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CHAPTER

# CHANGING EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR MANAGERS



**NIK KINLEY and  
SHLOMO BEN-HUR**

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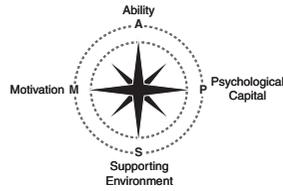
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# chapter 1

## How to Help Change Happen



It is rare to find “behavior change” listed in any job description. It is not even a common phrase used to describe what managers do. But changing people’s behavior is nonetheless something that all managers *have* to do. And in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous business world, it is something that managers will have to do *well* if they and their businesses are to succeed.

Often, behavior change is about helping and supporting people to develop themselves. Other times, it is driven more by a manager, who may need people to do certain things or behave in certain ways. Almost always, it is about improving performance.

*Almost always, it is about improving performance*

It can involve training people in essential skills, improving their ability to work with colleagues, or even trying to stop them from doing something. We may call it coaching, feedback, training, learning, or development, but whatever word we use, what we are doing is trying to change how people behave. We are endeavoring to get them to do something better or different.

The challenge is that changing people’s behavior can be one of the most difficult and complex management tasks. Think about yourself. When was

the last time you tried to change your behavior? Deliberately and actively. Not just thought about it, but seriously tried. What was it that you were attempting to change? Perhaps it was something big, like trying to improve a relationship, or something seemingly simpler like reading more books. How did you go about it? And now, be honest: how successful were you? Really. Because if you succeeded, you are probably in a minority.

Take a look at the global annual ritual of new year's resolutions. Resolving to change some aspect of your behavior or circumstances at the turn of the year is common to many cultures. And somewhere between 50 and 60 percent of people in these cultures say they make just such a resolution. There is a lot of variability in what people resolve to do, but some of the most common goals are getting fit, stopping smoking, and improving personal finances.<sup>1</sup> If you ask people a few weeks into the new year how they are doing with these resolutions, the vast majority – around 80 percent – say they are doing well. Even after a month, about 65 percent of people still say they are on track.<sup>2</sup> Ask them two years later, though, and fewer than one in five people say they succeeded in changing, and even this figure is probably optimistic.

Perhaps this is why bookstores are heaving with shelves of self-improvement books. They are a weighty testament to the fact that people hope and believe that they *can* change. Yet they are also proof that people feel they need some help. For all their initial motivation and confidence, translating good intentions into sustained behavior change is far from easy.

If you think changing your own behavior is difficult, how tough must it be to change other people's behavior? It may not be easy, but it can be done. You just need to know how. You just need to know what to do and which techniques to use. Unfortunately, most managers are working with only a limited set of tools and techniques. They have been taught a model of how to give feedback and coach their staff, and they have resources such as training programs at their disposal. Yet as good and useful as these may be, too often they are just not enough.

Take training programs and development workshops. Even the most wildly optimistic estimates of how much learning from these events is

transferred into real behaviors back in the workplace do not go much beyond 34 percent.<sup>3</sup> Then there is coaching. An increasing number of organizations use coaching by line managers as a tool for developing people and changing behavior. It has become a standard part of the managerial toolkit, and an amazing 99 percent of HR professionals believe that it can be of benefit.<sup>4</sup> Yet only 19 percent believe that the coaching going on in their business is effective, and less than 3 percent of firms even check whether it works.<sup>5</sup>

These statistics are really sobering when we remember just how much is spent on this activity. The training market alone was estimated to be worth over \$135 billion in 2013.<sup>6</sup> Even if we take the most optimistic success rates of 34 percent, that still means \$88 billion invested with not much to show for it – every year. And that does not include the coaching and broader development market.

We want to be clear here: we are fans of feedback, training, and coaching. They are essential tools and, done well, they can be highly effective. But most of the time they do *not* appear to be particularly effective. And this begs the question, *why?*

## What Managers Think

As research for this book, we conducted a global survey with over 500 business leaders and managers. When we asked them what main behaviors they needed to address or improve in others, the top five responses were:

1. Drive and work motivation.
2. Management and supervisory skills.
3. Collaboration and teamwork.
4. Interpersonal skills.
5. Attitude.

