Boundaries for Leaders

Title: ***Boundaries for Leaders: Results, Relationships, and Being Ridiculously in Charge***

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Book Description:

In Boundaries for Leaders, clinical psychologist and bestselling author Dr. Henry Cloud leverages his expertise of human behavior, neuroscience, and business leadership to explain how the best leaders set boundaries within their organizations–with their teams and with themselves–to improve performance and increase employee and customer satisfaction.

In a voice that is motivating and inspiring, Dr. Cloud offers practical advice on how to manage teams, coach direct reports, and instill an organization with strong values and culture.

Boundaries for Leaders: Results, Relationships, and Being Ridiculously in Charge is essential reading for executives and aspiring leaders who want to create successful companies with satisfied employees and customers, while becoming more resilient leaders themselves.

Book Quotes:

But . . . there is another truth. Leaders lead people, and it is the people who get it all done. And to get it done, they have to be led in a way that they can actually perform, and use all of their horsepower. Said another way, their brains need to work. You can cast a great vision, get the right talent, and yet be leading in ways that people's brains literally cannot follow, or sometimes even make work, much less their hearts.
Location 47

Leaders can motivate or demotivate their people. They can propel them down a runway to great results, or confuse them so that they cannot clearly get from A to Z. They can bring a team or a group together to achieve shared, extraordinary goals, or they can cause division and fragmentation. They can create a culture that augments high performance, accountability, results, and thriving, or cause a culture to exist in which people become less than who they are or could be. And most of the time, these issues have little to do with the leader's business acumen at all . . . but more to do with how they lead people and build cultures.
Location 58

It turns out, as neuroscience has shown us, that there are reasons for all of this. People's brains, hearts, minds, and souls are constructed to perform under certain conditions and dynamics, and when these are present, they produce and thrive. They think, behave, and perform to their capacities. When these conditions are violated or not provided, people cannot and do not bring visions and plans to fruition. And they all depend on the leader's style and behavior.
Location 63

There are several aspects of a leader's behavior that make everything work, and one of those is his or her

“boundaries.” A boundary is a structure that determines what will exist and what will not. Location 67

And you will be reminded that, as a leader, you always get what you create and what you allow. Location 90

Everybody out there is always trying to figure out the right plan. They meet, they argue, they worry and they put all of their energy into trying to come up with the ‘right’ plan. But the truth is that there are five right plans. There are a lot of ways to get there. The real problem is getting the people to do what it takes to make the plan work. That is where you win or lose. It’s always about the people.
Location 98

This book is about what leaders need to do in order for people to accomplish a vision.
Location 105

It is about leading the “right people,” empowering them to find and do the “right things” in the “right ways” at the “right times.” That is what will bring a plan to real results.
Location 118

What are boundaries? They are made up of two essential things: what you create and what you allow. Location 273

In the language of Apple, ‘who is the DRI, the directly responsible individual?'” Who owns it? It is a central principle of boundaries: ownership. Ultimately, leaders own it. They are the ones who define and create the boundaries that drive the behavior that forms the identity of teams and culture and sets the standards of performance. Leaders define the direction and are responsible for making it happen. And they are responsible for the accountability systems that ensure that it does happen. It always comes back to leadership and the boundaries they allow to exist on their property. Leaders define the boundaries, and successful leaders define them well in several key areas:

- The vision, the focus, the attention, and the activities that create forward movement are defined by leaders.
- The emotional climate of the organization and its culture is created and sustained by leaders.
- The unity and connectedness of the organization and the teams are built or fragmented by leaders.
- The thinking and beliefs of the organization are sown and grown by leaders.
- The amount and kinds of control and empowerment that people have are given and required by leaders.
- The performance and development of their teams and direct reports are stewarded by leaders.
- The leadership of oneself, which entails establishing one’s own boundaries and stewardship of the organization, is required by leaders. Location 293

Besides giving direction, good leadership boundaries also establish the norms and behaviors that drive success. They build unity and energy. They focus that energy and attention on what is important. They build optimism and empower people to do what they truly have the power to do to drive results. They set the conditions and standards for great teams and culture, as we shall see.
Location 354

Why is that? Just like a computer, the brain operates according to certain processes that are hardwired or encoded in the system. Ignore the operating instructions, and the brain flounders. But as a leader, if you understand how the brain works and what will make it function optimally, you can create the right conditions to help your people be at their best, and when they're at their best, the organization thrives and positive results stream in. Show me a person, a team, or a company that gets results, and I will show you the leadership boundaries that make it possible.
Location 405

- Attention: the ability to focus on relevant stimuli, and block out what is not relevant: "Pay attention!"
- Inhibition: the ability to "not do" certain actions that could be distracting, irrelevant, or even destructive: "Don't do that!"
- Working Memory: the ability to retain and access relevant information for reasoning, decision making, and taking future actions: "Remember and build on relevant information."

