

**“Boundaries for Leaders”**  
**Henry Cloud**  
**Book Note ~ Dave Kraft**

While leadership as a discipline is very, very important, the personal and interpersonal sides of leadership are every bit as important as the great leadership themes of vision, execution, strategy, and the like.

They can create a culture that augments high performance, accountability, results, and thriving, or cause a culture to exist in which people become less than who they are or could be. And most of the time, these issues have little to do with the leader’s business acumen at all . . . but more to do with how they lead people and build cultures.

Things such as:

- Help people’s brains work better
- Build the emotional climate that fuels performance
- Facilitate connections that boost people’s functioning
- Facilitate thinking patterns that drive results.
- Focus on what behaviors shape results
- Build high-performance teams that achieve desired results
- Help you lead yourself in a manner that drives and protects the vision

As a leader, you always get what you create and what you allow.

There are a lot of ways to get there. The real problem is getting the people to do what it takes to make the plan work. That is where you win or lose. It’s always about the people.

It is about leading the “right people,” empowering them to find and do the “right things” in the “right ways” at the “right times.” That is what will bring a plan to real results.

Individual weaknesses and poor interpersonal dynamics can overshadow the strengths.

“People” issues tend to sneak up on even the best leaders, sometimes derailing even the best talent and the best-laid plans.

When leaders lead in ways that people’s brains can follow, good results follow as well.

You can get the results you desire, if you lead in ways that people can actually follow.

He realized that he would have exactly the culture that he creates and would not have the one he did not allow to exist. Whatever culture he got, he was either building it or allowing it.

What are boundaries? They are made up of two essential things: what you create and what you allow.

In the end, as a leader, you are always going to get a combination of two things: What you create and what you allow.

Leaders define the boundaries, and successful leaders define them well in several key areas:

The vision, the focus, the attention, and the activities that create forward movement are defined by leaders.

The emotional climate of the organization and its culture is created and sustained by leaders.

The unity and connectedness of the organization and the teams are built or fragmented by leaders.

The thinking and beliefs of the organization are sown and grown by leaders.

The amount and kinds of control and empowerment that people have are given and required by leaders.

The performance and development of their teams and direct reports are stewarded by leaders. The leadership of oneself, which entails establishing one's own boundaries and stewardship of the organization, is required by leaders.

Leaders often construct teams and cultures that impede healthy human behaviors.

In other words, our brains need to be able to: (a) focus on something specific, (b) not get off track by focusing on or being assaulted by other data inputs or toxicity, and (c) continuously be aware of relevant information at all times.

Setting boundaries would help enhance executive functions: Attending to what was important, inhibiting what was not, and keeping it in conscious awareness.

Using the executive functions of attending, inhibiting, and working memory is a way of leading that permeates everything, so that the organization can make results-driven behavior as routine.

The research says that when we multitask, our brains run in a hampered state. Basically, multitasking reduces an astronaut's brain to that of a confused hamster.

It is not a leap to see your team or organization becoming one big brain, figuring out what is important, what is not, and getting it done through goals, plans, persistence, adaptability, flexibility, execution, and good self-management.

Clarity leads to attention and attention leads to results.

The best leaders will tell you that their strategy is always to surround themselves with people who are smarter than they are, and then empower them to do what they do best.

As research suggests, people don't leave jobs—they leave bosses.

The “caring, people-oriented leader” who has no boundaries creates as much stress as the tyrant, just of a different kind.

Research shows that one of the key ingredients of successful group behavior is having “clear expectations” for the group.

So the trick here is to give people the direction, structure, and accountability that drive good energy, but to do it in a way that does not create stress. And to do that, you have to watch your “tone.”

Hard on the Issue, Soft on the Person

I had a problem in that when I was focused on the task and it was not going well, I could get really buggy, and that came across harshly to others.

The quick way to think about healthy fear is that it motivates us to make reality better in some way, and to avoid bad outcomes.

These two sets of reality consequences—the promise of positive outcomes and the fear of losing something of value—are among the most fundamental drivers of human performance.

Sometimes we overlook the power that positive relational security can have on performance, but it is there, and it matters.

