



## Boundaries for Leaders

### Results, Relationships and Being Ridiculously in Charge

#### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In *Boundaries for Leaders*, Dr. Henry Cloud gives leaders the tools and techniques they need to achieve the performance they desire — in their organizations and in themselves. Drawing on the latest findings from neuroscience, Dr. Cloud shows why it's critical for leaders to set the conditions that make people's brains perform at their highest levels. How do great leaders do this? One way is through the creation of “boundaries” — structures that determine what will exist and what will not.

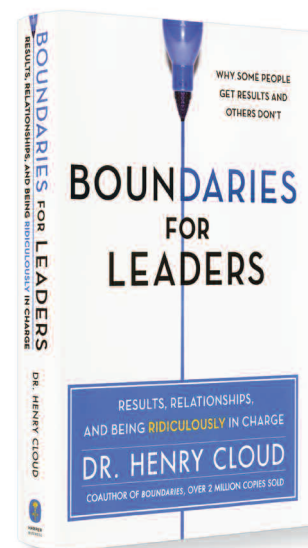
Readers will learn the leadership boundaries that set the stage, tone and culture for a results-driven organization.

The strong call to action in this book is that leaders are ridiculously in charge of all these elements, and they must own what they either create or allow to exist.

Filled with inspiring and practical examples from Dr. Cloud's coaching practice, *Boundaries for Leaders* is essential reading for everyone who aspires to lead companies, teams and cultures defined by high performance and healthy relationships.

#### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to help people focus their attention on the things that matter most.
- How to build the emotional climate that drives brain function.
- A method to create organizational thought patterns that limit negativity and helplessness.
- The best way to create high-performance teams organized around behaviors that drive results.



by Dr. Henry Cloud

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: BOUNDARIES FOR LEADERS

by Dr. Henry Cloud

**The author:** Dr. Henry Cloud has been a highly sought-after clinical psychologist and leadership consultant for CEOs and companies for more than 25 years. He has written numerous books, including *Integrity*, *Necessary Endings*, and *9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love and Life*, among others.

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For additional information on the author, go to [www.summary.com](http://www.summary.com).

## The People Are the Plan

My client, CEO of a \$20 billion company, looked at me with one of those expressions that smart people get sometimes when something extra smart goes off in their heads, the kind of thought that captures even their own attention. Head tilted and eyes squinted, he said something profound: “You know what is weird?”

“What?” I asked.

“Everybody out there is always trying to figure out the right plan. They meet, they argue, they worry, and they put all of their energy into trying to come up with the ‘right’ plan. But the truth is that there are five right plans. 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.”

He was right. Ultimately, leadership is about turning a vision into reality; it’s about producing real results in the real world. And that is only done through people doing what it takes to make it happen.

### When the “People” Side of Things Doesn’t Work

As I meet with leaders and their companies, I find that more often than not, they have smart plans. They know their business, or they would not be where they are. They are strategic, talented, gifted and experienced. Their “business” expertise got them to where they are, but as they rise to more significant positions of leadership, they need other skills in addition to what their business smarts can provide. They need to be able to lead people to get results.

What usually got them there was being good at the business, devising and executing “the plan.” But now, as leaders, they also have to be good at something else: getting people to do what it takes to make the plan work. 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.

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

### Chris: A Great Plan Hits The Wall

Consider the experience of one such leader. Chris founded his company by building on his success as a rainmaker. He had worked for a technology company and had consistently closed more sales than everyone around him. Like many successful people, Chris decided to do on his own what he had done for others. So, with some investors, he launched a new venture. “Why sell this stuff for someone else when I can do it for myself?” he reasoned. He was soon to find out the answer.

Things went well early on. Adding more and more employees, Chris’s company soon became a substantial entity, with revenue growing every year until it became a true market leader in its competitive space. The future looked good.

But within a few years, things began to be not so good inside the walls of the company. Key employees who had joined Chris because of his high energy and can-do spirit began feeling overworked and increasingly stressed out because of what they called the “chaos.” The company seemed to lack its original direction and momentum. That is when Chris’s board, comprised of key investors, called me.



