

“An incredibly useful book that has transformed my approach to both managing upwards and leading my team.”

Simon Haskey, Dell EMC

THE BOSS FACTOR



10 lessons in
managing up
for mutual gain

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Lesson 5: Seek clarity



- How can anyone score a goal if they can't see the goalposts?
- Why clarity is as much your responsibility as your boss's
- How to use the Five-Phase Framework and Seven Levels of Delegation to seek, gain and maintain clarity
- What to do if you're still struggling for clarity

AS WE'VE SEEN ELSEWHERE in this book, one of the Three Core Disciplines that enable leaders and the people they lead to excel is Establishing Direction. Critically, that direction not only needs to be the *right* direction – i.e. the right or best choice given the context – it needs to be clear and properly understood. Otherwise, it's impossible for people to fully commit, line up the necessary resources or decide on the right actions to take in pursuit of that goal. It sounds so simple, but I've worked with a lot of teams over the years who have lacked

“If you don't know where you're going, you will probably end up somewhere else”

Laurence J. Peter, author of *The Peter Principle: why things always go wrong*³⁹

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true, shared clarity on their vision, mission, roles and/or collective and individual objectives. For example:

- One team leading a group of companies dithered for years over whether to merge two of those organisations into one. When the chairman and CEO asked me to come and work with them, it was apparent that the lack of a clear, final decision was undermining the performance of both businesses. The two organisations were already collaborating in some areas, but they were delaying creating robust processes to maximise the efficiency of that collaboration because nobody knew whether or when those processes might need to change. At the same time, one of the company heads was determined to prove that his business should stand on its own, rather than being merged with the other. Unsurprisingly, this mind-set filtered down to his staff and encouraged habits and silo-thinking that undermined and/or reduced the value of collaboration with the other company.
- The executive board of a public sector organisation showed a distinct lack of accountability, for behaviours as well as results. We gave each member of the team a coach and a separate coach worked with the team as a whole. In my early coaching sessions with the CEO, his frustration with his colleagues' failure to deliver was palpable. He was clear on his expectations of them and equally clear – with me at least – on the ways in which they were failing to meet those expectations. However, it became clear through my discussions with the other coaches that the clarity he had in his own mind wasn't translating into clarity for the team. They weren't sufficiently clear what he expected them to deliver and how he expected them to behave, which made it difficult for them to deliver on his expectations. Not only that, but it gave them a great deal more scope for dodging accountability

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when they *did* know they'd failed to deliver. After all, if there was no explicit agreement on the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and performance, how could they possibly be outside those boundaries?

At an individual level, lack of clarity reduces people's commitment to their work, boss and organisations. It can undermine their self-esteem and it's a contributing factor to dissatisfaction – not just with work, but with life in general. At its worst, lack of clarity can increase our chances of suffering from depression⁴⁰. We have a fundamental need to feel a sense of control and understand what is expected of us. Without it, we fall into a state of 'learned helplessness', in which we lose all belief in our ability to affect what happens to us. So, this section of the book is not just about your work, development and career progression; it's about your health.

When it comes to performance as a team or organisation, clarity becomes increasingly important – and increasingly difficult – as the operating environment becomes increasingly changeable / volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. The more 'VUCA' the context, the more important it becomes for people at more junior grades in an organisation to be responsive and adaptable. Without clarity, though, that responsiveness and adaptability can descend into chaos; create unnecessary or even crippling risk and inefficiency; overwhelm people with too much responsibility or by taking them beyond their capabilities; undermine important policies, protocols, values and even an organisation's core brand; destroy economies of scale... the list goes on.

A Five-Phase Framework for achieving and maintaining clarity

A few years ago, I developed a Five-Phase Framework for my colleagues and me to use with the teams we were coaching. I've since found it enor-

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mously helpful in a range of contexts. It draws on a wealth of research models and insights into best practice from a whole host of different disciplines including project management, organisational change, executive coaching, the Agile movement and the military's 'intelligence cycle'⁴¹ and Mission Command model⁴².



The central idea of the Five-Phase Framework (see above) is this: regardless of its scale, there are five critical phases to any piece of work: Engage, Assess, Align, Progress, Review.

At each of those phases there are a number of people we need to be thinking about and potentially involving. In this case, those people are you, your boss, the stakeholders who have a vested interest in the piece of work and the wider team.

