

# CREATING CHANGE

FROM THE INSIDE-OUT Todd Davis

# Consider what makes your organization unique.

Perhaps you provide customers with the lowest possible cost. Or maybe you offer the highest quality products. Or most notable may be your highly-customized client experience. Regardless of the distinctive value your organization offers, almost everything in it—including your strategy, your services, and your systems—can be replicated. Except for one thing: the effectiveness of your people.

You may have heard the phrase that people are an organization's greatest asset. As a human resource director for many years, that philosophy guided my professional decisions. But after 14 years as a Chief People Officer, I see things a little differently. I've learned that it's not only the people who determine an organization's performance, it's what happens between people that makes the greatest impact on effectiveness. Your organization's ability to achieve sustained superior performance depends on the nature of the relationships inside it: how well people work together, how respectfully they treat one another, how carefully they listen to customers and suppliers, and how leaders model the type of behavior that attracts, retains and develops the best talent. In the end, it's the collective behavior within an organization's culture—how most people act most of the time—that is an organization's greatest competitive advantage.

So how do we foster this type of culture? As the late business guru, Stephen R. Covey said, "Everything starts with the individual because all meaningful change comes from the inside-out. Systemic organizational change can't happen without changes in individual behavior." This is even more true when those individuals are leaders.

A strong, effective culture starts to be created when those we lead see us genuinely trying to get better, to model behaviors that weave trust, safety, and credibility into the fabric of everyday work life: in team meetings, in one-on-one performance reviews, in employee and customer interactions, in policy creation and process execution. “But I am trying to get better!” you might be thinking. “It’s not me. It’s the other people ‘out there’ that need to change.” Well... maybe.

Consider the play by French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*. In it, three “souls” find themselves in the afterlife. They are trapped in a small room with no doors and the windows completely covered in brick. Thus the title *No Exit*! To make things worse, these three people really irritate the you-know-what out of each other. And the more they annoy one another, the more they attempt to change each other. This futile endeavor doesn’t go well and only escalates their frustration. Little by little, it dawns on each of them that hell isn’t fire and brimstone or the torture chamber they imagined it to be. Hell isn’t a place at all. Hell is other people!

Do you ever have to work with people who irritate or annoy you? Maybe it’s the ingratiating associate who solicits people higher up in the corporate food chain. Or maybe it’s your micromanaging boss who insists on unrealistic demands. Perhaps it’s one of your direct reports who continually complains, or the person you’d hope would magically quit. Or the manager of the department next door who frequently drops the ball.

When confronted with people like this, often our first reaction is to blame and insist that someone other than us change. “When will she stop rechecking my work?” “Why can’t he be more responsible?” “Things would be so much easier if they weren’t so controlling, or demanding, or temperamental, or arrogant, or impatient, or disorganized, or \_\_\_\_\_.” (Fill-in the blank with the personality trait that irritates you the most.)

When blaming doesn’t work, we often move next to fixing or trying to change other people. And when those attempts fail, we metaphorically, or literally, want to move to the next “room”

to find better people, smarter people who see the world more like us. But unfortunately, in this newer, better room, we find another group of people who begin to frustrate us all over again.

While we'd like to believe we're successful at changing others, usually we aren't. Despite our best efforts, over time we realize that an "outside-in" approach to changing others is a futile investment that yields little to no return. We resume work feeling frustrated and exhausted, further away from our goal of achieving a highly effective team, department, or culture. But the fact remains that our personal success is measured by the results we get. And unless we work alone in a vacuum, almost every result we get requires that we work successfully with and through other people. So, what can we do?

Let's go back to Sartre's play for a minute and share one important detail. In addition to having no door and the windows being bricked up, the room has no mirrors. Even if people wanted to look at themselves, they couldn't. The opportunity for self-reflection is lost, and the relationships continue to disintegrate. The simplest solution, but the one most difficult to implement can be found in the fundamental truth: in order to change what is on the outside (aka: the direct report, the associate, the boss, the culture), we must first change ourselves.

It's with this fundamental truth that I wrote *Get Better: 15 Proven Practices to Build Effective Relationships at Work*. Each practice is an opportunity to look in the mirror and examine what we can do to change before attempting to change someone else. When internalized and authentically modeled, these 15 practices can have a profound impact on what happens between people, thereby creating successful working relationships and transforming our rooms of "hell" into the paradise they can, and are meant to, be.

