

Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box (2010)

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For too long, the issue of self-deception has been the realm of deep-thinking philosophers, academics, and scholars working on the central questions of the human sciences. The public remains generally unaware of the issue. That would be fine except that self-deception is so pervasive that it touches every aspect of life. “Touches” is perhaps too gentle a word to describe its influence. **Self-deception actually determines one’s experience in every aspect of life.** The extent to which it does that – and in particular the extent to which it determines the nature of one’s influence on, and experience of, others – is the subject of this book. (Preface, xi)

Self-deception is like this. **It blinds us to the true causes of problems**, and once we’re blind, all the ‘solutions’ we can think of will actually make matters worse. Whether at work or at home, self-deception **obscures the truth about ourselves**, corrupts our view of others and our circumstances, and inhibits our ability to make wise and helpful decisions. To the extent that we are self-deceived, **both our happiness and our leadership are undermined at every turn...** Members of every culture participate to one degree or another in their own individual and cultural deceptions. (Preface, xii)

“You have a problem,” Bud continued. “The people at work know it, your spouse knows it, your mother-in-law knows it, I’ll bet even your neighbors know it.” ... “The problem is that you don’t know it.” (p. 7) ... “You’re doing more damage than you know.” (p. 9) **I was stuck because I had a problem that I didn’t think I had – a problem I couldn’t see.** I could see matters only from my own closed perspective, and I was deeply resistant to any suggestion that the truth was otherwise. **So I was in a box – cut off, closed up, blind.**” (p. 16)

“I want you to consider something...Really think about it. When you’re going out of your way to do all those things for Leon so that he’ll know that you have an interest in him, what are you most interested in – *him* or his opinion of *you*?” (p. 26) ...My words said, ‘I’m sorry,’ but my feelings didn’t, and it was the way I was feeling – revealed as it was through my voice, my gaze, my posture, my level of interest in his needs, and so on – it was *that* that he was responding to.’ (p. 28) What we’ll know and respond to is how that person is regarding us when doing those things.” (p. 29)

“Notice that some people...inspire devotion and commitment in others, even when they’re interpersonally clumsy,” said Bud. “The fact that they haven’t attended many seminars or that they’ve never learned the latest techniques hardly matters. They seem to produce anyway. And they inspire those around them to do the same. ...They don’t always say or do the ‘right’ things, but people love working with them. They get results.” (p. 30)

“But then there are other people ...who have a very different influence. Even if they do all the ‘right’ things interpersonally – even if they apply all the latest skills and techniques to their communications and tasks – it won’t matter. People ultimately resent them and their tactics. And so they end up failing as leaders – failing because they provoke people to resist them.” (p. 30) ...are you suggesting that people skills don’t matter at all? “No, I certainly don’t mean to suggest that. But **I am suggesting that people skills are never primary.** ...Whether or not people skills are effective depends on something deeper. ...deeper than behavior and skill.” (p. 31)

The Deep Choice That Determines Influence...

“So, what’s this something deeper?” I asked curiously. “Whether I am *in* or *out of* the box.” (p. 32)

“As we’ve been talking about, no matter what we’re doing on the outside, **people respond to how we’re feeling about them on the inside.** And how we’re feeling about them depends on whether we’re in or out of the box concerning them. Let me illustrate that point further...” (p. 32)

“About a year ago, I flew from Dallas to Phoenix on a flight that had open seating. While boarding, I overheard the boarding agent say that the plane was not sold out but that there would be very few unused seats. I felt lucky and relieved to find a window seat open with a vacant seat beside it about a

third of the way back on the plane. Passengers still in need of a seats continued streaming down the aisle, their eyes scanning and evaluating the desirability of their dwindling seating options. I set my briefcase on the vacant middle seat, took out that day's paper, and started to read. I remember peering over the top corner of the paper at the people who were coming down the aisle. At the sight of body language that said that my briefcase's seat was being considered, I spread the paper wider, making the seat look as undesirable as possible. Do you get the picture?" (p. 32)

"Good. Now, let me ask you a question: On the surface, what *behaviors* was I engaged in on the plane – what were some of the things I was *doing*?" (p. 32) "Well, you were being kind of a jerk, for one thing." (p. 33) "Now that's certainly true, ...but it's not quite what I mean...What specific actions was I taking on the plane? What was my outward behavior?" You were...taking two seats...reading the paper...watching people who might sit in the seat next to you... "Okay, good enough," said Bud. "Here's another question: While I was doing those behaviors, how was I seeing the people who were looking for seats? What were they to me?" I'd say that you saw them as threats, maybe nuisances or problems... Bud nodded. "Would you say that I considered the needs of those still looking for seats to be as legitimate as my own?" Not at all. Your needs counted, and everyone else's were secondary – if that." (p. 33)

"You're right. ...Now compare that experience with this one: About six months ago, Nancy and I took a trip to Florida. Somehow there was a mistake in the ticketing process, and we weren't seated together. The flight was mostly full, and the flight attendant was having a difficult time trying to find a way to seat us together. As we stood in the aisle trying to figure out a solution, a woman holding a hastily folded newspaper came up behind us, from the rear of the plane, and said, 'Excuse me – if you need two seats together, I believe the seat next to me is vacant. I'd be happy to sit in one of your seats.'" (p. 34)

