

OK, LISTEN. I'M GREAT
AT THIS. I'VE GOT YEARS
OF EXPERIENCE AND I'VE GOT
YOUR BACK. TRUST ME ?
READY TO GO ?

I GUESS
SO !

NO AND
NO !

CHAPTER NINE

TOP RIGHT

The problem with leadership

THE REALLY BIG IDEA

Most of the leaders I work with these days appreciate that telling people, ‘Just do it, because I’m the boss,’ doesn’t actually work that well any more. Instead, businesses talk a lot about wanting to ‘engage’ with their employees – to ‘empower’ them and increase their ‘autonomy’.

These are great words and sound aspirations, but what does engagement mean? Does it actually make a business more money? How do you actually *do* engagement/empowerment/autonomy on a day-to-day basis when the pressure is on and you work in an office with strip lighting on an unattractive business park, rather than having a trendy, bean-bag-filled space with a Starbucks concession?

First – the business case. Rather than just using words like ‘empowerment’ and ‘autonomy’ because everyone else seems to be, here is a quick rundown of the research. In a paper published in 2016 by Engage for Success called ‘The Evidence: Case Study Heroes and Engagement Data Daemons’, there were examples from a number of organisations that had been able to link engagement explicitly with increased sales and customer satisfaction. The Co-operative Group found statistically significant links between engagement and sales (sales were 4.2 per cent better in stores with high engagement). Marks and Spencer’s found that absence levels were 25 per cent lower in stores with high engagement. RBS absence rates were 2 per cent lower and customer service scores were 5 per cent higher in engaged business units. Cineworld linked engagement with increased sales of food and beverages.

I have seen it myself. One of the employee engagement surveys that I was responsible for was quoted in an article in the *Sunday Telegraph* in October 2011. I wanted to see if I could make the link between profitability and engagement explicit and irrefutable in my own business. The service-profit chain theory isn’t new and intuitively it makes sense to us that people who are happy at work will give better service. However, there is nothing like seeing those numbers link directly to sales and profit levers with your own eyes to make sure that you actually go and talk to team members about how engaged they are, rather than simply peppering your ‘rally the troops’ speeches with a few key words to pay lip service to it.

When I ran a series of engagement studies for 40,000 employees across a UK-wide business, I saw directly that



higher levels of engagement gave better sales. For every one-point increase in the engagement scores, sales against the previous year went up by 0.19 points. There were other tangible benefits: guest satisfaction rose by 0.18 points and employee retention by 0.15. We also found there were higher standards of safety in sites where there was higher engagement. These might sound like small percentage increases, but when the business sells over 135 million meals and turns over £2 billion per year these numbers represent big cash opportunities.

There can be a tendency to confuse engagement with being ‘happy-clappy’ or dismiss it as HR ‘fluff’. (Those who have been on the receiving end of me recently know I don’t do either!) But importantly, having these assumptions in your mind about ‘fluff’ may mean that your brain overlooks the opportunity to pull a hard profit lever.

In a nutshell, higher levels of employee engagement make or save you money because you are doing two things:

1. Increasing the *satisfaction* people get from their jobs. This means they do the job well – even when you are not there – thus decreasing the investment you need to spend on managing them.
2. Increasing the *commitment* they feel to the company. This means they stay and perform well with you rather than one of your competitors, so reducing recruitment and induction costs.

Science and research help us to understand that getting under the skin of what engages people has almost nothing to do

with HR 'fluff' and everything to do with using what we know about the human brain to get the best performance possible from individuals and teams.

You may have read about or been on training courses which talked about a 'servant' leadership style, or 'bottom-up' team-working. You might vaguely remember seeing some inverted triangles with employees at the top of the hierarchy and the CEO at the bottom. These concepts are not new. However, my practical experience has been that, whilst concepts and theories which seek to put engagement and empowerment at the heart of an organisation's DNA sound great, they are difficult to sell when profits are hard to come by or when times are tough.

To my mind this is because, whilst most of the books I have read about organisational behaviour and design cite business theory or case studies as the 'evidence' as to why we should try them out, they are easy to dismiss by telling ourselves that 'it wouldn't work here' or 'our business is not like that'.