In other words, our brains need to be able to: (a) focus on something specific, (b) not get off track by focusing on or being assaulted by other data inputs or toxicity, and (c) continuously be aware of relevant information at all times.
Location 421

Brain researchers say that "attention" is like a magic key that unlocks higher-order brain circuitry. When we pay attention to something, repeatedly, the necessary wiring is formed that makes it possible for us to learn new things, take the right actions, and achieve our goals. Research shows that driving that attention forward through repetition is critical to establishing new neural pathways and new connections—and thus new learning, growth, and insights. Attention is essential, but not enough. It can't really thrive without enlisting its siblings: inhibition and working memory. You need all three executive functions.
Location 438

In the context of leading a high-performance organization, it is much the same. Leadership must set the stage and ensure that:

1. What is important is always being attended to—attention.
2. What is not important or destructive is not allowed in—inhibited.
3. There is ongoing awareness of all the relevant pieces required to fulfill the task—working memory. Location 444

When those three needs of the brain are kept in the forefront of the leader's mind—attending, inhibiting, and working memory—meetings become something to look forward to rather than to dread, a time to renew energy, focus, and purpose. Good things tend to follow from good meetings in which the three executive functions are nurtured. Indeed research shows that there are tangible benefits when people are clear about where they are headed, energized to go there, and given the freedom to execute their gifts in that direction. People don't just show up—they soar. So, whenever you do meet, make sure it is clear what you want people to attend to in that meeting, what you want to inhibit, and what you are trying to keep in their working memory.
Location 515

Here is a little more brain science for you. When those three processes of the brain are activated, results happen because they enable the next level of the brain's executive capacities, which are the ones you really

want to have activated in your organization. It's the brain on steroids, so to speak. If executive functions of the brain are working well, and people are structured enough to focus, inhibit, and be conscious of what is important, they can execute the following list of behaviors, which actually are involved in producing results. (If you are a leader interested in results, and you think of all of your people doing these things well, this list should make you very, very excited):

- Goal Selection: They can choose goals based on priority, relevance, experience, and knowledge of current realities while also anticipating consequences and outcomes.
- Planning and Organization: They can generate steps and a sequence of linear behaviors that will get them there, knowing what will be needed along the way, including resources, and create a strategy to pull it off.
- Initiation and Persistence: They can begin and maintain goal-directed behavior despite intrusions, distractions, or changes in the demands of the task at hand.
- Flexibility: They can exercise the ability to be adaptable, think strategically, and solve problems by creating solutions as things change around them, shifting attention and plans as needed.
- Execution and Goal Attainment: They exhibit the ability to execute the plan within the limits of time and other constraints.
- Self-regulation: They use self-observation to monitor performance, self-judgment to evaluate performance, and self-regulation to change in order to reach the goal.

Location 567

In order for the brain to organize behavior toward new habits and new ways of performing, it must create new pathways to do that. In order for those new pathways to be created, people need experiences of being able to attend, be aware, and focus on their own thinking and what is going on that is relevant to their thinking. When you give them leadership that gets them to observe what they are doing, in light of what needs attention, inhibition, and remembering, lights begin to turn on. From those kinds of experiences come insight, which is like a lightning bolt that creates new wiring in the brain. But lightning bolts won't come if a leader is not setting clear boundaries of direction, both positive and negative ones, that define and support the paths for people to attend, inhibit, and remember. Clarity leads to attention and attention leads to results.
Location 613

Good boundaries, both those that help us manage ourselves and lead others, always produce freedom, not control. It is the freedom to attend and produce. Freedom used responsibly produces results. It is a production cycle on steroids.
Location 655

In the same way that the brain cannot work without the executive functions in place, it also cannot work if it is drowning in stress hormones. The cold, hard scientific facts are that your people think better when they are not stressed, afraid, or depressed. Yet many leaders do not put a lot of thought into creating a positive emotional climate for their people, and sometimes they create the exact opposite. As a result of their leadership, they create stress, fear, and sometimes even depression.
Location 751

Fight, flight, or freeze are the only options when there is a high degree of stress, because the higher brain shuts down.

