

THE POWER OF CLARITY

UNLEASH THE TRUE POTENTIAL
OF WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY,
CONFIDENCE, AND EMPOWERMENT

ANN LATHAM

BLOOMSBURY

'Ann Latham shares a process, long ignored and very needed. Clarity can benefit anyone who cares enough about the work to say what they mean and mean what they say.'

Seth Godin, author, This is Marketing

'Every professional recognizes the importance of clarity – yet it's often hard to come by in the corporate world. With this smart new framework, Ann Latham shows us how to enhance our own clarity, improve team productivity, and create better organizational performance.'

*Dorie Clark, Executive Education Professor,
Duke University Fuqua School of Business and author of Reinventing You*

'*The Power of Clarity* offers profound wisdom and pragmatic tools – industrial-strength thinking tools – for avoiding the activity trap where a bias for action can lead to wasted effort misinterpreted as true progress. A must-read for anyone who cares about advancing achievement.'

Chip R. Bell, author of Inside Your Customer's Imagination

'What we think is clear is too often what we merely perceive through the fog we don't see. In *The Power of Clarity*, Ann Latham clears that up, but be prepared for the reality.'

*Alan Weiss PhD, author of Million Dollar Consulting,
Legacy, and over 60 other books in 15 languages*

'Who doesn't want to work smarter rather than more or harder? Who doesn't want to be a more effective leader? In *The Power of Clarity*, Ann gives specific advice on how to unleash the power of clarity in a complex world. It provides theory only where necessary and is highly practical and applicable.'

*Prof. Dr. Guido Quelle, Managing Partner, Mandat GmbH, Dortmund,
London, New York and author of Profitable Growth*

'*The Power of Clarity* is chocked full of excellent, actionable advice on how to do just about everything better in any workplace. It's a rare business book that has something valuable on just about every page. No matter where someone is in their evolution as a leader or manager, *The Power of Clarity* has something to offer.'

Eli Lehrer, President, R Street

'A critical book for every leader! Learn to give your teams, employees and peers the clear communication they need to be their most effective and productive in *The Power of Clarity*.'

*Marshall Goldsmith, New York Times #1 bestselling author of Triggers, Mojo, and What Got You Here
Won't Get You There*

'*The Power of Clarity* is a 1000 watt halogen bulb blasting through the ambiguous fog of unfocused meetings, imprecise language, bloated to-do lists, ambiguous expectations, and the lack of serious prioritization that drags down organizational performance.'

*Daniel Markovitz, Shingo prize-winning author, speaker, and consultant.
His newest book is The Conclusion Trap*

'The one thing that sets apart people who wish for something, and those who achieve it, is that the second group at some point was able to get clarity. Ann explains in a smart and entertaining way why achieving and embracing clarity is the first step to become the better version of yourself, to work smarter, not harder, and to simply lead a happier life.'

Dr. Martina Muttko, author of Build Better Brains

'Ann Latham is one of the clearest thinkers I know. Her words leap off the page, with an urgency and a call to action that is hard to ignore. Her blend of dry humour and insightful wisdom is a gift to anyone seeking to work better, manage better, even live better. In this powerful call to action, she asserts that clarity is the most important attribute of a leader, and that unlocking clarity will lead to "profit, productivity, confidence, and empowerment". We all instinctively know that there's a better way to work. Reading this book is a great start.'

Jennifer Geary, COO, Asto UK

'This intriguing book provides compelling evidence that vague and confusing written and oral communication take an enormous toll on workplace productivity. Latham offers specific and straightforward advice for improving decision-making, communication and efficiency. A must-read for anyone, whether business leader or not, who wants better, faster outcomes.'

Van Zimmer, Former Judge, Iowa Court of Appeals

'If complacency and confusion are the disease, clarity is the antidote. And this book is a first-rate guide to infusing its healing powers throughout your organization. *The Power of Clarity* will help leaders of every kind sharpen their priorities, improve their process, and find greater meaning in their work.'

Daniel Pink, author of When, Drive and To Sell is Human

'Clarity is the holy grail of decision-making, which is the heart of effective leadership. Ann Latham has made the ethereal practical in *The Power of Clarity*. Rich in examples and practical applications, it is a worthy contribution to the science and art of leadership.'