"Now think of this woman. How would you say that she saw *us* – did she see us as threats, nuisances, or problems?" No...**she just saw you as people** in need of seats who would like to sit together. "Did she, like me (above), seem to privilege her own needs and desires over the needs and desires of others?" ...it seems...that **your needs and her needs counted about the same.**" (p. 34)

"Here we have two situations in which a person was seated on a plane next to an empty seat, evidently reading the paper and observing others who were still in need of seats on the plane. That's what was happening on the surface – behaviorally." (p. 34)



"But notice how different this similar experience was for me and for this woman. I minimized others; she didn't. I felt anxious, uptight, irritated, threatened, and angry, while she appeared to have no such negative emotions at all. I sat there blaming others...she seemed not to have blamed but to have understood ...– they needed to sit *somewhere*. And, if so, why shouldn't the seat next to her – and in her case, even her own seat – be as rightly theirs as any others?" (p. 35)

"Now...Isn't it the case that the people getting on both planes were people with comparable hopes, needs, cares, and fears, and that all of them had more or less the same need to sit?" Yes... "If that's true, then I had a big problem – because I wasn't seeing the people on the plane like that at all. **My view was that I somehow was entitled or superior** to those who were still looking for seats. Which is to say that I wasn't really seeing them as people at all. **They were more like objects to me in that moment than people.**" ..."Notice how my view of both myself and others was distorted from what we agreed was the reality..." (p. 35)

"So my view of the world was a systematically incorrect way of seeing others and myself. **I saw others less than they were** – as objects with needs and desires somehow secondary to and less legitimate than mine.

But I couldn't see the problem with what I was doing. **I was self-deceived – or in the box.** The lady who offered us her seat, on the other hand, saw others and the situation clearly, without bias. She saw others as they were, as people like herself, with similar needs and desires. ...She was out of the box. (p. 36) ...Either (a) I am seeing others straightforwardly as they are – as people like me who have needs and desires as legitimate as my own – or (b) I'm not. One way, I experience myself as a person among

people. The other way, I experience myself as *the* person among objects. One way, I'm out of the box; the other way, I'm in the box." (p. 37)

People or Objects...

"If you want to know the secret of (this company's) success, it's that we've developed a culture where people are simply invited to see others as people. And **being seen and treated straightforwardly, people respond accordingly**. (p. 40) Remember, people primarily respond not to what we do but to how we're *being* – whether we're in or out of the box toward them...[and often] assumes that when we are out of the box, our behaviors are 'soft,' and when we're in the box, our behaviors are 'hard.' That's why you wonder, I take it, whether one can actually sustain a business being out of the box all the time. But let's think about that assumption a bit harder. "Is the distinction between being *in* the box and being *out of* the box a behavioral one?" (p. 46) ...there are two ways to be soft/hard. I can engage in [soft or] hard behaviors and be either *in* the box or *out of* the box when I do them. The distinction isn't the behavior. It's the way I'm being when I am doing *whatever* I'm doing – be it soft *or* hard." (p. 47)



"So regarding hard behavior, here's the choice: We can be hard and invite productivity and commitment, or we can be hard and invite resistance and ill will. The choice isn't to be hard or not, it's to be in the box or not." (p. 48)

"I was on completely unfamiliar ground. (p. 50) I [was] full of questions. *First of all, what if someone else is in the box?* (p. 55) ...My anger grew with each step. *This is a waste of time*, I thought. *It's all so Pollyannaish. In a perfect world, okay. But blast it, this is business!*" (p. 56)

How We Get IN the Box...

"Tell me how it's been going so far...I really mean your experience *today*." Well, other than being told that I'm in the box, it's going great. Kate laughed. "Yeah, I know what you mean. But don't take it too hard. Bud's in the box, too, you know, ...and so am I, for that matter." But if everyone's in the box anyway, including successful people like you and Bud, then what's the point?" (p. 61)

"The point is that although we're still sometimes in the box, and probably always will be to some extent, our success has come because of the times and ways that we at the company have been *out of* the box. **This isn't about perfection. Far from it. It's simply about getting better** – better in systematic and concrete ways that improve the company's bottom line. That kind of leadership mentality – at every level of the organization – is what sets us apart." (p. 61)

"Now, at first you're going to think this is a silly story. But it illustrates well how we get in the box in the first place.

One night a number of years ago, when David was just an infant, I was awakened by his wailing cries. He was probably four months old or so at the time. I remember glancing at the clock. It was around one in the morning. In the flash of that moment, I had an impression or a sense or a feeling – a thought of something I should do. It was this: 'Get up and tend to David so that Nancy can sleep.' (p. 66)

"If you think about it, this sort of sense is very basic...We're all people. And when we're out of the box and seeing others as people, we have a very basic sense about others – namely that, like ourselves, they have hopes, needs, cares, and fears. And on occasion, as a result of this sense, we have impressions of things to do for others – things we think might help them, things we can do for them, things we want to do for them. ...This was such an occasion – I felt a desire to do something for Nancy. But you know what? I didn't act on it. I just stayed in the bed, listening to David wail." (p. 66) You might say I 'betrayed' my sense of what I should do for Nancy. ...I just mean that in acting contrary to my sense of what was appropriate, I betrayed my own sense of how I should be toward another person. So we call such an act 'self-betrayal'...one of the most common things in world..." (p. 67)

"Self-betrayal"

1. An act contrary to what I feel I should do for another is called an act of "self-betrayal."

"It might help to hear a few more examples."

