ADVANCE PRAISE FOR
Squawk!

“I’ve been talking about seagull management for years. If you want to understand how to turn it around, read Travis Bradberry’s Squawk!”
—KEN BLANCHARD, coauthor of The One Minute Manager® and The One Minute Entrepreneur™

“I started reading Squawk! thinking it would help me work with a seagull manager of my own, but soon came to recognize my own flight paths in Charlie’s. There are several powerful leadership messages woven into this entertaining and memorable parable—teaching me when I was least prepared (and most ready) for it. I have a list of ten colleagues who will be getting a most-unexpected gift.”
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“Squawk! does a tremendous job of confronting you with a critical understanding—everything that you say and do each day as a leader has a tremendous impact on those around you. Dr. Bradberry provides a wonderful solution with an easy-to-understand and utilize three-step model that allows you to engage your team and generate improved results. Read it, and you’ll see a positive change in your future!”
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“Squawk! is simple, yet powerful, and very entertaining. It provides a valuable illustration of how to get more from your team, and I was able to get through it in just one flight.”
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“Squawk! has a central theme I find near and dear—the tendency of managers to move so fast from problem to problem that they forget people are involved. People need time and attention, and this book is an important reminder that great management doesn’t happen on the fly—you have to be there for it.”
—STEPHEN LUNDIN, coauthor of Fish!® and author of Cats

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Advance Praise for *Squawk!*

“Companies are losing their top talent every day, and many of those departing do so on entrepreneurial wings. If you want to prevent this and learn to keep your flock together in friendlier skies, read this little fable and take its big lessons to heart!”

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“Seagull management practices kill organizational effectiveness. You might get favorable short-term results with swooping, squawking, and dumping behaviors, but in the long run they will demoralize a strong workforce and destroy the productivity of teams. The key learnings in *Squawk!* help teams enhance their effectiveness and create a real long-term competitive advantage for any company.”

—Robert T. Cancalosi, chief learning officer, GE Healthcare

“*Squawk!* offers leaders and subordinates an indispensable rock for their leadership rucksack. It teaches how to self-examine your leadership style and know how to give clear mission-type orders, while allowing subordinates the freedom to figure out how to get the mission done. As a military advisor in Iraq, I have seen firsthand how useful this book’s Three Virtues are to leaders, even in grave situations where life and limb are at stake. I recommend *Squawk!* wholeheartedly—you’ll never look at seagulls (birds or human) the same way again!”

—Colonel Francis (Frank) B. Burns, U.S. Army

“In thirty-five years in the people management business *Squawk!* is the most dead-on-center and entertaining thing I have read on what I now will forever refer to as seagull management. It took me back to my college days, when I read another seagull book that communicated so well. My employer has a culture of using books to build on our culture and this will be added to the list.”

—Terry Guthrie, SPHR, vice president of human resources, Festiva Resorts

“*Squawk!* is as profound as it is fun! A must-read for every manager.”

—Ron McMillan, bestselling coauthor of *Crucial Conversations, Crucial Confrontations*, and *Influencer*
To all of us, for those moments when we find ourselves swooping in on a problem, squawking up a storm, and flapping our wings about, only to discover that we have just pooped all over everything . . .
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The Seagull Manager

For as long as he could remember, Charlie had been flying high at work. When he shared this sentiment with others, most forgave the pun—not just because Charlie was a seagull, but, quite simply, because he was a seagull who truly loved his job. And up until recently, it was an easy job to love. As the head gull in a flock whose sole undertaking was pillaging the food court of a marine theme park in Southern California, he felt business was a genuine pleasure.

Many years earlier, Charlie’s flock had lived with the rest of their breed at the seashore. Charlie was well known among the gulls because he was gutsy and passionate, and his head was always swimming with ideas. One day he shared a fascinating vision of a place where a little ingenuity would ensure their prosperity. Charlie had seen the
place firsthand, and many of the gulls returned day after
day to hear him talk about it. In time, the cocksure leader
convinced a group of them to break away from the petty,
pecking grind at the seashore and join him to form their
own flock in a place they knew only as the food court.

When the new flock landed at the marine park, they
found that the food court was even better than they had
imagined. All of the food there was fattening and easy to
come by; the unsuspecting humans were no match for the
gulls’ aggressive dive-bombing. For years the resourceful
gulls enjoyed a life of abundance, snatching food from
unsuspecting tourists by day and roosting safely on a
craggy hillside at night. While the other flocks back at the
seashore battled the pelicans and humans for the ocean’s
dwindling supply of clever, speedy fish, Charlie’s flock
enjoyed a generous supply of tasty grub brought to them
daily by the patrons of the food court.

And no gull in the flock knew more than Charlie
about when, where, and how a gull could nab a hearty
meal. Charlie was so good at eating that the flock named
him their manager. Not that there was much for him to
manage. There was so much food around that keeping
the flock content and their bellies full was easy. For the
longest time, Charlie didn’t have to worry much about
keeping everyone happy.

