



## Step Up

### Lead in Six Moments That Matter

#### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

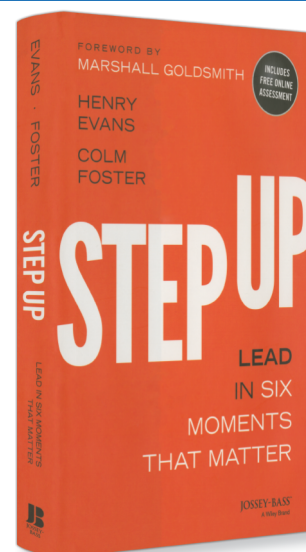
No matter what your title or place on the organization chart, you have the potential to be a leader — or more precisely, the potential to exercise leadership in the moments that matter most. Leadership is not a job title or position, but rather an action. In certain moments and situations, anyone can rise to the occasion to act as a leader — gaining respect, confidence and ultimately greater success in the organization. But how can you recognize these moments where leadership is required and then know what to do?

*Step Up* explains six critical “leadership moments”— everyday instances when you have a choice to shine or let opportunity pass you by. Based on their own research and extensive client work, Henry Evans and Colm Foster identify six regularly occurring moments and help you understand how to act wisely and decisively when those moments arise.

Anyone can take advantage of opportunities to act as a leader when the time is right — and reap the rewards. *Step Up* is a guide to exercising leadership when it matters most, boosting your personal impact and effectiveness, and making a real difference.

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

- How to recognize and seize the six critical leadership moments and lead with, or without, the formal title.
- How to leverage negative emotions and become more decisive for better business results.
- How to create emotional safety and, as a result, be the most informed person you can be.



by Henry Evans and  
Colm Foster

#### CONTENTS

##### Get Angry, Not Stupid

Page 2

##### Avoid Terminal Politeness

Page 3

##### Decide Already

Page 4

##### Act When You Are the Problem

Page 5

##### Leverage Pessimism

Page 6

##### Create Emotional Safety

Page 8

# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: STEP UP

by Henry Evans and Colm Foster

**The author:** Henry Evans is founder and managing partner for Dynamic Results, LLC, specializing in strategy execution, executive development and emotionally intelligent leadership. His best-selling book, *Winning with Accountability*, was published in 2008. Colm Foster specializes in working with executives and their teams to improve individual and team effectiveness and conducted much of the research which was used in the book.

*Step Up: Lead in Six Moments That Matter* by Henry Evans and Colm Foster. Copyright © 2014 by Henry Evans and Colm Foster. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Brand. 224 pages, \$28.00, ISBN 978-118-83828-0. To purchase this book go to [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com). Summary copyright ©2014 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries [www.summary.com](http://www.summary.com), 1-800-SUMMARY. For more information on the authors, go [www.dynamicresults.com](http://www.dynamicresults.com).

## Introduction: The Six Moments

We are going to share six critical leadership moments and what the highest-performing people — whatever their title — do when they are in one of those moments. Stepping up to exercise leadership in those moments will make the biggest difference to you in your own leadership journey.

1. **Using anger intelligently in the workplace.**
2. **Recognizing and dealing with “terminal politeness.”**
3. **Making decisions when no one else is making them.**
4. **Taking ownership when others are externalizing a problem.**
5. **Identifying and leveraging pessimism.**
6. **Reversing the momentum of negative interactions.**

By adopting the ideas and tools that follow, you will be able to “step up” in leadership moments as they present themselves. Through practice and reflection, you will increase your skill in predicting when these opportunities will arise and improve your ability to exercise your leadership.

The six moments do not follow a strict sequence or pattern. Your ability to create change in one of these moments will actually cause positive effects in the others. You will gain maximum benefit if you can work on each of the moments consistently over a significant period of time. By using the tools presented here, you will cease being a bystander and become an active participant who can catalyze change in the moments that matter. ●

## Get Angry, Not Stupid

Everyone has heard that people should suppress or even completely avoid feelings such as anger and frustration in the workplace. However, used intelligently, these feelings can actually build relationships. People can leverage their “afflictive emotions” — those that make them feel bad, such as anger, greed, hate, guilt or longing — to drive outstanding results.