"Yesterday...I go into the elevator, and as the door started to close, I saw someone scurry around the corner and race toward the elevator. In that instant, I had a sense that I should catch the door for him.

But I didn't. I just let it close, my last view being of that outstretched, lunging arm. Have you ever had that experience?" (p. 67)

"Or how about these: Think of a time when you felt you should help your child or your spouse but then decided not to. Or a time when you felt you should apologize to someone but never got around to doing it. Or a time when you knew you had some information that would be helpful to a coworker, but you kept it to yourself. Or a time when you knew you needed to stay late to finish some work for someone but went home instead – without bothering to talk to that person about it. I could go on and on...I've done all of these, as I bet you have, too. ...They're all examples of **self-betrayal – times when I had a sense of something I should do for others but didn't do it.**" (p. 68)

"Now think about it...This is hardly a monumental idea. It's about as simple as it comes. But its implications are astounding. And astoundingly unsimple." (p. 68)

"...I'm just lying there listening to my wailing child, how do you imagine I might've started to see, and feel about, Nancy? ...kind of lazy...inconsiderate...unappreciative of all I do...insensitive...[and] too busy sleeping to be aware of any of this. ...What do you think, was Nancy really asleep? ... maybe, but I doubt it. So you think she was faking it – pretending to be asleep? ...But remember, whether she actually was asleep is less important right now than whether I was *thinking* she was asleep. We're talking now about my perception once I betrayed myself. *That's* the point." (p. 69)

"So from the perspective of that moment, if she was just feigning sleep and letting her child wail, what kind of mom do you suppose I thought she was being? ...Probably a pretty lousy one. And what kind of wife? ...again, pretty lousy...inconsiderate... So, here I am, having betrayed myself, we can imagine that I might've started to see my wife in that moment as lazy, inconsiderate, taking me for granted, insensitive, a faker, a lousy mom, and a lousy wife. ...You've managed to completely vilify one of the best people I know." (p. 70)

"But it's worse than that, even...That's how I started to see *Nancy*. But having betrayed myself, how do you suppose I started to see *myself*? Oh, you probably saw yourself as the victim – as the poor guy who couldn't get the sleep he needed. And you would've seen yourself as hardworking...[and] the work you had to do the next morning probably seemed pretty important to you." (p. 70)

"How about this? What if I'd gotten up the night before? How do you suppose I would've seen myself if that had been the case? Oh, as fair... And how about this? Who is sensitive enough to hear the child? Well, YOU were the sensitive one, obviously (I chuckled...All of this – the way Bud saw Nancy and the way he saw himself – seemed on the one hand so absurd and laughable but on the other hand so common.) And if I'm sensitive to my child, then what kind of dad do you think I am? A good one! Yes...and if I'm seeing myself as all of these – as hardworking, fair, sensitive, a good dad – then what kind of husband do I think I am? A really good husband – especially putting up with a wife like the one you were thinking you had! Yes...so look what we have." (p. 71)

"For starters, look at how I started to see Nancy after I betrayed myself – as lazy, inconsiderate, and so on. Now think of this: Do those thoughts and feelings about Nancy invite me to reconsider my decision and do what I felt I should do for her? Not at all...What *do* they do for me? Bud asked. Well, they justify your *not* doing it. They give you reasons to stay in bed and *not* tend to David. That's right, Bud said...and added a second point to the list. **"If I betray myself...my thoughts and feelings will begin to tell me that I'm justified in whatever I'm doing or failing to do."** (pp. 72-73)

"Self-betrayal"

1. *An act contrary to what I feel I should do for another is called an act of "self-betrayal."*
2. *When I betray myself, I begin to see the world in a way that justifies my self-betrayal.*

Characteristics of Self-Betrayal...

"Take a look again at how I started to see Nancy. Do you suppose that in reality she's as bad as she seemed to me after I betrayed myself? No, probably not... Yeah, but what if she was? ...what if she really was a lazy and inconsiderate person, and even a bad wife, for that matter? Wouldn't that make a difference?" (p. 74)

"Let's just say, for the sake of argument, that Nancy *is* lazy...and inconsiderate. Some people are, after all. Here's the question: If she was lazy and inconsiderate after I betrayed myself, then she must've been lazy and inconsiderate before, right? Yes...If she's lazy and inconsiderate, she's lazy and inconsiderate. Before, after, it wouldn't matter. Okay, good, said Bud. But if that's the case, then notice

– I felt I should get up and help her *even though* she was lazy and inconsiderate. Before I betrayed myself, I didn't see her faults as reasons not to help her. I felt that way only **after I betrayed myself, when I used her faults as justifications for my own misbehavior.**" (pp. 74-75)

"So even if she *is* lazy and inconsiderate, the truth is that in self-betrayal, I'm making her out to be more lazy and inconsiderate than she really is. And that's something *I'm* doing, not something she's doing. ...Here I am in self-betrayal, and I think that I'm not getting up to help Nancy because of what she's doing to me – because she's lazy, inconsiderate, and so on. But is that the truth?" (p. 76)