# Practice 1: Wear Glasses That Work

One of the biggest threats to leading and working with others effectively is being overly invested in your version of the truth. Have you ever judged a person or situation too quickly or acted prematurely—only to find out later that your original opinion was incomplete or incorrect? Because we're human (and not all-knowing all of the time), our view of life can be limited. We may get stuck looking through a set of lenses that distort rather than sharpen reality.

The “glasses” we choose to wear each day are the beliefs through which we see ourselves and everything around us. And what we see informs what we think and feel—which has a direct impact on what we do and what we get.

If we're too invested in our point of view, we may miss seeing the true potential in ourselves or others—stunting growth. We may shut down ideas before they have a chance to thrive, or miss an opportunity that's right in front of us. Anything you want to improve (strengthening a relationship, advancing in your career, finding an innovative solution to a problem), requires that you first identify any limitations in the lenses you are currently wearing and swap them out for lenses that are more helpful.

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## Practice 2: Carry Your Own Weather

A short and stout college math professor routinely stopped to greet students while walking across campus each day. He seemed incapable of being in anything but a good mood. Early one spring morning a thunderstorm broke. Having forgotten his umbrella, he made his usual walk to class. Soaked to the bone, he remained happy as ever while annoyed students peeled off their layers of wet gear, complaining about the unexpected downpour. “Hey Professor, aren’t you at all bothered by the rain?” one student asked. Smiling, he replied, “Sure, but I benefit from my lack of height—it takes longer for the rain to reach me.”

While many students allowed the dark clouds and unexpected moisture to negatively affect them, the professor made a different choice. Rather than react to the weather, he carried his own weather. He chose how to think, feel, and act based on what he valued rather than on external circumstances. If you believe that external things (like other people or situations) are the source of your unhappiness or happiness, life will always happen to you. You’ll feel powerless, like a victim—finding reasons to blame others or justify your knee-jerk reactions. In time, “martyr” or “difficult” becomes your brand, and your ability to influence plummets. If you want to have a more influence in your life, or if your emotions are getting in your way, remember you have the freedom to choose to carry your own weather.

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## Practice 3: Behave Your Way to Credibility

Have you ever tried to talk your way out of a problem you've acted your way into?

Unfortunately, it's an approach we often try to avoid facing the humbling, and sometimes-lengthy process of regaining trust once it's been damaged. But we forget that once our credibility has been tarnished, the words we use to polish it may fall flat if they're not accompanied by consistent, observable behavior people can count on.

We all have a reputation—whether we like it or not. That reputation has been built over the days, weeks, months or years you've been with your employer, your partner, your children and your friends. What kind of reputation is it? Do people see you as credible? And what is credibility, anyway? Credibility is having a high degree of character and competence. Without both, people aren't going to trust you.

You might think well of me as someone who's thoughtful, considerate and loyal (character), but you might have reservations when I offer to pack your parachute for your first skydiving lesson (competence). Chances are you'd probably want to know just how much experience and/or training I'd had in parachute packing (none). And despite my amiable disposition and positive attitude, you'd be right to find me lacking credibility. In the same way, you might be hesitant if you learn the person who had packed your parachute had just been acquitted of a manslaughter charge on a technicality—they might have every parachute packing certification around, but if you feel something about their character is off, it will likely cause concern. Without high character and high competence, credibility can't flourish.

## Practice 4: Play Your Roles Well

Do you ever find that success in one area of your life comes at the expense of another area? If so, you may be feeling out of balance or even guilty. Or maybe you've neglected a role so long that it's caused severe relationship damage.

On a recent business trip to New York City, I saw a Broadway play. In line for a ticket, I noticed a play review tacked on the window at will call. The critic had given the lead a 5-star rating for her extraordinary performance: "She authentically embodies the most important qualities of the character." It made me wonder, what if the important people in my life were to write a review of my performance in each role I play? How many stars would they give me?

To implement this practice, choose the most important roles you play at work and home. Focus on no more than 5-7 roles at any given time—the only thing that comes from working on too many roles at once is mediocrity. Then determine the contribution you want to make in each role. Roles are never just about what you do, but are ways through which you express who you are. If a critic were to write a review of your performance, how would they describe your character? Become your own critic and write a statement for each role describing how you want to be in that role and the contribution you want to make.