Location 769

As research suggests, people don't leave jobs—they leave bosses.
Location 808

Mood research in scientific studies has shown that moods and emotions, both positive and negative, are "contagious." We "pass on" good or bad feelings and "infect" others' well-being. One very successful CEO I know has put this research into a simple, powerful policy at his company: If any leader wakes up in a bad mood, he instructs them to "stay home. I don't want you bringing that into the office." As with the flu, it's best not to infect the whole office with your bad mood.
Location 816

There are two human drives. One is connection and the other is aggression. Aggression here does not mean anger. It means initiative and energy, used in the service of goals. Everything we do is either relational or goal directed—or, ideally, both. Basically, we are "lovers and workers." We have relationships and we do things. We connect and we accomplish tasks. Care and drive. Be and do. Love and work. The love requires a positive relational tone and the work requires drive, expectations, and discipline.
Location 830

But be aware of the fact that as a leader, your position carries much more psychological and emotional weight than you know. People want to please their leaders; they don't want to let you down. As a result, they can often hear criticism in ways that you never intended, and that adds to the complexity of your job as a leader.
Location 879

But life is not all about avoiding negative consequences. There are positive reality consequences that increase performance as well—such as helping more customers, closing more deals, reaching transcendent goals, watching results rise, growing the company, increasing value, earning bonuses and promotion. Good stress pushes people to do great things, much greater than if there were no consequence to their actions.
Location 959

As the person in charge of setting emotional boundaries, your job is twofold. First, do everything possible to create "good fear," the positive performance anxiety that activates healthy stress. The drive that says, "If I get with it, I can get something good and avoid something bad." Second, diminish destructive fear, which is communicated through tone, lack of structure, and the threat of relational consequences—anger, shame, guilt, and withdrawal of support. People need to know that you are going to be "for" them, even when they don't do well.
Location 980

When we are emotionally and relationally connected to others, stress levels in the brain diminish. Put simply, relationships change brain chemistry.
Location 1117

More research findings about the positive effects of supportive connections continue to pour in, and they are equally compelling and conclusive: our brains need positive relationship to grow and function well.
Location 1129

Here are some of those ingredients that build connected unity:

- Shared Purpose: Unity grows when people come together around a shared purpose or goal.

- Awareness: Unity and connection grow as mutual awareness grows.
- Nonverbal Cues: If as a leader you are truly listening to your team, and truly tuning in, the level of connection of the team will be markedly better than if you're saying one thing while your body language or facial expression says another.
- Collaboration: Here I mean more than just asking people to give status reports, which are often best delivered by e-mail.
- Coherent and Relevant Narrative: We know from cognitive science that the human brain likes to organize experiences into a story, a narrative about who we are, where we have been, and where we are going.
- Conflict Resolution: It would be nice if business, and life, were all happy talk. But it isn't. It is hard, and it sometimes brings about situations where people feel pain, fear, grief, or anger. But avoidance of the tough issues, what psychologists call conflict-aversion, only makes things worse. So to create unity, sometimes we have to get right into the hard stuff, the things that people are really upset about.
- Emotional Regulation: At some time or other, we all experience very difficult, even destructive, emotional states. Fortunately we don't have to remain there. Connecting with others can provide a form of self-regulation.
- Emotional Reflection: Reflection is not problem solving, planning, or initiating something new. It is not judging. It is simply looking at things together and examining one's thoughts, observations, and feelings.
- Emotional Repair: Repair is one of the most important things that happens in good relationships. The truth of the matter is that we do have conflict, misunderstandings, reactions, and the like. We do get disconnected and miss each other. That is normal. But in good relationships, where the connections are deep and trusting, long-lasting damage doesn't have to be a side effect of honesty and conflict.
- Listening: Probably the most important connection builder is simple, but aggressive (active and intentional), listening. It is simple because it gets to the most basic need in life. People want to be known and understood.

Location 1302

The prevailing thinking patterns of a team or an organization—its norms and belief systems—will define what it is and what it does. Not to mention what it doesn't do or what it doesn't allow for. And the leader's boundaries determine the thinking that prevails.
Location 1360

The reasons organizations get stuck in one way of thinking are manifold, but one of the main causes is the failure of a leader to spot negative thinking and effectively set boundaries that prevent it from taking root while also making sure that optimism rules. What you create, and what you allow, is what you get as a leader. Especially thinking.
Location 1381

As a psychologist, I know that there are two kinds of people in the world. People whose circumstances overcome them, and people who overcome their circumstances.