"You think that's the truth, but it's not. ...The truth is her faults seemed relevant to whether I should help her only *after I failed to help her*. I focused on and inflated her faults when I needed to feel justified for *mine*. After I betrayed myself, the truth was just the opposite of what I thought it was." (p. 76)

"That's how Bud's view of Nancy was distorted...but consider how his view even of himself became distorted. Do you suppose that he's really as hardworking, important, fair, and sensitive as he was claiming himself to be? He was experiencing himself as a good dad and husband, for example, but in that moment, was he in actual fact *being* a good dad and husband? No...At the same time that he was inflating Nancy's faults, he was also minimizing his own. **He was inflating his own virtue. ...not seeing anything very clearly...(his) view of reality became distorted.**" (p. 77)

"Think about it...Before I betrayed myself, I simply saw something I could do to help Nancy. She was a person with a need that I felt I should fill. I saw the situation straightforwardly. But after I betrayed myself, my view both of her and of myself became distorted. I saw the world in a view that justified my failure. My perception became distorted systematically in my favour. When I betrayed myself, I became self-deceived...**[that] is how we enter the box.**"

"So...when in this story did Bud start to *blame* Nancy? ...When he betrayed himself. ...He wasn't blaming her when he just felt he should help her. Only after he failed to help her. ...but consider what happened to my *feelings* toward her after I got in the box...maybe 'irritated'...or angry – but did I feel this way toward her when I just felt I should help? ...No! So my blaming didn't stop with my thoughts. In the box, *my feelings* were blaming, too. ...**In the box, my whole way was blaming – both my thoughts and my feelings** told me Nancy was at fault." (pp. 79-80)

"And just to be clear here, was Nancy to blame? Was I irritated and angry because of Nancy? Were my thoughts and feelings telling me the truth? Think about it this way. ...What's the only thing that happened in this story between the time that I wasn't irritated and angry and the time I was? ...Your choice not to do what you felt you should do. Your self-betrayal. ...which is what was *the real cause* my irritation and anger at Nancy." (p. 81)

"Okay, I think I get this... As people, we have a sense of what other people might need and how we can help them. ...And if I have that sort of sense and go against it, then I betray my own sense of what I should do for someone. ...**And if I betray myself, then I start seeing things differently** – my view of others, myself, my circumstances – everything is distorted in a way that makes me feel okay about *what I'm doing*...justified in my own self-betrayal."

Life in the Box...

"So far we've learned how we get *in* the box. At this point we're ready to **consider how we carry boxes with us**. ...Notice that after I betrayed myself, I saw myself in certain self-justifying ways – for example, as 'hardworking, important, fair, sensitive, and the sort of person who's a good dad and a good husband.' That's how I saw myself after I betrayed myself. But here's an important question: Was I lying there thinking of myself in these self-justifying ways *before* I betrayed myself? No...these arose in my self-betrayal – **when I needed to be justified.**" (p. 83)

"Do you think it's the only time I've ever betrayed myself? ...I doubt it. I don't think I've ever gone a day without betraying myself in some way – and

"Self-betrayal"

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2. When I betray myself, I begin to see the world in a way that justifies my self-betrayal.
3. When I see the world in a self-justifying way, my view of reality becomes distorted.
4. So – when I betray myself, I enter the box.

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5. Over time, certain boxes become characteristic of me, and I carry them with me.

perhaps not even an hour. **I've spent a lifetime betraying myself...as has everyone else.** And every time I've betrayed myself, I've seen myself in certain self-justifying ways – just like I did in the story here... The result is that over time, **certain of these self-justifying images become characteristic of me.** They're the form my boxes take as I carry them with me into new situations.” (p. 85)

“Over time, as we betray ourselves, **we come to see ourselves in various self-justifying ways.** We end up carrying these self-justifying images with us into new situations, and to the extent that we do, we enter new situations *already* in the box. We don't see people straightforwardly, as people. Rather, we see them *in terms of* the self-justifying images we've created. If people act in ways that challenge the claim made by a self-justifying image, we see them as threats. If they reinforce the claim made by a self-justifying image, we see them as allies. If they fail to matter to a self-justifying image, we see them as unimportant. **Whichever way we see them, they're just objects to us. We're already in the box.**” (p. 88)

“And if I'm already in the box toward someone, I generally won't have feelings to do things for them. So the fact that I have few feelings to help someone probably isn't evidence that I'm out of the box. It may rather be a sign that I'm deep within it.” (p. 88)

“I'm suggesting that that's the way it generally is *for me* – at least for those I'm closest to in my life. Whether it's the same with you...I don't know. You'll have to wrestle with that for yourself. But as a general rule, let me suggest this: If you seem to be in the box in a given situation but can't identify a feeling you betrayed in that moment, that's a clue that you might *already* be in the box. And you may find it useful to wonder whether you're carrying around some self-justifying images that are feeling threatened.” (p. 89)

“Like being the sort of person who's a good spouse, for example?” ...Yes. Or the sort of person who's important or competent or hardworking or the smartest. Or being the sort of person who knows everything or does everything, or doesn't make mistakes or thinks of others, and so on. **Almost anything can be perverted into a self-justifying image.**” (p. 89)



