other ways in which this leadership team had moved past “false harmony” over the time we worked together:

- *Actively listening and paraphrasing what they heard.* This conserves time, reduces frustration, and most importantly allows a person to feel heard. People will shift in their thinking if they feel heard.
- *Focusing on what needs to happen to move forward, not rehashing the past.* The only reason to discuss the past is to pull the lessons out and then go on. Ask for clarification rather than assuming. A rule I use with myself is “stay curious.”
- *Asking open-ended questions to draw out another's perspective.* “Walk me through where you're coming from, and let me see if I can see it from where you sit with it.” Seeking to understand the feelings behind the perspective promotes mutual understanding even if the parties don't necessarily agree with each other.
- *Speaking up and not waiting on someone else to go first.* A leader in this group said that he learned that there was almost always someone else in the room who felt as he did, and by going first he was paving the way for a more honest conversation. He added that the repercussions of speaking up were so much less than he anticipated and realized this was a way to let the group know he felt strongly about their overall success.

- *Talking about the elephant in the room.* Rather than feed the elephant, stand beside it, paint it red, and talk about it by using “I” statements such as “I have a problem with…” or “I’m unsure about…”⁴
- *Agree in advance how to resolve a situation if consensus isn’t possible.* Agreeing in advance on your default position encourages the group to work at reaching consensus (consensus can be defined as 70% agreement and 100% support).
- *Routinely taking time at the end of meetings to evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting.* This includes allowing for differences, being present and engaged, and deciding what could be done to make the next meeting more effective.

It’s important to note that this group had done a great deal of concentrated work on teambuilding, including working their way through a reading list, developing team agreements, and using ice breakers at the beginning of meetings to get to know each other as people, not just colleagues. One of their most significant meetings occurred when they took shared responsibility for violating a key team agreement and set ways to get back on track. Because of their commitment to the success of the group over time, the negativity and whining gave way to a can-do attitude and genuine camaraderie.

Peer Group as First Team

This leads to another accomplishment celebrated by this team, which was the degree to which they’d come to value their peer group as their “first team.” In *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Lencioni reminds us that as leaders in an organization, our primary focus needs to be on advancing the greater good of the whole organization and not operating in silos or getting caught in turf wars. Loyalty to our peer group and what the organization needs take priority over our sense of loyalty or commitment to the departments we manage.¹

I recall sitting in on a meeting with a leadership team when they were dealing with a significant budget shortfall. Their operations team was asked to propose cost savings to offset a serious drop in revenue. It was obvious that they wanted to take ownership for a realistic proposal and not just implement across-the-board cuts. I watched them make several hard decisions; one director with a small department agreed to defund her entire area and distribute the work to other departments if necessary. The company’s revenue improved over the next quarter and her department was left untouched, but her commitment to the success of her peer group became a legend in the organization.

Another way I see this loyalty to the peer group play out in organizations is that leaders use their peers as a support system rather than the staff who report to them. This isn’t an easy transition for managers who’ve moved into a leadership role in the same departments where they were a part of the staff for years. It’s not easy but it’s necessary, and a mark of maturity that I watch for in the development of leadership teams. I recall one group that was focusing on building a strong peer group and their team agreements reflected this effort:

- We’ll give each other the benefit of the doubt and check things out with each other rather than pre-judging someone’s intent.
- We’ll advocate for each other as we work in our departments to assist our staff in seeing things from the other team’s perspective.
- We’ll assume positive intent and buy time to respond to differences between our various teams rather than react to a situation.
- We’ll celebrate small victories and be more mindful about expressing our gratitude for work well done between our departments.
- We’ll respect different perspectives and expect that we’ll all show up and speak up.

It’s unrealistic to expect that loyalty to the peer group will develop quickly. It takes time and experiences in which they struggle to deal with differences and learn to hold each other accountable. Accountability is another key feature I noticed in the group enjoying “a new day dawning.”

Accountability Is Never About Assigning Blame

It doesn't take long in a leadership team meeting to hear about a situation that didn't go well. I spent many an hour listening to the peer group I've been referencing as they related events that missed the mark. What I listened for each time was the *next comment* after someone described an untoward event. If I heard "Who was on that shift or in that meeting at the time?" this was a red flag. It's easy to "play gotcha" and feel self-righteous knowing that we would've handled things differently. All too often in organizations, accountability is code language for blaming, and as long as that's the case the organization will never come close to accountability. I knew this group had finally gotten that message the first time I heard someone say, "How did *we let* that happen?" rather than "How did that happen?"

In a hierarchical organization that relies heavily on the parent/child approach to management, accountability is seen as another way to talk about who's going to pay for the latest screwup. It's all about what happens *after* something goes wrong. A healthier view of accountability is just the opposite: It's about what happens *before* something goes wrong. For example:

- Making sure responsibility is well defined and expectations are clear
- Removing road blocks or system issues that impede follow through
- Developing a "recovery plan" in case things get off track and before they escalate⁵
- Agreeing on time frames for follow-up and providing resources to support the effort

I like the description of accountability offered in Gostick and Elton's book *All In: How the Best Managers Create a Culture of Belief and Drive Big Results*. They write that holding people accountable is "about assigning realistic goals, evaluating progress, and making positive course corrections at milestones, removing obstacles, and then closing the loop by celebrating successes or honestly and openly evaluating misses."⁶ I also like when accountability is defined as "a willingness to answer for results and learn from mistakes." So what did I see in this peer group that helped me know they had a healthy understanding of accountability rather than a punitive one?

- Attention to clarifying expectations and assigning names to a task in meeting minutes by asking, "Who owns this?"
- Negotiation of time frames and frequency of follow-up (there's no accountability without follow-up).
- Using Bridges' 4 Ps (purpose, big picture, game plan, my part to play) as a framework to discuss accountability⁷; understanding *what* needs to happen and *why*.
- Reviewing the "path out of the pity puddle"(situation, ownership, options, game plan) in staff meetings as a mental model for group problem-solving.
- Routinely having a "debriefing meeting" or "a learning look back" a day or two after an untoward event with all the key people involved to review what happened, what did we mean to have happened, lessons learned, and what systems need to be in place to keep it from happening again. The point is to start an honest conversation around "If we had this to do over again, what would we need to do differently?"
- Development of team agreements as well as group agreement on how to handle the situation when someone misses the mark.
- Ability to admit a mistake or change direction when needed.
- Respect for dissenting opinions or questioning assumptions.
- Routinely celebrating successes and annually giving an award for an employee who "stuck their neck out" (a gold figurine of a giraffe) and demonstrated real accountability in a difficult situation.

As part of the group reading assignment, I asked these leaders to read *Change the Culture, Change the Game* by Roger Connors and Tom Smith. They adopted a model from these authors that fit well with

the “path out of the pity puddle” and emphasized the need for personal accountability at all levels in the organization. Connors and Smith frame accountability as having four key steps: See it, own it, solve it, and do it. They call this “above the line behavior.” They also describe “below the line behavior,” which you might think of as the blame game. These include finger pointing, ignoring or denying the issue, saying “it’s not my job,” covering your tail, acting confused and waiting to be told, and having a wait-and-see mindset.⁸ The code language of “above and below the line” behavior became common and helped diminish those familiar below the line behaviors. A key takeaway is that people want to be accountable, do a good job, and learn from their experience, and by framing accountability in a positive way, we increase the likelihood of that happening. The shift in beliefs that I’m describing in the chart below provides a way to frame a more progressive mindset about accountability.

Conventional Wisdom	Progressive View
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability is a way in which we place blame for mistakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability is a willingness to answer for results and learn from mistakes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It’s about what happens after 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It’s about what happens before
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results in fear, punitive policies, and mistrust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results in reducing fear and increasing trust
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on need to control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on faith in people

Shifting from a “critical parent” mindset to a partnership based on respect and faith in each other means that the management team is consistent in handling mistakes with acknowledgement and support rather than blame and punishment. It’s about asking the right questions with respect, patience, and an emphasis on solutions. Our questions need to be candid and designed to get to the real issue, and we need to listen with hearts and minds so the discussion doesn’t feel like an interrogation. The whole point is to help people succeed, not reveal their failures. In his book *Creating the Accountable Organization*, Mark Samuel recommends that as a project gets underway, a recovery plan is part of that process and includes a discussion around:

- What problems can we anticipate?
- How will we deal with performance breakdowns?
- How will we deal with relationship breakdowns?
- Are there external issues that could impact our results?⁵

In addition to thoughtful consideration about how to recover when things go off track rather than waiting for a crisis to get our attention, it’s equally important to be certain upfront that those involved in a process are clear about the authority they have in the situation. The levels of authority included in the meeting minutes as projects are assigned to provide clarity (see Typical Levels of Authority, below).

Typical Levels of Authority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 1: collect data, environmental scan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 2: also provide recommendations or a suggested plan of action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 3: implement the plan after having met constraints or consulted with key players and track results
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level 4: use your best judgment and call if there is a problem

With a partnership approach, the intent is to expect growth and not perfection, provide clarity, emphasize learning and peer accountability, focus on the issue and lessons learned, and decide what needs to

happen going forward rather than punishing people. This creates a workplace of safety and trust, allowing accountability to improve performance and deal honestly with real issues. You'll know when you're well on your way with this shift in thinking in your organization when you hear:

- How are we helping this happen?
- What part of all this is ours to own?
- Help me understand how this fits with our agreement to...?
- What should I expect next time you make a promise?
- If we had this to do over again, what could we do differently?
- If you were in my shoes how you would deal with this?
- I want you to be successful with this, so what needs to happen next?

Just as clear expectations and follow through are essential for positive accountability, it's also useful to note how we deal with consequences and rewards. It's important for the consequences to be straightforward (e.g., "The decisions you make will determine the decisions I need to make") and not punitive. Rewards and recognition for a job well done can be as simple as a sincere note of thanks, group recognition, or perhaps asking ahead of time how positive outcomes could be rewarded.

A key insight in our efforts to develop a more progressive approach to accountability is to remember that every hallway discussion, debriefing meeting, or discussion as a team about accountability creates a positive connection and builds trust or a negative connection that erodes a sense of partnership. I love the line attributed to the late Maya Angelou: "I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

It's incumbent upon us to bring out the best in people. The way we deal with accountability in our organizations speaks volumes about our basic beliefs about the people with whom we work, and it's a key indicator of the relationship we want to build... as a parent or as a partner.

Decisions Made by Those Closest to the Work

To complete this discussion of what it looks like in organizations with a "new day dawning" and doing what works at work, let's address the issue of decentralizing decision-making. The single most significant difference I see in organizations that "get it" and those that don't is the degree to which they've decentralized decision-making. The best indicator of whether the leadership team functions as "upper management" in a parent-like fashion or whether partnership is a core belief of those in leadership roles is the infrastructure put in place to have those closest to the work making the decisions about the work. Read that carefully: They're making decisions about the work, not just recommendations.

All too often, participatory management is confused with the decentralization of decision-making. While participatory management is better than managing by fiat, it's only a middle step in moving decisions out where they belong. The key issue is who actually makes the final decision and has the accountability for that decision. In participatory management, the final authority lies with the manager who invites input but isn't obligated to use that input. In a structure that decentralizes decisions, the teams/councils are accountable for the decisions, thereby balancing responsibility, authority, and accountability, which is a basic principle discussed in Chapter 3. The chart on the next page clarifies these two different approaches to decision-making.

Participatory Management	Decentralized Decision-making
Leader invites input from frontline staff	Frontline involvement in decisions is expected
Leader maintains final authority for decisions	Teams/councils retain authority for decisions
Leader not obligated to use staff input	Obligation to use input from stakeholders
Leader accountable for outcome	Stakeholders accountable for outcome

It's interesting to watch the shift in thinking for team members who've grown accustomed to participatory management when they realize they now have full authority to make decisions that impact their work environment. I recall a council member in a meeting with a CEO who was explaining the move to decentralized decision-making, and she looked at him incredulously as he reviewed the scope of decision-making for the council and noted they'd have final authority for decisions. She said, "Are you serious ... We get to decide? Never in the 30 years I've been here did I ever imagine that we could actually make decisions ... I just assumed someone would have to sign off on what we're doing." Therein lies the crux of these two approaches, and missing that point can undermine the best of intentions and make our efforts for teamwork and staff engagement ring hollow. You either get it or you don't.

