Micro Messaging
THE SUMMARY

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Introduction: Setting the Stage

No matter who you are, at some point you have undoubtedly been on the receiving end of the micro inequities equation. We've all had a conversation with someone who, though they didn't move an eyelash or a single facial muscle, somehow clearly communicated the message: "The sooner I get away from you, the happier I will be." On the other hand, a wide smile, direct gaze, and hearty handshake don't always convey admiration. Sending the micro messages that convey your intended message requires a deep understanding of how others interpret truth or see through the pretense.

Micromessages can inspire confidence and enable an individual to stretch for higher goals, or they can undermine a worker's self-confidence and cause him or her to second guess every decision. They have the power to do this with barely a spoken word.

Chapter 1: Micromessages: The DNA of Leadership

It's not so much what we say that matters, but what the other person ends up hearing or inferring. We may think we're sending the exact same message to two team members, but the message they receive may be very different and is affected by the nature of the relationship. Personal feelings (their likes and dislikes) about each team member influence how we shape words, gestures, tone, inflection, and so many

other aspects of the ways messages are transmitted. Even if we were able to send a message in an identical manner to two people (as impossible as that may be), the filter of the receiver uniquely influences the interpretation.

Almost imperceptible subtleties of sending and receiving messages define micromessaging and its power of influence. These micromessages tell us how much we are valued and respected by those who control our destiny in the workplace. Micromessages tell us exactly where we stand and how far we are likely to go. They are as intangible as the medium through which they are sent. Through them, we build loyalty or contempt, commitment or indifference, even inspiration or sabotage. Micromessages are the very soul of leadership, and leadership is the primary driver of performance.

Micromessages influence relationships both up and down the corporate ladder; they are not the sole property of managers and leaders. Just as you instinctively know how your boss feels about you, she also senses how you feel about her. Though neither of you may be aware of the messages being sent, the recipient unwittingly understands the micromessages and reacts accordingly. Once we've had the time to learn an individual's style and behaviors, the accuracy of our interpretation of the person's micromessages improves. Some learn faster than others.

Everyone can learn to recognize and manage the sending and receiving of micromessages. Dr. Mary Rowe's pioneering research uncovered how these subtle messages are infinitely more powerful and far more pervasive than any of the large behaviors we pretty much have under control in the workplace. Dr. Rowe first began to explore unspoken communication as it affected students in 1973. She examined how the way someone raises or lowers his voice, smiles or does not smile, affected interactions. We receive a micromessage when someone makes eye contact or looks away, from the way a person coolly or warmly greets a staffer or fails to do so altogether. A micromessage can be sent in dismissive hand gesture, a positioning of the body toward or away from someone who is speaking; it can be the movement of a leg on a sofa that does not allow someone to join a group; it can be in the tone of a flat, emotionless phone message or a cryptic e-mail.

Dr. Rowe discovered that for some, sending small snubs can be reflexive habits and the product of cultural conditioning that begins at birth. Micromessages reveal what is behind our masks, including hidden assumptions that connect underachievement in the workplace with race, gender, nationality, religious preference, class, and appearance. These messages are called "micro" because they seem insignificant; their impact, however, is nothing short of monumental. On the surface, they're hardly worth talking about; they are the sort of thing that would leave you appearing to be hypersensitive and overemotional should you raise them as an issue.

By the time Dr. Rowe published her groundbreaking white paper in 1990, outright discriminatory attitudes and their accompanying behaviors were close to being invisible in the business environment. She had done nearly twenty years of research, detecting the prevalence of micro-inequities in the work environment at a time when they truly were macro.

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The insults were direct, the language blatant, and the prevalence widespread. Fast-forward twenty years and the outright expressions of discriminatory attitudes have been all but banished from the workplace. However, many of the sentiments have not disappeared—they've just gone underground. From beneath the surface, they come back to do their damage in the form of micro-inequities. While they are less blatant and hard-hitting, micro-inequities are perhaps more insidious because of their ephemeral nature. The negative impact of micromessages builds up overtime, hampering performance, and even causing emotional maladjustment.

Understanding the behaviors that underlie micromessages will dramatically increase your ability to control them, but total fluency will probably always be just beyond your grasp, as it is for all of us. Millions of years of mammalian behavior drive us to react by envy, fear, jealousy, anger, greed, love, and countless emotions and instinct, which can be toxic to the effective building of relationships of all types.