Nothing surprising there, nor is there anything unusual in the list of main methods that people report using to change these behaviors. They are the usual suspects of giving feedback, coaching, and training. However, when we asked these leaders and managers how often their attempts to change people’s behavior worked, the response – on average – was around 50 percent of the time. Half the time it seems to work; the other half it does not. In our experience that is an optimistic figure, but even if we take it at face value, it does not look good. Frankly, if you told your boss that in any other aspect of your role you were only successful half the time, he or she would want to know why and what was going wrong.

So we asked managers the same thing. When we asked them how confident they were about helping other people to identify and understand

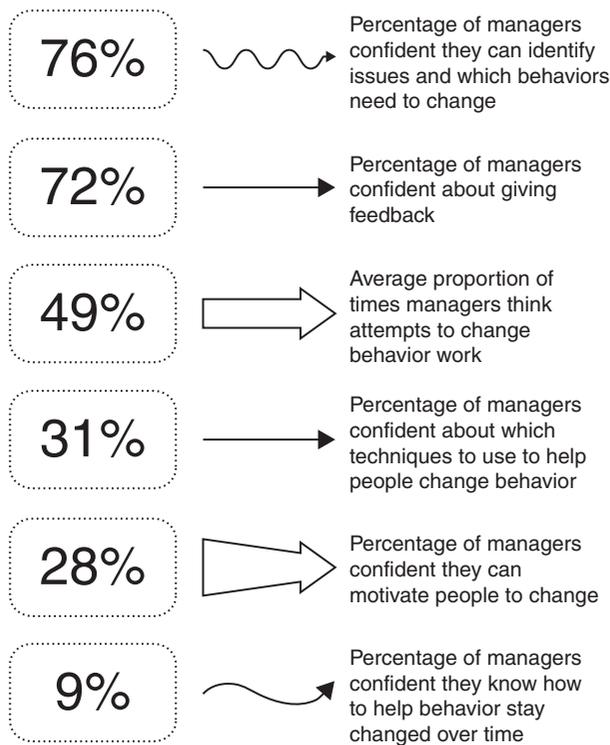


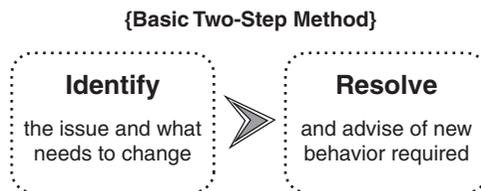
FIGURE 1.1 What managers think

which behaviors they needed to change, just over three-quarters said they found this easy. When we asked how confident they were about giving feedback, almost three-quarters said they felt confident they knew how to do that, too. Yet only 31 percent of them said they felt confident about which techniques to use to help people change behavior, and only 28 percent said they felt confident about being able to motivate people to change. Most worryingly of all, fewer than 10 percent of them said they felt confident about making sure behaviors stayed changed over time (see Figure 1.1). The issue for managers, then, is not *what* people need to change, but *how* to do it.

We know behavior change is hard and complex, but it ought to feel easier than this. We should have better success rates than we do and, at the very least, managers ought to feel well-equipped for the task. So something is missing. And this book is designed to fill the gap.

## What is Missing

The basic approach to changing behavior that the majority of people use most of the time involves two simple steps. They identify what needs to change and then they try to resolve the issue, usually by providing information – in the form of advice, feedback, or even training – about what new behaviors are needed. “Don’t do this, do that.” “This is the issue, and this is what you need to do about it.” Or, “What do you want to achieve? Now let’s think together about how you can do it.” They identify, and they resolve (see Figure 1.2).



**FIGURE 1.2** The basic two-step method of behavior change

This two-step problem-solving method is common to all aspects of life. It is simple, basic, and fundamental. Parents do it. Friends do it. Managers do it. Over the past 20 years, managers have become increasingly sophisticated about *how* they do it, too. Since the early 1990s, training managers how to coach people has become commonplace, and these days coaching is a standard piece of the managerial toolkit.

To help managers coach their people, a large number of different coaching models and approaches have emerged. Probably the most famous such model is the GROW model.<sup>7</sup> The G stands for “goal” and is all about helping people identify what they want to achieve. The R stands for “reality” and is about helping people understand where they are now and how far they are away from their goal. The O is all about identifying both the “obstacles” and “options” facing people. Finally, the W refers to planning a “way forwards.” As models go, GROW is pretty good, too. It is clear, practical, and results-focused.

