

Kim Scott: Radical candor requires undoing training that's been pounded into us since we were 18 months old and 18 years old. This whole, be professional stuff or if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all idioms. How can we be radically candid when we have all this sort of powerful training behind us? It's hard.

(Intro Music)

Robert Glazer: Welcome to Elevate, a podcast about achievement, personal growth and pushing limits in leadership and life. I'm Robert Glazer, and I chat with world class performers who have committed to elevating their own life, pushing the limits of their capacity, and helping others do the same.

Robert Glazer: Our quote for today's episode is, there is no diplomacy like candor. Wise words from E.V. Lucas. Candor, specifically radical candor, is a subject that our guest Kim Scott knows a lot about. Kim is the author of "Radical Candor: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity" which is a New York Times and Wall Street Journal best seller. In addition, she's the co-founder of the company, Radical Candor. Radical Candor has been a huge inspiration and a foundational element of our company's culture. I'm really excited to dig in with you today on the topic.

Kim Scott: Great to be here. I'm hoping I'll get some radical candor on Radical Candor. You'll tell me what works and what doesn't.

Robert Glazer: Perfect. That will be like a picture in a picture. We'll see if we can pull that off.

Kim Scott: Yes, very meta.

Robert Glazer: Don't get me started on the meta and my kids watching people play video games. I just, I still can't figure it out. [crosstalk 00:01:56] that will be another episode. It would be great if you could share a bit about your background. How are you first introduced to the concept of radical candor?

Kim Scott: Well, I think that it was a long time coming. One of my first experiences with perhaps radical candor was not being radically candid. Early in my career, I had started this software company called Juice. I came into work one day and I got an email with an article, a link to an article with 10 people. It was this article about how people would rather have a boss who is a total asshole than one who is really nice but incompetent. I thought, "Gosh, am I getting this because I'm a total asshole or because I'm nice but incompetent?" Which is worse? Surely these are not my two choices. That really sort of got me thinking on it. It was probably my ideas around radical candor began to solidify when I was working at Google. We taught a very radically candid culture. I was working for Cheryl Sandberg and I remember early in my career, I had to give a presentation to the founders and the CEO. I walked into the meeting and there is Sergei Brand, one of the co-founders and [inaudible 00:03:15] is on a treadmill. There is Eric Schmidt so deep in his email it's like his brain has been plugged into the machine. Like any normal person in this situation, I'm wondering what's my role in this room? How am I supposed to get these people's attention?

Kim Scott: Luckily for me the business that I was leading was on fire. When I said how many Ad Sense customers we had added over the last couple of months, Eric almost fell off his chair. He looked at me and he said, "What do you need? Do you need more marketing dollars? Do you need more engineers?" I'm thinking the meeting is going okay. In fact, I think I'm a genius. As I walked out of the room I passed by my boss, Cheryl and she said, "Why don't you ..." I'm expecting a high five or a pat on the back or something. She said, "Why don't you walk back to my office with me?" I thought, "Oh boy. I've done something wrong and I'm sure I'm about to hear about it." Cheryl started the conversation by telling me about the things I had done well. Not enough feedback [inaudible 00:04:16] but really giving me some information that I wasn't aware of. Of course, all I wanted was to hear about what I had done wrong.

Kim Scott: Eventually Cheryl said to me, "You said 'Um' a lot in there. Were you aware of it?" I kind of made this brush off gesture with my hand. I said, "I know, it's a verbal tic. It's no big deal really." Then she said, "I know a great speech coach. Google would pay for it. Would you like an introduction?" I made this brush off gesture again with my hand. I said, "No I'm busy. Didn't you hear about all those new customers? Who cares if I say um when I have a tiger by the tail." Cheryl stopped, she looked right at me and she said, "Kim, when you say um every third word, it makes you sound insecure and stupid." Now she has my full attention. No more brush off gesture with the hand. Some people would say it was mean of Cheryl to say that but in fact it was the kindest thing she could have done for me at that moment in my career because if she hadn't said it just that way to me and by the way, she wouldn't have said it that way to other people because they're maybe less bullheaded than I am but if she hadn't said it just that way to me, I wouldn't have gone to see the speech coach where I learned that Cheryl was not exaggerating. I really did say um every third word.

Kim Scott: This was real news to me because I had been giving presentations my entire career. I had raised millions of dollars for a couple of start-ups giving presentations. I thought I was pretty good at it. This got me to thinking, why had nobody told me? Like I had been walking around my whole career with spinach between my teeth but no one had the common courtesy to tell me. I realized that it was really two things about Cheryl that made it so seemingly easy for her to tell me but also so difficult for other people to just say it. One was that she cared about me as a human being, as a real person. Not just as an employee. But also, she never let her concern for my short term feelings get in the way of her willingness to challenge directly and really, the whole idea of radical candor is based on those two ideas. Challenge directly and care personally at the same time.

Robert Glazer: That story went on to launch your passion for radical candor. I love, my team will say I love my two by two matrices. I was drawn to yours. Those are the two axes of the radical candor. Can you walk us through the matrix and then the quadrants and then how they play out?