“Perverted? What do you mean? **I mean that most self-justifying images are the in-the-box perversions of what would be great out of the box.** For example, it's great to be a good spouse. That's exactly what we should be for our spouses. ...and great to think of others...to be as knowledgeable as we can...and so on. But these are the very things we're *not* being when we have self-justifying images about them. For example, certainly it's good to think of others, but who am I thinking of when I'm thinking of myself as the

sort of person who thinks of others? ...Yourself, I guess. Exactly. **So my self-justifying image lies to me. It tells me I am focused on one thing – in this case, others – but in having that image, I'm actually focused on myself.**” (pp. 89-90)

“Okay, fair enough, I said, looking for holes in his logic. But what about the one you mentioned about being smart or knowing everything? What's the problem with that?” (p. 90)

“Let's think about that. Let's say that you have a self-justifying image that says you know everything. How do you suppose you'd feel toward someone who suggested something new to you? ...I guess I'd resent them. I might find something wrong with his suggestion. ...Right. So would he keep coming to you with new ideas? ...Probably not. ...And would you end up learning new things? ...No, I guess not. Oh, I see your point. ...My self-justifying image about being learned can be the very thing that sometimes *keeps* me from learning. ...Yes. So, if I have this self-justifying image, is knowing everything really what I'm so concerned about? ...Not really. I guess your major concern is yourself – how you look. ...Exactly. That's the nature of most self-justifying images.” (p. 90)

Okay, so I can carry my boxes with me. Maybe I have some of these self-justifying images that Bud is talking about. Maybe I'm in the box toward (Name). Maybe (Name) is just an object to me generally. Okay. But what about (Name)? All of this seems to be saying that I'm the one with the problem. But what about his/her problem? What about his/her self-justifying images? Let's talk about that! (pp. 90-1)

“My anger was building again, when all of a sudden I became aware of it – and of something more: **I was aware of the hypocrisy in my anger.** For here I was angry that (Name) was in the box, but in my anger at him/her being in the box, *I* was in the box. I was angry at him/her for being like I was being! The thought caught me short, and (Name) seemed different to me in an instant – not different in the

sense that he/she no longer had problems but different in the sense that I saw myself as having problems, too. **His/her problems no longer seemed to excuse mine.**" (p. 91)

"Is this all making sense...? Yes. I understand it...I don't necessarily *like* it, but I understand it. ...I think I have some work to do." (p. 91)

"Until that moment, I'd felt that giving in to the possibility that I had a problem would mean that I was the loser, that I'd been wrestled to the ground, that (Name) had won. But now it didn't seem that way at all. I felt in a strange way free and unencumbered. (Name) didn't win, and I didn't lose. The world seemed much different from what it was the moment before. I felt hope. **Amazingly, I felt hope in the moment I discovered I had a problem.**" (p. 92)

Collusion...

"So far, we've been examining the internal experience of someone who's in the box. But as you can imagine, **my box can have quite an impact on others.** ...Think about it...Suppose this is me in my box – drawing a box with a stick figure in it. ...If I am here in my box, what am I communicating to others? ...Well, you're blaming them, I guess. ...Exactly. And do you suppose other people are generally walking around saying to themselves, 'Gee, I really feel blameworthy today; I need someone to blame me'? ...I don't think so. Most people are generally walking around thinking something like, 'Look, I'm not perfect, but doggone it, I'm doing just about as well as you could expect under the circumstances.' **And since most of us have self-justifying images we're carrying around with us, most people are already in a defensive posture, always ready to defend their self-justifying images against attack.**" (p. 93)

So, if I'm in the box, blaming others, my blame invites them to do – *what?* ...I guess your blame would invite *them* to be in the box. ...**By blaming, I invite others to get in the box, and they then blame me for blaming them unjustly.** But because I feel justified in blaming them while I'm in the box, I feel that *their* blame is unjust and blame them even more. Of course, while they're in the box, they feel justified in blaming me and feel that my further blame is unjust. So they blame *me* even more. And so on. ...So, by being in the box, I invite others to be in the box in response...And others, by being in the box in response, invite me to *stay* in the box...and you'll see that **when someone's in the box, the same pattern of mutual provocation and justification always emerges.**" (p. 94-5)

"So, around and around we go... Think of it: We provoke each other to do more of what we say we don't like about the other. So, ...from within the box I end up undermining the effectiveness of everything I do... **And the problem isn't merely that the box makes me ineffective, it's that it makes me destructive.** Because from within the box, I end up inviting more of the very thing that I'm complaining about, as well as other behaviors...that I will hate just as much, if not more. **Whenever we are in the box, we have a need that is met by others' poor behavior.** And so our boxes encourage more poor behavior in others, even if that behavior makes our lives more difficult. ...How? Why?" (pp. 97-100)

"When I'm in the box, there's something I need more than what I think I want most. And what do you think that is? What do I need most when I'm in the box? ...*is to feel justified.* **Justification is what my box eats, as it were, in order to survive.** ...In order to be justified in blaming, I need [someone] to be blameworthy. ...*I needed [Name] to be a problem in order to feel justified in always seeing [Name] as a problem.* ...when I'm in the box, I need people to cause trouble for me – *I actually need problems.* ...As incredible as that sounded, it rang true. ...By the simple fact of being in the box, each helps to create the very problems he or she blames the other for. ...**And when we are in collusion, we actually collude in condemning ourselves to ongoing mutual mistreatment!**" (pp. 102-04)

"And we do this, not because we like being mistreated but because we're in the box, and the box *lives* on the justification it gets from our being mistreated.

