

# LEADERSHIP **AND** SELF- DECEPTION

*Getting Out of  
the Box*

THE ARBINGER INSTITUTE



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*a BK Business book*

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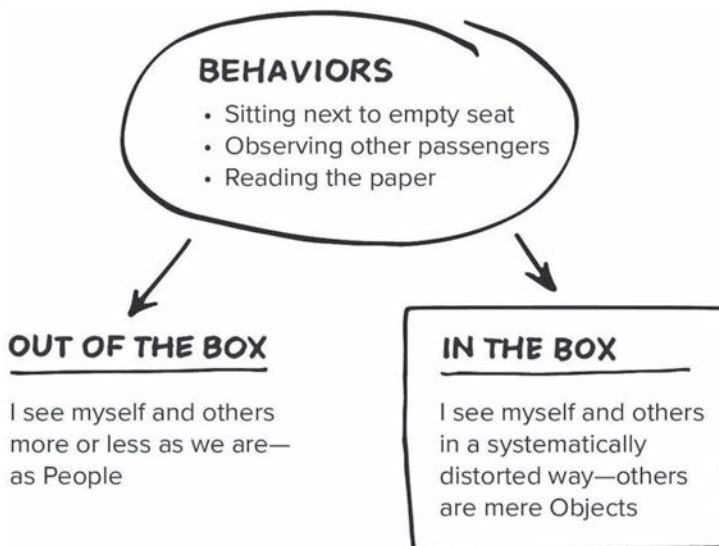
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way. So my view of the world was a systematically incorrect way of seeing others and myself. I saw others as less than they were—as objects with needs and desires somehow secondary to and less legitimate than mine. But I couldn’t see the problem with 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 saw straightforwardly. She was out of the box.

“So the inner experiences of two people,” he went on, “although they exhibited the same external behaviors, were entirely different. This difference is important enough that I want to emphasize it with a diagram.” At this, he turned to the board and spent a minute drawing the following:



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, Tom. I’ve done all of these, as I bet you have, too.”

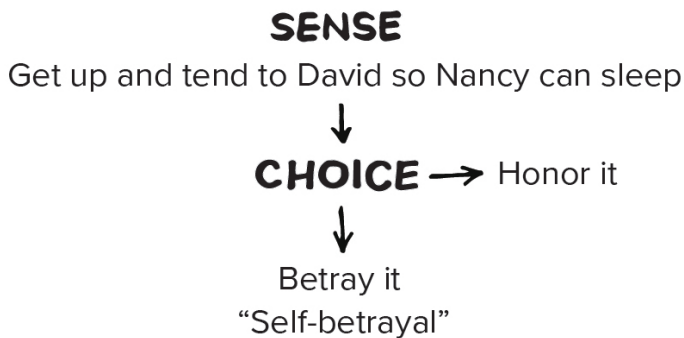
“Pretty much, yeah.”

“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.”

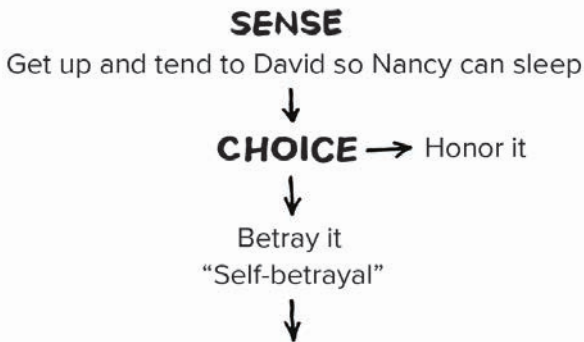
Kate paused, and Bud stepped in. “Now think about it, Tom. This is hardly a monumental idea. It’s about as simple as it comes. But its implications are astounding. And astoundingly unsimple. Let me explain.

“Let’s go back to the crying-baby story. Picture the moment. I felt I should get up so that Nancy could sleep, but then I didn’t do it. I just stayed lying there next to Nancy, who also was just lying there.”

As Bud was saying this, he drew the following in the middle of the board:



“Now, in this moment, as I’m just lying there listening to our wailing child, how do you imagine I might’ve started to see, and feel about, Nancy?”