### The Anatomy of Anger

Anger is a good example of an afflictive emotion that is highly leverageable. Consider anger as a fuel that you can use to generate the energy required to move to productive action. A great example of this is the case of Reddit, a web search company that was sold to Conde Nast 18 months after it was founded. While trying to get Reddit off the ground, Alexis Ohanian and Steve Huffman were called to meet a Yahoo executive who was interested in their project. When the executive heard that Reddit had only a few thousand users, he scoffed, “You’re a rounding error compared to Yahoo.” Ohanian returned home and wrote on the wall beside his desk, “You are a rounding error.” He used that comment to recall the anger he felt at being dismissed, causing two things to happen. First, he was convinced that he was not a rounding error and that his business was sound. Second, he used the energy his anger gave him to set out to prove the Yahoo guy wrong.

The problem for most people is not that they get angry; it’s that they *become less intelligent* when they do. Our beef is with stupidity, not anger. So we don’t want you to stop getting angry, as that would rob you of emotional fuel that you sometimes need to succeed. We simply want you to be *intelligent while angry*.



**1-800-SUMMARY**  
service@summary.com

Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 511 School House Road., Suite 300, Kennett Square, PA 19348 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions starting at \$99 per year. Copyright © 2014 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. **Available formats:** Summaries are available in several digital formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-SUMMARY (240-912-7513 outside the United States), or order online at [www.summary.com](http://www.summary.com). Multiple-subscription discounts and corporate site licenses are also available.

Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; Sarah T. Dayton, Editor in Chief; Ashleigh Imus, Senior Editor; Amanda Langen, Graphic Designer; Corbin Collins, Contributing Editor

## Summary: STEP UP

---

The key to developing your ability to remain intelligent, even as your blood begins to boil, is to recognize that anger is not a binary, “either-or” emotion. There are many levels of anger. At the mildest, you are slightly irritated, and then you become frustrated. If the situation persists, you become angry; and if the emotion continues to build, you may become enraged. You must start small — that is, learn to retain your thinking ability when you are merely irritated, and then move on to frustration, and so on.

### Respond ... Don't React

Our goal is to have you *respond* rather than *react*. A reaction is a somewhat thoughtless and sudden event, usually involving you saying or doing something you will later regret. A response comprises the behaviors and actions you thoughtfully planned to demonstrate when and if you were ever in a particular situation.

The first step is to identify your “triggers”: the types of people and situations that lead you into a highly charged emotional state. Ask yourself, “What type of behavior in others tends to make me feel upset?” and “What types of situations tend to make me feel upset?” After you have identified your triggers, you are equipped to do something about the anger that results.

The feelings you experience are preceded by physiological changes in your body. Becoming angry is your body giving you a sign that you are about to go primal. When you sense that this process is beginning, use the following techniques to help you stay intelligent.

**Breathing.** Deep, controlled breaths help restore blood flow and stop the production of the chemicals that cause you to react suddenly and with great force.

**Questioning.** When you ask your brain a question — any question — it forces blood back into the neocortex where intelligent thought occurs. Your body stops producing the “bad” chemicals and restores your ability to think and act more rationally.

**Palms Up.** You may notice that when you are triggered, you put your palms down or cross your arms. Uncross your arms, and focus on keeping your palms in an open and up position.

**Time-Out.** Sometimes all the techniques and leadership approaches in the world aren't going to help because you're simply too stressed. Admit your own feelings to yourself and, without blaming the other party, remove yourself until you can find balance.

Plan for the times that you expect to be irritated, and rehearse the responses suggested. Remember that your body will give you a heads up. If you are aware of what is

happening in your body, you can interrupt the cycle, stay at the stage in which you are simply irritated and not let the emotion get out of hand.

