

# KEEP IT SIMPLE: HOW 3-5 GROUND RULES CAN CHANGE YOUR CULTURE

Author:

**Leah Methner**

Communication and Human Skills Specialist

P. 1300 532 461

E. [support@leahmethner.com.au](mailto:support@leahmethner.com.au)

[www.leahmethner.com.au](http://www.leahmethner.com.au)

Leah Methner is a communication and human skills specialist, obsessed with making the “people part” of leadership and work life easier. She is a trainer, speaker, facilitator and author of two acclaimed books, “Steer Through the Storm: How to Communicate and Lead Courageously Through Change” and “Soft is the New Hard: How to Communicate Effectively Under Pressure” (Ingram Spark, \$25.00). Renowned for her engaging and straight-shooter style, Leah helps leaders and teams shift from knowing to doing, and radically improve their effectiveness. Visit [www.leahmethner.com.au](http://www.leahmethner.com.au)

LEAH METHNER

Running a successful rural business, one that attracts and retains great staff, goes beyond traditional metrics like pay and performance – it's about creating a culture where people flourish. Put simply, culture is the behaviours that are supported, rewarded, tolerated and make people feel included. Yet far too often leaders let poor behaviour go unchecked jeopardising a team's morale and productivity.

Nothing kills culture quicker than poor behaviour, particularly if it is excused and not addressed. It doesn't matter if a person is considered your star salesperson or machinery operator, if they are allowed to behave poorly, the message it sends to the rest of the team is that the behaviour is acceptable. The damage this can do is immense. Behaviour must be considered as part of performance.

But you can't hold someone accountable for poor behaviour if you have not set clear expectations about what good looks like. This is where many businesses fall short. They don't establish shared expectations for communication and behaviour with their teams, rather, they assume that how people treat each other should be "common sense" (which we know is not common).

The linchpin for a successful cultural and behavioural shift lies in the setup. Most conflicts and "people problems" within a business can be sidestepped or mitigated with good communication and clear behavioural expectations. But to be effective, it's not about leaders or business owners dictating what behaviours people must adhere to from above. To set expectations well and get the buy-in from your staff, creating them requires collective and collaborative effort. Bring the team together and hash out questions like:

- What do we want to be known for as a team?

- What do we want the experience of working together to be like?
- What do we need to do to make that experience a reality?
- What does good behaviour and communication towards each other look like in practice?
- What will we do and what won't we do?
- How will we hold each other accountable?

And the crucial one:

- What are our three plain-speak, practical ground rules for how we're going to work together?

Ground rules for communication and behaviour differ from values. They are simple, specific and actionable. Examples include: "Say it sooner", "Assume positive intent", "Acknowledge people", "Explain the why", "Get curious not furious", "Ask more questions", and "Seek clarification".

Avoid a cumbersome "shopping list" of rules that fade into oblivion. Challenge your team to distill their core behaviours into 3-5 ground rules that are simple and memorable, and that they agree will make the biggest difference to how the team works together.

Einstein's wisdom applies here: "The definition of genius is taking the complex and making it simple." Don't use jargon, corporate waffle, big words or complex explanations; opt for clarity. Imagine explaining your ground rules to a 10-year-old or a mate at a Sunday barbecue. It's about simplicity, not condescension.

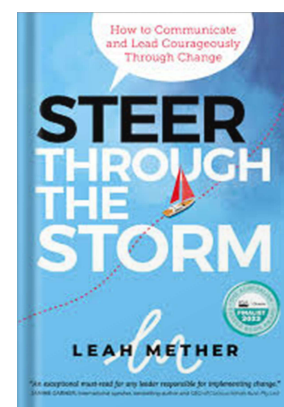
Once you've settled on your team's behaviours (ideally through a team vote) don't let them gather dust. Turn them into a living document – effectively a team charter. Regularly reference these behaviours in meetings,

conversations, and stories that illustrate their impact. Reward those who embody them and encourage your people to hold each other accountable if they fall short.

The specific ground rules you choose don't really matter as much as their simplicity, clarity and impact on how your team interacts. Nail these behaviours and you'll find the majority of conflicts melt away, attracting the right people to your business. This allows you to craft a culture by design, not default. It's the old 80/20 Pareto Principle: 80 percent of the problems are addressed by focussing 20 percent of the possible ground rules.

This isn't just about keeping behaviour in check; it's about making leadership easier. Not only will you be able to hold your people accountable but they'll be more willing to be accountable because they helped create the behavioural ground rules in the first place. Clear expectations will also make it easier for you to onboard new people to your business and culture, and for you to retain staff who uphold the behaviours you desire.

Remember, the behaviour you accept, support, reward and tolerate becomes your culture. Establishing shared expectations for good behaviour through clear and simple ground rules has the potential to transform your business for the better.



*Steer Through the Storm: How to Communicate and Lead Courageously Through Change* by Leah Methner