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# Practice 5: See the Tree, Not Just the Seedling

Have you ever given up on someone before they've had a chance to prove themselves? Maybe it was a coworker who saw things differently than you, or a team member you "inherited" who didn't seem to do their fair share. We're impatient with a person's slow learning curve; we sometimes expect perfect results without clarifying clear expectations; we get frustrated with someone's behavior when they're not doing the job how it should be done. We become so critical of the "seedling" that we don't see the potential "tree" growing right in front of us!

Such was the case with Greek grammar teacher, Joseph Degenhart, who was so furious with an unruly boy that he demanded the child be expelled from school. He wrote, "Nothing will ever become of you."

The student, as it turned out, was Albert Einstein. Because of such poor references, Einstein barely squeaked into college. But there, he met upper classman and a fellow physics student, Michelangelo Besso, who helped Einstein get a job and engaged him frequently in scientific discussions. It was during these talks with Besso that Einstein made his intellectual leap that led to the discovery of atomic power which reframed how we think about the universe. Hardly anyone remembers Besso, but without Besso's belief in Einstein, the world may have missed out on one of the greatest thinkers in history.

When we look at a person's potential, it allows us to see past the "seed" and envision the mighty tree it can become, inspiring engagement and unleashing talent.

## Practice 6: Avoid the Pinball Syndrome

When was the last time you played a pinball game? For those born post-pinball era, here's how it works: the player's uses "flippers" to launch a metal ball toward numerous physical targets to accumulate points. Lights flash, bells ding, and bumpers thump as the points rack up—making it easy to focus on the game and lose track of everything else.

Hitting and scoring points in a pinball game is a lot like tackling and achieving the urgencies that demand your attention every day: phone calls, texts, emails, meetings, etc. You may not feel like your urgent tasks are a game, but can become attracted to the rapid pace and focus that's required to get them done. Add a small endorphin rush as you check off your to-do's, and urgencies start to feel like scoring big in pinball: downright gratifying and even addictive. If you've ever reached the end of your day and felt like nothing of real value was accomplished, you might be suffering from the Pinball Syndrome.

Because urgencies act on you and vie for your immediate attention, with the Pinball Syndrome, you start to confuse what's urgent with what's truly important. You end up frittering away your time on exciting, but less important things—or worse, on distractions that guarantee you the next "high." You are so busy fighting fires, you miss opportunities to prevent them in the first place.

While some urgencies are also important, it's vital to recognize that many important things are not urgent, yet require you to act on them: long-term goals, important projects, and key relationships. But since urgent behaviors are easy to recognize and address, organizations often reward them. This can provide a powerful incentive to pull the plunger back, so to speak, and play round after round of trivialities.

You don't have to step away from the urgency game entirely, but you must differentiate between when you must play it and when you choose to play it. When you get a small respite between your urgencies (before the score resets and the next ball ratchets into place), it's what you do in that moment between reaching for the plunger in autopilot mode or choosing to step back and reflect on what's truly important—that will make all the difference.

## Practice 7: Think We, Not Me

Do you win at the expense of others, or, do you take care of everyone else at your own expense? Neither extreme leads to effective relationships.

In education, business, sports, or even family life, we are encouraged and rewarded to compete. As a result, many people adopt a win-lose mindset: if you get more, that means I get less—so I better get my share first! Others adopt a lose-win mindset: if you get more, there's nothing I can do, so I'll just give up and let others succeed. Each extreme is driven by your level of maturity and the amount of courage and consideration you show with others.

Highly mature people don't win at the expense of others, nor do they easily give up on their own needs. They seek mutual benefit by showing a high degree of courage and consideration in every relationship. Courage is the willingness and ability to speak your thoughts respectfully. Consideration is the ability and willingness to seek out and listen to others' thoughts and feelings with respect. Thinking We, Not Me is based on having an abundant mindset. If you believe there's a finite amount of everything (reward, credit, recognition, benefits, love), you'll create a fearful worldview, and it will be difficult to shift the focus off of yourself and take the others' needs into consideration. If you choose an abundance mindset—you will believe there's enough for everyone, and will be able to care as much about others' wins as you care about your own.

# Practice 8: Take Stock of Your Emotional Bank Accounts

You probably pay attention to your financial bank accounts—the deposits and withdrawals, the interest and penalties—but are you at risk of being overdrawn, or even bankrupt, in any of your emotional bank accounts?

