NECESSARY ENDINGS

THE EMPLOYEES, BUSINESSES, AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT ALL OF US HAVE TO GIVE UP IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD

Dr. Henry Cloud

NECESSARY ENDINGS

ALSO BY DR. HENRY CLOUD

The One-Life Solution
Integrity
Boundaries
9 Things You Simply Must Do
9 Things a Leader Must Do

The Wise, the Foolish, and the Evil: Identifying Which Kinds of People Deserve Your Trust

The time when you get to hopelessness can be one of the best moments for your future. To give up hope that something is going to change when it is not going to gets you unstuck immediately and brings energy. It brings life to the sickness of hope deferred.

And as we have seen, the decisions involving *people* can be some of the most difficult. We have talked about getting to the hopeless moment with people, and also how to design a process of change that actually has hope of being effective.

But how do you know if entering into that process of change with someone is even worth it? How do you know that it is going to help? Haven't you wondered that sometimes? "Are they ever going to change? Are they ever going to get better? Should I really keep working with them, thinking they are going to improve? Are my efforts to get them to change going to help anything at all?"

Or on the personal side of life, how do you know when to invest the effort with someone to work on making things better and when you should tell them that you are done talking about it? With

whom do you try, and with whom do you say, "I'm done talking"? That is a question that, if properly answered, can save much time and heartache.

And it is the subject of this chapter: how to diagnose a person to know whether working on the issue is likely to help or not.

If you are a responsible and loving person, then *you might assume that other people are like you—responsible and loving.* They do the right thing, taking responsibility for themselves, for their mistakes, for their work. And they care about other people and how their actions affect those people. That is what you do, right? Right. You have concern about how what you do affects others. So doesn't it make sense that everyone else would be like you and really care? Sure, if you lived on Mars.

But this is planet Earth. And if you are going to succeed in life and business, you have to succeed on this planet, not Mars. The truth is that not everyone on planet Earth is like you. Not all take responsibility for themselves or care about how their actions are affecting other people or the mission. Moreover, some are even worse than that. Some people are actually out to do you harm.

If you do not accept this reality, then you are going to spend a lot of time wasting time, money, energy, love, resources, your heart, and everything else that matters to you on people who will either squander it or destroy it. That is why this chapter may be the most important one that you read. It is essential to understand that not everyone is going to be open or even desirous of the change that you are trying to bring about.

So how do we know who is trustworthy to continue investing time, energy, and resources in and who is not? How do we know when a necessary ending is required with a person?

We have no crystal balls, and as a result, any of us can get surprised. I have seen "rock solid, good characters," or so everyone thought, go south and ruin lives (although usually there were

signs that no one saw). And I have seen absolute train wrecks turn around and become rock stars. So I would not claim that you can know for certain what anyone is going to do in the future. But . . .

Although predictions made from weather satellite data are not always right, they are right most of the time. They can see what is on the horizon and headed our way, though something still may change. And here is the good news: *there is a weather satellite for people, which will help you be right more than you are wrong.* And if you learn how to use it, you will save yourself untold grief, time, energy, money, and more.

The satellite that will give you the most accurate predictions is the ability to diagnose character. Once you learn the character traits that give real reason to hope that tomorrow can be different, you can know better whom you want to invite into your tomorrow. You can actually know that there is a real reason to go forward.

Likewise, once you know the traits that give zero reason for hope and in fact should help you get hopeless, you will know whom *not* to invite to your tomorrow, unless something changes. And as we will see, whether or not that change occurs probably depends more upon what *you* do than you realize. You have more influence to bring about change than you might think, but the key is knowing what to do with different kinds of people.

In this chapter, you are going to learn a simple way to diagnose character traits that lead to hope, as well as those that don't. And you are going to learn what to do with each type. Different types call for different strategies.

THE THREE KINDS OF PEOPLE

As a clinician, I hate simplistic, popularized, cheesy systems that people use to put others in boxes. Human behavior is much more complex than that, and when I hear those labels being tossed around, something in me wants to rebel and prove that particular system wrong. So here I go, doing something similar. But I would add that

this way of seeing people is backed by a lot of clinical data and re-search, as well as by the experience of many, many people. These three categories are described by virtually every group that has ever studied human behavior. It is depicted in the great literature of the ages, and I bet it will ring true in your own experience with people as well. It will pass the sniff test, I assure you. So here we go.

There are basically three types of people in the world, or better, three styles of behavior that a person can exhibit in a particular time or context. There are many ways of describing these three categories, depending on whether you are a psychiatrist, an em-ployer, a spouse, a lover, or a judge. They all use different words, but the same categories clearly emerge in people's behavior. I like the way that ancient wisdom literature puts it:

1. Wise people
2. Foolish people
3. Evil people

Those are the three categories of behavior that you will find yourself dealing with in virtually any situation involving others. Now here is the kicker: these three categories of people or behavior are very different in what motivates them and what sustains them. As a result, the ways to get them to change are very different as well. Therefore, here is what you have to realize:

You cannot deal with everyone in the same way.

