

Top teams *Leading by* *Example*



part of
2waytrust
Leadership

February 2009

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Introduction

Leading by Example is the first strand of 2waytrust Leadership and is designed for use alongside *Face-to-face feedback in small groups* and *Linking one-to-one appraisals to team meetings*. It will be updated every year as we gain new insights into leadership behaviours through our ongoing work with top teams.

It has taken a considerable number of years of working with Chief Executives and their Boards and Executive Directors to feel confident enough to reach some of the conclusions reflected in the pages that follow.

The power of volunteering

The essence of our approach is to do with the power of leaders volunteering to their immediate teams those behaviours that they know can cause problems.

The most dysfunctional behaviours are those that individuals refuse to own. Once they are owned, high performing teams can help with managing them - and others can gain the confidence to own **their behaviours** that also get in the way of higher performance.



In this way, top teams really can lead by example, being open about those aspects of their performance where they expect better of themselves just as they look to those who work to them to do the same.

Leading by Example is written to support you and your team in discovering those extra dimensions of openness and immediacy that could enable you to enthuse your organisation with a culture of being hungry to be the best.

This is about spending minimum time on that which you know you do well and nearly all of your time on those areas where you want to raise your game.

One thing we can be sure about is that after this recession is over, the future will belong to those top teams that raise their game and keep on raising it.

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Part One:

The 10 Principles of 2waytrust Leadership and putting performance first

1. We're open about our weaknesses as well as our strengths

When we are with our immediate team, we are open about our weaknesses as well as our strengths.

We know that if we are to be really successful in our leadership role, we need to be okay about who and what we are.

Being okay with ourselves means that we should open up with others in our team about those things that we wish we did a little better as well as those things that we know we do well.

2. We ask others to tell us straight if they disagree

Even when we are pretty confident that we're right about something, we make a point of asking others to tell us if they disagree with something that we say.

We don't want them to pretend to agree with us if they're not genuinely persuaded.

3. We invite face-to-face feedback from members of our team

We encourage our team to set aside quality time to give each other face-to-face feedback in small groups.

Whether or not we use the script for face-to-face feedback in small groups, we know that we are best able to receive difficult feedback when we invite it - and colleagues give it to us first-hand instead of via third parties.

4. We constantly talk to our team about issues to do with team performance

Discussions about how to improve performance are a natural part of our conversations with our team. We ask who - or what - is managing to drive up performance still higher, and who - or what - is getting in the way of higher performance.

At the same time, we are constantly looking for new ways of linking one-to-one appraisals to team-based discussions about performance. We know that the day we ease off in our pressure to perform more highly is the day we are bound to find our performance dipping.

5. When a difficult new business plan is in the process of evolving, we are careful to say at each stage that we probably haven't yet got it quite right

Big decisions are so often made in stages. The danger is that after the first stage the decision can be treated as a *fait accompli*, whereas the first stage is often little more than a statement of intent.

This is why big decisions need to be reconfirmed and proved right at each stage in their evolution. It always needs to be okay for people to say if they're not sure we are on the right track.

6. We are ruthless in reducing the amount of time at meetings spent on updating others. We want to maximise the time given to creative problem-solving and mutual support

We encourage anyone tabling an item for a meeting to make clear up-front what they need from the team.

We have the highest regard for colleagues who can say at a meeting, *"I'd appreciate your advice about such-and-such that isn't going as well as it should"*. Whenever we can, we should make a point of modelling this behaviour.

Too much of our time at meetings is given over to issues that make few demands on the creative capacity of the team. Information being offloaded onto the agendas of meetings is a sure sign of a low trust culture. It is in high trust cultures where people are relaxed about information being shared on a "need to know" basis.

7. We only want a consensus when it's real

We are careful to avoid reaching an apparent consensus too quickly. We would rather have majority decisions, with disagreements expressed openly, than consensus decisions that involve some individuals who see themselves in a minority not arguing for what they believe in.

Teams that conceal differences of opinion are destined to be middle-performers, at best. High performing teams are respectful of minority views and regard disagreement as a symptom of their desire to be the best.

8. We challenge ourselves before we challenge others

We know that those who are really hungry to be the very best are the ones who make a point of challenging themselves before they challenge others.

Everyone who works alongside them knows that they're tougher on themselves than they are on anyone else.

The better we become as leaders, the more modest we are about what we've achieved. The more modest we are, the easier it is for others to follow in our footsteps.

9. We accept that some of the habits that individuals get locked into cannot be broken, however hard we might try. When this happens we face the consequences on the basis that performance comes first

Teams hungry to be the best believe in our shared capacity to change and leave behind unhelpful habits.

Team members need to be supported in changing behaviours that get in the way of our performance, and reassured that most habits can't be left behind in one fell swoop. It takes time for people to learn new ways of working and high performers need to be patient with those who are changing some old ways and finding it hard.

At the same time, we know that there are some people who won't change their ways and whose response to being challenged is to say, "*I am as I am*". Where individuals are holding back performance and are proving stubborn in their resistance to change, they need to be clear that the choice is between shaping up or stepping to one side.

Top performing teams are constantly concerned with raising their game. They have no space for those who achieve a certain level of performance and then expect to “coast” the rest of the way.

10. We always try to practise what we preach

In trying to live these principles, we need to reassure others that they represent a goal to strive for and not simply a way of working that can be adopted by decree.

Teams need to be reminded that high trust, high performance leadership is all about us being honest about what we find difficult, not pretending that we have all of the answers and constantly being open and self-challenging in our quest for a more successful business.

These ten principles represent just **some** of the challenges that top performing leaders grapple with day-in, day-out, sometimes managing them rather well and at other times managing them rather poorly.

It’s our awareness of this that unites all leaders who are hungry to be the best.