Empowerment Is an Inside-Out Thing, Not an Outside-In Thing

Another core principle for shared decision-making is around the concept of empowerment. All too often, empowerment is framed as something we "do to" people with whom we work. When I hear leaders say they want to empower their people, it sounds as if we're granting permission for someone to exercise power over his or her work environment. We may want to create a positive workplace in which people can function at their best, using their heads, trusting their judgment, and acting on what they know, but this is a culture we foster. In reality, empowerment is all about recognizing the power inherent in the role and creating a work environment where that can be expressed. Empowerment isn't something given to you; it's already inherent in what you do. There's no granting of power but rather an acknowledgment that decisions need to be made by those who have to make them work. It's about honoring the knowledge and expertise that someone brings to the table by virtue of the role he or she is in and not something bestowed by those in authority. The more you understand the concept of partnership, the more inclined you'll be to move away from the parental "empowerment" of others.

Infrastructure Is a "Must Have" for Shared Decision-making

Every time I get into a discussion about empowerment and all that it means in a decentralized workplace, I recall an experience early in my career. I was doing a workshop entitled "Empowerment: Moving from Concept to Reality," and before the meeting a vice president was giving me a tour of the facility and talking about some of their key initiatives, including improving staff morale. He commented that while he knew they could do better, he felt they were "doing pretty well with this idea of empowering people." I asked him to tell me about the infrastructure they had in place to involve staff in decisions about their work environment. He said, "Well, they can come to my town hall meetings every month with any questions they have, and they can always raise their hands in a staff meeting and ask about anything we're doing in the organization." Needless to say, I had new insight after that conversation about what I needed to say in the workshop!

Without an infrastructure in place that legitimizes decentralized decision-making, we're just giving lip service to the concept. Without an infrastructure, whatever shared decision-making may be happening will likely be personality dependent: "We did that when so and so was here but after she left it fell by the wayside." While decentralizing decisions seems like a no-brainer, if we say it's important to balance responsibility, authority, and accountability, it doesn't just naturally happen; we have to be intentional about moving decision-making out and provide ongoing support for the process. It must be understood that the upfront cost in decentralizing decisions is offset by long-term gains. The entire management team needs to shine a light on this basic belief and understand how fundamentally important this is to a sense of partnership. There needs to be a commitment to providing tools to increase effectiveness, access to information, and support for the process. Without any one of these things the process will be undermined... consciously or unconsciously.

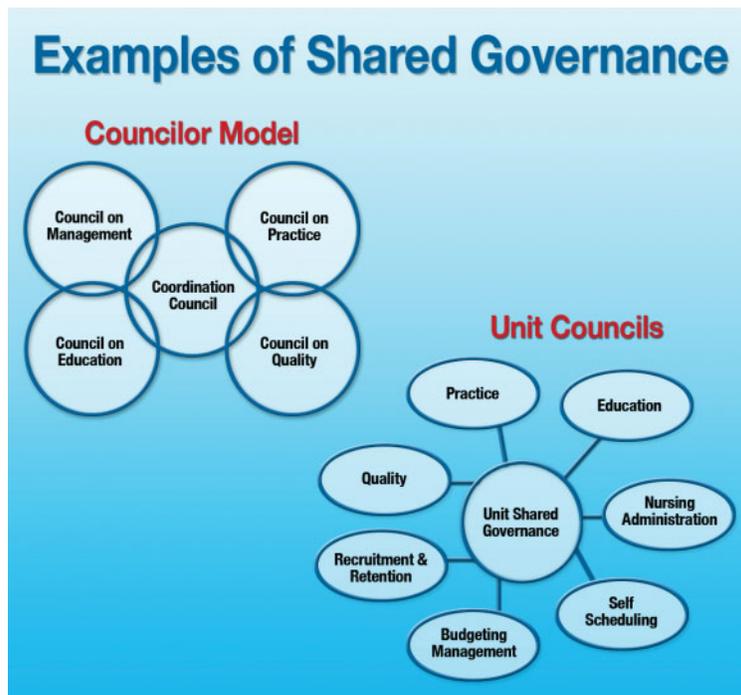
When organizations are intentional about operationalizing the principle that decisions are best made by those closest to the work, you'll find a structure in place that formalizes the decision-making authority and sustains the shift from participatory management to shared decision-making.

What Infrastructure Looks Like

In any number of companies in the business world, you'll find designated teams charged with decision-making around core business functions. Because the bulk of my experience has been in healthcare, I'll highlight several examples from that industry, but the underlying intent in all these efforts is to involve the subject matter experts in decisions so they'll be better decisions.

Shared Governance Model in Nursing

One of the earliest proponents of decentralizing decision-making in healthcare was Dr. Timothy Porter-O'Grady in the early 1980s. His classic model, often called the councilor model (see Examples of Shared Governance on the next page) takes key aspects of the work to be done (four councils) and assigns accountability for decisions in these areas to elected representatives from various nursing units on each of the councils. His model reflects the value of connecting the councils by having the chairs of each council form a coordinating council. The coordinating council provides a clearinghouse for projects and serves an oversight function to avoid duplication of effort and put short-term task forces together when councils have joint ownership for a particular initiative. These councils promote consistency in standards of practice across all nursing units and foster a more collaborative work environment as relationships develop horizontally with a shared focus of improving nursing practice and patient outcomes. Before or after developing the councils across all nursing units, most organizations develop unit-based councils to deal with practice, quality, education, and management issues.



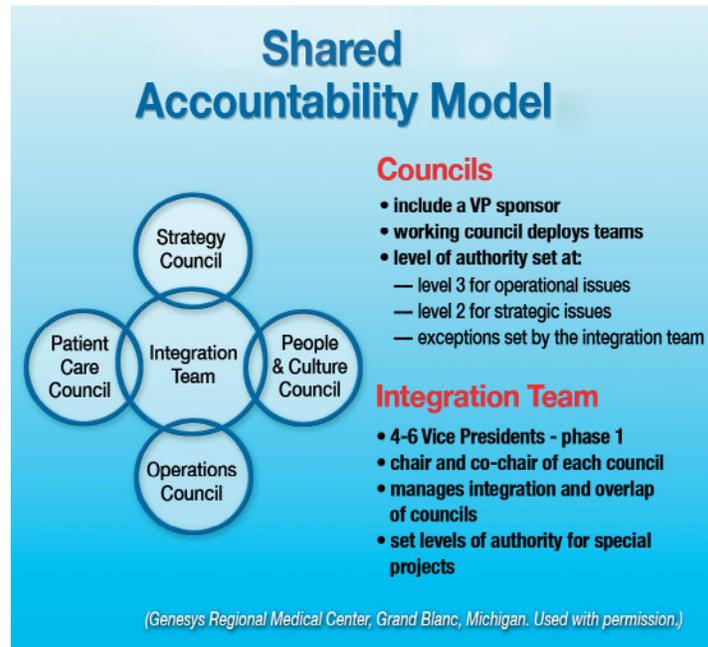
Second-generation shared governance involves inviting other disciplines to participate in unit based councils. This could include pharmacy, dietary, social work, etc.

The ideal size for councils is 7 to 14 members and training in problem solving and meeting management improves productivity.

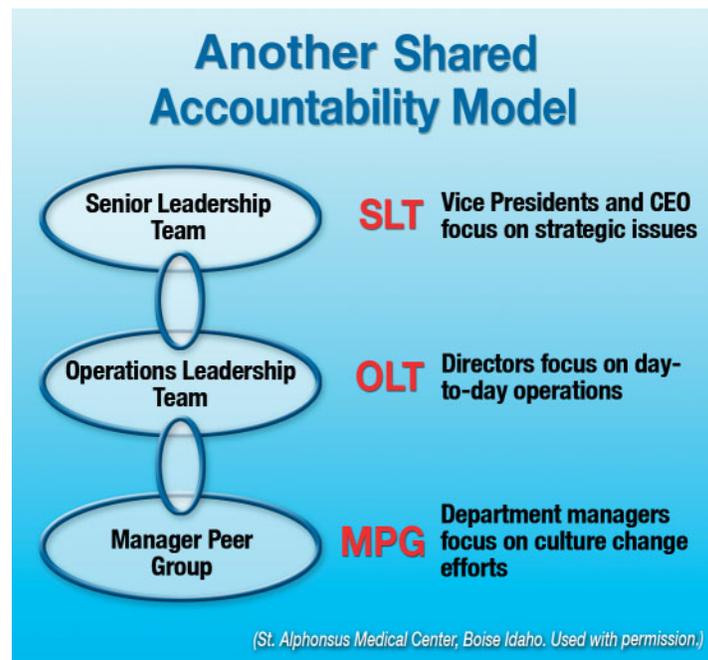
Shared Decision-making Organization Wide

A number of medical centers have taken this concept beyond just the nursing profession and put these councils in place to decentralize decision-making across all disciplines. An excellent example of an infrastructure for decentralized decision-making is one developed by Genesys Regional Medical Center in Grand Blanc, Michigan (see Shared Accountability Model on the next page) in which four councils were designated (Strategy, People and Culture, Operations, and Patient Care) and the chairs of these councils formed an integration team. The function of the integration team was like an air traffic controller overseeing the work being done to avoid duplication of effort, set levels of authority on special projects involving more than one team, and develop the budget needed to support the infrastructure. This group opted to have a senior sponsor on each of the councils to remove barriers and act as a resource. Karen Burdick, one of the key people involved in the development of this structure, relates that the People and Culture Council was particularly important in that organization because they were doing intentional work to change the culture and update human resources practices. She highlights several key points about the development of decentralized decision-making, including:

- It's key to consider stakeholders needed on the council or teams based on roles and expertise, not on people or personalities.
- A charter should be developed by each team designating the purpose of the team, objectives, decision-making scope, membership, frequency of meetings, and format for agendas.
- Key deliverables should be identified and mechanisms for linking communication regarding outcomes.
- As choices are debated in meetings, always consider what's best for the common good, the success metrics for each project or plan, and what signs indicate that the decision isn't working and should be revisited.⁹



Another model for decentralizing decisions is from St. Alphonsus Medical Center in Boise, Idaho (see Another Shared Accountability Model, below). A key feature of this model is that the chairperson of each council sits on the council with whom they work most closely; this improves communication between the three teams. You'll notice on both of these models that go across the organization that the senior team is focused on strategic issues while day-to-day operations are handled by department heads who have the responsibility and accountability for routine operations. As evidence that moving decisions



to the point of service improves the quality of the decisions, the operations team saved the organization several hundred thousand dollars the first year. They formed “affinity teams” to monitor supplies and purchasing, full-time equivalent positions, contracts, and various growth opportunities, and took ownership for balancing the budget and meeting financial targets. The directors in this group acknowledged their growth as a team and the difference in working with the senior team as partners. It’s been my experience that when you trust people and give them the freedom to do their best work, they’ll amaze you every time.

Proactive Horizontal Relationships

In addition to the benefits of decentralizing decision-making, there are two others I want to highlight because they’re essential in our efforts to do what works at work. One is the value of a peer group and the other is the energy that comes when you get the motor running in the middle of an organization.

We know that hierarchy lends itself to vertical relationships, as you can quickly see when reviewing an organizational chart. This is reflected in conversations about “the pecking order” or being “low man on the totem pole.” Parent/child relationships flourish in this environment as people “wait to see what comes down from on high” or “get their marching orders.” I can see the silo mentality in an organization when I walk into a group meeting and find all the finance folks sitting together, everyone in marketing at another table, and the nurses all sitting together. No one has a second thought about this until we begin the discussion of getting out of silos as part of teambuilding, fostering consistency in management practices, or decentralizing decision-making. I can see the face of a director who looked at me incredulously when I mentioned that his peer group needed to be his “first team.” “I just don’t see how that could happen,” he said. “I don’t even know half the people in the room with me today.” Therein lies the work to be done, and we augment that process by putting an infrastructure in place for shared decision-making. As managers and directors come together to work on issues that matter to them and to the success of the organization, their commitment to the process is strengthened when the structure for their meetings is formalized and they realize that by tapping into the expertise of their colleagues they can be more successful, both individually and collectively. Over time the peer group becomes invaluable by:

- providing support for newer managers, a sounding board to get feedback on an idea, or as many managers have said, “a safe place to ask a dumb question.”
- offering a group experience in brainstorming, problem solving, or fostering innovation around longstanding issues.
- allowing members to debate an issue and learn the group process skills needed for reaching consensus.
- dealing with inconsistencies in management practices and becoming more cohesive as a leadership team, diminishing the “us and them” mentality.
- “finding their voice” as a peer group to bring attention to an issue, defend a position, prioritize issues, or speak with one voice in working with the senior team.
- adding value in retaining top talent because peer relationships often foster loyalty to an organization.
- assisting in succession planning as leaders emerge in these peer groups.