You can use the framework with your boss, the people you lead or other stakeholders – it's as much a leadership tool as it is a tool for working effectively with people in more senior positions. If the work is fairly straightforward, I'd recommend working through all five phases in one sitting – perhaps using the image above as a way of holding the framework in mind. If it's especially complex, you'll likely benefit from working through a few iterations together, taking time out in between to reflect, recalibrate and gather additional information.

Phase One: Engage

This is the part where we get people on board with what we're meant to be doing. It's sometimes easy to leave this part to our leaders, rather

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than taking responsibility for it ourselves. If I'm adding real value, though, I'll proactively engage myself and my boss by bringing us together to talk about the piece of work in question and show them I'm going to be making life easier for them.

Where clarity is concerned, I need to get clarity on my boss's overall intent and how this intent aligns with the intentions of their own superiors. For *real* clarity, I'll want to extend that process to my stakeholders in general. I'll also want to know that this piece of work is high up those people's lists of priorities. Otherwise, I'm likely to struggle to get the support I need to ensure it succeeds.

The more I know about what my boss's boss was intending when she briefed my boss, the easier it'll be for me to be purposefully creative and adaptable without undermining our collective endeavour. This is particularly important in environments that are complex, unpredictable and/or ambiguous. To use a military example, if I've been asked to defend a particular hill because my boss's boss wants to stop the enemy taking the town on the other side of it, I'll know that I may need to move to another hill if the enemy unexpectedly comes from the opposite direction. If I'm not clear on the *reason* for defending the hill, I'll just sit there on top of it as the town burns below, expecting to be rewarded for the fact that the enemy never engaged me in battle.

I'll also increase my chances of success without overextending myself if I get clarity on what my boss considers to be the minimum criteria for success in this endeavour – similar to what the British Army calls the Main Effort and proponents of the Agile methodology call the Minimum Viable Product⁴³. That might sound under-ambitious, like “What's the very least I need to achieve here in order to scrape through with minimal effort?” However, it's this clarity that will help me understand where to draw the line on quality, timelines and resources. It's also a useful counter to perfectionism and scope creep, both of which are rife in the organisations I've encountered – and both of which increase stress and reduce efficiency, effectiveness and overall performance.

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All too often, bosses fail to clearly prioritise when delegating work to others. Like many people in organisations, they act as if everything's equally urgent and equally important. It can't be. To help prevent the stress and mess this can cause, it's important to ask them to identify the activity they believe is crucial to the success of the overall endeavour at that point in time and should therefore be first in line when it comes to allocating energy and resources. This prioritisation might change as the situation evolves but it's essential that any changes are made clearly and consciously, with both parties involved. Having a single Main Effort makes a huge difference in any relationship, but even more effective is to establish a clear ranking of the top five priorities and revisit these periodically. You may meet resistance in trying to get this – we'll look at why shortly – but if you and your boss can't get past this, you'll be conspiring to create problems for yourselves further down the line.

Understanding my boss and stakeholder's intent, the Main Effort and the minimum criteria for success means I know what effect I'm supposed to achieve and why it needs to be achieved. I'm not asking *how* it needs to be achieved: if the delegation is working properly, that *how* should be up to me – and we'll come back to that in a moment. We'll also look at reasons you might struggle to get clarity at any of these five phases.

Finally, this initial Engage phase asks that we think about the rest of the team. What clarity do they need from the outset? This might include my boss or me making it clear to the rest of the team where my role and remit begins and ends in relation to this work, what our aspirations are for the work and what I might need from the team to make it happen. After all, in high performing teams, everyone understands everyone else's role, responsibilities and challenges.

To help you put the Engage phase into practice, I'd encourage you to think of a current piece of work and complete the table below in order to check and enhance the degree of clarity you have with regard to people's engagement and how you'll need to manage it going forward.

Some suggestions as you approach this:

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- If you've more stakeholders than columns, or need more space, then do the work on a separate sheet or sheets, or download the Excel spreadsheet from the Boss Factor resources page at www.leaderspace.com
- You might also want to share and discuss this table with your boss – either after you've completed it or as you work through it
- Once you've ascertained the explicit and unspoken priorities, needs and expectations for a given stakeholder, it's well worth ranking them so you have a clear understanding of what's most important to them. You'll have a single ranking across both the explicit and unspoken boxes for a single stakeholder. Of course, you can do the ranking yourself or you can work through the ranking with that stakeholder or with someone else.
- To help you manage expectations going forward, it'll help if you agree how involved each stakeholder will need to be as the work progresses. Do they need to be informed at each decision point or only at key milestones? Is the expectation that they're kept updated, that they'll provide input or be involved in the decision-making? Do they have powers of veto? And what are your expectations of them when it comes to updating you on things they're hearing about the work or that might affect its chances of success?