Kim Scott: Yes, absolutely. Let's first think about care personally. What is it that moves us down on the care personally dimension of radical candor? Nobody starts out their career thinking, "I don't give a damn about other people. I think I'm going to be a great boss." That's not what happens. What happens is, we're 18, 19 years old. We get our first job. Somebody comes along and says, "Be professional." I think for an awful lot of people

that gets translated to mean, "Leave your emotions, leave your true identity, leave everything that is best about you at home and come to work like some kind of robot." You can't possibly care personally about others if you're showing up to work like some kind of robot. That's one problem. The other problem is the challenge directly dimension. Colin Powell said, "Sometimes leadership is the willingness to piss people off." Yet, our unwillingness to piss people off begins not when we're 18 years old but when we're 18 months old and we had a parent who said some version of, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all" to us. Now, all of a sudden, especially if you're a manager but in general at work, to be a good colleague, it's your job to say it.

Kim Scott: Radical candor requires undoing training that's been pounded into us since we were 18 months old and 18 years old. This whole, be professional stuff or if you don't have anything nice to say don't say anything at all idiom. How can we be radically candid when we have all this sort of powerful training behind us? It's hard. One of the things that I've done, which I hope makes it easier to develop this two by two that you mentioned, which sort of points out in strong language what happens when we fail on one dimension or another. When you do challenge directly but you fail to show that you care personally, I call that obnoxious aggression. Now, I used to call that the asshole quadrant but I stopped, it seemed more radically candid, right? I stopped doing that for a very important reason. Because as soon as I did that, people would use the two by two to start writing names in boxes. I beg of you, please don't use this two by two that way. It's not, these terms are not labels for other people or a way to judge yourself harshly. The way to use the framework is to guide conversations in a better direction. It's more like a compass. It's not like a Myers/Briggs personality test or something like that.

Kim Scott: That's obnoxious aggression, when you do challenge but you fail to show you care. Very often, once we've been obnoxiously aggressive, once we realize we've been a jerk, the temptation is to move the wrong direction on challenge directly instead of to go the right direction on care personally. If you do that, you wind up in the worst quadrant of all, manipulative and insincerity. This is where you neither show you care nor challenge directly. Manipulative insincerity is sort of backstabbing behavior, political behavior, the false apology. All that kind of stuff. Passive aggressive behavior that we love to talk about, about people doing at work. We also love to tell the obnoxious aggression stories but the fact of the matter is, by far the most common mistakes that get made at work and frankly in all relationships, happen when we do show we care. We are concerned with other people's feelings and because we're so concerned for their feelings, we fail to tell them something they really need to know. We fail to challenge directly. That mistake I call ruinous empathy. That's the one that the book spends a lot of time trying to help people overcome.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, it's interesting. I have always said I prefer and I think you just alluded to this, I prefer open aggression much better than passive aggressiveness. Passive aggressiveness is just the worst to me.

Kim Scott: Absolutely. It is the worst and yet, we all know that and yet we all wind up doing it sometimes. We all wind up saying things we don't really mean just to placate somebody's feelings.

Robert Glazer: Why is radical candor, you touched on this a little bit but why is it such an unnatural act for most people? Is it this learned behavior over a long time and they have to undo it or are we just generally, societally not comfortable with telling people the truth?

Kim Scott: I think a couple of things. One is just the very idea of telling people the truth. The fact of the matter is we don't know what the truth is, usually. We know what we think-

Robert Glazer: What we think is, yeah.

Kim Scott: ... we might be wrong. Very often, from a young age, children are so sure they're right about everything and they're so blunt. It gets them in trouble. It's hard to be nuanced with kids. I myself, I have twins who are nine and I'm tempted sometimes to say, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all" because they come out with some real doozies. I think part of the problem is just being a little bit nuanced in how we teach people from a young age to be kind and respectful of others without lying to them. It's easier to focus on one thing at a time than two things. Being radically candid requires you to be kind and clear at the same time. That can be hard. It requires some finesse and some nuance. I think that's a big part of it. I think also we are programmed to learn the most from the biggest disasters. Sometimes you will try to be radically candid with someone and you will get a really terrible reaction from them. They'll blow up, they'll start to cry, they'll start to yell at you, whatever. Those experiences I think loom so large in our minds that we forget that nine times out of ten, people actually genuinely appreciate the radical candor.

Robert Glazer: I think how you react to it probably determines if you're going to get it the next time, right?