### In Position to Lead

Leadership moments often show up when you are working in a group — and you can take those opportunities whether you are the formal leader or simply a member. Sometimes you want people angry in order to drive the best business result. You may also wish to catalyze a spectrum of emotions, focusing on certain ones during particular stages of a process or project.

There is an optimal mood for every task that a group might undertake. Knowing this provides you with leadership opportunities, in that you can help create the mood. Doing so requires that you become sensitive to the moods of those around you and develop your own repertoire of things that you might do or say to affect those moods.

Armed with awareness of a group's mood and tasks, you are in position to lead in one of two ways. First, you can **leverage the existing mood** by introducing a task that meets that type of mood. If your group has worked for some months to retain a reluctant client who eventually left, this is a great time to diagnose why you lost the client.

Another approach is to **change the mood** so that it is appropriate to a required task. For a group that's in a down mood because of having lost a client, rather than leveraging that mood, you can use your own energy, enthusiasm and words to move the group into a high-energy and pleasant state. ●

---

## Avoid Terminal Politeness

In many organizations, authentic, robust debate and challenge have been replaced by what we call *terminal politeness* — when people are being so polite that serious issues never come to the surface. People often avoid having the most important conversations, even when such avoidance can damage their organization or their careers. They usually do so for at least four possible reasons:

- They don't feel emotionally safe having such conversations because “messengers get shot.”
- The organizational culture encourages people to be too nice.
- They aren't honest with themselves. They tell themselves things like, “I've been too busy to address the issue,” instead of admitting, “I'm afraid to have that conversation.”

## Summary: STEP UP

---

- They think they're being considerate of someone else and "never find the right time" to have the discussion because the other person is "too busy" or "having a hard time right now."

Our clients often talk about igniting the "spark of innovation." But you need friction to ignite sparks. Without healthy and productive conflict, you can't generate friction. The challenge then is to ignite enough of the **right type of conflict** to bring the best out of people. Performance rises as conflict rises — up to a point. However, too little conflict and too much conflict *both* obstruct performance.

If you fail to understand the value of conflict and consistently slip into terminal politeness, your organization can't reap the benefits of a diverse workforce.

The best organizations are filled with a diverse group of people who leverage their diversity in a collaborative way. Diversity is supposed to incite friction and conflict. If your diverse workforce is not causing you headaches in terms of managing the different opinions and values that the various individuals hold, you may be suppressing some conflict and losing the potential innovation benefit that comes with dealing with that conflict in a constructive way.

### The Need to Be Liked

People tend to avoid conflict because they're seeking to fulfill two fundamental needs: to be liked and to be right. Human beings are hardwired to make connections and to form an impression of what other people are thinking, especially about us. The need to be liked, to be included and accepted, is indeed one of our most powerful needs.

There is considerable evidence that we like others better — that is, resonate with them more easily — the closer they resemble us on important qualities. The similarity might be a matter of simple demographics, such as age, gender or race, but also operates at the level of attitudes, beliefs and personality. When people hold opinions similar to ours, we presume that they hold similar attitudes, beliefs and values, and we like them better for it.

When people agree with us, they are confirming that our opinions or decisions are accurate — and we all like being right. We are designed to seek out evidence that confirms our decisions and to ignore evidence that suggests we are wrong. The more people disagree with us, the more we associate them with dissonance, the less we like them, and the lower we rate their capabilities.

The heart of the problem lies in our failure to adequately distinguish between the person and the idea. All of us can become better at keeping conflict from becoming destructive by learning how to skillfully distinguish

between conflict with a person and conflict about his or her idea. Once you do this, you can learn how to avoid terminal politeness and achieve the optimum conflict level that will bring about successful ideas and solutions. When your intentions are good and you are not launching personal attacks, you can be quite assertive in challenging or disagreeing with people and ultimately still be liked, even if people have to struggle with you in certain moments.