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service@summary.com

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Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; Sarah T. Dayton, Editor In Chief; Andrew Clancy, Senior Editor; Amanda Langen, Graphic Designer; Jeannette Scott, Contributing Editor

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The board's concern came from what they were hearing directly from some members of Chris's executive team. The team told the board that they had reached the breaking point, that they couldn't take the chaos and dysfunction anymore, and that if the board did not do something soon, they were going to leave. That amount of talent threatening a mass exodus certainly got the board's attention.

I wanted to get a feel for what was happening. What struck me first was the team's love for Chris. They wanted to be on his team and make what they had created succeed and grow.

But they had gotten to a bad place. When I interviewed them, they were as dismayed and as frustrated as they had been motivated and inspired at the beginning of the company's journey. They reported feeling like they were running around in a thousand different directions. Even worse, Chris would send emails to his executive team's employees, putting those people into a state of confusion as to whom they were supposed to be answering to — the CEO or their own boss?

### The Need for Boundaries

The issue was that Chris and his team had failed to establish the boundaries that would positively drive organizational health and the boundaries that would immunize them against sickness. The only solution was for the board to find a way to help Chris achieve his potential and for Chris to find a way to be the kind of leader his company needed.

The good news is that the issues Chris and his team faced are fixable. When leaders lead in ways that people's brains can follow, good results follow as well. ●

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## Ridiculously in Charge

Recently I was discussing similar people issues with another CEO. I asked him why he thought those problems were there. He talked about some reasons, most of which had to do with the various players involved, and also, the constellations of a few teams. But then I asked him a simple question.

"And why is that?" I asked.

"What do you mean? I think it is the reasons I just said."

"I know that reasons you said, but why do those reasons exist?" I continued.

"I don't get it...What do you mean?" he asked further.

"Who is the leader? Who is in charge of the culture? Who is in charge of the ways that it is working, the fact that all of that exists?" I pushed.

He just looked at me and nodded. "I am," he said.

"So what kind of culture would you like?" I asked. "What kind of culture would drive the business forward if you had it?"

When he thought about that, he looked upward, lost in thought for a moment. Then he got out of the "problem-speak" mode, and I could see a shift in his energy as a new vision of a different culture sprang to life in his eyes. He began to describe a company culture that was positive, highly energetic, accountable, innovative and performance oriented. He came alive when he talked about it.

"So why don't you build that kind of culture?" I asked.

For a nanosecond, it seemed like he was about to reflexively blurt out a reason why it could not happen, but then he paused and said something I will never forget:

"You know, when you think about it ... I *am* ridiculously in charge."

At that point, I knew he got it. 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.

### Boundaries: What You Create and What You Allow

What are boundaries? They are made up of two essential things: what you create and what you allow. A "boundary" is a property line. It defines where your property begins and ends. If you think about your home on your property, you can define what is going to happen there and what is not. You are "ridiculously in charge" of the vision. You build and allow the culture. It is all yours. You set the agenda, and you make the rules. And what you find there, you own. 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, through a handful of essential boundaries, make sure certain things happen, prevent other things from happening, and keep it all moving forward. Leaders are a positive force for good and a negative force against bad. You know what they are for and what they are against.

### Focus And Energy

But this positive and negative boundary-setting does not happen by itself. It takes energy and focus. As one founder of a very successful enterprise described it to me,

*When I started my organization, no one told me that half of my energy would be spent actually building and leading it,*

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and the other half, or even more, would be spent protecting and defending it against all of the things other people wanted it to be. It takes a ferocious amount of spinal fortitude to not end up making a crappy mix of your vision and endless bits and scraps from others who didn't have the cojones to start something themselves.

When a leader steps up and leads and sets boundaries that provide clarity that cuts through the noise, it is a new day. ●

### Leading So Brains Can Work

You do not have to be a brain surgeon to establish the boundaries that are usually made by a great leader.

But at the same time, underneath it all, it really is brain surgery because the reason that a leader's boundaries work is that they actually make it possible for people's brains to function as they were designed. Said another way, if you are trying to lead people and do not establish effective boundaries, your people will not be able to do what you need and want them to do because their brains can't work that way. You will build an organization full of geniuses who are producing brain-impaired results. "That explains a lot," one executive said to me. "Those are the kinds of results I am getting from all these smart people I hired."