The more developed the peer group, the greater ability managers and directors will have to coach the staff action teams, unit councils, or task forces that report to them. Coaching staff based on their own experiences gives managers and directors far more credibility. You can’t honestly teach something you haven’t felt.

I’ve had the pleasure of facilitating the development of peer relationships at every level in an organization, and it’s universally true that as they have success in dealing with substantive issues, their self-concept as a team improves, their ability to make hard decisions increases, and their energy level improves because they’re becoming more proactive and less reactive. When I first bring up the idea of moving decisions out and forming the infrastructure for peer-level decisions, I often hear, “People will never

agree to come to another meeting ... they're just too busy already." I always like to follow that comment with the question, "Are they busy or are they productive?" Effective peer groups working on issues that matter are productive, they feel valued, and they're adding to their skill sets in the process. On any number of occasions, I've seen team members come in on a day off or take on added responsibilities because of the value they see and feel in being proactive and speaking with one voice.

As the energy builds and becomes sustainable in a proactive group of middle managers, I've not only seen cost savings, better outcomes, and increased morale, but also the positive impact this has on staff reporting to them and to the senior team. I remember one staff member who emailed me a note of thanks to say she'd seen such a difference in her manager that she decided not to leave the organization. They'd developed a staff action team, changed staff meetings so they were run by the staff, developed team agreements with a department that had been their nemesis, been innovative in resolving longstanding issues with staffing and orientation, and several had formed a journal club.

Training as an Investment

Doing what works at work, especially as it relates to moving decision-making out in the organization, requires another shift in thinking: seeing training as an investment rather than as a cost. The "roadmap" discussed in this chapter is well worth the time and effort, but not without patience, resources, and a willingness to invest in people. As I've related the successes of decentralizing decision-making in several organizations in this chapter, I want to highlight the fact that in every organization there was also attention paid to training needs for:

- crucial conversations
- meeting management
- quality improvement skill sets
- dealing with disruptive behaviors
- speaking the language of finance
- understanding large-scale group change
- leadership in a time of transition
- negotiation skill sets/reaching consensus
- strategic planning and project management.

Offering people the skills needed for teams at all levels to be successful is a key issue as organizations weigh the value of doing what works at work. "Trusting the process" implies that the long-term gains will be worth the costs. As you reflect on that roadmap and think about your own organization, it may be obvious to you that it's way past time to start doing what works at work ... but only if the commitment to organizational development is real and sustainable.

While much of what I've been highlighting is common sense and fits perfectly with keeping top talent or recruiting the best and brightest, or is just simply the right thing to align with current workplace demands, I've been amazed over the years at how this work can be devalued. I've seen new CEOs decide that the organization could no longer afford time for "nonessential meetings" and dismantle the entire infrastructure in which the staff had been so invested. I've seen organizations spend years and lots of money developing an infrastructure for decentralizing decisions only to keep the real decisions where they always had been. All too often, organizations make the myopic decision to habitually cut the education budget when money is tight. I've also seen organizations invest thousands of hours from dozens of people and fail to provide the skill set training to sustain group development. Through benign neglect they undo what many thought was a real opportunity for substantive change. I often think of this as spending lots of money on landscaping while failing to put in a sprinkler system.

It's also important to note that when people get a taste of a new way of doing things that feels more in keeping with the "mission, vision, and values" statements and then fail to have the skill set training they need to match the challenges, they feel set up and betrayed. It's difficult to deal with the cynicism that develops when follow through begins to wane and the organization is on to the next great idea or consultant. Every time I hear, "Our people are our biggest asset" and then see training and development take a back seat to the next big thing, I know that trust levels will take a hit and perhaps take years to repair.

Transparency: Top Down, Bottom Up, and Horizontal

One of the best ways to get a sense of whether or not an organization has made a genuine shift from a top-down parental style to one of collaboration and partnership is the degree of transparency that exists between departments and the executive team. The more transparency, the better, because it builds trust and reduces redundancy while supporting collaboration and teambuilding.

I recently heard an interview given by the director of people operations (human resources) for Google in which he stated that transparency was one of the cornerstones of the culture at Google. In his book *Work Rules! Insights from Inside Google That Will Transform How You Live and Lead*, Laszlo Bock makes the case for transparency as a means of building trust in a high-performing organization. He writes, "Openness demonstrates to your employees that you believe they are trustworthy and have good judgment. And giving them more context about what is happening (and how and why) will enable them to do their jobs more effectively and contribute in ways a top-down manager couldn't anticipate."¹⁰ At Google they share the code base (a collection of codes that make their products work) with new hires on their first day. Quarterly goals of all teams are on the intranet, and the executive chairman shares information every quarter, using the same presentation he gives to the board of directors. On a weekly basis, employees have the opportunity to take part in a 30-minute Q&A session with senior executives—and no questions are off limits.¹⁰ It's obvious that these executives understand that the people they've hired are, in fact, their success and they're serious about treating them as partners.

One could argue that the more transparent we are in sharing data, eliminating silos or sacred cows, and rewarding collaboration over competition, the more we build partnerships and foster a sense of commitment to the mission of the organization. The senior team sets the tone for transparency by talking about the elephant in the room, sharing information with those impacted before press releases are sent, or taking the time for an occasional "no agenda" meeting just to take the pulse of the organization and make time for real conversation. People feel valued when you give them your time and you level with them; any of us would say that's what partnership is all about. The next time you're faced with the decision to share information or withhold it, think about what you'd want if the shoe were on the other foot whenever you possibly can.¹⁰

What I Know for Sure

To borrow one of my favorite lines from Oprah, what I know for sure after almost three decades of working with hundreds of organizations is that once you rethink assumptions so they align with what you believe, see the benefits from changing your management style, and experience a sense of partnership in your work environment, you won't be able to go back to the land of "how we've always done it." Those who "get it" will find a way to live out a desire to do what works at work. And if you really get the value of partnership over parenting, you'll find yourself questioning any number of management practices that have come to be accepted as conventional wisdom.

Going back to the iceberg in your mind's eye, you'll realize that by changing what you think, you now have good reason (and an obligation) to change what you do. To be authentic, there needs to be an alignment between what we say we believe (shifting from parent to partner) and the management practices we live by. While you might find it interesting to work with your partners in human resources and revisit some of your policies that reflect a parent/child tone, I want to take a deeper look into the systems for performance management. I've opted to review the system for discipline and performance appraisals because these two policies speak volumes about whether we see ourselves as parents or partners. Let's take the insights gained thus far and consider what it would look like to challenge conventional wisdom with management practices that line up with our changes in thinking and that allow us to begin doing what works at work.

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Chapter 7

Ensuring the Audio Matches the Video

Changing Policies and Procedures

Reflecting on that proverbial iceberg where we began this journey, hopefully you've found several basic beliefs about management that resonate with you. Assuming we're on the same page, it's time to shine a light on the management practices that flow from those shared beliefs. If our policies and procedures reflect these basic precepts, you could say that "the audio matches the video," but that's not always the case. You might find it interesting to review your policies and notice how often the tone in which they're written is very parent/child or the stipulations or practices outlined reflect a basic lack of trust. Pay particular attention to those policies or practices with the greatest gap between how it's supposed to work and what actually happens.

To help get you started with this idea of the audio matching the video and aligning beliefs with actual practice, I've opted to address two managerial functions that have likely left you frustrated: Dealing with a disciplinary issue and completing a performance appraisal. I believe we keep using outdated approaches in these key aspects of organizational life because we're not sure what else to do. For the remainder of this chapter, we'll venture off the conventional path and onto a more progressive one, and in doing so, the audio and the video will synchronize. Wouldn't that be a nice note to end on?

Disciplinary Process for Commitment or Compliance?

Several months after I finished a management development program, one of the participants called to express her frustration with having to use her organization's discipline policy with a seasoned professional whose performance had been slipping. She shared how hard it was to have worked on creating more of a partnership with the staff on her unit and now having to revert to what she felt was a very parent/child way of addressing a disciplinary issue. She said that having to comply with the steps in the policy left her feeling like she was caught between doing as she was told by HR and violating her own common sense. I empathized with her frustration and we talked over ways she could negotiate with HR to update the policy. As we finished the call, I couldn't help but wonder how often managers who consider themselves progressive are forced to use a system that makes them regress into old patterns that they'd rather not use.

The policy I'm referencing is called *progressive discipline*, which is a nice way of saying that we treat people worse and worse (progressively escalating the punishment) until they comply with what's expected. The typical steps include a verbal warning, a written warning, suspension, and then termination. Since the 1930s when a top-down, hierarchical model was the norm, this approach has served to follow the criminal justice model in which discipline and punishment are woven together as a means of "enforcing the rules." Reread this paragraph and you'll notice the tone of the language: That people have to be punished into compliance or that the punishment should fit the crime. This line of thinking fits perfectly with a critical parent mindset and is clearly at odds with everything that speaks of partnership. Knowing that their role is to recognize people for a job well done and deal constructively with those who

fail to meet expectations, managers will tell you that there's nothing constructive about connecting discipline and punishment. Using progressive discipline is destructive and sets up an adversarial relationship rather than a sense of partnership. When I ask managers if this age-old policy works for them, the barrage of complaints I get are consistent across all kinds of organizations. As one manager told me, "I'd give up this game we play in a minute if I just knew another way to do things." The universal complaints with escalating punishment include¹:

- It puts the manager in a "police role," which feels controlling and parental and runs counter to promoting adult behaviors, especially in dealing with seasoned staff or professionals.
- Managers see the process as simply too many hoops to go through for HR approval.
- The process is adversarial in nature and there's a "reluctance to go there" if you don't have to; as a result, problem behaviors go on much longer than they should.
- Managers know they allow some people more leeway than others.
- Employees learn to play the game of meeting expectations only as long as they're "being monitored" and manipulate the system; once they've served their time, nothing else is required.
- Over time, punishment loses its power and being "written up" is no big deal.
- The system fosters an "us and them" relationship that runs counter to creating a sense of partnership.²
- It rarely results in improved motivation, ownership for personal change, or self-discipline; rarely does someone come back from suspension with a good attitude or renewed commitment.
- It stresses compliance rather than commitment.
- When employees act in certain ways only because they must, the organization has lost the benefits of individual commitment and acceptance of personal responsibility.

In the decades this traditional approach has been used to bring about behavior change, the escalation of punishments totally undermined progressive managers who wanted to work in partnership with their staff. To put it mildly, "little value comes out of the common belief that discipline and punishment go hand in hand."²

As you read that list, it's painfully obvious why the manager who called me was so exasperated. Our conversation brought back memories of the dissonance I felt over years in administrative roles when it was time to have a conversation about needed behavior change, especially involving knowledge workers. I remember the day when a colleague shared with me a now classic article by Eric Harvey, entitled "Discipline versus Punishment" from *Management Review, the Journal of the American Management Association*. How refreshing it was to discover another way to handle disciplinary issues that wasn't parent/child in nature and that had the potential to foster an even better relationship between employees and managers!

