

YOUR LEADERSHIP

# EDGE

LEAD ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

ED O'MALLEY  
AMANDA CEBULA

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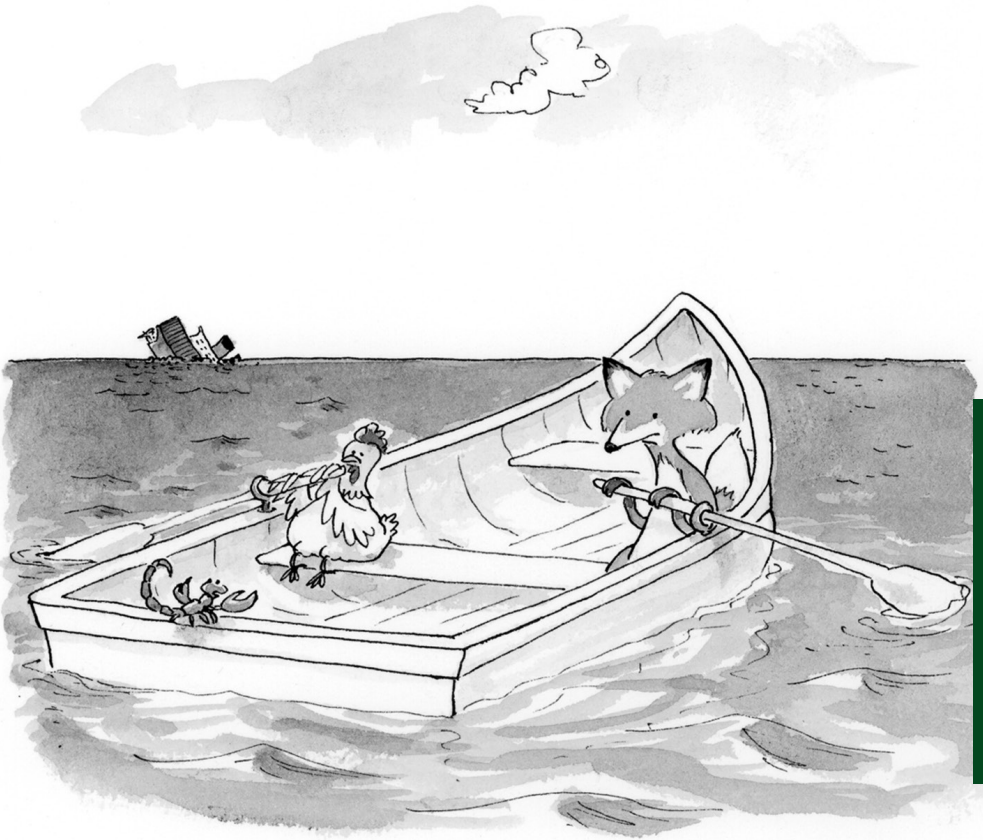
CHAPTER 16  
ENERGIZE OTHERS

# *Create a Trustworthy Process*

**Leadership isn't about the right answers —  
but it is about process.**

In one way, that's a freeing notion. You don't have to have all the answers. If the process engages, honors and challenges people, you stand a greater chance of having the group discover what needs to be done. On the other hand, people get stuck if the process seems fishy, unpredictable or lacks transparency.

Progress on the challenges facing today's organizations takes time. People must do work they would rather avoid. It's a process, and the process must be trustworthy.



“SO IT’S BASICALLY A MATTER  
OF EACH OF US DOING OUR JOB,  
NOW, ISN’T IT?”

*Don't confuse trustworthy with conflict-free. A trustworthy process doesn't mean there's an absence of tension. Rather, it's by working through the tension that people make progress.*

And there is a difference between trusting everyone involved and a trustworthy process.

Rarely will people all completely trust each other, especially if you are convening a diverse group of stakeholders. Maybe the people you need to engage don't know each other well enough — or maybe they know each other too well — to fully trust. Maybe all the ice-breakers and teambuilding exercises in the world won't do the trick.

Building trust among people is a good thing. But the leadership idea here, the one that really helps energize others, is to create a trustworthy process.