People need a culture in which leaders drive people to “get better,” instead of driving them to be perfect or avoid making mistakes. Research shows that a “getting better” orientation goes much further than a “being perfect” orientation.

When we are emotionally and relationally connected to others, stress levels in the brain diminish. Put simply, relationships change brain chemistry.

Just getting together does not bring unity, as bad meetings have shown us all. But neither does not getting together.

You are not overwhelming people with too many meetings, but you are having enough structured time together to drive connection. And what you are doing in those meetings is more than just getting together and reporting in. You are getting to real connectedness.

Creating a climate that allows for vulnerability and high levels of trust builds connection.

Remember, you get what you create, as well as what you allow. So create connection and do not allow disconnectedness.

Don't allow big problems to become elephants in the room. Bring them to mutual awareness. Name the elephant.

Project updates don't require meetings, but collaboration does.

Make a place for people to see where they are in the story, what it means for them, and what role they can play in moving the story forward.

At some point every high-functioning team I have ever worked with has had to grapple with some very emotional and conflict-laden interactions before they get to their highest levels of collaboration and achievement.

Leaders are notorious for not listening. They are often persuaders by nature, and in their interactions they try to convince people to accept their version of reality or their answers without really appreciating where the other person is coming from.

Before you try to move people to your position, make sure they feel that you understand where they are coming from, what they are feeling, and what they are dealing with.

The prevailing thinking patterns of a team or an organization—its norms and belief systems—will define what it is and what it does.

Seligman put this negative thinking style into three categories, the “three P's,” which are:

- Personal
- Pervasive
- Permanent

Personal: “What ever made me think I could be a leader? The reason we are stuck is that I am not up to this task. What ever made me think I was good enough to pull this off?” Pervasive: “It seems like everything I am working on is failing. Nothing is going the way I need it to go.”

Permanent: “It is not going to change.” There are two kinds of people in the world. People whose circumstances overcome them, and people who overcome their circumstances.

Earlier we said that for the brain to be at its best, the executive functions of attention, inhibition, and working memory must be present. Then we said that a positive emotional climate, connectedness, and positive thinking add to the brain's ability to perform as well. Now we are adding another extremely important element to the recipe: **control**.

Instead of being a control freak by controlling other people, leaders must turn into control freaks about letting others be in control of what they should be in control of that drives results.

Find and focus on the things that you can control that affect outcomes.

## 1. Create Connections to Deliver the Program

Connectedness is built when the environment is safe, and when people are not just parading their strengths, or judging others, or hiding, but are being honest about their struggles.

## 2. Regain Control Through the “Control Divide”

When you get your people to think about, look for, and take charge of what they can actually control, it has an impact on success. Brains change, and so does behavior.

## 3. Take Note of the Three P’s

## 4. Add Structure and Accountability

Social psychology research has shown that when people assign a specific time and place for completion of specific tasks and goals, their chances of success increase by up to 300 percent.

## 5. Take the Right Kind of Action

Don’t count the score. Count the behaviors that run up the score.

They were measuring the activities that would eventually lead to outcomes,

In the list of actions that your people can control, have them find the ones that actually affect outcomes.

The key to success is to be expending energy on the actual drivers of results, not just actions in general.

Nothing drives strong teams like great performance, and what drives strong performance is a commitment to a shared vision and shared goals with behaviors and relationships aligned with reaching those goals.

Teams can get along well and still go nowhere; to get somewhere, they have to do more than get along. They have to work together on the right things in the right ways at the right time toward the same goal. A team’s operating values create a certain kind of environment with an allowance for certain kinds of behaviors and a prohibition against others.

The key here is to see that the team is aligned around a shared purpose or goal. It does not belong to a person, but to the team as a whole. As a result, it is going to take the entire team to make it happen. That is the essence of a team.

People do not trust us when we understand them. They trust us when they understand that we understand them.

My diagnosis was that a lot of their problems stemmed from an emphasis on “consensus,” which often caused people to not really say all that they meant, and which made getting to an actionable decision take far longer than necessary with everyone trying to be so “nice.”

