RADICAL CANDOR

By Kim Scott

ACTION ITEMS

- Books
  - Andy Grove (Intel) biography
  - Harvard Business Review on culture that captures thousands of small innovations
  - Primer on Decision Making
  - Denial by RIchard Tedlow
  - Competing on the Edge by Shona Brown

KEY CONCEPTS
INTRODUCTION

- "We hire people who tell us what to do, not the other way around." --Steve Jobs
- Apple University's mandate: "We want to defy the gravitational pull of organizational mediocrity."
  - At Apple, they developed a class called "Managing at Apple"
  - All teams need stability and growth to function properly.
    - Rockstars: Loved their work, were world class at it, happy where they are, don't want to move.
    - Superstars: Growth mindset, want to expand their role and take on more.
  - You need both.
- At Apple, as at Google, a boss's ability to achieve results had a lot more to do with listening and seeking to understand than it did with telling people what to do; more to do with debating than directing; more to do with pushing people to decide than with being the decider; more to do with persuading than with giving orders; more to do with learning than with knowing.
- There is a world of difference between autonomy and neglect.
- In Managing at Apple, we often played a video of Steve explaining his approach to giving criticism. He captured something very important: "You need to do that in a way that does not call into question your confidence in their abilities but leaves not too much room for interpretation … and that's a hard thing to do." He went on to say, "I don't mind being wrong.

And I'll admit that I'm wrong a lot. It doesn't really matter to me too much. What matters to me is that we do the right thing." Amen! Who could argue with that?

- In Silicon Valley, they have to get it right. No reason for employees to pay the "asshole tax", (have to work for an asshole because that is the only job available that pays that much). There are too many available jobs and a war for acquiring talent.
- You can't have a relationship with everybody.
  - But you can with your direct reports and how you treat them will trickle down through the organization.

1: BUILD RADICALLY CANDID RELATIONSHIPS

Bringing your whole self to work.

- "Is my job to build a great company," I asked, "or am I really just some sort of emotional babysitter?" Leslie, a fiercely opinionated ex-Microsoft executive, could barely contain herself. "This is not babysitting," she said. "It's called management, and it is your job!"
- We undervalue the "emotional labor" of being the boss. That term is usually reserved for people who work in the service or health industry: psychiatrists, nurses, doctors, waiters, flight attendants. But as I will show in the pages to come, this emotional labor is not just part of the job; it's the key to being a good boss.
- Ultimately, though, bosses are responsible for results. They achieve these results not by doing all the work themselves but by guiding the people on their teams. Bosses guide a team to achieve results.
  - Guidance
    - Feedback.
      - Praise
      - Criticism
  - Team Building
    - Figuring out the right people for the right roles.
    - Hiring, firing, promoting
  - Results
- Very few people focus first on the central difficulty of management that Ryan hit on: establishing a trusting relationship with each person who reports directly to you. If you lead a big organization, you can't have a relationship with everyone; but you can really get to know the people who report directly to you. Many things get in the way, through: power dynamics first and foremost, but also fear of conflict, worry about the boundaries of what's appropriate or "professional," fear of losing credibility, time pressure.
- Developing Trust
  - #1: Share more than your "work self" [Care Personally]
    - Encourage others to do the same.