Harvey's ideas resonated with me because his underlying belief is that changing behavior is a personal responsibility and it's possible to get someone's attention without punishment. It's no longer the manager's responsibility to take names and write people up; instead, it's all about recognizing what's going well and letting low performers know the consequences of their decisions to not meet standard expectations. The choices they make determine the choices managers need to make. Requesting that employees take ownership for needed changes and recommit to the organization by being disciplined in how they behave is the polar opposite of seeing discipline as something you do to people. It's about creating a commitment for self-discipline rather than punishing someone into compliance. The ownership for behavior change rests with the employee where it belongs, not with the manager. This approach has been called nonpunitive discipline, discipline without punishment, and positive discipline. For purposes of this discussion, I'll use the term *positive discipline*. The advantages of positive discipline over the more traditional method are significant. They include:

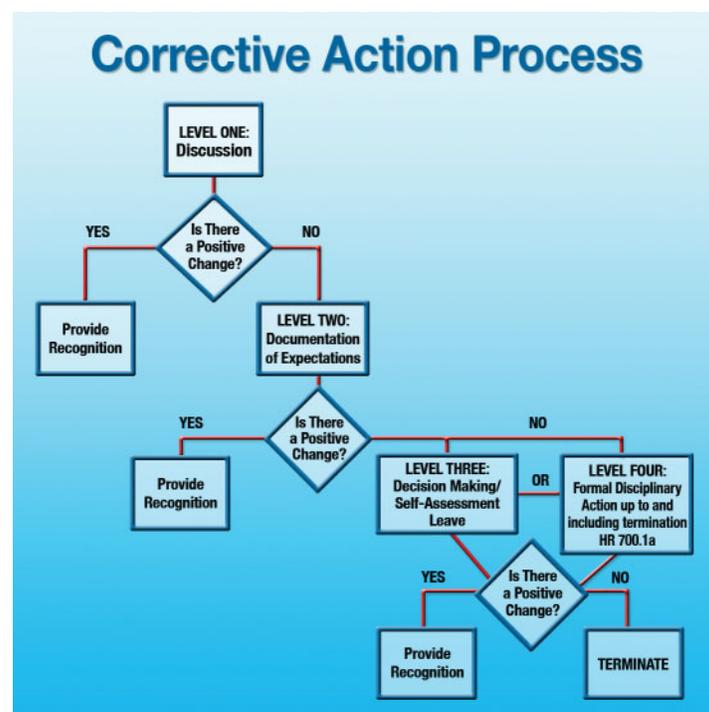
- The manager is no longer in a police role, but rather is a coach.
- Performance issues are dealt with in a timelier manner; there are no hoops to jump through.

- The responsibility for behavior change is placed with the employee, where it belongs.
- Employees develop their plan for maintaining behavior changes rather than being given an “action plan” by the manager.
- It creates a sense of partnership between adults rather than fostering a parent/child relationship.
- It emphasizes the future, not the past.
- Time spent monitoring for compliance is instead used for coaching and recognition of positive changes.
- Unionized work environments prefer this approach because it’s fair and transparent.²

When you treat someone like an adult, he or she is more likely to respond like an adult and take ownership for his or her own behavior change. You’re asking someone to be more self-disciplined rather than disciplining them with increasing levels of punishment.

Moving Away from Punishment and Building Commitment

Developing a process with the intent of fostering commitment rather than ratcheting up punishments isn’t complicated. The system resembles the more familiar model as seen below (Corrective Action Process), but the underlying belief in this approach is substantially different. Positive discipline shifts the ownership for behavior change from the manager to the employee and reinforces the manager’s effort to provide support and encouragement to bring out the best in the employee. This is all about ownership and accountability, not inflicting punishment. This shift in thinking from a punitive model to a more affirming one is significant and needs to be organization wide. If we just use new language or tweak a process while still operating in a parental mindset, it will become apparent to employees that this is nothing more than lip service or a cosmetic change. While the process isn’t complicated, the underlying assumptions take time to change and need to be taken seriously. Harvey makes a point of this when he cautions that making the change just on paper or with new language will never work. He writes, “The impact of the change on the organization will be no more than that of putting a Mercedes emblem on the front end of a Pinto. What’s required is a total organizational commitment to an entirely different approach to the issue of managing people, performance, and professionalism.”²



However, positive discipline isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to be used any time expectations aren't met. It's appropriate in situations in which formal discipline or termination isn't needed, but at the same time the employee needs to close the gap between what's expected and what's actually happening. This approach also works particularly well when the issue is behavioral in nature and when a straightforward conversation would likely get the person's attention. When there are concerns about performance and/or behavioral issues, the manager makes note of positive behaviors and offers constructive feedback about what needs to change and why. A frame for this conversation might be "what's working, what's not working, and what needs to be done differently." The assumption is that the employee will make the necessary adjustments to comply given clear examples of what needs to change and the opportunity to improve. For many, this is all that's needed: honest, constructive feedback with the intent to help the person be successful.

If the employee fails to respond or sustain the needed changes, the first step in the positive discipline process is a *verbal reminder*. The manager identifies examples of the standards that aren't being met or the behavior norms being ignored and asks the employee to take ownership for making the changes to get things back on track. Being clear about "what we have now and what's needed instead" is the kind of conversation that can occur early on before things have deteriorated. Managers are more likely to embrace this conversation because it's not adversarial. Counter to the traditional approach, the choices about next steps belong with the employee, not the manager. The conversation is based on what the employee chooses to do to be more accountable and how the manager can support his or her efforts. I like to end these conversations affirming the employee's ability to make the needed changes because the whole point of positive discipline is to be affirming rather than punishing. One outcome of a verbal reminder is that immature decisions and "acting out" are dealt with in a timelier and adult-like manner, and those behaviors diminish as a result.³

For those who don't get the message or fail to sustain their commitment for personal change, the next step involves using a *written reminder* because there are times when the visual trumps the verbal—seeing the issues in black and white serves to reflect the seriousness of the situation. The manager is clear with the employee about the fact that he or she hasn't taken ownership for needed changes and provides specific examples. The point in this conversation is to dig deeper to better understand why the agreed upon plan hasn't worked and encourage problem solving and specific, realistic goal setting. After this meeting, the manager writes a confirming memo to the employee reflecting the issues discussed and the specific steps the employee has agreed to take to rectify the concerns. A day or two after the meeting, when the employee is likely to be less defensive, the manager has a short meeting to confirm the points made in the memo, asks for any corrections needed, and reconfirms with the employee the commitment that the issue will be resolved. It's important to note that the written documentation occurs *after* the meeting, not before, allowing the employee to have input and decide the next steps. This is the more adult approach instead of being written up and handed an action plan. Another key point is that the employee is *not asked to sign* the memo indicating receipt of it. All this has ever done is convey a lack of trust, so instead you convey your trust in people to act on what they've promised to do and let them know you take them at their word.¹

If these two steps don't get the desired results, the next step is the most distinctive aspect of positive discipline and what clearly separates this approach from the traditional approach. Two things have to happen in this next step. First, the action taken needs to be dramatic enough to get the employee's attention, and second, the action needs to be strong enough that a third party would agree that the employee had a clear indication that he or she could in fact be terminated if he or she failed to respond. The way this is done is to give the employee a paid day off to decide whether or not he or she wants to remain employed by the organization; this is called a *decision-making leave*. Since this is a paid day for the employee to reflect and assess his or her next steps, there's no punishment involved. Should the employee opt to

comply with stipulated changes in behavior, the employee is asked to return the next day with a letter of recommitment to the organization.

Several things need to be said about the decision-making leave to avoid confusion and misinterpretation. Obviously, this step isn't taken without the awareness and approval of HR and others in administrative roles. What makes this step in the process unique is not only that the time to make a decision is paid time off, so it's not punitive, but also that the employee is required to provide a written statement of the changes that he or she will be accountable for going forward. In the traditional system, the suspension is just time to be served without pay and there are no stipulations about what will happen going forward; the point is just to serve the time and get back to work. With a decision-making leave, it's clear that the organization anticipates that the employee's performance and behavior will comply with stated expectations and that failure to comply with the letter of recommitment will result in termination. While you may think that other employees would resent someone getting a paid day off, that's not the case. Employees know the process and no one wants this kind of time off. Anyone who's experienced this process will assure you it was no picnic and the decision-making leave wasn't optional.

It's possible the employee will return from the decision-making leave with the awareness that he or she needs to resign. Others will return with their letter of recommitment and then fail to live up to what they said they'd do. In this case, the employee is terminated. In effect, the organization is saying, "we need you to function at a level that apparently doesn't fit with your capabilities." Much like a no-fault divorce, it's simply a parting of the ways. This leaves the manager with less guilt, engenders less anger or workplace violence, and because of the fair and transparent process, the terminations are upheld. In reality, most employees given a decision-making leave return with a sincere level of recommitment to the organization and succeed in their efforts to sustain needed changes over time.¹ This "wake-up call" serves to get the employee's attention and ensures the behavior changes will be sustained.

I'm reminded of a story told by an employee relations manager in a large healthcare system of an employee who actually sent a thank-you note to HR after going through this process. She noted that she thought the process was fair and she recognized that her performance had been slipping for a variety of reasons. She acknowledged that her supervisor could have just fired her but instead she was given the opportunity to reflect on the situation and make a decision about whether or not she wanted to meet expectations. She returned from the decision-making leave with a whole-hearted commitment to the organization.⁴

In this same organization, employee satisfaction scores have shown a steady improvement every year, according to their Gallup Employee Engagement survey. Of particular interest is an item that states, "My supervisor cares about me as a person." This score has improved every year since the positive discipline policy was implemented.⁵ Reinforcing this point, the director of nursing found such positive outcomes with this approach that he wrote an article for *Nursing Management* journal entitled "Positive Discipline Reaps Retention," in which he noted a dramatic decrease in suspensions or disciplinary actions and an overall improvement in employees acting in a more mature and responsible manner as they were encouraged to take ownership for needed changes. He mentioned that communication between staff and managers had improved, and managers were no longer at odds with their colleagues in HR because the policy is clear and workable.⁶

In another large healthcare center in Michigan, the employee relations manager found similar success with this approach and was especially impressed by the plans developed by employees to sustain their behavior changes. In reflecting on the progress made in just one year, she stated, "It's become clear to me that when we treat our employees as adults and support their efforts to change, they respond as adults and often exceed our expectations."³ This comment serves to illustrate how important it is that the audio match the video if we want to create a healthy work environment. As Harvey points out, "It is

through the discipline system that the organization's culture is revealed most directly to the individual."² The employee handbook may extol the value that an organization places on their employees, but nothing speaks louder than how concerns are addressed when things deteriorate.

There will always be a small group of people in any organization who have no intention of taking ownership for behavior change. There are those who are so attached to a victim mindset that personal accountability is a foreign concept. There are people in administrative roles just as attached to making sure the punishment fits the crime. I've dealt with senior executives who couldn't relinquish their criminal justice mentality, which had been instilled early in their careers, and no one was fooled by their newfound language or halfhearted endorsement of policy change.

A Well-Planned Implementation

In my experience, the most helpful guide to use in the implementation of positive discipline is *Discipline Without Punishment* by Dick Grote. He offers excellent suggestions for effective coaching as well as a detailed process for moving to positive discipline. It's important to have HR, members of the management team, and selected employees on the implementation team working together. Having just HR drive the change minimizes the opportunities for partnership between staff and management.⁷

This is a substantial culture change, and a shared sense of ownership for the change will augment the importance of this process. It's also important to measure, monitor, and maintain this management practice with metrics established and ongoing training planned. A cautionary note: Notice the language choices you make as you develop this policy. In my work I've seen a positive discipline policy written with a highly parental tone, undermining the value of partnership. It isn't uncommon to see the decision-making leave labeled as a "disciplinary leave of absence," and the punitive language again creeps back in, making one wonder if it's just a cosmetic change.⁸ When no real change in underlying beliefs is taking place, it's always apparent in the tone and language used in the policy. Beware of old language in a new policy and use this as an opportunity to reexamine underlying beliefs and assumptions.

Evidence-Based Management Practice

In the introduction, I mentioned that one of my intentions in writing this book was to highlight evidence-based management practices and move away from how we've always done things. Moving to a way of dealing with performance issues that's based on affirmation and partnership rather than a punitive, parental approach is a classic example of what I had in mind. The evidence is there to say this is a "best practice," and no effort to shift from parent to partner as part of an organizational culture change can happen without moving to this approach. Consider the following examples of success with positive discipline:

- A government agency in Texas saved 1.2 million dollars with a 30% reduction in turnover within the first two years.
- A utility company had a 63% decrease in employee grievances in one year.⁷
- A transit system had 100% of appeals involving disciplinary actions upheld.²
- A nursing department experienced a 75% reduction in disciplinary actions in one year.⁶

As further evidence that this model for disciplinary issues is becoming best practice, I know of a large health system on the West Coast that negotiated with 27 different unions to implement this approach. Clearly, the time has come to recognize that the policy used for most of the last century has no place in this century. If the audio is going to match the video, having partnership as a key aspect of our approach to discipline is long overdue.

