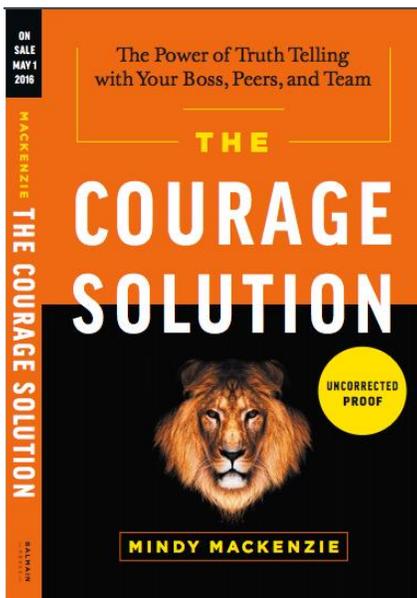


THE COURAGE SOLUTION

The Power of Truth Telling with Your Boss, Peers, and Team

By Mindy Mackenzie



It was during her time as the Chief Performance Officer of Beam, Inc. that Mindy Mackenzie earned the nickname, “The Velvet Hammer.” Not only was she able to lead her executive team colleagues in a refreshing, truth-telling manner, but she did so while maintaining the utmost professionalism and grace. Her extensive background in psychology, coupled with two decades of corporate experience, made her the ideal person to successfully lead the organizational negotiations for the buyout of Beam, Inc. by Suntory, a large Japanese holding company.

After ensuring that the merger ran smoothly, Mindy left Beam to embark on a new and even more exciting journey: making a difference not just for one company, but for many. With *The Courage Solution; The Power of Truth Telling with Your Boss, Peers, and Team* (Greenleaf Book Group, May 3rd, 2016), she draws from her vast experiences in business to help entry-level associates, senior executives, and everyone in between learn the efficacy of truth telling.

The Courage Solution is the culmination of the wisdom that Mindy learned over the course of her 20-year career. Prior to working at Beam, she spent five years at

Campbell Soup Co. and nine years at Wal-Mart, advancing through various Senior Leadership HR and Organizational Development roles. Now an author, speaker, and CEO advisor, Mindy provides sharply focused, quick-read strategies in four key areas:

- **Part 1: *You First*** offers techniques to take ownership and accountability for creating a career and life you love, with increased fulfillment, a greater sense of purpose, and more joy and energy every day.
- **Part 2: *Lead Your Boss*** describes proven techniques to transform your relationship with your boss.
- **Part 3: *Lead Your Peers*** provides methods for accelerating positive peer relationships to improve business results.
- **Part 4: *Lead Your Team*** gives approaches for generating and creating the most effective teams and having more fun while doing it.

With truth telling being the commodity in shortest supply in corporate America today, *The Courage Solution* challenges business professionals to take deceptively simple actions that require vulnerability and courage, which will dramatically improve their impact on the job while increasing their happiness and fulfillment. It is built on the simple truth that *the only thing you can reliably change or control at any company is yourself.*

The book is filled with great tips, interactive exercises, and a variety of relatable anecdotes to help the reader improve communication with any and every colleague – from a brand new associate, fresh out of college, to the Chairman of the Board. *The Courage Solution* covers the following topics:

- Managing the daily madness, and balancing all of the demanding areas of your life.
- Why it's important to express your goals outwardly and always be open about the areas in which you could stand for some self-improvement.
- Why it's important to “ditch the corporate ladder and aim for the mosaic,” because upwards mobility can be attained by growing in multiple directions.
- How to be a good mentee – the mentor-mentee relationship shouldn't be one-sided.
- Why everyone needs a “schtick,” and how to make yours authentic and positive.
- How thinking like an owner will help you get invested in your day-to-day work.
- When it's appropriate to lead your boss, and how to go about doing so.
- Agreeable disagreement – why handling conflict effectively is key, particularly when you're dealing with your boss.
- Why being timid is causally linked to being unhappy, and what you can do to conquer your fears.
- How to fire people well.
- Why you need a personal pit crew and how to cultivate one.