However, recent scientific studies about how the human brain works suggest they *will* work. Given that most organisations are filled with human beings with the same evolved brain circuitry and physiology, it becomes very difficult to argue that 'that fluffy stuff won't work for us here in our business'. The science shows us that, irrefutably, these 'rules' about how the brain seems to respond to rewards or threats are common to us all. So, whether we like it or not, the research now evidences, through combining economics, evolutionary biology, psychology and neuroscience, that building trust, creating engagement and bringing the human



side of ourselves to work are not ‘nice to haves’. They are the first things a leader needs to do to get their people perform to their potential.

You have to have engagement and trust in your *organisational* DNA because the desire to engage and work with people we trust is in our *human* DNA. Evidence shows that we will only respond to a leader who is tough, strong, courageous and challenging if we trust them first. When we trust someone, our brain will look for reasons why that person’s courage and strength are positive characteristics and how we could benefit from them personally. If we don’t trust them, our human wiring will look for reasons why that tough and challenging approach might be a danger to us and something we want to avoid. We know about the pitfalls of that from the SCARF we met in Chapter 4.

The science helps us to accept that some of the behaviours that we learnt from our old boss simply don’t work as well as they used to and why the JFDI approach (Just F***ing Do It) is either dead or dying. It’s not just about Generation Y and millennials entering the workplace with different expectations, although a lot has been written about that. Science suggests that even when the workplace was staffed by with Generation X employees born in the sixties and seventies that there *even more* profit could have been had through increasing engagement, if we’d known then what we know now about how the human brain responds. Getting good financial results can make us lazy. Our brains are cognitive misers – a term we met in Chapter 1. Thinking in new ways takes up a lot of energy. Our brains would rather stick to the tried

and tested methods of doing things. And if it isn't broke (and you are making enough money to keep your shareholders or owners happy), then why fix it?

Sometimes people only get to the point where they know they and their organisation need to change when the cash isn't coming in as easily as it used to. It is why a healthy chunk of my professional life is spent helping already successful leaders to tweak their thinking patterns, in businesses that are aggressively looking to increase profits or cash.



Some leaders I work with find increasing engagement and autonomy comes naturally, but I would say that the majority of people I have worked with at a senior level have come to accept via feedback or increased self-awareness in later life that they are merely 'OK' at it. The people I love working with

don't cover up the realisation that genuine engagement doesn't come as naturally as they perhaps thought it did. I'm actually very fond of those leaders who are blunt and honest enough to confess they would still prefer to be completely in control of absolutely everything and would rather all jobs in the business were done 'their' way. I love their openness that they are learning to live with the discomfort of creating genuine engagement (rather than spending their entire lives at work micromanaging everyone). I love their candour when they make changes not through any sense



of altruism or higher purpose but exclusively because they have come to trust the science and know it will make them more money.

The science and research around creating engagement and autonomy is quite easy to explain. However, science also explains why actually doing this in real life is easier said than done. Given too that engaging a team is only one of the many demands of a managerial role means that it is quite usual in my world for even experienced, talented and successful leaders to benefit from some help.

Remember changing the way we do things when they appear to have worked in the past takes energy that our brain does not want to invest. So I'm unfazed when managers go to great lengths to justify micromanaging their teams because 'We are just not that sort of business,' or 'There just isn't time,' or 'It just won't work because of the pressure here right now.' You are. There is. And it will.

First – the good news, the easy explanation. If you do a straw poll around the kitchen table with your family or in the bar with your friends and ask: 'Imagine someone asked you to do something that might physically harm you or that really frightened you. What would they need to do or say and how would they need to make you feel in order for you to even consider doing it?'

I have found that ninety-nine times out of a hundred (once you have debated 'How risky?' 'Is it life or death?' 'Would you do it for a million pounds?' etc.) that the same two things come up:

**'I'd have to really trust them and their motives
for asking me to do it,'**

and

**'They'd need to convince me they knew what they
were doing and would stay strong and calm, even if
I was panicking or things went wrong.'**

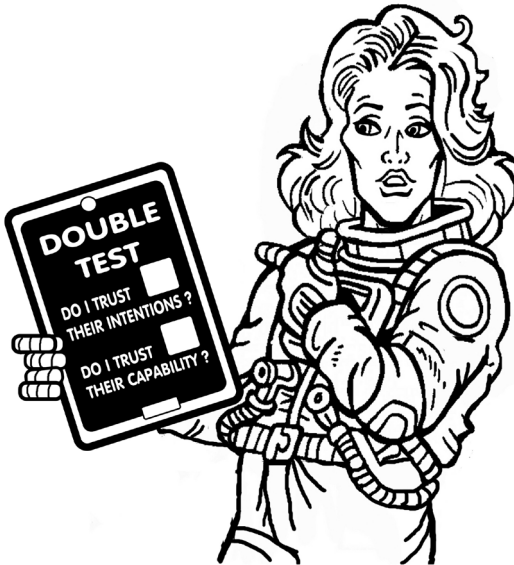
'People are People' (as the mighty Depeche Mode appreciated). Human beings are human at work too. So if the only way for 'people' to get other 'people' to do something genuinely life-threatening was for us to a) trust them and b) see them as strong and capable, why would this be any different at work?