- ○ #2: Tell people when their work isn't good enough. [Challenge Directly]
- The combination of these two things = "Radical Candor"
- Fred Kofman, my coach at Google, had a mantra that contradicted the "just professional" approach so destructive to so many managers: "Bring your whole self to work." This saying has become a meme; Google it and you'll get more than eight million results. Sheryl Sandberg referred to it in her 2012 commencement address at Harvard, author Mike Robbins devoted a TEDx talk to it in 2016, and Stewart Butterfield, Slack's CEO, has made it a priority for his company. Bringing your whole self to work is one of those concepts that's hard to define precisely, but you develop a feel for it when you start to open up to it. This often means modeling the behavior yourself by showing some vulnerability to the people who report to you— or just admitting when you're having a bad day— and creating a safe space for others to do the same.
- The source of everything respectable in man either as an intellectual or as a moral being [is] that his errors are corrigible. He is capable of rectifying his mistakes, by discussion and experience. Not by experience alone. There must be discussion, to show how experience is to be interpreted.
- Former Secretary of State Colin Powell once remarked that being responsible sometimes means pissing people off. 1 You have to accept that sometimes people on your team will be mad at you. In fact, if nobody is ever mad at you, you probably aren't challenging your team enough. The key, as in any relationship, is how you handle the anger. When what you say hurts, acknowledge the other person's pain.
- Emboldened, the next time she argued her perspective she did so even more forcefully— so much so that she worried maybe she'd stepped over a line with her boss. She hadn't, and to make that clear Russ sent across the "Help me, help you" Jerry Maguire clip. In the movie, Jerry and his client Rod get in a big argument, and the punch line features Rod telling Jerry, "See, that's the difference between us— you think we're fightin', and I think we're finally talkin'!"
- Don't be radically candid about things that don't matter. It takes energy. Only do it for things that matter.
- Scott, Kim. Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity . St. Martin's Press. Kindle Edition.
- Culture matters.
  - ○ East Coast...may adopt radical candor to the extreme.
  - ○ In Japan, or in the south...it may take the shape of "polite persistence"
  - ○ Slight difference, but same concept. Don't silently suffer.

2: GET, GIVE, AND ENCOURAGE GUIDANCE.

Creating a culture of open communication.

- Don't let positive results cover up things that you know need to be addressed.

	Don't Care Personally	Care Personally
Challenge Directly	Ruinous Empathy	Radical Candor
Don't Challenge Directly	Manipulative Insincerity	Obnoxious Aggression

- Radical Candor
  - Offer radically candid praise and criticism. Always.
  - Be specific.
- Obnoxious Aggression
  - Criticize without showing that you care.
  - However, this is important…if you cannot be radically candid, the 2nd best thing you can do is be obnoxiously aggressive.
  - Most people prefer the jerk that challenges them versus the nice boss that never is real with them.
  - "Kick down & kiss up". Beat up the people below them, kiss ass of the people above them. Terrible.
- Manipulative Insincerity
  - You don't care enough about them to challenge directly.
  - You think you care about the team, but you don't if you act this way towards them. You are vain and simply want people to like you.
  - Don't do fake apologies either.
- Ruinous Empathy
  - Russian anecdote. Guy has to amputate his dog's tail, but loves him so much that he only cuts off an inch a day rather than all at once. His desire to spare his dog pain actually leads to more pain.
  - Be specific and thorough with praise as with criticism.
- Start with asking people to be radically candid with you.
  - Don't dish it out before you show you can take it.
  - Actively solicit it.
- It is important to give more praise than criticism.
  - It guides people in the right direction.
  - Encourages people to keep improving.
- When you criticize, criticize the work or the output, not the person's abilities.
- "I don't mind being wrong. And I'll admit that I'm wrong a lot. It doesn't really matter to me too much. What matters to me is that we do the right thing."--Steve Jobs

3: UNDERSTAND WHAT MOTIVATES EACH PERSON ON YOUR TEAM
Helping people take a step in the direction of their dreams

- To build a great team, must understand how this job fits into each person's life goals.
    - Are they rock stars or superstars?
- Your job is not to provide purpose to your team but to understand why the job is important to them.
- Keep your top performers top of mind. Be a partner to them. Not a micromanager or absentee manager.
- Don't treat rock stars like second class citizens simply because they are content to rock it at their current job and don't want to grow. You need rock stars!! Celebrate them.
- When you have rockstars...keep them challenged. Don't stifle their growth. Always new opportunities.
- They had "promotion packets" at Google. If you felt like you deserved a promotion, you could submit a packet of achievements, recommendations and it would be reviewed. Direct supervisor was not part of that process, but could appeal the process.
- Lack of interest in managing is not the same thing as being on a gradual growth trajectory.

4: DRIVE RESULTS COLLABORATIVELY
Telling people what to do doesn't work.

- The ultimate goal is to achieve collaboratively what you could never achieve individually. To do that, you need to care about the people you are working with.
- Sometimes leaders are like someone spinning a long rope over their head. It doesn't feel like they are spinning too fast because they are at the center of it. TO the people on the end of the rope, it feels like they are going 100 mph and hanging on for dear life.
- Lay your power down and work collaboratively.
- The Get Stuff Done Wheel
    - Listen
    - Clarify
    - Debate
    - Decide
    - Persuade
    - Execute
    - Learn (then go back to listening)
- Listen
    - Not just to those who always speak.
    - Prompt the introverts.