#### The Brain's Executive Functions

In brain terminology, executive functions are needed to achieve any kind of purposeful activity — such as reaching a goal, driving a vision forward, and conquering an objective. Whether driving a car or making and selling cars, the brain relies on three essential processes:

**Attention:** the ability to focus on relevant stimuli and block out what is not relevant: "Pay attention!"

**Inhibition:** the ability to "not do" certain actions that could be distracting, irrelevant or even destructive: "Don't do that!"

**Working Memory:** the ability to retain and access relevant information for reasoning, decision making and taking future actions: "Remember and build on relevant information."

#### Organizational ADD

Sadly, many organizations seem to be suffering from the equivalent of attention deficit disorder (ADD).

The remedy for organizational ADD is found in the way that great leaders think and lead in everything they do. I was in a planning meeting in a company where I had just begun to talk to them about leading with executive functions in mind. The president, who had been

### Steve Jobs' Moment of Clarity

When Steve Jobs returned to Apple as CEO, the company was in trouble. After diagnosing the problem as a lack of focus and by pruning 70 percent of Apple's models and products, Jobs brought the company a much-needed moment of clarity through setting a positive boundary.

According to the biography *Steve Jobs* by Walter Isaacson,

*After a few weeks, Jobs finally had enough. "Stop!" he shouted at one big product strategy session. "This is crazy." He grabbed a Magic Marker, padded to a whiteboard, and drew a horizontal and vertical line to make a four-squared chart. "Here's what we need," he continued. Atop the two columns he wrote "Consumer" and "Pro"; he labeled the two rows "Desktop" and "Portable." Their job, he said, was to make four great products, one for each quadrant. "The room was in dumb silence," Phil Schiller recalled.*

From that point on, when it came to making computers, Apple employees knew what they were supposed to be working on as well as what they were not supposed to be working on.

very frustrated for about a year, began the meeting by saying, "Today we are going to be here for an hour, and when we leave this meeting, we want to have answered this question...(and then she gave the question). That is it, no other topics." Then, when the group began to get distracted with extraneous issues and discussions that were not going to get them to an answer to that question, she brought it back. "Off topic for today. Back to getting to an answer." And they did it. More to the point, she and the team left the meeting invigorated and excited about the future. "We can turn this around! That felt so much different," she said. She was attending, inhibiting and creating a flow of working memory. Others felt it too.

#### One Big Brain

Here is a little more brain science for you. When those three processes of the brain are activated, results happen because they enable the next level of the brain's executive capacities, which are the ones you really want to have activated in your organization.

**Goal Selection.** People can choose goals based on priority, relevance, experience and knowledge of current realities while also anticipating consequences and outcomes. Key Words: Choose Goals and Anticipate Outcomes.

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**Planning and Organization.** They can generate steps and a sequence of linear behaviors that will get them there, knowing what will be needed along the way. Key Words: Generate Behaviors and Strategy.

**Initiation and Persistence.** They can begin and maintain goal-directed behavior despite intrusions, distractions, or changes in the demands of the task at hand. Key Words: Begin and Maintain Behavior.

**Flexibility.** They can exercise the ability to be adaptable, think strategically, and solve problems by creating solutions as things change around them, shifting attention and plans as needed. Key Words: Adapt, Think and Solve.

**Execution and Goal Attainment.** They exhibit the ability to execute the plan within the limits of time and other constraints. Key Words: Execute within Time.

**Self-regulation.** They use self-observation to monitor performance, self-judgment to evaluate performance, and self-regulation to change in order to reach the goal. Key Words: Monitor, Evaluate, Regulate.

If you look at this list, 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. Not to mention the innovation and creativity that follow. Almost every organization in the world has goals and plans. But only a select few organizations benefit from leadership that creates the environment and the practices that attend, inhibit and remember, thus making high performance possible. ●

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### The Emotional Climate That Makes Brains Perform

In the same way that the brain cannot work without the executive functions in place, it also cannot work if it is drowning in stress hormones. The cold, hard scientific facts are that your people think better when they are not stressed, afraid or depressed. Yet many leaders do not put a lot of thought into creating a positive emotional climate for their people, and sometimes they create the exact opposite. As a result of their leadership, they create stress, fear and sometimes even depression. There might be lots of little things you're doing, none of them outrageous or dramatic, that still might be having a negative effect on your people.