On our best day, we might begin to appreciate people who alert us to alternative points of view. When we keep an open mind, we can understand that they present us with learning opportunities that the people who always agree with us do not deliver. ●

---

## Decide Already

We don't expect our leaders to be right all the time, as the only way to be right all the time is to constantly operate inside your comfort zone. We *do* expect them to be decisive and to be able to bring people along with them once they have made the call. And although they may seem completely confident and convinced of their position, many leaders face the same self-doubt and anxiety as those who don't consider themselves leaders.

Leaders do not have perfect information. What they do have is the ability to decide on a course of action, commit to it, and then communicate that decision confidently and convincingly. They exercise decision leadership, which is the ability to balance intuition with data and to proactively take intelligent risks. When others are "stuck" or "frozen" in a state of indecision, the person who steps up and declares a decision is the leader in that moment or interaction.

Great leaders truly commit to a decision, even though they are a little anxious, and honestly display an authentic commitment. Whatever your job title, nothing will undermine your leadership credibility more than the inability to make and *stick* to a decision that affects others.

### The Why of Indecisiveness

A number of factors can undermine your ability to decide, communicate and execute in uncertain environments:

- You may not even realize how often you do fail to face problems: Human beings are notoriously inaccurate in our ability to self-assess. And few of us rarely, if ever, get quality feedback on our leadership behaviors.
- People want to both *be and be seen* as a nice person: You can often be tempted to sugarcoat or downplay difficult information. You probably feel anxiety about

## Summary: STEP UP

---

your ability to make the point or intervention, and you worry about how people will receive the message.

- Many people simply doubt their ability, which can keep them from exercising leadership: This can become a self-fulfilling prophecy; after all, if you don't believe in your ideas, why would anyone else?

In order for you to effectively exercise leadership, you need to be able to see yourself as a leader. The U.S. Army has a much more succinct way of saying this: "You can't lead a cavalry charge if you think you look funny on the horse."

The most fundamental point is that there is no link between anxiety and accuracy. Just because you are nervous does not make your point or decision invalid. Just because the other people appear confident doesn't make their perspective valid. They may simply handle their anxiety better. You are less likely to offer your opinion or to tell it like it is when you are nervous or anxious. But anxiety can become the fuel that propels you to do better next time.

The more often you take action, the more confident you will become in doing so, and the easier it gets. With practice you will get better at exercising decision leadership, and as you get better, you will find it easier and easier to recognize these moments and step up.

### **Decide or Decide to Not Decide ... Don't Procrastinate**

Here are a few suggestions for improving your ability to be decisive when it matters.

**Look back over decisions you've made in the last ten days.** How timely were they? How clearly did you communicate them? How transparent and accountable are you for these decisions? Even just heightening your awareness of the habitual issues will make you focus on improving this aspect of your decision leadership.

**Decide when to decide and when not to.** The idea is not to turn yourself into an action junky, running around making decisions to demonstrate your decisiveness. There is a right time to hold off. We call this systematic waiting or masterful inactivity — purposefully deciding that you are not going to decide or act.

**Know when to change your decision.** Human beings tend to want to stick by their ideas and opinions. You should generally stick to your guns once you make a decision. But beware of becoming so emotionally attached to a decision that you're merely out to prove that you were right in the first place. If this is the case, it's time to make a different decision.

### **About Managing Anxiety**

You can better manage your emotional reactions, such as anxiety, by understanding the connections between your physiology (how your body acts), your cognition (what and how you think) and your emotions (how you feel). Because all three elements are connected, you can intervene in any one of them in order to affect the other levels. Essentially, you can *act* your way into a new approach to thinking and feeling, *feel* your way into a new approach to acting and thinking, or *think* your way into a new approach to feeling and acting.

People who struggle with anxiety can usually deal with their nerves successfully when they can control their physical reactions. When you are nervous, the principal physical symptom has to do with your breathing. Concentrate on deliberately slowing down your breathing, and ensure that you are taking full, deep breaths. Use a rhythm: breathe in for a count of three; then hold your breath for a count of three, then breathe out for a count of three, followed again by a hold for a count of three. Do this at least three times.