What GROW and all the other coaching models do is to offer a more structured and sophisticated way of approaching the basic two-step method for changing behavior (see Figure 1.3). They enable us to question the issues involved and make sure we really understand them. They help us set better goals and develop effective action plans. And they remind us to track people’s progress.

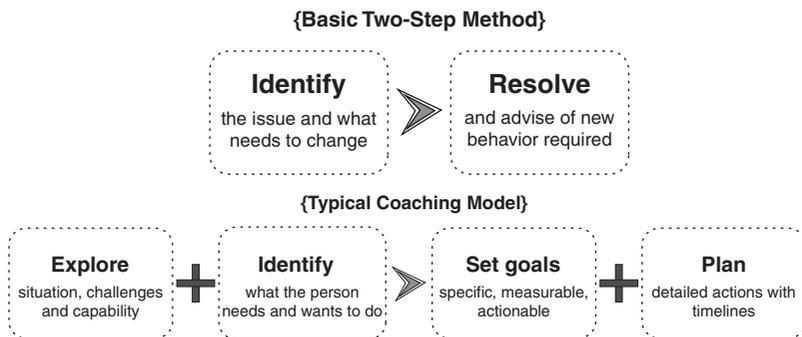


FIGURE 1.3 A typical coaching model for changing behavior

Yet despite the seemingly endless range of coaching models available almost all of them share two basic faults. First, they have more to say about the process managers have to follow and the steps they have to take than about the techniques they can use. For example, they may suggest that you “first discuss this, then that,” but tend to be less clear on *how* to discuss it. Or they may suggest that you write a plan for changing a behavior, but say less about what kinds of activities can be included in the plan. And when they do suggest techniques, they tend to describe only a very limited range. So they set a clear path for people to follow, but tend not to provide all the tools to get there. Part of the aim of this book is to set this right and to provide a much broader set of tools and techniques for managers to use.

Our second concern with so many coaching models is that their main focus is still on the two basic steps. It may be a more sophisticated version, but the focus is still on identifying *what* people need to change and *what* they need to do. This may sound reasonable and essential, and it is. Managers undoubtedly need to help people do these things. In fact, behavior change cannot work unless managers *do* help people do them. But these two steps ignore everything else that is going on around the change and which can have a huge impact on it: the environment and conditions in which change happens.

## ／ The Power of Context

One of the clearest examples of the importance of context in behavior change comes from an unusual place: studies of whether criminals reoffend after they have been released from prison. Reoffending rates vary depending on the type of prisoner and the type of offense they committed. Overall, though, evidence from the UK, Europe, the US, and Australia suggests that between 40 and 60 percent of prisoners released from prison reoffend within 12 months.<sup>8</sup>

Looking at the difference between those who reoffend and those who manage not to, two major factors stand out. First, treatment or attending

some kind of change program seems to help, although exactly how much depends on the quality of the program. Second, the context and life circumstances that individuals return to after participating in a change program or being in prison are critical. The amount and quality of family support, whether or not they can find a job, and the types of friends they have can all affect how likely they are to reoffend. In fact, these factors can be even more influential in determining whether people reoffend than the quality of any change or treatment program they attend. No matter how well-intentioned, well-treated, and rehabilitated a criminal may be, if he or she has little family support, poor personal relationships, friends who are criminals, no job, and housing problems, it is much harder to stay on the right side of the law.

The key lesson here is that if you want to change someone's behavior, their context – the environment and situations in which they operate – has to act like a life-support machine for the new, desired behavior. If it does not, then the chances are that the new behavior will not hold and old ones will re-emerge. This is why one of the most consistent findings from research into the effectiveness of development activities such as coaching and training is that contextual factors (what happens outside the coaching or training room) are *more* important in ensuring behavior change happens than the quality of the training, development workshop, or coaching.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, research from almost every type of behavior change intervention you can imagine shows the same thing. Take what is perhaps one of the most extreme examples: brainwashing. In the Korean War of the early 1950s, some American soldiers emerged from prisoner-of-war camps as seemingly devout and passionate Communists.<sup>10</sup> Subsequent investigations by the CIA showed that they had been through extraordinary ordeals, which included interrogation, torture, isolation, restriction of food and water, and the use of drugs.<sup>11</sup> Their sense of free will and free thought had very literally, deliberately, and systematically been broken down. And yet, even so, the vast majority of these individuals did not stay brainwashed for long once they had rejoined their colleagues and returned to their normal environment.

