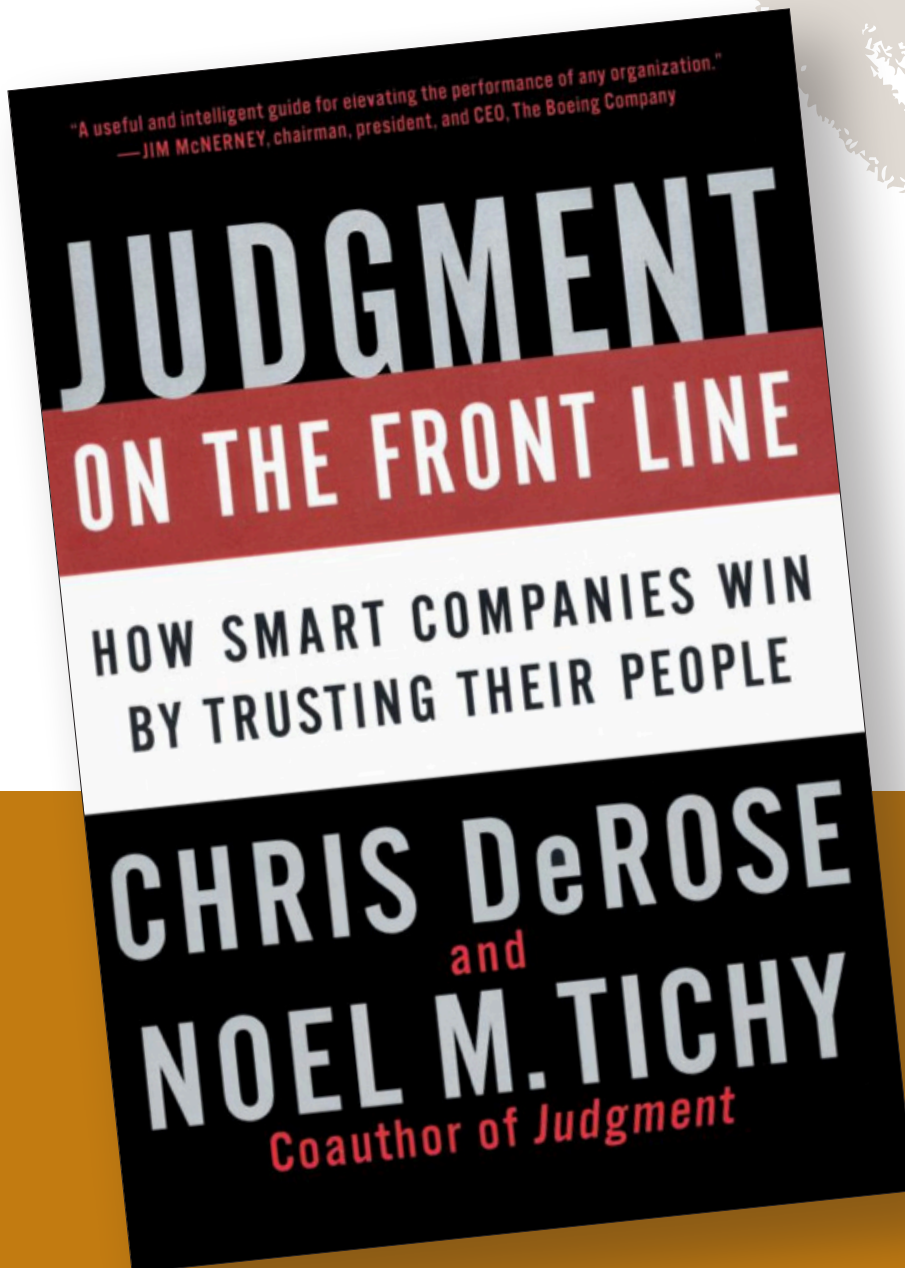


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Judgment on the Front Line | *Chris DeRose and Noel Tichy*

Judgment on the Front Line: How Smart Companies Win By Trusting Their People
Penguin Group, New York NY, 2012. 274 pages.

In *Judgment on the Front Line*, authors Chris DeRose and Noel Tichy assert that too many organizations do too little to tap into the intelligence, creativity, and experience of their frontline workers.

Their thesis – supported by interviews with over twenty organizations – has been that organizations that have a sincere desire to maximize the contribution of all their employees need to invest in the development of good judgment among their people who occupy the frontline positions, where every organization most closely touches its customers and community.

Judgment on the Front Line delivers a practical process that will transform organizations of all sizes – even churches – by transforming the organizational dynamic from an increasingly outmoded hierarchical management style to one that fosters more trust and investment in frontline employees.

Doing so requires reverse engineering the organization from the front line back to headquarters, creating systems, structures, and organizational roles that are designed to support those who serve the customer.

The Frontline Innovation Factory

The front line is the richest untapped source of ideas and innovations

- Those closest to the customers understand their needs best.
- Frontline leaders have the know-how to solve operational problems.

Winning organizations embrace the paradox of creativity and control

- Leaders control by setting context and boundaries.
- Leaders creatively unleash their front line by teaching them to make judgments.