Think back to Chapter 1 when we talked about cognitive dissonance. People are people, and human beings would rather not do things they don't want to. We find compelling evidence for what we already believe to be true and will go to great lengths to convince ourselves that we really don't need to change after all. So in order to stand even a fighting chance of landing an unpopular decision in tough times, people need more from you than just a clear direction and a threat about what happens if they don't do something. People will question what you are asking them to do and justify not doing it in all sorts of complicated and time-wasting ways that mean you have to micromanage them to within an inch of their lives *unless* you can pass what I call the Double Test:



1. They must trust you as a person – they need to believe you have good intentions towards them.
2. They must trust your competence – they need to believe you are strong enough to act on those intentions.

The science and research suggest there is a pecking order. If someone's subconscious doesn't give you the thumbs-up to question 1 when people ask themselves if you have good intentions towards them, then they don't get as far as asking themselves question 2 about your capability. So you can be super-capable and have the most impressive CV in the world, but at a deep personal level people won't care because they



don't trust what you will do with all those skills and all that knowledge. In fact their subconscious thinks you might use your skills to hurt them. Your competence becomes a threat, not a benefit.

Leaders who get brilliant results fast in the toughest times pass this Double Test. When people ask themselves 'Do I trust them?' 'Do I think they are strong?' they get a fast 'Yes' to both. Those lucky leaders who are naturals and pass the Double Test quickly are personally highly effective because that speed of obtaining trust and respect means they don't need to spend much time 'evidencing' it. They don't need to remind people of their qualifications and experience. They don't need to wander round deliberately asking people about their weekends because they have been told it might help them seem a bit more human. This frees up time for them to spend on the business, getting other things done.

Researchers think that the key to getting this trust quickly lies in understanding our evolutionary biology. I find this a bit mind blowing, but I trust the science. Remember, some of our human wiring is really old – around two to three million years old – and researchers have found that some of this inherited wiring is still functioning and influences some of our thinking.

I can't really get my head around bits of my wiring being millions of years old, so I find it easier to think about our cave-dwelling ancestors again. Choosing the right person to be led by might literally have been a matter of life and death for them. Your ancestors' survival would have depended on being able to trust that a person genuinely wanted to keep



them alive *and* was capable of physically protecting them and providing them with food and shelter. Pick well, based on the Double Test, and you get to pass on your genes and your subconscious behaviours. Pick badly and you die, and your genes die with you. So if your potential ancestor picked a leader who was strong, but who didn't see value in them as an individual, there was the real possibility of your ancestor becoming bear-bait or being left out in the cold if the cave was short on room. They didn't get the chance to become your ancestor because they died. Pick a leader who cares about you as an individual, AND who can fight the bear and you are home and dry.

All this is why we are attracted to particular traits in leaders. We have evolved with genetically coded behaviours that kept our ancestors alive. We sometimes don't stop to wonder what exactly it is that Manager A does to makes us brave enough to perform at our best. Or why we can't put our finger on why we don't like Manager B and take steps to cover ourselves. Some of the things we do subconsciously and without thinking are in our brain wiring because they were passed down to us from ancestors who survived. What the science helps us to understand is that it is not our super-sophisticated modern brains that are making some of our decisions about what engaging leadership is – some of it is our 'ancient' subconscious calling the shots.

Most of the time we make decisions about whom to trust in a split



second. The science suggests we made our mind up about people at most within seven seconds of meeting them. And after that point we will look for 'evidence' that this first impression is true.

