

# The Case of Jake

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*A Carefully Crafted 360° Feedback Strategy  
for Working with a Difficult Employee*



**The Napier Group**

**MANAGEMENT MONOGRAPH  
Volume III**



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# Leadership Matters

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## A Case Study of a Manager

*Taken from Measuring What Matters, by Rod Napier and Rich McDaniel, published by Davies-Black, January 2006*

*We are, all of us, all the time coming together and falling apart.  
The point is we are not rocks. Who wants to be one anyway,  
impermeable, unchanging, our history already played out.  
~ John Rosenthal*

*Bless those who challenge us, for they remind us of the doors we  
have closed and those we have yet to open. They are big medicine.  
~ Navajo Prayer*

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Earlier we were told of the peevish old man who self-righteously protected the seat next to him on the bus for what turned out to be an imaginary friend. The brash young man who called his bluff and sat unceremoniously in the seat placing the old man's suitcase on his lap was willing to wait until the friend showed up. All too often the old man's behavior would be rewarded, actually reinforced because there is no one who would hold him accountable for being so rude, intimidating and obnoxious. How stunned he must have been watching his suitcase sail out the window—a real consequence for his selfish and controlling behavior.

This chapter is about how simple to develop and use metrics can gain the attention of difficult employees who, perhaps for years, have manipulated those around them and become known as problems. They exist in nearly every organization—long term contributors turned pain in the necks, often red-lined, shunted into non-essential jobs or simply tolerated for fear that firing them would lead to an unseemly law suit with their records showing they had been systematically rewarded over the years.

### A Reluctant Jake

Recently, a client took me aside and said: "I am confused by a problem that places me between a rock and a hard place. I have a 25-year veteran who has been a manager for half that time and he's not getting with the program. He's paying lip service to the new values and changes we're introducing."

I asked him to continue, but I could see what was coming: another case of a long-term employee not adapting to the new demands of a changing organization. After years of loyalty, this person couldn't just be discarded. As the client continued, I learned that the situation was worse than that. "In the past, Jake has always done exactly what was

expected. He is demanding, highly controlling, and often insensitive: he intimidates most of his employees and will not tolerate disagreement or his authority being questioned. Over time he's become even less tolerant, periodically flies off the handle and he's been known to humiliate his subordinates in public.

"When getting the job done was the soul definition of management, he was often acknowledged for putting in long hours and never complaining. Put plainly, management never had to worry about his area. But, now, with our 'new day' management style, his approach strikes at the heart of two of our core values—cooperation and participation. I don't know what to do about him. The complaints keep pouring in, but people are afraid to confront him directly because he has a reputation of 'getting even' if you ever get on his bad side."

My client painted a picture that is almost a classic in modern day mismanagement. It is a story that suggests:

- Management had not developed a balanced process of supervision in which product or outcome goals were, to some degree, balanced by attention to 'process' or maintenance goals. In other words, there had been little or no recognition that how one manages, deals with relations and builds morale, has any value when compared with the more easily measured outcome based goals of upper management. Such a short-term mentality is losing favor by increasing numbers who recognize there are measurable bottom line payoffs from attention to "how" such work is accomplished over time.
- Because Jake's bosses over the years didn't have to worry about him—and there were few outward signs of trouble—they simply let him alone. They even joked about how "there was never any trouble in Jake's area," while they winked at his obvious tyrannical behavior.
- As he became more abrasive and even arrogant, Jake's supervisors didn't know what to do with him. He had always been rewarded for the exact behaviors that were no longer acceptable. In fact, during his own management career, hardly a year went by in which Jake had not been given a larger-than-average raise. Quite possibly, if Jake were fired (which most of my client's peers were suggesting), he might, with good reason, sue the proverbial pants off the organization.
- The supervisors who managed Jake and other management supervisors in the organization were not only conflict averse, they simply lacked the skills to deal with many others in the organization who had been ignored and not dealt with over the years.

One of the secrets rarely discussed concerning the downsizing and reengineering of the 1980's and early 90's was management's desire to get rid of dead wood and others who

had long been rewarded for their abrasive and autocratic management styles or who, for whatever reasons, no longer fit into management's plans.

## Supervisory Incompetence

On the one hand, upper management is guilty of gross negligence—not providing certain managers with feedback, education or disciplinary action for blatant acts of hostile and aggressive behavior toward their employees. They have not been accountable and are just as much to blame as are the Jakes of the world who have been systematically rewarded and reinforced for obnoxious and often destructive behaviors. Now, Jake stood to *suffer the consequences for their failure to deal effectively with such obviously improper management behavior.*

On the other hand, the reward system seduced Jake and others like him into believing that they are "the best" because they have been tolerated, patronized or ignored for so long. In this organization, Jake and others inferred that lack of attention indicated support for their behavior and their overall approach to management. The actual lack of supervision reinforced dysfunctional behavior.

Predictably, when Bob, his boss, finally gave him the feedback he needed, Jake was outraged. He fumed that he felt betrayed after being praised for his approach to management for so long. "What have I done wrong?" he bellowed. Hadn't he done everything he had been asked? After all, he had never heard anything about being too aggressive, belligerent, hostile or all of the other arrows that were now being shot in his direction.

Certainly, he had been tough, but the job demanded that he be tough. "And besides," he queried, "who are these individuals suddenly attacking my reputation? Let them accuse me to my face. If they are afraid, they don't deserve to be listened to."

So, my client asked, "What is the antidote for this very real and difficult problem?" While he recognized that he and others were guilty of their own supervisory misconduct, he was more interested in quick action that would turn around a rapidly deteriorating situation with Jake and, presumably, others. He faced an uncomfortable question of ethics on the one hand and practical problem solving on the other.

From a systems perspective it was essential that management recognize that Jake is a symptom and not "the" problem. Clearly, it was going to be much more difficult to implement the concepts of collaboration, cooperation, and participative management than to understand them.

One problem of this "new management" perspective is that the words are so easily spoken and so difficult, without proper training, to make meaningful. The values of domination, control, and intimidation appeared to be deeply ingrained in the system, just as the norm of 'not really supervising' or holding people accountable for their

negative management behaviors had been acceptable. Meaningful change would require time, financial commitment, and retraining so that the spoken values aligned themselves with the skills and behaviors of the new management practices that were now in vogue.

Above all, it would necessitate upper management modeling more positive and effective behaviors. They must first be willing to own their part of the problem. They consistently focused their attention on short-term results at the expense of long term morale and productivity. Historically their response to such a predicament would be to "fix" those representing the problem or symptoms. They fail to comprehend how, over time, they had colluded to both create and maintain the problem.

As for Jake and others like him, something had to occur soon because continuing to condone his abusive attitude made any efforts at meaningful change a joke in the eyes of the employees. While the system change might take years, the Jake issue had to be addressed immediately. People were, in fact, waiting to see if the new initiatives by management had teeth. Dealing with Jake would prove to be a highly visible and critical first step.

### **360° Feedback: a Response to Jake and His Manager's Dilemma**

Most of the time, firing someone represents a last straw after tolerating ineffective behavior for years. It's the angry "I've finally had all I can take of so and so's attitude, or behavior" response. As with Jake, where people had long hoped that he would somehow get the message through osmosis or some other magical act, there had been little feedback, and no re-education through appropriate courses or mentoring. 360 degree feedback provides a decisive, positive and ethical response to Jake. But it demands that management must acknowledge that they are part of the problem and that Jake deserves a real opportunity to change and get with the program. The underlying assumption is that it is unfair to expect quick change after years of tolerating and reinforcing his abusive approach to management.

This approach *cannot* be an insidious ploy on the part of management to prove their case against Jake so they can get rid of him and not be sued. Without believing that he and others like him are capable of change and deserve the opportunity, the effort will result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, failure for Jake and the sad realization by management and others that they knew all along he couldn't be saved. Going through the motions is not acceptable—real effort to save Jake is essential. Put simply, he is a victim of management's negligence.

For his part, Jake will have a tough row to hoe. Change of this magnitude is never easy, especially when it deals with long-standing habits and previously supported behaviors. But, it needs to be noted, *we are not attempting to change the essence of who Jake is, only how he "chooses" to behave toward those who report to him.*



This distinction is critical and built on the premise that Jake, just as in the case of the old man on the bus, knows exactly what he is doing when he chooses to be abusive, intimidating or controlling. It also assumes that, at 52 and with nearly fifteen years to go before retirement, he has considerable incentive to alter his style and general approach to his management.

Too often we are led to believe that someone is a lost cause because their particular behavior as a leader is inherent in their nature; that some immutable, genetically implanted pattern conditioned them at an early age and is impossible to change. But people behave in ways that are easy, comfortable, and for which they are rewarded. If such behaviors are no longer deemed acceptable and new behaviors are rewarded—change can occur. Also, if the consequences for using them are potentially negative enough, the chance of real change occurring goes up.

*If Jake was required to alter his management behavior to maintain his positive job performance ratings, and ultimately to keep his job, the chances for real change occurring would increase dramatically. Measuring change on Jake's part is at the heart of this process.*

The feedback we've been speaking about could help Jake take his situation seriously and focus his attention on what it took to be successful. Specific action steps could follow; they could be benchmarked to track his success and to determine whether response warranted further support and, if so, what kind.