If for some reason you'd rather not use the table, you might prefer to create your own checklist for the Engage phase. I'll be suggesting this for all five phases towards the end of this lesson, so you'll find space on [page 122](#) for recording your ideas.

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| Stakeholder | Me |
|---|----|
| Explicit priorities, needs and expectations (what they're saying) | |
| Unspoken priorities, needs and expectations (the things they're not saying) | |
| What do they believe is the 'Main Effort' / minimum criteria for success? | |
| How much do they benefit if this work succeeds (0 – 5)*? | |
| How much do they lose if it fails (0 – 5)?** | |
| How engaged are they at the moment (0 – 5)*** | |
| How involved do they need to be? | |
| Actions required | |

* score from 0 - 5; use a minus number if it's in their interest that it fails

** use minus numbers if it would be harmful to them if this work succeeds

*** use minus numbers if they're actively disengaged

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| My Boss | |
|----------------|-------|
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Phase Two: Assess

This is where we ascertain the gap between where we are now and where we need to be. For example:

- **Resources (people, equipment, budget, etc.).** What do I need? What do I currently have available to me? How might my available resources change over the course of this work? What scope do I have for accessing additional resources if necessary and how would I go about that?
- **Enablers and supporters.** Who is actively supporting what we're doing? What support are they providing or offering (advocacy, advice, practical assistance, influence, etc.) Who has supported this in the past and for what reason are they no longer doing so? Who could potentially start or stop supporting us in the future? Similarly, what other internal and external factors does my boss already know will, or could, help make this happen?
- **Risks and blockers.** Who's resisting already or could potentially derail what we're trying to achieve? What are the key risks that my boss is already aware of? What upcoming events could potentially impact our success? What past events could have left residual effects that might reduce our chances of success? What's happening elsewhere in the organisation (or outside of it) that could draw resources or support away from what we're doing?

The more complex the task, the more time and energy I'd invest in answering these questions. I'd be expecting to do a fair amount of the assessment myself, but my boss will have a lot of useful information already, so it's well worth exploring this at the outset. Similarly, I'd be remembering to ask these questions in relation to the team, whether that's the team I'm leading or my team of peers.

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Thinking of a current piece of work – ideally the same one you considered in the Engage phase – take a few moments to describe the gap between where you are now and where you need to be, using the questions above to stimulate your thinking.

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Phase Three: Align

Once we've assessed the gap between our aspirations and our current reality, we need to decide how we're going to close that gap. However we plan to do it, we're going to have a hard time putting that plan into action if it's not aligned with the needs, agendas and actions of our stakeholders – and particularly our boss. Very few bosses will genuinely give us the license to do whatever we want – those that do are generally pretty ineffective leaders. So, while there's a lot to be said for leaders giving their people autonomy, it's always wise to ensure a clear and up-to-date shared understanding of the extent of that autonomy and what means are justified in achieving our objectives.

For instance, I remember asking the owners of a 250-person business what they expected of its Managing Director – he was in the room at the time. Their initial response was a nice clear profitability target. That was it, they assured us both.

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“So,” I said, “if he hits that target by ditching IT services [their core offering] and switching to selling golf clubs, that’d be okay?”

No, they said; it wouldn’t. In fact, not only did he need to stay true to the original vision for the company, but they wanted to subject him to quarterly reviews, which would include an assessment of his impact as a leader within the organisation. Lucky we cleared that up early, then, as they’d have ousted him if he’d brought in the money but failed to deliver on those previously unspoken expectations.

Unlike that Managing Director – at least until we had that conversation – many commercial aircraft pilots benefit from very immediate, explicit and visible clarity regarding what are considered optimal and acceptable parameters: a ‘tunnel in the sky’ shown on the cockpit’s head-up display. This shows the ideal route to their destination given the current conditions, but it’s a fairly broad tunnel and the pilot is left in control. It’s helpful for leaders and the people they lead to have some equivalent, some guardrails that provide clarity on any ‘must have’ courses of action and any courses of action that would be absolute no-nos. These benefit both parties: they limit the potential fallout for your boss and reduce the amount of damage you can do yourself and the project, while increasing the extent to which your boss can hand you control and autonomy which empowers you and makes life easier for them.