Imagine someone meets you as part of a 'meet and greet' on the first day at your new company. You have seven seconds to get them on your side. Maybe you aren't your usual personable self. Perhaps you are distracted because you have just read the company reports and realise what an uphill struggle the next month is going to be. You are introduced and half miss their name or misunderstand the job they will do. They think you don't look like you are listening to them (you probably weren't). But the bad news is that every time they meet you subsequently, their brain will actively look for evidence that you don't listen. Worse, it will automatically deselect the times you do listen whilst staying constantly on the lookout for one time you don't. Using every ounce of energy you possess to focus on the people you meet for the first time and spending that seven seconds looking them straight in the eye, dredging up a genuine smile and simply appearing to be someone who cares about them as an individual can save you hours later on when you ask them to do something challenging. Their first impression – 'Here is someone I can trust' – will be the one they search out 'evidence' for.

The news gets worse before it gets better. Say the person is going to be one of your direct reports and spends a half an hour with you. Science has shown we give off around 800 non-verbal cues during that time. So no matter what you said, their subconscious will have absorbed 800 'clues' about



you. Their impression is then likely to be set in stone. Give them the impression that this is something you are finding a chore and that you would much rather be 'getting down to business' is likely to make the 'getting down' to that business much more time consuming because you will have to work hard later on to establish yourself as a leader whose motives people can trust.

This means that we might well try and rationalise how we feel about our boss (or our prime minister or president) and be able to find examples of why our feelings are logical, but really, our subconscious brain has already chosen who we want to follow, way before our rational brain thought about the reasons why.

So back what can be achieved in seconds if you pass the Double Test. Listen in closely. Your team do more when you are not there because their brains want to look for evidence that what you asked them to do makes sense and is in their interest. You free up time to do additional things in the business.

When I'm asked for advice about why a really competent person is taking more time than it should to get a team aligned behind them. I advise them to get feedback as to why people might not trust them before they look to spend time and money anywhere else.

When someone doesn't trust you, they can spend a vast amount of energy trying to protect themselves from harm because they don't think you will protect them. So they triple-check everything. They introduce tick boxes to make sure things can't go wrong and you won't berate them. They want

you there to check they are doing it right and to your standard. They would rather you tell them what to do so that they don't make the wrong guess.

The 'what's not in it for you' is that you have to be there all the time so they can check things with you and you can provide direction and instructions.

The fact that you might inadvertently be increasing the amount of time you need to spend at work cuts both ways – it is true of the leader who offers too much support and helps people to do the job. Even a really well-intentioned leader whom people love to bits might still not be able to stretch performance. Why? Look at the 1600 clues per hour that they are giving people about their strength or capability. When you are giving people clues that you will avoid challenging conversations because you want a 'happy ship' and when you take difficult tasks off people when they struggle, you have the reverse problem. People need you there for constant reassurance. You have become like an overprotective parent. They like you there all the time checking in with them. Just in case. So you don't get to leave them to it and work on something else. Chances are you are doing some of the tasks they are perfectly capable of doing themselves to help them out.

In both of these cases we are inadvertently spending more time than we need to at work, either by micromanaging or nurturing. Equally, we are accidentally encouraging people not to perform to their potential. Where we are providing too much reassurance that 'It's OK' when people fail to complete a task on time and to a standard, we are actually helping them to believe that underperformance is OK. On the other



hand, when people fear failure, they won't experiment and try new things. In micromanaging and over-checking we encourage people to do enough to not get shouted at – but no more.

The research and science builds a compelling case that you need both strength and trust to lead well. It is the two qualities in *combination* that are required to lead well and to build an autonomous team who can manage perfectly well without you. You need to be trusted as a person (so they feel they can try without fear when you aren't there) and perceived as strong (so they want to impress you and feel you can protect them if they get it wrong). The evidence suggests you can't lead to your potential if you have one and not the other.

Getting feedback about trust and strength is the first thing that I do when I'm asked to help a team or a leader where the performance is not where it should be, given the talent present. I use it particularly when performance seems to drop off when the leader is not there to 'supervise' the team. So if your people continually don't do things to the standard that you wanted or seem to drift away from their objectives when you are not there, you may have to face an uncomfortable truth. It is possible that their subconscious gave you a big red *Britain's Got Talent* 'X' buzzer to those fundamental questions about trusting your intentions and your capability. I have helped clients where we have had to face a very difficult truth. That this has been going on for years because their team have been looking for evidence that they didn't really trust them since they first met.