Our hunger is not for greater transparency and trust for their own sake. It is for higher levels of reciprocal trust as a means of achieving higher levels of team performance.

Part Two:

The ten most dysfunctional behaviours in leadership teams

We set out below the 10 behaviours that in our experience are most common across all leadership teams and get in the way of teams improving their performance.

We all possess some of them and the moment we're able to own them it's much easier for our team to help us manage them.

After this summary we say a little more about each behaviour, to help you in thinking through how changes in your own behaviours could improve the performance of your team.

1. We all have a tendency to **store grievances**, so that when they come to the surface they can be much more destructive than they would have been if they had been shared when they were first experienced
2. **Defensive behaviour** is common to us all and comes in all shapes and sizes. The most common defensive behaviour is captured by the words "I'm not being defensive!"
3. Some people are almost **allergic to conflict** and will go to considerable lengths to avoid it, whilst others are almost addicted to it and need to generate some if it doesn't occur naturally. Too much or too little conflict can wreak havoc with the performance of a team and good conflict management skills are vital for higher performance
4. Far too many leaders **let their pride get in the way** of saying they're wrong. People who can't say they're wrong tend to induce copycat behaviour among those who work with them - and teams in which no-one can say they're wrong are destined to be middle performers at best
5. Large numbers of us are "**control freaks**" at work. Most people in leadership positions need to be control freaks at times, because there is a vital link between control and standard-setting. There are, however, real difficulties with compulsive control "freakery", as we explain in the commentary that follows

CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL BEHAVIOURS

6. Many Executives have a habit of being too “territorial” in their dealings with other members of the team, jealously **guarding their own patch** and resisting any incursions on the part of others, irrespective of the issues at stake. Top performing teams have no time for turf wars and support each other in ensuring that staff leave behind the “silo mentality” that dominates far too many workplaces today
7. Some of the best leaders are **perfectionists**, and every top performing team knows how much it owes to its perfectionists. At the same time, perfectionists can tyrannise others with their obsessive concern to set standards just beyond the reach of any mortal! As others help them to understand their impact on the team, they might even see that they often tyrannise themselves more than they do anyone else!
8. One of the mantras of some CEOs and Executives is that they are interested in **strategy rather than detail**. They tend to be matched by others who are happier discussing operational issues rather than general strategy. Teams that exclude either end of this spectrum, or pit one against the other, could find their business paying a heavy price. Top performing teams are into both strategy and detail, whilst being careful to make sure that in their time planning they don’t jumble up these different types of conversations
9. Some of the most powerful leaders also have strong **protective behaviours**, and whilst this is in many ways a comment on their capacity to care for others it can also undermine performance. It does not help when some team members “protect” other members of the team against themselves, as some strong Directors tend to do in relation to their CEOs
10. One of the most difficult behaviours for teams to deal with is the tendency of some CEOs and top Executives to betray as little as possible of their own personal feelings on any given subject. This **withholding behaviour** is typified by them very occasionally saying “we” and never saying “I”, and instead always talking about “them” and “you”. One of the best ways of supporting those who withhold in this way is to keep on asking fairly regularly, *“And where do you personally stand on this issue at the moment?”*

Assessing yourself against these behaviours

Commentary

The importance of volunteering self-criticism

We hope that as a team you will set aside some time to discuss those behaviours that you would like to leave behind, as a way of improving your overall performance - and you'll see that we suggest how you might go about this in Part Four on pages 32-36.

It's important for everyone coming in on this discussion to volunteer some self-criticism in relation to those behaviours where you know you're personally compromised.

Everyone in the team is going to look at the list and know, immediately, that there are headings where they fall down in their behaviour. What you need as a team is for each of you to be able to say this in an **open and relaxed way**.

The more you feel you can "say it as it is", on the subject of **yourself**, the easier you will find it to be straight with others on the subject of themselves!

We are all much better at taking criticism from those who are able to criticise themselves. So if you want to be tough on someone else, which could help a lot with permitting all of you to get rid of some old "baggage", you first need to be **tough on yourself**.

What you can't do is play it safe on yourself and at the same time use this discussion as a chance to say some risky things about others. If you do, expect them to defend themselves whilst lobbing back something pretty robust in your direction!

We now talk through these behaviours in turn, to support you in assessing yourself against them.

1. How much do you store grievances?

If you think that you're quite a storer, you're in pretty good company among a large number of leadership teams. "Storing" is a very common behaviour that many of us tend to deny.

By "storing", we're referring to our tendency to hang on to grievances that start off as relatively petty and then build up over time. They might stem from something that was said directly to us or something that was passed on through the "grapevine" and we regard as unfair or simply wrong.

We all store to one degree or another, and storing is probably at its most compulsive when there is some sort of rivalry between individuals that is reinforced by mutual dislike between their respective teams.

Clouding our view

The biggest danger of storing is that it clouds our view about the person responsible for some wrongdoing that has been stored by us. With each additional wrong, our judgement of their behaviour is driven by the grievances that we have already built up.

After a period of time, stuff that hasn't been released can build up to such an extent that there's an almighty explosion that ends up costing someone their job.

If only we could have found a way of getting rid of the grievances that we had been storing, the explosion and all that followed might have been avoided!

It's most important that we are all able to talk freely about our tendency to store and how difficult it is to break this habit. We have all known times when we see someone seething about something and yet insisting that everything is fine - and it's common knowledge that they have an issue with someone else in the team and are refusing to discuss it.

Without doubt, those who do the most to undermine the performance of a team are the ones who go into denial about their own capacity for storing grievances.

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2. How often do you find yourself becoming defensive?

We all have a capacity to be defensive. The challenge for each of us is to ask ourselves how often we become defensive and in what ways our behaviour changes in these moments.