Two final points when it comes to aligning. Firstly, it can be helpful to ascertain early on what help your boss is willing or expecting to give you when it comes to ensuring the team and your other stakeholders are sufficiently aligned with the decisions you make.

Secondly, I’d recommend exploring with your boss the possibility that there may be things they cannot share with you for some reason. Showing that you understand this reduces the tension they’re likely to be feeling if there *is* information they need to withhold. It also allows you to work together to find creative ways to ensure that your decisions and actions are still aligned to the various agendas in play and would still make

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sense were you apprised of that missing information. For instance, you might agree on a 'proxy' for that information – a substitute that you both know is false but is close enough to the truth to enable you to operate as efficiently and effectively as you would if you knew it. By way of example, I once coached someone who had a non-work issue that they didn't wish to share, but which we had to factor in if our work was to succeed. I asked her to give it a name and she called it 'Kevin'. From then on, we were able to check the impact of Kevin on things we were discussing without me ever having to know what Kevin actually was.

Returning to the piece of work you've been thinking about as you've worked through this lesson, what are the key things you need to consider and do to ensure you've sufficient, genuine clarity at the Align phase?

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Phase Four: Progress

This is the phase where most of what is considered the ‘actual work’ gets done. The British Army’s advice here is that the leader should have minimal control measures in place, to avoid placing unnecessary limits on their ‘subordinates’. This is in spite of precision being pretty important in military contexts - in terms of objectives, outcomes and the way those outcomes are delivered with minimal loss of life. So I believe the same ‘minimal control methods’ approach applies in civilian contexts, too. Importantly, though, ‘minimal’ means ‘optimal’ not ‘recklessly absent’.

The following Seven Levels of Delegation⁴⁴ can really help here. They’re a way of clarifying the degree of decision-making authority our bosses are giving us, rather than making assumptions and risking those assumptions being misaligned. It’s particularly useful during this phase as it should be an iterative agreement, evolving as the work evolves and the environment around you changes. It also helps your boss to gradually let go of responsibility, particularly if they’re finding that difficult – more on that in Lesson 6. The Seven Levels are as follows:

1. **They tell you what to do:** they assess the problem, decide the best course of action and issue the instructions. They might explain their rationale. They might invite questions so they and you can be sure you understand what they’re expecting from you, but the instruction itself is not debatable.
2. **They ask you for the data they need to make a decision:** they ask for your analysis of the problem but not your proposals for solving the problem. They then review your analysis, decide what needs to be done and explain their rationale to you.
3. **You offer options:** they ask for your analysis of the problem (or perhaps present their own analysis of it) and your ideas for potential solutions, plus the pros and cons of each. Then they choose from between those options (or integrate your ideas into an

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alternative), explain their decision and ask you to proceed with that course of action.

4. **You offer a single recommendation:** they ask you to analyse the problem, work out the optimal solution and come to them for approval to put that solution into action. They then explain their reasons for giving or withholding that approval.
5. **You check your decisions before moving forward:** they leave it to you but ask that you keep them informed of your decisions, actions and rationale before you proceed so they can raise their concerns beforehand if they have any. Ideally you should give them a realistic deadline for raising those concerns, after which you can assume it's okay to proceed.
6. **You get on with it and report back:** they leave it to you and ask only that you keep them updated on what you've done and why you chose to do it. As with Level 5, they are still accountable for anything that goes wrong, but can take very little credit for what goes well.
7. **Full autonomy:** they step back and you get on with it with their full, public endorsement. You don't check with them, you don't involve them in identifying problems or resolving them. If you do report back to them, it's with a single bullet point stating what was achieved, so they know you've actually been doing something. They are still fully accountable for oversight of your work.

Getting clarity from your boss on which level you're meant to be at can be enormously helpful, bearing in mind that you could potentially agree different levels for different kinds of decision. However, few bosses are sufficiently clear or proactive in this regard. It's one of the reasons they find it so hard to delegate. When they operate at too low a level, they're micromanaging and stifling their people. When they operate at too high a level, things go wrong and they let their own bosses down, so they

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typically swing back the other way and overshoot the ideal balance of autonomy and oversight. The decision as to which is the right level will depend on an assessment of:

- The riskiness of the work, in terms of the likelihood of it going wrong and the impact if it does
- The extent to which you have the capacity to deliver it (see Lesson 7, Continually Build Your Capacity)
- Your commitment to the work (see Lesson 8, Secure and Maintain Commitment)
- The volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of the environment in which you're working.