Nowadays, things were decidedly different.
At first, there was the odd baby pecking out of an
egg here and there, but the babies grew quickly. Soon, the
newest members of the flock had hatchlings of their own. In what felt like no time at all, the flock's size tripled. Unfortunately, the food court did not.

The marine park continued to be a popular place, but only so many sunburned tourists could squeeze into the food court at one time. Initially, the flock's new mouths to feed were welcomed with open wings because there was plenty of food to go around, but it was only a matter of time before abundance and prosperity gave way to bickering over who got to peck first at an abandoned plate of nachos.

In the old days, a squabble among flock members wouldn't last long—some of the birds would simply move on to the next ready meal. As time and change transformed food into a scarce commodity, the squabbles became more frequent and more dramatic. With each passing month, the food supply became increasingly inadequate, and the gulls' hunger eroded the camaraderie of the team.

When the latest hatchlings reached maturity, Charlie still felt he was doing an excellent job running the show. He filled his days with the same essential activities he always had—negotiating the boundaries of marine park turf with other birds, resolving conflicts between flock members, undertaking an occasional grunt mission to dive-bomb unsuspecting children and snatch their sweets, and (for stress relief) dropping precision-guided munitions down the backs of shirtless sightseers. It was business as usual for Charlie, and he loved it.
That is, until he returned to roost one blustery evening and found the flock in the middle of a heated discussion. Charlie overheard small snippets of their conversation—something to do with concerns about the food supply—and he immediately mistook their debate for bickering. As he was prone to do, Charlie was squawking orders before his feet even touched the ground. He landed in the middle of the flock, flapped his wings like crazy to back them off, and finished with a tirade that supposedly held the best course of action.

Usually, when Charlie finished “solving” the problem, he would fly off to his next responsibility, leaving little opportunity for discussion. But on this night, with all the gulls gathered together in the roost, he had nowhere else to go. Charlie’s slow realization of this fact created an awkward silence. He strutted around with his chest puffed out and wings pulled back long after he had run out of things to say. He looked at the faces surrounding him and realized they didn’t hold the usual array of befuddled looks. Instead, the gulls looked strangely determined, almost as if they were expecting this.

Scott stepped forward. He was the flock’s top performer, and his glossy coat of feathers and stout frame were a stark contrast to the emaciated gulls behind him. Scott had been with the flock since the beginning, and he was not one to mince words, “Charlie, we’ve got a serious problem here.”

“Really? What’s the matter?” Charlie asked, assuming there had been some type of accident.
“We’re hungry, Charlie. Nobody’s getting fed,” Scott replied, glancing at the gaunt birds huddled on either side of him.

Charlie scanned the flock of gaunt seagulls himself. “Oh, man, just look at all of you! Are those dang sparrows snatching all of our food?” he asked. The flock responded with a profound silence. “Are you listening to me?” Charlie demanded. “Don’t worry—you don’t need to worry—just get to it. You guys can outwit any bird that’s leaving you hungry. I know it.”

“Charlie, you’re not getting it,” Maya said as she squeezed her way forward. “That bird—the one that’s leaving us hungry—it’s you.” Like Scott, Maya had been with the flock since its inception, and her wisdom and insight were highly regarded. Unlike Scott, she was generally understated, and her poignant allegation sent an immediate murmur through the flock.

“Whoa? What? Me?” Charlie stuttered, dumbfounded. “I’m not the one who’s been eating all of your food. I hardly even see all of you most days.”

“Well, that’s part of the problem, Charlie,” Maya said. “What do you mean, exactly? How am I eating your food if I’m not even here?” Charlie scratched his head with the tip of his wing as he spoke.

Scott stepped back in, “You’re not literally eating our food, Charlie. The problem is we don’t have enough food to go around, and under your leadership things aren’t getting any better.”
“How am I supposed to make sure everyone has enough to eat when you don’t even tell me there’s not enough food to go around?” Charlie asked indignantly.

“We’ve been trying to tell you for some time, actually, but you just don’t listen to us. Kind of like tonight—you assume you know what’s going on. It’s why we gathered here, so we can talk to you about it.”

“All right, if that’s the way it is, then let’s hear what I’m doing wrong,” Charlie continued. “I want to know how I’m responsible for you all not getting enough to eat.”

Yufan, a recent import from Taiwan who had joined the flock (he’d become trapped in a shipping container that was, fortunately for him, filled with cans of tuna, although his beak was still a little dull from the journey), stepped forward and asked if he could share the flock’s example with Charlie. Heads nodded enthusiastically around the semicircle. As Yufan prepared to speak, Charlie felt a lump growing in his throat. Everyone is in on this one, he thought.