In addition to managing your physiology, you can adopt either a cognitive or an emotional approach by seeing the situation from another perspective; thinking through the worst that could happen and identifying how you would handle that; and helping yourself feel differently about the situation. ●

---

### **Act When You Are the Problem**

Moments of leadership arise when the people around you are stuck in old ways of thinking and behaving. However, catalyzing change in others requires that you are comfortable with changing yourself.

Unfortunately, history has shown that the more successful you are — both as an organization and as an individual — the more difficult the transition may be. The trap of success dictates that both companies and people start to believe in their success recipe. The more successful they become, the more they emotionally invest in their success recipe — especially those senior leaders who may have been responsible for crafting and codifying the recipe. This kind of thinking can render an organization learning disabled.

Remember that there are no best practices or success recipes. There are only *next* practices: your current best thinking, which is subject to continuous challenge and stretch. Genuine transformation and the ability to continually learn and adapt only come when people open up to

## Summary: STEP UP

---

the possibility that they themselves will need to alter their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.

### Step Up

When you start to make changes in your own behavior, you will start to exercise real leadership in the moments that matter. Here are some suggestions for how to do that:

**Get Assessed.** Being genuinely curious about others' observations and feedback is the most crucial way to make personal change. Receiving 360-degree feedback is most useful in understanding others' perspectives. It includes direct feedback from subordinates, peers, supervisors and others. Most leaders rate themselves dramatically higher or lower than others rate them. Once you have solicited feedback, don't just ignore it; declare what you will work on.

**Ask the "Magic Wand" Question.** The magic wand question is, "If you could magically and permanently change one thing about me for the better, what would it be, and why?" You might also ask the magic wand question about your organization, by saying, "I know we've got a 30-year legacy of doing what we do really well. But what might our clients, suppliers and shareholders change about us permanently and instantly if they had the power — even if they were wrong?"

**Understand Someone You Don't Understand.** Find the smartest person you know who often disagrees with you, and seek understanding with that person. Clients often complain about people who frequently disagree with them and with their ideas. We usually advise them to appreciate those people even if only for the fact that they give them a developmental opportunity that like-minded people don't bring to the table. When you feel yourself shutting down to someone else, it's a signal for you to say, "Tell me more about that. Where does that idea come from? What has your experience been?" Such an approach will likely help you forge a connection that makes it easier to catalyze change.

**Learn New Things.** To keep up with the times and with ever-changing demands, you will need to learn new skills. Read subjects that you have not read before; play games you've never played. Go to see things you would not ordinarily see: an opera, an art exhibit, a sporting event. Go talk to your company's interns or entry-level employees about what they are experiencing and what they think your company could do differently.

**Become Comfortable with Uncertainty.** We must become comfortable with uncertainty in order to inspire and incite others to change and, perhaps more important, innovate our way through change. Accept your strengths,

and work on developing new ones. This begins with a general openness to change and a willingness to be "comfortably uncomfortable." ●

---

## Leverage Pessimism

The popular belief in the power of positive thinking has led many people to be suspicious of any form of negativity. People who point out risks or issues are described as Chicken Littles. But what if the sky really is falling? What if your group or organization is facing real challenges of which you are not aware? Worse still, what if some people in your group or organization are aware of issues — but you are not listening to them? Leveraging pessimism is like taking medicine; you don't have to like it, but you do have to do it.

Optimism expert Martin Seligman notes that when bad things happen, pessimists tend to think in terms of what he calls the Three Ps to explain negative events:

**Permanent.** A pessimist tends to see a problem as something that won't change, whereas an optimist can view it as a temporary setback.

**Pervasive.** A pessimist thinks globally; the issue has implications beyond this specific incident. In contrast, an optimist tends to see the problem as related only to the specific isolated event.

**Personal.** A pessimist assumes personal blame, whereas an optimist sees a broader picture.

Pessimists get a bad rap. Yes, they can be a true pain, but they also point out problems and shed light on tough issues that others may be avoiding. You may be undervaluing pessimists; they can actually serve a purpose and have a role to play in your organization. However, we don't think pessimists should be in leadership roles. No one wants to be on a team led by someone who is telling them they will lose the game before the game has even begun. Our experience has led us to conclude that the best leaders are optimists who have good reality testing. They say things like, "I am fully aware of the challenges we will face, but in spite of that, I am confident that this team can deliver."

