

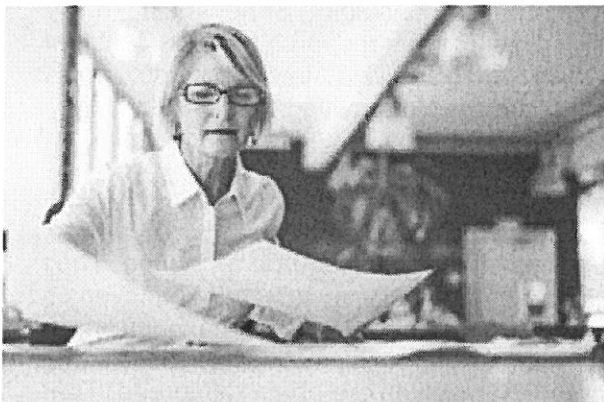
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Is There a Better Way To Be a Boss?

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by [Gael O'Brien](#)

With anyone we've ever worked with or for, we've likely seen their best and worst leadership moments, as they have ours. We might adamantly reject that any of the recent stories about [overconfident leaders](#), [meltdowns](#) or [toxic bosses](#) could ever apply to us. Nonetheless, leadership excellence and building company success raise the bar inviting us perpetually to ask: "Is there a better way to be a boss?"



In a constant wave of things to read about effective leadership, two new books offer ideas and execution strategies that stand a good chance of inspiring people to do their best work. While having different agendas, [Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity](#) and [Stretch: Unlock the Power of Less -- and Achieve More Than You Ever Imagined](#), look at ways of relating to employees that can transform a company.

Both books offer approaches to re-innovate the maxim "employees are our most important asset." From different perspectives, they address connection, the authentic spirit behind creating a caring relationship – an area where many leaders' well-intended efforts fall short. A [recent survey](#) by [Gallup](#) found that only 21% of employees surveyed say they are managed in a way that motivates them to do outstanding work.

Radical Candor

Radical Candor by [Kim Scott](#), former [Google](#) and [Apple](#) manager and CEO coach ([Twitter etc.](#)) was inspired because too many good people become bad managers. "Radical candor," she writes "just means saying what you think while also giving a damn about the person you are saying it to."

It's based on caring personally and challenging directly. Caring personally is fundamental because "relationships, not power, drive you forward," she writes. Caring personally depends on finding time for authentic two-way conversations. "Your job is not to provide purpose," she says, "but instead to get to know each of your direct reports well enough to understand how each derives meaning from their work." Challenge directly means challenging others and encouraging debate and their challenge of you, delivering hard feedback, making hard calls and holding the bar high. Radical candor only works, she explains "if the other person understands that your efforts at caring personally and challenging directly are delivered in good faith."

The first half of the book identifies core ideas around building "radically candid" relationships; creating a culture of communication (based on getting, giving and encouraging guidance, a word she prefers over feedback); learning what motivates team members ("helping people take a step in the direction of their dreams); and driving results collaboratively (because telling people what to do doesn't work). The second half identifies tools and techniques to support these ideas. For example, she provides more than 40 pages

detailing examples of ways to get/give/encourage praise and criticism, including why radical candor may be harder for men managing women and why gender bias makes radical candor harder for women. Other tips in this section include how not to personalize when giving guidance to an employee (even if it really is personal); how to gauge your impromptu guidance and track improvements in doing it; being radically candid with your own boss; and handling performance reviews.

Scott is a gifted storyteller of her own (and others') leadership failures and how radical candor avoids failure. She has redefined the definition of "maximizing shareholder value" learned when she was in business school. "In life, she writes, "I learned that too much emphasis on shareholder value actually destroys value, as well as morale." Instead, she says, "I learned to focus first on staying centered myself, so that I could build real relationships with each of the people who worked for me." Only when she was centered and her relationships solid, she explains, "could I fulfill my responsibilities as a manager to guide my team to achieve the best results." Shareholder value is the result, not at the core, she adds.

Stretch

In *Stretch*, **Scott Sonenshein**, also an adept storyteller, offers an additional dimension to how relationships build connection and achieve best results. A former strategy consultant, Sonenshein, Henry Gardiner Symonds Professor of Management at Rice University, draws on his research on the science of resourcefulness to teach how to stretch (a mindset and skill set) to "untap the value in front of you." This is how some succeed with few resources and others, he explains, fail in spite of having so much available. How we think about and use resources, says Sonenshein, "has a tremendous influence on professional success, personal satisfaction and organizational performance."

He applies the stretch mindset to running businesses and one's life, offering research-supported approaches. One illustration involves how a manager's expectations shape employee performance. The reason, says Sonenshein, is when those expectations are high, they alter positively how the employees see themselves. He describes a virtuous circle. When employees see that a manager sets high expectations for them, they raise their own expectations so they work harder and think more highly of themselves. As they perform at higher levels, he says, their positive expectations about themselves are again reinforced. The manager observes these positive changes, he adds, reinforcing his or her initial expectations and it leads to the manager evolving better coaching and feedback which continue to fuel these employees' performance edge.

Expectations also shape first meetings with people in the workplace, says Sonenshein. The good or bad we've heard about someone influences the signals we send that person, which if we think he is a jerk, Sonenshein says, can push him closer to being that jerk. By the same token, he points out, our beliefs about ourselves make us better or worse: "we are what we expect," so seed positive expectations. Stretching, like a muscle, is a mindset that requires practice to strengthen. Sonenshein provides 12 exercises to encourage becoming a stretcher -- whether the goal is to improve organizational performance or live a more satisfying life.

Becoming a better boss is an invitation to develop ourselves as well as our team. Scott and Sonenshein reduce the stress in accomplishing both. Whether it is developing radical candor or a stretcher mindset, their range of insights and how-to approaches offer ways of leading and relating that support doing one's best work.



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