"Self-betrayal"

1. *An act contrary to what I feel I should do for another is called an act of "self-betrayal."*
2. *When I betray myself, I begin to see the world in a way that justifies my self-betrayal.*
3. *When I see the world in a self-justifying way, my view of reality becomes distorted.*
4. *So – when I betray myself, I enter the box.*
5. *Over time, certain boxes become characteristic of me, and I carry them with me.*
6. *By being in the box, I provoke others to be in the box.*
7. *In the box, we invite mutual mistreatment and obtain mutual justification. We collude in giving each other reason to stay in the box.*

So there's a peculiar irony to being in the box: **However bitterly I complain about someone's poor behavior toward me and about the trouble it causes me, I also find it strangely *delicious*.** It's my proof that others are as blameworthy as I've claimed them to be – and that I'm as innocent as I claim *myself* to be. **The behavior I complain about is the very behavior that justifies me.** ...Once in the box, we give each other reason to *stay* in the box." (pp. 104-5)

"We do this not only by mistreating the other person directly, by the way, but also by how we might begin to talk about or gossip about that person with others. The more people we can find to agree with our side of the story, the more justified we will feel in believing that side of the story. ...I might gossip about others in order to gather allies. Whether at home or at work, boxes want to spread in order to gather additional justification. And with every mistreatment – direct and indirect – we give each other further justification for staying in the box. That's the grim reality." (p. 106)

"Think about how self-betrayal, and everything we've been talking about, explains the self-deception problem – **the problem of being unable to see that I have a problem.** To begin with, when I'm in the box, whom do I think has the problem? ...Others! But when I'm in the box, who, in fact, has the problem? I do...my box provokes *problems* in others. It provokes what I take as proof that I'm not the one with the problem. ...So what will I do if anyone tries to correct the problem they see in *me*? ...You'll resist them. Exactly!" (pp. 106-7)

"I was carrying the disease I blamed everyone else for. I infected them and then blamed them for the infection. ...*How can I possibly get out of the box?*" (p. 129)

Toward Being Out of the Box...

"You see...the question 'How do I get out of the box?' is really two questions. The first question is 'How do I *get* out?' and the second is 'How do I *stay* out once I'm out?' ...Think about it, and I want to emphasize this again: When you're feeling that you want to be out of the box for someone, in that moment you're already out. You're feeling that way *because* you're now seeing him/her as a person...and there are some pretty specific things we can do, once we're out of the box, to *stay* out of the box." (pp.131-2)

"To begin with, it helps to understand how we *don't* get out of the box. Think about the things we try to do when we're in the box. For example, in the box, whom do we think has the problem? ...Others. That's right, so **normally we spend a lot of energy in the box trying to change others.** But does that work? Does that get us out of the box? ...No! Why not? ...Because that's the problem in the first place: I'm trying to change them because, in the box, I think they need to be changed. But does that mean no one needs to be changed? Is everyone doing things just perfectly, then – that no one needs to *improve*? ...No, of course not. Everyone needs to improve. Then why not the *other guy*? What's wrong if I want *him* to improve? ...That's a good question. *What is wrong with that?* -- I'm not sure..." (p. 133)

"While it's true that others may have problems they need to solve, are *their* problems the reason I'm in the box? ...No. That's what you think in the box, but it's a misperception. Exactly...**so even if I were successful and the person I tried to change actually changed, would that solve the problem of my being in the box?** ...No, I guess it wouldn't. That's right, it wouldn't – even if the other person actually *did* change. So, trying to change others doesn't work." (p. 134)

"What about doing my best to *cope* with others? Does that work? ...I wouldn't think so. That's right, it doesn't. And there's a simple reason why. 'Coping' has the same deficiency as trying to change the other person: It's just another way to continue blaming. It communicates the blame of my box, which invites those I'm coping with to be in *their* boxes. How about this one? Leaving. Does leaving work? Will that get me out of the box? ...Maybe – it seems like it might sometimes. Well, let's think about it.