## **The Origins of Data-based 360° Feedback**

In 1975, our small consulting firm in Philadelphia developed the first approach to what is now known as 360° feedback. We were not trying to help leaders in trouble survive; rather, our program focused on helping good leaders use their time more effectively, motivate others, conduct better meetings, deal with conflict, or handle specific troubling problems. We called the process "Executive Role Counseling" and it was built on the following assumptions:

- Most of us have difficulty understanding our impact on others. We are literally too close to ourselves and lack the objectivity to perceive ourselves dispassionately and accurately.
- We need descriptive data to help us be rational as we attempt to scope out our leadership reality and increase our effectiveness.
- When most people begin to understand the consequences of their behavior — and are provided specific help and strategies to overcome what they and others perceive as negative results—they will be motivated to improve their own performance.

- Most astounding is what happens to people when they realize that there are few secrets. The hard reality is that others know us well, warts and all. 360° feedback, through systematically gathering candid information from those we influence, reveals just how transparent we are.
- If we assume others really know our frailties and foibles, we can begin to address them more directly and honestly. It truly changes the game of life for many and reduces the need to continue fooling both ourselves and others.

Over the years, the truth of these assumptions has been translated into an entire movement within modern management.<sup>1</sup> By offering leaders like Jake periodic assessments of their actual management behavior it is possible to help them work toward positive behavioral improvements that can dramatically influence the quality of both their leadership and their individual effectiveness.

In the rest of this chapter, we will see the detailed strategy we used to help Jake turn around and become a more effective leader at the age of fifty-two. The process is neither costly nor complex and is within the capacity of any boss who has the patience, commitment, and sensitivity to help an employee save his job. It is a reflection of what is best about the new management strategies being pursued within organizations.

### A 360° Turnaround

After Jake's typically defensive response to the idea that he might be a less-than-perfect manager, rather than attacking his behavior and obvious denial, Bob suggested to him that he had a dilemma. While he didn't want to put undue weight on hearsay, if people were afraid and intimidated it was essential to ascertain the issues and try to correct them. Bob believed that Jake would want the truth. That meant he would require additional information. He suggested that he and Jake develop a number of questions to describe the behaviors they each valued most in a leader within the organization. They would then decide who among those familiar with Jake as a boss, colleague or friend could best respond to the agreed upon questions and, eventually, if Jake should address any issues suggested by the data; if necessary, they would create action strategies that they could monitor together. He noted that even if the data, for some reason, turned out to be less than positive, the process would be perceived as a

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<sup>1</sup> Ever since 360 feedback has caught the imagination of upper management, it has attracted an army of consultants and organizations dedicated to helping and offering one-of-a-kind data, support, data interpretation, and strategic problem solving. The price for this management ticket can be extraordinarily high; such organizations differentiate themselves by offering increasingly stylized approaches, sophisticated and complex data, and related information. However, you can undertake 90 percent of the data gathering and related methods with easy-to-follow guideline. Once again, the key is measuring what truly matters. Overcoming ineffective behavior assumes that individuals interested in improving their performance could replicate what we did for Jake. The same principles could be utilized in a team approach as well. Outside help may be desirable, but it is not necessary to be successful.

developmental intervention, providing new choices for Jake and the opportunity to improve his effectiveness.

Jake grudgingly accepted the process. He admitted that during his entire career he had received virtually no feedback except for discussions about salary increases, and an occasional pat on the back when he completed a project. Still, he had concerns and wondered why he was being singled out in this instance when there were lots more like him. He was suspicious, but he couldn't resist a procedure that would potentially disprove critics who were tarnishing his good name.

Bob asked him to list ten to fifteen leadership behaviors he thought were important to his being a competent leader, giving special attention to those values the leadership team supported and that represented the newly directed shift in management practices. As his boss, Bob would also think of an equal number of values / behavioral characteristics; then they would negotiate a satisfactory list of between twelve and twenty questions based on these behaviors. The two lists were as follows:

**Jake's List**

1. Is organized
2. Is goal directed
3. Maintains control
4. Commands respect
5. Communicates well
6. Takes charge
7. Disciplines people fairly
8. Holds people accountable
9. Has a sense of humor
10. Treats people equally
11. Gives clear directions
12. Runs an efficient meeting
13. Is open to new ideas

**Bob's List**

1. Listens well
2. Works well with people
3. Delegates effectively
4. Is well organized
5. Collaborates effectively
6. Holds people accountable
7. Communicates clearly
8. Is easy to approach
9. Problem-solves effectively
10. Plans effectively
11. Is good at conflict resolution
12. Is patient and calm
13. Is a good meeting facilitator
14. Is open to feedback
15. Treats people fairly

Jake and Bob agreed that they could each choose five of the criteria from their own lists, and that these criteria would eventually be laid out as items on a ten-point scale. Then they would agree on as many others as they could, up to twenty.

It was obvious from the outset that Jake and his supervisor were approaching management from "slightly" different points of view. As might be expected, Jake's items

leaned toward behaviors that were control oriented. Bob on the other hand, clearly aware of other issues, focused more on process—on Jake's relationship with those working for him. The ensuing discussion enabled Bob to explain his own view of management and why he felt some items were important to him. Similarly, Jake was able to articulate his own view. Leadership Development Assessment, Part 1, is the eventual measurement instrument they built for Jake. (See Figure 1.)

The assessment instrument was designed to reveal many of Jake's strengths and limitations. Jake was to buy in on all the items, and there was to be a clear understanding why the particular items were been chosen over others. The intent was not to paint Jake into a corner and slight his many strengths. However, it was also evident that some of his strengths had become excessive, and they were no longer proving to be assets to him.

In addition, not all aspects of Jake's leadership that were causing problems for employees were identified in the fourteen agreed-upon scaled items. Many of the issues that were not identified would be uncovered in the second part of the assessment. With this in mind, Jake and Bob agreed on a number of open-ended questions that would allow for an even more telling picture of his management style. The questions were designed to provide specific examples of how he diluted or enhanced his effectiveness.

Finally, Jake was asked to answer both the open-ended questions and the scaled items from two perspectives: first, as he saw himself in his role at the time and, second, as he believed those responding—on average—would perceive him. In a sense, he would try to predict what the responses would be from those whose opinions he was seeking. Because he had had so little feedback over the years, there would inevitably be areas of discrepancy that would contribute to his understanding of his own leadership. By estimating what he believed others would say and comparing these responses to his own view—as well as those of his supervisor, Bob—he could ascertain how in touch he was with reality. Further, he would learn if and where his own perception had been flawed.

The Leadership Development Assessment, Part 2 (see Figure 2), is the second instrument Jake and Bob agreed to. Again, the questions are simple, direct, and potentially useful for gathering information.

### **Laying the Groundwork for 360° Feedback**

Part of the success of the 360° experience depended on how believable Jake was in convincing the respondents that he seriously intended to take a hard look at his own behavior. As far as his employees were concerned—many of whom had problems with him—they not only had to believe in his good intentions, but they also had to feel secure in their anonymity.

Figure 1

**Leadership Development Assessment, Part 1**

**Indicate your relationship to Jake:**  
 \_\_\_\_\_ friend or family    \_\_\_\_\_ employee    \_\_\_\_\_ colleague    \_\_\_\_\_ other

**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following items relating to my behavior as a leader based on your personal knowledge of me. I am attempting to assess my own effectiveness and would appreciate your being as honest and straightforward as possible. Return your anonymous evaluation in the attached envelope to the outside resource, who will tabulate and interpret your responses. I will then be given the results and will use them as part of an ongoing leadership development process. Thank you.

For each item, circle the number on a scale of 1 to 10 that best suggests Jake’s usual behavior. In number 1, for example, 1 = most disorganized and 10 = most organized.

1.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	IS DISORGANIZED					IS WELL ORGANIZED					
2.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	IS DIFFICULT TO APPROACH					IS EASY TO APPROACH					
3.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	DOES NOT LISTEN					LISTENS WELL					
4.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	DOES NOT SET GOALS					SETS CLEAR GOALS					
5.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	DOES NOT HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE					HOLDS PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE					
6.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	RUNS INEFFECTIVE MEETINGS					RUNS EFFECTIVE, ENGAGING MEETINGS					
7.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	IS A POOR COMMUNICATOR					IS AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR					
8.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	USES LITTLE OR NEGATIVE HUMOR					USES HUMOR EFFECTIVELY					
9.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	TREATS PEOPLE UNFAIRLY					TREATS PEOPLE FAIRLY					
10.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	DOES NOT COLLABORATE EFFECTIVELY					COLLABORATES EFFECTIVELY					
11.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	IS NOT OPEN TO FEEDBACK					IS OPEN TO FEEDBACK					
12.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	FINDS DELEGATING DIFFICULT					DELEGATES EFFECTIVELY					
13.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	HANDLES CONFLICT POORLY					HANDLES CONFLICT WITH EASE					
14.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	IS OFTEN IMPATIENT OR REACTIVE					IS PATIENT AND CALM					

Figure 2

**Leadership Development Assessment, Part 2**

**Indicate your relationship to Jake:**  
\_\_\_\_ friend or family \_\_\_\_ employee \_\_\_\_ colleague \_\_\_\_ other

**Directions:** Please answer each of the following questions in the space provided. Specific examples will be greatly appreciated and will enable Jake to focus on areas of needed development.