Publication Data:

The Courage Solution: The Power of Truth Telling with Your Boss, Peers, and Team by Mindy Mackenzie; Greenleaf Book Group; ISBN: 978-1-62634-330-6; Hardcover; 256 pages; \$24.95; May 3rd, 2016

About the Author:

Mindy Mackenzie is an accomplished corporate executive, a highly acclaimed speaker, and CEO advisor. Before starting her advisory practice, Mindy served as Chief Performance Officer of Beam, Inc., where she earned the nickname of the “Velvet Hammer.” She was revered for being the truth teller amongst the executive team by exhibiting a bold combination of honesty and empathy. Her impressive career also includes five years at Campbell Soup Co, where she lived and worked overseas, and nine years at Wal-Mart, where she advanced through various Senior Leadership HR and Organizational Development roles. An expert on truth telling in the workplace, her expertise includes leadership and organizational effectiveness, transformational change, culture, and strategy.

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About Mindy Mackenzie



Mindy Mackenzie – or the “Velvet Hammer” as she was affectionately known during her days at liquor giant Jim Beam – is currently a sought-after speaker and CEO advisor to Fortune 100 companies. Previously, Mindy served as Chief Performance Officer of Beam, Inc., where she was responsible for a team of 150 and was part of the executive team that led consistent outperformance and created tremendous shareholder value delivering double-digit earnings growth. It was her ability to lead her executive team colleagues in a refreshing “truth-telling” manner while maintaining her professionalism and grace that earned her the aforementioned nickname. Ultimately, Mindy led the organizational negotiations for the \$16 billion dollar buyout of Beam, Inc. by the large Japanese holding company, Suntory.

Mindy’s impressive career also includes five years at Campbell Soup Co. during which she lived and worked in the Asia-Pacific region and nine years at Wal-Mart, where she advanced through various Senior Leadership HR and Organizational Development roles. Her passion is inspiring business professionals to increase their personal fulfillment through dramatically improving their professional impact.

Mindy also serves as a senior advisor for McKinsey, one of the most prestigious management and consulting firms in the world. She is a frequent guest lecturer for the MBA and Executive Education programs at Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. Mindy holds a Bachelor’s degree from Ambassador University and a Master’s degree from the University of Louisiana. Mindy lives with her son in the Chicagoland area.

Q&A with Mindy Mackenzie

1. Why did you write this book?

In a world where every business professional I encounter is time-starved, juggling competing priorities, and adapting on the fly to near constant change, all while trying to navigate their career (and life!) adroitly, I thought it was time to share a handful of deceptively simple but incredibly powerful tools that when applied to the core relationships at work (boss, peers, and direct reports) make a huge positive difference with the least amount of effort.

2. You have an impressive history with some major international brands — Beam, Inc. being the most recent. How did your career shape your thinking and help you to develop “The Courage Solution”?

Everything in this book is based on firsthand experience, with a lot of trial and error. These aren't just theories but practical solutions that I have come across during my time at Jim Beam, Campbell Soup, and Wal-Mart – three global, complex, performance-oriented organizations. Quite simply, these methods work. There are a lot of highly beneficial leadership and general business books on the market. Unfortunately, most people don't have time to read or apply them. This book is different because it is intentionally designed for a quick-read, quick-application experience with the reader being able to jump to a specific section of the book and get immediate, practical help when they need it from someone who has had to “eat what she cooks” every day for 20 years in the corporate world, just like they do.

3. What about current work environments or cultures makes this book particularly relevant now?

Now more than ever, truth telling is the commodity in shortest supply in Corporate America today. And that's a tragedy because, in this case, the cliché has it right – the truth really *is* the only thing that can set you free. But with constant pressure for more growth, profits, and improved performance—with less people and resources to get them (and with intense and frequent change)—everyone from the C-suite on down is tempted to take the easy way out. To avoid the hard truths facing the business. To avoid the tough conversations and tough decisions. To blame the “other guy” for the reality the business or team is experiencing. The myth that the hard truths always have to hurt isn't actually true, either. It's all in how you approach it. And the only way to get the sustainable business results you desire through the people you work with and for is to take ultimate accountability and display extraordinary courage and vulnerability – with your boss, your peers, the people you lead and yourself.

4. One of the main points you stress in the book is that “the only thing you can reliably control or change at your company is yourself.” Why is it so important for business professionals to remember this?

Because the bottom line at work is this: it doesn't matter what's going on around you. There is only one thing you can change – and it's in the mirror. That might not be good news but it is the truth. You control you. And the best way to start seeing a positive change in your experience is if you start with yourself and see where you get. Changing the one thing you can change at will – your own habits, ways of thinking, attitudes, and behaviors – will begin to positively transform your experience on the job and the results you achieve. But it's not easy and will

require you to be courageous. It will require you to tell the truth to yourself first. And that can be uncomfortable, but the upside is definitely worth it!