Which levels best describe the way your current boss delegates to you?

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What factors encourage them to operate at that level (or those levels)?

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What would you change, and how would you do that?

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It's also worth remembering, when working with these Seven Levels of Delegation, that there might be any number of reasons why your boss has suddenly moved from one level to another. Some reasons might be directly related to you – whether it's about the commitment you're showing or the capacity you're displaying, or something else. Other reasons will have nothing at all to do with you. We'll explore this further in Lesson 6 when we look more closely at how responsibility does and doesn't get shared between leaders and the people they lead.

When looking at this Progress phase in advance, it can be helpful to brainstorm the kinds of situations that might justifiably raise the need for your boss to intervene or for you to seek help. You might, for instance, introduce some form of risk assessment that identifies ways in which each of those risks could be removed, reduced, managed or mitigated. Depending on the circumstances, it can also help to create some mutual understanding of the kind of help that could be made available if it's needed.

You'll also want to agree, and continue to revisit, your own and your stakeholders' attitude to failures and delays. The Agile methodology calls for 'failing fast'. This is really a shorthand for creating quick, efficient experiments and ensuring each tells us something useful, whether it succeeds or fails. So I'd encourage you to seek (and periodically recalibrate) clarity on how best to experiment and quickly learn from those experiments whether they fail or (hopefully) succeed – as well as clarity on the extent to which such experiments are acceptable.

Being Agile also means trialling multiple approaches simultaneously so we don't place all our eggs in one basket. For example, a software developer once told me that, all too often, his client organisations were determined to invest all of their budget in building one technology platform through which to communicate with their customers, ignoring the fact that they already knew that different customers prefer to use different platforms for different things: desktop or mobile browsers for some interactions, phone or webchat for others – and then there's SMS,

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email, instant messaging, Facebook, Twitter, dedicated apps and so on. This single, linear approach was a key reason, the developer said, for so many organisations failing to properly engage with their customers. So I'd encourage clarifying the extent to which parallel activities are permissible (or tolerable) and re-clarifying as you go.

Finally, remember that – at each phase – we need to attend to all four of the boxes at the centre of the Five-Phase Framework. In the Progress phase, it's critical to ensure that there are no unpleasant surprises for our team or stakeholders.



Phase Five: Review

The Five-Phase Framework makes it look like the Review phase comes at the end. In reality, the framework is iterative and most of us go through numerous five-phase processes in parallel over different time spans. One might last a year, another a month; another might run its course in a single meeting.

At the same time, it's certainly worth agreeing review processes upfront. There's obvious stuff like key milestones and key performance indicators, but it's always worth exploring and agreeing when and how we're going to report back on the progress we're making. After all, people differ considerably in their needs for information, both in terms of the frequency they require and the level of detail they're looking for. And people's needs often differ from project to project, relationship to relationship – particularly as the external pressure they're under waxes and wanes.

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Importantly, it's the nature of any endeavour that things change. New information comes to light; people join or leave; resources appear, change and disappear; people's circumstances evolve, altering what they need from you, the project and each other; objectives can change entirely, sometimes without essential people noticing. Building in the right review processes helps us stay on top of these changes and adapt to them.

The Review phase sits at the core of the Agile methodology. As you may or may not know, Agile teams have regular 'retrospectives' which will typically bring the team – and potentially its core stakeholders – together around a handful of key questions, to which everyone is expected to contribute answers. This is *really* good practice. I'd suggest working up your own key questions as they'll be tailored to your context and relationships, but you might draw on the following for inspiration:⁴⁵

- What's gone well since our last review?
- What's gone less well than we'd have hoped?
- What should we do differently next time?
- What one small change would make a big difference?
- What assumptions have we been making and how can we test those?
- Who are we not sufficiently involving / engaging / communicating with? (Or, who are we involving too much?)
- What is puzzling us / the team / our stakeholders? (Or, what are we / they struggling to understand?)
- Who do we want / need to thank?

You'll notice they're all open questions and none of them ask 'Why?' Asking 'Why?' tends to provoke defensiveness, so questions that start with that particular word are best avoided, or at least used carefully.

