

VantagePoint

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ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

HOW DO LEADERS THRIVE? AN OPPORTUNITY TO ENCOURAGE INNOVATION THROUGH THE ENVIRONMENT.



BY **Lacey
Savage, Psy.D.,
Leadership
Consultant**

In business, as in life, there are many opportunities to reflect on your vision, evaluate your progress, mission, and goals, and lay out a new path ahead. Sometimes these opportunities come as external stressors (e.g., a global pandemic) or industry changes, and at times, they are driven internally by a desire to innovate, accelerate growth or drive the business or industry forward. However the desire for change may come about, the perspective and mindset with which it is pursued has significant impact on the tenor of the undertaking and, if positive, can create a shared vision and commitment to building and sustaining momentum, enliven the environment and support further innovation.

As we know from the literature, e.g., open systems theory, the environment is an influential partner in the co-created outcome of the players involved. For example, we are each located in a particular geographic region, and participate in relationships that influence our world view, our belief in potential, and our commitments. The health of the environment, which can also be described as the soil of the organization, can provide nourishment to accelerate growth and outcomes, or, if the soil is lacking key nutrients, growth and desired outcomes are stagnated or do not occur. For leaders and team members, one such nutrient that facilitates increased connection, output, and innovation is a foundation of psychological safety in teams.

Psychological safety can be described as the belief that what one says will be heard and valued for its contribution, and even while some may disagree, the person will not be disrespected or at risk for sharing their point of view. It conveys value for people at all levels and is a core ingredient for innovation and increased collaboration. When psychological safety is not present, team members may hesitate to share ideas and withhold alternate perspectives that would improve the work due to fear of retaliation or the risk of experiencing a type of loss (e.g., loss of role, financial loss, and or exclusion from an inner circle). Withholding points of view and going along with the majority decreases innovation and supports maintaining the status quo which can ultimately lead to decreased profits and business models

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Melissa Regester, Ph.D. has been with Vantage for seven years and is our Research and Data Science Lead.

MEET MELISSA REGESTER, PH.D.: 10 QUESTIONS IN 10 MINUTES

- Q: What is the most important room in your home?** **A:** My favorite would have to be the kitchen. I love cooking and I especially love actual hardcover cookbooks. The kitchen just brings everyone together for some fun and obviously tasty food. I have so much fun cooking pistachio-crust lamb chops, salmon, and even paella! Also, my favorite chili is from Skyline Chili (huge in Ohio where I used to live) and I have perfected a copycat recipe of it! It is such a great winter dish for Chicago.
- Q: What did you want to be when you were small?** **A:** I wanted to be many things! I wanted to be a lawyer, an astronaut, even a forensics psychologist! But my favorite is a football scout for the Miami Dolphins. Given what I do now, if Mike McDaniel reads this and is ever looking for a leadership/team specialist, call me!
- Q: What is the best gift you have been given?** **A:** Oh gosh. This is a hard one. I've been given so many amazing gifts, but I would say the best gifts haven't been tangible. They have been friendships, love, even experiences. Quality time is one of my love languages; an amazing gift would be just that!
- Q: If you could go back in time to change one thing, what would it be?** **A:** Not forgetting Spanish! My first language was Spanish and as I was learning English, I did my best to focus on that and I didn't continue to speak Spanish. I wish I had kept it up so I could still speak it fluently. I can understand most of it now, but speaking it back becomes more challenging for me.
- Q: What's your favorite family tradition?** **A:** I absolutely love Passover, which is a Jewish holiday. For as long as I can remember we all head to Minnesota where my aunt and uncle live and celebrate there. The entire family comes together, we eat amazing food, and celebrate an important holiday!
- Q: If you had a warning label, what would yours say?** **A:** Ha! I love this question. Probably "Careful, will clean up your plate before you are done eating" or "Warning, does not know how to whisper."
- Q: What's the most fun you've had this week?** **A:** I will totally cheat and go back a couple of weeks. We recently ended our honeymoon going to Santorini and it was such an amazing experience. The views were breathtaking. The first day we went on a boat to a volcanic hot spring and went snorkeling. The next day we rented an ATV and drove around the island eating lots of fresh seafood and Greek salads! Our hotel had actually double-booked us, and we were upgraded for free to a room that included our own private hot tub and pool. As you can imagine, leaving paradise was the hardest!
- Q: What's the last movie you went to see?** **A:** The last movie I saw in theaters was Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret. Fun fact, Judy Blume knew my grandparents and they are featured in her

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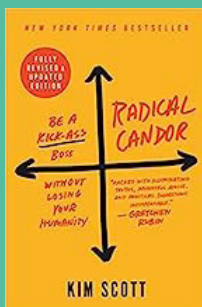


BOOK CLUB RECOMMENDATION

Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity

by Kim Scott

The idea is simple: You don't have to choose between being a pushover and a jerk. Using Radical Candor - avoiding the perils of Obnoxious Aggression, Manipulative Insincerity, and Ruinous Empathy - you can be kind and clear at the same time. Radical Candor is about caring personally and challenging directly, about soliciting criticism to improve your leadership and also providing guidance that helps others grow. It focuses on praise but doesn't shy away from criticism - to help you love your work and the people you work with.