This all goes on at a subconscious level. We often miss what we did or didn't do to get the red 'X' and the buzzer. As usual there is more bad news before it gets better. Whilst you might get feedback about this sort of thing, your team may never tell you straight. For a start, they might not be able to put their finger on why they don't trust you. It's just a feeling they have. So they are unlikely to disclose something they can't back up with evidence. Even more fundamental than that, imagine telling someone more senior than you that fundamentally you don't trust their personal intentions ... Mmm maybe not!

Back to the research. Some people don't like my choice of words – 'trust' and 'strength'. That's fine. Different experts describe these two key traits or dichotomies of 'trusting someone's good intentions' and 'believing someone has strong capability' using different terms, but all broadly find the same thing.



Stanford psychologist and professor Deborah Gruenfeld, in a number of academic papers and, more helpfully for us, really eloquently on YouTube, describes the two traits as 'approachability' and 'authority' – 'I will move towards you because I trust your intentions and I'm happy for you to be in authority because you know what you are doing and will be strong enough to do it.'

Harvard's Amy Cuddy talks about the dichotomies as 'warmth' and 'strength'. 'I warm to you because I trust your intentions,' 'I will follow you because you are strong and have the capability to protect me when things get tough.' You

can read a summary in a *Harvard Business Review* article called 'Connect, Then Lead'.

Others who have translated this into practical advice describe 'support' and 'challenge'. 'You provide me with support, so I trust you care about me, and you challenge me because you are strong and know a lot and I'm OK with this.'

OK. So, in principle this all makes sense and lots of separate research agrees. However, as I mentioned earlier, getting the idea is quite easy, but it is really hard to get right in practice. The reason for this is quite simple: like patting your head and circling your stomach, the two things are easy to do separately, but difficult to do together. In fact, let me rephrase that.

Our body and brain find it almost impossible to be both supportive and challenging at the same time.

Deborah Gruenfeld explains this well. To be authoritative, you need to project your experience and your knowledge as being greater than that of your team and to some extent this leads to distancing yourself from them. Then, to be approachable, you need to get closer to them and demonstrate genuine warmth and empathy – really valuing your relationships with people and hearing their perspective. Difficult to do both things at once.



Amy Cuddy and the Harvard team point out too that there is a hormonal correlation – feeling ‘warm/supporting people’ generally means that they and we are secreting a hormone called oxytocin. Feeling ‘strong/being challenging’ generally means we are secreting testosterone. The bad news biologically is that these two hormones are not very good at co-existing. Some evidence suggests that releasing oxytocin cancels out some of the testosterone and vice versa. Each hormone neutralises the power of the other. This helps to explain why it doesn’t ‘feel’ right to do both together – our bodies have a biological issue with it. So even if your brain buys the idea that it makes good business sense and you get the science, don’t be surprised if, at the very moment when you need to turn on both your warmth and your strength at the same time, your body and your brain (it is lazy, remember) resists.



What I see and hear described a lot is that trying to exhibit trust and strength at the same time is a bit like being on a see-saw. When one quality is high and visible, the other is probably low and hard to see.

This means that on some days, your people are pretty sure they can trust you because you genuinely seem to care, but other days you are more challenging and the last thing you seem is caring. One day you are hosting a conference and talking about autonomy, engagement and empowerment and you have a great time with your team being sociable in the evening, then later in the week you haul them all in and tell them to JFDI and cut expenses because the company needs to hit its monthly cash target. You might be able to convince

yourself that you are doing both. You will be able to ‘evidence’ that you have done things that week both to build trust and to be strong and challenging – but because you haven’t done them at the same time, you don’t get the business benefits that deeper engagement and autonomy are capable of creating for you.

In summary:

1. Being a good leader is easy to describe: ‘it takes warmth and strength’. But it is really difficult to do in practice because it requires you to do two different things at once and your body and brain don’t like it. You need to work at it. The engagement and autonomy it creates, even when you are not in the room, will mean you can spend less time ‘managing people’, leaving you more time to focus on growing your business.
2. It is not likely that you can expect yourself or other people to ‘grow up’ and get over needing human warmth at work, because the impulse to want to trust and be protected is an inbuilt, protective bit of wiring that is millions of years old.
3. If people don’t trust you, you will have to be a very present leader who has to check everything. People will be too scared of getting it wrong to invest much time and energy into doing it without you.

4. If people trust and like you, you have to keep challenging them, otherwise they get cosy, bored and don't perform well. Nice and comfy means more time at work for you because people like your reassurance. You have to chivy them up and cheer them along to get anything done.