**Question 1:** Please indicate Jake's three greatest strengths or the assets he has as a leader that you believe he should maintain.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 2:** When you see Jake approaching you, what are the three strongest feelings or thoughts that come to your mind?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 3:** What are the three behaviors that are most critical in blocking Jake from being as effective a leader as he could be?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 4:** If you could give Jake two pieces of advice that would help him in his role but that, for whatever reasons, you might be afraid to give him, what would they be? (Again, please be specific.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**Question 5:** If you were Jake, in his role as the leader of his area, what would you do immediately to improve morale and productivity? Please be specific and assume the same personnel and there has been no large windfall of money in his budget.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

We cannot overestimate how fearful people become when their careers can be jeopardized. This was especially true with Jake, who had often retaliated against those who crossed him. To make matters worse, his defensive attitude and pattern of denial offered little reason to expect much from his initial efforts. For many respondents the question was, *“Why should I risk potential negative consequences for telling the truth?”* Again, building safety and confidentiality into the process was essential, as was the need for Jake to show his enthusiasm for the process itself.

## **Orienting Jake and His Employees**

In the first meeting between Jake and Bob, something unexpected happened that helped to create a more positive attitude. After hearing the concern over his behavior and management style—especially given the direction the organization was taking—Jake had responded in a typical fashion. He had blustered and attacked his accusers. He suggested that Bob was unfair and that he had never heard any of these concerns previously. Instead of rolling over and passively accepting his outrageous and intimidating behavior, Bob, said calmly, "This appears to be exactly what people have been talking about, and it's no longer acceptable. Your typical response to someone who differs from your opinion or way of thinking is to attack, deny, and overpower. If you did it to me, a person with some authority over you, I can only imagine what you would do to one of your direct reports.

"Let's face it, you can be threatening and overbearing. I don't need much more than your present reaction to validate much of what people are saying. However, to be fair and in order not to judge you prematurely, I'm going to suggest a means of approaching the data so that we can develop a clear picture of your true situation as objectively as possible."

Bob then laid out the fundamentals of 360° feedback and what it would take to make it work.<sup>2</sup> He expected that Jake would engage the process fully and openly, and that, based on what the data revealed, he and Jake would spend the next few months working to get him on track.

After perhaps three months, they would review the results of the action plans based on the 360° data, and take a more definitive look at Jake's future. What made Jake all of a sudden so conscientious and open was that at some level he knew that the game was up and that he would have to begin taking a serious look at his own management style as well as at the new ideas advanced by upper management. And it was also clear that

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<sup>2</sup> 360° feedback is often utilized strictly as a critical piece in the process of leadership development with no relation to compensation, advancement opportunities, or, as in Jake's case, specific problems. In fact, it is being used increasingly as a normal part of the supervisory cycle, separated from quantitative goals and performance-related requirements.

Bob's own behavior and his attention to Jake, who had been a simmering problem for a long time, was changing as Bob's own skills and attitudes began to reflect the new direction of management.

As a result, after some coaching from Bob, Jake discussed the situation with his nine employees. He asked for their help in his self-improvement program by filling out two questionnaires. He told them that he heard some unsettling information and wanted a better picture of reality. He even stated that he was prepared to review the results with the group. He indicated he was asking his boss, Bob, and six to ten others (from outside the workplace) who knew him well to complete the questionnaires. He also mentioned that he would compare the collected data with his own assessment of himself and what he thought they and others would say.

He then distributed the two assessment questionnaires, along with envelopes addressed to an external professional previously used by the division. The consultant would tally and interpret the data and ensure confidentiality. Because he was interested in each person's *individual* response, he requested that the members of the group sit some distance apart.

Finally, he told the group that they would be working closely with his own boss to understand the data and to build specific action plans. He said that he would probably ask them to respond to the questionnaires again in six months to evaluate his progress; he emphasized that it was important for them to be candid because the current information would be used to benchmark his improvement. He emphasized that what he was doing was consistent with management's new emphasis on data-based inquiry. Although the process would be challenging, he saw it as essential to his growth and hoped that he could count on their candor and cooperation.

### **Analysis and Interpretation of 360° Feedback**

Even though the two instruments were designed for simplicity and cost effectiveness, they generated a huge amount of data that could be used to support Jake in his efforts at self-improvement. As always, with a sample of only twenty respondents, including him, the results should be accepted with reservations. Nevertheless, the fourteen questions in the Leadership Development Assessment, Part 1, would predictably generate some valuable and irrefutable patterns of behavior.

The data from Jake's nine employees could be taken alone and would be extremely helpful. The added data from family, friends, and colleagues, however, would make more apparent the areas of strength and needed development. Furthermore, the potential discrepancies between Jake's perceptions and others', including Bob's, could provide additional useful information. Once one begins to ask the right questions and probe the obvious relationships, reviewing such data is not difficult. But since we rarely do this, the following approach should prove helpful.



## The Great Reversal Approach

The first rule of all data analysis and interpretation is that it matters little how valid, reliable and objective the data collected are if the individual or organization doesn't own them. The issue for Jake, as it would be for anyone receiving such information, was for him to consider it a gift, perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take a hard look at himself and move forward as a more effective leader.

Most of us rarely, if ever, receive quality feedback that reflects who we are to others and how we affect them. It is little wonder, then, that our misperceptions are rampant. Because Jake pushed people away, intimidated those around him, and controlled the information he received, he heard what he wanted to hear and virtually never received anything but positive information. Realizing that it would be difficult for Jake to hear what could be uncomfortable information, Bob had him take the tallied information overnight, without any accompanying interpretation. He instructed Jake in great detail how he might begin to draw implications for his role as a leader. In addition, he asked Jake to consider what forces in his early development, as well as in later adult years, had shaped his current values and approach to leadership.

To help Jake gain some distance and objectivity, Bob suggested that he attempt to act as though he, Jake, was a consultant who was asked to answer some of the following questions about Jake the leader, person, friend, and family man. Having responded to these questions as fully as possible, he would then return to Bob, who, would act as if he were Jake the client, and they would engage in a dialogue. He would ask questions to clarify Jake's interpretation so that they could both understand as much as possible from the data.

Clearly, Jake knew considerably more about the results, their historical roots and implications than anyone else did, and it was hoped that by encouraging him to view the data as a consultant he would develop the distance necessary to be a more dispassionate interpreter. Since Jake realized that Bob was prepared to study the same results and would familiarize himself with their nuances, it was to his advantage to be as open and forthcoming as possible; otherwise, he might appear ignorant, insensitive, or both.

By now, it would have become evident to Jake that this undertaking was serious business and connoted a very different approach to him, his job, and, quite possibly, his career. Reviewing the results in this light would make it much more difficult for Jake to deny or avoid many of the implications from the data. Bob provided Jake with twelve questions to guide him in his role as "consultant to himself."

1. Among the fourteen scaled items in Part 1, which of the scores appear in the good to excellent range, usually defined as between 8 and 10 on the ten-point scale? (Most people will find scores from 5 to 7 in the acceptable range, even

though when asked whether it would be acceptable for those working for them, the answer is usually no.)

2. Usually, scores are clustered in obvious patterns. What do the patterns tell you about Jake's leadership effectiveness? Which behaviors seem to be most effective and which are *least effective*? Are those behaviors in which Jake scored low in any way related? For example, suppose he scored low in listening and in communicating and low in being open to feedback. This result would begin to raise new questions and problems because the behaviors tend to be so interdependent. As Jake attempts to understand how to become more effective in his leadership, what are the implications of such large patterns?
3. Looking at the four different categories of data—from family and friends, employees, colleagues and others—do you find consistent patterns? For instance, is a split among the employee group predictable across the various questions? Do most of them respond together while a few others seem to disagree consistently? Why might this be, and what might be the consequences—if any—for morale and productivity? Or is there a consistent difference between how colleagues score compared to employees or family and friends? Given what you know about Jake (his entire role and behavior) and some of the issues he needs to address as a leader, try to explain why these patterns occur.
4. Are there interesting discrepancies between Jake's view of himself ( $x$  on Figure 3) and the various groups' perceptions of him? Do the employees consistently score Jake's behavior well above or below what he predicted they would on average ( $x_o$ )? What causes such differences? Ask the same questions in relation to how Jake's family and colleagues scored his behavior.
5. Are there discrepancies between Jake's scores ( $x$ ) and the way I (Bob) see him ( $s$  in Figure 3)? Imagine what I will say as to why we differ.
6. Are there significant or consistent differences between how Jake thought the other groups would perceive him on the scaled items ( $x_o$ ) and the way they actually perceived him? Why would this be?
7. In theory, the open-ended data should explain why people have scored high or low on many of the scaled items. What consistencies—either high or low—do you see in the responses to any of the scaled items? What consistencies do you see between high or low scores Jake received on the scaled items and the answers to the five open-ended questions?
8. How did Jake's early upbringing or experiences influence some of the behavior patterns revealed in the responses, both positive and negative?