Performance Appraisals

When I first sat across a lunch table from Mary Jenkins, a newfound colleague in the field of organizational development, and listened to her ideas about rethinking our approach to performance appraisals, I had the same feeling as when I first read Eric Harvey's classic article on a new way to deal with discipline. Finally I could see another way to design a system that felt so much more like a partnership between adults rather than a parent/child interaction. In her bestselling book *Abolishing Performance Appraisals: Why They Backfire and What to Do Instead*, which she co-authored with Tom Coens, she makes a case for rethinking so much of what we do with performance management in organizations. I told Mary that day, as I prepared for my flight back to Nashville, that I was so glad we met when we did . . . She filled in a puzzle piece for me that I needed to complete this book.

Stop Walking in Front of the Truck to be Sure It Hurts!

That was the working title for this book, meaning how often do you need to get run over by a dated practice before you make a change? Although my editors nixed it, I shared it with Mary as we compared notes on our experience with performance appraisals. If you've spent enough time in organizations, you've likely seen this cycle play out:

- A system is developed with a 5-point rating scale (3 being average) and the system is lauded for all the functions it accomplishes—everything from compensation to development to promotions or staffing assignments!
- Within a few years most employees are rated in the top two categories because ratings form the basis for merit pay.
- The solution is to move to a 6-point rating scale and spread out the ratings with the distribution looking more like a bell-shaped curve. This works for a year or two and then a review indicates that most employees are in the top two categories.
- The senior leadership team gets frustrated with “ratings creep” and calls for a forced ranking so employees must be ranked in the top 15% (high performers), the middle 75% (medium performers), or the bottom 10% (low performers). This creates a nightmare for managers and all sorts of problems for HR around gender discrimination, age discrimination, and so forth. The system lasts about 15 months.
- After the damage has been done, the decision is made to give managers the prerogative to assign what they consider to be a fair rating for employees. At the same time, the system for assigning merit pay is much less transparent.
- The status quo is maintained for a year or two and a new CEO arrives . . . and the cycle starts all over again.

No wonder a book about abolishing performance appraisals hit the mark! To track your own experience with this system, how many of the following statements about the appraisal process ring true for you?

- Once appraisals are done, they're filed away and get very little attention.
- All manner of coercion techniques are needed to get managers to complete the process, including posting names of those who are tardy, strongly worded directives, and so forth.
- Managers complain about the bureaucratic nature of the process and what a waste of time it is to complete all the paperwork involved.
- Every year employees complain that their ratings aren't fair and feel demoralized after the process.
- Long-time marginal performers have a file of satisfactory or better appraisals, which presents a problem when termination is being discussed.
- Due to inconsistencies in ratings, appraisals are difficult to use in considering promotions.
- Managers and employees simply go through the motions, jump through the hoops for HR, and are less than invested in the process.
- With ratings generally inflated, the idea of a “pay for performance system” rings hollow.

If the majority of these statements are true in your organization, join the crowd.

If we look at the research done on performance appraisal systems for the last 50 years in hundreds of surveys, articles, and studies, it's clear that what we've done for years doesn't work. Dissatisfaction with this system ranges from 60 to 90 percent, depending on the article or study referenced.⁹ In a recent article for *Harvard Business Review*, Marcus Buckingham, a guru in the field of organizational development and a bestselling author, shares his insights while working with one of our largest management consulting firms. He writes, "At Deloitte we are redesigning our performance management system. This may not surprise you. Like many other companies we realize that our current process for evaluating the work of our people and then training them, promoting them, and paying them accordingly is increasingly out of step with our objectives."¹⁰

Buckingham has identified one of the key reasons why our performance appraisal systems backfire. Several functions are bundled together in hopes of accomplishing:

- feedback on performance
- compensation issues
- coaching and development
- organizational improvement
- motivation
- documentation in the event of termination
- staffing decisions¹⁰

In reality, these *multiple competing priorities* are a fundamental part of the problem in that taken together, they serve to undermine each other. For example, for there to be an appropriate differential in pay, there needs to be a good distribution of ratings. But when ratings are tied to pay, the ratings will skew higher. This attention to ratings often makes the feedback about performance turn into a defensive discussion rather than one that's developmental in nature, and both parties leave the conversation frustrated.

Another reason for the failure of performance management systems is the fact that they're based on a faulty set of beliefs that few of us would claim. These underlying assumptions (at the bottom of that iceberg) aren't credible when using research from the behavioral sciences or our own common sense (see chart below).¹¹

Conventional Wisdom	Progressive Thinking
Supervisors are the best source of feedback for those reporting to them.	Feedback is internalized when it comes from a trusted, credible, and respected source and from those with different areas of expertise.
Focusing on an individual's weaknesses will improve his or her performance.	Optimal performance is aligned with capabilities, values, and interests.
Poor performance stems from laziness or irresponsibility.	System issues, "fit" for the job, and relationship issues impact performance.
Supervisors with proper training can be fair, objective, and unbiased.	People unknowingly bring perspectives and biases into a rating process.
People will withhold effort unless they're incentivized in some way.	People are intrinsically motivated when work is meaningful; pay isn't a motivator but can be a de-motivator.
Appraisals are required by law and are necessary for legal documentation.	With few exceptions, the law doesn't require appraisals, and they can work against employers in litigation.

It's important to note that the conventional approach to performance appraisals runs counter to the values espoused in most organizations. For instance, we say we value diversity, but performance appraisals are designed in one-size-fits all fashion in terms of the timing, format, and frequency of feedback. The performance appraisal is focused on individual performance when we stress teamwork as the way the organization functions. We talk about partnering with each other, yet the system is set up in a win-lose fashion in terms of rewards. These mixed messages are so common they're just assumed to be part of the process that we've accepted as just how we do things.

Two other key reasons that performance appraisals backfire according to Coens and Jenkins are that they *demotivate more than they motivate* and they *don't improve organizational performance*. While we may have the illusion that improving individual performance results in collective improvement for the organization, that's a false assumption if you understand systems theory. Through the work of W. Edwards Deming in the latter half of the last century, we know that well-designed systems and processes within a work environment foster creativity that fuels organizational success. He noted that the performance appraisal is unfair in that it ascribes to people in a group differences that may be caused entirely by the system they work in.⁹

My own issue with this system over the years has always been how the design of the system created a parent/child dynamic that often seemed counter to everything I believed about work relationships. Perhaps that's why the words of Peter Block resonated with me when I read his take on performance appraisals:

“Performance appraisals are an instrument of social control. They are annual discussions, avoided more often than held, in which one adult identifies for another adult three improvement areas to work on over the next 12 months. You can soften them all you want, call them development discussions, have them on a regular basis, have the subordinate identify the improvement areas instead of the boss, and discuss values. None of this changes the basic transaction . . . If the intent of appraisals is learning, it is not going to happen when the context of the dialog is evaluation and judgment.”¹²

When all is said and done, we remain hopeful that somehow performance appraisals can be worthwhile despite all the evidence to the contrary—and if we're honest about it, we simply can't think of a way to accomplish this bundle of objectives any other way! Knowing that performance appraisals are supposed to provide employees with feedback so they can learn from mistakes and build on their capabilities, we simply accept the fact that these discussions are arranged by managers once a year, go into the personnel file, and are tied to compensation . . . it just is what it is. There are drawbacks, but this approach has simply become an artifact of organizational life . . . or so we convince ourselves. When you step back from this ritual and consider the outcomes across all kinds of organizations and the near universal frustration with performance appraisals, it makes you wonder why we keep doing something that violates our principles, runs counter to research from the behavioral sciences, and consumes an inordinate amount of time and energy. The good news is that in the last decade, organizations have begun to consider alternatives. If you're tired of the audio and video being out of sync and tired of doing what doesn't work at work, some of the ideas that follow will pique your interest.

Out-of-the-Box Thinking

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that we can move from a parent/child dynamic to a sense of partnership by operating off a different set of assumptions. These include:

- Unbundling the process and separating developmental and evaluative feedback—this is essential.¹³
- Moving away from paternalism by shifting the responsibility for obtaining feedback to the employee, who synthesizes the information and creates developmental goals.⁹
- Giving managers the role of facilitator or coach, not judge.

The point with unbundling the different functions packaged in the performance appraisal process is to create separate approaches to achieve desired results. When each function is taken separately, the opportunity is there to develop creative approaches. Dealing with feedback, compensation, and legal cover provides a useful framework for this discussion.

Credible Feedback

It's a given that we all need feedback if we're interested in developing our skills and building on our strengths. With this good intention, the question becomes how do we develop a process that allows for that feedback to be honest and credible (rather than sugar coated or generalized) so we can track progress on a learning curve and see improvement over time? Given the value in creating a sense of partnership and fostering ownership, it would seem logical that the employee drives this process rather than the manager. Obviously there would need to be training on how to best give and receive feedback because it's a skill to do this well on either end of the conversation. A key understanding, however, is when someone else is assigned to judge our work, which can engender a sense of disempowerment. If we're true to the basic principle of adult/adult relationships and autonomy, employees need to take responsibility for assessing their own work and developing their plans to improve.⁹ This is a significant shift in thinking and is foundational in creating a performance appraisal system that aligns with shifting from parent to partner.

Think about a time when you were given feedback that was worthwhile and that you still remember to this day. My guess is you were in a conversation with someone who knew you well, whose insights and perceptions you valued, and who you knew had your best interest at heart. As you would expect, research shows that feedback from sources that meet those descriptors will have greater impact.⁹ Designing an employee-driven system promotes more useful feedback, with the employee choosing the feedback source, and also strengthens intrinsic motivation that's in line with our need for mastery or getting better at what we do. Consider a system in which the employee synthesizes the information gleaned from trusted sources and also completes a self-assessment. The employee then meets with the manager to review an individual development plan and in that discussion identifies relevant organizational objectives, personal career development objectives, and necessary support, such as training needs, assignments, and so forth.

The leadership team at Stanly Regional Medical Center in Albemarle, North Carolina redesigned their performance appraisal process along these lines while working with Mary Jenkins and Howard Stanton to also review their compensation practices. I've included information about their feedback and development process at the end of this chapter (see Associate Conduct & Disciplinary Action and Individual Development Plan). You'll note that the process is greatly simplified in that just a single piece of paper is kept in HR with all pertinent data (annual skills competencies, mandatory training, etc.), allowing for a significant reduction in paperwork. The manager completes the section on objectives in conversation with the employee and they meet two times over the year for this in-depth conversation. Obviously, ongoing feedback occurs without waiting for a meeting because this is key to effective development.

Shifting from manager-driven feedback to employees taking ownership for their own development is very similar to the shift we discussed regarding disciplinary issues. Taking managers out of a judging role and instead focusing on their coaching skills also is in line with the shifts in thinking we discussed earlier in this chapter regarding behavior changes. This may be out-of-the-box thinking, but it's obviously aligned with the theme of this book to foster partnership rather than parental styles of managing. The audio matches the video when we say employees are our most valued asset and demonstrate this with a sincere interest in the development of those assets.

In their work with Deloitte managers, Buckingham and Goodall assisted in designing a system that asked managers to take part in a "performance snapshot" four times a year based on what they *would do* with a given team member instead of what *they think* of that team member. In response to four questions,

the managers generate data that's later used in the aggregate to identify those eligible for promotion or those with critical skills, performance pattern analysis, development paths, and succession planning. The questions include:

- Given what I know of this person's performance, and if it were my money, I would award this person the highest possible compensation increase and bonus (measures overall performance and unique value to the organization on a 5-point scale).
- Given what I know of this person's performance, I would always want him or her on my team (measures ability to work well with others on a 5-point scale).
- This person is at risk for low performance (Yes or No).
- This person is ready for promotion today (Yes or No).