Different people, in different categories, require different strat-egies. If you try to deal with a foolish person, for example, in the same way that you deal with a wise person, he will drive you crazy,

and you will lose time, resources, and heart. And if you deal with an evil person at all, you might lose your business or your life. So it is essential that you understand very quickly whom you are deal-ing with and take the appropriate stances that will ensure that you create the necessary endings.

If you are bristling at such rigid categories, I understand. I do not mean them that way, either, as in reality they are not absolutely discrete. The reality is that most of us have some of all three in us. We can be wise in one situation or context or issue and not so much in another. But the reality is that when you see these behav-iors in the people you are dealing with, you have to act accordingly and not worry about the label. These labels are not meant to be rigid, but helpful ways to identify particular patterns of behavior in people about whom you have to make tough decisions.

Which brings me back to my earlier point about the kind of person you are. Your problem may be that you deal with people in the same way that works for you. Here is what I mean: if you are a loving and responsible person, when there is a problem with your performance or when someone has an issue with you, you want somebody to come to you and tell you. You want people to let you know if there is something you can do better or if you are hurting them in some way.

And when they do that, what do you do? You listen, feel sorry about your performance or your treatment of them, and take own-ership of your performance, results, or behavior. You observe your-self, you listen to their input, and you change. The outcome is that trust is built, the relationship is strengthened, and you have gotten better for the interaction. Therefore, you value input and see it as the way to deal with people.

And that's the problem. Because that works with you, that is what you naturally do with others when there is an issue or a prob-lem or when things are not going the way you'd like them to go.

You address the problem, and you expect others to have the same kind of response when you are in their shoes: you expect them to own up and make a change.

That is a great plan, and you can expect everyone to do exactly that—on Mars. But on Earth, it does not always work, and that is why you cannot deal with all people in the same way. They are not all like you. What works with you will not work with everyone, and it is imperative that you figure out what kind of person you are trying to get to change. Otherwise, you will just assume that all are responsible people who will respond to your feedback. *And the ones who are not will cause you more and more trouble as you continue to give them feedback so they can change.* With them, you need a different strategy. So let's look now at the three kinds of people so that you will know what to do with each.

WISE PEOPLE

I was asked by the chairman of the board of a company I consult with to accompany him to a lunch with the CEO of their organization. So I could better understand what was going on, we met beforehand, and he told me of the concerns that he had with the newly placed leader. He said that he'd been chosen for his operational strengths, which were really needed in the environment at that time in this particular industry. It was a time to organize the chaos, set up new structures, and right the ship. He was perfect for that assignment.

But, the chairman said, he was concerned that the CEO did not seem like a visionary to him, and he knew that at some point, visionary leadership would be important. The operational crises would one day be over, and the company would then need someone to give it a longer-term vision and be able to get everyone on board to realize that vision. He did not see the new guy as being really able to do that. In fact, he had recently watched the CEO handle some current issues poorly, losing opportunities for internal messaging and communication of values, strategy, alignment, and the

like. The chairman's concern was that he was operating well but not leading in the ways that would be required for the long run. So we came up with a list of issues to talk to him about at the lunch.

The challenge for the chairman was that he was still feeling the effects of working with the previous CEO, who had been very difficult to deal with in a lot of ways, particularly when it came to receiving feedback about his performance. As a result of that experience, the chariman had a lot of trepidation going into this lunch, fearing more of the same kinds of defensiveness and denial. He wanted me there to help structure the conversation, to serve as a facilitator or extra voice if needed, and probably to offer moral support in what could be a tough conversation. To say to a new CEO that you are concerned that he is not acting like a leader is a course fraught with potential land mines.

Depending on whom you are dealing with.

The chairman began by telling the CEO that he was glad to have the opportunity to talk to him in this setting, informally and not with the whole board, as he was going to have to say some things that might be difficult to hear and wanted to discuss them before they got to the level where board involvement might be necessary. At this point, it was just informal feedback to see what the CEO's thoughts were on some issues.

It was clear that the CEO could tell that this was not going to be a lot of happy talk. The tone of the lunch got a little more serious—not contentious, but the mood had clearly been set: we are here to talk about some important stuff, and it is not all good. The entrées were on their way, and I found myself wishing he had saved his prologue at least until after I had gotten to enjoy my lunch.

The chairman then went into a pretty awkward presentation of a list of ways he had noticed that the CEO was not acting "leaderly," as he put it. He named several instances in which he felt he was acting like a manager, not a leader, and said he thought that to

make it as a CEO, he was going to have to do differently. If I had not known better, from the content list as he laid it out, I would have thought he was firing him. I braced myself for the response, putting myself in the CEO's shoes, thinking how difficult that feedback must have been to hear. (*Where is my entrée?* I remember thinking. *This could go bad.*)

What happened next literally caused my eyes to water. The CEO looked up, nodded slowly, and said, "You have just given a great list of the things that I need to learn how to do to be a great CEO. Those are definitely my opportunities to grow. I would like to get better in those areas. Can you guys help me?"