9. What in Jake's education, training, or earlier work experience helps to explain his particular approach to leadership, the kinds of success he's had, and some of the behaviors that, according to the responses, keep him from being as effective as he might be?
10. Based on your (as Jake the consultant) interpretation of the data, what specific concerns should Jake have concerning his leadership, and what areas appear to deserve greater attention?
11. Are there particular areas of knowledge, skill, or experience Jake could use to help improve his current leadership effectiveness?
12. What areas of identified strengths, which have always been helpful to Jake, may have become overused or excessive and are no longer as beneficial?

The data Jake received without interpretation is summarized in Figure 3 for Part 1, and in the next section, for Part 2. You, the reader, might want to assess the implications of the scaled and open-ended questions. You could ask most of the same questions Jake was asked to answer as if he were a consultant to himself. Then compare your analysis and interpretations to those following the data summaries. In fact, most of the data summaries represent the raw data spread out on a line (in the case of scaled items) and the categorized responses—using direct quotations as much as possible—for the open-ended questions. The questionnaires were sent to a consultant primarily to ensure confidentiality and to protect those responding.

Figure 3

**Leadership Development Assessment, Part 1**

**Indicate your relationship to Jake:**

\_\_\_\_\_ friend or family    \_\_\_\_\_ employee    \_\_\_\_\_ colleague    \_\_\_\_\_ other

**Directions:** Please respond to each of the following items relating to my behavior as a leader based on your personal knowledge of me. I am attempting to assess my own effectiveness and would appreciate your being as honest and straightforward as possible. Return your anonymous evaluation in the attached envelope to the outside resource, who will tabulate and interpret your responses. I will then be given the results and will use them as part of an ongoing leadership development process. Thank you.

For each item, circle the number on a scale of 1 to 10 that best suggests Jake's usual behavior. In number 1, for example, 1 = most disorganized and 10 = most organized.

1.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	cxo			I	If	lffc	llfcs	lcx	I	
	IS DISORGANIZED									IS WELL ORGANIZED
2.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	lll	I	I	c	llfcs	ffxo	fc	llx	fc	
	IS DIFFICULT TO APPROACH									IS EASY TO APPROACH
3.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	lll	lllf	fc	c	lfxos	c	lfc	llx	fc	
	DOES NOT LISTEN									LISTENS WELL
4.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
				I	If	f	lfc	lllfcc	lxos	lcx
	DOES NOT SET GOALS									SETS CLEAR GOALS
5.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
					If		lllcc	lllc	lxos	lcx
	DOES NOT HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE									HOLDS PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE
6.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	I	lff	lllfcc		llcc	lfs	cxo	x		
	RUNS INEFFECTIVE MEETINGS									RUNS EFFECTIVE, ENGAGING MEETINGS
7.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	lll	If	I	fs	llfc	ccxo	fcx	I	I	
	IS A POOR COMMUNICATOR									IS AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR
8.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	I	lfc	ll	llcs	c	I	xxo	lffc	If	
	USES LITTLE OR NEGATIVE HUMOR									USES HUMOR EFFECTIVELY
9.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	ll	lllf	lc	fcx	fcxo	If	cx	L		
	TREATS PEOPLE UNFAIRLY									TREATS PEOPLE FAIRLY
10.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	llf	ll	ls	llfc	ls	fcxo	If	cx		
	DOES NOT COLLABORATE EFFECTIVELY									COLLABORATES EFFECTIVELY
11.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	lll	llfc	lll	ffxo	lfcx	cs	C			
	IS NOT OPEN TO FEEDBACK									IS OPEN TO FEEDBACK
12.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
			lll	I	cs	I	fccx	llfcxo	If	f
	FINDS DELEGATING DIFFICULT									DELEGATES EFFECTIVELY
13.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	ll	llfcs	lllc	lfc	fxo	cx	I	L		
	HANDLES CONFLICT POORLY									HANDLES CONFLICT WITH EASE
14.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	ll	slffcc	llxo	llfcx	lc	I	f		I	
	IS OFTEN IMPATIENT OR REACTIVE									IS PATIENT AND CALM

Note: The following symbols were used to denote the source of each response: direct report/employee = I; Jake's score = x; what Jake thought others would, on average, say = xo; family and friends = f; other = o; colleague = c; supervisor (Bob) = s

## Jake's Open-ended Data Summary from Part 2

Below are responses to the five questions in Part 2 of the Leadership Development Assessment. (Similar attributes or behaviors have been clustered, with occasional quotes that appear characteristic. The numbers in parentheses denote the number of additional responses that used that term or a similar one.)

### Question 1: Please indicate Jake's three greatest strengths or assets he has as a leader that you believe he should maintain.

#### What *respondents said* were Jake's strengths:

(There were no apparent differences across the various groups)

Strong (7)

Direct (3) • No bullshit • with Jake you know where you are.

In charge (1) • In control • Takes control of a situation.

Organized (3) • Gets things done.

Dependable (2) • Does what he says he'll do. • You can be sure the job will get done.

Politically aware

Sense of humor

Hold people accountable (3) • You can't get away with anything with Jake.

Loyal (3) • Dedicated to the organization.

Not afraid of conflict.

Competent • Knows his job.

Clear goals (2) • Goal-directed

Determined (1) • Tenacious.

#### What *Jake thought* were his greatest strengths (x):

Will get the job done

Loyal

Knows the organization in order to make things happen

#### What *Jake thought* others would say (xo):

Will get the job done

Tough but fair

Honest

#### What *Bob, Jake's supervisor*, said were Jake's greatest strengths (s):

Dependable

Well organized

Loyal to the organization

**Question #2: When you see Jake approaching, what three strongest feelings or thoughts come to your mind?**

Afraid (3)	Hey, big guy	Nothing
Get ready for a quip	Watch out (1)	Fun
No Comment (6)	Caution	Go the other way
Be careful	Good guy	Loyal
Hostile	Rigid, inflexible	The Eagles (football friend)
Tough (2)	Friend	The boss (2)
All business	Here comes the enemy	Mr. Trouble, trouble
Friendly (2)	Angry, unfriendly (3)	Know it all
Stay on his good side	He's unconscious	How can I not be noticed?
The rock	Bully	Positive
Controlling		

Each of these items was evaluated as being positive, negative, or neutral. A percentage of each was calculated based only on actual comments made.

Percentage of positive words or comments used—23%

Percentage of neutral words or comments used—17%

Percentage of negative words or comments used—60%

**Question #3: What are the three most critical behaviors that block Jake from being as effective a leader as he could be?**

He gives little thanks (3), Will take you for granted, Shows little appreciation for work well done, Dominant (6) (3), Overbearing, Controlling

He has to get over believing he is the only person who can be right,

Not a good listener (3)

Even when he listens you don't get the feeling he hears you.

Intimidating (6)—Uses threatening behavior to control people.

He will ask for your opinion and then rebuff you publicly when he doesn't agree; he actually shouts when he's angry and it works because people just show up and go through the motions.

Rigid (3), inflexible.

Treats those he doesn't like like sh!t.

Plays favorites (2) if he likes you, its fat city.

If you're on his good side everything is fine, but cross him or make a mistake and you'll know if for years.

Uses negative humor (2) put downs, sarcasm with Jake, humor is always at the expense of someone.

Temper (2) and anger (2) get in the way.

His temper is legendary—he blows and people run.  
He doesn't allow a climate of trust to develop.  
Poor communication (2)—One way he controls people is to hold information that he could share close to the vest.  
Boring meetings.  
Needs to delegate (2)

**What Jake thought were his greatest blocks (x)**

Needs to delegate more.  
Sometimes my opinions are too strong.  
I need to communicate more with those reporting to me.

**What Jake thought others would say (xo)**

He's too demanding.  
He can be threatening, too controlling.  
Needs to delegate more.

**What Bob, Jake's supervisor, believes are his blocks:**

Too controlling, needs to let go more (i.e., delegate).  
Has many people afraid because of his physical size and temper.  
People need to feel valued more—morale appears low.

**Question #4: If you could give Jake two pieces of advice that would help him in his role but, for whatever reason, you might be afraid to give him, what would they be? Please be specific. (These are direct quotes from those participating in the survey).**

1. Spread opportunities and recognition around, everyone needs them.
2. People resent seeing you treat your boss and peers with loving kindness and those who report to you like pieces of nothing... like the difference between share croppers and owners.
3. It feels as though you live by three words: Control, Control and Control. It makes people crazy.
4. Stop abusing people. You seem to be doing it less, but you still use your temper as a weapon, and it can hurt.
5. Relax! Enjoy your job so we can enjoy ours.
6. You take everything so seriously. I've seen you have fun.
7. You are a tough but usually fair boss, but you need to admit your own mistakes and stop acting so perfect.
8. I and others feel out of it in your meetings. If you stopped talking "at" people and involved them more it would help.
9. Try the golden rule on for size.