Kim Scott: Yes. Well, how you react to their reaction. I think there's another problem that I notice in my career. It's that a lot of feedback training sort of teaches people to believe that if they say it just right, they can control the other person's reaction. That's just not true. You can't control or predict how another person is going to react to what you tell them. All you can do is start out sort of gently, notice how they respond and then move in the right direction. If somebody gets really upset you can react with compassion. If somebody is blowing you off the way I was to Cheryl, you've got to move out on the challenge directly dimension probably more than you're comfortable doing. I think that sometimes well meaning training on feedback actually further paralyzes people because it leaves them with the sense that if they get a bad reaction they failed in some way. That's not true. You're going to get tears, you're going to get anger, you're going to get some emotion. If you tell somebody when their work isn't nearly good enough they care about their work and it's normal that they react. I think one of the best things you can do is just eliminate the phrase, "Don't take it personally" from your vocabulary and react with human compassion. Of course people take it personally.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, that's a crutch phrase. There are a couple people on my team who have started with, "Well if I'm telling you honestly" I'm like, well you've got to stop saying that. I hope it is honestly.

Kim Scott: Yes.

Robert Glazer: For someone who is listening to this and they say, "Oh that's my boss" in the manipulative insincerity quadrant, is it hopeless? What can they do? Do they need to have some radical candor about the way that they're behaving? Is that something people can really move themselves away from if they don't want to do it?

Kim Scott: I think you have two questions. One is what happens if your boss is being manipulative insincere, how can you lure your boss towards radical candor? The second is, what if you self identify that you yourself are being ruinously empathetic or manipulative insincere? Is that the question?

Robert Glazer: Yeah. The first one was the question, the second one is interesting too. If you're listening to this in either way, say, "Oh geez, I think I've been doing that" or "That is my boss" what are the next steps there?

Kim Scott: Right. The first step is as soon as you hear this and you start associating one of those phrases I just uttered with a person, stop. You're making the fundamental attribution error. You're just saying, "Oh this person is that way and therefore they're useless." If that's your mentality going into the conversation, you're probably not going to move it in a great direction. I think there's an order of operations for radical candor whether you're planning a conversation with your boss, a peer or an employee. The order of operations is, start by soliciting feedback. Start by asking what you could do or stop doing to make it easier to work with that person because it's very tempting, most of us in our relationships, especially frustrating relationships at work, have feedback debt. Sometimes there is technical debt but in relationships there is feedback debt. Very often we've gotten so frustrated by that other person that all we can do and see in our interactions with that person is this thing that frustrates us. If we take a step back and try to imagine from that person's perspective, what are we doing ourselves that might be contributing to the problem and ask the person and be prepared not to get defensive when the person answers you so that you can understand things from the other person's perspective a little bit.

Kim Scott: That's the first order of operations. The second thing you should do is focus on the good stuff, not in the feedback sandwich or there's the less polite way of phrasing it, the shit sandwich kind of way but really focus on the good stuff. What is it about this person that you genuinely enjoy? That you genuinely appreciate? Verbalize that. Give voice to the things that you like about working with that person. Again, we very often have feedback debt and we forget all the good stuff because we're so frustrated by the bad stuff. I had a friend who worked on Wall Street. She got a new boss and this guy was known as the biggest A-hole on Wall Street and that's saying something. She was a little nervous about this new boss. She adopted this mantra, there is only love. She refused to talk badly about this guy even to her husband and definitely not to anybody at work. She would only say good things. Now, to him, she also said what she appreciated but having done that, she then told him when he did things that made it impossible for her to be productive at work. She told him directly.

Kim Scott: Once you've solicited feedback, step number one, step number two, think about the things you like and actually give the person some praise. Step number three is to say there's something that's bothering me, can I tell you about it? Then just tell the person. Start gently and figure out if the person hears you and is incredibly defensive. Then you have to manage that. Or if the person hears you and is angry or upset, then you've got to move the right direction on care personally. You've got to show some compassion for the emotion. Don't dismiss it but don't back off your challenge. Don't get pushed by the other person's emotional outburst into one of the bad quadrants. If somebody yells at you, the temptation is for you to have an obnoxious aggressive reaction to their obnoxious aggression. Don't let that happen. You can't control someone else's emotions but if you're batting above average, you can manage your own emotions. Sometimes you'll tell somebody something, most often what happens is you think you've said it so clearly you just sort of geared up your courage to say this thing but the person hasn't heard you at all. Now you have to say it again more strongly. That is hard.

Robert Glazer: One of the things that we've always tried to stress and it's kind of an irony, we've used situation behavior, outcome framework and feedback. You talked about this in the book and I'd love to hear some examples for people around, you need to care personally but you need to depersonalize the feedback. You've talked about the Cheryl Sandberg example, she said it made you sound stupid, not that you were stupid. I think the mistake a lot of people make is in personalizing the feedback. Can you give people some examples of the difference between caring personally and then how you depersonalize the feedback so they get at the, what is the problem or the outcome of the behavior.

Kim Scott: Yeah. It's so important because the goal of feedback is to help people improve, to help people change something. If you criticize somebody's personality, it's really hard to change your personality. If you say, "The problem here is that you're negative." Maybe the person feels, "Yes, you're right. I do kind of have a negative personality and it's hopeless." You want to make sure you're giving feedback, as you say, there's a world of difference between Cheryl saying to me in the meeting, that's a situation, by the way she doesn't have to describe the situation in great detail because she's giving the feedback right away. It's more efficient. "When you say um every third word," that's the behavior, "It made you sound stupid." World of difference between saying that and saying, "Kim the problem here is you're stupid." If that really is the problem, there's not much I can do about it.