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becoming out of date and ineffective. Even further, when psychological safety is not deeply embedded in communication norms, it can lead to catastrophic consequences and loss of life when team members have concerns, and do not speak up to challenge authority or lead a team to adjust the plan. This is documented in many industries including healthcare, manufacturing, financial and industrial (e.g., the Enron scandal, the VW Diesel scandal).

What types of behaviors are evidenced in an organization that provides psychological safety? As a foundation, the environment should convey trust, respect for differing perspectives, productive conflict, and a willingness to adapt and try new methods.

But how do you create an environment that encourages people to thrive and function at their highest ability? How does one learn if their ideas are top notch or if there are ways to adapt or add to them, to create an even better product? Some teams are able to provide direct and clear constructive feedback to improve their outcomes while other teams are critical of each other, leading to fear and resentment. There are many factors at play, however, in our experience, creating an environment where leaders flourish begins with building trust over time. This is realized through consistent commitment and follow through on agreed upon ways of working including honoring difference of opinions and effective communication patterns.

Beneficial ways of team engagement in communication and action include openness to feedback, adaptation, and receptivity to continuous process improvement; these are key personal and cultural attributes that set a stage for growth. How feedback is delivered and interpreted are integral aspects to this process. When feedback is respectful of differing perspectives and given for the purpose of improving the product for a better outcome, rather than criticizing the person, multiple individuals can partner to create something better than one viewpoint. An organization with an embedded culture of constructive feedback has an increased ability to adapt more quickly and grow through ambiguity in markets and industries, where a culture of criticism and blame is more likely to silence new ideas and differing opinions in an effort to uphold the way things have been and or maintain current power structures.

All teams have conflict, acknowledged or not, and this comes with an opportunity to adapt and create a new way forward to increase effective outcomes. For teams to be high performing, there needs to be a shift from "I" to "We" in vision, goals, and ownership of outcomes. Does the team have a shared vision and mutual goals that all are working to deliver on together? Is the team willing to evaluate and discuss their differing perspectives, and come to an agreed upon process to move forward, with trust in their colleagues? When a team is willing to create individual and collective commitments to reach their common goals, and actively participate in creating a new future, they can skyrocket while continuing to iterate. When this process or way of functioning is new, it may feel a little awkward, and with practice it begins to be a natural way of engaging and can spread throughout an organization.

In our work with teams, we often ask: What will you commit to do to help your team excel? What is your stretch vision for success? What personal and collective work do you need to do to perform well and

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Meet Melissa Regester, Ph.D.: 10 Questions in 10 Minutes

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books! For this movie, my late grandmother, Linda Hornik, was based off the character Laura Danker. She loved going to the movies, so I had to go see it for her with a big bucket of popcorn!

Q: What childhood activity do you wish you could still do now? **A:** I was a competitive swimmer. I went to the Junior Olympics a few times back in the day. I would swim twice a day, every single day. It was exhausting but I loved it. I would love to get back into it and swim some laps! What a great workout.

Q: Would you rather explore a new planet or the deepest parts of the ocean and why? **A:** A new planet, for sure! I love space and everything about it. While getting my Ph.D., I was fortunate enough to help lead a NASA-funded project that looked at team dynamics. It was an incredible experience that incorporated my love for space and teams! 🌍

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support your colleagues? Actions that create an atmosphere of psychological safety, respect for differing opinions, consistently communicate the value of all team members, work through productive conflict and embody an openness to try new ideas or methods create environments that encourage innovation, connection, idea sharing, and accelerate growth. If you would like to improve your results, it's important to look at the dynamics at play and build an environment that supports the achievement of outcomes far better than you have imagined. 

ABOUT LACEY SAVAGE, PSY.D.

Lacey's background as a Clinical and Organizational Psychologist provides a full toolkit for partnering with leaders to encourage leadership growth in support of team member and client retention, internal leadership development, and enhancing organizational culture. Her training in behavioral science gives her a unique lens in developing people and high-performing teams to create environments and leadership capabilities that help people thrive and flourish in their work. Lacey completed her undergraduate education at Asbury University and received her Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology from Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California.

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