10. Stop being a bully. As the boss people can't fight back or even disagree with you. It makes people not want to come to work.
11. Lighten up!
12. You have lots of nice qualities. Let people see them more often.
13. You want people to respond immediately to every suggestion you make, yet you seem totally closed to any feedback. Try it, you'll probably like it.
14. You have a lot of respect for knowing your job well but you can easily blow it when you are insensitive.
15. Relax!
16. Listen more—people have good things to say.
17. Some people are underutilized and others used all the time. Try to spread the work and goodies more evenly.
18. Recognize that some people actually work as hard as you, and need praise and recognition even if you don't.
19. Try not to push so much. People will do great work if you get out of the way.
20. How can someone so well organized dress like a slob.
21. People aren't machines. Don't treat them like that.
22. It feels as if you are a bit behind in relation to some of the new management stuff they're asking of others. Why not try them? Things like more participation would work in our area.
23. Take it easy. People make mistakes and so do you. Id doesn't have to be a source of anger.
24. Stop acting like a marine all the time. It's even going out of style in the marines.
25. I'd suggest that you try giving people more authority and control over what they do. You give lots of responsibility and tend to keep too much authority.
26. All work and no play makes Jake a dull boy.
27. This exercise gives me a glimmer of hope that you may have begun to listen to those who can help you.

**What Jake's advice to himself was (x):**

Stop taking myself so seriously.  
Listen to people more.  
Use my time more efficiently.

**What Jake thought was the advice others would give him:**

Delegate more—spread the work around.  
Don't be so hard on people.  
Listen.



**What Bob, Jake's Supervisor, gave him as advice:**

Involve more people in decisions that matter to them.

Let some of the "nice guy" part of you out; I see it when you relate to upper management. (Also with your family).

Listen hard to those who work in your area.

**Question #5: If you were Jake, and in his role as leader, what would you do immediately to improve morale and productivity with the same personnel and with no large windfall of money? (These are all direct quotes):**

1. I'd meet with my direct reports regularly and begin to act more like a coach and guide rather than a "cop" or a dictator. I'd try to know each individual as a person.
2. I'd let those working for me have more responsibility and the necessary authority to go with it so they could do their job without always waiting to check everything out.
3. I'd stop playing favorites... it kills morale and creates an atmosphere of tension and jealousy.
4. The first thing would be to begin talking to people civilly and without the feeling that everything is a crisis. The constant sense of urgency leaves people on edge and feeling exhausted.
5. I'd reorganize our area and redistribute the workload. It's all out of whack with some people doing so much more than others. As part of this, I would start to manage more and stop getting involved in everything. People can handle it.
6. I'd take a vacation and let people know on my return that there would be a "new day" and I'd begin to treat the people at work with more respect and dignity.
7. The first thing would be to try and build a team. Let's face it, morale sucks and a lot of things would have to get out on the table. The most important thing would be to create a sense of "we" instead of him and us.
8. There's a lot of talk about re-engineering. Well I'd assess every person's role and interests and skills, see where we overlap and where we do unnecessary activity and then have us reapportion our workloads so that we have to work with each other more.
9. I'd start treating people fairly.
10. I'd bring in an outsider and do some intense team building where we could work together, play together and have some much-needed fun.
11. I'd have a long conversation with each person and try to help them believe that we can do more, that we can be more cooperative and less competitive, and agree how to work together more. As of now everyone does their own (or Jake's) thing and it's everyone for themselves.

12. Get Jake some training in how to work together with people.
13. I'd do something to work on trust in our work group. It feels as if everyone is at everyone all the time.
14. I'd have a big pizza and beer party as the first of something we'd do every month to celebrate ourselves as a group.
15. We should go away for two or three days and agree on a plan. A means of getting on the same page. Sort of starting over with some common goals and ways we might help each other get there.

**What Jake's response was (x):**

Bring the group together to develop some common goals so we have some reason to talk together.

**What Jake thought others would say (xo):**

Deal with the personality differences and unresolved conflicts in the group—probably with a facilitator of some kind who could also teach us how to work better together.

**How Bob, Jake's Supervisor, responded to the questions (s):**

There appears to be considerable tension in the group that needs to be resolved. The first step would be to create an activity or event which would allow them to experience some success together as a group doing something that would be meaningful (solve a problem, develop mutual values, create a common mission or vision).

### **Jake's Response to the Data**

As both Jake and his supervisor reported, Jake was stunned by the amount, consistency, and predominantly negative flavor of the information he received. There was no room for denial or excuses. When he had agreed to undertake the 360° feedback, it had mainly been a practical decision to placate Bob. Jake later admitted that he thought he could probably blow off the negative data no matter what they suggested.

He decided to cooperate with what he viewed as a charade because, in his twenty-some years with the organization, he had never lost a skirmish, let alone a match. True, he paid a heavy price for his stubbornness and overbearing attitude. Over the years, upper management had begun to see him as a liability and had redlined him in his present role. Nevertheless, they kept rewarding him as a highly effective supervisor who met deadlines and, most important, controlled his employees.

Jake is a perfect example of organizational co-dependency. Management colluded by knowingly ignoring Jake's destructive behaviors; doing so made life easier for them, though Jake's employees suffered. And, on a different level, the employees also colluded (acted co-dependently) when they protected themselves from his wrath. They

accepted his abuse silently, did not confront him, and did not report his indiscretions to upper management—except through informal complaining.

They found it easier to endure the pain because the consequences of telling and being found out were intolerable. They preferred to live with the enemy they knew and hold onto their jobs until something better came along or until Jake was promoted out of their lives. While management and employees lived in silence, their behavior encouraged Jake to act boldly and actually reinforced his destructive behaviors, which took an increasingly larger toll.

Jake's shock and dismay turned quickly to fear and trepidation. How could he possibly keep his job with such heavily weighted negative data? And, even if he could, was it possible to change? Weren't they asking him to be something that he could not be? But to their credit, management believed he deserved the opportunity to change, given the collusion that had reinforced his deleterious style. Management also assumed that people *could* change if they are no longer rewarded for destructive behaviors and have the opportunity to learn and practice more appropriate ones. Though most gave Jake little chance to overcome his old reactive patterns, they were determined to give him an honest shot at real change.

Following is a summary of the information Jake gleaned from the two questionnaires, along with Bob's own interpretations that added balance and insight. Regarding the scaled items, Jake agreed that scores of 8, 9, and 10 were preferred, 7 was borderline but acceptable, 5 and 6 needed definite attention, and anything below 5 required immediate resuscitation. Jake also agreed to share the results with his employees and to develop a specific action plan.

### Areas of strength

Of the fourteen scaled items representing behaviors he valued as a leader, Jake found only four items in the acceptable range, and one of those was suspect. Most of the respondents agreed that he is well organized. Most people, including himself and Bob, scored him at 8 or above; when asked if he were goal directed, he received similar ratings. He was scored lowest on organization and goal directedness by his family, where in a relationship with a strong and demanding wife, he apparently is more *laissez-faire*.

Holding people accountable was his highest score. One can see why management supported him all those years: organization, accountability, and goal directedness were highly ranked, and having good interpersonal relations and maintenance behaviors received little or no reinforcement from management.

The data took on considerable credibility for Jake when he saw that he was given kudos in areas he knew were his strengths. He couldn't easily deny the negative data if people had credited him with many positives. Obviously, there was no vendetta; people who

disliked him didn't simply give low scores across the board. (This is consistent with our experience: people tend to be incredibly fair and will give even the most brutish loud their honest opinion if they have any hope that things will get better and he may improve.)

The final positive score among the scaled items was on item 12, delegation. Of the 20 possible scores, twelve were at 7 or above. The problem was that of his nine direct reports, six had scored him 6 or below, with four clustered at 3. In the eyes of friends, family, and colleagues, and even his supervisor, he was seen as effective at delegating. Jake placed himself on the borderline at 7. Even a superficial analysis hinted at possible trouble in this area for Jake. Delegation would be one of the areas he would most likely have to address.

### More Strengths

Jake wasn't kept around for so many years without other redeeming qualities. The words people used to describe his strengths rang loud and clear: strong, direct, tenacious, determined, get the job done, no bullshit, dependable, and loyal.

The agreement was uniform across all groups. For management, who valued production and control, Jake was perfect. Throw in loyalty and you had someone you can count on to get the job done, take initiative, and not be pushed around by troublesome employees. And it worked, until the fallout accumulated and began getting in the way of (1) productivity, (2) morale, and (3) the new philosophy ushered in by the quality management movement.

### Strengths Becoming Weaknesses

One of the diagnostic questions Bob asked Jake to consider was whether he had strengths that over time had become impediments. When human beings fail to receive regular feedback, they tend to rely on those behaviors for which they are always rewarded. Feedback is used in any system to maintain balance. Upon reading the data, Jake observed that most of his problems centered on characteristics for which he had been consistently rewarded.

Strong became intimidating, direct became overbearing, accountable became fear driven, tenacious and determined became rigid and controlling. It wasn't that his strengths were no longer valued, but lacking the ability or desire to moderate them—and given his propensity toward personal power and control—he had become a caricature. Even Jake admitted to this reality.

Most of us strive valiantly to be successful, to become effective, to develop those skills we need that will help us succeed or, at the very least, not fail. But without some caring and supportive feedback along the way, we, too, will soon be out of balance—overusing the things we've got and minimizing those things less valued that we may need.