Robert Glazer: Right. I was going to say part of that is why it's bad for you. It's actually something we try to stress in a lot of our client communications too about why is it bad for the person. Because then you're going to get their attention.

Kim Scott: Absolutely. This is part of the sort of things that I think are helpful to go into a conversation, especially all these things are true of praise by the way as well as of criticism but you want to go in, the mindset you're trying to be helpful to that person. That's why explaining why changing this thing, whatever it is, or doing more of it in the case of praise is going to help that person succeed. You're aligning your interests and that person's interests. You're explaining what's in it for them. The helpful is really important. The humble is also really important. I think that feedback is a gift in one of two ways. Either it's a gift because you're right about what you're saying and the

person, because you've told the person they can change it or you're wrong about what you're saying but only if you tell the person what you think can they change your mind.

Kim Scott: Remember that the idea here is it's not like you have a pipeline to God and the other person is an ignoramus. You want to make sure you're going in being humble and also you want to give the feedback right away, immediately. Feedback has a short half-life. You want to do it in person if at all possible because most of communication is non-verbal. You won't really know which vector to choose on the radical candor two by two if you're not doing it in person because you won't know how the other person is reacting. Then you want to praise in public, criticize in private and most importantly, as you said, you don't want to make it about personality. It may be a very personal issue, it could be the person has BO. But you don't want to say, "You're a dirty person." It's just when you don't wear deodorant you get BO.

Robert Glazer: What should the half-life on feedback be? I heard someone from the Ritz-Carlton speak a few years ago and they said, we've tried to emulate this, probably not as well as we could have but they had this 72 hour rule. You either had to give it within 72 hours or you had to sit on it. They called it targeting. Someone showing up to a performance review with three or six months of grievances that they weren't willing to speak up with in the moment on that. I'm curious if you have a philosophy on the half-life of when it should be given.

Kim Scott: Yeah. I mean, 72 hours maximum to bring it up the first time and hopefully to deal with the issue. I do think, though, that sometimes when you're giving a performance review, it's useful to remind the person of things that you've already talked about in the past but nobody should hear anything for the first time in a performance review. I think the 72 hour rule is a great one.

Robert Glazer: What percent of companies would you say that is true?

Kim Scott: Zero. Probably not even at Ritz-Carlton. Not because companies are bad, it's just really hard to do this. It's sort of an emotional discipline that most of us lack. Giving the best feedback I've ever gotten in my career always happens in these two minute conversations right after, within an hour, usually walking out. I've said or done something and as soon as the meeting is over and we can get a private moment, somebody pulls me aside and we talk. That's always been, in my experience, the most effective way to give and to get feedback. It's interesting. A two minute conversation doesn't require any planning, doesn't require any extra calendaring. It's fast, it's free, it doesn't cost anything. But it does require enormous emotional discipline and really changing habits of a lifetime. Once you get in the habit of doing this at work, it's like brushing and flossing. You feel gross if you don't do it but getting into the habit, these kinds of feedback conversations shouldn't feel like a root canal by the way, to pursue the dental analogy for a minute. It really should feel pretty fast and just basic hygiene. But getting into the habit is hard.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, because if the point of feedback is to learn it's almost offensive to you four months later to sit down and tell me about something you've been stewing about for four months, when I've probably made that same mistake over and over again.

Kim Scott: The same mistake, yeah exactly. It feels like one of those middle school relationships where you have your first breakup and somebody brings up this tiny thing from six months ago. Yet, the systems that we put in place around management kind of foster that kind of bad behavior inadvertently. I think feedback systems, I think performance reviews are actually quite important to do but if they become a substitute for the hygiene of these impromptu feedback conversations, it's like capping a rotting tooth. It's just going to make it rot faster.

Robert Glazer: The standards that people operate from I don't think are very productive but they, one of the great things about the book is that you're giving people a framework on how to do it. I think there's a lot of things in business that have been carried on from generation to generation because people just don't know a better way to do it. They do what's been done to them. I'm writing my second book about using capacity building as a leadership strategy. You touched on this a little bit in the book but how do you see one's ability to give and receive feedback well associated with their ability to receive capacity?

Kim Scott: It's a great question. I'm excited to read your second book. You know, you cannot possibly build capacity, you cannot possibly learn and improve if you don't know what you're doing wrong. One of your first jobs as a leader is to really solicit feedback from the people who work for you. You are going to get the best feedback of your career from your employees because very few people are going to observe you as closely as your employees do. They're going to watch every move you make and they're going to criticize it. They're going to critique it. If you can learn what they're thinking and what they're observing, nothing will improve you more as a leader. Now, the second reason to solicit feedback is because it gives you an opportunity to teach your team that you view feedback as a gift and it gives them the opportunity to see that their feedback doesn't make you weaker as a leader it makes you stronger. Your willingness to hear about mistakes you're making is the source of your strength. That's going to make them, in turn, much more willing to hear feedback from you and from their colleagues. It's really around soliciting feedback as a leader that you build that culture of feedback. That's the right place to start. I mean, you've got to give it to but start by soliciting it.