By aggregating the data, there can be a rich discussion of possibilities related to compensation or how to better develop a particular group or subset—spending time talking about people instead of ratings.¹⁰

Before leaving the topic of feedback, I want to mention the value of “upward feedback” as a vehicle for understanding how employees feel about their managers. With the intent of stressing partnership rather than paternalism, the mechanisms in place for providing feedback need to be in place at all levels—and taken seriously. As the Director of People Operations (Human Resources) for Google, Lazlo Bock writes in *Work Rules!* about how challenged he was to find that his scores from Google's upward feedback survey clearly indicated that “my conduct didn't match my aspirations.” He met with his team and detailed for them the changes he intended to make and was very transparent about being a better leader. His staff appreciated his honesty, shared their perceptions of how he could improve, and within a short time his scores were much better. He also notes that as managers across the organization were given honest feedback and the necessary training regarding key aspects of their role, “there has been a steady improvement in manager quality as reflected in the survey.” Given the key role that managers play in every organization, it would seem logical that their developmental issues and training needs would be a high priority.¹³

Fair Compensation

When we stop trying to use money as a motivator and pay people fairly, the likelihood that salary can come off the table as a center point for discussion increases. Pay and promotion discussions that occur at different times in the year than developmental discussions help to deemphasize the issue and allow people to focus on their work. Creative ideas with this function include profit sharing, skill-based pay, employee stock ownership, and team-based incentives. Quite often, cost-of-living increases and market-based pay scales can be the basis for a transparent compensation system so pay isn't a central issue. In addition, career ladders can serve as an objective means of providing merit pay or the use of maturity curves within pay grades to correlate pay with experience.⁹

The most significant issue when it comes to compensation is whether or not the system is seen as fair by those it impacts. When fairness is a characteristic of the system, the audio matches the video. Having said that, most organizations give managers a budget to disseminate and often this is characterized as a “pay for performance” system. This is an illusion because a careful examination of the data (plotted on a graph to see the whole picture) routinely indicates no correlation between perceived performance and pay. A wide variation, in fact, exists between the two that can't be explained. While I admit that compensation systems aren't my forte, I've found it interesting to see the work Mary Jenkins and Howard Stanton have done to better understand what's really happening in an organization when it comes to compensation (see jenkinspeoplesystems.com for more in-depth information).

While on the topic of extrinsic rewards, let me also add a word about placing a high value on recognition rather than compensation. I think it was St. Augustine who said, “Man needs affirmation more than he needs bread.” Having that recognition come in the form of experiential awards (dinner at an expensive

restaurant, a weekend getaway, team dinners, etc.) rather than a monetary reward is key. Research has found that people see experiential awards as more thoughtful, more fun, and more memorable.¹³

Legal Cover

Some might think that we can't dismantle the appraisal process because it provides a paper trail in case an employee needs to be terminated and protects the organization against a lawsuit. This thinking is quite common but not based in reality. Attorneys will tell you that the paper trail from typical performance appraisals can easily be picked apart in court. With inconsistencies in the ratings or standards, ambiguous language, and broad-based generalizations, the data indicate that judges most often rule in favor of the employee.⁹ A much better way to deal with this issue is to have a corrective action process designed for the small minority of employees who risk dismissal. It's important to differentiate between issues with capability requiring a performance improvement plan and those that are behavioral requiring corrective action similar to the process described with positive discipline. My experience has been that managers are often unsure of this distinction between capability and behavior; this is an example of the training needs identified as you fine-tune each function.

Cross-Functional Design Team

In this discussion of the issues with traditional performance appraisal systems, my intent was to provide an overview of ways in which this approach fails and does more harm than good. I wanted to address this particular management practice given how it impacts a sense of partnership, but also highlight ways in which we could follow Peter Block's advice and "create a future different from the past." The timing has never been better, as more and more organizations are beginning to toss out the old and develop an approach that better fits their needs. My suggestion is that you consider developing a cross-functional design team in your organization to conduct a preliminary assessment of the need for change and the particular functions of appraisal that you want to change. Start with a charter from top management reflecting its support as well as the boundaries for this project. Bring together a small team of people, including HR personnel, who are passionate about creating a better system, and then methodically review the function you want to change, including the old and new assumptions underlying the practice you want to develop. Explore different models and decide on the key concepts and skeletal framework, as well as a clearly defined goal for what you want to propose.⁹

I suggest that the design team read *Abolishing Performance Appraisals* by Coens and Jenkins because similar to *Discipline Without Punishment* (recommended earlier in this chapter), the authors lay out a well-defined case for change and a way to bring those needed changes to fruition. Never underestimate the need for training and development to sustain the new system—be sure to factor that into the process.

Understanding What Motivates Us

While some would say that doing away with the traditional performance appraisal means people won't be motivated to do good work, this line of thinking runs counter to everything we know about intrinsic motivation. That's not surprising, as organizations tend to focus on external motivators (T-shirts, water bottles, tote bags, etc.) because they're easier to provide and take less time and intentional work than building on intrinsic motivators.

From decades of research on the subject of motivation, we've come to understand that intrinsic motivation is more powerful than extrinsic motivators like a performance appraisal. In his best seller *Drive*:

The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us, Daniel Pink distills intrinsic motivation down to three key points:

1. Sense of purpose: The desire to do what we do for a cause greater than ourselves.
2. Autonomy: The desire to direct our own lives and have control over our work.
3. Mastery: The desire to learn and become more proficient in what we do at work.¹⁴

Perhaps you can see how seeking credible sources of feedback and taking ownership for one's own career development fit perfectly with these intrinsic motivators. My guess is that any employee would be glad to forego his or her "annual review" for a system that's aligned with these deeper needs. As Daniel Pink so eloquently stated, "We know that the richest experiences in our lives are not when we're clamoring for validation from others, but when we're listening to our own voice—doing something that matters, doing it well, and doing it in a cause larger than ourselves."¹⁴

Think about the hours spent on performance appraisals in your organization and just imagine using that time, money, and resources for a system that's grounded in intrinsic motivators and allows people to do what they do best every day ... a system that supports their need to learn and allows them to partner with mentors and have managers who are good coaches. Assuming that sparks your interest, you may just want to sign up for that cross-functional design team I mentioned earlier!

Associate Conduct & Disciplinary Action

Alternative Corrective Action

Policy Statement: Alternative corrective actions are an optimal, nontraditional approach to employee discipline, and provide for a variety of methods to correct behavioral issues. Employees may be offered a choice of negotiating an alternative action in lieu of discipline. In cases where the only appropriate penalty is termination or where the misconduct is egregious, this alternative to formal discipline shall not be used. Alternative corrective actions do not become part of the employee's permanent record.

Conditions & Procedures: Supervisors who administer alternative corrective actions shall use the following criteria:

- The misconduct warrants a penalty less than formal discipline or termination;
- The deciding manager determines that corrective action has a good probability of preventing further misconduct;
- The employee either self-initiates an awareness of the issue or admits to being engaged in the identified misconduct, accepts responsibility for it, and agrees not to repeat the misconduct;
- The employee agrees to waive any and all rights to grieve, appeal, complain, or otherwise contest actions taken as a result of the corrective action; there is no requirement to initiate formal written disciplinary procedures; however, supervisors have the option of completing a disciplinary action through the decision phase and then enter into an alternative corrective action agreement. If the employee violates the terms of the alternative corrective action agreement, one of two options exist:
 1. Impose already decided upon penalty that had been held in abeyance;
 2. Initiate formal disciplinary action up to and including termination upon violation of the agreement.

(continued)

Alternative Corrective Action Agreements

May be in the form of the following:

Verbal Discussion: between the employee and the supervisor. There can be several of these.

Corrective Interview: used when the infractions continue. This is a formal meeting in which the objective is to develop a written agreement or action plans to ensure future infractions do not occur.

Self-Assessment Leave: One (1) day with pay for the employee to rethink their work habits. A self-assessment leave would be expected to occur once in the employee's career. A repeat would mean termination. It is expected the employee would sign a "work performance improvement plan" after this leave. If not, they would be terminated.

FORMAL DISCIPLINARY ACTION: Taken in the form of a written warning, or termination as outlined in HR Policy 700.1(a).

The Department Manager/Supervisor is responsible for:

- Informing the employee of the standards of conduct that the employee is failing to meet; counseling employee to avoid situations that might result in a need for formal disciplinary action.
- Keeping systematic records for events, dates, discussions with employees, concerning a matter with potential for developing into a disciplinary problem.
- Deciding to discipline and determining the penalty when preventative measures are not successful.
- Determining whether alternative discipline in lieu of formal disciplinary action is appropriate.
- Consulting with the Employee Relations Manager prior to proposing written disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Human Resources will review documentation and advises manager on appropriate course to take. May assist in preparation of a corrective action agreement or termination.

Guidelines for Associate in Preparing Letter of Commitment

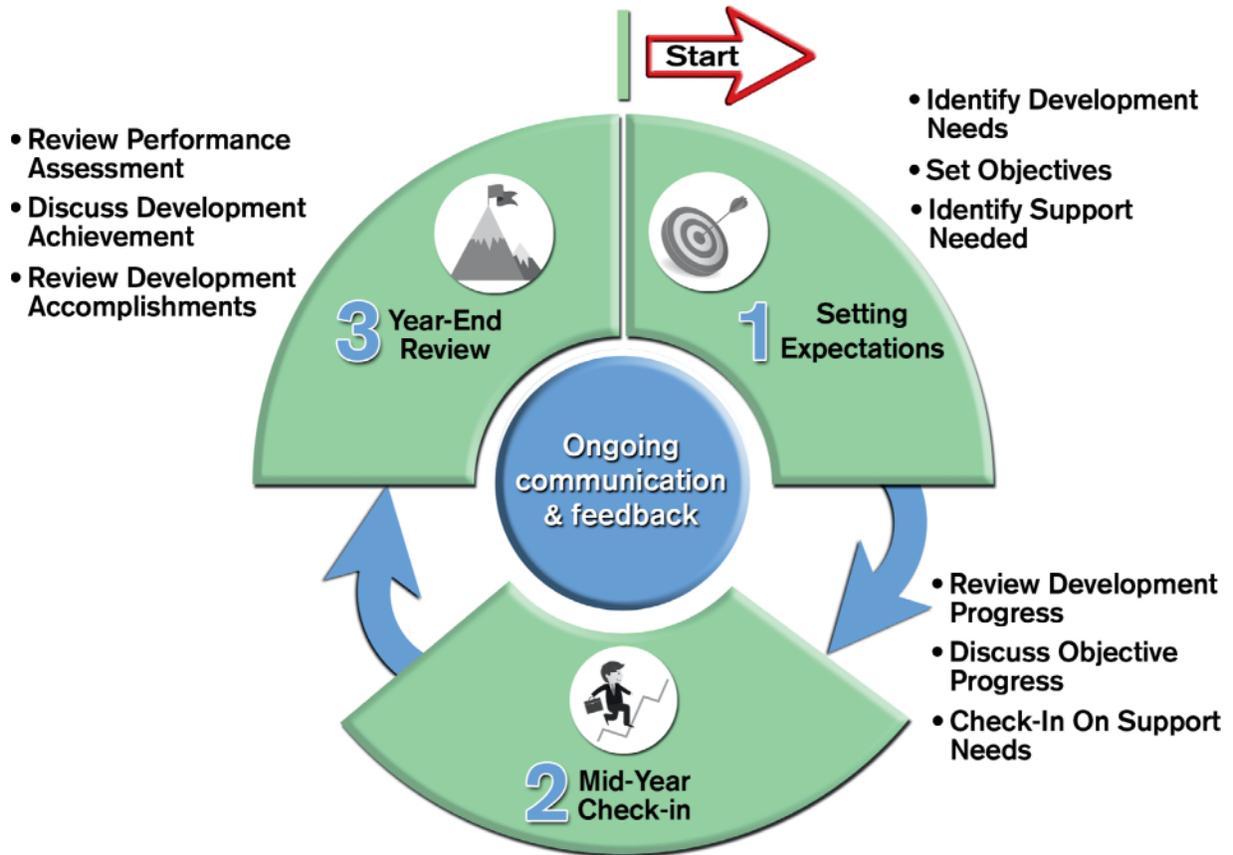
- State the reason you are writing the letter (define what the problem is).
- State what you are going to do to correct (not improve) the situation.
- State your commitment to the organization, the department, and your job.
- State what you expect your supervisor to do should you not correct the problem.