The more you practice the art of micromessaging, the more you will discover how its mastery lies at the center of effective leadership and forms the foundation of individual performance. Positive micromessaging can energize employee engagement and impact financial performance for the better.

Chapter 2: The Blind Spot

Observe how colleagues acknowledge one another and establish visual contact, how close they stand, and listened to the inflection of their words. At first glance, such greetings might appear to be repetitive, but when you take a closer look at the gestures, tone, inflection, and gazes, you can catch clues as to where everyone stands. You'll spot some relationships that are close and personal, and others that appear somewhat strained. Sometimes even without uttering a word the micromessages of a silent greeting can spell out who is, and who is not, "connected."

When the common elements people share are easily visible, the connection often happens without effort. Familiarity, whether by gender, race, or circumstance, creates an immediate connection. When groups of like individuals are together, there are still plenty of subtle messages that announce any number of microinequities and microadvantages. People make eye contact; they perhaps offer a light smile, a nod, or a slight lift of the chin. From this they know how close each is to the "inner circle." In those ten minutes or so of pre-meeting social chatter, everything about personal relationships is reconfirmed. Though never spoken, a careful observer could easily discern the rings of each concentric social circle. Effective micromessaging isn't about doing the right thing. It is about identifying your proximity to the inner circle.

One leadership blind spot is the manner in which questions are asked. Questions often reveal what we want or expect the answer to be. Typically, the structure of a question falls into one of three forms: the assumptive no, the assumptive yes, and the neutral. You ask the question the way you

want the answer to be. Sometimes questions aren't questions at all. Questions can be statements and statements can be questions.

Carefully consider the micromessages within the questions you are asked, as well as those you are asking. Meetings and one-on-one sessions can waste precious time in a circular dance of questions chasing the wrong paths. Know what question is being asked and why the question is being asked and, if unclear, insert the trump question, "Why do you ask?" This is an effective technique that shines a search light on this blind spot.

At its core, the blind spot of leadership crops up when we say one thing but telegraph something quite different. Our blindness is not linked to intelligence or level. We forget that intellect and performance are not inextricably linked. Some of the smartest people I have known are the worst perpetrators of microinequities. Corporate senior executives are often oblivious to the effects of microinequities because they are rarely on the receiving end of these messages. Actually, what they experience the most are microdeceptions, more commonly known as pandering and brownnosing. A senior executive never really knows if the nods of agreement and support are genuine or politically motivated. Even the employee can be confused. Do I think I agree with the boss because I've concluded that it's the best idea, or am I influenced by the source of the message?

Chapter 3: Birds Do It, Bees Do It—Even Babies Do It

Long before infants are able to speak, they are fully interactive through micromessages. You can look into a baby's face and clearly read curiosity, anger, disinterest, playfulness, fear, trust, and a host of thoughts and emotions. The baby, of course, reads and understands sounds and expressions as well. Without a single word, you can have an interactive exchange with someone possessing the verbal vocabulary of a goldfish.

Instant messaging has become a central part of the way we communicate electronically. In the workplace, a different sort of "instant message" reaches well beyond the dimensions of the computer screen and can be quicker, clearer, and without that annoying beep announcing a new message. Each of us has attended meeting after meeting with team members we like and admire. Without ever saying a word, she gets the message you unconsciously but repeatedly send: "Pat, you are so smart. You always cut through all the garbage and get right to the heart of the issue every time. People look up to you. You're a role model."

In that same meeting, to someone else on the team you may have sent very different messages. Still void of a single word, he hears: "You really are a jerk. How did you get this job in the first place anyway? This team would be so much better off without you."

If the sender of the message has the "stripes" of power or authority, the message will have a powerful effect on participation and performance at meetings. Neither party will likely make the connection between those micromessages and the performance, but these messages will affect participation,

the expression of new ideas, the willingness to challenge the boss and even others in the room. Your action when these messages are observed become the accelerator of leadership effectiveness.

Chapter 4: I Didn't Say She Stole the Book

Subtle inflections can alter the core meaning of a message. Sometimes just putting the emphasis on a different word transforms the whole meaning of a statement. You just have to listen carefully to discover how a small change can transform everything about what is really being conveyed.