### Give Boundaries, But Check Your Tone

There are two human drives. One is connection, and the other is aggression. Aggression here does not mean anger. It means initiative and energy used in the service of goals. Everything we do is either relational or goal directed or, ideally, both. Basically, we are “lovers and workers.” We have relationships, and we do things.

An integrated leader does both at the same time in a way where one affects the other. He provides a positive state of being and tone while aggressively accomplishing things with people. The problem in leadership is when we do one without the other.

Lack of structure, a lack of clear boundaries, creates its own kind of stress. But the opposite is also true. When leaders are only “task oriented,” aggressively pursuing results with no focus on the emotional tone of their interactions, they set off stress reactions in others. 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.

### Preserve Relationships and Get Results

As the person in charge of setting emotional boundaries, your job is twofold. First, do everything possible to create “good fear,” the positive performance anxiety that activities healthy stress. The drive that says, “If I get with it, I can get something good and avoid something bad.” Second, diminish destructive fear, which is communicated through tone, lack of structure, and the threat of relational consequences — anger, shame, guilt and withdrawal of support. People need to know that you are going to be “for” them, even when they don't do well. ●

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### Power Through Connection

Creating connections is another form of boundary setting. You are setting a positive boundary, or structure, to form unity. And you are setting a very firm boundary against disconnection and fragmentation. We know from neuroscience that certain kinds of relational and emotional interactions build connection and unity based on patterns of the brain's functioning.

Here are some of those ingredients that build unity:

**Shared Purpose.** This can be the overarching mission of the company or a team, or it can be the specific mission of that time of getting together.

**Awareness.** Make sure that you set the stage in your team and in the larger entity so that people are aware of what is happening with one another and with the orga-

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nization. When people feel like they are out of the loop, the seeds of disconnection are sown.

**Nonverbal Cues.** Use nonverbals to show that you are open, positive and warm. When you have to deliver hard news, be respectful but firm. And put your smartphone in your pocket, purse or bag.

**Collaboration.** Project updates don't require meetings, but collaboration does. I'm talking about creating a climate where problems and issues get shared and solved through the team's engagement with one another.

**Coherent and Relevant Narrative.** 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.

**Conflict Resolution.** When people can go into the hard stuff and begin to talk about what they are experiencing, the power of relationships to transform those states of fear into courage, or anger into resolution, is a truly wonderful thing to see — something that no number of happy-talk slogans can compete with.

**Emotional Regulation.** At some time or other, we all experience very difficult, even destructive, emotional states. Fortunately we don't have to remain there. Connecting with others can provide a form of self-regulation.

**Emotional Reflection.** Reflection is not problem solving, planning or initiating something new. It is not judging. It is simply looking at things together and examining one's thoughts, observations and feelings.

**Emotional Repair.** Repair is one of the most important things that happens in good relationships. The truth of the matter is that we do have conflict, misunderstandings, reactions and the like. Seek repair and, when necessary, even have your team discuss how they would like to repair.

**Listening.** Probably the most important connection builder is simple but aggressive (active and intentional) listening. It is simple because it gets to the most basic need in life. ●

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### The Gatekeeper of Thinking

I like to tell people that “thinking” is like a piece of software. It is like a computer program that runs everything we do and dictates our outcomes. If a software program says do “a” or “b,” then “a” or “b” will happen. If it is not written in the code, you can click on the icon all you want, but nothing is going to happen.

So it is with thinking in individuals and in groups. Whatever norms and behaviors get encoded and rein-

forced determine what happens next — indeed, what is possible. The prevailing thinking patterns of a team or an organization — its norms and belief systems — will define what it is and what it does. Not to mention what it doesn't do or what it doesn't allow. And the leaders' boundaries determine the thinking that prevails.

### The “Can't Be Done” Virus

I was working with a company where a team was considering an acquisition that would require a significant capital infusion. In the executive team meeting where the opportunity was being discussed, several members pushed back strongly on the idea: “We can't waste our time on this plan. It is impossible to get the financing that we would need to do this.”

