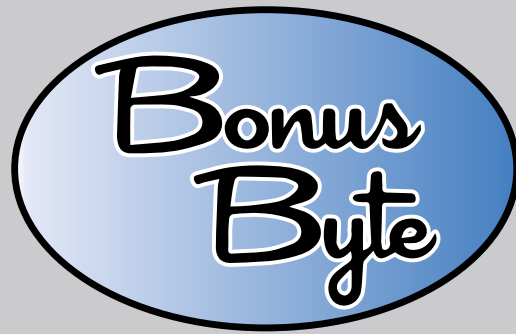


**BUD**

**TO**



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**How Do I Discipline My Friends?**

# HOW DO I DISCIPLINE MY FRIENDS?

by Guy Harris

One of the most difficult situations confronted by supervisors of any experience level is when they find themselves needing to discipline a friend for work related issues.

These situations can come up due to unacceptable workplace behaviors or due to poor results. In either case, the situation carries many implications beyond the normal supervisor-employee relationship.

Here are some of the many problems you might face in this situation:

- Your friend...
  - Sees you as too harsh
  - Believes you will not follow-through on the disciplinary warning
  - Makes emotional appeals based on your friendship
- Other people...
  - Believe your friend will get special treatment
  - Think you delayed acting for too long
  - Believe your action is not decisive enough

These are some of the very reasons we wrote this Remarkable Principle:

Be *friendly* with your former peers. Do not focus on creating new *friends*.

If the person you must speak with about a disciplinary issue was already your friend before becoming a supervisor, you cannot go back and “unfriend” him/her (it’s not Facebook). Understanding this reality, here are two general thoughts to help with this situation:

- **Don’t wait to act until it’s a discipline issue.** When you’re dealing with a person you have known for some time and has been your friend, you might be tempted to avoid discussing a potential performance or behavior problem because you don’t want it to affect your friendship. The reality is that the situation will affect your friendship whether you discuss it or not – better to discuss it and have the opportunity to fix the situation than to avoid it and let it get out of control.

Unless it’s a situation that develops suddenly or a one-time serious event, it is better to discuss the potential issue early while it’s still a coaching situation rather than waiting until it becomes a discipline situation. (This idea fits with the “No Surprises” concept listed as one of the *Six Keys to Performance Reviews* in Chapter 29.)

- Get ahead of the potential problem with a discussion early in your new role. In Chapter 7 we suggest having a discussion with your former peers about how your new role might affect your relationship. This is particularly important when your peers are also your friends. One way to potentially head-off the disciplinary process with your friends is to speak frankly with them about what is and is not acceptable in the new context of your relationship. Knowing where you stand on coaching and discipline issues can often give people the clarity they need to avoid doing anything that creates the situation where you must discipline them.

Assuming you are faced with the situation of disciplining a friend, first remember to apply the general tips for how to give feedback (Chapter 28) and the *Six Keys to Making Performance Evaluations Work* (Chapter 29).

With those concepts as the background, here are some additional thoughts about how to discipline a friend:

- **Listen first.** There may be good reasons for what you observed, and there may be something you don't understand. Before you decide to administer discipline, stop long enough to make sure you understand what happened (or did not happen) from the other person's perspective. (This really applies to any person, not just your friends.) If you still need to initiate a disciplinary action, you will at least have offered the chance to be heard.
- **Make it factual.** In these situations, you might find yourself tempted to use your friendship as a way to gain leverage. If you do this, you make what amounts to an emotional appeal rather than a factual discussion about observable and objective behaviors and/or results. If you choose an emotional appeal, you make the conversation about your friendship rather than work related and business impact issues.

While you do want to be empathetic and understanding, you do not want to make the conversation about emotions. If you must discipline a friend, keep the discipline conversation about behaviors or results and not about your friendship.

- **Focus on the future.** Try as you might to keep the conversation about work and not about your relationship, your friend might do otherwise. If this happens, he/she might talk about what happened in past situations with previous supervisors or how you behaved before you were a supervisor. Whatever you do, do not get drawn into a discussion about what has happened in the past or what you used to do when you were in his/her position. It is a line of discussion that seldom results in a positive outcome.

You can acknowledge the past without focusing on it. For example, you could say something like this: "John, you're right. I did say/do that before I was a supervisor. Now, I regret that I said/did that. I was speaking/acting with incomplete information. If I had known then what I know now, I would not have said/done that. And, what happened in the past is not the issue here. We are here to discuss \_\_\_\_\_, and what we can do to correct it."