Different people have different ways of responding defensively:

- 👉 When some become defensive, it's almost as if they're erecting a brick wall all around them to keep others at arms length. *"You can come so far and no further"* is the signal they give out
- 👉 Some others defend themselves by going on the attack and using more aggressive techniques to make colleagues back off. Their signal is more like, *"Anything more like that and I'm going to take you on."*
- 👉 And others go into that sullen defensive mode, in which anyone who says something that doesn't go down well is met with a brooding silence. *"If you keep on at me like that, I won't play this game - and when others see me sulking you'll get the blame."* (Kids do learn a lot from us, don't they!)

In defensive mode, we all tend to **listen less**, especially to views that we disagree with.

Avoiding confrontation

The worst way to manage someone else's defensiveness is to appear to be critical of it. Words such as **"Why are you so defensive?"** are invariably interpreted by anyone who is feeling defensive as an attack.

The best time to discuss defensive behaviour with colleagues is when they are NOT in a defensive frame of mind.

Often the best way to help someone out of a state of defensiveness is for the other person to offer the view that they probably triggered it:

“ I'm really sorry if I put that rather clumsily. I could sense that it put your back up. Let me try and put it differently... ”

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Of course, you might feel that someone is responding defensively to you for reasons that have nothing to do with how you raised the idea. In this case, it might be best to say that you would like to find a way of coming back to the discussion at another time when they - and you - can reconsider it in a fresh light.

Avoiding the veto

Quite often in teams, certain individuals will go into a defensive mode in order to veto the discussion moving in a certain direction. If you feel this is happening, it's essential to the performance of the team that you deal with it in the moment, since each successful veto will encourage that individual to adopt this behaviour again in the future when they're unhappy with the way the discussion is going.

It's possible to be firm but also generous:



I realise that this raises difficult issues for some of us, and we need to look at them all very carefully. Can we make sure that we first understand what it is that we're trying to achieve before we look at how this could affect each of us around this table?



Declare it!

In trying to curb our own defensiveness, the best way is often declare it. It can help a lot if you make a point of saying to others in the team that when you next feel yourself becoming defensive you'll try to say so - so that at least you're acknowledging it.

Ask them to say something if you don't get there first. That's a good way for them to support you in managing your own defensiveness.

3. How do you respond to conflict?

This is one of those issues where we all tend to jump in different ways.

Some of us quite enjoy a good argument, which can be both a strength and also a real weakness. It means that we might push something further than we need and in the process provoke someone else to dig their own trench more deeply.

Others among us don't particularly like conflict but accept that disagreement is sometimes a necessary part of the decision-making process. We can easily let ourselves slip into the role of an onlooker once those who enjoy a healthy argument get stuck in.

There are too many people in top teams who tend to sit back and watch once a serious disagreement is in play.

You will often see from the expressions on other people's faces who is half in and half out of the conversation, and it's important to help keep each other in on it by asking for their views in a way that requires them to engage with the discussion.

If you see yourself as one of the people who really HATE conflict, you need to discuss with others how your behaviour changes when you sense a conflict brewing. How far will you go to stop a disagreement developing into a fully-fledged row?

Some will go to considerable lengths to try to deflect a disagreement. A common behaviour is to insist that any conflict isn't as black and white as others are suggesting:

“ I really don't think we're as far apart from each other as some are suggesting... I'm sure there's a compromise we can all agree on. ”

Sometimes a team can benefit from a spirit of compromise - **but not always**. There are quite a number of occasions when a team is best served by a genuine difference of opinion being brought to the surface so that a clear choice can be made. At these times, those who love compromise and hate conflict can end up getting in the way of greater clarity.

If you are one of those who dislike conflict, make sure you tell the others. They can help you a lot with managing this by saying that they expect you to find a particular discussion difficult, and hope you will be happy to stick with the conversation a little longer until everyone is clearer about the different options that are emerging.

Of course, it can be tremendous if a **genuine compromise** emerges that can draw on the greatest strengths of different positions. But this needs to be because the compromise offers the best way ahead and is not just the quickest way of ending the conflict.

4. How often does your pride get in the way of you saying you're wrong?

For some people in leadership positions, especially Chief Executives, it can be excruciatingly difficult to say they are wrong in front of colleagues. So difficult is it that many have told themselves over a considerable number of years that they don't "do" being wrong.

For someone like this, other members of the team have a real challenge. They need to help them let go of a longstanding habit in which they have invested a considerable amount of personal pride.

They might have persuaded themselves that to be a good leader they need at all times to be confident in their own judgement. If so, they could well have developed the view that if they give so much as an inkling that they think they were wrong about something they will be showing themselves to be an inadequate leader.

Powerful emotions are tied up with the whole idea of not being able to be wrong, and if you take on a colleague who never admits openly to being wrong you need to be **generous** in the way you manage them.

Avoiding a full-frontal assault

The more an individual's pride is tied up with a decision, the more others need to be conscious of supporting them through the process of trying to let it go. A full-frontal assault on that decision is nearly always destined to backfire!

Above all else, we need to be sensitive in the way we manage others when they feel they are being asked to admit to having been wrong about something. If there is just one person in your team who appears to be scoring points on the back of this, the ground is almost certainly set for a stalemate - or a row!

High performing leadership teams work hard at supporting each other in leaving behind previous positions that have outlived their usefulness for the team. They are aware of the dangers of personal pride getting in the way of good decision-making, and at these moments are careful to reassure and boost those who might fear that they are being asked to eat humble pie.

What was right before isn't right now. The issue isn't about who was right or wrong, it's simply about making sure that the team as a whole does everything in its power to be right - NOW.

5. Are you a “control freak”, and if so, how much?

The condition of being a “control freak” is quite common in leadership teams, and there can surely be few teams where every member genuinely believes that there are no control freaks sitting round the table!