I felt like my hair was about to catch on fire because I had just come from a meeting with another company whose founder did not think this way at all. In fact his company would not even exist if he had. When he had started it, he was in bankruptcy from a previous business. It would not have taken the smart naysayers very long to say, “Forget about finding money for a new start-up. It is not going to happen. Your financials won't allow it.” But he did not suffer from that kind of thinking. Instead he thought it could be done.

So he found an office building for sale that he knew would be perfect for the right big tenant. Then, he went to a Fortune 500 company and convinced them to rent “his” building (that he did not yet own) at a rent very favorable to them, subject to his purchase of the building closing. Next, he went to a bank and sold them on the blue chip company that had signed a lease with him that would more than service the note. The bank financed the purchase of the building, and he pulled \$10 million out at closing and used the proceeds to finance his startup. About six years later, this startup had amassed over \$3 billion in assets — assets created from bankruptcy, but not from bankrupt thinking. ●

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### Control and Results

The lesson for leaders is clear: Focus your people on what they have control of that directly affects the desired outcomes of the organization. When you do that, two powerful things happen. Not only do you get results, but you also change the brains of your people so they function better and then get even more results, in a spiraling, upward direction. Both are important.

### A Positive Energy Field

Getting people to attend to what they can control that affects results while inhibiting activities and thinking that

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don't is one of the most powerful ways to create energy where there has been stagnation.

A residential real estate developer I worked with was in a very bad market situation, and neither he nor his competitors were selling much of anything. One of the important metrics in this business is the cost of carrying a project until it is sold, carrying the loans before the finished property can be sold. The longer a project takes to sell, the longer the builder has to carry the cost on his books, and the higher the costs eating into profits. Therefore, time-to-closing is a key driver of success. As you can imagine, any CEO studying the numbers will be eager to move inventory.

In this instance, the CEO had delivered a clear message about what factors his team could control to beat the competition and drove the message continuously. "You can control three things: have the best product, have the best salespeople, and have the best price," he had told them. They could not control the recession, but those three they could absolutely control. Having delivered on the first two, product and salespeople, and still not getting sales, he saw that the only one that was left to attend to was price.

What had happened up until this point was that their competition was lowering prices when there were sales in the marketplace, trying to catch up with others in the price drops. In the CEO's mind, that was reactive. The only way to get ahead of the price war, he figured, was to do one thing before anyone else: forget margins, focus on closings only, and drive the result by activating a behavior that you can control: lowering price first and by a lot. In the short term, margins would be lower, but you would win in many other ways in a bad market.

So he gave his team one target mandate that they could control: "Make closings, period. Cut the price to make closings, but make the closings." And he put them totally in control of meeting the closing metric by controlling the only behavior that would drive the closings — lowering the price. They were free to lower it to make a close. And they won, big time. They stayed ahead of everyone else, ended up cutting prices less in the long run because they were first, and got rid of expensive carrying costs. In their markets that year, they were the only builder that did not lose money. They focused on what they could control and held each other accountable for closings.

You can set values and goals, but if you give your people specific ways to be in control of actions that drive the organization forward, you'll have created a distinct competitive advantage. ●

## High-Performance Teams

"Ok, in the spirit of getting the dead fish out of the drawer, I have to tell you that no matter how long he has been there and how much loyalty we have toward him, Jerry is just not able to oversee moving a factory from one country to another. He just can't pull that off." So said the head of operations at the beginning of an executive team meeting.

His reference to "a dead fish" was shorthand for a lot of hard conversations this executive team had tackled to get to this moment. A dead fish? They got it.

So, what was it that the team instantly understood? It went something like this:

Talking about Jerry's ability is an issue that we all know is not pleasant. It smells bad.

And even though it smells bad, no one wants to deal with it. So it stays hidden in the drawer. As a team, we have committed to always getting the dead fish out of the drawers. In light of that, we are now going to talk about it, and I can assume buy-in from you guys.

After a few heavy sighs, the team got down to it. Jerry had to be reassigned. No doubt about it.

### Change Behaviors = Changed Outcomes

Leaders get what they create or what they allow. So, a team's operating values create a certain kind of environment with an allowance for certain kinds of behaviors and a prohibition against others.

