



## Radical Candor

### The Surprising Secret to Being a Good Boss

Kim Scott | First Round Review © 2015

Management consultant Kim Scott presents a delightfully candid talk on how to deliver feedback in order to nurture employees. By sharing her personal management missteps and other anecdotes, Scott offers fresh, witty and useful guidance that is applicable to neophyte and veteran leaders alike. *getAbstract* recommends Scott's wisdom to human resources personnel and to managers at all levels of the corporate hierarchy.

### Take-Aways

- Two factors – readiness to “care personally” for others and readiness to “challenge directly” – determine successful employee guidance. A great boss masters both traits.
- “Radical candor” – the ability to offer frank criticism without creating an adversarial relationship – is the most effective type of managerial interaction.
- Managers who excel at challenging directly but fall short in caring personally are “assholes.” Those who demonstrate neither trait illustrate “manipulative insincerity.”
- The most common management mistakes occur as a result of “ruinous empathy,” whereby leaders care about their workers but don’t challenge them.
- To foster radical candor at your organization, begin giving and receiving feedback after interactions with your employees, discourage “backstabbing,” facilitate ways for even the most junior staffers to provide feedback, and prioritize your well-being.

## Summary

Praise and criticism are the building blocks of guidance, a manager's primary duty. Good bosses not only give guidance but solicit it for themselves and encourage it among their employees. The best guidance occurs through "radical candor" – the ability to offer frank criticism without creating an adversarial relationship. Management consultant Kim Scott experienced radical candor when her boss pulled her aside after she had delivered a presentation and informed her that her speech was littered with "ums," which made her "sound stupid." Scott appreciated this blunt but constructive feedback.

*"Guidance...is the single most important part of managing people."*

Imagine a 2x2 matrix, whereby the *y* axis plots readiness to "care personally" for others and the *x* axis plots readiness to "challenge directly." Great leaders occupy the upper right-hand quadrant, radical candor; that is, they exhibit genuine care for their employees' well-being and recognize a "moral obligation" to challenge their workers. To exercise radical candor, be humble and helpful. Offer instant feedback that identifies flaws in a person's actions, not his or her character. Be public when issuing praise but private when delivering criticism. Managers who excel at challenging directly but fall short in caring personally are "assholes." Those who demonstrate neither trait illustrate "manipulative insincerity." Happily, few managers boast this Machiavellian style. Most managerial mistakes occur as a result of "ruinous empathy," whereby leaders care about their workers but don't challenge them. These managers never dole out the constructive criticism their employees need to improve. Take four steps to foster a culture of radical candor at your organization:

1. **Seek "impromptu guidance"** – Introduce the radical candor matrix at your firm. Solicit critique from your employees following each interaction.
2. **"Make backstabbing impossible"** – When dealing with combative employees, request that the foes work through problems with each other before coming to you. Never speak to one about the troubling issue in the absence of the other. When necessary, jump in to help the rivals reach a fair solution quickly.
3. **"Make it easier to speak truth to power"** – To evaluate a middle manager, meet with his or her direct reports as a group. Ask them how the manager could improve, and share their suggestions with the manager to encourage behavioral change.
4. **"Put your own oxygen mask on first"** – You can't begin to care for others if you don't care for yourself. Prioritize your physical and mental health.

## About the Speaker

**Kim Scott** is an author, entrepreneur and management consultant.



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