You're now going to read a seven-word sentence six times aloud. (Reading these sentences silently won't give the full measure of the effect.) Each time place the emphasis on a different word. The words themselves will not change. The only change will be what you make the listener focus on. Here's your sentence: *I didn't say she stole the book.*

Start by reading the sentence with the emphasis on "I". It wasn't me who said it. Someone else made the remark, so leave me out of it!

Now put the stress on, "didn't." I *didn't* say she stole the book. The meaning: A statement of denial. I never made that remark.

Now put the emphasis on "say." I didn't *say* she stole the book. As you do, pause briefly just before the word say then slightly raise your palms while saying the word. The message: I damn well know she did it, but kept my mouth shut.

In the next iteration, the focus on the word *she* makes it clear that the listener only misunderstood who you were accusing; I didn't say *she* stole the book. It's clear to everyone the book was stolen, just not by her.

Now, as you emphasize the word "stole," bring your two hands to your chest level and point your palms outward. I didn't say she *stole* the book. She definitely has the book, but may have inappropriate possession with no malicious intent. Maybe she was just borrowing it and forgot to return it.

As you emphasize the word *book*, open your eyes a bit wider. I didn't say she stole the *book*. This version of the sentence suggests ambiguity as to what was stolen. There's certainly no question she's a thief; the only question is, "What exactly did she walk off with?"

We do this sort of thing routinely as a part of our daily communication in the workplace. The emphases on the words we use with a particular person are often influenced by our personal feelings. We never stop to carefully analyze the gestures and movements associated with specific words, but the messages are nevertheless sent, and somehow subconsciously understood, by the

receiver. Words and micromessages are ongoing competitors, but when the topics involve elements that drive work relationships, micromessages always score the knockout punch.

All our lives, we have been told that words are very important. The size of one's vocabulary is often a sign of intelligence and education. A solid grasp of grammar and word usage is essential for acceptance in most business communities. Industries make millions selling courses designed to improve vocabulary and writing composition skills. Yes, words are important, but when you compare words to what's wrapped around them in the delivery, they pale in comparison. The impact and influence of the unspoken messages being sent is even stronger than the words.

Chapter 5: It's Here, There, and Everywhere

Each business operation is colored by the cultural context in which it operates. The same pressure from the top that might improve individual worker performance in Singapore might have the opposite effect in Ireland. Holding your body erect and puffing out the chest might be necessary for a boss to command respect in a Latin American culture, but the same stance could be read as bullying or arrogance in Ireland. Conversely, a slightly shy, round-shouldered American executive who always looks down might be judged an unworthy opponent, and therefore ineffective, in more macho cultures.

Cross-cultural micromessages also get sent and misinterpreted within a country. Microinequities are a part of intra-national communications breakdowns, particularly when it comes to communications between the cosmopolitan regions of a country and its provinces. For example, Northern Italians hailing from Florence and Milan have a great deal of trouble treating their fellow country folk with the same respect they give one another. They think of the Southern Italians as peasants or farmers. When they come together in the workplace, the messages of hierarchy are subtle but clear. Similarly, the provincial French are quite used to thinking that their Parisian cousins are from another country entirely, since some well-heeled Parisians look steeply down their noses at the "provincials."

Chapter 6: Speaking the Language

Each of us carries patterns of behavior and interpretation that takes decades to learn. It is our cultural template. Everyone intellectually knows that behaviors vary across geographic regions, but when we actually find ourselves thrown into a culture vastly different from our own, intellect meets reality and we briefly go into culture shock.

We establish ways of interpreting behaviors from a very early age. We watch the way those around us behave, react, and speak and, regardless of their words, figure out the true meaning. We develop an ethnocentric bias we are hardly aware of, driving how we filter the behaviors of everyone we encounter. Simply stated, most of us believe our way is "right," and we tend to judge others by how they measure up to our standards. We often disregard reality and see what we want.

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"We must never assume we are fully aware of what we communicate to someone else," the anthropologist Edward T. Hallwrote in his classic text, *The Silent Language*. "There exist in the world today tremendous distortions in meaning, as people try to communicate with one another. The job of achieving insight and understanding into mental processes of others is much more difficult than most of us care to admit." Dr. Hall wrote this almost a half-century ago.

What is true for understanding and communicating regional cultural gaps is also true for communicating within a single corporate culture. When you step into a new job, you need to learn how the regional and corporate cultures manifest themselves in that environment. Businesses spawn jargon, style, behavior, and other cultural norms, which individuals joining the organization need to learn and decide whether to conform to. A new hire's compliance to the cultural norms signals to others that he or she is a member of the "tribe," someone "in the know," and connected.