The paradox is that for many at fifty, when we need the balance, we may also find ourselves redlined, dead-ended and without the resources to move forward. (That was Jake.) Advancing in the organization in a more demanding role may require less of old ways and more of the skills abandoned on the wayside. *There oughta be a law!*

Jake was a victim of a system that played him like an instrument and failed to give him the feedback he needed until it was nearly too late. In another organization with less heart, he'd have been gone without a look back or apology. In the eyes of most shortsighted management, the problem would have been Jake because it appeared that he couldn't adapt, not management with their years of support for a narrow range of behaviors,

### People's Feelings about Jake

Imagine yourself in a dream walking down a long hallway where you pass everyone you know in your life. And imagine that they, as in Jake's case, are asked to register their three strongest thoughts or feelings about you as a person.

That daunting thought is the beginning of a possible nightmare. Then consider how you would feel if you were to estimate the percent of positive, negative, and neutral responses.

Yet, that is what people do to us all the time without our knowing it. They rarely have the opportunity or, perhaps, the *will* to tell us—and that is a huge source of seduction. People know and see almost everything about us and have feelings about almost everything we do: how we walk, talk, play, how we think and what we say. But since they don't have permission to tell us, this incredible source of essential information rarely if ever reaches us. Yet, we need it desperately if we hope to understand our impact.

In such a difficult exercise, what percent of positive or negative responses is acceptable? Well, we know we can't please—nor should we—all the people all of the time. And our life goal should not be, as Albert Ellis used to say, to be “liked by every single living human being on the face of the planet.”<sup>3</sup> But what would satisfy you? How about 50 percent positive, 40 percent negative, and 10 percent neutral? Or 25 percent positive, 50 percent negative, and 25 percent neutral? Or what about 30 percent positive, 30 percent negative, and 40 percent neutral?

In the first instance, is having 50 percent of people not feeling positive about you satisfactory? Surely not for me, but you may have a greater tolerance for negative opinions. Or what about having more negative than positive opinions—that could be devastating—or don't you care what people think? You are who you are, and if people don't like it they can lump it, right?

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<sup>3</sup> Albert Ellis, *Overcoming Destructive Beliefs* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2001).

It suddenly would become easy to justify, rationalize, and deny the rejecting and negative words. No, I'm not on earth to please everyone, but if I have to get along, depend on others to get a job done, collaborate, or have a satisfactory relationship, I'd better be conscious of how I'm getting in my own way and what's turning others off as a result of my own behaviors.

Many of us can go all the way through our entire educational experience and receive little effective feedback other than grades. This paucity of response inevitably continues in work, and even marriage, where most of us are isolated from information about how we affect others, including our spouses and children. And, finally, what if 40 percent see me as neutral? That could be as threatening as not being liked or even being disliked (the old saying, I'd rather be disliked than ignored).

That brings us to a question often posed by Sal Alinsky, the famous social activist, to his clients, "Do you really want help?" or "Do you really want to know?" Would you? That is the challenge—*having the courage to know*. And then he'd ask it again, "*Do you really want to change?*" He believed the client must first actively desire to change before they'd ever be ready to face the enemy, who, more often than not, is himself.

Here we have Jake who had been going through his life in charge, in control, successful by most standards, and he is asked to take a hard look, to gather data on himself—which he didn't really even want. No, cutting through to the truth of how others see us is not easy. It is tough business even for the most courageous. Don't take it lightly for yourself, and particularly for others.

There was Jake, minding his own business, handsomely paid, acknowledged for years of work well done, suddenly confronted with 23 percent POSITIVE, 60 percent NEGATIVE and 17 percent NEUTRAL. What is Jake supposed to do?

Certainly there have been jokes about his being tough, mean, tenacious, uncompromising like a bear. But to have words like "angry," "unfriendly," "bully," "rigid," and "inflexible" come flying off the page, or comments like "know it all," "here comes the enemy," or "Mr. Trouble" would give anyone pause.

But, you say, he represents an extreme. You chose Jake as an example to make a point. Not so. Of every one hundred manager/leaders for whom we gather 360° feedback, we expect 20 to 35 percent to reflect these scores. After years of "convenience management," and tacitly supporting abuse of other non-productive and dysfunctional behaviors, Jake symbolizes a problem facing many leaders. Jake and his supervisor—after years of collusion and denial—must own this reality and take responsibility for perpetuating a style that has had destructive consequences.

Bob or others must handle the information skillfully and compassionately so Jake can hear what is said, save face, and begin rehabilitating. If you were to gather the data on yourself, it would be important to share it with someone you trust so you could sort through its implications and determine how to respond for on-the-job behavioral change.

Jake felt the negative word responses focused on “fear” and “distrust.” He saw them as symptoms or outcomes of other detrimental behaviors that formed the underlying causes he had to identify, understand, and address. He had already identified strengths that he used excessively, and he saw how they might engender distrust, fear, and intimidation.

When he realized that Bob was not appalled at the data, that he was not going to be dismissed, and that he was going to have the opportunity to change, he accepted the challenge as he always had—with tenacity, goal directness, and determination. He said to Bob, “Well, if we’re going to let it all hang out, here goes...” and proceeded to be brutally frank in his analysis of his remaining data.

### Narrowing the Deficits

The few questions asked generated so much information that it could seem overwhelming. However, there were not nearly as many issues as the variety of negative data might suggest. The challenge was to determine the things Jake could and needed to pay attention to in order to experience success as soon as possible. Usually, a few key attitudes and behaviors cause most of the problems: so a few critical changes can go a long way toward making important improvements.

From the scaled items, as well as the areas of blocks, Jake, responding in the role of “the consultant” reported:

1. Jake apparently failed to communicate effectively at many levels; his style of communicating had to change. He listened poorly to most of his employees. His direct reports tended to find him unapproachable. The fact that three scored a 1, and all but two were under 5, was a serious problem.

Further when asked to hypothesize how the relationship between his employees who scored his approachability at 1, 2, or 3 (five altogether) and the two who scored 8, he imagined there might be competition, favoritism, and possibly jealousy. Clearly, he was going out of his way to treat people differently and reaping problems as a result.

2. This issue of favoritism was again raised in relation to whether people felt that Jake treated them fairly. Seven of his direct reports, along with one family member, scored him as 3 or below – while one report scored him at 8. The same pattern held true in areas of collaboration, feedback, and delegation.

All of these behaviors require a more positive relationship between Jake and those reporting to him. The consistently low scores suggest poor morale and feelings of impotence among most members of his group. And, predictably, family and colleagues rated him 4 or 5 points higher on almost every item than did his direct reports; Jake treated his peers, family, and superiors more sensitively and respectfully than those working closest to him.

3. Additionally, Jake discovered that he had no idea just how deeply people felt about certain issues. For example, he ranked himself high (8) in the area of collaboration, while the median of all the scores was at 4, and his direct reports' ranking was at 2. In talking about this, he said that at meetings he was always seeking people's opinions; apparently, however, he didn't realize that most were unwilling to speak the truth or would defer to him rather than disagree.

In fact, on eleven of the scaled items Jake rated himself in the highest 25 percent, suggesting he was generally out of touch with the feelings of most of those around him. Similarly, he scored himself higher than did Bob on twelve of the scaled items. Again, a critical question for Jake was how could he harbor such delusions and how could he ensure that such discrepancies would not continue.

4. Two scaled items in particular seemed to reflect Jake's leadership abilities. The one with the lowest score (median of 3) related to Jake's willingness to stay calm and patient. He is perceived as over reactive, quick-tempered, and sometimes belligerent; most people feared him. This impatience was tied closely to his apparent inability to handle conflict effectively. It's little wonder most people felt he was difficult to approach. One can imagine staff meetings with Jake providing information but receiving few responses to his requests for questions or information. Typically, the only people to speak out were the one or two who appeared to appreciate him, and he them. Such a climate reduced people's willingness to risk or to disclose personal feelings or ideas that could make them feel vulnerable.

Predictably, Jake indicated that when he observed their protective attitudes, lack of initiative, and increasingly dependent (wait for me to tell them what to do) behaviors, he would feel let down and increasingly less willing to let go and delegate to such non-responsive individuals. He was in a self-fulfilling, unsatisfactory catch-22. The more he showed his discontent, the more the group withdrew and failed to respond.

5. Finally, on the scaled items, Jake noticed that humor had gotten mixed reviews. He admitted that humor at his level in the organization could be a "little rough." But he had never seen it relative to his scores on other behaviors. He now realized that his sarcastic, cutting humor would only exacerbate the passivity, withdrawal, and self-protection in many of his direct reports. On the other hand, those not likely to be afraid or hurt by his comments, or those who could play



the game of old-boy humor with him, saw him as fun to be around. But, as Bob asked, was there an alternative to Jake’s type of “humor at someone else’s expense?”

### Insights from Advice Given

Inevitably, what connects the recipient of 360° feedback to his or her data is the direct quotes from the respondents. Unlike the things that block Jake (question 3 of Figure 2, page 10) that are categorized, the items in question 4, in which individuals provide advice they might otherwise be afraid to give, go right to the core.