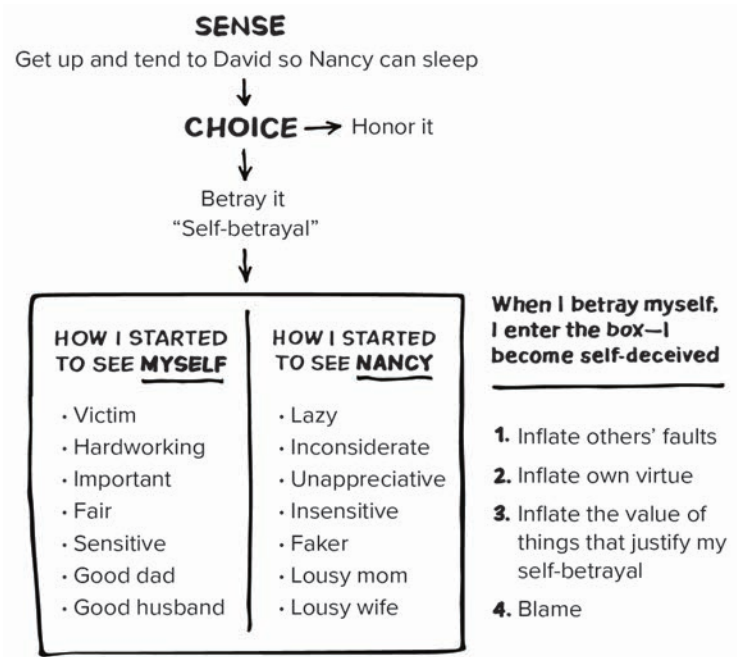
<b>HOW I STARTED TO SEE <u>MYSELF</u></b>	<b>HOW I STARTED TO SEE <u>NANCY</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Victim</li><li>• Hardworking</li><li>• Important</li><li>• Fair</li><li>• Sensitive</li><li>• Good dad</li><li>• Good husband</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lazy</li><li>• Inconsiderate</li><li>• Unappreciative</li><li>• Insensitive</li><li>• Faker</li><li>• Lousy mom</li><li>• Lousy wife</li></ul>

“Let’s think about this diagram. 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 these thoughts and feelings about Nancy invite me to reconsider my decision and do what I felt I should do for her?”

“Not at all,” I said.

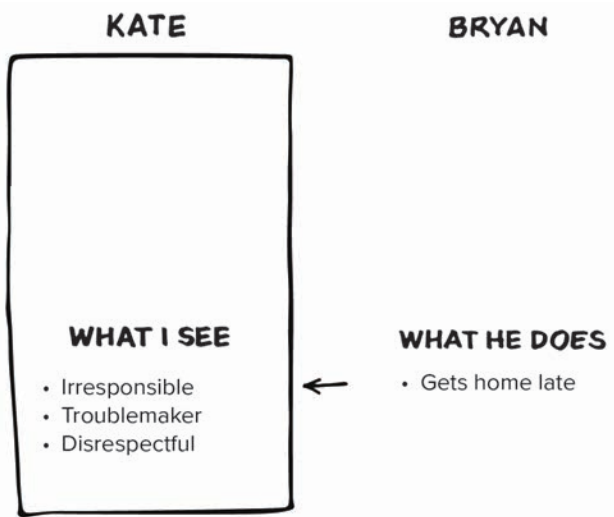
“What *do* they do for me?” Bud asked.

“Well, they justify your *not* doing it. They give you reasons to stay in bed and *not* tend to David.”



“Your self-betrayal,” I said, my voice trailing off as I became lost in the implications of this thought. *Really? Is that right?*

I looked again at the diagram. Before he betrayed himself, Bud saw Nancy, whatever her faults, simply as a person who could use his help. I understood that. But after he betrayed himself, she seemed very different to him. She didn't seem to *deserve* help anymore, and Bud thought he felt that way because of how *she* was being. But that wasn't true. The only thing that happened between the time that Bud felt irritated and angry and the time that he didn't was something that *Bud* did—his own self-betrayal—not something that Nancy did. So Bud's feelings *were* lying to him!



“Let’s think about this situation. If I’m in the box and see Bryan as an irresponsible and disrespectful troublemaker, what sorts of things do you suppose I might do?”

“Well . . . ” I began.

“You’d probably discipline him pretty severely,” Bud interjected.

I nodded and added, “And you might start criticizing him a lot.”

“Okay, good,” Kate said, adding to the drawing. “Anything else?”

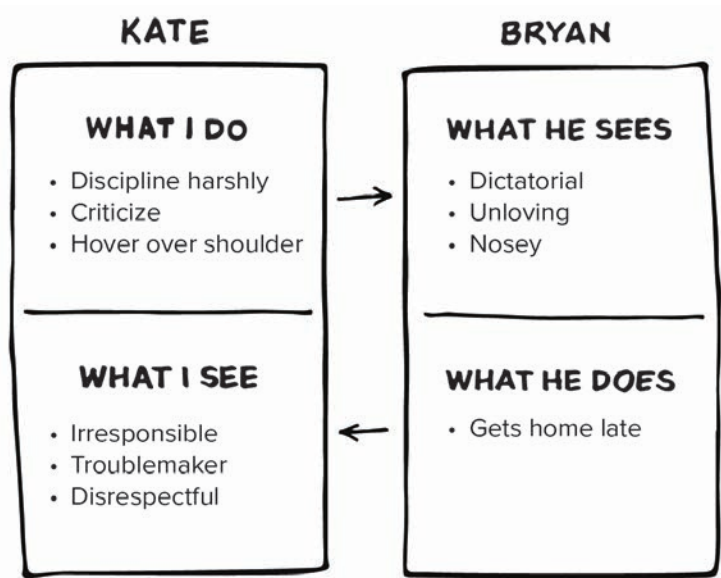
“You’d probably start hovering over his shoulder to make sure he was staying out of trouble,” I said.