5. What is a Personal Declaration?

At its essence, it is sharing who you are, where you come from, what you stand for and value, your strengths and weaknesses, your approach to work, your leadership philosophy and anything else that will help accelerate trust in important relationships at work. When you capture this information on a simple one-pager and then openly share this with those you work for, with or lead, it is transformational. It only fails if your actions don't live up to what you declared.

6. With technology so pervasive at work and in daily life, is it really possible to maintain and advance your career while unplugging completely from time to time? How do you answer the inevitable question, "Why didn't you respond my e-mail?"

Yes, it is absolutely possible to maintain and advance your career while completely unplugging from time to time. Unfortunately, it is very rare. In fact, most people believe the myth that staying connected 100% of the time is a necessary evil if you want to climb the corporate ladder. They are mistaken. And are miserable. And are underperforming because of it, whether they believe it or not. I often say to executives when we get on this topic, "even Ferrari's need an oil change." There are loads of research that support that every human needs times to rest and recharge so they can perform optimally. The issue isn't lack of knowledge. The issue is giving yourself permission to do it when no one else around you is and then the courage and know-how to take the needed, unplugged break. You have to set the expectation with your clients and coworkers, communicate clearly how issues will be handled in your absence, and be sure you have a credible colleague serve as your proxy. When set up properly, it works beautifully. Then you have no problem answering the "why didn't you respond to my e-mail?" question – and it likely won't come up because you communicated clearly ahead of time.

7. As a single mother, you raised your son while climbing the corporate ladder. What is the single greatest piece of advice you have for other women in the same position?

Be nicer to yourself and stop judging yourself so harshly. It is hard being a working parent let alone a single, working mother. Some days will stink. Some will be terrific. You will not do it perfectly. You will need help. Getting practical help on the home front is essential. Keep that prioritized and then try and let yourself off the hook. As the wisdom literature says, "Love covers a multitude of sins".

8. You say "overwork is an addiction." Why do you think it's oftentimes an addiction rather than ambition?

Addictions are dependencies in the worst sense – but they are called addictions because there is an element of pleasure – of a "pay off." Overworking is the same. Many report feeling overwhelmed, over-tired, depleted and generally out of control of their life. And yet they don't see that there is any other way to successfully operate in the business world. In fact, many use the excuse that they are too important or too devoted to their customers to live any other way. Or they blame the boss or the company culture. While some of that may be true, there is a darker side to this addiction to overwork – we like the control. We like the power. We don't want to give up the pleasure "pay-off" of being needed, important, or indispensable to the team. We like to give ourselves a pat on the back for our commitment – we are so committed that we are willing to make any and all sacrifices...sacrifices that are

detrimental to our health and well-being and come at a huge cost both in the short and long term to our marriages and to our relationships with our children. We know this, and we do it anyway.

9. You suggest empathizing and adopting an enterprise-wide mindset in order to strengthen your relationship with your boss. What advice do you have for those finding it difficult to empathize?

If you really want to, you can find *at least one thing* you respect or admire about the person you work for. When things are bad, sometimes you can only think of one. But for most people, when challenged, they can identify several characteristics of their boss that are positive. And it is imperative to keep this front of mind when dealing with your boss. Remember: they have a bigger job than you, more pressure, more priorities, more people to manage. More of everything. That fact alone can help you empathize more. If you genuinely can't do this, it's time to get a new boss.

10. How do you build a rock-star team without individual rock stars?

It is possible to have a team of so-called "B" players deliver A+ results if you define and align as a group to the behaviors and characteristics of a high-functioning, healthy team. That takes time by the leader and serious and committed intent. But it has a huge pay-off. And in the process of deliberately spending time with your team on *how* you will achieve your results and holding everyone accountable to being "all in," it becomes very evident, if it wasn't already, who should stay and who needs to go.

Mindy's Advice for "Leading Your Boss"

Forging a successful and healthy relationship with your boss is an inside-out job. You have to be willing to approach and engage with your boss differently. With a different mindset. With a different attitude. With a different intent. Then, what comes out of your mouth and how you follow that up with your actions will yield far different results.

If you truly can't have a different mindset or intent toward your boss—and you may have very good reasons for that—you need to get a new boss. However, if there is a glimmer of hope regarding your boss, try to apply these techniques first. At the very least, it will give you good practice that will help you start off on the right foot with your next boss. And on the upside, you may actually see positive change in your existing relationship, such that it does not require you to change jobs or companies.