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**What questions would you ask? Of whom would you ask them?
And when?**

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Trouble getting clarity?

Sometimes we're doing our best to get clarity but it's just not forthcoming.

I once coached the German CFO of a division of a well-known multinational – let's call him Christoff. Christoff was on a contract with a long notice period, rather than being fully employed by the organisation. He wanted clarity from his boss in the parent organisation regarding the likely length of that contract, so that – if necessary – he could start looking for another job. His boss appeared to be dodging the question and Christoff was growing increasingly frustrated.

We brainstormed and explored a number of reasons why a boss might not be as clear as we'd like them to be. Those reasons might vary from phase to phase, but they're going to come from one of four sources:

- **Your boss.** Some years ago, I thought I was giving my team latitude, when I was actually failing to be sufficiently clear because I didn't have clarity in my own mind. I felt behind on a project from the start and unable to clear enough time to do the planning I knew was needed. So I was hedging my bets, delaying giving clarity until I could be more certain what I wanted from them. From my team's perspective,

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I wasn't giving them freedom, I was avoiding telling them where the goal posts were so I could then move them once we'd kicked the ball far enough across the field. Some bosses will fail to give sufficient clarity for similar reasons. Others might be withholding information because they're afraid to share it, bored of sharing it or think they have already been clear enough. Others might lack sufficient confidence to be clear, fearing they'll be seen as bossy or controlling. Others may lack or feel they lack the communication skills to be sufficiently clear.

- **You.** Maybe your need for clarity is different from theirs and they've already given what they think is reasonable. Perhaps you want more detail than they're used to giving, or you like to think further ahead than they do, or you need more of the bigger picture than they'd think to offer. Christoff was a highly confident, assertive, focused and career-driven man with a very strong need to feel in control and a tendency to meet that need by exerting control over others. He was being offered opportunities for roles outside of his organisation and had a wife and teenage children who were used to a life that afforded a fair degree of comfort. Add to that the fact that he profiled as more risk averse than most, particularly under pressure, and it starts to become clear how his own needs and habits were contributing to this situation – whereas he, like most of us, saw the 'problem' as something that existed completely outside of him. Christoff's boss was at a very different stage in his life and career, with different priorities and pressures upon him. He was also less detail-conscious, more tolerant of ambiguity and had considerable appetite for risk. In other words: on a very different wavelength from Christoff.
- **The relationship between you and your boss.** Perhaps they trust you so much that – rightly or wrongly – they don't feel the need to give you more clarity. Perhaps they're afraid of offending you or patronising you if they're too clear. Perhaps they don't trust you enough. We'll look at trust in detail when we explore the next lesson 'Take due responsibility'.

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When I asked Christoff to describe his approach to his boss, it was clear that his directness was creating a confrontational dynamic. The call for clarity sounded like a demand, even an ultimatum, rather than a request. What was lacking was a more adult-to-adult conversation that tabled Christoff's needs and desire to stay with the organisation while showing empathy with his boss's position.

- **Your boss's context.** Perhaps, as with Christoff's boss, there are external reasons why they can't be as clear as they'd like to be. Perhaps they're forbidden from sharing certain information, like at Apple where the shroud of secrecy over new products means bosses can't share certain things but accept that that means their staff will make some decisions that'll look 'bad' in hindsight – the payoff being the millions of dollars' worth of free advertising generated by the excitement that secrecy creates. Perhaps your boss is being influenced by their own boss's or peers' very different view of you or your relationship. Perhaps there are dynamics in your team that make it hard for them to be as clear as they might be otherwise. Perhaps the landscape is changing too quickly or the situation is too complex or ambiguous for them to gain sufficient clarity themselves.

Without sufficient clarity, it's going to be harder for us to deliver as well on what our bosses and other senior stakeholders want or need from us. It'll also be harder for us to fully commit to the endeavour and harder to galvanise others and hold them to account. So how should we get that clarity if it's not forthcoming? It's hard to give a single, simple answer. My hope is that by reflecting on the work you've done so far in this book and considering Christoff's situation and the four sources I've listed above, you'll see a way forward that suits your unique situation.

What did Christoff do? He took a step back, analysed what he and his boss were bringing to the situation, in terms of interpersonal style and the needs they had for themselves and for the business. He considered the stakeholders around them and what a good outcome and process

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would look like for them. Then he took these insights to his boss and negotiated a level of clarity and certainty that would allow him to relax for the next eighteen months while allowing the business the flexibility it needed during what was a challenging time for everyone. Last time I checked, he was still there and doing well.