She added that to the drawing and stepped to the side. “Now let’s suppose Bryan betrays himself—that he’s in the box toward *me*. If he’s in the box toward me, how do you suppose he might see me and my disciplining, criticizing, and hovering over his shoulder?”

“He’d probably see you as dictatorial,” I said. “Or maybe unloving.”

“And nosey,” Bud added.

“Okay, ‘dictatorial,’ ‘unloving,’ and ‘nosey,’” she repeated as she added to the drawing. “Good,” she said. “Now look what we have.”



“If Bryan’s in the box and seeing me as an unloving, nosey dictator, do you suppose he’ll want to be home earlier or later?”

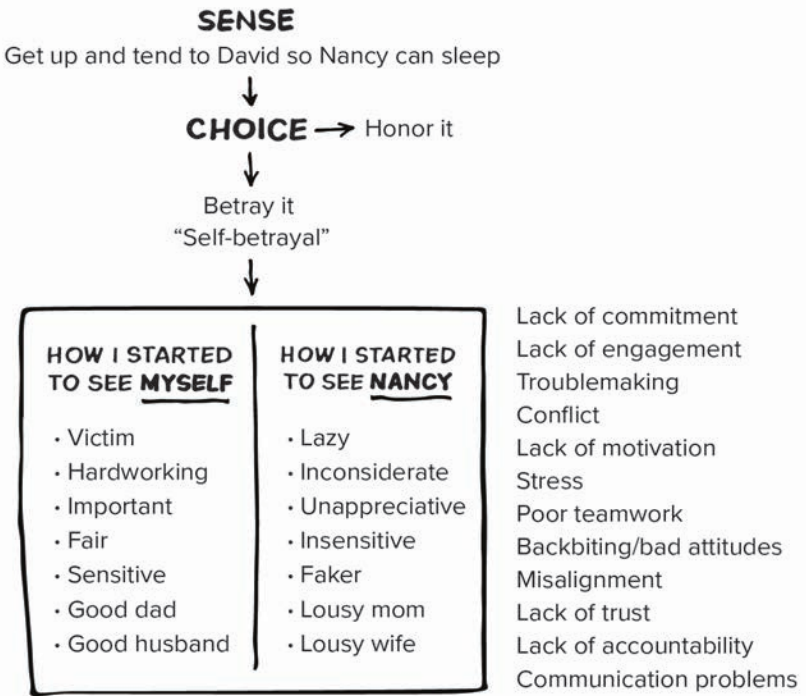
“Oh, later,” I said. “*Far* later.”

“In fact,” Bud offered, “he’ll be less likely to do *anything* the way you’d like him to do it.”

“Yes,” Kate agreed, drawing another arrow from Bryan’s box to her own. “So around and around we go,” she said, adding still more arrows between the boxes. “Think of it: We



“Okay, good,” Bud said, finishing the last few. “That’s a good enough list. Now let’s take a look and compare it with the story right over here where I failed to get up and tend to my child.”



“Notice: Did I have a commitment or engagement problem after I betrayed myself?”

“Yes,” I answered.

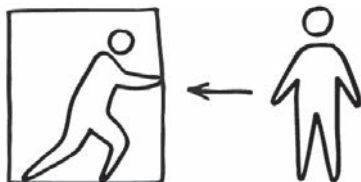
“But how about *before*? Did I have a commitment or engagement problem when I just had the feeling to get up and tend to David so that Nancy could sleep?”

“No,” I said.

## 21 *The Way Out*

“Think about yesterday,” Lou continued. “You just said that it felt like something changed you. We need to think about that a little more carefully.”

He moved toward the board. “I want to talk about self-betrayal and the box for a moment—to make something clear that may not have been made explicit yet.” He drew the following diagram:



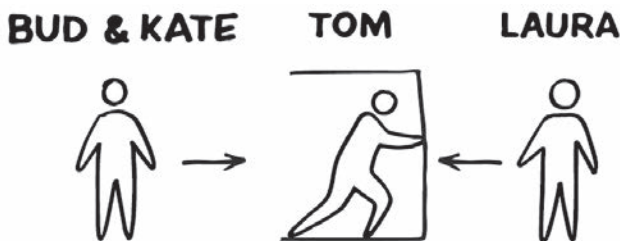
“To begin with, here’s a picture of what life is like in the box,” he said, pointing at his drawing. “The box is a metaphor for how I’m *resisting* others. By ‘resisting,’ I mean that my self-betrayal isn’t passive. In the box, I’m actively resisting what the humanity of others calls me to do for them.