Where do I think the problem is when I'm in the box? ...In others. Exactly. But where *in fact* is the problem when I'm in the box? ...In myself. Yes. So if I leave, what goes with me? ...The problem...I get it – the box goes with me! That's right. In the box, leaving is just another way to blame. It's just a continuation of my box. I take my self-justifying feelings with me. Now it may be that in certain situations, leaving is the right thing to do. But leaving a situation will never be sufficient, even if right. Ultimately, I have to leave my box too." (pp. 134-5)

"What doesn't work in the box"

1. *Trying to change others.*
2. *Doing my best to 'cope' with others.*
3. *Leaving.*

“How about communicating? Will that work? Will that get me out of the box? ...It seems like it would – if you can’t communicate, you don’t have anything. Okay, let’s consider this one carefully. Look here at Bud’s story. After he betrayed himself, here’s how he saw Nancy – as lazy, inconsiderate, insensitive, and so on. Now here’s the question. If he tries to communicate with Nancy now, while he’s in his box, what’s he going to communicate? ...Oh, he’s going to communicate what he’s feeling about her – namely that she’s all of those bad things. Exactly. And will that help? Is Bud likely to get out of the box by telling his wife that she’s all the lousy things he’s thinking she is when he’s in the box? ...No. But what if he’s a little more sophisticated than that? I mean, with a little skill, he might be able to communicate more subtly and not just come right out and blast away. That’s true...but remember, if Bud’s in the box, then he’s blaming. It’s true he may be able to acquire some skills that would improve his communication techniques, but do you suppose those skills would hide his blame? ...No, I suppose not. In the box, whether I’m a skilled communicator or not, I end up communicating my box – and that’s the problem.” (pp. 136-7)

“In fact, this point about skills applies to skills generally, not just to communication skills. You might think about this way: **No matter what skill you teach me, I can either be *in* the box or *out* of the box when I implement it.** And that raises this question: Will using a skill *in* the box be the way to get *out* of the box? ...No. I guess not. That’s why skill training in nontechnical areas often has so little lasting impact. Helpful skills and techniques aren’t very helpful if they’re done in the box. They just provide people with more-sophisticated ways to blame. ...the people problems that most people try to correct with skills aren’t due to a lack of skill at all. They’re due to self-betrayal. People problems seem intractable not because they are insoluble but because the common skill interventions are not themselves solutions -- we can’t get out of the box simply by implementing new skills and techniques.” (pp. 137-8)

“There’s one more possibility we should consider. What if I try to change *myself* – *my behavior*? Can that get me out of the box? ...It looks like that’s the only thing that *can* get you out. This is tricky, but quite important. ...think about the story where Nancy and I are arguing but I tried to apologize and put an end to it. I changed myself in a radical way in that case: I changed all the way from arguing to kissing. But did that change get me out of the box? ...No, because you didn’t really mean it. You were still in the box. And that’s just the point: Because I was in the box, I *couldn’t* mean it. **In the box, every change I can think of is just a change in my style of being *within* the box...**and they are therefore just more *of* the box – which is the problem in the first place. Others remain objects to me. So, I can’t get out of the box merely by changing my behavior.” (pp. 138-9)

“But wait a minute. You’re telling me that I can’t get out of the box by trying to change others or by doing my best to cope with others or by leaving, communicating, or implementing new skills and techniques. And then you’re telling me on top of that that I can’t even get out of the box by changing *myself*? Well, you can’t get out by continuing to *focus on yourself* – which is what you do when you try to change your behavior in the box. ...Then how could we *ever* get out? I mean, if what you’re saying is right, then there’s no way out. We’re all stuck. Actually, that’s not quite right. **There is a way out, but it’s different than anyone generally supposes.** And you do know what it is...you just don’t realize that you know it.” (p. 140)

“So consider this: If being in or out of the box is something that’s deeper than behavior, do you suppose that the key to getting out of the box will be behavior? ...No, I guess it wouldn’t. **But since the box itself is deeper than behavior, the way out of the box has to be deeper than behavior, too.** Almost any behavior can be done either in the box or out of the box, so no mere behavior can get you out. There’s a fundamental problem with the question, ‘What do I need to *do* to get out of the box?’ (p. 143)

The Way Out...

“The box is a metaphor for how I’m *resisting* others. By ‘resisting,’ I mean that my self-betrayal isn’t passive. In the box, I’m **actively resisting what the humanity of others calls me to do for them.** For example, in the story where Bud’s failing to get up so that Nancy could sleep, that initial feeling was an impression he had of something he should do for Nancy. He betrayed himself when he *resisted* that sense of what he should do for her, and in resisting that sense, he began to focus on himself and to see

“What doesn’t work in the box”

1. *Trying to change others.*
2. *Doing my best to ‘cope’ with others.*
3. *Leaving.*
4. *Communicating.*
5. *Implementing new skills or techniques.*
6. *Changing my behavior.*

her as being undeserving of help. His self-deception – his ‘box’ – is something he created and sustained through his active resistance of Nancy. This is why it’s futile to try and get of the box by focusing further on ourselves: In the box, everything we think and feel is part of the lie of the box. The truth is, **we change in the moment we cease resisting what is outside our box – others.**” (pp. 144-5)

“In the moment we cease resisting others, we’re out of the box – liberated from self-justifying thoughts and feelings. This is why the way out of the box is always right before our eyes – *because the people we’re resisting are right before our eyes.* We can stop betraying ourselves toward them – we can stop *resisting* the call of their humanity upon us. ...But what can help me to do *that*? This is an important point. Toward any one person or group of people, I’m either in or out of the box at any given moment. But since there are many people in my life – some that I may be more in the box toward than others – in an important sense, **I can be both in and out of the box at the same time.** In the box toward some people and out toward others. This simple fact can give us leverage to get out of the box in the areas of our lives where we may be struggling.” (pp. 145-6)