Robert Glazer: Learning to give it is probably, in terms of if you're going to improve as a leader and you can't give it, you're already cutting yourself short there.

Kim Scott: Yes, exactly but start by learning to take it. Don't dish it out until you prove you can take it.

Robert Glazer: All right, we're going to take a quick break for a message from our sponsor and we'll be right back with Kim.

Speaker 3: Hi, I'm Adam Grant. As a warden psychologist I've spent most of my career studying two big questions, how do we unlock original thinking and building cultures of productive generosity? With those questions in mind, I recently co-founded a pretty extraordinary community dedicated to discovering ground breaking ideas while trying to make the world a better place. It's called the Next Big Idea club. Together, my friends Malcolm Gladwell, Susan Kane, Dan Pink and I search far and wide for the eight most original, most essential non-fiction books of the year. We send them straight to you. We also

interview the authors and we send you the key insights across video, audio and text formats. Remember, this is a book club so when you join the exclusive online forum, you get the chance to discuss every season's selections not just with other members but also with me, Malcolm, Susan and Dan. Get insider insights from Dan Pink, Malcolm Gladwell, Susan Kane and Adam Grant. Sign up for the Next Big Idea club today at www.nextbigideclub.com/tenoff and get 10% off your subscription.

Robert Glazer: Welcome back everyone. Kim, one of the things you talked about in the book was this notion of A player and B player and C player and how that's a lot misused. You talked about the concept instead of rockstar and superstars. It really helped me think about how we think about that particularly in a company that's always growing. I think it's an open debate around you can't have everyone always wanting better because you need people who want to operate where you are today. Can you walk through the difference between rockstar and superstar a bit?

Kim Scott: Sure, absolutely. I mean, my fundamental belief here is that there is no such thing as a B player. It's just a cop out to dismiss people as B players. Every single human being has real potential to be great at some kind of work. One of the most offensive experiences of my career was when I was working with a leader, we were doing some call center work. This leader just didn't have respect for the work and didn't think the work was important and therefore decided that he needed to hire B players to do this work. I thought that is a recipe for failure. That is a recipe for a really crappy customer experience. That's not how we're going to do things here. You want to make sure that you understand that for every job that you have in a company, you want to respect the work and the people who do the work. You want everyone to have an opportunity to be excellent at their work but I do think that there are two very different kinds of people who are excellent at the work. Some of the people are those who are great at the work but who are going to be hungry to grow, who are going to want to change things, who are going to want to be doing different work in the near future, who keep growing and expanding their skill sets.

Kim Scott: There are other people who are great at the job and they're happy to keep doing it. They don't necessarily want to pour a ton of energy into learning the next job. You want a balance of both of those kinds of people. The people who are eager to change, the change agents on your team, I call the superstars. The people who are great at their job and happy to keep doing it I call the rockstars. You want to make sure that these, again, are not labels. People are in superstar mode, they're in rockstar mode. We shift between these modes throughout our lives and careers. You want to make sure you're creating the opportunity for people to be flexible and to shift between these kinds of roles in their careers but you want to make sure that you're managing these two different kinds of outstanding performers very differently because if you push people when they're in rockstar mode to be learning the next job, you're going to push them away. If you don't respect them for being good at their job and not necessarily wanting the next job, you're going to push them away.

Kim Scott: If you give all the highest ratings to the people who are in superstar mode, who are hungry for the next promotion, then you're going to make a big mistake and demoralize people when they're in rockstar mode. I mean, the reward for superstar

mode is the promotion. It's not necessarily the high rating. You want to make sure that you're being fair to people when they're in different modes. When people are in superstar mode and you, the manager, are in rockstar mode, sometimes the temptation is to clip the wings of the superstars. That's a terrible mistake too. They may not stay on your team forever, they may want to go and do something different but while they're in your orbit, they do amazing work. They usually go well above and beyond what's expected and that's great. You're lucky to have them while you do.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, I know, it's a really interesting way of thinking about it. I think that anyone who would read that chapter or that section would have a different perspective on the conversations in their organization if they've been talking about A players and B players and do we need B players. I hear these conversations all the time and I just think it's such a better way to think about it and how to use your people in the right way.

Kim Scott: Think about it. Do you want to be called a B player? No, of course not. Then if you have people on your team who are doing great work who you care about, do you want to think of them as a B player? No but that doesn't mean you need to put them up for promotion. It doesn't mean promotion is the, there's a lot of growth obsession, I think particularly where I live here in Silicon Valley.

Robert Glazer: Absolutely.

Kim Scott: We also need to balance growth and stability.

Robert Glazer: No, if you had all stability you'd have no innovation. If you had all growth you have chaos probably.

Kim Scott: Yeah and exhaustion and burn out. You need both. You need both in your life, you need both in your work, you need both on your team.