One strategy for keeping the conversation focused on the future is the "two alternative futures" approach. Using this technique, you discuss with your friend what the future looks like under two different scenarios – one detailing the results he/she will get if choosing to continue behaving the way he/she is currently behaving and another where there are different results by changing behaviors to what you suggest. (This is also a good change management approach.) Here's what that might sound like in practice:

“John, if ‘x’ behavior continues, \_\_\_\_\_ is the most likely outcome. If you change ‘x’ to ‘y,’ \_\_\_\_\_ is the most likely outcome. Which outcome would you prefer?”

- **Acknowledge the discomfort.** Finally, if you are uncomfortable with the conversation, admit it. If you are uncomfortable, you might behave in ways that seem different or strange to your friend. He/She might not understand the change in your behavior and will likely take it negatively or assume you have some negative intention.

Don't try to fake it. You don't want your discomfort to look like you don't care, you are angry, etc. Simply put the issue on the table to avoid miscommunication.

# ABOUT BUD TO BOSS

*Bud to Boss* provides new leaders and organizations looking to develop new leaders with insight, resources and powerful learning opportunities designed to specifically address the challenges of successfully transitioning from peer to leader.

To speak with someone about how we can help you or your organization, send a note to **info@BudtoBoss.com** or call the number on this page.

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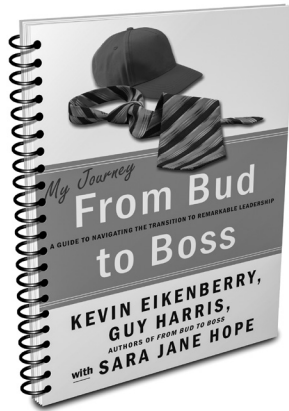


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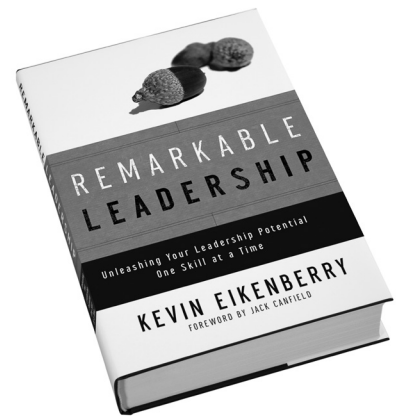


## My Journey From Bud to Boss

A companion volume to the From Bud to Boss book, the Journey is a workbook designed to help you apply the knowledge gained to actual work experiences. It includes activities, questions, and exercises designed to take you beyond the concepts introduced to you during the Workshop or the book. And while this book is completely designed to be written in, all of the templates and tools are available in both PDF and Word document form so that you can use them over and over.

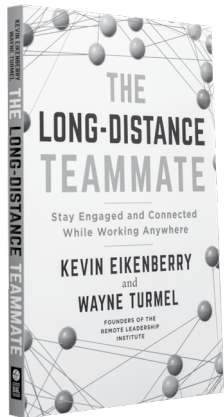
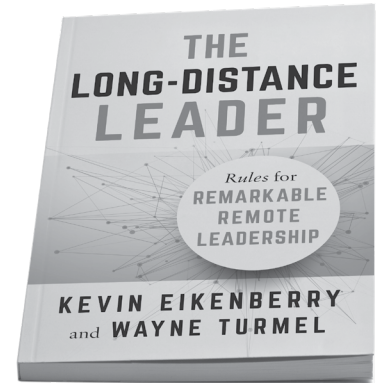
## Remarkable Leadership

is a practical handbook written for anyone who wants to hone the skills needed to become a remarkable leader. This book outlines a framework and a mechanism for both learning new things and applying current knowledge in a thoughtful and practical way. It explores real-world concerns such as focus, limited time, incremental improvement, and how we learn.



## The Long-Distance Leader

is a practical, candid look at what it takes to lead people, projects and teams in today's dispersed workplace. The book showcases 19 rules for being a remarkable remote leader, and offers practical models, tools, and best practices to tackle the real-world challenges from how we work and communicate virtually.



## The Long-Distance Teammate

Written by the founders of the Remote Leadership Institute, this book is the most authoritative single resource for helping remote workers get work done effectively, build relationships that are both productive and satisfying, and maintain a career trajectory when they are not in constant close contact with their leader, coworkers, or the organization in general.

Check out our website for additional leadership resources including our free video training series, blogs, newsletters, podcast and more!

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