If you see yourself as a control freak the key question to ask is how much you **trust** those around you to get on with their job to the standards required.

- 👉 If you don’t trust them to achieve these standards, is there perhaps an issue about you not having the right people in post?
- 👉 If you’re clear that they are the right people for their jobs, the issue probably has more to do with you and why you can’t let yourself trust them more.

Just by raising this question within a team can help some individuals to free themselves from the harsh assumptions they tend to make about others.

For many CEOs who are compulsive control freaks, this stems from their need to drive themselves almost to breaking point. If it’s possible to challenge this and help them to ease up on others, this can do a lot to help them **ease up on themselves**.

The occasional control freak

Others among us see ourselves as occasional control freaks, only exercising control when it’s really necessary.

There are times in every business when everyone in a leadership role needs to run the risk of being labelled a control freak for the sake of ensuring that a job is done to a certain standard and within a certain time frame.

The two processes of control and standard-setting are closely entwined, and it is simply not possible to achieve consistently high standards without leaders at times being ready to take “control” of some specific function.

However, there are big challenges for all of us around HOW we exercise control and enable people to achieve the very high standards expected of them.

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Too often, the right questions aren't asked first and it's no surprise that those being "controlled" become defensive.

This is why an up-front discussion about how a shared goal is being met can quickly result in the other person volunteering a more ambitious workplan than would be imposed by a Director/ Manager insisting on controlling the situation before that initial discussion has been had.

If you think you're not a control freak - check it out!

If you think you're not a control freak, how about checking this out with others in your team? You might find one or two being rather more conscious of your occasional need to control. Or you might find them saying that a little **more control** at times would be a good thing.

There is a danger that those who pride themselves on never being a control freak might not be sufficiently engaged with the detail of the work carried out by their team to exercise proper control over the overall direction of their work.

In this case, **selective** control freakery has quite a lot going for it!

6. How much do you jealously guard your “patch”?

For those of you who think that the honest answer is “a lot”, the rest of us should ask whether it’s because you think this is how you’re **expected** to behave.

Many of those Directors who jealously guard their patch will be the first to say that if they are to survive in their organisation, there’s no alternative.

On the whole, the larger the organisation the more true this is.

Those of you who are territorial, and not ashamed to own up to it, are better placed than anyone else to challenge colleagues on this:



I can fight for my patch as well as the next person, but I know - as do you - that this organisation suffers from far too much territorialism.



Quite a lot of us accept that we are fairly territorial - and don’t see this as too much of a problem, on the basis that we’re not really any more territorial than anyone else.

Bring on the steamroller!

To decide whether this is good enough, it can be helpful to put yourself into the mindset you have at a meeting when you feel that a colleague is beginning to stray onto your patch more than you would like, and fear that this could encourage others to follow suit. What happens to your behaviour in these moments?

What happens to many of us is that we can turn into a steamroller. Through our force of language and whole demeanour we try to roll all over anyone else who becomes opinionated about something to do with our patch.

Nearly every team has at least one person who readily takes on the role of a steamroller to flatten anyone who dares to question or challenge them.

Who's trying to stop turf wars?

Even if you insist that you don't jealously guard your patch and try to keep out of turf wars, the challenge remains:

 What are you trying to do to STOP them?

You know the damage that turf wars do. As well as being a waste of time, they force levels of trust in organisations even lower and consume vast amounts of energy for little if any purpose.

Turf wars are a very major problem in so many organisations, and one of the problems with some of those who keep out of them is that they act as if there's nothing they can do about them.

Fewer turf wars, higher performance

No organisation can entirely eliminate territorialism and the silo mentality that goes with it and does so much damage to performance. However, much more can be done to combat the worst excesses of turf wars.

Those who do genuinely keep out of them still need to engage with those "steamrollers" among us when we revert to our default mode of trying to see off all-comers. You need to encourage us to see what we are doing and ask us if we can create a little more space for others to pursue ideas that we find threatening.

If you ask the driver of a steamroller - nicely! - to step outside of their cab, you'll be surprised by how many agree to do just that.

7. Would you describe yourself as a perfectionist?

If you see yourself as a perfectionist in relation to just about everything, the rest of us need to show some sympathy towards you. Perfectionists can be tyrannised by their constant preoccupation that things around them aren't as good as they should be.

Quite a number find it very hard indeed to discuss this. One of the greatest services anyone can offer a perfectionist is to acknowledge that they are one - and that this can be **hard**.

The more perfectionists can share with others their "tyrant within", the less tyrannised they will feel.

Asking others to SAY something!

One of the reasons why it is so good for perfectionists to own this behaviour is that this creates the opportunity for them to ask others whether they think they are ever **unreasonable** in the standards they expect of others.

Some perfectionists can be quite unkind towards themselves and adopt the same behaviour towards others without intending to be unkind to them.

Even when someone has performed a task to a very high standard, the perfectionist will tend to see the extra bit that was missing and discuss this before giving any positive feedback. The other person can feel very undermined and angry that all of their hard work hasn't been recognised - even though the perfectionist probably intended none of this.

To try and avoid this happening, the single most effective thing that can be done by those of us who own up to being perfectionists is to ask others to say something in the moment if the impact of our behaviour on them is in any way unkind.

Applying our professional judgement

At first sight, those who see themselves as **occasional** perfectionists represent the balanced ticket - rather like occasional control freaks. Those in this group accept that there is sometimes a need to be a perfectionist but also recognise that the pressures of leadership mean that we must all be careful in selecting those aspects of our workload where we need to "go the extra mile".

CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL BEHAVIOURS

The issue that needs to be discussed here is how much we should acknowledge this explicitly with colleagues. If we don't, they could easily feel that we're offering them inconsistent leadership, sometimes telling them that anything short of 100% isn't good enough and at other times being satisfied with only 85%.