Given only this opportunity to say it, and given permission to be honest, most individuals speak their true feelings. Those who rated Jake were no exception. The prescriptive messages to him were poignant, pleading, and sometimes brutally frank. The old adage “Don’t ask if you don’t really want to know” applies double here. What makes the medicine easier to take is that by the time an individual has looked at the first three questions, he pretty well knows what his issues are. Seeing them in quotes only confirms the patterns observed previously.

In this light, Bob asked him to select the half-dozen statements that had the greatest impact on him and seemed to capture the essence of the remaining data. Bob also asked him to explain why he chose the items he did:

*People resent seeing you treat your boss and peers with loving kindness and those who report to you like pieces of nothing—like the difference between sharecroppers and owners.*

The whole idea about favoritism struck home with this comment. Jake told Bob that growing up he had been treated like nothing, and here he was doing it to those he supervised. The appearance of kissing up to his superiors also did not sit well.

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*Relax! Enjoy your job so we can enjoy ours.*

Not only did he not think about work as fun but apparently Jake had never stopped to consider that his ill humor or negative attitude would determine if others enjoyed their work. He simply had lost touch with his impact as a leader. He realized he was known as a person who could have fun outside of work, so why not at work?

He always thought that you come to work in order to work and save fun for home and family.

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*I, and others, feel left out in your meetings. It would help if you stopped talking at people and involved them more.*

Jake said that he knew meetings were not very pleasant, but he viewed them as minimally important, just something to get through. Most of the meetings he attended were a waste, he said, and “I guess I was just keeping up a bad tradition.” He now intended to use meetings to remedy some of what obviously ailed him. Other data indicated the need to build trust, collaborate more, utilize people better, and show a greater fairness.

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*Stop being a bully. Because you’re the boss, people can’t fight back or even disagree with you. It makes people not want to come to work.*

Apparently this affected him greatly. He hated bullies. Yet by not considering the influence of his role and his power, he had unintentionally slipped into one of the easiest of all traps. He admitted that it was easy to shout and intimidate and watch people snap to. That’s how he was raised. But it was embarrassing to face that bald truth.

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*Some people are underutilized, and others are used all the time. Try to spread out the work and goodies more evenly.*

This statement as well as others hinted at both favoritism and an unwillingness to delegate or to see getting a good assignment as a reward and sign of recognition. His problem with control was confirmed repeatedly by Bob and others at each level. But it was his direct reports who he had let down. He admitted that his need to control everything might be the most difficult pattern to break and would need Bob’s help, but he was willing to try.

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*It appears that you are a kind and giving father. Why not use some of those behaviors on those who work for you?*

This comment hit Jake the hardest. He did see himself as a loving father, and the data showed that in most situations, his family ranked him on the scaled items higher than the workers had. He found it interesting that at home, he overcompensated for his own non-caring father, but at work he used more of his father’s qualities. Perhaps, he thought, that was because at work they seemed to value the macho, tough boss more than the gentle, supportive father. He also laughed that he had another “boss” at home to share the demands of parenting.

*Stop acting like a marine all the time. It's even going out of style in the marines.*

Jake laughed when he considered the truth in the statement. First, there was the new Marine Corps that focused more on relationships and teamwork among the men and women. Second, he admitted that he used a marine style to intimidate people when he wanted to get something done. In fact, it was one of the things he had been known and rewarded for. Clearly, it was an old pattern that would not be easy to change, but he was willing to try.

### **The Productivity and Morale Question**

People love to respond to this question: if you were the boss what would you do to increase productivity and morale? The question assumes you want to know and that the individual is placed in a position of power. It allows him to focus on removing the hurts or aggravations that he really believes will make a difference. But remember: to ask and then not respond in some measurable fashion will build even greater disillusionment and mistrust.

Some leaders say they would never ask that question because then they would be expected to respond to everything others ask of them. To us, that is not the issue. People simply need to feel heard and to be responded to in an adult fashion. If something is not feasible, a leader can say so and say why. If something is a good idea, the leader can implement it, acknowledge the source of the idea, and use the accomplishment to recognize and appreciate people.

Refusing to collect good ideas assumes your workers are petulant children waiting to jump on management if their suggestions are not implemented. Clearly, the more combative these relations, the more the expectations will be raised and the greater the need to take action on at least some ideas. However, most people are reasonable; they appreciate being asked and are pleased when their ideas are executed. Following are the most important suggestions Jake chose, along with his rationale.

*I'd have a long conversation with each person and try to help him believe we can do more, that we can be more cooperative and less competitive, and agree on how to work together more. As of now, everyone does their own thing and it's everyone for themselves.*

Jake noted that because the data suggest that he does not know his people well and, in many cases, they didn't trust him, he would have more regular conversations with his direct reports and begin building more personal relationships. This would also address the issue of favoritism and lack of fairness.

*I'd take a vacation and let people know that on my return there would be a "new day," and I'd begin to treat people at work with a little more respect and dignity.*

He believed he needed to do something dramatic—the idea of a “new day” appealed to him, and he was considering how to accomplish this. Whatever the means, it would require more than platitudes.

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*I'd have a big pizza and beer party as the first in a series of "fun things" we'd do every month to celebrate ourselves as a group.*

Jake saw that people who occasionally have fun together feel more committed and very likely care more about work and each other. To do this would reflect a change in his style and send a signal that more changes would be coming. He also realized that it would be uncomfortable at first, and that building trust with himself and within the team would take time.

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*I'd let those working for me have more responsibility and the authority to go with it, so they could do their job without always waiting to check everything out.*

Powerful evidence suggested that Jake was perceived as being too controlling, that he did more of the “work” of the organization than necessary; if he was going to be a leader, he would have to manage better and build trust through effective delegation. He knew this area would require the most help.

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In reviewing the recommendations, Jake believed that the most salient issues were contained in the five he chose for Part 2 of the questionnaire. Between the advice given in question 5, and the feedback he received in question 4, he felt that he had heard the most critical messages.

### **Action Steps for Jake**

At one point, Bob indicated that he and Jake had spent roughly five hours debriefing his data and probing the responses to the questions he had asked Jake to consider. He had new insights about what made Jake tick and felt increasingly committed to his success.

For his part, Jake began to understand how his present situation had evolved and that much of who he was as a leader was rooted in messages and experiences from the past. Although the process was not intended as therapy, by understanding how his strengths (born out of his personal history) meshed with the needs of the organization for a long time, Jake began to understand that the system had changed, but he had not.

Now, could he accommodate the shifting nature of these needs and the expectations of management? Because the data focus had remained on his “behaviors” and not on personality limitations or character flaws, Jake could look at this difficult situation as a problem to be solved rather than a flash point for anger and resentment.

When asked to develop a list of problems that the data suggested needed solving, Jake identified the following needs:

1. To develop a greater sense of team within his group along with increased trust. This could begin with developing some shared values and ultimately more shared goals.
2. As part of developing trust, to deal with the frustration and anger that appeared to exist toward him and among some team members. This would imply gaining skills as a group in dealing with future conflict.
3. To reduce the perception that favoritism and a lack of fairness were involved in how work was distributed and how reward and recognition were earned. This might include looking at a more equitable approach to supervision.
4. To listen better, show more patience, and be less prone to use anger and intimidation as means of control.
5. To develop more creative and collaborative meetings – moving beyond basic show-and-tell information sharing and using the group to solve problems they all shared.
6. To develop a positive and regular method for generating useful feedback for himself and the team as it moved forward.

The pages of data and hours of work analyzing and interpreting the information yielded six important concerns around which, with Bob’s help, serious strategies would be developed. Most objectives centered on the team, their interpersonal relations, and Jake’s role as leader and authority.

All goals were achievable; yet all demanded changes on both Jake’s part and the group’s. Also, as Bob began to support and work with Jake, he, perhaps for the first time, began to understand his own role as supervisor and how, through his absence, he had been a part of Jake’s problems.

He had been virtually invisible for years, letting Jake do his thing with little monitoring or criticism. In a sense, no news – or trouble – had been good news. As the 360° feedback had revealed, most issues had a common theme of control and its relation to Jake’s view of power and responsibility. Had he not gained a very different perspective on these issues, he would not have been willing to consider changing behaviors to become the type of leader management now favored.

## Successful Elements of 360° Feedback

Jake had become a troubled employee, nurtured and reinforced by an increasingly dysfunctional organization. The 360° feedback data for Jake uncovered issues ignored for years that were symptomatic of a less-than-perfect organization and its impact on a loyal and equally dysfunctional employee. By asking direct, unsophisticated questions

agreed to by Jake and his boss, the process of discovery felt both real and emotionally accessible to Jake, who was understandably fearful and suspicious.

In this case, as we've shown earlier, measurement does not have to be complicated or perfect. Furthermore, it is not just for leaders in trouble. It is for managers who want to know their impact fully, to be conscious of the underlying issues they cause that affect their team or organization and, ultimately, their overall performance. Such discovery does not require high-priced outside consultants (although in the case of Jake, an outside perspective could have been useful). It does require a strong commitment from every participant, a willingness to own the data, to share it openly, and to take action in many of the behavioral areas they can control. Our experience over the past twenty-five years suggests that for 360° feedback to be effective, the following must occur in an integrated and seamless fashion.