“So although it’s true that there is nothing we can think of and do from within the box to get ourselves out, the fact that we are almost always both in and out of the box at the same time, albeit in different directions, means that we always have it within our capacity to find our way to a perspective within ourselves that is out of the box. That is what [we] supplied for you – an out of the box environment from which you were able to consider your in-the-box relationships with new clarity...you were able to think of a number of things you could do to help reduce your in-the-box moments and heal your in-the-box relationships. In fact there is one thing in particular that you did while your were out of the box [here]: **You questioned your own virtue.** The out-of-the-box nature of your experience [your learning here] invited you to question whether you were in fact as out of the box as you had assumed you were in other areas of your life...a moment when the light came pouring in...when I saw the hypocrisy in my own [resistance] – seeing and feeling straightforwardly. (pp. 146-8)

“In a way, this is quite a miraculous thing. But in another way, it’s the most common thing in the world. It happens all the time in our lives – usually on very small matters that are quickly forgotten. All of us are both in the box and out of the box toward others. **The more we can find our way to the out-of-the-box vantage points within us, the more readily we will be able to shine light on the in-the-box justifications we are carrying.** All of a sudden, because of the presence of the people who continually stand before us, *and* because of what we know as we stand out of the box in relation to other people, our box can be penetrated by the humanity of those whom we’ve been resisting. When that happens, we know in that moment what we need to do: We need **to honour them as people.** And in that moment – when I see another as a person, with needs, hopes, and worries as real and legitimate as my own – I’m out of the box toward him. What remains for me, then, is the question of whether I am going to *stay out.*” (pp. 148-9)

“Are you saying that in order to stay out of the box, I have to always be doing things for others? Hmm...You’re worried that in order to stay out of the box, you have to do everything that pops into your head to do for others. And that seems overwhelming, if not foolhardy. Am I right? ...Yes! Well, we need to consider whether being out of the box creates the overwhelming stream of obligations you’re worried about. Let’s consider the driving situation. First of all, think of the people in the cars far ahead and far behind me. Is my being out of the box likely to make much of a difference in my outward behavior toward *them*? ...No, I suppose not. How about toward drivers who are nearer to me? Would my being out of the box change my outward behavior toward *them*? ...Probably. Okay, how? What might I do differently? ...You probably wouldn’t cut people off as much. Good. What else? ...You’d probably drive more safely, more considerately. And who knows – you might even smile more. All right, good enough. Now notice – do these behavioral changes strike you as overwhelming or burdensome? ...Well, no. So, in this case, being out of the box and seeing others as people doesn’t mean that I’m suddenly bombarded with burdensome obligations. **It simply means that I’m seeing and appreciating others as people while I’m driving, or shopping, or doing whatever it is I am doing.**” (pp. 150-2)

“In other cases, getting out of the box may mean that I relinquish a prejudice that I have held toward those not like myself – people of a different race, or faith, or culture. I will be less judgmental when I see them as people than when I saw them as objects. I will treat them with more courtesy and respect. Again, however, do such changes seem burdensome to you? ...On the contrary, they seem freeing.

Then you understand how we live insecurely when we're in the box, desperate to show that we're justified – that we're thoughtful, for example, or worthy or noble. It can feel pretty overwhelming always having to demonstrate our virtue. In fact, when we're feeling overwhelmed, **it generally isn't our obligation to others but our in-the-box desperation to prove something about ourselves that we find overwhelming.**" (p. 153)

"Remember...once I get in the box in response, I actually *need* the other guy to keep being a jerk so that I'll remain justified in blaming him for being a jerk. And I don't need to do anything more than get in the box toward him to keep inviting him to be that way. **My blame keeps inviting the very thing I'm blaming him for. Because in the box, I need problems.** Isn't it far better to be able to recognize others' boxes without blaming them for being in the box? After all, I know what it's like to be in the box because I'm there some of the time, too. Out of the box I *understand* what it's like to be in the box. And since, when I'm out of the box, I neither need nor provoke others to be jerks, I can actually ease, rather than exacerbate, tough situations." (p. 160)

"Think about it. If everyone was focused on *others*, who would they *not* be focused on? ...Themselves. (p. 171) And as you think about that, I want you to keep in mind: A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. You can use this material to blame just as well as you can use anything else. **Merely knowing the material doesn't get you out of the box. Living it does.** And we're not living it if we're using it to diagnose others. Rather, we're living it when we're using it to learn how we can be more helpful to others... Here are some things to keep in mind while you're trying to do just that (p. 174):

Knowing the material

- Self-betrayal leads to self-deception and 'the box.'
- When you're in the box, you can't focus on results.
- Your influence and success will depend on being out of the box.
- You get out of the box as you cease resisting other people

Living the material

- Don't try to be perfect. Do try to be better.
- Don't use the vocabulary – "the box," and so on – with people who don't already know it. Do use the principles in your own life.
- Don't look for others' boxes. Do look for your own.
- Don't accuse others of being in the box. Do try to stay out of the box yourself.
- Don't give up on yourself when you discover you've been in the box. Do keep trying.
- Don't deny that you've been in the box when you have been. Do apologize; then just keep marking forward, trying to be more helpful to others in the future.
- Don't focus on what others are doing wrong. Do focus on what you can do right to help.
- Don't worry whether others are helping you. Do worry whether you are helping others.