**Interview**

Necessary Endings – Dr. Henry Cloud

Dr. Henry Cloud is a clinical psychologist and leadership consultant with a unique ability to connect with audiences. Drawing upon his broad range of experiences in private practice, leadership consulting, and media, he simplifies life’s issues and gives easy to understand, practical advice. Its Dr. Cloud’s humour, compassion, and “in the moment” confrontation that make his approach to psychology, business and spirituality such a success.

Dr. Cloud has written or co-written over 20 books, including Necessary Endings, published by HarperBusiness.

**GM: What was the background to you writing Necessary Endings?**

Dr. Henry Cloud:

In coaching CEOs and high level executives, I continued to see the issue over and over again. Leaders found it difficult to execute “necessary endings,” and sometimes did not even see the realities that were staring them in the face. It became clear that this was a pretty common problem and at the same time exciting because of how far it can move a business forward when dealt with.

**GM: What surprised you the most when researching it?**

Dr. Henry Cloud:

I was really surprised that some of the issues were so consistent with such high performers. It reinforced the ideas as I began to see them showing up across industries and at different levels of leadership. I think before this project I had always seen these issues a bit more as idiosyncrasies of individual leaders. But when you think about it, it makes sense as this topic taps into a lot of clear developmental issues of all humans.

**GM: How has your career as a clinical psychologist influenced you as a leadership consultant?**

Dr. Henry Cloud:

It has informed me and shaped a lot of my thinking in the three areas where leaders have to show up and deliver: self-leadership, interpersonal dynamics with the people they lead, and maximizing their talents for performance. I think a lot of the leadership literature makes more sense and is richer when you add in a more dynamic understanding of personality functioning and interpersonal dynamics at a deeper level.

**GM: Are the strategies for successfully ending negative business practices and processes intrinsically the same as the strategies you recommend your clients apply in their personal lives?**

Dr. Henry Cloud:

Some are and some aren’t. I loved writing about the dynamics of “when to have hope and when to let something go,” as that is such a big issue for people both personally and professionally. “How do you do decide when someone or something can be fixed?” is a big one. Then, facing the internal maps that keep people stuck and dealing with the resistance to making endings happen, are common in both business and personal lives.
But, in leading organizations, the complicating factors are in the dynamics that come because there are many more stakeholders in the "endings," and there are political forces at work that individuals do not have to deal with. Put that together with managing P and L's and the pressure of a bottom line, as well as business' often having such a short-term focus, and you have a much different context than in people's personal lives. Also, the strategies for business must include the leader being a "change agent," which is more complicated. And, remember, in personal break-ups, there is rarely legal exposure for how well you do it.

**GM: What are the main key strategies?**

**Dr. Henry Cloud:**

First of all you have to find out how clear the leader is about both the need for an ending, and his or her internal orientation towards is. There is a lot of denial, or false hope, or resistance that if you don’t see early on you will have a good strategy that keeps getting delayed or sabotaged. The leader has to challenge some assumptions that he might have about how endings are seen or feel to him or others. Then, it is important to get the ones who actually are going to drive the ending in a position that they are the ones who feel the urgency. You have to get them "close to the misery," as I put it, and also clearly "hopeless" about continuing in the path that they are currently in. I get them to go through a diagnostic to show them why a business or a person or a strategy either has hope or not, and if you can get them to a "good sense of hopelessness," then you have a lot of momentum building. After that, it goes interpersonal and organizational as you have to implement a strategy with the teams and the organization to make sure that the power dynamics do not get in the way, and morph people into a new reality that feels positive and has energy. That means doing some organizational moves that are key in terms of empowering the people and groups who will go forward and neutralizing those who are in the way. And all along the path, there are decisions to be made in terms of who is going to help and who is going to be a problem, and how to deal with those individuals.