When an emotional bank account balance is high, so is the resulting level of trust. When the balance is low, trust plummets and relationships suffer. While there are similarities between a traditional bank account and an emotional one, there are a few key differences:

- Never accumulate an emotional balance in order to make planned withdrawals later.
- Unlike your financial bank account, you can't sign up for recurring direct deposits in your emotional account. They require you to walk up to the "teller," as it were, and make the transaction in person.
- While we may not go to jail for emotional counterfeits, we will pay a price for contrived compliments, fake apologies, overly-extravagant gifts—or gestures we deem as deposits but really aren't in the eyes of the receiver.

Small, personalized, consistent, and genuine deposits over time are far better than extravagant deposits made once in a while.

## Practice 9: Examine Your Real Motives

Motives are the underlying reasons for the actions you take and the words you say. No one can tell you what your motives are. They may try, but you are the only one who can know your real reasons for doing what you do.

Are your motives healthy—based on wanting the best for yourself and others? Or do you ever have an unhealthy motive—one that is driven by fear, anger, or an unfulfilled need for acceptance, power, or safety? Consider these questions:

- When you make comments in meetings—is your real motive to add value to the discussion (healthy), or do you mostly want the boss to think you're smart (unhealthy)?
- When you take on everything yourself rather than delegate to willing, able people—is your real motive to save time (healthy), or do you fear losing control (unhealthy)?
- When you give unsolicited advice to your coworker, is your real motive truly to help (healthy), or do you need to feel like you are better than they are (unhealthy)?
- When you can't say "no" and find yourself doing others' work—is your real motive to sincerely help (healthy), or are you afraid that doing for others is the only value you add (unhealthy)?

Unless you make a regular practice of examining your motives and questioning your choices, you might inadvertently go on auto-pilot and create a divide in the relationships that are most important to you at work and home.

## Practice 10: Talk Less, Listen More

Unfortunately, when it comes to real-life relationships, our propensity to talk more than we listen can get us into real trouble. Of course, in the rush to solve problems and get things done, there's a natural tendency for all of us to simply tell. And we're quite good at it. Think of the great communication classes you may have had over the years. While called "communication," they were all about how to deliver or present a message. I challenge you to find one that was about how to effectively listen.

Of the various aphorisms handed down by the ancient Greeks, perhaps Zeno offered one of the most practical: "We have two ears and one mouth, so we should listen more than we say." Now you can't argue with logic like that. And the truth is, when we take it upon ourselves to do all the talking, we almost always pay a price.

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Making quick decisions and judgement calls will often lead to misdiagnosed solutions, faulty assumptions, narrow perspectives, and misunderstood facts. As a result, we deprive others of the opportunity to solve problems on their own. If losing out on the efficacy of our plans wasn't a steep enough price to pay, when we fail to take time to truly listen, we threaten trust. Imagine going to a doctor with a sore throat and headache, but instead of listening to you describe your symptoms, they take one look at your knees and write a prescription for physical therapy. Would you ever return for another visit? Would you trust the doctor again? While this example may sound ludicrous, many of us "prescribe before we diagnose" all the time.

Think about a time when you felt misunderstood by someone. How did it make you feel? Maybe you got defensive and vented your anger and frustration? Or maybe you felt intimidated or shut down, perhaps committing never to open up to that person again? Regardless of the response, each time we feel misunderstood (not truly heard) by someone important to us, we can feel disrespected and hurt. We may even experience an unintentional breach of trust—as if an essential part of the relationship bond was chipped away.

One of the most profound gifts you can give to another human being is your sincere understanding. To do so requires clearing away your mental clutter, suspending (at least temporarily) your agenda, and stopping long enough to focus and hear what someone is really saying. When it comes to creating effective relationships, a famous adage I'm often mindful of is with people fast is slow and slow is fast. An attentive, unbiased, listening ear gives people the rare opportunity to feel understood—a gift some psychologists argue we need as much as the air we breathe.

## Practice 11: Get Your Volume Right

We all have natural strengths—our “go to” way for getting things done. Using and nurturing them is a fundamental part of who we are. But sometimes, they are so engrained, we’re unaware of how we overuse them and the impact that has on others.