Robert Glazer: It sounds like another two by two matrix that might be coming.

Kim Scott: Yes.

Robert Glazer: One of the areas where I think companies really struggle with candor is in how people leave the organization, either voluntarily or involuntarily. We tried to use candor specifically in the development of what we call our mindful transition program, which is our moonshot to eliminate two weeks notice. Why is it so hard for employees and employers to be honest when something is not working out for either side?

Kim Scott: Well, I mean the very worst part of being a manager is having to fire people. When you're having to fire someone, it's generally emotionally traumatic for that other person and emotionally traumatic for you. You, as a leader, feel like in some way you failed to quote unquote save the person, which is a crazy way to look at it but even great leaders often do. They feel, they get their egos attached with helping somebody else succeed in a job that just may not be right for them for whatever reason. It's brutal to watch the emotions that it causes in the other person when you have to fire them. It's totally

understandable that we run and hide, euphemism around leaving. If you're quitting a company, there's all this don't burn bridges, you want to leave on a good note and very few companies are good at really doing exit interviews because it is an opportunity to learn what is going badly in your organization when somebody leaves. But it's again, it's all these emotions get wrapped up in a tight knot. If you can just sort of pull them apart, like any problem, you want to make sure that you are parsing it and breaking it apart into its smallest parts in order to solve it.

Robert Glazer: But isn't giving two weeks notice in itself almost burning bridges in some cases? I like to give the analogy that if you're in a marriage, I understand there's some paradigm here and some fear on behalf of the employee but if you're in a marriage and you're like, "You know what? I'm moving in two weeks and I have a new partner and we bought a house" and this is the first that anyone heard about it, it seems so silly in the relationship context but I feel like [crosstalk 00:38:25].

Kim Scott: It happens.

Robert Glazer: It does happen but it happens a lot more in the work context where the employee just couldn't have that radical candor conversation around being in the wrong thing, being unhappy. If someone in their family was moving, they just, I don't know that they couldn't have it or they're not sure that the organization would be receptive to it.

Kim Scott: Well, I think the onus is on the leaders at a company to create an environment where it's safe to speak truth to power for sure. I think also very often people are afraid that the choice of the date will be taken away from them and that if they say what they're unhappy about, they'll get fired. They want to set up, they want to make sure they have an exit plan. I think it's really important for leaders to make it clear to people that it's okay to leave. It's okay to be unhappy but you've got to prove that you're not going to pull the rug out from under people. That does take time but it's absolutely do-able. Again, a lot of this goes back to soliciting, getting good at soliciting impromptu feedback as a leader. Another thing that I've noticed is that I've gotten the best feedback from people when they're mad at me but it's tempting to avoid people when you know they're mad at you. If you, as a leader, can manage not to get triggered yourself, go and talk to people when you know they're angry at you, you'll often hear about problems much earlier on. There's also this denial. It's so hard to lose an employee. You just are hoping it won't happen. Often you kind of see that there is a problem but you don't ask. You don't ask why or what's going on. That's a terrible mistake.

Robert Glazer: I just saw a stat that said that even at all the best places to work, whether it was Google or Apple, the tenure was 1.8 years I think at this point. Even these companies that people love, they're going to leave. I think this is the sort of intellectual radical candor that people need to have with themselves as leaders is that you probably shouldn't assume that people on your team are going to stay for 5 or 10 years. When the data doesn't show otherwise.

Kim Scott: It doesn't bear that out. I think the other thing to remember is that people join companies and leave managers. Another thing that can really help prevent this two weeks notice deal is to have what I call speak truth to power meetings. Recognizing that

it is very difficult for people to offer their boss radical candor, you as the boss's boss can go in and talk, have a meeting with all of the direct reports of your direct reports and meet with them together, otherwise you'll spend all your time having these so-called skip level, I hate the work skip-level meeting because it sounds so hierarchical but if you gather the team together without the manager in the room and say, "What could this manager do or stop doing to be a better boss to you all?" At first it's going to be incredibly awkward and painful but if you can push through the discomfort of that meeting and get everybody in the room to go around and say what they really appreciate about working with that person and one or two things they wish would change, you'll find that you learn about things that people are doing that they don't know they're doing much faster. They can fix them.

Kim Scott: That's important not only for the bosses but for all the people who work for the boss. Occasionally you'll learn that you have somebody who just has no business leading people. That's painful to learn but the sooner you learn it, the better. I think that's another thing that can really help build a culture of radical candor and help people find a way to give voice to problems when they see them and speak truth to power.

Robert Glazer: You mention this in the book but there is a lot of people who don't want to be managers but they've been sort of conditioned that's the only way to grow-

Kim Scott: Yes.

Robert Glazer: ... I think you said organizations need to make it safe for more individual contributor roles. Right?

Kim Scott: Yes and for growth in the individual contributor roles. Google has done this really well in the engineering organization where you can progress, there's not a ceiling on your career. You can keep progressing and never have to manage people. That doesn't always scale at every organization but in most places you can keep giving people responsibility and bigger roles and keep them learning without having to require them to become managers.

