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CEO, *The Creative Class Group* & Author, *Upgrade*

It's Time to Get Rid of all Bosses

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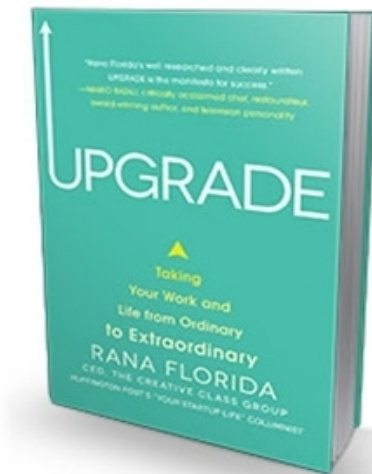
I was thrilled to read the recent headline in the [Washington Post](#), "Zappos to say Goodbye to Bosses." The Internet shoe retailer is eliminating job titles, replacing their traditional corporate bureaucracy with a holocracy, an organization that revolves around the work that needs to be done rather than the people who do it.



Photo Credit: InVision

"The holacracy concept," the Post explains, "is the brainchild of management consultant Brian Robertson, a serial software entrepreneur who says he launched the idea after realizing he was 'more interested in how we worked together' than in his own job. The concept has a couple of high-profile devotees -- Twitter cofounder [Evan Williams](#) uses it at his new company, [Medium](#), and time management guru [David Allen](#) uses it run his firm -- but Zappos is by far the largest company to adopt the idea." I know Zappos well, our [firm consulted](#) with Tony Hsieh and his team some years ago; it's completely in character for them to make such a bold and decisive move.

As I wrote in my book, [Upgrade](#), "Early on, I realized the value of changing my vocabulary. Subordinate, employee, and staff became colleague and team because ultimately that's what we all are in the workplace. When I began as CEO at the [Creative Class](#), I told my team members that I was not their boss. 'Please don't call me boss, don't send me approvals like I'm your boss, don't ask for approval to go on vacation. There is no vacation request form,' I said. 'We are all colleagues. You are getting paid for your expertise. I am not going to do performance reviews or expect status reports. It is up to you to manage your own workload, to manage the clients, and to deliver a quality service.'



'I don't care when you work, how you work, or where you work,' I told them. A few of them did not understand and still wanted to report in to me. I had to constantly remind them not to fill up my in-box with such trifles. 'Great, you're going on vacation with your kids and won't be checking e-mail,' I'd respond. 'Have fun. Find a colleague to manage your clients and make sure your clients know how to reach them.'"

I thought about those conversations when I was [interviewing Mayor Richard Daley](#). "I can't recall many instances when I was mayor where an issue was so crucial that my staff had to awaken me in the middle of the night," he told me. "I hired very competent managers who knew I expected them to work hard. They knew they couldn't be afraid to make a decision. Sometimes the decisions were right, and sometimes there should have been a different approach. The important thing is that the decision was made."

Josh Patrick, the founder and principal at a financial advisory services firm, agrees. "One of the things we constantly told employees," he wrote in *The New York Times* [You're The Boss](#) blog, "was the following statement: 'You are the expert at your job.' It took several years for some of our people to actually believe it. But I've used this mantra in my business life ever since. The key is that when you make this change, you stop telling people what to do and you start asking them their opinion about the best way to get something done. This can produce all sorts of benefits."

The goal of team members and colleagues is to add value, skills and expertise. Managers can and should enable and even unleash their people, but they cannot control them. I am not the boss of my team, but I am available for feedback and input. If they'd like to canvas my thoughts, the door is always open.

Zappos' goal is to get more of its people to take charge of themselves. Speaking from experience, I can attest that it works.

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