Let’s say your natural strength is being practical; you pride yourself on finding fact-based solutions. But if set too high, this “practical volume” may turn into pessimism: you perpetually find “facts” or reasons for not doing something. Instead of the leader who inspires and engages forward motion, you become the naysayer who slows everything down. Or consider the strength of being loyal. If dialed too high, loyalty may turn into gullibility: choosing to overlook flaws in a project or ignore “red flags” in people in favor of blindly pledging allegiance. When we inadvertently turn the volume to high on one of our strengths, the less than stellar result can often be a blind spot to us. We’re confused as to why things aren’t getting better. Because our strengths have always worked for us before, we’re confused and frustrated they aren’t working now. It’s called a blind spot for a reason! Find a trusted friend and get feedback on when you might be dialing up your strengths too much.

## Practice 12: Extend Trust

Are you more inclined to distrust others than to trust them? Or do you give away your trust prematurely and regret it later? Neither extreme is useful when building effective relationships. In my years of coaching and leading others, I find that the majority of relationship snags are rarely caused by people trusting too much; they’re caused by people trusting too little.

So, how do you learn to trust others? Start by recognizing that trust is more than a nice feeling. It requires action. It's not enough to say that you trust someone. You need to turn your trust into an act by extending it to others. And when you extend trust, do it wisely.

- 1. Assess the situation.** Identify what you're trusting a person to do. Deliver a weekly report on time? Win an important legal case? Sell software? Build a rocket? Honor and cherish you until "death do you part?"
- 2. Assess the risk.** Identify the potential risks. What happens if the person to whom you've extended trust fails, underperforms, gives up, gets distracted, or missteps? Are the stakes for failure too high, or can you tolerate a learning curve? Be realistic and objective here.
- 3. Assess the credibility.** Consider the character and competence of the person to whom you're extending trust. Do you trust them to be honest and follow through (character)? Do they have the experience or skillset necessary for the task at hand (competence)? If not, do they have the discipline and drive to grow into it?

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If the overall risk is relatively low and the credibility of the person is high, extend trust. But if the risk is high and the credibility is low, you may need to slow down the process and work with the person to increase his/her skills before you extend trust. In some cases, even when the credibility is solid, the risk may be too high to extend trust.

Remember, always start with a high propensity to trust. Then follow it up with the three assessments quickly and consistently. If you do, you'll be well on your way to trusting yourself to extend trust wisely.

## Practice 13: Make it Safe to Tell the Truth

When was the last time you asked for feedback? If you can't remember, you're in good company. Most of us resist it because we equate it with criticism. It brings to the surface what we don't want to admit—that each of us is a work in progress. But if we avoid creating opportunities to receive feedback, or unknowingly make it unsafe for others to give it, we'll miss a huge learning curve and a perfect chance to build high-trust relationships.

Knowing how to receive feedback and when to invite it in, requires careful self-examination. Consider these four steps:

1. **Assume good intent.** People who have mustered the courage to give you feedback often are feeling as vulnerable sharing it with you as you are receiving it. They are momentarily risking the security of the relationship. When you show up with an open heart, you send a signal that says, "You're safe to share."

- 2. Ask for feedback.** One way to discourage people from giving feedback is to surprise them in the moment with a request for it. A more effective approach is to let the person know beforehand that you'll be asking for feedback later. Also, a vague question like, "How did I do?" makes it difficult for people to respond with anything meaningful. A more effective approach would be to ask people to share specific things or behaviors you could say or do to improve.
- 3. Evaluate the feedback.** Just because you ask for feedback doesn't mean you need to act on every piece of it. It's critical to be clear about the values you stand for and have a long-term vision of who you want to become so that you're prepared to compare someone's "truth" against what you feel and know is most true for you. Absolutely consider all feedback you are given. Then carefully evaluate what rings true for you.
- 4. Act on the feedback.** Not acting on feedback—or not explaining why we aren't going to act on it—is worse than not asking for it in the first place. While people may start to feel safe when you ask them for feedback, they will know they are safe when they see you take their feedback seriously.

## Practice 14: Align Inputs with Outputs

Do you find yourself unable to consistently get or replicate your desired results—especially when it comes to building relationships? While many inputs (beliefs, actions, words) contribute to relationship effectiveness, identifying the right inputs can make all the difference.