This letter will be maintained in the supervisors departmental file and not be part of the Human Resource file.

OR

If you cannot make a commitment to change, you may write a letter of voluntary resignation and your supervisor will process necessary termination paperwork.

Individual Development Plan



Individual Development Plan

Name: _____ ID Number: _____

Department: _____

STEP 1: Setting Expectations

I-ACT-LIST: Integrity Accountability Compassion Trust Learning Innovation Selflessness Teamwork

Reviewed / Discussed: yes/no (circle one)

Job Description	Y/N	Opportunities for utilizing personal strengths & interests	Y/N
Planning for development & improvement	Y/N	Support of organizational & department priorities	Y/N

Objective Setting:

SMART: Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant Time-Bound

Organizational Objectives: Consider Stanly goals, objectives, and key performance indicators.
Personal Objectives: Consider job responsibilities, career interests, performance feedback, and the I-ACT-LIST

Support Needed: Development or support needs to help achieve objective (on the job learning/assignments, system improvements, training, etc.)

OBJECTIVE	COMPLETION DATES Target ___/___/___ Actual ___/___/___	STATUS Mid-Year Year-End ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ
SUPPORT NEEDED		Mid-Year Year-End ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ

OBJECTIVE	COMPLETION DATES Target ___/___/___ Actual ___/___/___	STATUS Mid-Year Year-End ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ
SUPPORT NEEDED		Mid-Year Year-End ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ

OBJECTIVE	COMPLETION DATES Target ___/___/___ Actual ___/___/___	STATUS Mid-Year Year-End ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ
SUPPORT NEEDED		Mid-Year Year-End ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ ⓐ ⓑ ⓓ

ⓐ Green - Completed or on track with no-concerns ⓑ Yellow - Some concern - back up plan in place ⓓ Red - Major concern-completion is at risk

Signatures: "We discussed expectations for the year."

Employee: _____ Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

Individual Development Plan Discussion Guide and Meeting Record

MID-YEAR and YEAR-END Suggested Discussion Topics	What went well?	What would make the job easier/more effective?
	What didn't go well?	Major strengths and contributions?
	How did work impact others?	Needs for further growth and development?
	How did work impact Stanly's strategic objectives?	Ideas for process/departmental improvement?

STEP 2: Mid-Year Check-in

Reviewed / Discussed: yes/no/not applicable (circle one)

Performance Feedback: Contributions & strengths, opportunities for development/improvement		Y/N
Progress to current objectives & support needs	Y/N/NA	Organizational improvement opportunities
		Y/N

Employee Comments (optional)

Signatures: *"We discussed my mid-year review."*

Employee: _____ Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

STEP 3: Year-End Assessment and Feedback

Performance Assessment: (Check one)	Exceeds Standards ()	Meets Standards ()	Below Standards ()
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Signatures:

Supervisor: _____ 2nd Level Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

Reviewed / Discussed: yes/no/not applicable (circle one)

Performance Feedback: Contributions & strengths, opportunities for development/improvement		Y/N
Progress to current objectives	Y/N/NA	Annual skill competencies
Organizational improvement opportunities	Y/N/NA	Mandatory training
	Y/N/NA	Corporate compliance
		Y/N/NA

Employee Comments (optional)

Signatures: *"We had a year-end discussion."*

Employee: _____ Supervisor: _____ Date: _____

Return original with supporting attachments to Human Resources after Year-End review. Provide copy to employee

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Chapter 8

Lessons Learned

Up Close and Personal

Letting go of old patterns is a process involving personal and organizational change. Some of you may have chosen to read this book for support in making changes so you can work smarter and enjoy your management role. Others might want to take the ideas offered for much-needed culture change in your organization. Here, I'll discuss lessons learned using that two-pronged framework and close with some advice on keeping yourself in a good place as you do what works at work.

There's merit to *staying with the question* sometimes and allowing self-reflection. It's been said that we don't learn from experience, we learn from *reflecting* on experience. When a therapist posed the question to me, "*What part of this is yours to own?*" as I was relating my soap opera at work, I had no idea how often his words would ring in my ears for years to come. As you seek to manage in a way that's more about partnership than parenting, stay with that question and take time for self-reflection. Review the "blind spots" I mentioned in Chapter 2 and decide on two or three that you intuitively know you want to change. Choose someone who knows you well to be your accountability partner and be intentional about changing your management style. It's nearly impossible to do this behavior change in isolation, so find that person who'll tell you when you have broccoli in your teeth and team up.

Stay with that all-important question and know that the personal changes you make are fundamentally important to doing anything else covered in this book. Without personal changes, your audio will never match the video and your credibility will take a hit. Over a period of time, you may want to include a close friend or family member, as well, so your learning curve extends to both work and home life. You'll know you're making progress when you've developed a healthy sense of detachment and a life outside of work, and you no longer feel hyperresponsible. Feeling more proactive and energized is another indicator of progress. Be sure to celebrate small victories! If you find over time that you're doing a better job of *sending the mail to the right address, asking for what you need, and being true to how you honestly feel*, you're well on your way to finding your voice and giving up being all things to all people.

Accept as a given that you'll "regress under stress." Taking two steps forward and one step back is just part of the process sometimes. You may regress to a parent mode when you're feeling pressure to produce certain outcomes. Regressing to a child mode when those to whom you report become demanding isn't uncommon. As you get pushback from some or others present a roadblock, just *see the person or experience as a teacher*. Make sure you learn the lesson and begin again. Perhaps a controlling boss is helping you see that you have a right to how you feel and what you need, and that speaking up is the only way she'll ever respect you. A manipulator in your path can help you learn how to set limits. I can say from experience that if you fail to learn the lesson, other teachers will show up in years to come until you get it.

Your efforts to be more of a partner with your staff present a learning curve all its own. Given that many of those reporting to you have grown up in hierarchical organizations, it's important to *go slow to go fast later*. I've seen managers announce in a staff meeting that they wanted to develop a staff action team or a unit-based council and ask for volunteers, appoint a convener for the group, and later that week give them agenda items for their first meeting! It's easy to get caught up in getting things done and

forgetting this important point. If you've ever made a stir-fry dinner and noticed that cutting up all the ingredients beforehand is more efficient, you have a perfect analogy. Taking time to let the staff think over the things that matter most to them, having them tell you who they want on the team, and giving them the training they need to run an effective meeting or problem solve as a group demonstrates that you want to partner with them. Taking the time to ensure they can be successful means that you've greatly increased the likelihood that your efforts for partnership will be trusted and their early successes will help build momentum for more substantive issues. As you develop those with whom you work, remember to *expect growth and not perfection*, and trust the process.

As you work to make meaningful personal changes, never underestimate the value of humor and vulnerability to help you connect with people and find common ground. Over the years I've found that humanist Carl Rogers was right when he said, "The things we think are most personal are most universal," and by sharing lessons we've learned or admitting mistakes and asking for help we're tapping into that common ground that says we're *all* on a learning curve.¹ Self-inflicted humor has a way of disarming people and acknowledging our humanness. Simply saying, "If I had that to do over again I'd do it differently" creates a level playing field and makes it easier for others to be vulnerable when they need to be. Vulnerability helps to create trust, so give yourself permission to be human and notice how others partner with you as a result.

Being less of a parent and more of a partner with your team will be embraced by some and very frustrating to others who'd rather not be accountable adults. Part of doing what works at work is to own your responsibility to raise the bar, and in that regard you can expect to be challenged. To shore up your intuitive sense and help you avoid typical pitfalls in dealing with difficult people, establish a mentoring relationship with someone whose judgment you trust and with whom you can be honest. Pay attention to those around you who are the least parental and most effective in what they do, and solicit their advice. As I write that line three faces pop into my mind of mentors who were just what I needed at the time, and my lesson was just to ask for what I needed.

Speaking of mentors, I'd like to add the best advice I had from those three who were instrumental in my success. A nationally known nursing colleague with whom I worked early on in my consulting career noticed that I was a little anxious as I was preparing to work with a large healthcare system shortly after joining the company. I was anxious because I felt like a novice and this was a huge assignment. She reminded me, "Your job isn't to have all the answers. Your job is to help them recognize their own answers and trust their own insights. Quite often, the wisdom is in the room." A few years into my consulting career, I watched a chief nursing executive work with her leadership team to close a hospital. Amazingly, she was getting thank you notes from those who were losing their jobs! The compassionate process they'd developed to move through this difficult time left people feeling genuinely cared for. As she shared her insights about this experience with me she said, "Sometimes you simply need to redefine success." I knew as she said it that her words would be useful to me for years to come, and sure enough they have been. A few years ago I had the pleasure of working with a kindred spirit who was the internal organizational development specialist in a large health system where I was doing a leadership development program. It seemed as if we could finish each other's sentences within the first morning we worked together, and I came to trust her perceptions. She would often remind me to "stay curious" and explore the situation more before forming an opinion. I can't tell you how many times that advice has kept me from jumping to a conclusion and failing to see the bigger picture. Keep an eye out for those colleagues with whom you resonate and listen carefully—they can be of great help with your learning curve.

Culture Change Efforts

The image of a three-legged stool pops into my head when I reflect on my experience with culture change, both those that worked and those that fizzled. This is substantive work, over at least four or five

years, if not more, and shouldn't be undertaken lightly. A champion at the executive level (preferably the CEO), strong support from HR, and a committed organizational development specialist fill out my three-legged stool. Without any one of these supports, the chances of success are greatly diminished.

When you take on the challenge of moving decision-making out into the organization and aligning management practices with a mindset toward partnership instead of parenting, it's imperative that the organization support this effort with an investment in the expertise needed to increase success. Those with a background in organizational development will be familiar with Kotter's model for large-scale group change or Bridges' model for managing transitions as well as skill set training needed for group problem-solving and promoting teamwork. One of my key lessons learned over the years is how important this expertise is during the long haul of culture change. A well-trained organizational development specialist will also have the credibility to work with the executive team as they try to relinquish control, which is never easy.

The culture changes described in the preceding chapters are significant, and the last thing that needs to happen is for the middle to get energized about getting out of silos and working on issues that matter to them only to find those to whom they report aren't sold on the need for change. In years of facilitating shared decision-making and cross functional work teams as they took ownership for daily operations, I've seen a pattern of the top committing to the culture change work but then having great difficulty in relinquishing control and becoming more strategically focused. As one CEO said to me when he began to get some well-founded pushback from the director group on key initiatives, "I wanted them empowered, but not this empowered!"

One way to work through this is to have the executive team take the first steps before rolling the idea out to the mid-level. For instance, have the executive team set objectives for changes they want to make and a time to measure their success. Only after they've followed their learning curve should the concept be cascaded to the middle of the organization.

Another pattern that's very damaging is for an organization to make real progress with culture change efforts and then have a new CEO dismantle the infrastructure or be bought out by a system or company and told to fall in line with new directives. Strategizing ahead of time on how to avoid these realities might allow good work to flourish. Making a business case for maintaining the gains or using pilot projects to prove the value of an updated policy are ways to offset this all-too-frequent scenario.

To quote a mentor of mine, "The process isn't done once a system is implemented!" The ideas presented in this book require meaningful behavior change, short circuiting old patterns so you don't regress under stress, and looking back to incorporate lessons learned. Creating subject matter experts or "train the trainer" programs and setting up a structure of annual reports on key initiatives would ensure ongoing training and development after implementation. Budgeting for this training speaks volumes about how serious an organization is about culture change. Failing to sustain developmental work with training dollars is one of the most classic ways the audio fails to match the video. When it's clear that efforts for sustaining culture change may lack funding, avoid taking employees down this path because the cynicism produced when old patterns win out may last for years and create a sense of insurmountable betrayal.

Bring Your Best Self to Work

How we show up at work each day matters a great deal. A management role in this 24/7/365 interconnected and increasingly complex world is challenging, to say the least. It's easy to slip into a workaholic pattern and feel like a gerbil on a wheel. None of us make good decisions or handle situations with any emotional intelligence if we're depleted. The dynamic underneath depletion is anger, and we're seeing that in spades with the increase in workplace incivility. We know that the brain is wired in such a way that we hold on to negativity like Velcro and let the positive roll off like Teflon, so bringing our best selves to

work has to be intentional.² Your best efforts to change your management style, foster partnership, and create a more empowering work environment will be undermined when you fail in the area of personal balance and self-renewal.