GOT IT – NOW WHAT?



First things first

Remember, research shows the two dichotomies have a pecking order. If people don't warm to you and trust you, then they probably won't think you are capable. Patrick Lencioni in his New York Times Best Seller *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, describes trust as the first and fundamental thing that must exist between people in order for a team to function at all. Every piece of evidence I have been able to find suggests that without trust as a foundation, you can't build any relationships that are substantial and lasting. It would be like creating an architecturally fabulous house that is beautifully decorated on a bed of sand. No matter how good it looks, it's going to fall over. This means it makes sense to work on people trusting your intentions first. Think more simply about how your team could warm to you. Are you 'real' and authentic in your dealings with them? Are you 'likeable'?

Maybe you are trying to help another leader to become more effective and get the response 'I'm not here to be

liked, I'm here to be respected.' A practical thing that I do is introduce people to research undertaken by leadership company Zenger Folkman. People were asked to rate their previous leaders across two scales – whether they liked them and whether they thought they were effective leaders. The study created a database of almost 52,000 leaders. Of those 52,000 people, only twenty-seven who were 'disliked' were also rated as 'effective'. Do the maths. It means only 0.05 per cent of the people who were not liked managed to convince people they were good at their job.

Even if you have heard a leader say they are 'not here to be liked' and 'don't have time for all that soft stuff', letting them read this research helps them to think about whether they want to persist with the assertions against those kind of odds. You may have noticed that employment references given these days stick to the barest of facts – what dates someone was employed from and to and in which role. The HR professional in me could talk you through the case law that makes that necessary these days. However, for our purposes in relation to the notion of being 'liked', it is much more probable that people will use their social networks to speak to people, rather than rely on a written reference from a former employer. Thus, it's pretty likely that people will phone someone up to ask 'What do you think of such and such?'

It is also a very regular topic at the coffee machine and over lunch. If people don't like you, it can affect the internal and external perception of your ability to do your job. So the leader you are helping with might well 'not be there to be liked' but they might be more likely to be more personable

if they knew there was a clear correlation between being 'liked' with people saying, 'I actually don't think they are very good at their job.' The work of Zenger Folkman, which is widely cited in journals and magazines, explains succinctly why you need to be both liked *and* respected – not one or the other.



Use the 'evidence' to your advantage

We've covered ad infinitum that our brains look for evidence for what we already believe to be true. If we don't like or trust someone and we can't put our finger on why, we will try to find logical and more 'business-like' reasons to evidence why it's true. Use this to your advantage. Work on being trustworthy first. People are then much more likely to look for evidence that you are good at your job and share that evidence when they are asked what they think about you.

Use a personality profiling tool

As we discussed in Chapter 6, there are a large number tools on the market such as Myers Briggs, Wave, Insights and so on. Most of them should help you to understand whether you will find the 'strength muscle' or the 'warmth' one easier to use. You can then plan with a coach or your HR support how to authentically develop the muscle that naturally gets used less.

Get some quality feedback

This is really difficult. If people don't trust you, they are likely to be too scared of the consequences to give you feedback. If they like you but don't believe you are that strong, they won't

want to hurt your feelings by being critical. However there will always be clues hidden within your feedback and you can tune into those – if you really want to find them.

Try this. Write down two columns and put ‘Warm’ at the top of one and ‘Strong’ at the top of the other. Take the key words written down in your performance review or 360 feedback and put them into one of those columns. So ‘helpful’, ‘genuine’, ‘tries’ would probably go under the ‘Warm’ column. ‘Driven’, ‘focused’ and ‘strive’ would go under ‘Strong’. Compare the columns. If you have a balance of words in both, you might be OK. If you have a long list in one column and next to nothing in the other, you might want to make it safe for someone to help you to understand what that means for you. Is it hiding a fundamental lack of trust, or do your team like you but think you are a bit of a pushover and are actually rather bored?

Be honest with yourself

Ask yourself what your intentions are towards your team. Do you really and deeply care if they succeed? Would you protect them? Would you trust ‘you’?

If the answer is ‘No’ then they can probably sense it. Even if you talk a good game and tell them ‘You can trust me,’ they probably don’t. No amount of telling them to trust you will make it any better – they will just look for evidence that it’s a ploy for you to get something done.

Equally, ask yourself how strong you are when things aren’t going well. Do you avoid difficult conversations because you don’t want to upset people? Do you use language that signals

strength and courage? Do you speak up for your team, even when someone much more senior than you challenges one of them unfairly?