Putting the Five-Phase Framework into practice

In case you'd like to create your own checklist here, I've left you some space to do so on the following pages.

Whether you do that or not, I'd encourage you to experiment with the Five-Phase Framework and use the space below to record the successes and challenges you've encountered when applying it to your own work and to your relationship with your boss and other senior stakeholders.

Ways in which the Five-Phase Framework has helped

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Challenges I've faced when implementing the Five-Phase Framework

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THE BOSS FACTOR

Your Five-Phase checklist

(This page is left blank for you create your own set of reminders should you wish to do so.)



Applying this lesson as a leader of others

If you lead people yourself, I'm hoping this lesson will have encouraged you to think about the degree of clarity you've been giving others. As we saw at the start, if you don't Establish a clear Direction with your people, you'll find it hard to Secure their Commitment and between you you'll find it hard to ascertain, let alone Build, the necessary Capacity to get the job done.

The three ARC Qualities have a role to play here, too. Clarity of purpose makes it easier to allocate responsibilities, and clear responsibilities increase people's commitment. Clarity makes it easier to be courageous in the face of adversity because it's far easier to push on through when you know where you're meant to be headed – ambiguity and



uncertainty rob us of our momentum. On the flipside, being clear with the people we lead isn't always easy: sometimes it requires us to draw on our values and those of the people we lead in order to find an authentic way forward; sometimes the path is obscured by a web of competing responsibilities; sometimes it takes courage to cut through the noise and be clear; sometimes it takes a combination of authenticity, responsibility and courage to admit to our staff that we're struggling to be clear with them because we're far from clear in our own minds.

So, if you have responsibility for leading others, I'd encourage you to use this Five-Phase model and the Seven Levels of Delegation explicitly with them. I'd invite you to challenge yourself to be as clear as you can be and challenge them to do the same.

THE BOSS FACTOR

In summary

Without clarity on the intended direction and criteria for success, it's hard to fully commit, to marshal the necessary resources to get the job done, and to measure progress. We've drawn on a Five-Phase Framework that helps you Engage the right people, Assess what's needed, Align your stakeholders, Progress that plan and Review your progress and ways of working.

If you've really tackled this lesson you'll be ready to use this approach in your own work and you'll know at any given time at which of the Seven Levels of Delegation you and your boss are operating.



Praise for The Boss Factor

“An insightful, enjoyable book that offers the kind of instant payback that’s critical to anyone working in a fast-growing, entrepreneurial business. It challenged me to look closely at myself, how I operate and how that plays out with others. In doing so, I discovered that – despite my best intentions – sometimes my attempts to help others aren’t actually that helpful. This deepened my understanding of my relationship with my boss and ways to further improve it. It also enabled me to adapt my approach to leading others.”

Michael Borthwick, Group Financial Controller at Claranet

“An incredibly useful and accessible book that has transformed my thinking and approach to both managing upwards and leading my team. As a leader, it’s crystal clear to me that the relationships I have with my team are critical to the success of the work we do together. The ten ‘lessons’ described in this book offer us a way of examining and discussing those relationships to set us all up for success. It’s a book I know I’ll read and refer to more than once and the author makes that easy: there’s a lot to reflect on and the way *The Boss Factor* is written is like having him in the room with you.”

Simon Haskey, Consulting Practice Lead at Dell EMC

“Richard Boston has nailed it. If only I’d known this earlier in my career, I’d have saved myself a lot of grief, done a much better job, and had a happier boss! With so many books for leaders and so few for those they lead, this will be invaluable for anyone in their first or second job, as well as for those in middle management looking to enhance their relationships upwards.”

Peter Young, Director and executive coach at Bladon Leadership

“Insightful, practical, enjoyable and accessible. There are a lot of books out there, many of them hard to finish. This one hooks you in with a combination of stories, facts, ideas, theory and challenging exercises that encourage the reader to pause and reflect on what the content really means for them. As much as you’ll want to read on, it’s well worth investing some time in that reflection: you’ll remember more, you’ll apply more, and you’ll find the various questions

and exercises trigger powerful conversations with your boss and any people you lead.”