**GM: To what does your term “Middle Space” refer?**

**Dr. Henry Cloud:**

It is the place where leaders either make it or they don’t. If you take all of the leadership concepts on one end of a continuum, i.e. the things that leaders have to do such as cast vision, engage talent, execute, do deals, build alliances, be a change agent, etc......and then on the other end of the continuum you have the leader's personal and interpersonal "issues," and dynamics, the middle space is where it all happens or fails to happen. It is where “what they know they need to do vs. who they are as a person with issues" interact. Leadership, in my view, is in large part about how an individuals personal and interpersonal strengths and weaknesses collide with a vision, execution, teams, and an organization. The middle space is where that personal and interpersonal growth needs to happen so that leaders can win and execute their strategy.

**GM: Could you define what a Necessary Ending is, and what happens when we avoid them?**

**Dr. Henry Cloud:**

A "necessary ending" is the termination of something "whose time has passed." It could be a business, a strategy, an employee, a product line, or whatever. The "necessary" part means that if the ending does not happen, then either bad things occur or good things don’t. If we avoid them, then the business either stagnates, or in many instances, will die. These endings are truly "necessary" for the business to get where it wants and needs to be.
GM: Should we re-position endings as new beginnings, and how can we shift this paradigm?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

Certainly should happen, as that is what they are. You are executing an ending so that something new can begin, the same way that it happens in a season ending and beginning (winter to spring), or the pruning of a rose bush. You prune a rose bush, i.e. put the end to some of the buds or branches, so that new growth can occur. Endings is a very positive practice and idea. It is inherent in life, and very life-giving, therefore very positive. And when leaders do them well, you can feel life coming back into organizations.

GM: What is “pruning”, why is it so crucial, and how can managers/practitioners institute a “Pruning Challenge”?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

Pruning by definition is the “cutting away of what is unwanted or superfluous and thereby reducing its reach.” Wow...think about that. If you could reduce the influence and “reach” of the sick or weak parts of your business so that the good ones could use all of the resources! That is why it is so crucial....the things that are obstacles are holding the business back, and getting vital resources that the business needs to thrive. Managers can institute a challenge by taking the simple formula in the book and taking their teams through an exercise of figuring out the three areas where pruning have to happen: the "good" but not "best" things that are taking up resources and have to go, the 'sick and not getting well' whose time has past, and the 'been dead a long time' things that are in the way. Then they have to look at the resistance and reasons why these have not happened and get to execution. It creates a LOT of energy to do this.

GM: Why is this process onerous and what are people so afraid of? Is it because people equate pruning in the business context with contraction and redundancy?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

It is mostly onerous because of our internal maps of how we see endings, and the interpersonal fears that it brings up. A lot of times creating an ending means that someone will either have to let go of something or a person that they are attached to, or they will have to face difficult conflict with people, or that some people are going to lose and that is painful. Plus, it takes courage, but as Drucker said, it is the 'life and death decisions' that leaders must make that will bring about success, and most of them have to do with people.

GM: Can we apply any criteria or a metric to decide when it is best to cut and run?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

Yes ...I have a diagnostic in the book that takes people through figuring out when something has hope and when it doesn't. One of the big questions to figure out first is whether or not there is true objective reasons to have hope or whether thinking that something will turn around is really just a "wish," and not "hopeful" at all. Then you have to ask 'what is going to be different that can lead us to expect different results than we have been getting? I usually want them to diagnose two areas in particular. First, where is the energy for something different going to come from? Who, or what, will bring that energy and push? Second, where will the different template, or path, or direction come from that will give something hope? Without new energy and a new template, you are pretty much guaranteed to get more of what you have been getting from a person or a strategy.
GM: What are the telltale signs that a business relationship is becoming toxic? What should an individual do if that toxic business relationship is with their boss or someone else in the workplace?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

The telltale sign to me is disengagement of some sort. When a business relationship is good, it calls the best out of someone. When it is toxic, it does the opposite. A person is having to adapt to the toxicity and cannot fully engage with all they are for the sake of the vision. Hope is lost, energy is lost, and negative motivations slowly take over. If with the boss, the ideal is to work it out directly. From there, if that is not possible, they have to figure out if there is another power coalition that can help, like a team or group of peers, HR, higher ups, etc. If not, then they can go into *managing the manager* mode and quarantine the boss to the best of their ability. Or, as is needed in many situations, be getting their assets collected, increasing skills and marketability, so they can go somewhere that appreciates them.