If the answer is 'No' then you might have a great team spirit, but it might be too cosy for people to perform at their best. Being trustworthy but not challenging them might mean that you need to face facts – your team members might never achieve what they could whilst they continue to work for you. Can you live with that?



Fake it until you make it – but be careful

This is a tricky one. There was a brilliant BBC *Horizon* programme on the science of laughter. It highlighted that the brain releases different chemicals when people hear a real laugh versus a fake one. When we hear a genuine laugh, we warm to the person – and release chemicals that encourage us to move closer to them and trust them more. When we hear a fake laugh we release chemicals that make us suspicious and encourage us to create more distance between us and the other person. Worse still for those faking it, our brains order the release of chemicals in milliseconds, much less time than it would take to say 'fake laugh' or 'real laugh'. So people have moved away or towards you many seconds before their conscious brain has worked out whether you are being nice for real.

So if you don't actually care what people did at the weekend, you might be better off not touring the office on a Monday morning to ask them about it. They will sense you are faking it. Do walk around the office, but do so with the

clever part of your brain fully switched on to ‘curious’ rather than going, ‘I’d better ask about their weekend ... oops bored already.’ You will do more harm than good. Ask questions to get to know your team. Find genuine common ground and ways to like them as people. It might take a bit longer, but you will get far more time back if your people sense you are being genuine.

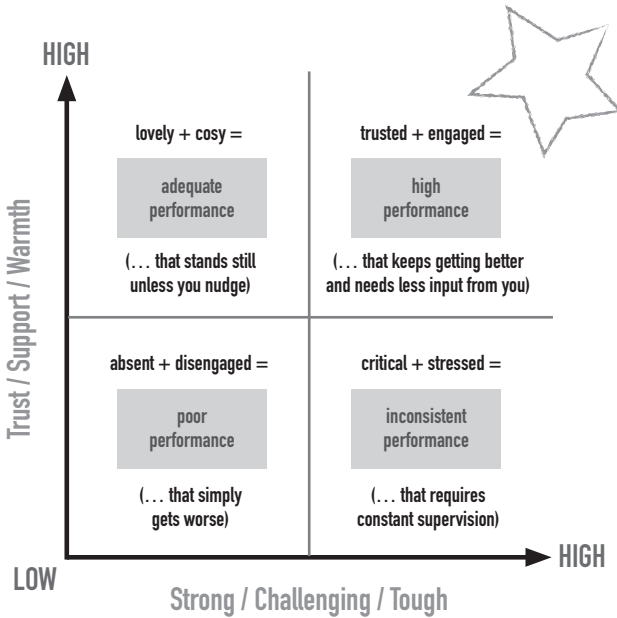
Remember, if you find your brain telling you it feels like you are wasting time on ‘idle chit-chat’, remind your head that giving people ‘evidence’ to like you could be the most productive thing you do all day.

Practise in real life, on real things

Take a piece of paper. Draw an L shaped axis. Draw an upright cross in the centre to fill the space and create four boxes.

1. Write down the leftmost vertical axis ‘Trust/Support/Warmth’.
2. Write under the lower horizontal axis ‘Strong/Challenging/Tough’.
3. Write ‘Low’ in the bottom left-hand corner.
4. Write ‘High’ at the end of both the outer axes – so at the top left of the page and the bottom right.

Well done! You just drew a ‘Boston Matrix’ or a 2 x 2 diagram. In my experience, doing one of these make you look like a genius.



You can draw these four boxes quickly and use them in a practical way to think about what high trust and low challenge sounds like when it comes out of your mouth. Or what low trust and high challenge looks like when you move around your workplace. It can be easier to envisage what high trust *and* high challenge looks like, when you have identified what it *doesn't* look like first. I don't usually bother with the bottom left box ... generally the activity in that box is to do absolutely nothing!

For an example – think about a conversation you need to have with someone. Let's call her Clare. Maybe Clare's performance has dropped off a cliff. She has delivered a report to you late. It's not the first time. Her lateness causes you to

look inefficient. Think about the first lines that you could use to open this conversation and put practical examples of these words in each of the four boxes so that you can practise. You will start to see which style might be easiest for you, and where you might need to dial up either the challenge or the support.