Matt Church, founder, Thought Leaders and author of Rise Up: An Evolution in Leadership

'Communicating with clarity is vital for effective conversations and effective relationships. *The Power of Clarity* is packed with examples that prove clarity is the essence of effective communication – and the fallout from lack of clarity can destroy careers and even organizations.'

Ken Blanchard, co-author of The New One Minute Manager and Leading at a Higher Level

'A valuable resource for managers and leaders at all levels who can achieve greater organizational excellence using the many practical strategies in this book.'

Joseph R. Weintraub, Professor of Management, Babson College and co-author of The Coaching Manager and How to Manage Student Consulting Projects

'If you want to cut through the clutter and chaos of your crazy-busy life, get *The Power of Clarity*. It's filled with rock-solid strategies to help you get the right things done expeditiously.'

Jill Konrath, international speaker and bestselling author of More Sales, Less Time

'Clarity. Such a seemingly simple concept yet so difficult to achieve in a complex world. Ann shows how to break through "disclarity" and attain amazing results through practical, real world examples. A must-read for our time.'

Lynne Robertson, CEO and owner, FAME agency

'*The Power of Clarity* offers a holistic and inclusive way of thinking and doing that would benefit any kind of organization. Latham demonstrates how enhanced attitudes, confidence, respect, trust, and satisfaction are consequences of her process just as much as improved performance.'

Katherine Platt, Associate Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Babson College

'Every day, in nearly every organization, lack of clarity leads to frustration, dissatisfaction and failure to deliver to expectations. *The Power of Clarity* reveals a huge, hidden-in-plain-sight frontier for improvement. I couldn't see it before reading this book. Now I can't not see it!'

Amanda Setili, author, Fearless Growth and The Agility Advantage

'This is a crisp, clearly written book on a critical but overlooked element of individual and organizational capacity: clarity. Although it seems obvious that lack of clarity wastes enormous amounts of time and capacity, many forces get in the way of achieving it. This book, which has almost universal application, shows the systematic ways of thinking and action steps that can bring valuable, time-saving, focused processes to problem-solving. Everyone who works will benefit from it.'

Allan R. Cohen, Emeritus Professor of Management, Babson College and bestselling co-author of Influence without Authority

'Latham's book is a gem, a real guide on how to alleviate ambiguity and distractions at the individual and team level. If we follow her process of "harnessing the power of clarity" we will change the way we work, increasing effectiveness, trust and commitment. Her method applies to all of us. I can't wait to use *The Power of Clarity* with my team!'

Ann McElaney-Johnson, President, Mount Saint Mary's University

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Introduction

Let me tell you about a not very memorable day. I was talking with a client, a Fortune 50 executive, who told me he had been promoted to vice president. After I congratulated him, he went on to explain that he still had all his old responsibilities because they weren't going to replace him. Furthermore, he also retained the responsibilities of a peer who left a year before and was never replaced. There was a time when this disclosure would have been shockingly memorable. What a nightmare! But it's no longer memorable. Instead, it's shockingly common!

Corporations are stressed. Leaders are stressed. Employees are stressed. Customers expect near perfection. Global competition, technological change, and stock market expectations provide relentless pressure. Organizations are as lean as they can be – too lean. Best practices – lean techniques, supply chain management, new technology, and SMART goals coupled with greater accountability – have reached the point of diminishing returns. Employee engagement and change management efforts, despite spawning whole new billion-dollar industries, haven't delivered as promised.

How can we continue to do more with less? How can we possibly work smarter, not harder? Leaders are desperate for the next generation of new thinking that will help them improve profitability, productivity, and workforce commitment and effectiveness.

This book provides that new thinking. It's the answer they need now.

Unrecognized and hidden in plain sight, smack dab in the middle of organizations of any size or complexity, is a new frontier of enormous opportunity. This is the part of the company running without the benefit of clear objectives. Where the most common activities defy traditional process improvement. Where priorities are always too numerous to be called priorities. Where, according to one internal study by a Fortune

30 client and my own surveys, as much as 80 per cent of employee time is lost to confusion and counter-productive activities. And where management tolerates *cognitive uptimes* as low as 20 per cent without so much as a raised eyebrow, despite expecting production uptimes above 99.9 per cent.