Whenever we discriminate in our standard-setting behaviour, we need to find some way of involving members of the team in that process so that they understand that consistency is not an abstract principle.

It is our professional judgement that needs to be consistently applied to deciding when it is that we need to set the standards of a perfectionist.

The challenge of managing perfectionists

In many ways, those who see themselves as NOT being perfectionists are the ones who tend to think that they've got it just about right! They're freed from the tyranny of being a perfectionist themselves, and all they have to do is to make sure that there are enough in the team to keep the team's standards of performance as high as they need to be.

However, the question remains of what sort of leadership non-perfectionists need to offer to those who ARE perfectionists to help them play to their strengths and minimise their weaknesses.

If you ask them what they see as their weaknesses, you will doubtless hear words such as:

“ We need to check everything five times and it's still not enough... I need to do most things myself because the others can't be relied upon to do them well enough... ”

In so many organisations, perfectionists have slowed down essential pieces of work with damaging consequences for the business, all because they weren't satisfied that the work was as good as it could be. Perfectionists can be great prevaricators and postponers. They can quickly get lost in the detail of something and drive colleagues almost barmy by their constant emphasis on what they might have got wrong rather than what they have got right!

They need to be managed closely and consistently, with great understanding - and an appreciation of how their legendary strengths can so easily tip over into chronic weaknesses.

8. How much are you into strategy?

How many times have you heard other Chief Executives and Executive Directors ask why there aren't enough people at the top who can "think strategically" and help develop a clear "vision" for the business?

Each time it's said, isn't it tempting to say *"You're right - what a shame there aren't more!"*

Are you one of those people who think that your team doesn't spend enough time discussing business strategy?

If there are others around you who feel more secure discussing operational issues, how do you encourage them to engage with those aspects of your agenda that you regard as rather more strategic?

From our experience of working with top teams, we have found that quite a number of those who regard themselves as natural strategists can display an air of **intellectual superiority** towards those more concerned with operational issues that can be quite polarising within the team.

They readily display boredom and irritation when the discussion turns to anything that they regard as too detailed.

Those who see themselves at the more operational end of the spectrum then put on their own display of disinterest and short-temperedness the moment the discussions turn to issues around strategy and vision.

Drilling down into detail

Those of you who tend to limit yourselves to occasional forays into discussions about strategy are probably the ones best placed to find a way of leaving behind this false tension between strategy and operations.

To achieve this, you need to be as tough with those at the operational end of the business who rubbish discussions about strategy as you are with those strategists who rather look down their nose at the idea of discussing operational issues.

9. How much do you see yourself as a protector of others?

This is one of those questions that might result in many people saying “Not me!” If you are one of them, you should make a point of asking whether anyone else feels that there are **any members of the team** who are in fact quite protective in their behaviour towards the CEO or another team member. You might be surprised by the number of team members who identify others as protectors. They might actually be protecting YOU!

In 2WayTrust, one of the things that have struck us in our work with top teams has been the extent to which some HR Directors and Finance Directors in particular define their role as being there to protect their CEO.

All sorts of reasons are given, but nearly always the emphasis is on stopping their CEO from doing something wrong - which they would be bound to do if they weren't there to protect them!

Attractive, but suspect

On one level, this behaviour can appear attractive - how nice for a CEO to be surrounded by Directors so keen to protect them!

On another level, it is not good news from the CEO's point of view, because more often than not it reflects a lack of trust in them.

Protectors tell themselves they're being really conscientious and caring, whereas in reality they can be quite manipulative, always ready with an instant justification for creating a protective “bubble wrap” around the CEO to save them from being exposed to anything as risky as the unvarnished truth.

Under-performance

This protector relationship can also be unhealthy when it works laterally, with one Director protecting another and covering their back against any questions that are too probing.

The effect on performance can be dramatic if some Directors feel that there is under-performance but know that the moment they ask any questions one of the stronger Directors in the team will intervene to protect a weaker colleague.

CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL BEHAVIOURS

We all need to challenge ourselves on whether this is going on around us, and if so, whether we're acknowledging it in any way. Where a CEO is involved in this sort of dynamic it's so easy for Directors to see it and decide that it's not up to them to get involved.

You know that if you watch this happening from the sidelines, you are effectively colluding with a pretty unhealthy relationship with damaging consequences for the team as a whole.

Protectors can become more and more CEO-centric, and it can distort the whole balance of the leadership team if others slip into a passive role and treat any issues that get tied up in this protective knot as out of bounds.

Championing the team

Some of you might feel that you just don't relate to this at all. Of course, this might be because it's not going on. Alternatively, it might be because you've become used to seeing your CEO ensnared in one or more one-to-ones with individual 'protectors', and have felt quite excluded by this - and denial is the best weapon you've got for protecting **yourself!**

Understandable though this might be, the truth is that you would all be better served by doing something to fight for a more real relationship between the team and your CEO. At the very least, you need to argue for members to bring difficult issues to the whole team, suggesting potential solutions and then inviting others to help shape a way of moving forward.

Champion the team and its creativity, and in the process you should find that the rather introverted energy of CEO/protector becomes converted into something much more inclusive.

CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL BEHAVIOURS

10. How often do you withhold from others?

We have included this behaviour because in all teams the behaviour of withholding is genuinely difficult to manage. When people withhold, the statement is in what they **don't do** - and this makes it much more difficult to manage.

Imagine you're reporting to your leadership team on the work of your Directorate. Everyone is saying something positive apart from one person who sits there silently. You feel that this in itself represents a statement, and their whole body language persuades you that they don't want to have anything to do with anything positive that's being said about your Directorate. And you know that if you challenge them on this, they will say that of course they're impressed - and yet their **tone** will convey some sort of put-down.