An introduction that would 'fit' the top-left box would be high on warmth, but low on challenge. Perhaps something like:

'Are you OK, Clare? If you don't mind, I'd really like it if we could talk about your performance. I'm worried about you.'

Then think about the bottom-right box. This would be an introduction that is very challenging and low on warmth:

'What the hell is going on with you? I have had enough of you letting me down. I'm not going to tell you about your report being late again. If you don't sort it, I will.'

Then think about the top-right box. High support and high challenge. What would that introduction sound like? Try to find words that you actually use:

'Clare, we really need to have an open and honest conversation about what is behind your reports being late. What is not negotiable is that I absolutely have it on time from now on. I'm hoping now I have made



that clear that you can trust me enough to talk to me about what is really going on here so I can help you work through it.'

You can use this exercise with your teams or yourself to think about almost anything. I have used it with very different audiences, from call-centre employees to help them to deal with difficult customers to executives preparing 'state-of-the-nation' style speeches.

Be top right – with or without permission

Many of the clients I work with end up deciding that a top-right leadership style is the way to go. In some cases this has led to an organisation using 'top-right leadership' as a simple framework and I have coached their whole senior team and trained their line managers to use it daily.

However, one of the great things about deciding to be more 'top right' as an individual is that it doesn't actually require any organisational infrastructure. You can decide to make your conversations and challenges belong to that top-right box tomorrow. You might not always get the balance between support and challenge, warmth and strength or approachability and authority spot on. But, with practice, you will absolutely see the difference in the power of your conversations. It's because the science is on your side.

TOP RIGHT QUESTIONS

For you

- When I dealt with that situation today was I more concerned to assert my authority or to build the relationship?
- Which quadrant did that conversation belong to?
- What would I do if I were going to have a 'bottom-left' approach to this situation? What about a 'bottom-right approach'? And what would 'top-left' look like? So what's 'top right' in this situation?
- Do I feel it is better to be liked or to be respected? What would mean I could have both?
- Which relationships do I have where there isn't a high level of trust right now? What could I do about that?
- Are there some people who I avoid challenging? What could I do to make it more likely that I would challenge them when it is required?



For others

- Would this situation be better if you dialled your challenge up, or provided more support or both?
- If I told you that my instincts suggest you could have been a little more supportive/challenging, would there be a grain of truth in that?
- What are your fears about being too supportive/challenging? Are those fears genuine and what evidence do you have?
- What will be the consequence for you if you avoid having a challenging conversation?
- What are the benefits or potential opportunities of building a more trusting relationship?

LEARN MORE AND SHARE

Really great read

Compelling People by John Neffinger and Matthew Kohut

An easy to read introduction to the principles of being top right. The authors draw on Amy Cuddy's research and the references are helpfully written so that you can know a little more about another book or paper before you go to the trouble of reading it.

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni

A New York Times Best Seller with practical ideas and a simple theoretical model. His research shows how trust is the bottom building block of the team functionality "pyramid" (a bit like Maslow's hierarchy if you are familiar with it) He argues without trust, you can't build a successful team. It is widely used in sport as well as business and good for cutting through politics.

Blogs

A summary of the research in this chapter and ideal for sharing the key elements of the science:

www.itsnotbloodyrocketscience.com/uncategorized/great-leadership-simple-to-define-really-hard-to-do/
<http://zengerfolkman.com/great-leaders-move-fast/>



Articles

A summary of the key principles of the *Compelling People* book can be found in Amy Cuddy, Matthew Kohut and John Neffinger, 'Connect, Then Lead', *Harvard Business Review*, July–August 2013.

A quick summary of the importance of being both liked and respected can be found here:

www.forbes.com/sites/joefolkman/2013/7/25/exceptional-leaders-are-they-the-friend-or-the-enemy

Internet resources

Find Deborah Gruenfeld's video *Power and Influence* on YouTube.

PARTING SHOT

High support; high challenge.

At the same time. Pretty straightforward to describe. Really hard to do. However, in my experience, clients who persist in trying to do both at the same time get results that genuinely amaze them. Results they can quantify in cash. And they confirm that it absolutely frees up some of the time they used to spend ‘managing’, giving them space to do some of the things they would have done but ‘didn’t have the time’.

That promise of more time has got to be worth challenging the cognitive miser in you, hasn’t it? What one thing could you do right now to try this approach today and tomorrow? Do it. Provide your miserly brain with some good ‘evidence’ that it is worth the effort.

I promise. You won’t be disappointed.