I don't exactly know how to describe it, as it was not a business response that was welling up inside of me. It was a human one. My heart was seeing, right in front of me, something that is good and pure about the best of people. The CEO heard frank feedback about himself and how he could do better, received it, and desired to make the effort to grow. Also, I think I was being moved by the very virtue we have been discussing: hope. I was seeing hope emerge before my very eyes. There is hope for people who are receptive to feedback and who take ownership of where they need to grow. This man would do fine. He would learn, and he would grow. And not only was I seeing hope for him, but also for the organization that he led. I saw good things in their future.

We went from there to talking about how the chairman and I, along with some leadership training, could be helpful to him. We came up with a structure for his development over the following year. He applied himself, and we found that he actually had the gifts and abilities to do what the chairman had been asking for, but he never had really seen those things done before and just needed a little coaching. He stepped up and did well. Now, years later, he is thriving in his role. Why? *He is wise.* And wise people learn from experience and make adjustments.

Wisdom certainly means many things. If you examine the various ways that wisdom has been discussed in philosophy, religion, and the behavioral sciences, they all involve a coming together of knowledge, understanding, insight, and discernment so that a person knows what is good and what to do. The bare definition can sometimes make the wise sound like the sage who knows it all, but another key ingredient of wisdom puts the others in perspective: *experience.* Wisdom comes from experience, either the experience of others or of oneself. And to let experience do its work, a person has to be open to receiving the lessons that it has to teach.

That is why I knew that the CEO would do fine. The person who ultimately does well is the one *who can learn from his own experience or the experience of others, make that learning a part of himself, and then deliver results from that experience base.* And that requires being open to feedback. This CEO was doing that. He was listening to feedback regarding his own experience, his performance, and where it was lacking, and he was gleaning insights from the experience of this seasoned chairman and a consultant. As a result, he would become better as he learned what he needed to do. He would use his natural strengths and gifts to implement what he was hearing, and he would do well. It was the wisdom of listening to feedback and learning from experience that ensured this.

Which brings us to the key diagnostic of the wise person:

When truth presents itself, the wise person sees the light, takes it in, and makes adjustments.

You have heard it said of people that they "saw the light." Wisdom is a stance that people take wherein they are open to hearing the truth, so when it comes, they listen to it and make the necessary

changes to be aligned with that truth. Such people take feedback, correction, and training well. When you tell them something about their performance that is accurate, they hear it. They respond to it positively, and they apply it. You don't get resistance or a fight. In fact, they see it as a gift.

The result? They learn and they get better as a result of feedback. Wise people will always grow and get better, and as a result, when you are dealing with one, you have good reason to hope. If something is wrong, they can learn. They don't resist the truth that they have to align with. As the phrase goes, they "take it to heart." No defensiveness.

Now, there is something very important to realize here: *wise* does not mean smartest, brightest, most talented, most gifted, most charismatic, or charming. While wisdom may coexist with all of these traits, it is completely unrelated. It is very possible, as we shall see, to have brilliant, charming fools in your midst whom you or others have been fooled by precisely because they were so smart and gifted. More about that later. But for now, understand that this diagnostic is about one thing and one thing only: *a person's ability to take feedback and make the adjustment.* With people who can respond to feedback, given that they have the gifts and abilities that you need in your context, there is always hope.

The mature person meets the demands of life, while the immature person demands that life meet her demands. You can see how wisdom plays into maturity, as the wise person would take in the truth and adjust herself to meet whatever change truth is demanding of her. But without that ability, the demand would go unmet, and the person would remain unchanged as a result of the feedback, none the wiser. That is why the proverb says, "Correct a wise person and he will be wiser still." Feedback *helps* the wise. They value it.

Traits of Wise Persons

Here are some traits of the wise:

- When you give them feedback, they listen, take it in, and adjust their behavior accordingly.
- When you give them feedback, they embrace it positively. They say things like, "Thank you for telling me that. It helps me to know I come across that way. I didn't know that." Or "I really took what you said to heart, and here is what I did." Or "Thanks for caring enough to bring this to my attention. I needed to hear this." There is some sort of appreciation for the feedback, as they see it as something of value, even if it is hard to hear. You might hear them offer a response like, "Well, this was tough to hear, but it is good. It will help me even if it hurts."
- They own their performance, problems, and issues and take responsibility for them without excuses or blame.
- Your relationship is strengthened as a result of giving them feedback. They thank you for it, and see you as someone who cares enough about them to have a hard conversation. They experience you as being for their betterment.
- They empathize and express concern about the results of their behavior on others. If you tell them that something they are doing hurts you, you get a response that shows that it matters to them. "Wow, I didn't realize I had hurt you like that. I never would want to do that. I am sorry." Or they are concerned about how their performance is affecting the company or the team. "I am sad that I have been letting us down. I want to do better." Or "I will not let that happen again."