One way to see this distinction is through the participants in our programs. They come together from different walks of life. We challenge them to immediately work together to help each other make progress on their own individual dilemmas. In their short time together, with tough expectations laid out before them, it is unrealistic, maybe impossible, to think they could establish any kind of full trust to work together.

What does happen, though, is that through a trustworthy and transparent process based on collaboration and confidentiality, people can dig deep, and fast, to share meaningful things with their new counterparts and help each other make progress.

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**WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT CREATING  
A TRUSTWORTHY PROCESS?**

Search for the Simon Sinek “Why good leaders make you feel safe” talk on [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com).

Leadership is more about the process challenges than the content challenges. You don't have to have the answers, but if the process engages, honors and challenges people, you stand a chance of having the group discover the right answers for its situation. All along the way, the process must be trustworthy.

Why? Because much is at stake. Remember, leadership is about change and change sometimes means loss. People stand to lose things — for real or just in their heads — if the change you are promoting succeeds. They are already on edge. A move they don't understand or that lacks transparency could send them over that edge.

#### HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES.

- ▶ A union president is promoting new models for paying teachers. The current “years of service plus education level salary grid” has been in place for decades, and that makes the teachers skeptical from the beginning. It will be nearly impossible to implement if teachers, parents, administrators, school board members, students and others don't trust the process.
- ▶ A civic official is spearheading an effort to generate generous economic incentives to lure businesses. The incentives will redirect taxpayer dollars from such things as streets, sidewalks and public safety to the private accounts of for-profit businesses. Community unrest may boil over if citizens don't feel the process for distributing incentives is above board.
- ▶ A group of employees longs for a better culture at work, a culture that promotes sharing, curiosity, learning and asking for help. Other employees are skeptical. They fear poor performance reviews if they ask for help and worry others will get promoted over them if they share knowledge. The culture won't change if the instigators can't figure out how to create more trust among the crew.

## WHAT ARE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUSTWORTHY PROCESS?

- People are free to express ideas, thoughts and opinions.
- Those most affected are part of generating ideas and making decisions.
- People know where they fit in the process. They know what happened before and what's coming next.
- There is space and time to express vulnerability.
- Those in charge model openness to exploring new ideas.
- The lines of authority and non-authority become blurred as people work together.
- Higher-ups embrace failure as a learning opportunity, helping others deal with fear of making mistakes.

## HOW DO YOU CREATE A TRUSTWORTHY PROCESS?

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Lots of them. Broad questions allow people to share what's on their minds. Use trust-building questions like: What concerns you the most about this issue? What would make this successful from your point of view? Of all the things we could do, what should we do?
- **Listen to understand.** Most of us listen just enough so we can reply. Forget about replying. Just understand. Discern the song beneath the words.
- **Be around.** If you are there, with the people, they'll have more chances to visit with you informally and formally. Being super-busy and running from meeting to meeting, event to event, creates an image of "I'm too busy to talk about what's on your mind."

- **Design the process together.** Ask others: How should we work on this issue? What's important to you about how we work on this?
- **Create multiple environments.** Take people to coffee to chat. Bring all the stakeholders together for collective discussion. Send out a survey. The more different types of environments made available, the more likely everyone will experience a type they are comfortable with.
- **Consider establishing group norms at the start of the work.** For example, "We agree to give honest feedback to one another to learn and grow. In return we agree not to take things personally. There will be no dancing around issues. Let's have a data-gathering mindset versus blame and fear of failing."



*If you bring the right people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies to address the shared concerns of their organization or community.*

— DAVID CHRISLIP





As a newly elected legislator, I'm concerned about what my district thinks now that the campaign is over. With all of the mud-slinging and distrust in politics nowadays, how can I get to work for people who already don't believe I will do a good job?

- POLITICAL PABLO

Dear Pablo,

It's rare to find an elected official focused on building a trustworthy process among their office and constituents. Congratulations! Getting elected with that kind of mindset is half the work! Gather eight to 10 people with a range of views. Ask what's most important. Ask what kind of citizen engagement they'd like to see. That's your first experiment. See what you learn and go from there. You can let us know how it goes by leaving a comment at [www.yourleadershipedge.com](http://www.yourleadershipedge.com).

Onward!