Optimists and people with positive bias see a munificent and benign universe where good things generally happen. People with a negative bias tend to focus primarily on the bad experiences in life — and this perception of the world colors their reality. These people are not *inventing* issues and obstacles; rather, they tend to be sensitized to these issues and more likely to see problems than do people with a positive bias.

## Summary: STEP UP

---

### Empathy Is Critical

To leverage pessimism, you need to be able to empathize with those who hold pessimistic views. Empathy is about *feelings*, not facts. Being empathetic requires you to express understanding of how another person feels and to do so in a way that he or she recognizes. People respond to and interact with us based on what they think of us, not on what we think they should think of us. We must care about how they feel, express our understanding of that and — once we've acknowledged the other person's feelings — move on to the facts. Empathy is a powerful antidote to the kind of misunderstanding that destroys relationships.

### How To Handle Objections

The objections that people raise to ideas, plans or processes are often openings to the Vortex; that is, they can lead a conversation down a negative path. We have developed a five-step process for responding to such objections:

- 1. Listen/inquire:** Make sure you understand the objection thoroughly before moving on. Ask a question that gets the person to fully express her point of view.
- 2. Empathize:** Speak to feelings before you speak to facts. Remember that empathy is about the expression of your understanding of how the other person feels.
- 3. Isolate and restate:** The person making the objection may have mentioned five things going wrong with her day, but she probably came to you to discuss only one.
- 4. Answer:** This is the step most people skip to as soon as they hear a problem: offering an immediate opinion or solution. Navigate the first three steps before taking this one — where you tell the person what you will or won't do for her.
- 5. Complete:** Check in to see if you have resolved the situation to the best of your ability. If not, go right back to step one, and ask what else you can do. ●

---

## Reverse Momentum

Pessimism isn't the only thing that gets you stuck. Anyone can get stuck in redundant discussions that seem to be plummeting into a spiral of negativity. Although these discussions are horrible time wasters, they provide the opportunity to step up and exercise leadership by being the one with the tools and skills to reverse the negative momentum.

Look for the following signs of redundant, negative conversations:

- People are repeating a point (particularly something they don't like or are worried about).

- You're having that *déjà vu* feeling: "We identified this problem last week and didn't do anything about it then."
- You recognize that the subject at hand is outside of your or your team's control or influence.

The actual cost of having you sitting in a redundant meeting is a hard fact that is pretty inescapable. We'll sometimes point to it and ask whether the discussion we are currently engaged in is a good use of everyone's time and also a good investment for the organization.

### Groupshift

Groupshift is the propensity for the early ideas presented in a group to become disproportionately persuasive and carry more weight. Thus, when someone in a group offers a negative opinion early on, it can sway the whole discussion. It is at that point you can step up, exercise leadership, and reverse the conversation's direction before it gathers momentum.

Momentum is essential to making progress. However, it can lead to poor outcomes when it is destructive in tone. We all need to be thoughtful in our conclusions and remain wary of being carried along by a discussion's momentum. When groups start to agree on a topic and coalesce around the problem's diagnosis and potential solution, they begin to form closer bonds. They take comfort in the fact that they are agreeing and become convinced that their argument is a good one. They tend to speed up in their thinking and can make potentially fatal jumps in logic that are not soundly rooted in either evidence or robust inquiry.

Negative interactions can spiral out of control, and if you have engaged in groupshift early on, they can lead you and your team to places and conclusions that may not be appropriate or justifiable.

What would it take for you to be the one to stand up and interrupt this flow the next time it happens?

### State It Once

Name a problem if a problem exists, and do so in a productive and constructive way. It is never a good idea to just leave it alone and not mention it. By stating it once, you call attention to the problem; you put it on the table where people can look at and acknowledge its existence.