Rebecca Stevens, whose previous roles include heading up leadership, talent and organisational development at Kimberly-Clark, Deloitte and BP

“A really important book on a really important topic. Every one of us has a boss: even as a CEO I had people who could call me up in the middle of the night and make demands of me. The great leaders are the ones who’ve lived up to Richard Boston’s ten lessons when working with the people above them – whether they’ve done so by accident or by design. This book will save you the pain of learning the hard way. It’ll help you craft your own, informed recipe for success. And it’s a really easy read: I like it so much I’ve already read it twice and will no doubt come back for more.”

Tony Cooper, retired Partner at Deloitte, entrepreneur and ex-CEO of Merryck & Co

“I had a great time reading this book. When I first read it, I was a few months into a new in role in a complex, pressured environment and it took some of that pressure off. It’s an interesting and enjoyable read, rich with new ideas and material, and was directly relevant to conversations and challenges I was having at the time. Not only that, it challenged my assumptions about what it means to lead and be led. It helped me see patterns I’d built up over the years. It encouraged me to be honest with myself and it got me thinking differently about myself, my boss, team and peers; about the relationships between us; and about the world in which we operate.”

Catherine Poyner, Head of Transformation in central government

“A refreshing book that takes a new perspective on the relationship between leaders and the people they lead. I really loved the practical tools and exercises, which made this book a directly relevant, interactive and memorable experience where so many are a passive stroll through theories that are all too easily forgotten. This book actually made me think far beyond just reading it. It made me do something. It made it stick.”

Geoff Morey, Learning and Organisational Development Consultant at Macmillan Cancer Support

“An inspirational and highly enjoyable read... especially given the current situation in my career, having just moved into a new role, in a new team, with a new manager, in a new company. I have always been intrigued by the fact that, across a range of jobs, I have sometimes struggled with my bosses while at other times things went really, really smoothly. This book offered some powerful insights into why that is and encouraged me to reflect on what I bring to those relationships. I am sure many, many other people will enjoy it as much as I did!”

Vicky Monsieurs, HRD Manager, Center Parcs Belgium-Netherlands-Germany

“I took a lot of value from this book both as a leader and as a follower of leaders. It also felt realistic, showing that Richard Boston understands that it’s not possible to be perfect in either role at all times. It has helped me become a better boss for the people I lead and has inspired me to change the way we work as a team. Like most leaders, I cannot be successful without the people I lead. This book has helped me begin to create an environment that’s intentionally designed to enable a team to excel in their roles, get the best from me and allow room for growth. I’d recommend it to other leaders, either as a book to give to your people, as a reference point for one-to-ones and team meetings, or as a blueprint to use behind the scenes.”

Mark Griffiths, Director of Account Relationship Management at WorkForce Software

“A very useful, highly educational book that distils a huge amount of knowledge and a multitude of methodologies into a format that is very easy to digest and apply. Each chapter stands alone and provides its own concise guidance. However, the greatest value is in the whole: this is a book that challenges stereotypes, looking at leadership from the other side of what is after all a two-way relationship. By understanding and applying the book’s 10 lessons we enhance our understanding of both sides of that relationship, which can only enhance our ability to lead.”

Seb Henkes, founder of Sabio, a multi-award-winning tech company listed as one of the UK’s best places to work

“A concise, eminently readable book that offers an interesting counterpoint to the mass of books written on leadership. It made me challenge myself – especially on

the topic of courage in the relationship with one's boss. As a 'middle manager' I've found it helpful to combine this new book with insights from the author's previous book, *ARC Leadership*, to ensure a 360° approach to my workplace relationships. Highly recommended."

Matt Champkin, Recruitment Manager at Blick Rothenberg



Praise for Richard's previous book, ARC Leadership

"This book has had a real impact on me... Business schools in particular would do well to pay attention... given what's gone on in corporations, they need to take greater responsibility for producing future leaders who aren't simply able to profitably grow a business, but are – to their core – Authentic, Responsible and Courageous."

Karen Lombardo, recently retired Worldwide Head of Human Resources at Gucci Group

"A rigorous, intelligent book that challenges us to make a fundamental shift, to make ourselves better – both as leaders and as people."

Adam Burns, Editor, MeetTheBoss TV

"Positive, hopeful, intelligent, friendly, shrewd, eye-opening, evidence-based and incredibly generous. It challenges and supports us like a great coach or trainer would do... part character review, part campaign for personal overhaul."

Phil Hayes, Chairman, Management Futures