Then there are the victims of depression. Studies have repeatedly found that although therapies can be effective at treating depression, someone's life context is a significant determinant of whether their depression returns. Simply put, those who fall back into depression tend to have experienced more negative life events and less family support than those who manage to avoid further bouts of depression.<sup>12</sup> It is the same for people treated for alcoholism and drug addiction: the environment they return to after treatment has a big influence on whether or not they relapse.<sup>13</sup>

### Context is Internal, too

We usually think of context as what lies outside people – their circumstances and the environment they live in. Yet there is another type of context, which researchers have shown to be just as important. That is what is going on *inside* people, what they bring to any attempt to change their behavior. One obvious such factor is their current level of capability – what they are able to do. Yet there are other, less obvious, factors at play here as well. Things like how much confidence or self-belief people have that they *can* change, and how committed they feel to the change. Then there is the degree of willpower individuals have, and their level of perseverance and resilience. These are as much part of the context for change as external factors, and all have been shown by researchers to be critical in determining whether or not behavior change succeeds.

For example, people with higher levels of motivation to change are more likely to persevere and sustain the change over time.<sup>14</sup> People with higher levels of self-confidence are more likely to achieve behavioral changes such as losing weight, stopping smoking, and quitting drugs.<sup>15</sup> And people with higher levels of resilience are more likely to succeed in their goals and find ways around potential obstacles and challenges.<sup>16</sup>

Both inner and outer context matter, then, and they often matter more than anything else. Yet you would never guess so from looking at most behavior change and development interventions, because in most of them contextual factors simply do not receive the attention they deserve.



The exception here is people's level of current ability, which *is* usually considered. And, to be fair, things like motivation to change and confidence *are* sometimes explored. Incentives may even be offered. But the central focus in the vast majority of cases is on the information to be taught, the skill to be learned, and the behavior to be changed.

As a result, many coaching, training, and development interventions are fundamentally limited. It is as if we have been focusing on only half an equation and hoping to get the right answer. It is why less than 10 percent of managers have any confidence that the behavior changes that people try to make will stick over time. And it is why this success rate will stay low until managers have the necessary tools and techniques to understand and do something about these contextual factors.

It is not all bad news, though. Because *you* – as a manager – are ideally placed to influence this context for change. After all, you are a large and vital part of it.

## What You Need to Do

Part of your role as a manager in supporting people to change behavior is to help them through the two basic steps of identifying the issue and resolving how they ought to behave going forward. You need to help them set goals and create action plans. And to do this, you have coaching models a-plenty to help you. But these steps, although important, are not enough on their own. There is a second, critical part to your role.

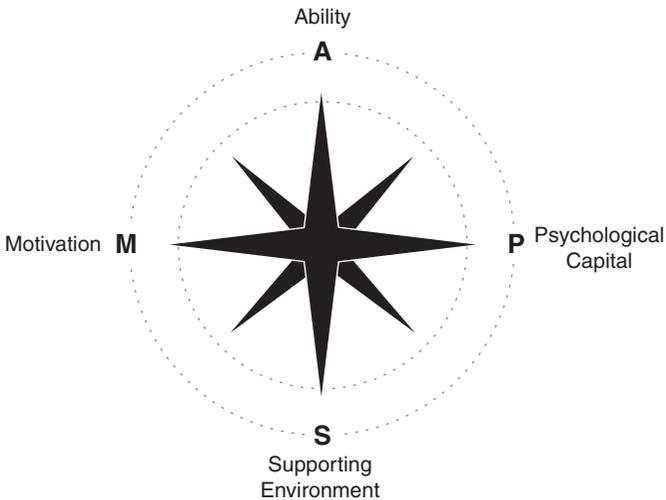
You need to shape, adapt, and fine-tune the context in which people are trying to change, in order to help the change happen and to give it a decent chance of succeeding and being sustained. You need to make sure that people's inner and external contexts can act as a kind of life-support system for the change.