“Charlie, you don’t understand the problems we’re having with the food supply because you aren’t around most of the time. You disappear until you see us squabbling or we ask for your help, and then you come swooping in out of nowhere and . . .”

“Well, I’m busy. Would you rather I followed you around all day and fed you myself?” Charlie asked sarcastically.
There was a nervous shuffling of webbed feet until Scott ventured, “Now, come on, Charlie, that’s not fair, and it’s not even the point. Please allow Yufan to finish.”

Charlie held out the tips of his wings toward the group, took a couple of steps backward, lowered his head, and pursed his beak together tightly to let everyone know that he would now keep it shut and hear them out.

“When you swoop in on us because we’re having a problem with something,” Yufan continued, “you don’t get the full story because you don’t even try. You’re too busy squawking to listen.”

Scott joined in again. “Just like tonight. You go right into telling us what to do like it’s all so simple and we’re too stupid to know what to do.”

“Wait just a minute!” Charlie spat. “I never called anyone stupid.”

Although some of the flock began to cower, Scott wasn’t fazed. He knew Charlie well and had thought it would come to this. “You’re right, Charlie, you didn’t. But it sure feels like you think we’re stupid when you swoop in out of nowhere and fire a bunch of orders at us like we’re a bunch of hatchlings that can’t come up with any worthwhile ideas on our own. And what’s worse is that you take off and leave us behind to clean up your mess.” Scott was on a roll and felt that he just might be getting through to his seagull manager, “It’s like the time—”
“Like when?” Charlie was through with listening and back to butting in.

Yufan jumped in. “All right, Charlie, I know what he was going to say. He’s talking about last Thursday afternoon. Everybody remember that fat, hairy guy in the orange tank top who bought his wife a super-sized plate of nachos with jalapeños right before the food court closed? The humans started to argue—something about she’s allergic to jalapeños and he should’ve known better—and then the two of them stormed off and left the nachos right there on the table.”

“And?” Like most who are forced to endure a heap of criticism, Charlie was growing more impatient by the minute.

“And we all flew over there for the feast. But even with that huge plate of nachos, there wasn’t enough room for every gull to get his beak in there. So, we had to stop eating and figure out what to do.”

“Yes, and . . .” Charlie beckoned, tapping his foot.

“And we weren’t sure what to do. There wasn’t enough for everyone, and there wasn’t any other food available, so we couldn’t just send some of the flock off to another table. Plus, no one really had any kind of priority on the nachos ’cause that couple just left them there.” Yufan finally had Charlie’s attention. “We’re finding ourselves in situations like these every day lately. That’s why so many of us are going hungry.”

Charlie had calmed down considerably, “All right,
I see your point. That situation poses an interesting dilemma. But I still don't see what this has to do with my management.”

“You don’t?” Maya blurted out in genuine amazement.

“No, I don’t. Is there some kind of connection between me and your problem last Thursday?” Charlie asked.

Yufan shook his head with disappointment. Behind him, all the exasperated gulls rolled their eyes.

Naturally, Scott took over. “Well, Charlie, Maya went off and found you so you could help us figure out what to do with those nachos. You swooped in, landed in the middle of the table, and shot off a bunch of orders that didn’t do us any good. You said something glib, like ‘Whoever snatched these nachos gets to eat them, and the rest of you need to go find your own food. There isn’t enough for everybody.’ And then you grabbed a couple for yourself and were gone. Poof! It should’ve been problem solved, but instead you left us right where we were before, minus some nachos.”

“It also made me feel like a foolish hatchling—and look like one to everyone else—when you told the flock that I shouldn’t have come to get you and we should be able to figure these things out on our own,” Maya said. “We’d been sizing up our options for some time and were planning on sharing our ideas and potential strategies with you. But when you got there, you didn’t even give...
them any consideration. You left us worse off than we were before.”

“Ya, instead of helping us solve the problem, it was like you, well, like you . . .” one of the gulls in the back said, his voice trailing off nervously.

“Like I what?” Charlie barked.

“Like you pooped all over everything,” Scott piped up reluctantly.

An almost audible hush fell over the flock.

Swallowing hard, Maya decided to back Scott and drive the point home, “You pooped all over us and our problem—you pooped on our ideas, you pooped on our hard work, and then you just flew off and left us there to clean up the mess. To clean up your mess.”

Charlie felt as if he’d just taken a crushing physical blow. Seagulls pooped on people intentionally to demonstrate their superiority. It was unthinkable that one gull would ever do such a thing to another gull.

Charlie’s body began to feel heavy as he stood there, motionless, in the midst of the deafening silence. The sting of his flock’s feedback made it hard to think straight. He was failing them, and he didn’t know what to do. Finally, with all eyes still fixed intently upon him, Charlie spoke, “OK. I see how it is. You’ve made your point loud and clear. I’m outta here.”

And with those words, Charlie flew away.
Want to see what happens next?

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