Conformance should never violate your personal values. If the conformity is within the range of acceptability, it can be leveraged to enhance the business experience. Operating in an overly friendly fashion in a conservative business environment, where a reserved manner is prevalent can be as ineffective as the stuffed shirt working in the more relaxed, highly interactive, looser atmosphere that came of age in the dot-com era.

Does this mean that we have to be disingenuous to be effective? Absolutely not. To be a more authentic business leader in the context of your own business culture does not require putting on a mask. No one likes a phony. The goal is to operate within your own range of flexibility without compromising personal values. We learn to become aware of the cultural language and system of symbols and manners, and we use them as best we can to communicate well and to get the job done.

Many leaders are too narrow about their flex range, even when minor adjustments could have a major impact on the performance of their teams and the business. When they sense a particular employee doesn't conform to their own style, that employee gets sent microinequities that can make the staffer feel alienated and probably less willing to perform up to his or her potential. The true leader takes the time to observe, ask questions, learn, and operate through the filter of "where the other guy is coming from." When we perceive an action that is interpreted as offensive, we have a responsibility to verbalize and validate.

The receiver has the primary responsibility for resolving a potential misinterpretation. The receiver must take the initiative and verbalize how a particular message was interpreted, facilitating a process that will validate the accuracy of the message. The receiver of the message passes the baton. The sender of the message becomes responsible for confirming or modifying the message to make clear what was intended. It is a process that gets to the core meaning of a message and allows us all to speak the same workplace and social language.

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Chapter 7: What's in it for Me?

How can you truly be an effective leader, if you can't effectively manage everyone on your team? The real power of diversity is the skill of identifying what is unique about each member of the team, and applying specific developmental and motivational strategies that amplify each performance. Until you are able to identify the unique characteristics that motivate people differently, and apply that awareness as a catalyst to generate maximum commitment, support, collaboration, loyalty, and performance from the entire team, you cannot be a truly great leader.

Diversity may have its origins in the desire to fix a social problem, but its real power is its ability to ignite stars. It takes considerable effort to identify the unique profiles of your staff, but do you really believe there's any chance of getting different people to their peak levels using one single management style? The many successful leaders who used a singular style, regardless of their ultimate success, were performing at a level of oblivious mediocrity. Their success would no doubt have soared to greater heights if they had applied their ample leadership skills to the unique needs of the individual. There is no incentive to adopt a different style if you don't see a need or reason to change.

Diversity initiatives will only become successful when the people who dominate the positions of power and influence see and feel how the process has a long-term personal benefit for them. Not much in the world of business ever reaches levels of success until those holding the reins clearly see: *What's in it for me?* What's in it for you is mastering the link between leadership and performance. When this is achieved, even staunch disbelievers switch from being "pulled" to "pushing" hard in favor of the effort.

This expanded definition of diversity includes factors like the way you talk, how long you've been with the company, how you dress, wear your hair, and even whether you have a tattoo, none of which help define the quality of what you bring to the organization. However, they do, in many cases, alter how well you are accepted and treated at work. These judgments, which we all make at one time or another, serve to divide us into ready-made camps of "Them" and "Us."

In his classic text *The Nature of Prejudice*, psychologist Gordon W. Allport explained that each of us has to find a way to order the world around us and our needs. Dividing things—including people—into categories is one of the things we do to feel we have control of our lives.

To say that prejudice has its roots in human nature is not to excuse it. It just helps to know that everyone harbors bias; and more often than not, bias is applied to things rather than people. Our prejudice, "prejudging," is making assumptions without having adequate information. Making assumptions based on past experience can actually hamper our growth and success.

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Chapter 8: Retrain Your Brain

Although everyone has his or her performance affected by micromessages, some are affected disproportionally. Women, people of color, and those with disabilities seem to get more than average microinequities. People see us and promptly put us through a series of mental filters or checklists. The body we arrive in is what people most readily see: our race, gender, age, attractiveness, and other items that define our visible profile.

The first thing mammals identify is gender. Dogs aren't exactly discreet in the way they determine this, but it is their first order of business. People often become frozen when they can't identify a gender. They attempt to reconcile the seemingly conflicting signals of body shape, voice frequency, hair length, facial hair, and other distinguishing factors, to the detriment of any conversation they might have been having.