- Clarify
  - Push the team to convey thoughts more clearly.
  - As a boss, you should be the editor, not the author.
  - Ideas can be so powerful, but they start off as fragile, barely formed thoughts, so easily killed.
  - Ideas were getting killed at Google management meetings, so they had a process to vet them before presenting at management. They came more fully formed and well thought out.
  - Lots of tech companies have "hack weeks" where you take some time to explore new ideas.
  - Selection, elimination, emphasis...the only ways we can get to the real meaning of things. Understand who you are communicating to.
- Debate
  - Rock tumbler. Lots of noise and friction, but out comes polished stones. That is our job as bosses/leaders. THe end result is worth the noise and friction. Don't leave it on too long--just left with dust.
  - Focus the conversation on ideas, not egos.
  - Duty to dissent. Will someone take up this role? Provide a challenge to an idea for the sake of debate and vetting?
  - Have some humor and fun with it.
  - Be clear when the debate ends and time for decision.
- Decide
  - OKRs (objectives and key results)
  - The people closest to the facts should lead the decision making.
  - Collect facts, not recommendations. People get their egos wrapped up in recommendations. Get facts first.
  - Ok to go "spelunking"...dive deep and go directly to the front line person most knowledgeable about the facts.
- Persuade
  - You made a decision, but there are still people that don't agree with it, and they may be responsible for implementing it.
  - Time to get more people on board.
  - Be in tune with the emotions of the listeners.
  - Credibility: Demonstrate your expertise and humility.
  - Logic: Show your work.
- Execute
  - Minimize the collaboration tax.
    - Don't waste your team's time.
      - 1:1s...come with a list of problems she could help with.
      - Clear the decks for your team to operate efficiently.

- - ■ Keep the "dirt under your fingernails"
      - ● Stay connected to the actual work that is being done.
    - ■ Block time to execute
      - ● Block time off on your calendar to execute.
- ● Learn
  - ○ Don't be too proud to change course.
  - ○ Keep learning, always.
  - ○ Stay consistent. Don't ride the highs or lows too hard.

PART TWO: TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES
5: RELATIONSHIPS

An approach to establishing trust with your direct reports.

- ● Stay centered.
  - ○ You can't give a damn about people if you don't give a damn about yourself.
  - ○ How does the leader structure their life and their job?
  - ○ Know what you need to stay centered. Different for everyone.
    - ■ Daily, weekly, monthly, annually.
    - ■ Put these on the calendar.
- ● How can you do this for your team?
  - ○ Lay down your authority. If you need your authority to get things done, are you really being a good leader?
  - ○ Google had distrust of unchecked managerial authority.
- ● Get to know the people that you work with every day. Company events are awesome, but you need to know the people you are around all the time.
- ● It is a balance of respecting boundaries and asking people to bring their whole selves to work.
- ● Master your reactions to others emotions.
  - ○ Acknowledge emotions.
  - ○ Ask questions.
  - ○ Don't add your guilt to people's difficult emotions...doesn't help.
  - ○ Don't tell other people how to feel.
  - ○ If you really can't handle it, ok to step out.

6: GUIDANCE

Ideas for getting/giving/encouraging praise and criticism.