- They show remorse. You get a feeling that they have genuine concern about whatever the issue is and truly want to do better.
- In response to feedback, they go into future-oriented problem-solving mode. "I see this. How can I do better in the future?"
- They do not allow problems that have been addressed to turn into patterns. They change. They adjust and fix them. It does not mean that change will be instantaneous. There are few instant cures with no slips, as a goal is always being approximated until one gets there. That is why surgeons in training start on cadavers. But they listen and learn and eventually are wise enough to cut living people. Wise people likewise address their faults, and you see changes in actions and behaviors instead of patterns that go unaffected by the feedback.

Strategies for Dealing with a Wise Person

I have said that the pruning moment happens when we get to a good state of hopelessness, in which we know that more time is not going to help. An ending is needed because more time is not going to make that good bud the best bud, or the sick one get better, or bring the dead back to life. So what does knowing if you are dealing with a wise person have to do with hopelessness?

It tells you whether or not more time is justified in finding out if someone can get better. If you have a performance problem with a person or in some way he is not being the best, which you know is demanded for the position, then you have an important question: do I fix or do I replace? If you remember, that was Jack Welch's pruning command: "fix, close, or sell." Whether or not a person has the traits of wisdom will likely tell you if they will be fixable or not. You cannot fix people who will not take feedback, because from their perspec-

tive, they do not have a problem. So as far as they are concerned, there is nothing to fix. That is why they do not change.

But if a person can take feedback and coaching and use it, there is a real reason to have hope. It may not mean success is certain, as she could take it all to heart and still not have the gifts or abilities needed for the job. But then you would know for sure that more time would not help and your decision would be clear. Both of you have tried your best, and it just did not work. You gave help, she used your help, and still the fit was wrong. Move on down the road, and both of you can be happy.

Can you have hope that is not an empty wish with wise persons? Absolutely. Give them resources, train them, coach them. You will likely get a return on your investment. They will take it in and get better, and you will have avoided an unnecessary ending. If they do all of that and still are not up to the task, it will be clear that an ending truly is necessary, for both of you have done all you can.

The bottom line with a wise person is that *talking helps*. Feedback helps. They use it, so keep on talking until there is nothing left to discuss. In chapter 11, I will be giving some specific communication tips for having these and other kinds of sometimes difficult conversations. But for now, let's take a look at the next category of person.

THE FOOLISH PERSON

I witnessed the following conversation as my client was talking to his product manager.

"Kyle, I want to talk to you about the product launch. There were some issues, and I want us to figure out what happened," Tony, the boss, said.

"OK, let's do it. I got the numbers, and I know that it didn't get to where it was supposed to," Kyle replied.

"Right, what do you think happened?" Tony asked.

"Well, I think marketing just missed it. They had this whole emphasis for the local saturation, and I don't think that is where the real interest is," Kyle explained.

"I talked to them," my client said, "and they said that they were limited in the exposure they got because the coverage they wanted from the ads didn't happen. They said it conflicted with ads the television network had already sold before us."

"That could have happened, those guys at _____ network are idiots," Kyle said.

"What do you mean?" Tony asked.

"Well, they are so unorganized, they always screw it up."

"When I talked to media, they told me that the date had not been reserved for our ads because your final graphics hadn't been sent in time, and they said they had asked you for them weeks before and never got a reply—even after several requests," Tony said.

"I doubt that's true, but it could be. IT has lost a lot of e-mail lately, and it is possible that I never got it," he said.

"But that isn't what concerns me," said Tony. "This is not about IT or the network or e-mail. The launch is *your* deal. If it works, it is because you made it work, and if the TV network was not cued up to go in time, it seems like you would have been monitoring this to know that we had a problem. Then, even if it *were* IT, you would have known it and been on top of it. As a result, we have really missed our number, and it is going to affect a lot. I need better than this."

"But I can't control the network. I made sure that media had put in the buy, and they should have known that it was not all nailed down. They should have seen this," he retorted.

"Kyle," the boss said, "media reports to you in this chain. This is yours."

"Yeah, but I did my part with them. If the galleys weren't there,

I had given them the time schedules, and they should have caught it," he explained. "Besides, that was the week that you pulled me over to work on next year's catalogue. I wasn't even here to be aware of what they were doing."

At this point, I interrupted the conversation. I turned to Tony and asked him a very simple question: "Tony, how are you feeling about this?"

Tony sighed and said one word: "Hopeless."

"I can see why," I said. "Seems like the problem is never here in the room."