- Each individual seeking personal feedback must have a deep, abiding commitment. If it is seen as obligatory, those responding to the request to share their perspective will be less committed. Similarly, each person seeking feedback must be willing to talk personally with those providing data to show why their help is important and valued.
- The 360° feedback process is very personal to those seeking information. When possible don't use boilerplate questionnaires. Rather, tailor the questions with information unique to the individual being reviewed and most critical to his or her success. Broadly define the desired picture, as in Jake's case, or focus on a specific issue requiring individual feedback as with Jake and Bob.
- We cannot overstate just how scary it can be to provide unfavorable feedback to a peer or a boss. Maintain confidentiality to make people who contribute information feel secure. Individual information must pass through the hands of only those who are neutral or totally trusted. Such precautions can make the difference between receiving valid or invalid data. It was true in the case of Jake, and it will be true with anyone seeking confidential data based on suggestions found in this book.
- Receiving feedback from a 360° process does not guarantee change. People rarely have the fortitude or discipline to change old habits or patterns by suddenly being made aware of such data. This is a fact and is not meant to be a criticism. Feedback is a single step in a long process that may demand new skills,

practice, and structured support. Here progress needs to be monitored and measured whenever possible. Working with a trusted colleague can make the difference between success and failure. Bob's steady support and unwavering honesty helped Jake be honest with himself and provided the insights Jake might not have had otherwise.

- Most people in a work situation know each other well, and an individual's limitations and needed areas are no secret. If the 360° feedback recipient has the courage to do so, making the data public can lend instant credibility to the process and motivate the individual to succeed in change. An individual who talks about her own areas of desired change is more credible than one who gives participants a summary report of her data. Talking through data with those affected and showing how they can help will generate support and increase the person's chances for success. Paradoxically, showing vulnerability (not weakness) and seeking support can a strong person internalize the feedback and strengthen her commitment to change.
- Developing a plan of action framed in *measurable* outcomes with the help of a coach, mentor, or boss can be crucial. Witnessing our own progress by benchmarking our current level of success against old behaviors and our new standards is the gold standard of accountability. The more others are conscious of our progress, the more we can maintain the support we need. In this vein, Kurt Lewin, the father of this approach, would talk about the difficulty of *unfreezing* our old behaviors and then *refreezing* them at a higher, more productive level.<sup>4</sup> Reducing the tendency to revert is at the heart of any successful change effort. Good intentions mean little until the change has transformed us.
- Finally, change in the workplace usually takes a crisis or problem to motivate the desired change. In the case of Jake, that crisis or problem—until he saw the benefits of change to his life—was that *not changing* would cost him his job. There are few better ways of gaining someone's attention than that realization. Therapeutic change takes on a totally different perspective.

## Summary

Jake's case was extreme, although it could be repeated thousands of times. Rewards are one thing and negative consequences quite another. Creating a contract that *motivates both through rewards and negative consequences* provides a powerful stimulus to spark change.

The potential repercussions if we fail to change are endless; they could include, for example, paying money to a charity, writing a check to a hated political foe, forgoing a

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<sup>4</sup> Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

scheduled holiday, taking a difficult person to dinner, or giving up a sacred ritual for a time. Consequences must have a negative valence in order to be viable, and we must commit to them if the process is to work. They can provide focus and reinforce our commitment.

Also, having the penalty kick in repeatedly allows us to fail and know we will have to pay again if we fail again. Slipping on the road to change is not the sin; quitting—giving up on the commitment to do what you need to do—is. So we must make it tough on ourselves.

Using 360° feedback effectively can have a huge impact on establishing a new reality. Clear, valued information drawn from those we care about is one important example. Further, regular feedback at the end of a meeting that evaluates the quality of the design, the quality of the group's interaction, and the quality of the leader/facilitator's behavior can over time ensure that meetings will gradually improve. But this requires that the information is systematically used to improve future designs. This is the key if the leader is to create a climate of openness and participation, with the focus being both personal and group development.

Everything starts with useful information. Good information engenders trust, especially if the leaders care enough to seek it and then to respond. Making visible course corrections and creating real improvements will build trust and credibility. The notion of continuous improvement was popularized with the advent of the quality movement. But many teachers and advocates in the movement made it difficult and arduous. It can be simple, direct, and ongoing, and it can provide immediate consequences.

*The unembellished viewpoint taken here is the antidote to ineffective supervision. Asking hard questions, gathering direct data, and acting on ever-present information are the keys to personal development, which should be an ongoing and relentless part of any management process.*



# Appendix

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## The Napier Group Management Monographs

These are a series of small, focused volumes that are problem oriented and offer managers and leaders new ways of thinking and coping with challenging issues. Our goal is to provide specific strategies for dealing with specific problems. The reader should finish with additional tools and designs that will extend their repertoire of responses in the particular area under study.

**I. The Power of Design**

A conceptual understanding of the concept of “design” that will provide leaders new insights into their meetings, team building and managing the inevitable conflicts that arise on a daily basis.

**II. Ten Classic Designs for Running Better Meetings**

From our archives of more than a hundred design strategies, we have chosen ten that rarely fail. We take the user by the hand and lead them through each step of the design, offering advice and tips to insure success.

**III. 360° Feedback Reviews—Powerful and Effective Tools for Change**

In the thirty-five years since we introduced this concept, 360° Feedback has become one of the sacred cows of business and industry. This offering will help leaders understand why it often fails and how to make it work, given their particular needs.

**IV. The Case of Jake—A Carefully Crafted 360° Feedback Strategy for Working with a Difficult Employee**

If you work in an organization of twenty or more, you are bound to have a Jake. He is smart, aggressive, competent, sometimes abusive and arrogant—and needs to change or go. He has been rewarded over the years, which makes him difficult to fire. What to do?

**V. The Window Shade Theory of Power and Authority**

It is the rare organization that does not experience conflict over what is Mine, Yours, and Ours. We find this conflict can be a major source of unresolved tension. Here we share a practical piece of theory that can be translated directly into success with your team members—a rarity indeed.

**VI. Fundamentals of Conflict Management**

Here is a primer that will help you see the managing of conflict through a different lens. It offers a good beginning for people interested in becoming better equipped for handling all types of conflict—with individuals, groups, organizations, and most importantly, within themselves.

**VII. Tools and Skills for Handling “In Your Face” Conflict and Difficult People**

Most of us have a narrow range of behaviors when dealing with conflict. We never had a course in managing conflict, yet we experience it every day. Here we explore some creative strategies that will bolster your repertoire of responses for handling conflict with subordinates, peers, and bosses—and even your kids and spouse. We include the use of paradox and other creative strategies.

- VIII. The Key to Cultural Change: Altering Dysfunctional Organizational or Team Norms**  
There is a lot of talk about “changing culture.” Yet, there is extraordinarily little practical advice for well-intentioned leaders. Norms are the underlying stones of a culture. Changing them will move the culture to a new place. This volume is all about norms and how to change them in order to create a more productive and positive culture at work.
- IX. Developing Membership: The Key to Organizational Morale and Cohesion**  
Membership among employees or team members is all about whether people feel they belong. When they do not feel like they belong or are part of the team, morale is guaranteed to decrease and, eventually, productivity. Most managers have not a clue about this critical concept. If leaders do not “get it,” it is predictable that membership will be something to address. We show you how.
- X. Six-Step Problem Solving: A Tool for individuals and Groups for Solving Difficult Problems**  
Most leaders leap prematurely to solutions. The results are unanticipated consequences and mistakes overlooked in a disorganized and time-shortened process. Here we create an easy to follow, stepwise strategy for solving a wide range of problems. It offers a way of thinking about problems and how to engage others in their solution, while increasing their ownership.
- XI. The Group Management Questionnaire (GMQ)—A powerful Tool for Measuring and Developing Team Effectiveness**  
It is rare that a diagnostic tool can lead you to immediate solutions. The GMQ is a 72-item instrument comprised of best practices based on eight team assessment areas. It is easy to score, chart, and graph. It can also be used to benchmark team leader performance over time. We have used it successfully in a hundred organizations over twenty- five years.
- XII. Creating Effective Rules of Engagement for More Productive Teams**  
These behaviorally defined values guide a team in its action with its members and others with whom it deals. They are observable and measureable and without those, teams can lose focus and be unable to deal effectively with each other. They are for the team to develop and to manage them. They are foundational for all team building.
- XIII. Tools and Techniques for Effective Strategic Planning with Your Team or Organization**  
Most strategic planning efforts—large or small—are a huge disappointment for those investing large amounts of time and dollars. Key to success is building creative approaches to engage the multiple constituents invested in a positive outcome. Our extended repertoire of different designs can be adapted to meet the special needs of your team or organization.
- XIV. Seduction of the Leader—How to Build Trust and Speak the Truth in Your Team or Organization**  
Like it or not, the older we are and the more influence and power we have, the less those around us are willing to tell the truth. How to create a sense of openness and trust among those working for us is the bane of most leaders. The more trust, the more cohesion and the greater morale. In a bottom line driven, building such openness is increasingly a challenge. This will help.



**The Napier Group**

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