Changes in consumer behavior, a generational swing in employee attitudes, and the growth of social media have all contributed to an erosion of command-and-control organizations. In their place, organizations that emphasize decentralization and collaboration are rising in order to more nimbly respond to consumer needs. Those who embrace these changes and learn from their front lines are able to create a virtual factory of new ideas and innovation.

Building the Front Line-Focused Organization

Strong leadership is required to unleash the front line

- Senior leaders use their authority to create the architecture and support systems.
- The organization's top team must stay directly connected to those in the field.
- Information from the front line should be used to define and refine the strategy.

Building a front line-focused organization is a process

- An integrative framework is needed to replace a collage of initiatives.
- The process helps whether starting from scratch or rebuilding a decades-old institution.

Judgment on the Front Line | *Chris DeRose and Noel Tichy (cont'd)*

Five Responsibilities of Leaders in a Front Line-Focused Organization

- **Define a Customer-Based Vision** – set the vision and define the strategy based in part on observations, feedback, and learnings from the field.
- **Develop a Front Line Focused Culture** – create a culture of front line focus with a deep respect for the needs and experience of the front line.
- **Obsess over Talent** – while deeply respecting their entire organization, leaders know they will win only by having the best talent and right kind of leadership at the front line.
- **Define the Judgment Playing Field** – leaders ensure that front line teams are equipped with the right resources to make good judgments on behalf of the organization and in the interest of the customer.
- **Live on the Line** – leaders need to go where the action is, a reality check at a deeper level than just an annual fly by appearance.

Although academic research has provided many labels for the drivers of employee commitment, the authors summarize them as the “four C’s”:

- **Context** – Frontline employees want to connect their daily interactions with the customer to the achievement of larger long-term goals.
- **Control** – Frontline workers want to feel empowered to make autonomous decisions and take action when necessary.
- **Care** – If employees do not feel connected to their organizations and have a sense that coworkers and managers are not concerned about their well-being, then they will not care about the organization or their job.
- **Creativity** – Frontline employees need the opportunity to exercise their individual thought and creativity and invest their own personality in their work.

Five-Step Process for Building the Front Line-Focused Organization

- **Step 1: Connect Front Line to the Customer** – senior leaders set expectations for how the front line connects with customers.
- **Step 2: Teach People to Think for Themselves** – the front line needs a method and language for solving complex issues.
- **Step 3: Experiment to Implement** – frontline personnel see opportunities to create new products and services.
- **Step 4: Break Down the Hierarchy** – liberating frontline capacity provides more time for thinking and innovation.
- **Step 5: Invest in Frontline Capability** – failure to get the right talent will undo even the best efforts to create a front-line focused organization.

Judgment on the Front Line | *Chris DeRose and Noel Tichy (cont'd)*

Starting at the Top

Building a front line-focused organization requires top-down support

- Senior leaders set expectations for how the front line connects with customers.
- Top leaders must clearly define the scope of frontline judgment authority.

Shaking up leadership at the top

- Senior leaders may be the slowest to embrace change to a front line-focused organization.
- Adapting frontline solutions locally requires organizational support and resources.

Teaching People to Think

Accessing frontline intelligence requires teaching problem-solving skills

- The front line needs a method and language for solving complex issues.
- Decision-making can't occur at the front line if people don't know how to think critically.

Leaders must articulate, align, and refine the problem-solving methods

- Common frameworks and language reduce hierarchy and enable frontline action.
- Developing judgment skills requires experiential training, tools, and strong support.

Experiment to Innovate on the Front Line

Frontline innovation ideas are an untapped reservoir of growth potential

- Frontline personnel see opportunities to create new products and services.
- Most organizations lack a methodology for collecting and testing frontline ideas.

A culture of experimentation creates growth and commitment

- Frontline leaders grow as they put their ideas into action.
- When employees experiment, they emotionally commit to their customers and coworkers.

Breaking Down the Hierarchy

Reducing hierarchy liberates frontline capacity

- Hierarchies proliferate rules and bureaucracy that bog down the front line.
- Liberating frontline capacity provides more time for thinking and innovation.

Hierarchies don't disappear overnight

- The more entrenched the hierarchical mind-set, the more radical the action required.
- The ultimate goal is creating meaningful collaboration at all levels.

Judgment on the Front Line | *Chris DeRose and Noel Tichy (cont'd)*

Investing in Frontline Capability

Rigorous selection and training is critical to building commitment

- Failure to get the right talent will undo even the best efforts to create a front line-focused organization.
- Up-front investment in hiring can break the cycle of employee turnover.

Frontline supervisors create local environments that retain talent

- Frontline supervisors lead most of an organization's employees yet receive the least training.
- Great frontline supervisors unleash employees and increase commitment.

A Never-Ending Process

The front line is successful only with CEO support and direction

- If senior management fails to define a winning competitive strategy, the front line is set up to fail.
- The burden of top leadership failure is felt most profoundly by those near the front line.

Sustaining a front line-focused organization is a never-ending process

- Frontline disciplines require ongoing investment and development.
- Communication mechanisms need to be structured to enable dialogue between the frontline and senior leaders regarding market or customer changes.