- Soliciting impromptu guidance.
  - Grin, create a safe space, encourage when people are giving you feedback.
  - You are the exception to the criticize in private rule. It is your chance to show that you want the feedback.
  - "Is there anything I could do or stop doing to make it easier to work with me?"
  - Endure the silence. 6-10 seconds. See if they fill it.
  - Point out when their body language is at odds with what they are saying.
  - LIsten with the intent to understand, not respond.
  - Reward the candor if you want more of it.
  - Keep a gauge of how many times people criticize you during the week? Praise you? Disproportionate?
- "Fix it weeks"
  - "Hack week": come up with new ideas and try them out.
  - "Fix it week": Fix old and annoying problems that have been bothering people for months.
- Giving feedback
  - Situation, behavior, impact
    - Whether praise or criticism.
    - Give the situation, the behavior, and the impact it had.
  - Go through a conversation that didn't go the way you wanted. Or a situation.
    - Line down middle of the paper.
    - On the left, write down what you communicated.
    - On the right, write down what you thought.
    - Where did it go sideways?
  - Stating your intention to be helpful can lower defenses.
  - Give feedback quickly as possible...right after the event. Take 2-3 minutes. DOesn't need to be its own meeting.
  - Keep some slack time in your calendar.
  - Avoid feedback black holes.
  - Correcting someone in email...don't do "reply all" unless totally necessary.
  - Remote offices. Need some type of daily interaction if possible. Even if it is a quick phone call.
  - Say "that's wrong" not "you are wrong"
  - When giving radical candor up the ladder, and boss is not on board, ask permission to be candid first.

7: TEAM

Techniques for avoiding boredom and burnout

- Find out what your team's "crazy ass dreams" are...what is in the core of their being that they want to pursue?
- Conversation #1: Life Story
  - "Starting with kindergarten, tell me about your life…"
  - What choices they had made. Ask about those decisions.
  - See what motivates them.
  - If someone signals discomfort, you have to respect that.
- Conversation #2: Dreams
  - What do they want to achieve at the apex of their career?
  - What skills do you need to acquire to make this happen?
  - Do they align with core values? If core value is "work hard", a dream of "retiring early" may not make sense.
- Conversion #3: 18 month plan
  - What do they need to do in the next 18 months to go down this road?
  - Move confidently in the direction of your dreams. Encourage them to do the same.
- Growth management
  - Determine who needs what types of opportunities and how you are going to provide them.
  - Once a year, put together a growth management plan for each direct report.
- Hiring
  - Methodical, document process, be specific about needs.
- Firing
  - Don't wait too long
  - Don't make the decision unilaterally
  - Give a damn
  - Follow up...check on them a month later. Don't push it. See how they are doing.
- Promotions
  - Be fair, be thorough.
- Reward your rock stars.
  - Thank yous
  - Designate as gurus/experts/go to people at the organization.
- Avoid absentee management and micromanagement...strive for partnership

8: RESULTS

Things you can do to get stuff done together...faster

- 1:1 Conversations
  - Employees set the agenda, you listen and help them clarify.
  - Understand what they are trying to accomplish and what is blocking them.
  - Think of them as having lunch or coffee with someone.
  - Limits herself to 5 direct reports.
  - Weekly or at least every other week. 30-60 minutes.
  - Let them set the agenda.
  - Questions
    - "Why"...
    - "How can I help?"
    - What can I start doing/stop doing?
    - What wakes you up at night?
    - What are you working on that you don't want to work on?
    - Not working on that you want to work on?
  - Warning signs
    - They cancel your 1:1s...don't see them as valuable.
    - Only updates...could have been done by email. Not digging enough.
    - Good news only...don't feel comfortable talking to you.
    - No criticism...you haven't made it safe/encouraged it to happen.
    - No agenda...they are overwhelmed or don't' understand the purpose.
- Staff Meetings
  - Review metrics, study hall updates, and identify, but do not make key decisions.
  - Three goals
    - Review how things have gone the previous week.
    - Share important updates.
    - Clarify the most important decisions and debates for upcoming week.
- Think time
  - Block it off on calendar, and protect it.
- Big debate meetings
  - Debate, not decisions. Major issues facing the company.
  - Lower the tension. Not there to decide, only talk pros and cons.
  - Foster a culture of debate.
  - Slow the decision train down.
- Big decision meetings
  - Pull all the facts and make the decision.

- All hands meetings
  - Everyone.
  - Get others up to speed.
  - Presentation, then Q&A.
- Execution time
  - Time reserved for getting things done.
- Kanban Boards
  - Put up boards
  - Three columns...to do, in progress, done
  - Buy post its and move them around and you quickly see what is the bottleneck.
- Walk around
  - Time to walk around and just visit with people.
  - Schedule an hour a week of walking around.
  - See what catches your attention.
- Conscious culture
  - "Culture eats strategy for lunch."
  - Be aware of it, be purposeful about it.