The second step on our mental checklist is to assess whether the person is generally like us in structure. Here, we identify whether someone uses a wheelchair, is extraordinarily tall or exceptionally small, is missing a limb, or has some other significantly different physical characteristic. Next is race. It's not just Black noticing White, or vice versa, it's also noticed intra-racially. Skin tone and color tell us about how much we are alike or different, even within the same race.

Culture or nationality likely place fourth in sequence on the checklist. If the average acculturated American were to sit down for an intimate chat with a Korean, an Aboriginal Australian, an Egyptian, a Hawaiian, or a Nigerian, even if they were of similar skin colors, the American may suffer a debilitating brain freeze.

When groups come together, the checklist process is highly active, as members compare and contrast those around them. It is the central theme of all first dates. How that checklist gets tallied by the end of the evening determines whether there will be a second date.

As natural as it may be to use the checklist to assess the people we interact with, it no longer serves its mammalian purposes in a high-technology, global, twenty-first century. We don't need to fear that the people we interact with may be members of a neighboring and dangerous tribe. Today our tribe could include twenty people on a conference call from multiple countries, stretching several time zones, looking dramatically different, yet with the same family (company) name.

Let the checklist operate as information only. Remove it from your filters and use the precision of micromessages for your lens instead. Assess tone of voice, facial expression, gestures, proximity, and eye contact, a person's choice of words, syntax, and nuance, along with all indicators of what the message is conveying beneath the words themselves. This practice will identify the true messages being sent and how best to respond. Since it's always the cultural template of the sender that defines

the accuracy of the message, using this process still requires constant validation of your assumptions. Mastery of this skill minimizes the gap of actions based on miscommunication and strengthens relationships to support productivity.

Those who have habitually received a disproportionate share of microinequities are often more aware of their existence and eager to respond when they occur. As radar becomes more finely tuned to the stealth delivery of microinequities you will begin to see how no one is immune.

Chapter 9: Is This About Faking It?

A senior-level executive goaded me once by complaining: "There are things I really don't like about a certain person on my team. She doesn't know enough. She talks more than she works. Am I supposed to do 'daycare' with her? Tell her 'good job,' even when she, in fact, isn't doing a good job at all? Am I to mask my real feelings, pretend I like the woman when I really can't stand her?" Let's hit that one head on. No, we don't expect people to violate their values and do things that send inappropriate or wrong messages. We all live with some level of pretense. It comes with being a part of civilization.

Let me use myself as an example. I am personally opposed to the concept of wearing a necktie. It is a superfluous piece of material that neither holds my shirt up nor keeps my neck warm. Occasionally, it acts as an expensive napkin. Still, it is within the range of what I am willing to do to earn respect and acceptance in certain environments. As with all business processes, we sometimes must comply with things we may not personally subscribe to or endorse. Of course, my flexibility has its limits. I wouldn't wear lederhosen or a kilt because it falls outside the range of what I'm comfortable doing, but others might. Managing this process well is about being equitable, not identical. It is also about being genuine—saying what is true—without inhibiting performance.

In the workplace, we have a responsibility to ensure that all are given the messages, conditions, and environment to perform to the fullest of their potential—and to unlock talent that runs the risk of being underutilized. The practical application of the power of micromessages is not about being nice. It is about sending messages that are clear, direct, and fair. We need to understand how even the most subtle nuances of our delivery influences each person getting the messages. Every micromessage a manager sends affects an employee's perceptions of the company. These perceptions greatly influence how effective that employee will be while working for the company. Ultimately, it's about making everyone as productive as possible.

Chapter 10: That's One Dumb Rat!

Whenever we interact with a group in a meeting, or with an individual, we walk in carrying our own fixed ideas and filters. All of us have a tendency to reach conclusions based more on our preconceptions than the facts of the encounter itself. When assessing intangible qualities in our colleagues, like character, mood, or emotion, our filters act powerfully. Deciding from the

moment we meet a coworker that there is something different or odd about him that makes us feel uncomfortable, we likely implant filters that weed out anything that might make him appealing. We continue to "bank" more and more information, unconscious messages, and signals that support our original belief. Conversely, the people we like we cut lots of slack.

In the same way that filters can interfere with what's really happening, they can control what we think and feel about a particular person. When we meet someone for the first time we can't always quickly decide, based on our traditional elephant-sized criteria of age, race, and gender filters, if this is a capable person. However, once we've reached our snap judgment, our filters settle into place, and we look for, and usually find, evidence to back up our assumptions.