They had to be able to trust each other to really say what they were thinking, and they had to trust each other that if they said it, it would be well received, even if disagreed with.

A third said, “When you give me feedback, I need you to understand where I was coming from when I did whatever I did. I can’t stand to be not understood. You can tell me anything you want if I feel like you know where I was coming from.”

When teams truly realize that they are “for” each other, and that each member is “for” their shared objectives, then they trust each other. And—this is huge—they represent the team downward in their own functions or departments. They wear the “team hat,” instead of the “functional hat.”

Trust Grows When We Display Credibility and Character

Trust Grows When We Believe in Someone’s Capacity and Ability

Is your team specific about their fears about each other’s capacity? Can you have enough trust to say “I am not sure that falls into your strengths, Terry. Let’s talk about how that is going to work.” And does Terry have enough trust to know that your intent is “for” him and the team and the organization when you say it? Can he thank you for giving him that gift?

Trust Grows When Someone Has Built a Good Track Record

And where do we make investments? We make investments when we trust that someone’s intent is for our good. We trust when they have the character patterns to make us believe that they will behave in a certain way that we know is “characteristic” of them. We trust them when we know they have the capacity to pull off whatever we are depending on them to do. And lastly, we trust when they have a track record of good results and positive behavior. Add all of those together, and we want to “invest.” We want to place what is of value in their hands. We want to place it in their “care.”

Connection, intent, character, capacity, and track record are the building blocks of trust.

Great teams are driven by performance. And several things fuel performance, but two of the most important ingredients are measurement and accountability.

The point is for the team to be invested in helping each other get better in executing the values, and also to keep the values in front of them on an ongoing basis. Working memory.

Leaders open themselves to outside inputs. Set a boundary on your tendency to be a “closed system,” and open yourself to outside inputs that bring you energy and guidance. Being an open system means, basically, that you are not arrogant enough to think that you have all the answers, or that your organization has all the answers, or even that you should. The best leaders and organizations I know make use of outside sources for coaching and lifelong learning in a very organic fashion.

That is what good character does . . . it hungers for feedback.

To be the best you can be, you must develop a hunger for feedback and see it as one of the best gifts that you can get. The weakest leaders are threatened by feedback, and often completely closed off to insights that are so easily seen by others.

Set boundaries on your tendency to allow single events or results to define you.

Do not let any one loss tell you who you are or what your potential or future is.

Don't be ruled by fear. Fearful leaders—that is, those who respond out of fear—are the worst leaders, period.

Put some boundaries around the “need for more information” and the desire for absolute certainty. With most big decisions, risk cannot be entirely eliminated. Deal with it and get moving.

The degree to which you allow the naysayers to take root will be the degree to which your change initiative fails.

The higher you go as a leader, the more responsible for yourself you are for how you allocate your time.

In my work, I have always seen a high correlation between success and the leader's propensity to put the vital activities, such as team building or strategic work, in the calendar first and not move it later.

Brain research has shown that the higher-thinking functions actually take physical energy. Allow yourself time to refuel after you experience one of these episodes, just as if you had come back from a long run on a hot summer's day. Give your brain a rest.

A problem or a situation that keep happening over and over again is not a problem. It's a pattern. It's not your gifts that will hold you back; it's your patterns that get in the way of your gifts.

He failed because he had not built a culture that attended to what was vital to making the vision a reality, while inhibiting everything else. He had not focused on building an organization characterized by a healthy and positive emotional climate, a connecting culture, optimistic thinking, and the empowerment of individuals in ways that would create strong teams and drive results.

Far too many people think plenty about the plan and not enough about the people.

You have hired smart people, right? And you have a great plan, right? What could possibly go wrong? The only thing that could get in the way is the failure to create a culture where brains can flourish, where people are inspired and empowered to do their very best work.

You can take charge and lead if you:

Help people attend to what is important, inhibit what is not important or toxic, and remember what they are doing. Create an emotional environment that is free of the wrong kinds of stress. Build teams that are deeply connected. Help people to think optimistically and root out pessimism. Help people get in control of what they can control. Build great teams that are high performance. Lead yourself in ways that create great performance in others.

