

**Book Review: *Radical Respect* by Kim Scott**  
**By Leda Stawnychko**

In *Radical Respect*, Kim Scott builds on the principles she introduced in *Radical Candor*, where she emphasized the importance of direct, honest communication in leadership. For those unfamiliar with *Radical Candor*, that book focuses on how leaders can balance being caring and direct in their feedback to promote better relationships and enhance team performance. In *Radical Respect*, Scott extends these ideas, positioning mutual respect as the cornerstone of effective leadership, particularly in the face of shifting societal values, where behaviours once considered acceptable are now recognized as harmful and outdated.

Drawing from her extensive experience as a Silicon Valley executive and consultant, Scott offers practical advice, concrete examples, and clear recommendations for advancing workplace respect cultures. While her primary examples stem from corporate settings, the insights and strategies she presents are highly transferable to leaders in academic settings, particularly those serving as department chairs.

Scott defines respect as the “regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, and traditions of others,” which stands in contrast to the more conventional view that ties respect to admiration for someone's abilities or achievements. She argues that respect is a fundamental right, inherent to everyone, rather than something that must be earned. This redefinition forms the basis of her broader thesis—that respect is not merely a leadership tool, but an essential quality for fostering healthy, high-performing teams.

*Radical Respect* is structured into two main sections. The first focuses on strategies for managing bias, prejudice, and bullying, setting the stage for the more severe problems of discrimination, harassment, and physical violations discussed in the second section. By organizing the book this way, Scott reinforces the idea that leadership plays a critical role in addressing not only severe violations but also everyday biases and microaggressions. Scott emphasizes the leader's role in cultivating environments where these negative behaviours are recognized by everyone and actively corrected, noting that leaders cannot fulfill this responsibility alone. Her concept of “engaged upstanders”—individuals who are empowered and encouraged to speak out against misbehaviour—highlights the leader's responsibility to foster psychologically safe environments where everyone is empowered to speak up and educate each other on what constitutes acceptable conduct.

One of the most valuable aspects of *Radical Respect* is Scott's ability to offer simple and practical steps that leaders can take to address workplace incivility in a tactful yet diligent manner. For example, she suggests that leaders establish clear expectations for behaviour during meetings and ensure that no one individual dominates discussions. She also advocates for creating cultures where meeting participants are encouraged to use immediacy to bring awareness about disrespectful actions. A simple “ouch” directed at the perpetrator can raise awareness of the impact of what was said without derailing the flow of the meeting.

Scott cautions against the “brutal ineffectiveness” of systems that fail to hold people accountable for bad behaviour, warning that such environments inevitably lead to a decline in organizational culture. Instead, she suggests developing systems to prevent the silencing or disempowering of

staff and to ensure everyone holds each other accountable for soliciting and rewarding candid, respectful feedback.

A key element of Scott's approach is her emphasis on leveraging referent power—grounded in personal influence, respect, and relationships—alongside soft tactics when addressing misbehaviour. This approach, which relies on persuasion, empathy, and example-setting, is particularly effective in academic settings, where hierarchical power is often limited, and collaboration is key. Scott's method aligns well with what typically works in academia, where leaders must navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and foster environments of mutual respect without depending on formal lines of authority. By advocating for these softer tactics, Scott provides academic leaders with practical tools that are not only effective but also well-suited to the collegial and intellectual culture of universities.

Given the growing attention to workplace incivility within post-secondary institutions, Kim Scott's *Radical Respect* emerges as a timely and essential resource. The book offers powerful insights that resonate deeply in academic settings, such as: "Behaviour uncorrected is behaviour accepted," underscoring the importance of holding individuals accountable for their actions. Additionally, Scott advises, "When you speak truth to power, do it with love. Remember that the person you are speaking to is also human," emphasizing the need for empathy and respect even in difficult conversations. These words of wisdom are particularly relevant as academic institutions seek to create more respectful and inclusive environments.

While Scott's practical examples are helpful, the lack of more detailed strategies on self-awareness leaves a gap that could have strengthened her overall message. Although she highlights the importance of self-awareness and emotional intelligence among leaders, the book would benefit from more in-depth strategies or case studies on how to cultivate these skills, particularly in environments already contending with incivility.

Despite the minor drawbacks, *Radical Respect* remains a valuable resource for academic leaders at all levels. Scott's practical advice, clear writing style, and relatable examples make the book not only informative but also highly applicable to post-secondary settings. Her call for leaders to extend grace to themselves and others—acknowledging that leadership is hard, and mistakes are inevitable—adds a compassionate touch that permeates throughout the book.

*Radical Respect* is a compelling read for department chairs and other academic leaders looking to build more respectful organizational cultures and address the complex challenges of post-COVID academic leadership.