Checklists have more to do with compatibility, while filters tell us more about assessment and capability. Performance and compatibility should not be linked. Whether you like, dislike, or are comfortable with someone should not play a role in determining potential, assigning a project, or measuring performance. Filters are more closely linked to our experiences and the information we receive from others. We should not totally disregard this information, but we do need to clean our filters regularly to make sure we are getting the best result.

Chapter 11: Shrink Group Think

If you really want to see microinequities in action, you need go no further than everyday business meetings. You make a suggestion and it is met with a very bland, ho-hum response. Then, fifteen minutes later, someone else offers the same half-dozen as "six" and suddenly it shows profound insight. Of course, sometimes the reason for this phenomenon has to do with the quality of our communication. Our delivery certainly influences how others hear what we say, but there are often other influences at play. Many times those influences have to do with who is doing the talking. One of your goals as an enlightened leader who understands micromessages is to make sure that you don't send microinequities that shut down the creativity and innovation of anyone on your team.

Chapter 12: Bottoms Up!

How many times have we heard stories of people who are unceremoniously ushered out of the company because of their poor performance then become stars in the new company they join? Clearly the poor performance wasn't a lack of ability. There were other factors at play. When an employee is not meeting your expectations, you need to ask what role you might have played in getting them there.

We are less likely to allow those we have personally interviewed and selected from a healthy list of often impressive candidates to slip into the lower performance ranks. Oddly, you may not even see it as a problem, but rather a natural process of helping those we care about to succeed. Forget

that level playing field metaphor. Instead, think of providing every player with the same quality equipment and tools. No one on the team should get more practice time with the coach, or a higher quality racquet and, if some do, don't dump those who didn't from the team. That's not fair.

There are countless stories of people who left an organization where the chemistry was downright poisonous for them. Their poor performance history caused their termination to be recorded as "positive resignations." They went on to another company where they became a star. Competitive profit-driven businesses cannot coddle lackluster employees, but leaders have the responsibility to accurately assess both roles in the performance equation—the filters along with the employee's potential.

It is hard to know what an individual needs to make their talent blossom. Analyzing the messages you send and receive can shine a brighter light on whether our conclusions regarding employee quality are based on fact or unexpressed emotions.

Chapter 13: Mixed Messages

While conducting a multinational session in Europe, I asked people to describe their region's style of communicating and how they viewed the way other cultures communicate. One woman, after describing how her culture communicates in a firm but respectful style, tending to take evenly spaced turns expressing thoughts, then added a perception about her Latin American counterparts. "When we talk to people in Latin America, they always seem angry or upset." At that moment, a man seated at a distant table stood up, slapped his hand on the table, and said, "That's absolutely right! People always think we're angry." His eyes were big and his voice was loud. His hand kept slapping the table. "We're not angry. We're passionate!" As the group discussed it further, we all understood and accepted he was right. I reminded those present, myself included, of this important factor: it is the cultural template of the sender that defines the accuracy of the message.

As Americans, our cultural blind spots sometimes keep us from seeing the micromessages in other cultures. Careful and respectful observations can save us from projecting our own cultural bias when interpreting other cultures. The way of life of a people—their behavior patterns and attitudes—can be read through micromessages. By watching, we learn to understand things about a culture that go beyond spoken language. The result is better communication and greater effectiveness in business interactions.

Chapter 14: Micromessages: In the Air and Everywhere

Micromessages are the central thread in every form of communication, including electronic communications. Our e-mails, voice mails, instant messages, phone conversations, and virtual meetings are all fully loaded. Everyone has had the experience of receiving an e-mail that made you furious, only later to learn you completely misinterpreted the message. When that happens, the one

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important lesson to remember is to ask questions. Misunderstandings can be cleared up when you identify and clarify differences in business practices or communication styles.

I routinely caution clients not to react too hastily to an e-mail message, because those same e-mails are often written in haste. Translating thought to fingers and the time it takes to enter one character at a time is a process that encourages brevity. Sometimes brevity becomes cryptic and a message is distorted. Make an effort to send messages that empower even when you are using electronic communication. Be wary of misreading messages sent to you; clear up any confusion quickly. Remember the power of non-judgmental, neutral questions when making sure your messages are clear.