Corporate Citizenship on the Front Line

Engaging in the community can turbocharge the front line

- Frontline associates learn by giving back and developing their leadership skills.
- Participation in the community strengthens organizational commitment.

There is a front line outside corporate walls

- Progressive companies are turning citizens and social agencies into an extension of their front line.
- Doing so is good for the individuals, companies, communities, and society as a whole.

More than simply asking the key questions, it is time for leaders to create organizational structures and systems that implicitly trust those at the front line – who often earn the least yet do some of the most difficult and frustrating jobs – to exercise good judgment, get closer to customers, and day in and day out, deliver great results for their organizations.

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Judgment on the Front Line | *Chris DeRose and Noel Tichy (cont'd)*

Recommended Resources

1. **Read** why Auxano's Vision Room Curator Bob Adams thinks *Undercover Boss* may make good TV, but is a lousy way to keep in touch with your front line team.
2. **Read** what *Judgment on the Front Line* authors Chris DeRose and Noel Tichy call the "4 Cs of Front Line Engagement."
3. **Download** Chapter 1 of *Judgment on the Front Line*.
4. **Read** what authors DeRose and Tichy write about *Judgment on the Front Line* for the American Management Association.
5. Watch a series of brief videos by **Chris DeRose** and **Noel Tichy** as they discuss *Judgment on the Front Line*.

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Go Ahead Actions for Vision Clarity

by Clint Grider, Ph.D., CFRE

Vision Clarity Connection

Nelson Mandela once stressed: “It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory... then people will appreciate your leadership.”

In *Judgment on the Front Line: How Smart Leaders Win by Trusting Their Employees*, authors Chris DeRose and Noel M. Tichy crystallize this idea by helping leaders tap into their most powerful brain trust through relentless empowerment of front line team members.

As described in this SUMS, DeRose and Tichy present a compelling case that challenges leaders to take a hard look at how effectively they are learning from their employees. Most leaders quickly agree with the concept that people are the most important part of an organization. However, many of those same leaders unintentionally compartmentalize this assertion when faced with the daily rigors of “management.”

Do product development, improvement of business processes, and daily experimentation center on leader interaction with *front line* team members? Is intentional time for employees to *think* and *experiment* planned and ruthlessly guarded by leaders? Do team members understand the business model and feel their creativity and input is so valued that they are deeply invested in the success of the overall organization? Are they empowered to make significant company decisions on behalf of the customer?

As we consider honest responses to these and related questions, we as leaders should be energized to enhance areas that need improvement. The greatest opportunity for dynamic innovation and success depends on our diligence to grow from the bottom up—by constantly improving our empowerment of and attentiveness to the brilliance of those at the front line of our organizations.

Go Ahead

1. The authors present 5 characteristics of leaders in a front line-focused organization on page 2 of this Sums. At your next leadership meeting, have your team individually rank each of the characteristics FOR THEMSELVES from a “5” (I’m extremely front line-focused) to a “1” (I don’t practice this characteristic at all). Total the results on a whiteboard, take a team average, and discuss ways to improve the team average and individual scores.
2. A 5-step process on how to build a front line-focused organization is introduced on page 2 of this Sums, with details on pages 3 and 4. At your next leadership meeting, divide your team into 5 groups and assign one step to each group. Have each group:
 - a. Assess the current state of that process from a “5” (we practice this with excellence) to a “1” (we are vaguely aware of this step).
 - b. Brainstorm ideas to move from your current state to a “5.”
 - c. Have each group share their results with the entire team.
 - d. Select 2 appropriate ideas for each of the 5 steps, and develop a schedule to implement them.
3. Have you identified someone who can help you build or hone a culture of empowerment? Do you need objective help to look at where you are and next steps to consider? Call or email me for a free one-hour assessment.



More About Clint Grider

Clint Grider, Ph.D., CFRE

Highly regarded as a “vision optimizer,” Clint can keenly identify the key people and strengths that are at the core of an organization’s culture. With this discernment, he guides leaders through vision clarity processes leading to meaningful results and sustainable momentum. Bringing the gifts of encouragement and creativity to the process, he helps teams advance vision through increased passion and ownership. Blending these abilities with years of experience building healthy organizations, Clint guides churches and non-profits to realize big dreams.

A Certified Fund Raising Executive, Dr. Grider has an additional ability to serve organizations in developing and aligning resources to achieve their goals. Clint has served in leadership roles for successful campaigns ranging from \$2 million to \$637 million. He also has served as a strategic planning consultant for universities, schools, churches, and other non-profits, with a particular emphasis on helping organizations improve their systems and capacity. This unique combination of skills and experience have enabled him to effectively serve ministries and organizations like America’s Family Coaches, the Texas A&M Foundation, Sky Ranch, Houston Baptist University, and Baylor College of Medicine.

Clint received his bachelor’s in business administration and marketing from Baylor University, master’s in educational psychology from Baylor, and Ph.D. in educational administration with specializations in process improvement and strategic planning from Texas A&M University.

He and his wife Kindra have been married 23 years and live near Dallas, Texas with their two daughters.

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