A CEO's User Manual

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Would life be better if leaders were more open about who they are, what they think and what they value?

At Reward Gateway, we're keen to find out, so here it goes....

I produced this "user manual for me" after hearing a talk by **Adam Bryant** at The *New York Times New Work Summit in 2016.*

The goal is to share what I value, what I think is important and share some things I'm good at and some things I'm still working on.

*I think it all started with **this interview** Adam did back in 2013 with **Ivar Kroghrud**. I explain my interest and how I developed this over here on **my blog** about culture, leadership and employee engagement.*

*I'd love to hear your **feedback**. Let me know what you think.*

@glennelliott *or* **LinkedIn**

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Simplicity and Clarity

I really value simplicity and clarity. Complexity drives me nuts.

I also know that simplicity and clarity is expensive - it takes time and iteration but I think it's essential to make communications effective and for ideas to spread.

Remember the old line "I'm sorry for writing you a long letter but I didn't have time to write you a short one"?

Bad News

I like this **early, straight and factual**.

Don't ever worry about what I'll think.
Together we can fix anything.

I don't care what the method is - voice call, video, face to face, instant message - whatever is fastest.

Just don't wait and save it up - bad news only seems to get worse with age.

I value people who own their sh*t

I really value people who can critically evaluate themselves, their products, their teams and their business. If someone knows and shares it warts and all then I know they're in control.

I worry when someone tells me it's all great - it never is and then I worry they have blindspots.

Being able to see and state what is not how you want it shows you own it.

Say Sorry

I'm often surprised how few people understand the power of this simple word.

When I make a mistake (which I do often) I always say I'm sorry - it costs little and often takes all of the heat out of the situation. Over the years I've developed this and now I can deliver a really great genuine apology - it's really handy.

Being able to say sorry to colleagues and clients is a skill I really value in my team.

I'm Sorry

My brain works too quickly sometimes and I can fail to take people with me, especially on the "why" we're doing something and sometimes even on the "what".

It's partly due to excitement and passion but it can be really unhelpful.

I'm conscious of it and trying to be better. If you see it happening please tell me.

Trust

I trust people who tell me it like it is and don't sugar it up, cover it up or wrap it up in wool.

I lose trust in people who gossip, tell tales on others, undermine others or cover things up.

The easiest way to get fired is to lose my trust.

Care

You'll never get fired for making a mistake or for running a project that fails, that's just innovation.

You will get fired if you stop caring.

Asking for feedback

I believe that adding people to a problem should improve the outcome because of diversity of perspective. So if you ask me for feedback I'll give you it and I'll give any suggestion I can on making something better.

Sometimes people interpret that as me being disappointed in them or their work and that's not what I intend.

Quality is both valuable & expensive

Quality comes from time and iteration and is therefore expensive. We only have so much bandwidth in the team and the business and sometimes "good" is "good enough".

Sometimes I don't spot that and my natural urge is to make something better at all costs. If you think I'm polishing something that doesn't need it at the expense of something that does then speak up.

Responsibility

I value people who take responsibility and lead with things.

But I also value people who ask for support and check in regularly. I know that 10 minutes spent discussing something can save hours of re-work later.

I'm a big believer in two heads are better than one.

Diversity of opinion

We've built a great business at Reward Gateway by constantly innovating and iterating what we do.

Diversity of opinion and constant challenging of our status quo is key. There are no sacred cows that should not be challenged.

One of the worst things I hear is "*We didn't do that because someone said you wouldn't like it*" - which may hark back to something I said casually five years ago that may no longer be relevant.

Doing the right thing

We sometimes have to take tough decisions on products and teams that negatively affect some people for the benefit of the company, the wider team or our clients.

I can do that and sleep at night if I think we've behaved correctly, treated people with respect and dignity and made things no-worse than they need to be.

I trust and promote managers who also believe that doing the right thing is important.

Ambition

I have huge ambition for what we can achieve and often I am over-ambitious with my own time and commitments.

When this happens I tend to focus really hard and can become quite intense on a single project. Sometimes this come across as me being abrupt or looking like I'm in a bad mood and it's not intended.

My go-to "safe place" is to be open and honest.

I think openness with your people builds huge trust. I believe that people can take all types of "hard news" but they can't take lies and cover-ups - they destroy trust.

Not everyone is used to that, it can be uncomfortable for people with different experience. But I do expect this of all of our managers and leaders and it's not optional.

My Calendar

My calendar is open and I rarely make events private.

But generally only meetings, calls and appointments get into my calendar - like you I have lots of other work to do too. Just because my calendar is empty doesn't mean I'm free or have spare time.

So don't assume I'm ignoring you if you think my diary looks free but I'm being unresponsive.

I prioritise visible and transparent leadership

I lead a decent sized business and there are lots of calls on my time. But the order I work in is People, Product then Profits.

I will prioritise catching people doing good things, trying to be a good leader, listening to people via feedback channels and Glassdoor, sharing thoughts through my blog and communicating and talking to RG people.

Some people will think my prioritisation sucks but I'm comfortable with it.

*Thanks to **Ben Horowitz** for making me feel I could say this. His book "**The Hard Thing about Hard Things**" is a permission slip for entrepreneurs to be themselves in the face of a corporate world asking them to do the opposite and fit in with average.*

And finally… "Hi, I'm Glenn Elliott and I'm an Ambivert"

Almost everyone thinks I'm an extrovert but actually I'm an **ambivert** (dead in the middle of the introvert-extrovert scale).

This means I can be really public and outspoken, I can present on stage to 1,000 people but once it's done I'm desperate to go home and recharge by being quiet and alone for 3 days.

That's why I often vanish quickly after events and rarely turn up at the party for long. It's just me needing some introvert time.

*Thanks to **Susan Cain** for helping me to find this out and making me feel much happier by "coming out" about it. Her book "**Quiet**" has been an amazing read and has influenced us at Reward Gateway on everything from diversity to workplace design.*

Thanks. This was my V1. My SFD*

Please tell me what you really think. Do you love it? Hate it? Is it useful or confusing?

Does it show promise? How could it be better?

You can comment through my blog, Tweet me, send a LinkedIn message, ask me a question on Quora or if you work for Reward Gateway, talk to me through Glassdoor.

*SFD? That's thanks to **Brené Brown**. Read **this article**

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