And that is the problem with the fool. Whereas the chief descriptor of the wise person is that when the light shows up, he looks at it, receives it, joins it, and adjusts his behavior to align with the light, the fool does the opposite: *he rejects the feedback, resists it, explains it away, and does nothing to adjust to meet its requirements.* In short,

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The fool tries to adjust the truth so he does not have to adjust to it.

We saw how the wise person adjusts to the truth. In contrast, the fool adjusts the truth so he has to do nothing different. He is never wrong; someone else is. If you have had the above conversation, which I am sure you have had with the Kyles in your own work or life, you know exactly what Tony was feeling: hopeless. The reason is that Kyle was taking no ownership of the problem. Giving feedback was hopeless. Therefore, as we shall see, *it makes no sense to keep giving it,* but more about that in a moment.

You probably know this experience. It is the gnawing feeling that you get when you have the same conversation with someone about the same issue over and over, and slowly sink into the frustration and despair of hope deferred. You wish that the person

would hear what you are saying, as your intent is not to persecute but to solve a problem so that something will work or that your relationship will get better. But you get nowhere and mostly feel stuck. You try over and over, and yet nothing ever happens.

The point to understand here is that that is exactly what someone engaged in the foolishness of defending against seeing the truth is trying to accomplish. She is in a stance that is designed not to see the truth or grasp it or in any way adjust to it. Her goal is to avoid ownership of the feedback, which would require her to take responsibility and change. As a result, she constantly produces collateral damage for others, does harm to the cause, and everyone but her feels the effects. So, the frustration all around her grows.

Just as *wise* does not necessarily mean smart or extremely gifted, *foolish* does not mean dumb or lacking talent. Ironically, a fool actually may be "the smartest person in the room," or the most gifted or charming. Because of that, fools often keep us confused because of their many wonderful attributes. Our attraction to their talents and gifts keeps us hooked and makes it difficult to give up on them. So we continue to try, thinking that "one more conversation" will do the trick. But we get more of the same kind of behavior each time we try to solve a problem or give input, coaching, or correction.

Traits of Foolish Persons

- When given feedback, they are defensive and immediately come back at you with a reason why it is not their fault.
- When a mistake is pointed out, they externalize the mistake and blame someone else.
- Unlike the wise person, with whom talking through issues strengthens your relationship, with the foolish person, attempts to talk about problems create conflict, alienation, or a breach in the relationship.

- Sometimes, they immediately shift the blame to you, as they "shoot the messenger" and make it somehow your fault. "Well, if you had given me more resources, I could have gotten it done. But you cut my budget." Or "That's because you told me to make sure that I focused on the other project." Or "You never told me that you wanted it that way." The energy shifts, and suddenly you find yourself the object of correction.
- They often use minimization, trying to in some way convince you that "It's not that bad" or "This really isn't the problem that you think it is. It's not that big a deal."
- They rationalize, giving reasons why their performance was certainly understandable.
- Excuses are rampant, and they never take ownership of the issue.
- Their emotional response has nothing to do with remorse; instead they get angry at you for being on their case, attacking with such lines as "You never think I do anything right," or "How could you bring this up after all I have done?" Or they go into the "all bad" position, saying something like "I guess I can't do anything right," which is a cue for you to rescue them and point out how good they really are.
- They begin their response with "Well, you . . ." and get you off-topic by pointing out your flaws.
- They have little or no awareness or concern for the pain or frustration that they are causing others or the mission. While their behavior or performance creates a lot of collateral damage for others, they seem oblivious to it and see others as the problem for thinking that there is an issue.
- Their emotional stance toward getting corrected is oppo-

site to that of the wise person, who embraces the feedback and shows appreciation for your taking the effort to share it. Instead, their stance is one of anger, disdain, or some other fight-or-flight response. They either move against you or move away from you as a result. I have heard many people say that after they confronted someone with something, the person never talked to them again if they did not have to.

- They see themselves as the victim, and they see the people who confront them as persecutors for pointing out the problem. They feel like the morally superior victim and often find someone to rescue them and agree with how bad you are for being "against" them.
- Their world is divided into the good guys and the bad guys. The good ones are the ones who agree with them and see them as good, and the bad ones are the ones who don't think that they are perfect.

The important theme to recognize in all of these traits is a lack of ownership of the issue and a refusal to take responsibility and change behavior to meet the demands of life. Instead, fools want reality to change for them. They always want the outside world to change instead of them.

Strategies for Dealing with the Foolish Person

We began with the problem that loving and responsible people have—they assume that everyone is like them and will respond to feedback. They think that if they just point out a problem to someone, the other person will respond as they do and take responsibility and change. But, as we have just seen, foolish people are not like them at all. In fact, they are exactly the opposite, desiring to *not change and not listen.* Which brings us to the strategic issue: Whereas

talking about a problem to a responsible, wise person helps, talking about a problem with a fool *does not help at all. Therefore, further talking about problems is not the answer.*

So stop talking.