If you say nothing, you feel that they've "won". If you say something, you can end up appearing like a needy child who wants everyone to offer you congratulations.

We have worked with some Chief Executives and Directors who know that they can automatically go into a position where they clam up on others when they feel under pressure of any sort. They erect their brick wall - but that's not all. They also want to find some way of punishing the person who pushed them further than they wanted to go.

So they make a point of holding onto some information that they know the other person knows they have, or withdraw from all eye contact as their way of saying that the conversation is only being continued under duress.

More often than not this sort of response is quite habitual and quite a few of those who slip into it don't feel good about it - and know that they could do with leaving it behind.

Declaring the behaviour

If you think that you might be one of these people, the most useful thing you can do, by far, is to declare this behaviour to other members of your team:



Sometimes you might feel that I'm holding out on you about something. This is an old habit of mine that I can slip into when I feel under pressure, and I really hope that you won't give up on me at this stage. In fact, if we can agree a phrase that you use in those moments, whatever it might be, it might just help me to switch out of it.



CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL BEHAVIOURS

When people are trying to leave behind an old habit that they know to be unhelpful, humour can help a great deal. All you need, usually, is some sort of agreed phrase that is your way of calling this particular behaviour.

From our experience, withholders who declare to close colleagues that they have a habit of withholding and would appreciate some support with leaving it behind, are 80% of the way there to leaving it behind. What they need now is your help with achieving the final 20%.

The occasional withholders

It is those who withhold occasionally, for example when they feel in a corner, who can be more difficult. They don't think they have a problem and know that they only withhold when they really feel under threat in some way - and want to reserve the right to do what they have to do to get out of the trap that they're in.

If you're one of these people it would help a lot if you could try to say that something has thrown you or made you feel threatened, when you start to withhold. Describe what it is that has triggered your sense of being cornered. This will help others to see the impact of their behaviour on you and give you a chance to step back for a few seconds and regain your composure.

Remember: withholding happens when someone feels that they're losing some control and the power of initiative is slipping away from them. If you can regain your sense of control and initiative, your **need to withhold** will largely fade away.

Withholding is much more common than it needs to be among leadership teams **because** far too many withholders get away with it without a word being said.

Withholding often makes people angry and confused, creates barriers where they don't need to be created and nearly always assumes the worst of the person being targeted by the withholder. This is why it needs to be challenged.

As with all of these behaviours, the more generous the challenge the greater the prospect of the individual seeing their behaviour and agreeing to try and let it go.

Working through these issues as a team

Breaking the ice

In our own coaching work with top teams, one of the comments that CEOs and Directors have often made is that they never set aside enough quality time to discuss how they are working together as a group.

One of the real challenges facing all leadership teams is that it is always easier to discuss the issues “out there” than to discuss some of the behavioural issues “in here” that are getting in the way of them working well together.

The reason we have explored these behaviours in the way we have is to support your team in discussing them together, knowing that they pose some pretty tricky challenges for each of you.

They are HARD - and it's because they are hard that so many of us have avoided discussing them for so long.

2waytrust Leadership is about teams accepting that if they want to be really high performers, and not just middle performers, every member of the team has got to find their own way of owning their behaviours - especially those that can create difficulties for others.

If you have difficulty with conflict, or tend to become over-defensive when challenged, or are a bit of a control freak at work, or tend to get bored when the team are discussing strategy, SAY SO.

The more you own your behaviour, the easier it will be for others to own theirs.

We ALL have baggage and sensitivities that we bring to our leadership positions, and far too many leaders pretend that this isn't true.

Of course, the person who's best placed to start this process is the Chief Executive/ team leader. If they back off from it and say that it's not for them, it's so much more difficult for others to open up a frank discussion about team behaviours and their own personal weaknesses.

If CEOs make clear that you're prepared to lead this discussion, as we suggest in Part Four, you'll be surprised by how freely and openly others pitch in as well.

CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL BEHAVIOURS

Assuming the best

In 2WayTrust, there is one phrase that we use in all of our work with teams and that is “assume the best”.

These three words can seem very obvious and you might be tempted to say “of course” - but please don’t under-estimate our tendency NOT to assume the best when we are saying something difficult to someone else.

If you find yourself saying some difficult things to others about their behaviour, make a point of assuming the best of them as you say what you have to say. We have found that the key to assuming the best is for you to imagine that person **living** the behaviour that you want them to live.



It makes such a difference to your whole tone and the way you project what you have to say, and you will be surprised by how open and sympathetic you’ll find them in response - especially if you have managed to own some aspect of your behaviour where you have had a rather unhelpful habit that you want to leave behind.

Seeing the links between different behaviours

As you work through the questions, you will see a number of interesting linkages between the different behaviours.

Think of the defensive withholder, or the storer who is also a control freak, or the perfectionist who is also a visionary, or the protector who is also a consensualist (and the **pressure** that person can put on the CEO not to take any risks whatsoever).

We often find that the way these behaviours work is to reinforce each other - and that by owning one or two of them it becomes easier for each of us to acknowledge those that we haven’t yet owned.

-  People who are very defensive might come to recognise their own capacity to withhold, which is bound to be worse whenever they’re feeling defensive. But they probably first need to recognise their defensiveness to be able to recognise their withholder
-  Or those who are control freaks might come to recognise how they store things as part of the process of exercising control. But they might first need to recognise their control freak to be able to recognise their storer.

CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL BEHAVIOURS

If you feel that someone in your team is in denial in relation to one or more of these ten behaviours, try to hold back from confronting them over this.

Wait and see if they own one of them and perhaps give an example of where that behaviour has knocked your performance as a team, being careful to talk of it as something that you know can be left behind. **That's** assuming the best!