Robert Glazer: I'm fascinated, you talked a little bit about it before, about the ruinous empathy quadrant. The first couple times I saw it, I don't think I actually intellectualized it. It took me about a year to think about and see it. Then I was writing an article about the dangers of helicopter parenting and removing obstacles and it was kind of like a light bulb went off for me. Like, "Oh that's ruinous empathy. Now I get it."

Kim Scott: Yes.

Robert Glazer: I see it in family situations probably a lot more than work. Can you talk about why you think it's the most dangerous form of feedback?

Kim Scott: Well, the problem with ruinous empathy is that people don't know that there's a problem and so they don't fix it. For me, one of the most painful moments in my whole career came when I had hired this guy, we'll call him Bob. I really liked Bob. He was

smart, he was funny, he was charming. He would do stuff, like we were at a manager off-site and we're playing one of those endless get to know you games. Nobody wanted to do it but nobody had the nerve to say this is a waste of time. Bob was the guy who had the courage to say, "Hey, I've got a great idea. It will be way faster." Whatever his idea was we were down with it. Bob said, "Let's just go around the table and tell each other what kind of candy our parents used when potty training us." Weird but fast. Then for the next 10 months, every time there's a tense moment in a meeting Bob would whip out just the right piece of candy for the right person at the right moment. Anyway, we liked Bob. He was quirky, he was fun to work with.

Kim Scott: One problem with Bob, he was doing terrible work. Absolutely terrible work. I was puzzled about what was going on. He had this amazing resume, all these past accomplishments. I learned later the problem was he was smoking pot in the bathroom three times a day, which may explain all that candy. But anyway, I didn't know any of that at the time. All I knew is he would hand stuff into me and there would be shame in his eyes. Instead of telling him that his work wasn't nearly good enough, I would say something like, "Oh Bob this is such a great start. You're so awesome. You're so smart. We all love working with you. Maybe you can make it just a little better." I didn't want to hurt his feelings. Of course he never does make it better and all his colleagues are having to cover for him and redo his work. This goes on for 10 months. Eventually the inevitable happens and I realize, if I don't fire Bob I'm going to lose my best employees. I sit down to tell Bob where things stand and when I finished talking, he pushes the chair back, he looks me right in the eye and he said, "Why didn't you tell me?" As that question is going around in my head, he said, "Why didn't anyone tell me? I thought you all cared about me."

Kim Scott: It was probably one of the worst moments in my career and yet it was too late to save Bob. Even Bob at this point agreed he should go. All I could do in that moment was make myself a very solemn promise that I would never make that mistake again. That's why I wrote the book "Radical Candor" and came up with the framework so that I can help you avoid those Bob moments because they're terrible.

Robert Glazer: Has Bob reached out to you since you've written the book?

Kim Scott: Bob has not. Bob has not although I do happen to know that he's doing well. He's in a good job and he seems to have gotten his pot habit under control.

Robert Glazer: Good. I read a comment that you made about how "Radical Candor" was depicted recently in the show, "Silicon Valley" and you weren't very happy about it.

Kim Scott: Well I wasn't that unhappy because it sold a lot of books. It like, doubled our sales that week but yeah, it was definitely obnoxious aggression mistaken for radical candor. That is a very common mistake. It's one of the most painful things that happens. I'll walk into a room and somebody will say, "In the spirit of radical candor" and then they proceed to be a total jerk. That's not radical candor. That's obnoxious aggression. I probably got a little defensive about it.

Robert Glazer: That's what I was going to ask you. How do people not go back after listening to this discussion or the book, how do they really draw that line? I'm going to just start telling everyone everything that's on my mind. What are some guide posts to let them know that they're operating in the right quadrant and not the wrong quadrant?

Kim Scott: Well, you know there's no universal measure for radical candor. It gets measured not at your mouth but at the other person's ear. The only way that you can know that you're being radically candid and not obnoxiously aggressive or radically candid and not ruinously empathetic is to gauge the other person's reaction. To ask the other person how it's going from their perspective. It's hard to know what's going on at somebody else's ear. You know what your intentions are. If you're self aware you know what your intentions are. You know what's coming out of your mouth but it's hard to know how it's getting interpreted. That's why sort of slowing down, asking, a shared vocabulary can be very helpful. It's hard enough to give feedback and then to ask for feedback on your feedback starts to feel really tedious. It's useful to be able to have a shortcut for those conversations. That's part of the reason why I think the framework is helpful.

Kim Scott: If you see that somebody's not reacting well to some feedback you're giving them, you can just ask. Say, "I feel like maybe I'm being obnoxiously aggressive here. How could I say this better?" Or "I feel like I'm not getting through to you. If I don't say it more strongly I'm going to wind up getting ruinously empathetic but I'm going to feel mean if I do say it more strongly. What's a better way to get through to you?" It can be very helpful.