At least about the problem. Remember the definition of *crazy*—continuing to do the same thing expecting different results. If you have had this conversation sixty-three times, do you really think that number sixty-four is going to do the magic? The not-so-technical word for this is *nagging.* Nagging or any other kind of repeated attempts to get someone to listen should never have to be done, and if you are having to do it, something is wrong. After repeated attempts to get him to see an issue, *it is time to quit talking about the problem and time to have a different kind of conversation.* Stop talking about the problems, and talk about a new problem: *the new problem to talk about is that talking doesn't help.*

At this point, it is time to change the conversation from trying to get them to change to talking about the fact that no change is happening and that is the problem.

"Joe, I have talked to you about *a*, *b*, or *c* on several occasions, and I do not want to talk about those anymore. It is not helping. What I want to talk about now is a different problem. The problem that I want to talk about is that trying to talk to you about a problem does not help. So what would you suggest we do about that? How can I give you feedback so that you will listen to it and do something about it?"

Sometimes this may get a response, and if it does, you are a step farther down the road. But chances are that you will get more of the same, and at that point, it is time to go to the strategy of creat-

ing a necessary ending of this pattern. The way you do that is by no longer having conversations about the problem, but rather by setting limits on the problem instead of trying to solve it through talking about it. While the strategy with a wise person was to talk about problems and resource them with more input and help, the strategy with a foolish person is to stop talking and move to two important interventions: *limits* and *consequences*.

First of all, set limits on yourself in terms of what you will allow yourself to be exposed to in terms of the fool's collateral damage:

- "Susie, at this point, I have tried to get you to see the issue and change it, and that has not helped. So I have to make sure that at least it is not affecting me [or the team, or the company, or the results, or the family] any more. I can't afford to miss another quarter's numbers because you are unwilling to do what I have asked. So I am taking this responsibility away from you. I have to give it to someone who will do what I need."
- "Sam, I cannot allow myself to continue to be hurt or endangered by your drinking. So the next time it happens, I will leave the event or the house and go somewhere where I am not affected by it."
- "Keith, your anger is hurtful to me, and I can't allow myself to be yelled at anymore, so the next time it happens, I will leave."
- "Roger, this team and the environment we want to have around here are important to me, so I can't allow your abusive behavior to ruin it anymore."

Consequences are often the next essential step. Whereas feedback has not helped and limits will protect you from the collateral damage of someone who avoids ownership, consequences are

the last step that may cause the person to hit bottom and "see the light." Consequences are for their sake, perhaps to get them to turn things around:

- "Mary, we have had several gatherings where you have drunk too much and ruined it for everyone, so I need to tell you that until you can control yourself, we won't be including you anymore. You are no longer invited."
- "Bill, we have had several discussions about your performance, and nothing is changing, so I am going to have to remove you from your position."
- "Roger, we have talked about this a number of times, and I have tried to get some changes from you, but it is not working. I am giving you an unpaid suspension to think about it and see if you would like to continue here and under what circumstances that might happen."
- "Dave, I want to live in a sober house, and since you have chosen to not do anything about your addiction, I won't be living with you anymore until you get treatment and get sober."
- "Barbara, I wish that I could continue to have you as a client, but I have talked to you about the problems that make this difficult for me. Since you have chosen to not change those issues, I can no longer do work for you. If something changes, feel free to let me know."

The strategy for foolish people is simple: Quit talking about the problem and clearly communicate that because talking is not helping, you are going to take steps to protect what is important to you, the mission, or other people. Give limits that stop the collateral damage of their refusal to change, and where appropriate, give consequences that will cause them to feel the pain of their choice to not listen.

The necessary ending that you have to initiate with people caught in their own foolishness is to *end the pattern.* You cannot control them or get them to change. What you can do is *create an ending to the effects their refusal to take responsibility is having on you or others.* By so doing, you have accomplished two things that nagging did not do. You have limited the effects of their behavior on you and others, thus quarantining their ownership disease from further infecting your life, the team, or the mission, *and you may have done the one thing that can influence them to change. Talking will not help, but doing something that causes them to feel the consequences of their behavior may be what finally turns them around.*

The key here is to see that holding out hope for someone who is resistant to feedback is not grounded in a lot of reality. It is hard enough to fix some problems when someone owns them. But if they are in denial about them, then they are not even working on them, and there is not much reason to have hope until they do. *This is why it is so important for you to recognize foolish behavior.* Once you see it, you know that an ending is nigh—if not an ending with the person, then at least an end to allowing their unchanging pattern to affect you or things you care about. Otherwise, you cannot have hope that tomorrow is going to be different from today.

The Key to Changing a Foolish Person's Behavior

As we have seen, there is a big difference between ending a wise person's problem behavior and ending a foolish person's. With the wise, if you talk about it, resource them, and help them, you usually get improvement. With the foolish, talking usually does nothing, and only consequences matter. Let's talk about that for a moment, so you see how essential this point is and why you sometimes have to bring consequences into the picture.