Once they've got used to owning that particular behaviour they might find it easier to see the link with the behaviour that you've seen but so far they've refused to recognise.

Our capacity for change



In 2WayTrust, our experience of working with leadership teams has persuaded us of one simple proposition, which is that most of us in leadership positions have a greater capacity for change than we give ourselves credit for.

If you take that judgement into your discussion about 2WayTrust Leadership and apply it to yourself as well as the others in your leadership team, you will be amazed by some of the breakthroughs that you can make together as a team.

What we all need, however, is the support and encouragement of others in our team if we are to change our behaviours in the ways we need in order to perform to higher standards.

Unlearning old habits

In trying to meet the challenge of higher performance there are two key principles that should guide us:

-  The more open we can be about those behaviours of our own that we want to change, the more likely it is that others will feel able to reciprocate and offer up those behaviours of theirs that they would like to change
-  The more we can assume the best of them, the more readily they will assume the best of us.

Be tough on yourself before you are in any way critical of anyone else, and deliver any criticisms with generosity and understanding.

And remember that this process of mutual support needs to be **ongoing**.

The process of unlearning old habits is very much one of taking two steps forward and then one back, before moving forward again.

Part Three:

2WayTrust Groundrules for Leadership Teams

2WayTrust always suggests that leadership teams should adopt their own groundrules for their team discussions. Whilst the groundrules that we recommend for leadership teams vary a little for each one, we have 9 core groundrules that we recommend for just about every leadership team.

If you find them useful, we hope that you will consider adopting them for your team:

1. For all of our team discussions, we work on the basis that **we all take away what was agreed** and do not repeat to others who said what on the way to achieving our agreed outcomes. We trust each other to respect any confidences that we might share, and if we have any reason to believe that there might have been a breach of trust we discuss that immediately with the person concerned - and if we are not satisfied, raise this at the next team meeting
2. As a team, we always seek to give quality time to issues that we acknowledge as difficult and **not amenable to any one simple response**. When we discuss these issues together we each give ourselves permission to change our mind and encourage others to do the same
3. We accept that at times we are bound to find ourselves disagreeing with each other. Whenever this happens, we make a point of being as relaxed as we can be about any differences of opinion. We are aware of the dangers of **trying too hard** to persuade others to see an issue in the same way that we do, and each invite the others to say something if any of them ever feel that's what we're doing
4. Our aspiration is that as a team we should grow closer together through healthy exchanges of view and supporting each other every step of the way. This is why, whenever we comment on ideas put forward by others, we try to behave in the way that we would expect a **supportive mentor** to do

2WAYTRUST GROUNDRULES

5. When the team gets stuck on a really important issue, we occasionally break into small groups of two or three to bring some fresh thinking to the discussion. These groups last for 10 to 15 minutes and are standing, unless anyone has a physical need to sit down. We ask that anyone bringing an idea back to the team does so **on their own behalf**. This makes it easier for us all to move on in our thinking as we respond to the ideas of others, without feeling that we have to defend a pre-agreed view
6. When we come in on the discussion in team meetings, we always try to **respond to the person who has just spoken**. This discourages people from storing up points that can make the discussion very disjointed and helps ensure that at different stages we really can focus on the particular issue under discussion
7. We always try to **minimise our use of jargon**, and avoid any acronyms that can slow down the discussion
8. We recognise that the mixture of professional and personal issues involved in working relationships can sometimes trigger powerful emotions for individuals. In these moments, we respect the right of team members to disengage from a particular discussion and share with the group how they are feeling. At the same time, we recognise that individuals can sometimes “dump” on groups in a way that isn’t helpful. This is why we are **careful not to expect others to take on our personal “stuff”** and are each responsible for ensuring that it doesn’t get in the way of our performance as a team
9. We each undertake **not to become distracted** by our mobile phone or Blackberry during team meetings, and invite others to challenge us if they feel that at any time we are not fully engaged with the item under discussion.

Part Four:

Top teams and culture change

2waytrust Leadership is for businesses that already rate themselves pretty highly.

You know you're good but could be better.

You **need to be good** to deal head-on with the challenges posed by 2waytrust Leadership. These are about the links between business performance and leadership behaviours.

- 👉 Which of your current behaviours - by you and others in your team - are getting in the way of higher performance?
- 👉 Do you make a point of telling others, face-to-face, when you have any difficulties with their behaviours at work?
- 👉 And do you make it as easy as you can for others to tell you, to your face, if and when your behaviour has a negative impact on them?

You know that you need to be able to have these discussions as a top team if you want others to do the same. That's why this strand of 2waytrust Leadership is called Leading by Example.

If you want others to be prepared to change their behaviour at work to improve performance, you need to demonstrate that you're doing just that.

Set an example so that you and all Directors can say to your teams:

"In our top team we put performance first. We say what needs to be said to make sure our behaviours don't get in the way of higher performance. It's what we expect of ourselves - and what we expect of you."

Chief Executives - taking a risk so that others might follow

We are writing this part of *Leading by Example* as if you're the Chief Executive wondering how best to use this with your top team to help you move forward.

Of course, it doesn't have to be you as Chief Exec who drives this discussion, and you might well have a practice of sharing the leadership of key discussions among your Directors. However, we hope that you will avoid the temptation of handing this session over to your HR Director!

For the truth is that when you are talking about team behaviours and Directors are deciding whether to opt for the "safe mode" or take the risk of saying something they haven't quite managed to say before, they are more likely to take the risk if that's what they see their Chief Exec doing.

If you as Chief Executive are willing to lead this discussion and show that you're prepared to open up and be rather more frank than you usually let yourself be, there's no doubt that this will have quite an impact on the others.