After you state a problem once in a productive and constructive way, the best thing to do is change the conversation's momentum, shifting from a focus on the problem toward a focus on the solution.

The leaders in an organization are the people who *habitually move* from stating problems to finding solutions. When-

## Summary: STEP UP

ever they sense that negative momentum is building, they immediately convert it to a solution-oriented dialogue.

Just as you can reverse negative momentum in one-on-one conversations and in the meetings you attend, you can also reverse your own negative momentum by choosing thoughts that start a positive cycle. ●

### Create Emotional Safety

The higher you are on the organization chart, the more power you wield. You make higher-leverage and potentially riskier decisions. You receive an ever-growing quantity of information. Unless you make it safe for people to bring you bad news and to honestly discuss problems and failures, you'll get information that's distorted by people's fear of your reactions, especially if the news is about you. Bad news is suppressed until it *has* to be shared, and good news is overplayed. We believe that when someone high up who makes big decisions fails to create emotional safety, he or she is not only one of the most powerful people in the organization but also one of the most dangerous.

Emotional safety brings together the ideas we have already shared. You can now use negative emotion wisely, avoid terminal politeness, be more decisive, be more aware of your own need to change, leverage the wisdom of pessimists, and reverse the momentum of negative interactions. However, you won't be successful unless you can enact these in a way that is emotionally safe for others as well. You need to become your organization's Director of Emotional Safety.

In your role as Director of Emotional Safety, you'll be the person who is given a clean and accurate read of situations; the one who hears first, not last, when there is a problem; and the one who operates with good rather than bad intelligence. You will make people feel safe, appreciated and perhaps even rewarded for bringing you bad news.

The job of the Director of Emotional Safety is to create the context or environment that encourages others to produce excellent work. It requires a genuine focus on others and less of a focus on yourself. Creating emotional safety is a smart thing to do. There are three reasons why this works:

- The quality of your information deteriorates when people don't feel safe talking to you.
- Without emotional safety, your people may pursue goals beyond the point where the pursuit continues to make good sense.
- People do not grow in a fearful environment.

### Two Keys

Being the Director of Emotional Safety is not always about making people feel good. There are two key principles to keep in mind as you assume the role.

First, you must get the balance right between supporting and challenging your people and between nurturing them and holding them to account for their mistakes and missteps. People perform best when they strike a balance between their competence to do their work and the level of challenge in that work.

When your people feel bad about making a mistake, you have to allow them to feel bad. Don't rush in to rescue them, and don't add your own anger to the mix. When people don't recognize their mistakes and need a judicious boot in their rear end, it is okay for them to experience a bit of your anger or frustration. Just make sure that you, not your anger, are in control.

The second principle is that making it safe for people to be honest with you frees them to be vulnerable around you. When they are, reciprocate. Being vulnerable to someone is crucial to building trust, and trust is the foundation of relationships. As a leader, you have to make the first move. The ability to be authentically yourself is critical to building a trust relationship with others.

Your ability to create emotional safety will prompt people to be open and honest with you about your ideas and suggestions and their own performance. Recognizing when you are at risk of creating an emotionally unsafe environment requires that you really tune in to what others are saying — and just as important, not saying — and reflect on how you've contributed to that environment.

A leadership moment is an instance when you must make a choice. Will you step up in those moments that might seem small but that significantly impact business results and relationships? Will you intervene, or will you let the chance pass you by? ●

#### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Step Up*, you'll also like:

1. ***How to Be Exceptional*** by Robert H. Sherwin, Jr., Barbara A. Steel, John H. Zenger, Joseph R. Folkman. The authors show that to be exceptional as a leader requires a revolutionary approach to leadership development.
2. ***The 5 Levels of Leadership*** by John C. Maxwell. Maxwell details each level of leadership and provides a clear path to reach the next.
3. ***The Truth About Leadership*** by Barry Z. Posner, James Kouzes. Leadership experts James Kouzes and Barry Posner share 10 time-tested fundamental truths about leadership and becoming an effective leader.