Whenever someone is not taking responsibility, there are always consequences. The question is, Who is *suffering* the consequences? Most times, with someone who is not responsive to feedback, their

company, team, boss, co-workers, or loved ones are the ones who are suffering the consequences of their behavior. An addict, for example, is not trying to ruin anyone's life; he is just trying to avoid responsibility for his problems. But as a result of not taking responsibility, he ruins many people's lives with the "collateral damage" of his addiction. There are certainly consequences, but he is not the one who is suffering them. Others are.

On the job, when someone is not owning her issues, it is usually the company, the team, or co-workers who are suffering the consequences—a toxic culture, being held up, not meeting deadlines, not getting deals done, losing potential profits, losing customers, not accomplishing the mission, et cetera. They are suffering, as they are all working hard, taking responsibility for themselves, and yet paying for the results of her denial.

So as long as you are not creating a necessary ending to this pattern, there is no force driving change, because the person has no consequences. *With these kinds of people, the only time they get it is when it begins to cost them.* That is the only time they feel any need to listen and change. It is exactly why a necessary ending is often the right thing to do.

I frequently hear bosses, co-workers, and others say to a person in this kind of denial, "You *need* to begin getting your reports in on time so we can move forward and hit our deadlines." Then they say to me, "I told him he needs to do it, but he still doesn't."

I usually say it is not true that he needs to do it. "Apparently he does not need to at all, or he would be doing it. It sounds as though *you* need him to do it and that *you* are the only one who feels the need for him to perform. He obviously feels no need at all. I think what we have to talk about is how to *transfer the need for him to perform from your shoulders onto his, as he is the only person who can do anything about it.*" Consequences are the way to do that. When people begin to feel consequences for their behavior or performance, all of

a sudden they realize that "I need to perform, or I am going to get fired." The need has finally been transferred from the shoulders of the people who should not be experiencing it to the shoulders of the one who should.

When a spouse says to the alcoholic, "You need to go to AA," that is obviously not true. The addict feels no need to do that at all, and isn't. But when she says, "I am moving out and will be open to getting back together when you are getting treatment for your addiction," then all of a sudden the addict feels "*I need* to get some help or I am going to lose my marriage." The need has been transferred. It is the same with any kind of problematic behavior of a person who is not taking feedback and ownership. The need and drive to do something about it must be transferred to that person, and that is done through having consequences that finally make him feel the pain instead of others. When he feels the pain, he will feel the need to change.

So, in terms of when to have hope and when not to, if you are hoping that someone in denial is going to get it and change, but there is nothing in the picture to force that change other than your desire, that is probably a wish and not real, objective hope. If you are dealing with this kind of person, it is probably time for a necessary ending to the pattern of not listening and the beginning of a different plan. A plan that has hope is one that limits your exposure to the foolish person's issues and forces him to feel the consequences of his performance so that he might have hope of waking up and changing.

EVIL PEOPLE

Sometimes in a workshop or in leadership training, in teaching about these three categories of people, I will summarize the methods of dealing with them like this in order to introduce the concept of the evil person:

1. With wise people, talk to them, give them resources, and you will get a return.
2. With foolish people, stop talking to them about problems; they are not listening. And stop supplying resources; they squander them. Instead, give them limits and consequences.
3. With evil people, to quote a Warren Zevon song, the strategy is "Lawyers, Guns and Money." The reason? You have to go into protection mode, not helping mode, when dealing with evil people.

Lawyers, guns, and money usually get their attention. That introduction is not only for effect. The truth is that I am not kidding.

Lawyers, Guns, and Money: *A Tough Pill to Swallow*

For some people, it is a big step to realize that there are people in the world who hurt you—not unintentionally the way a foolish person does but because they *want to*. But it is true. There are some people whose desire it is to hurt others and do destructive things. And with them, you have to protect yourself, your company, your loved ones, and anything that matters to you. They actually want to bring you down.

This is difficult for some leaders to come to grips with; they think that they can reason with anyone and finally get through. But evil people are not reasonable. They seek to destroy. So you have to protect yourself—ergo, lawyers, guns, and money.

I use that phrase to symbolize resources that you use to protect yourself. Sometimes you must see people for who they truly are, protect yourself, create a *very* necessary ending, and have nothing more to do with them. The kind of person who likes to bring others down, is intentionally divisive, enjoys it when someone fails, and tries to create the downfall of others or of the company is to

be protected against at all costs. The longer that you have hope for this kind of person, the more vulnerable you are.

Many women have to get restraining orders, as they are in relationships with destructive men and their very lives are in danger. They need to create a very firm, necessary ending with no contact and be protected by their attorneys, police, and others: ergo, lawyers, guns (police), and money.