We suggest that you set aside at least two hours for this discussion and approach it in three stages:

Stage 1 VOLUNTEERING SOMETHING THAT YOU WOULDN'T USUALLY DISCUSS WITH THE TEAM ABOUT YOU AND YOUR BEHAVIOURS

If you are to have an honest discussion with the team about behaviour you need to find a way of opening it up that signals,

"This is different, we ARE going to say some things to each other that we haven't quite managed to say before and it's going to be okay."

You will know that you've made a breakthrough when other members of the team are okay about saying things to you as Chief Exec that they expect you to find difficult but want you to know so that you are at least **aware** of your impact on them.

To make it possible for others to say difficult things to you about you, the best thing you can possibly do is to volunteer something about yourself that exposes what they regard as a weak flank of yours - and to be pretty relaxed about owning it.

"I'm conscious that at times my perfectionist/ steamroller/ defensiveness/ whatever it might be causes problems for some of you. I know there are times when it's got in the way and I haven't said anything - nor has anyone else. We need to start saying more things straight to each other and need to start this now. So can someone please tell me - is this something that causes problems for you and is there something I need to hear from you about it? And please don't cop out on this one and just say what you think I want to hear"

What's most important about this round is that you're volunteering something as an incentive to others to follow suit and do so themselves. You OWN what you volunteer and at the same time show that you KNOW this can be a problem for others - and it wasn't your intention to make life any more difficult for them than it already is.

It's honest, it's open, it's declared - and it's a challenge to everyone else round the table to follow suit.

So, when you've had some people responding, how about then saying,

"Okay, we've already agreed that we as a team are committed to leading by example. That's what I've tried to do in this discussion. So can someone else now volunteer something about yourself as well, so that we understand better what you think might be one of the downsides for us together with the many upsides that you each bring to this team!"

You should aim for everyone to volunteer something about themselves during this part of the discussion. This then leads on to:

Stage 2: GIVING OTHERS FEEDBACK ABOUT THEIR IMPACT ON YOU - IN A WAY THAT IS SENSITIVE BUT ALSO HONEST AND UPFRONT

Here again, it should make it easier for the others to go through this stage if you start off:

"Okay, we've each volunteered something about ourselves and some of the difficult behaviours that we all have and other members of the team need to manage and support us with. The problem is that we don't know if we've put our finger on the most difficult one unless others give us some honest feedback about what creates problems for them. I told you that I tend to take an entrenched position rather too quickly/ avoid conflict/ become bored by detail too soon/ whatever it might be! I found it very helpful hearing your comments on that and think that if you tell me when this is a problem for you in future, as soon as it happens, it will help a lot.

TOP TEAMS AND CULTURE CHANGE

*What I don't know, unless you tell me, is whether this is the **biggest problem** I sometimes cause for you. So if I say to you that I really want you to tell me, without thinking much about it, what you find as the most difficult problem with me in my relationship with you as Chief Executive - what comes to mind first? Someone dive in and give it to me straight!"*

If the group sit there silently, it's best to ask someone directly. It's usually easiest to go to one of the members of the team you're particularly close to, because there will be lots of ways you can be quite light and teasing with them in encouraging them to say something.

What's important is to get the group to start giving you feedback about you and for you to be seen to be listening carefully.

Depending upon your style, it can be good to take notes and to ask people to give specific examples.

"Okay, I know what you mean when you say I can give the impression that I don't want anyone to disagree with me/ appear to assume the worst of others the moment anything goes wrong/ whatever it might be.

Can you bring to mind a moment in the last few weeks when there was this problem and bring that moment to life as you experienced it then. It will help me understand better how to handle this sort of situation differently in future."

If you can encourage others in the team to tell you when they found you a problem and can make a point of not justifying yourself and genuinely trying to understand as much as you can about why they felt as they did, this in itself will demonstrate one of the very finest acts of leading by example.

As before, once you've paved the way you want to make sure that others invite comments from members of the team about themselves in similar fashion. This is where your role will be vital in encouraging and affirming, and not being shocked by what's said.

This second stage is clearly the most difficult part of the process. It's worth reminding the team that what you're doing together is making something possible for yourselves as a leadership team and that's about giving each other open and honest feedback. In "*Face-to-face feedback in small groups*" we set out a more detailed process for all teams to give each other face-to-face feedback every few months.

This exercise is about paving the way for wider culture change across your business and shattering the myth in some people's minds that difficult things about individuals just can't be said, at least not with them in the same room. **They can be said - and in high performing teams hungry to be the best they need to be said!**

One more stage coming up, after a short natural break, perhaps.

STAGE 3: AGREEING WHICH KEY PRINCIPLES AND GROUNDRULES WOULD BEST SUPPORT YOU AS A LEADERSHIP TEAM

By comparison, you will find this stage pretty easy. It's about making sure that you take away from the meeting some principles and groundrules that could work best for you in enabling you to take your team performance up to a higher level - and keep it there!

You will see that on pages 4 to 7 we have set out 10 principles of 2waytrust Leadership and then on pages 30 to 31 we have suggested nine groundrules for leadership teams. Inevitably with this sort of exercise, some of them are bound to be more useful for you than others. We hope that as a team you will go through them together and decide to hang on to those that are most helpful and find a way of making them your own.

For some you might like the words that we have used, whilst others might need to be converted into language that works better within your corporate culture.

The heading to the principles says all that needs to be said about them. They're about "putting performance first", and if some of them can help with that process we'll be well pleased!

The one thing we know about this process is that it's long and hard and has no end.

There's something **addictive** about the ideas in 2waytrust Leadership that means most of us who are drawn to them view them as central to the way we intend to be at work - on the basis that no other approach can satisfy and challenge us in quite the same way.

We might not get to the end of this journey for many years, but let us all be clear that each of the strands has two banner phrases all over them: "work in hand" and "this is for life"!