“For example,” he said, pointing to Bud’s story on the board, “in the story here about 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 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, as Bud was

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. In fact, that’s what happened to you yesterday. Let me show you what I mean.”

Lou walked to the board and modified his drawing.

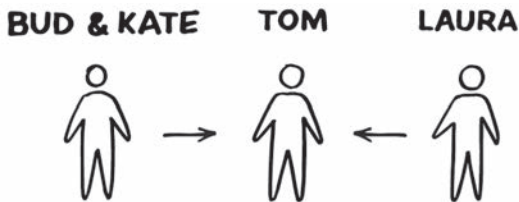


“Here’s how we might depict what you were like yesterday,” he said, standing to the side of the board. “You were in the box toward Laura but out of the box as you engaged with Bud and Kate. Now notice: Although you were resistant to Laura’s needs because you were in the box toward her, you nevertheless retained a sense of what people generally might need because you were out of the box toward others—namely, Bud and Kate. This sense that you felt and honored regarding Bud and Kate, combined with the continual call of Laura’s humanity to you—which is always there—is what made getting out of the box toward Laura possible.

“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

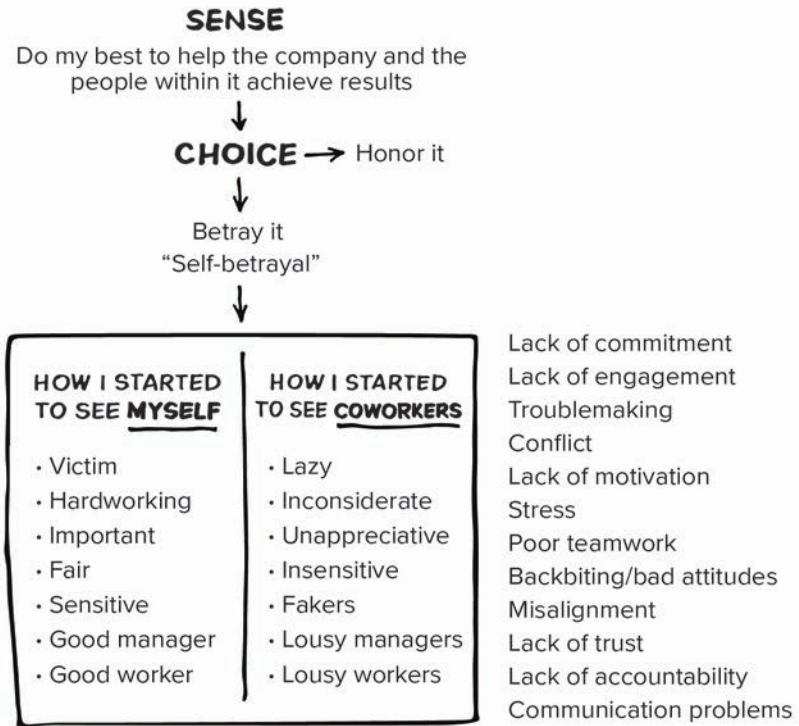
anger. It was as if everything changed in an instant. “That’s true,” I said. “That’s what happened.”

“Then we need to modify this drawing still more,” Lou said, turning to the board. When he finished, he backed away from the board and said, “This is how you looked when you left last night.”



“You were seeing and feeling straightforwardly. Laura seemed different to you because in the moment you got out of the box toward her, you no longer had the need to blame her and inflate her faults.”

Lou sat down. “In a way,” he said, “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 honor them as *people*. And in that moment—the



toward many of their coworkers frequently resemble the feelings Bud had toward Nancy in the story he told. And you'll often find that people who formerly were committed, engaged, motivated, looking forward to working as a team, and so on, now have problems in many of those areas. And who do you suppose they think *caused* those problems?"

"Everyone else in the company," I answered. "The boss, coworkers, the people who report to them—even the company, for that matter."

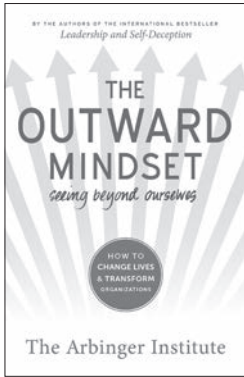
"Yes. But now we know better," he said. "When we blame, we blame because of ourselves, not because of others."



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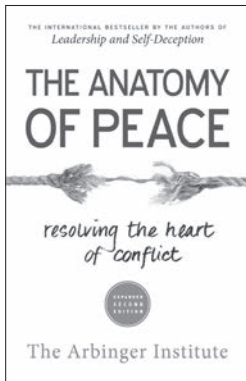
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