But this is true in business, as well. Rarely is there physical danger; more often it is an individual's career or the company that is in danger. There are people who do want to bring you down and destroy whatever you have built—for many reasons. They envy you and want your position, or they think they were slighted and want to sue you to get back at you. I have seen some ugly things happen in the business world, and some of it could have been avoided if people had not held out false hope for dealing with a person who engaged in a lot of evil behavior. Do not hope for the evil persons to change. It could happen, and it does, *but it does not happen by giving in to them, reasoning with them, or giving them another chance to hurt you.* It happens when they finally are subject to limits that force them to change. Jail does some people good.

The bottom line with evil is to stay away, create the firmest protective ending that you can, and get real help to do it. Use your lawyers, law enforcement (that is the guns part), and your financial resources to make sure that you will not be hurt by someone who is trying to destroy you or the things that matter to you. Whereas you talk to wise people about problems and you talk to fools about consequences, do not talk to evil people at all, period. "You can communicate with me through my attorney" is a phrase that exists for a reason.

Problems versus Patterns

Another thing to consider when you are trying to figure out if you are going to go forward with a person is the issue of problems

versus patterns. A problem is something in someone's performance or behavior that you need to end; it is specific and objective and isolated. For example, a big project is blown because of a specific mistake or because an interpersonal conflict is not handled well.

A pattern exists when there are problems but they do not stand alone as isolated issues or occurrences. Instead, you can link many occurrences together to see that this person made a mistake on the big project because she didn't get organized or do her research. And this is just one more example of many times when she has done the same or similar things. It is not a specific, one-time problem. It is a pattern that we can recognize and now almost count on. It is recurring.

When you are dealing with a recurring pattern, there is less hope that just a conversation or a little correction is going to help. Patterns, many times (though not all), are tendencies that people have less conscious control over, and the process of change is more difficult. Change certainly can happen, but if you are depending on it in any significant way and need to have hope for long-standing patterns to change, then look at the ingredients of the change process that I listed in Chapter 6 in the section entitled "When to Suspend Hopelessness."

Hope and the Strengths Movement

One of the great emphases of recent management literature has been the strengths movement. Championed by the Gallup Organization, organizational researcher Marcus Buckingham, and others, the message is a good one: people do better when operating from their strengths than from their weaknesses, and companies do better when they are making sure that people spend their time and energy doing what they are good at rather than what they are not.

This finding is relevant to our discussion about hope in two

ways. The first is that sometimes a person's performance is not going to get better if you continue to have her doing something for which she has very little giftedness, ability, or inclination. You are swimming upstream to try to hold on to the hope that it is going to get better. A better move is to see what happens if you move that person to an area that uses her strengths. Then you might have a lot more hope for better performance.

This is true in personal life, as well. I have seen marriages turn around when a long-standing conflict over one spouse's nonperformance gets reversed because the couple decides to change roles in that area. I remember one marriage in which the wife was continually disappointed in her husband's handling of the finances, an area that he had zero inclination for but that both of them thought was "the man's role" in the family. She was much more organized, better at dealing with numbers, time lines, details, and so on, and she actually enjoyed it. So they got over their thinking that the man should handle the money, turned it over to her, gave him some of the other responsibilities that she was carrying, and they did very well. Strengths matter, so base some of your hope on them.

There is another way strengths matter when it comes to hope: sometimes people are indeed operating in their area of strength, but their character issues are so formidable that their strengths are neutralized. They may be very creative but so disorganized and such procrastinators that you can't get a project done. Or so combative that they can't be a member of a team. In those cases, it is not a matter of getting them to focus on their strengths, as they already are. It is a matter of seeing if they will deal with their basic character problems, in the manner we talked about in the last chapter. If they will, there is hope. If they won't, then looking for other areas of gifts may not matter. There is a difference between *strengths* and *character*. See my book *Integrity*: *The Courage to Meet the Demands of Reality* (HarperCollins, 2006) for more on this issue.

It's All About Hope

Necessary endings happen when you get to a "good hopelessness." It is that moment when you see reality clearly and know you have to bring "what is" to an end. Unfortunately, sometimes that decision involves people, and deciding when to keep going with someone and when not to is one of the most difficult decisions that we have to make, and we must make it in many contexts, throughout life. It was much of what Peter Drucker referred to as the "life and death decisions" for leaders, and it is true in the personal space as well.

So making people decisions should never be taken lightly. It is crucial that we have good criteria for when to have hope and when to reach hopelessness. If you have hope in someone who is in denial, that is usually misspent time, energy, and resources. At the same time, as we have seen, there can be hope for them if you do the right thing and create an ending, that is, stop enabling the pattern by implementing some limits and consequences.

Conversely, other people can readily change, given the right input, because they are wise and open to hearing what you have to say. There can be great hope in many instances, provided they have the gifts and abilities to deliver what you want from them.

Seeing the differences between wise, foolish, and evil people will be a good tool for you in making those difficult decisions.