Context, of course, includes a lot of different elements, many of which are simply beyond managers' sphere of influence. So what are the things you *can* do? What are the aspects of someone's context that you, as a

manager, can easily influence and that will make a real difference to any attempts to change behavior?

Four factors stand out above the rest. For each one, the scientific evidence is clear that it can significantly affect people's chances of success at changing behavior. And for each, there are proven and easy-to-apply techniques that managers can use to boost it. We have combined and developed these four factors into the *MAPS model for change*. It describes the contextual factors that are most critical in supporting people to change their behavior. And in doing so, it shows you the levers you can pull to support change. The four factors, shown in Figure 1.4, are:

- **Motivation** – do they want to change?
- **Ability** – do they know what to do and do they have the skills required to change?
- **Psychological capital** – do they have the inner resources, such as self-belief, willpower, and resilience, they need to sustain change?
- **Supporting environment** – do key elements in their working environment, such as incentives, situational cues, and social norms, support them changing?



**FIGURE 1.4** The MAPS model for behavior change

To maximize the chances that any attempt to change behavior will succeed and be sustained, as many of these factors as possible have to be right. In the following chapters, we are going to outline the research into why each of the four is so important and describe a range of simple techniques you can use to affect them.

The importance of the first factor – motivation – is simple. If people do not want to change, then the chances are they will not. The subject has been much talked about in recent years, with a spate of popular books and some highly viewed TED talks. Much of this, however, has been about how to motivate people to perform better, and although motivating people to change is similar, there are some key and significant differences. Later, we will explain what these are and what you can do about them.

The second element – ability – is a basic consideration in all behavior change. People need to know what they have to do, and they need to be able to do it. This is the factor more than any other that coaching and other change models have succeeded in helping us get better at – through goal setting and action planning. But we will briefly revisit the research and reveal some perhaps surprising ways of looking at whether people have the ability to change.

The third element – psychological capital – may be a new phrase to you, but psychologists have been studying it for many years. Through this research, they have identified a cluster of four inner resources that significantly impact whether people can sustain behavior change: self-belief, optimism, willpower, and resilience. Not all of these are easy for managers to affect (it can be tough to change someone's level of optimism, for example), but there are some simple things you *can* do, and we will show you what they are.

Finally, there is the supporting environment. These are things outside individuals that *you* can change to help them change. Like motivation, it is a subject that has received growing attention in recent years, in particular through the focus on habits and how to form them. This research has shown how physical changes to people's environments can help trigger and reinforce new, desired behaviors and transform them into automatic

habits – things we do without really thinking about it. So we will look at how you can create these kinds of triggers as well as how you can use incentives to encourage certain behaviors and discourage others. We will also explore the power of social support and norms, the impact of the environment on how people choose to behave, and even how you can use economics to help change happen.

In this book, we will use the MAPS model to show how you can create a context or environment that gives change a better chance of succeeding. One question we are often asked is how the MAPS model fits in with the two-step behavior change model or a typical coaching model. We suggest that you need to think about the MAPS contextual factors after you have set clear behavior change goals, but before you create an action plan (see Figure 1.5). The reason for this is that you should be clear what behaviors you are changing and what goals you have before you can understand what impact the MAPS contextual factors will have on these things. Yet you should do this before you make a plan because, in effect, we believe you have to create *two* plans: one for the person, describing what they need to do to change their behavior, and another for *you*, outlining what you need to do to create a context or environment in which the change can happen and be sustained.

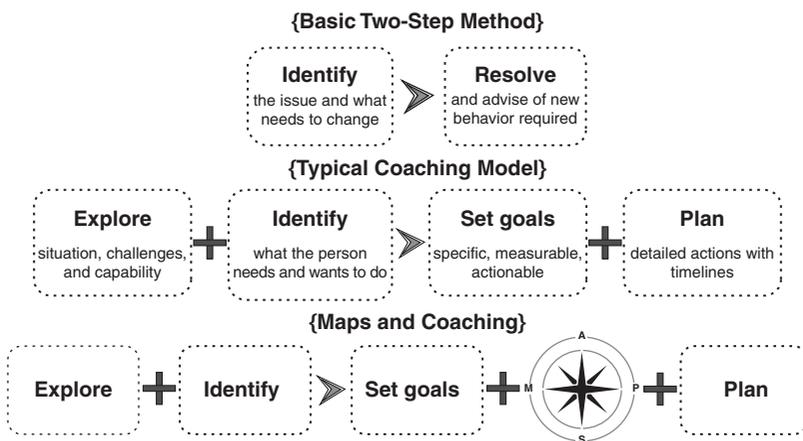


FIGURE 1.5 MAPS in coaching

## What is in This Book

This book is a practical one. It is about tools and techniques that you can incorporate into your day-to-day activities without adding endless amounts of time or extra activity.