A friend of mine, Deb, needed to change an input with her 7-year old son, Dylan, who had a habit of forgetting his shoes. As Deb readied herself for work and to drive Dylan to school each morning, after getting in the car she would ask Dylan if he had everything he needed for the

day and he would dutifully reply yes. Occasionally, when Deb would drive up to the curb to drop Dylan off, she'd hear him announce that he'd forgotten his shoes. Frustrated and angry, she'd chastise him, drive back to the house to grab the missing footwear, then deliver her tardy child back to school. This routine happened enough that Deb knew she needed to figure out a way to solve the problem—for good. With the benefit of hindsight, Deb used a five-step process:

- 1. Clearly describe the output you want.** Short-term, Deb wants Dylan to have his shoes before she drives him to school. Long-term, she wants to rear a child who is responsible and capable of taking care of himself.
- 2. Assess the current reality.** Dylan remembers his shoes sporadically which causes Deb frustration and makes them both late.
- 3. Examine the inputs.** Deb prompts Dylan to remember his shoes, chastises him for forgetting them, and then drives home to get his shoes for him. None of these inputs achieves the outputs she wants.
- 4. Choose a new input you think will most likely achieve the desired output.** Deb decides to allow Dylan to experience the natural consequences of forgetting his shoes. The next time he announces he's forgotten his shoes, she says, "That's okay. I guess you'll just need to go without them. You can stay indoors during recess. I'll pick you up at the end of the day."
- 5. Analyze the result.** Dylan is unpleasantly surprised and unhappy about wearing socks to his second-grade class. The next day, he remembers his shoes—and never forgets them again!

The next time you're struggling to achieve your desired result—especially in the area of relationships—try applying these five steps again and again until you identify the inputs that work.

# Practice 15: Start with Humility

Has your lack of humility ever held you back from getting better? Would you even know if it had? Above all other character qualities, humility is foundational. It's like salt—it brings out the best flavor of each character quality required for creating effective relationships.

We rarely use the word humility at work. It's like people are afraid to talk about it, as if it is the enemy of what it takes to be noticed, promoted, and to succeed. But according to Professor Mike Austin, Ph.D., professor of philosophy at Eastern Kentucky University, people who are high in humility “lack self-absorption, so they have more courage to try new things. That really frees them up to take risks ... they're not paralyzed with a fear of failure because that's not their chief concern.” In my experience, people with humility are more collaborative and open-minded: they are far more interested in what is right than in being right.

The word humility comes from the Latin “humilis,” which literally means “low.” But it doesn't mean low self-esteem (thinking you're less than others), or low courage (not speaking your mind). The “low” it's referring to means you can get to a place where you realize you are one piece of a much bigger picture. Humble people are strong. They have a secure sense of self because their validation comes from the inside, not the outside. In short, they are not controlled by their ego.

Consider the most humble person you know. Chances are he or she has created solid, meaningful connections with others. If you're serious about getting better—especially at building relationships that work—I invite you to try humility on for size. Just the opposite of “weak,” humility is the greatest strength we can develop and model.

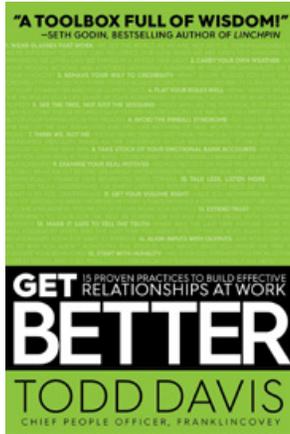
# Summary

In my experience, these are the 15 practices I've seen time and time again trip us up, or become real catalysts for moving our relationships forward in effective, meaningful ways. Because we are all measured by the results we get, and we get our results with and through others, nothing is more important than learning how to be more effective in our relationships. And while it's natural and somewhat engrained in us to immediately look at others and tell them what they need to do, or fix, or change, like the individuals in Sartre's play; that got them nowhere. However, unlike them, we do have mirrors and the ability to carefully examine what we might change or do differently—where we can Get Better. 📖

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# Info



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Todd Davis, FranklinCovey's Chief People Officer, has been entertaining and inspiring people throughout the world for more than twenty-five years, with his deep understanding of leadership, employee engagement, and talent management. He has delivered numerous keynote addresses and speeches at top industry conferences and associations, at annual corporate events, and for FranklinCovey clients, many of which are Fortune® 100 and 500 companies. He lives in Salt Lake City, Utah.



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