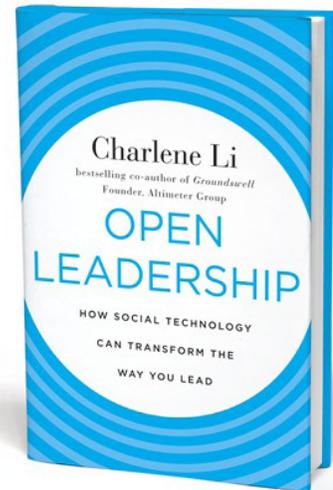


# THE NEW RULES OF OPEN LEADERSHIP

From Chapter 1, pages 14-16 of *Open Leadership* by Charlene Li

What's changed today is that new technologies allow us to let go of control and still be in command, because better, cheaper communication tools give us the ability to be intimately familiar with what is happening with both customers and employees. The result of these new relationships is open leadership, which I define as:

*Having the confidence and humility to give up the need to be in control while inspiring commitment from people to accomplish goals.*



Open leadership fosters new relationships—and to understand and govern how these new relationships works, we need new rules like the following:

**1. Respect that your customers and employees have power.** Once you accept this as true, you can begin to have a real, more equal relationship with them. Without this mindset, you will continue to think of them as replaceable resources and treat them as such. And if you ever need a reminder of what that customer and employee power looks like, just go read a social media monitoring report on your company from a vendor like Radian6, BuzzMetrics, or Cymfony—you'll quickly be humbled by the power of these people.

**2. Share constantly to build trust.** At the core of any successful relationship is trust. Trust is typically formed when people do what they say they will do. But in today's increasingly virtual, engaged environments, trust also comes from the daily patter of conversations. The repeated successful interchange of people sharing their thoughts, activities, and concerns results in relationship. New technologies like blogs, social networks, and Twitter remove the cost of sharing, making it easy to form these new relationships.

**3. Nurture curiosity and humility.** Often, sharing can quickly turn into messaging if all of the outbound information isn't accompanied by give and take. Expressing curiosity about what someone is doing and why something is important to that person keeps sharing grounded and focused on what other people want to hear, balanced with what you want to say. The natural outgrowth of curiosity is humility, which gives you the intellectual integrity to acknowledge that you still have a lot to learn, and also to admit when you are wrong.

**4. Hold openness accountable.** In relationships, accountability is a two-way street—it makes clear the expectations in the relationship, as well as the consequences if they are not met. So if your product causes someone problems, what's the first thing you should do? Apologize and figure out how to resolve the problem. Likewise, if you give someone the ability to comment on your site and they misuse it, they should understand that you will deny them future access.

**5. Forgive failure.** The corollary to accountability is forgiveness. Things go wrong all the time in relationships, and the healthiest ones move on from them, leaving behind grudges and blame. This is not to say that failure is accepted; rather, that it is acknowledged and understood.

## ACTION PLAN

With these rules in mind, you can ask yourself the following questions. They will give you a starting point, as well as a preliminary roadmap to help you reach where you want to go.

- What are your biggest challenges and fears when it comes to your customers or employees using social technologies?
- How would you describe the nature of the relationship today with your customers?
- With your employees?
- With your partners?
- How would you like those relationships to look and feel like two years from now?
- What are your biggest fears about giving up control?
- What is the one thing over which you are most nervous about giving up control?
- Where do you see the greatest opportunities in letting go and being open?

## CONVERSATION

In the comments below, please share some of your thoughts about the challenges you face being an open leader.

For more information about *Open Leadership*, visit <http://open-leadership.com>.

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