We are going to begin, though, with some theory; because in order to understand how to shape the context for change, you need to understand what is involved in change. So in Chapter 2, we briefly present four key approaches to understanding the challenges involved in behavior change. These approaches have been developed by the world's greatest experts in human behavior over the last 100 years. They are significant because each provides us with a different way of identifying the most important contextual factors for individuals engaged in change, and because all of the techniques used in this book stem from one of the four.

In Chapters 3 and 4 we turn to the factor of motivation. We look at how to motivate people to want to change, as well as covering the thorny question of whether and how to use rewards and even punishment. Two chapters solely about motivation may sound a lot, but it really is *that* important. After all, if someone does not want to change a behavior, then they invariably will not do so.

In Chapter 5 we briefly examine ability. We say briefly because of the four factors in our model, this is the one you will already be most familiar with. We will, however, look at how you can make sure that people do know how to change, as well as providing a couple of easy techniques you can use to ensure they understand the challenges involved.

In Chapters 6 and 7, we explore psychological capital and what you can do to strengthen people's sense of self-belief, optimism, willpower, and resilience. Along the way, we look at how groups as varied as athletes, teachers, and even the US Army have used these concepts to drive behavior change.

In Chapters 8, 9, and 10 we delve into three very different approaches to creating a supportive environment. We begin by exploring the science

of habits, before moving on to two new, but scientifically grounded, approaches to changing people's behavior: gamification and nudging.

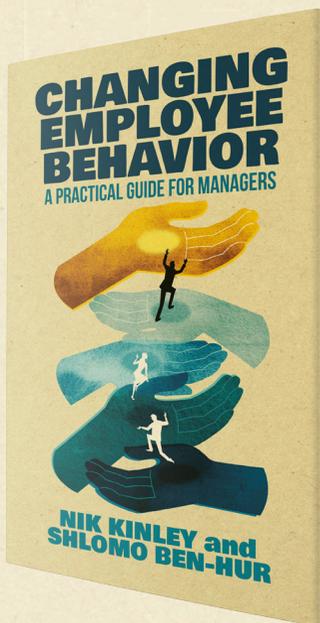
Finally, as there are a *lot* of tools and techniques in this book, in Chapter 11 we show you where you need to start. We show how you can identify which areas of the MAPS model you most need to focus on, and how you can choose which techniques to use.

\* \* \*

The psychotherapist Gianfranco Cecchin once said that the secret to being a good therapist is to create a context so that no matter what you do, you will be successful. This is, of course, an ideal rather than a practical reality, but he had a point. All the problem solving, information giving, and skills teaching involved in much current training, development, and managerial coaching is undoubtedly essential. But if they are to stand a chance of working, the context people are in has to support change. Contextual factors need to be addressed.

What we will do in this book is to show you how to create this context or life-support system in which behavior change can be successful. We will give you the tools you need to make sure that the training, coaching, and development you give genuinely works and leads to lasting change. We will show you how to help change happen.

# The Manager's Guide to CHANGING EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOR



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An important part of every manager's job is changing people's behavior: to improve someone's performance, get them to better manage relationships with colleagues, or to stop them doing something. Yet, despite the fact that changing people's behavior is such an important skill for managers, too many are unsure how to actually go about it.

This book reveals the simple, but powerful techniques for changing behavior that experts from a range of disciplines have been using for years, making them available to all managers in a single and comprehensive toolkit for change that managers can use to drive and improve the performance of their staff. Based on research conducted for this book, it introduces practical techniques drawn from the fields of psychology, psychotherapy, and behavioral economics, and show how they can be applied to address some of the most common, every-day challenges that managers face.

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