Which brings us to another point: Values make it possible for a guiding language to develop that gives structure and identity to the boundaries of behavior we want to encourage and prohibit. Every team needs a common lexicon, a memorable language, to communicate just what these boundaries are. When the team landed on the saying "dead fish out of the drawer," everyone now knows exactly what that means. And whenever it is said, the team instantly comes together around a shared value they had agreed upon. ●

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## Trust Makes Teams Able to Perform

The first requirement to build trust is to connect through understanding the other person. Remember, people do not trust us when we understand them. They trust us when they understand that we understand them.

I remember once, in a team meeting with my staff, I gave an employee a project to do and a deadline. She told me there was no way she could do it. I disagreed,

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countering that it wasn't that big a deal. In fact, I was certain she could get that project done in time without it taking away from the other objectives I had committed her to. She pushed back again, and I was bugged. I thought she was being negative and exaggerating the whole thing. From my vantage point, it was all very simple, very much a just-do-it proposition.

As the conversation went on this way, I could tell she was getting amped up even though she was not getting overtly mad. But I saw her chin trembling, not in sadness but in anger. Her words were getting crisper and almost staccato as she said them. Then she said, "OK, come here. I want to show you something."

We went down the hall into her office, where she proceeded to outline all of the work that had been required the last time I'd asked her to take on a task very much like this one. Wow, I could now see that it was complicated and time-consuming, involving interactions with federal agencies, professional agencies and several businesses. The paper trail alone was daunting. I looked at her and said nothing for a moment. I was embarrassed at my clueless lack of understanding.

Finally I just looked up and said, "I'm sorry. I had no idea."

At that moment, I saw a few tears forming in her eyes. She finally felt understood as she understood that I understood.

She did not have to protect herself anymore. She trusted me, so she could stop resisting me and join me instead. Plus, as she described the things that were involved, I was not resisting them and was more in a role of working together to find some solutions. ●

### Boundaries For Yourself

There is a law of leadership physics that affects many leaders without their being aware of it, and it can do them in if they are not careful. But if they are, they can soar. The law is this: the higher you go in leadership, the fewer external forces act upon you and dictate your focus, energy and direction. Instead, you set the terms of engagement and direct your own path, with only the reality of results to push against you.

### Leaders Open Themselves to Outside Inputs

Great leaders simply don't buy the old saying that it is lonely at the top, even if they do accept that the buck stops with them. When it does stop with you, the last thing you need to be is isolated.

What I'm talking about is outside support and input — support from people who can be objective and who don't have a vested interest in outcomes other than their care for the leader and his personal and professional growth.

### Boundaries On Thinking And Fears

I have not met a leader who thinks perfectly rationally 100 percent of the time. All humans have a tendency toward goofy or distorted interpretations of events and other people's motives, especially under extreme stress. And all of us have our insecurities and those touchy buttons that when pushed cause our thinking to go awry and our fears to be magnified.

The key is to know your own particular style of kookiness. Once you know your own patterns, you can recognize them and change them. While there is no limit to the variations on distorted thinking that affect performance, there are some patterns that crop up more often than not. These include overidentification with results, indecisiveness, conflict avoidance and resistance to change. Let me explain.

### Still Ridiculously in Charge

When you realize that you are ridiculously in charge, it does not only mean you are in charge of others or in charge of what goes on in the organization. It also means that you are ridiculously in charge of yourself. My experience with high-level leaders is that there are two kinds. The first kind of leader is defined by the work. The second kind is in the process of actively defining the work, and they do that by first defining themselves and taking charge of who they are going to be and how they are going to work. They have good self-leadership boundaries.

Think of it as another way of not just working in the business but of working "on" the business by working on you. Lead with these boundaries on yourself, and you will be more in charge than you ever thought possible. ●

#### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Boundaries for Leaders*, you'll also like:

1. ***Care to Dare*** by George Kohlrieser, Susan Goldsworthy and Duncan Coombe. Learn how to tap into your own secure bases, past and present, and how to become a secure base for others.
2. ***Bury My Heart at Conference Room B*** by Stan Slap. Slap helps executives ignite the massive power of any manager's emotional commitment to his or her company.
3. ***Multipliers*** by Liz Wiseman and Greg McKeown. Learn the difference between a genius and a genius-maker and why you need to become the latter.