- **Intensely study your boss to get to know the human being behind the mask.** Seek out people who have worked with or for this person for long enough to have a credible view on who they are and how they operate. Ask your new boss probing questions. Be curious. Do your homework. This will save you an immense amount of time and pain later.
- **Understand the company you work for, the business you are in, how the firm makes money, who the end customer is, and how what you do every day fits into the strategy of the company.** You also need to understand the culture and how things really get done. This is table stakes.
- **Get the boss-employee relationship basics right.** Keep your leader informed and never surprise them. When you or your team makes a mistake, 'fess up and move forward with a plan to fix it. And give your boss the benefit of the doubt.
- **Make a concerted effort to elevate your thinking to an enterprise-wide perspective.** Frame your suggestions and solutions to business issues from this context and your ideas will be smarter, which will make them far more likely to be implemented.
- **Get in tune with your boss by knowing exactly what they are wrestling with on a weekly basis.** Ask what their single greatest priority for the upcoming week is, and then strive to bring them solutions to that issue.
- **Provide honest, positive praise and affirmation to your boss—to them directly, and to their superiors and others.** Look for traits that you admire or respect and communicate that. Always be truthful. Be deliberate and diligent about making deposits in your relationship bank account.
- **Be smart by preparing your boss for your pushback, challenges, and disagreements.** Use the LCS (Like, Concern, Suggest) method to frame your differences so that your leader can hear what you have to say and positively respond. Don't suppress your views or just go along with things for political reasons. Tell the truth—just do it wisely.

5 Unconventional Ways to Be Bold in the Workplace

Mindy had a dream: to be Chief Human Resources Officer at a global company by the age of 40. Through a series of bold and audacious moves, she made her dream come true at 39 as the Chief Human Resources officer of Beam Inc. How did she do it? She discovered at a young age that there is an element of career management that entails being courageous and putting it all out there. In other words, **be boldacious!**

- **Don't Be Afraid to Make the Move:** Nine years into her career at Walmart, Mindy realized that while her career was flourishing, her personal life was floundering. Ultimately, she needed a change of scenery. This opportunity came about when she was offered a top job with Campbell Soup Company as their Vice President of HR and Public Affairs, for the Asia-Pacific region. But there was one catch – this dream job would relocate her to Sydney, Australia. She uprooted her young son from his home and set about to make a new life in a completely different country. It ended up being the best decision of her career.
- **Image and Impact:** Studies suggest it takes just 7 seconds to form a first impression. How do you make that first impression count? By dressing the part! Make sure your style matches the substance you bring to the job. Changing your professional “uniform” will contribute to building a greater presence on the job and garner more respect amongst your peers.
- **Falling in Like – The Best Office Romance:** Peer-to-peer relationships are critical to your success in an office. But many times, no matter how much respect you have for your peers, you just can't break free from a state of constant competition. Sometimes these feelings are irrational and confining, but developing a strategy to overcome them is imperative to building collaborative and productive work relationships. Break the pattern of competitiveness by inviting your colleagues to your home! They will be shocked by the invitation and you may be surprised by how much fun you will all have in a more relaxed setting. It may sound a bit old-fashioned, and it's something that's rarely done anymore, but it's a tradition worth reviving.
- **Taking a Worry-Free Unplugged Vacation:** When Mindy moved to Sydney she had never taken more than a one-week vacation, during which she was glued to her phone and email, in her entire career. But seeing her hardworking and happy Australian colleagues take weeks off from work, having amazing adventures with their friends and family, and coming back rejuvenated and refreshed changed her mind set for the better. She realized that what many of us are really saying outwardly, when we argue that we could not possibly take an unplugged holiday, is that we are too important, too critical to the enterprise, and too necessary to our clients to possibly step away. By following a simple, three step process before leaving for your holiday, you too can take a stress-free unplugged vacation and rest assured that business will run as usual without you.
- **Saying You're Sorry:** To quote the great Sir Elton John, “[at the office], sorry seems to be the hardest word.” We tend to view apologies as a sign of weakness. But in fact, they require great strength. The more you apologize, the better you become at apologizing. This is an important skill because a failed apology will make it increasingly difficult to positively interact with your colleagues. A genuine apology is key – just be careful how you go about it. Apologizing at the office is different from apologizing in “the real world.” Depending on the circumstances, there can be office politics to think about and, in certain situations, admitting fault can do more harm than good. That's why it's so critical to follow the three essential steps to make your apology effective.