Robert Glazer: You frequently post radical candor tips on Twitter. A recent one I saw was around the topic of giving praise and what to do if someone is remote. It caught my eye because our company is mostly distributed. Have you found it's more challenging for companies to care personally and challenge directly with remote workers?

Kim Scott: Yes. I mean, so much of communication is non-verbal, is seeing with body language or facial expression. If you're not in the same place, it's way harder to gauge the other person's reaction. But it's not impossible. One of the things that I have found is that there is a hierarchy of medium. If you do work with people who are not in the same location as you are, try to use video conferencing as much as possible. You can get 60% fidelity if you can at least see the person reacting. If you can see their face. If you can't use video conferencing, the telephone is way better than email and email is usually a little better than text because we're so short over text. I think in general there's no excuse for resorting to written communication only. At least pick up the phone and call the person. In an ideal world, have a video conference. Another thing that I have found with remote employees is that more frequent check-ins are better than longer, less frequent ones.

Kim Scott: If you're in the same location with somebody, a 45 minute one on one once a week is probably enough, is almost certainly enough. You're going to bump into them in the hallway, you're going to see them. You're going to kind of have a sense of what's going on with the person. If somebody is remote, it's a good idea to try to talk to them every day if possible for 5 or 10 minutes. It's a little harder to schedule but if you're flexible and work on just finding a mutually convenient time that can be really helpful. Another

thing that can be helpful if you're in different time zones and you don't want to travel all the time. Just to work in a different time zone. When I was pregnant I was unable to travel, I was pregnant with twins and grounded but I was managing teams in I think 10 different countries. One week per quarter I would work Europe hours and one week per quarter I would work Asian hours. That way I didn't have to fly but there's just more surface time with remote people. I would do sort of theatrical things like have a beer, I mean I was pregnant so I couldn't really drink but I would have a bottle of beer on the video conference at some crazy hour California time. Those things can help.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, there are a lot more remote companies these days and I think it presents new challenges for managers and figuring out different ways to do things. I think there's some great tips in there that people can take advantage of.

Kim Scott: You know, it's so interesting because getting people to sort of not rely on technology and remember that there's a human being they're working with is incredibly difficult in today's world. Shortly after I sold the book, I started a company to build an app that was supposed to help people be more radically candid. I realized that my goal was to teach people how to put their damn phones in their pockets, look each other in the eye and talk. The app was kind of a value subtracting round trip for that. We shut the app down but it's really surprisingly difficult to allow technology to actually help us connect. So often it comes in between us.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, it's hard. I think for as much productivity gains we get, we're losing a lot in the human interaction department. That's interesting about the app. I could see how it might be used in the wrong ways, exactly the ways they didn't want it to be used.

Kim Scott: Yeah. A lot of companies are doing the same thing too. Now people are, instead of giving each other impromptu oral feedback, they're writing it down, which is a disaster.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Kim Scott: It's so much better to have a quick conversation.

Robert Glazer: We try to make video the default for everything where it can't be in person. For business leader who is listening to this and going, "We need to do this" how do they get started and can you also maybe explain a little bit about how Radical Candor the company works with businesses who want to adopt these principles?

Kim Scott: Sure, absolutely. There's a lot of resources for people. Radical Candor the company offer talks and workshops that help people roll out the ideas in the book. We'll come in, we'll work with your team in person but that of course, doesn't always scale perfectly well. In fact, part of the reason I wrote the book is that there were so many people who I wanted to coach but I couldn't coach because I don't scale, I'm a human being. I really wrote the book to offer step by step practical suggestions for things you can do. I even wrote in order of operations in the book. A lot of companies who are in a situation where they can't afford to pay for the talks and the workshops will actually buy the book and read it with a group of managers and they'll go a chapter a month and they'll

implement the ideas in the book. That has also proven effective but it's been so interesting to see how different companies take different parts of the book and roll them out and have great success with them. It's been really fun to watch.

Robert Glazer: Well, with that, how can people get in touch with you if they want to work with you?

Kim Scott: Kim@radicalcandor or Jason@radicalcandor is our email, @kimballscott is me on Twitter, @candor is the company on Twitter and we're always publishing blog posts and we've got a lot of resources on our website, which is radicalcandor.com.

Robert Glazer: Yeah and I'll put a plug for the Twitter following as I mentioned before they have some great info graphics that they put out each week. I think they're really helpful to actually bring back to your team if you're trying to implement pieces of it.

Kim Scott: Great. Thank you. Don't forget to buy the book. I think the book is great too.

Robert Glazer: Kim, I can't say enough positive things about your book, "Radical Candor." It should definitely be a must read for anyone who is managing and leading others. The concepts you write about are things that we worked to implement in our company and I know that's been instrumental in our ability to create an award-winning culture. I really appreciate you taking the time to join us on Outperform today.

Kim Scott: Great conversation. Thank you so much.

Robert Glazer: All right. For our listeners you'll find all the links including where to find the book and everything Kim just spoke about, discussed within the episode in the show notes. Until next time, thanks for listening and keep Elevating.