Chapter 15: The Power of the Spell

While you are in a meeting, unanswered microinequities cause people to offer lower-quality responses and often to shut down. However, bestowing microadvantages during a meeting encourages people to answer at length and with confidence.

Chapter 16: Breaking the Spell

There is also a dark side to micromessaging. The process can be used to achieve our own objectives at the expense of others. Although most people gravitate to micromessaging because of what it has to offer in achieving business objectives, occasionally they make it "all about me." Microinequities can be delivered as microadvantages, causing others to be put down. On the surface, offering help to someone in a way that implies an inability to get the assignment done well may seem supportive on the outside, but may have toxic effects. Your "kindness" can be damaging.

Just as a question can be a statement, a statement can be a question. For example, if someone distributes resources in a way you feel is unfair, simply make a statement that serves as a question. "I couldn't help but notice that the resources were distributed in this way." The statement of your "observation" is a somewhat evasive yet non-threatening inquiry about the person's decision. It will, of course, be read as a question. There is a dark side to this skill. It can be used for sabotage and other illicit purposes, but this is the rare occurrence. Most people see the huge potential the skill offers to enhance our own performance and the performance of those with whom we work.

Chapter 17: Teachers at the Epicenter

Schools are at the epicenter of cultural transformation. We want to shake things up in our schools so that the inequalities in our system and our cultural prejudices will not continue in future generations. Whatever we change at school will reverberate outward and have an impact on future generations.

A study by Dr. Robert Rosenthal showed that a teacher's expectations can create potential and achievement. When average students were treated like brilliant students, low and behold, by the end

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of the term they were performing like the "smart kids." When a teacher thinks, even without saying it, that Jose simply is not as smart as Craig, it's likely Jose will get that message and live down to the teacher's expectations. Fast-forward to high school, Jose has had ten years of getting the message that he's not so bright. He instinctively will likely see high achievement as sour grapes and not desire them as a goal. Unfortunately, many students who receive microinequities are already stuck in a rut, while others are on the fast track. It becomes more and more difficult to leap from the rut to the right track. The fact is, we live up to or down to the expectations projected from people with knowledge and authority.

If you have children and you're reading this on a school day, your children are getting micromessages this very moment. To the degree that they learn how to read these messages and effect strategies for change in their classroom situation, they can transform their own attitudes toward learning as well as the ways they are viewed by their teachers. In the classroom, children and teachers sit at the epicenter of the potential for change in the achievement gap so prevalent in our public schools. Becoming aware of the micromessages in our educational system may require the destruction of some old and comforting teaching habits. As silent and coded prejudice falls by the wayside, we can unlock the potential for every student to reach his or her highest level of ability. Micromessages provide a critical key to closing the achievement gap that educators have struggled with for so long.

Chapter 18: Resetting Your Filters

Let me reinforce that none of the concepts or practices in the mastery of micromessage management requires you to be anything less than genuine about your true feelings and values. You don't need to be disingenuous in an inappropriate way in order to effectively use micromessages. Teachers who use micromessaging effectively provide balanced attention and interaction with every child in the class, regardless of how he or she may feel about the student personally. The teacher's job is to fill students' minds with knowledge, build self-esteem, and encourage them to live up to their potential. The job of the leader is much the same, but the leader also needs commitment and loyalty in order to develop a team that will outpace others.

The following microadvantages top-ten list can be a pivotal catalyst for turning around problem relationships. Use these ten steps to improve your use of micromessages for a positive impact:

1. Actively solicit opinions
2. Connect on a personal level
3. Constantly ask questions
4. Attribute/credit ideas
5. Monitor your facial expressions
6. Actively listen to all
7. Draw in participation
8. Monitor personal greetings

9. Respond constructively to disagreements
10. Limit interruptions

All ten microadvantages can be applied to any relationship without violating your values or misrepresenting your opinions of others. You will, however, fertilize and unlock participation, creativity and innovation.

The power of the small has always held the force to alter our lives. Our attention tends to be drawn by the big and the obvious, but whether it is the tiny seed that is the basis for all life, or the microscopic bacteria and viruses holding the power for all life's destruction, what you don't see can either kill you or support you. The smallest micromessages can either kill relationships or your career or, if managed well, make it stellar.

Harness the micromessages that are the seeds of great leadership. Your continued subtle pruning will bring them to their greatest heights and yield the best possible fruit for your nourishment, advancement and enjoyment.