I mention this as a deal breaker not only because of work-related pressures but also because I think we're being judged by a new yardstick in the workplace today. It's no longer just about our expertise or training but more about how we handle ourselves and deal with each other.³ The management style I'm recommending in this book and the organizational changes that naturally flow from more progressive belief systems require that those in leadership roles step up their game and take ownership for adding value by what they bring to the table.

My grandmother gave me good advice years ago when she said, "Always try to leave things better than you found them." That can only happen when we put forth the effort to manage self-talk and stay positive, intentionally engage in self-renewal practices, and realize that we're setting the tone as leaders for the kind of work climate we create with those around us.

Positive Self-Talk

Mark Twain made us all aware of our self-talk when he said, "I have had all manner of trials and tribulations in my life ... and some of them actually happened!" We all know the voice in our head that allows us to see the glass half full or half empty, that reminds us of past failures, or motivates us with a mantra to carry us through a challenging time. Our self-talk creates our attitudinal outlook, and our attitude is everything ... in fact, if you talk with people undergoing chemotherapy, they'll tell you attitude is everything! Here are some of the things I've learned about that voice in my head, along with ideas to make it work for you rather than against you.

- *Understand that positive thinking gives you energy while negativity drains your energy, and we always have the option to look at the half full or half empty.* We decide if we're going to think in a way that leaves us with energy and feeling proactive or if we're going to just circle the drain and take up residence in the pity puddle. If you want proof, take notice of your energy level the next time you leave a gripe session.
- *Reframing is a skill you can learn that will serve you well as you work on keeping a positive mental outlook.* The point is not to sound like Pollyanna but to know that you can't change what happens, just how you decide to think about what happens ... then reframe those situations in a way that leaves you with energy. For example, focus on lessons learned in a difficult situation or see the person who's causing you to stay awake at night as a teacher and value the ways this has caused you to come out of your comfort zone. Reframe a situation and deescalate your emotions by saying, "Five years from now no one will remember this." A line I use with myself is, "Something about this is perfect ... I just don't know what it is yet." Whether we have an unexpected change to deal with or a life-altering event, reframing things in a way that leaves us proactive makes a world of difference in the ability to deal with it. I always remember Victor Frankl's line in *Man's Search for Meaning* when, as the Nazis took him into the concentration camp, he said to himself, "They may have my body but they will never get my spirit!"⁴ Now that's reframing at its best.
- *Spend time with people who have a "can do" attitude and your own self-talk will benefit.* Emotions are contagious, so don't self-sabotage by listening to the BMW club (bitching, moaning, and whining) or to those who always have a reason why something can't work. One of my lessons learned is that when you spend energy trying to get someone out of the pity puddle they're likely to pull you in with them. Intentionally move toward people who allow you to be positive and proactive and away from those who drain you.

- *Watch the tendency to say something will be “hard to do.”* How you frame a situation will go a long way in determining what your experience is like. When you convince yourself that something will be hard, it likely will be. Say to yourself, “I’m not sure how this will turn out, but it’s bound to teach me something and be an adventure,” and it will be.

Self-Care Practices

Perhaps the most important thing that any of us ever learn about self-renewal is that if we fail to be intentional in routinely doing the things to replenish body, mind, and spirit, it’ll never happen. As one workshop participant said to me, “If I don’t take care of me no one else will—that I know for sure.” Here’s my top 10 list in terms of lessons learned about self-care—use them like a checklist and go with what resonates with you. You’re welcome to add to this list and use it as a starter kit for taking better care of yourself!

1. ***Allow yourself quiet time each day.*** This can be yoga, devotional time, journaling, meditation, or whatever allows you to unplug and just be. A Buddhist teaching reminds us, “Just as a jar of muddy water settles and becomes clear when it is still, so do we.” Take time to settle.
2. ***Practice mindfulness.*** Making an intentional effort to be here now, in the moment and without judgment, is the crux of mindfulness, and the health benefits have been well documented. Mindfulness is a practice, a way of being that requires “an embodied engagement on the part of anyone expecting to derive benefit from it . . . it requires a strong commitment to yourself for discipline and at the same time bringing to each moment a gesture of compassion and kindness.”⁵ So often we’re rehashing an experience or rehearsing for the future, and as a result we miss this moment. Practicing mindfulness allows us to live our lives, not live in our head. Being more mindful can allow us to “purposely pause” and listen in a much deeper way to those around us.⁶
3. ***Get regular exercise, adequate rest, and eat healthy foods.*** These are basic self-care items, and hopefully your commitment to this can come prior to a health-related wake-up call.
4. ***Laugh on a daily basis.*** Laughter is tonic for the soul, so find ways to smile as often as you can and hang around people who are funny—they’ll serve you well!
5. ***Have an attitude of gratitude.*** This self-care tip can be used in several ways, and when you decide to try it, you’ll be amazed at how your energy shifts. As you fall asleep at night, think of five things you’re grateful for and notice the difference it makes. When you’re in a long line, heavy traffic, or dealing with lost luggage, notice how your energy changes when you tap into an attitude of gratitude.
6. ***Take a break in your routine every six to eight weeks.*** There was a day when the research on stress advised that we take a break in our routines every three months. With stress levels being high in most work environments, you need a break more often. This can be taking a long weekend or attending a conference; the point is to get away. As we have time away, reflection can be more useful and you may find that you regain perspective just by getting some distance on the situation.
7. ***Spend time with people who nourish you.*** All too often when our schedules get hectic, we forego a birthday party or skip dinner with friends or convince ourselves that someday soon we’ll get in touch with that friend who keeps coming to mind. Being with people you love, or friends who make you laugh or really listen to you, can recharge your batteries like nothing else.
8. ***Make time for hobbies and outside interests.*** This means a life outside of work enjoying things that take us in a totally different direction. As I think about hobbies, golf comes to mind, or my love of photography or fly fishing. What comes to your mind as you think about things you enjoy doing? If you love to read and the last book you read is *Gone with the Wind*, we have a problem!

9. **Learn to say no.** Such a simple two-letter word, but for many of us who are natural caretakers and pleasers, we more often say “no problem!” Self-care requires that we be proactive and set boundaries, making conscious decisions about how we use our time and energy rather than just reacting and letting life happen to us.
10. **Celebrate small victories.** We learned at an early age not to brag about ourselves and are wired to hold onto the negative and dismiss the positive. Noticing and celebrating when we’ve met a deadline, overcome an obstacle, or stretched ourselves to do something out of our comfort zone is a way to balance all the attention that too often goes to the next thing on the to-do list. Whether it’s dark chocolate and a good wine, a fishing trip with old buddies, or buying a little trinket to celebrate yourself, small victories are important. Celebrating work well done is time well spent.

Setting the Tone

A recent report by ABC News indicates that Americans work more than anyone in the industrialized world—less vacation, longer days, and delayed retirement.⁷ It’s easy to see that creating a work environment that engenders partnership rather than parenting is worth the time and effort. As you reflect on your takeaway ideas from this book, you may well conclude that much of what I’ve written is common sense, but it doesn’t commonly happen.

As I bring this chapter on “lessons learned” to a close, one thing I know for sure is that those in leadership roles set the tone for the culture changes I’ve described. Your management style and the way you handle decision-making or the policies you put in place all serve to create experiences for people that allow them to believe that their work is meaningful. In turn, when they believe they’re doing meaningful work, they act in ways that demonstrate their value. And when that happens, the culture changes!

Knowing that you set the tone for doing what works at work, my challenge to you is to create experiences for people that will allow them to believe things can be different. That process may need to start with you being different, as you deal with them as partners or sell the problem and support their decisions on what to do about it. It may even mean that your department serves as a pilot for a new way to handle discipline, or that staff members take more ownership for their own developmental process and build on their strengths.

You may even want to start your efforts to do what works at work by stopping: Stop rescuing and stop feeling responsible for everything! The best way for you to impact anyone else’s behavior is by what you do yourself. Give some thought to what you want to stop doing in order to start doing what works and build some momentum for yourself in the process.

Across the globe, momentum for the changes I’ve described *is* building, and that may well serve to inspire your efforts. Check out any of the “best places to work” and you’ll recognize the themes from this book in the descriptions of their culture. As you think about the millennial generation that will soon make up the bulk of the workforce, it’s helpful to know that they have no use for hierarchy and their driving force is to do meaningful work. In doing what works at work, you’ll be ahead of the curve and create a work climate that attracts the best and the brightest of this well-educated segment of the workforce.

After spending several years formulating my thoughts for this book around moving from parent to partner and shared decision-making, it was heartening to see a review of retired General Stanley McChrystal’s new book *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*. He advocates “normalizing sharing information and power so that informed troops can connect the dots on the fly” and make potentially lifesaving decisions. He stresses the need for leaders to transition from the “all-knowing puppet master” to an “empathetic crafter of culture.” When I read his advice for leaders that “nurturing an organization is more valuable than trying to oversee its every move” and that his leadership style is “more

like gardening than playing chess,” it gave me hope.⁸ An outstanding military figure is acknowledging that hierarchy, silos, and withholding information no longer works in today’s world.

As you make the effort to show people their opinions matter, you’ll not only set the tone for doing what works at work, you’ll be on the right side of history: Sooner or later organizations will have to employ these changes to survive. During this all-important transition, know that whatever success you have is a step in the right direction, and that when all is said and done, you’re leaving a legacy.

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Points to Ponder

- Send the mail to the right address—avoid triangles.
- Ask for what you need—it ups the chances you might get it.
- Be true to your intuitive sense.
- Just because they throw it doesn't mean you have to catch it.
- Focus on the “circle of influence”—personally and with peers.
- Being proactive energizes—reactivity is de-energizing.
- Things are unfolding as they should.
- Forgive whoever you need to today—not for their sake, but for yours.
- Practice the power of positive thinking—focus on the half full.
- Control is an illusion.
- Don't push the river—it flows by itself.
- Learn the lesson—lay it down—and go on.
- Trust the process—no one died and left you in charge.

Enough already... Start doing what works at work!



Sharon Cox

Sharon Cox is a nationally known healthcare speaker and author, with 40 years' experience ranging from faculty and administrative roles to consultation and training. She's conducted seminars for more than 500 healthcare organizations on leadership training, change management, shared governance, and organizational development. Sharon is the co-author of *Nature's Wisdom in the Workplace: Managing Energy in Today's Healthcare Organizations*, *Essential Skills for Nurse Managers: Tips Tools and Insights*, and was a contributing author to *The Engaged Workforce: Proven Strategies to Build a Positive Health Care Workplace*. She's also an editorial board member and regular contributor to *Nursing Management* journal. Sharon lives in Nashville, TN, where she enjoys golf and fly-fishing with her husband Jim.

Get out of the pity puddle

Tired of trying to keep employees motivated and not getting anywhere? Frustrated with outdated management systems and performance evaluations that waste your time? The controlling, caretaking, and top-down decision making we've done for so long doesn't work! Real change hinges on shedding a hierarchical mindset and moving from parent to partner with your teams. But where do you start?

Enough Already... Start Doing What Works at Work! offers a roadmap to positively impacting your workplace, making the case for a more commonsense approach to management. If you can start doing what works at work, you can create a future that's different from the past. There's no more time to waste!

Here's a sampling:

On educating managers...

"If we see it, we get it. The visual trumps the verbal."

On dysfunctional teams...

"Get off of the seesaw and out of the parent/child way of doing things."

On staff entitlement...

"Just because they throw it doesn't mean you have to catch it."

On victim thinking...

"What part of this is mine to own?"

On ineffective communication...

"When differences are expressed in the parking lot rather than in the conference room, it's a problem."

On reframing a situation...

"Something about this is perfect...I just don't know what it is yet."

"This book is a real gem! Sharon Cox has condensed her wonderful wisdom and practical advice from years of experience across a wide variety of organizations in her usual down-to-earth style. She makes an airtight case for updating management practices, with an emphasis on partnerships. The insights, tools, and wisdom she shares make this a valuable guide for those ready for management in the 21st Century. This is clearly a useful and life-changing resource!"

Tim Porter-O'Grady, DM, EdD, APRN, FAAN, FACCWS
Senior Partner, Health Systems, TPOG Associates, Inc.