GM: How does the concept of “hoarding/retention” apply to entrepreneurs, small businesses, managers etc.?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

The two basic thoughts of a hoarder are “I may need that,” and “I will miss that if it is gone.” So, they hold on to things that they should let go. Basically it is a fear of thinking they can find or create what they need going forward if they let go of something that has no value, or a fear of letting go of something they are emotionally attached to. Both are necessary steps in order to get to where they need to go.

GM: How can we assimilate and normalize Necessary Endings into our lives? What are the harsh truths that we need to come to terms with in this process?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

The harsh truths are really good news. They are that endings are normal and can be the gateway to getting where you want to go if you are willing to take the steps. Certainly they can be painful, but you have to get to a place where you see them as normal. If you do, and rework your old belief systems around creating necessary endings, you will get to places you never thought possible. Pulling a tooth is painful for a moment, but then you can finally enjoy a good meal. There are a lot of “feasts” waiting on people if they will just pull the tooth.

GM: Can you expand on your notion of “The Anatomy of Hope”?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

It is basically that for something to have hope, it has to be objective, with a real reason to believe. There needs to be new wisdom brought in, new energy, people who have the character and ability to make it work. Then there has to be a real path that is tangible and workable. If there are new ways of doing things that are added and not the same old same old, then hope makes sense. Otherwise, it is very good for a leader to be hopeless about something that has no hope, and create the necessary ending.

GM: What structures need to be in place in order for Necessary Endings to happen?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

There has to first of all be a position of strength for the one creating the ending. They have to be grounded in some people who see things the way they do to help them go through it. This is tough stuff. Secondly, there has to be a structured plan or path to see it through all of the chaos that sometimes endings produce. Third, there has to be a group of powerful coalitions that will help create the critical mass of people, belief, practices, and
energy to get to the new reality. Also, you must get people close to the misery of what needs to end so they have enough motivation to make the ending, as well as close enough to the reality of the new reality so they will be motivated to keep going. Put those together, and a leader can take a group through almost any kind of change process.

GM: Is resistance to change the mortal enemy of Necessary Endings, and what can be done to vanquish it? What archetypes will you come up against when facing resistance?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

Is is certainly one of the enemies, as well as old belief systems that make endings "bad" in people's minds when in reality they are not. You can vanquish them by getting people to believe new things, and changing their mental maps, as well as the things mentioned in 16 above. You will always run into the kinds of people who resist any kind of change, and they must be neutralized in some way. They cannot be won over. There is another group who are sceptical, but can be won over and brought along and that is where a leader should spend some significant time.

GM: Are there any coaching tips you can give to someone who needs to have a "difficult conversation" in order to implement a Necessary Ending?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

Be honest, kind, and clear. Make sure that you get clear in your own head first that you care about the person and want what is best for them. Then, when you are ending something for them that is going to be painful, you know that it is good for them as well as for the company and that will be felt by them at some level. And make sure that you have done the pre-work of letting them know of problems way ahead of time for the ending. They should have had a chance to change if possible, and be prepared. Then, know before going in to the conversation what you want the outcome to be. Do you want to leave an open door or do you want no question that there will never be another opportunity? Be clear about that and make sure you say it. Don't leave doubt or fuzziness. Affirm the person and the relationship, and then be as honest as possible. It will hurt for a moment, but be good in the long run. Honesty and integrity will guard you.

GM: Whom do you think does Necessary Endings well and whom do you feel needs to make one fast?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

I think a good example in a number of ways is Jack Welch (Chairman and CEO of General Electric between 1981 and 2001). He had a policy of ending whatever was not working and did it clearly and with candour.

GM: Finally, are there any closing comments you would like to make?

Dr. Henry Cloud:

I would encourage people to get the book and go through the pruning exercise with themselves, and then their teams. As they do that, figuring out what needs to stay vs. what should go away, they will find great energy and focus. Pruning is a great way to begin the process of "necessary endings."