This is the problem that no one is seeing. The problem unseen and undescribed by existing vocabulary. The problem shrouded by our *clarity blindness*. Since we can't see it and don't even have the vocabulary needed to talk about it, it's not surprising that we have never committed to eliminating it.

But ask any employee. In their gut, they know the problem is there – the waste, the confusion, the constant juggling, the wishful thinking, the circular decisions. They know it's bigger than anyone admits. They know it's the source of endless sighs and under-the-breath resignation, 'Why does everything always have to take longer than it should?' It's the reason they sit in meetings for so much of each day and accomplish too little. The reason email chains grow and copy in too many people while consuming another big chunk of each day. The reason big initiatives fizzle without results. The reason they and their co-workers are cynical, frustrated, disengaged, and looking for another job.

Welcome to the *cognitive zone*. This is where employees spend their days trying to move *cognitive objects* without the advantages of physical processes that move physical objects: clear objectives, well-defined processes, shared vocabulary, mapping techniques, few priorities, and visible evidence of tangible progress. This is the land of ambiguity, *kitchen sink conversations*, ad hoc processes, and disjointed interaction. And this is your organization's single greatest opportunity to improve profitability and productivity while also improving individual and organizational confidence and truly empowering employees by maximizing their ability to contribute their very best to the success of the organization.

In this book, I explain what the cognitive zone is, where it is, why it exists, and why it is filled with disclarity. I then set you on the path to transforming the cognitive zone with the *power of clarity*.

This book will open your eyes and change the way you think and work in order to be more effective, more productive, more profitable, and happier! This is the book that leaders and employees in every organization, for profit and non-profit, need right now. Bigger than lean, the power of clarity is the new frontier of performance improvement.

Before I left the corporate world to start my own consulting company in 2004, I asked many people with whom I had worked – co-workers, bosses past and present, and direct reports – ‘What is it that I do exceptionally well that is most unusual?’

Their wonderfully thoughtful responses opened my eyes, inspired my company name, nailed my value proposition, and, most important of all, set me on a mission to not only deliver that value in spades, but also to teach others to do what I do extremely well so that it is not so uncommon.

So, what is my special talent? Distilling what I hear from others and finding the nugget in the chaos that suddenly brings everyone together around a compelling common cause. Framing conversations and leading people to powerful conclusions, policies, and processes that they are eager to embrace. Creating order and logic by translating massive quantities of information into discrete objectives, critical decisions, and concrete steps that make discernible progress possible. Identifying and forcing the tough decisions needed to remove obstacles and prevent dilution and distraction from sabotaging success.

In short, creating clarity. *Uncommon clarity.*

With that, my business was launched and I’ve been writing and consulting to create clarity ever since. I’ve worked with organizations in more than 40 industries ranging from small businesses to corporate giants such as Hitachi, Boeing, and Medtronic and non-profits as diverse as Smith College and Public Television. In almost 20 years of consulting, I’ve encountered only one company that didn’t need far greater clarity. You will read about it towards the end of Chapter 2. The remainder are clarity blind. They aren’t as clear as they think they are.

They don't see the waste and damage. And they certainly don't know what to do about it. I do.

A consultant contacted me recently to ask the difference between strategy and clarity. This question blew me away. But I was incredibly thankful because it perfectly illustrates several important points. First, the word 'clarity' itself is incredibly unclear. Second, if we don't really understand what clarity is or how to recognize it, we can't possibly appreciate how often it is missing or understand the potential value of greater clarity. Third, people usually assume clarity applies only to goals and communication. They could not be more wrong. And fourth, we simply haven't been taught to recognize or create clarity.

In case you too are asking that consultant's question, strategic clarity is clarity at the 35,000 foot level. This is essential and a great starting point. However, it is not sufficient. We need clarity at *all* altitudes. We need *clarity-in-the-moment*. We need our cognitive uptime to be as important and as high as our production uptime. That's how we will dramatically boost our profit, productivity, confidence, and empowerment. That's the next frontier. That's the power of clarity.

Imagine applying for a position in a manufacturing company without knowing about lean manufacturing. Soon, not understanding the power of clarity will be equally egregious for *any* leadership position. No leader or aspiring leader can afford to be clarity blind.

[Click to get your copy of *The Power of Clarity* now!](#)