Location 1646

The lesson for leaders is clear: Focus your people on what they have control of that directly affects the desired outcomes of the organization. When you do that, two powerful things happen. Not only do you get results, but you also change the brains of your people so they function better and then get even more results, in a spiraling, upward direction. Both are important.
Location 1700

Here's what happens. When people's brains are working at their best, they are more creative, better problem solvers, less reactive, more proactive and goal oriented. They have more energy, and they have a better sense of well-being. The lesson for leaders is this: give people more control and they will thrive. And then, help them focus that control on the things that drive results, and they win, and you will, too. Location 1708

Nothing drives strong teams like great performance, and what drives strong performance is a commitment to a shared vision and shared goals with behaviors and relationships aligned with reaching those goals. Teams can get along well and still go nowhere; to get somewhere, they have to do more than get along. They have to work together on the right things in the right ways at the right time toward the same goal. They have to perform. And that requires teamwork. And teamwork is only driven by a shared purpose or goal. Location 2068

And the one thing we know about behavior is that it is under your control. When you recognize that fact, you can move from being overwhelmed to being empowered. You realize that everything that causes bad outcomes is in your control to change, and that everything that causes good outcomes is also due to your behavior. Change behavior, and you change outcomes. That is power. And empowering. Location 2138

The first requirement to build trust is to connect through understanding the other person. Remember, people do not trust us when we understand them. They trust us when they understand that we understand them. What that means is not "that we get it." What it means is that "they get it that we get it." For that to happen, we have to listen and understand where they are really coming from, and truly connect with them, showing them that we understand. Location 2316

"Intent" is key to trust. As I said in the book Integrity, if we know that someone's intent is to help us, that they are "for" us, we open ourselves to them. We give to them. We cooperate with them. We invest in them. We share with them. We work, and even die for them. But if they are not "for" us, there are only two other possibilities. They are "for" themselves and neutral to us, or they are actually "against" us.
Location 2379

To truly trust someone, we need more than that. We need to know that they are looking out for us as well as for themselves, and thinking about how things will affect us, especially when we are not there to look out for ourselves.
Location 2389

Trust Grows When Someone Has Built a Good Track Record…Said another way, we can trust people to do what they have done in the past. Or another way, the best predictor of the future is the past, unless there is some intervention that has made things different. That is a track record.
Location 2482

When you think about it, that is what we are looking for in life. Investment. We want people to invest their hearts, minds, and souls with us. We want our teams to be invested in what we are trying to build. We want individuals to be "all in." We want friends and loved ones who are invested. And where do we make investments? We make investments when we trust that someone's intent is for our good. We trust when they have the character patterns to make us believe that they will behave in a certain way that we know is

“characteristic” of them. We trust them when we know they have the capacity to pull off whatever we are depending on them to do. And lastly, we trust when they have a track record of good results and positive behavior. Add all of those together, and we want to “invest.” We want to place what is of value in their hands. We want to place it in their “care.”
Location 2494

There is a law of leadership physics that affects many leaders without their being aware of it, and it can do them in if they are not careful. But if they are, they can soar. The law is this: the higher you go in leadership, the fewer external forces act upon you and dictate your focus, energy, and direction. Instead you set the terms of engagement and direct your own path, with only the reality of results to push against you.
Location 2629

Being an open system means, basically, that you are not arrogant enough to think that you have all the answers, or that your organization has all the answers, or even that you should. You know that there is experience and energy outside of what you bring that can add to your personal and organizational infrastructure, and you open yourself up to it. In my experience, when there is a real problem in an organization at the top, one of the issues always in the picture is a leader who cannot take objective input or who is arrogant. They have corporate boards comprised of “yes” people, and they surround themselves with others who do not tell them the truth out of fear. Or there are those who do tell them the truth and are marginalized.
Location 2726

To be the best you can be, you must develop a hunger for feedback and see it as one of the best gifts that you can get. It is part of being an open system and has incredible value not only to you but also to your people.
Location 2753

Most people can see and solve a problem. But leaders must get above the problems that are not being solved and see that there may be more than a problem going on. Instead of a “problem” there may be a “pattern,” and patterns are what will end up ruining your business.
Location 3015

The first is a pattern masquerading as a problem—that is, a problem or a situation that keep happening over and over again is not a problem. It is a pattern. Patterns can be with people—like Joe, who always misses deadlines for getting financial reporting done in time for you to prepare for your meetings. Location 3017

Then there is the second group of patterns, which is the repetition of the same work. What I mean by this is that if there is something that only you can do, at least in the beginning, but then you find that you are doing that same thing over and over again in the same way, and you pretty much have it nailed, it might be time to turn that over to someone else. There is a pattern of work, a repeatable formula, to what you are doing, and that means it is probably transferable. Leadership demands that you move it down the organizational tree. If there is a known path of the work, and it is repetitive, it can probably be taught. And if someone else can be taught to do it, it might be time to delegate that work, so that you can get back to doing what only you can do: lead.

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle “location” is provided after each entry.