

FRANK  
HAGENOW



# LEADERSHIP WITHOUT



# MIND GAMES

How to Win People with  
Ethics and Decency

Frank Hagenow  
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with Ethics and Decency

GABAL

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#### Bibliographic information of the German National Library

The German National Library lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic information is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-96739-057-5

Copy editing: Audry Wagner-Morales, Königsbach-Stein (Germany)

Proofreading: Geraldine Ludbrook, Ph.D., Venice (Italy)

Cover design: Martin Zech Design, Bremen (Germany) | [www.martinzech.de](http://www.martinzech.de)

Photo book cover: KsushaArt / Shutterstock

Author photos: Ingo Boelter, Hamburg (Germany) | [www.ingoboelter.de](http://www.ingoboelter.de)

Composition and layout: ZeroSoft, Timisoara; Das Herstellungsbüro, Hamburg (Germany) | [www.buch-herstellungsbuero.de](http://www.buch-herstellungsbuero.de)

Printing: Print on demand

First published under the title “Führen ohne Psychotricks” in 2018

by GABAL Verlag, Germany

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Printed in Germany

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## Welcome on Board: Let's Lift Anchor

Why another book about leadership? Bookshop shelves are already full of those. Does this guy Hagenow have to put in his two cents, too? Hasn't everything been already said on this subject? One could answer with a quote from German comedian Karl Valentin (1882-1948): "Yes, everything has already been said... just not by everyone."

The topic of leadership is very complex and subject to constant change. As a psychologist, business coach, and communication trainer, I find the human and interpersonal aspects of this topic particularly important. After all, it's always people who must deal with each other in companies, often causing problems in the process. However, this book isn't a plea for generalized democracy or a coddling management style. We live in a free market economy in which everyone's success depends on how profitable a company is.

If you're an executive, manager, board member, or entrepreneur, you have a high level of responsibility; you should be aware of the mind games, i.e. psychological tricks played at the executive level, as well as the pitfalls, mechanisms, and phenomena occurring there. In parts 1 to 3 of this book I will provide you with comprehensive background knowledge and basic psychology principles for your everyday management life. But I would like to go one step further and, in addition, provide you with some effective tools, tips, and checklists for practical application. In part four of this book you will find the "Manager's Toolbox," which will help you expand your skills for leadership on equal terms.

I am convinced that value-oriented leadership will give you and your company a strong competitive advantage. It will also make you less

likely to be crushed between the millstones of the hierarchy. A management style that creates clarity, demonstrates competence and a sound judgment, treats employees with decency, and, above all, on equal terms, will help you achieve this. If you're looking for long-term success and want to build trust and establish stable relationships, you have come to the right place. Welcome on board!

After all, managers are often like captains on their voyage through the depths of leadership. With their business steamers and their crew they set course for a corporate goal and often have to struggle with stormy weather along the way. That is why many examples and metaphors are borrowed from a nautical context because so many delightful parallels to leadership topics can be drawn and illustrated here.

When writing this book, I essentially limited myself to using the masculine form. I did so because, on the one hand, men still occupy more management positions than women, unfortunately! But above all, to make it easier for you to read and to avoid linguistic distractions. Nevertheless, female executives, managers, or employees are always expressly meant. After all, this is a universal, gender-neutral issue.

In this book, you will learn about the different ways in which you can encounter psychological trickery, the meaning and effects of these tricks, and how you can use the right approach to avoid them.

I wish you fair winds and following seas in your journey to leading with decency and without mind games.

Yours  
Frank Hagenow

PART I:

# Whistling for the Wind—The Fascination of Mind Games and Psychological Tricks



To use the tips for dealing with mind games and leading without psychological tricks correctly, it's important – in addition to some general background information – to know the professional environment in which psychological tricks are used. So, let's focus on that in the following four chapters.





# 1. Cheating is Welcome—Lies and Fraud Everywhere

## What This Is All About:

Where the fascination for psychological tricks comes from and what makes us so susceptible to manipulation in the first place. Why we sometimes let ourselves be seduced so easily and, against our better judgment, ignore all the warning signals. Which well-known examples, as well as less common ones, can help us identify our personal thinking patterns.

## The Psychological Trick—How it all began

In the very beginning, according to the Bible, God created Adam and Eve—and the Devil invented the psychological trick. You know the story: Adam and Eve are the first human beings created by God, and they initially have an utterly easygoing existence in Paradise, the Garden of Eden. But then the Snake persuades Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, despite God's prohibition.

*"Apple, anyone?"*

*"Oh, no, I'd rather not. We could get in trouble for this."*

*"No one will notice."*

*"But if someone gets wind of this, we'll get kicked out of here for sure."*

*"Oh, nothing much can happen."*

*“Well, okay.” (She bites.)*  
*“Ha-ha, gotcha!” (He sneaks away.)*

Christianity speaks of the Fall of Man, and many painters, among them Michelangelo, Rubens, Lucas Cranach the Elder, or Albrecht Durer, have captured this key scene of the human genesis in their works. As a consequence of the rebellion, the Bible describes how Adam and Eve become aware of their nakedness and are ashamed of it. They then make clothes from fig leaves and try to hide from God. God confronts them, and Adam puts the blame on Eve, and Eve on the serpent. In the Christian tradition, the serpent is often referred to as the Devil. Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, and from then on they have to take their existence into their own hands, and so must all generations after that.

The incident with the apple represents, at least for Western culture, something like the beginning of seduction and manipulation. It’s the prototype of the psychological trick, if you will. Even back then, using tricks only provided a short-term prospect of success, and it ultimately left long-term negative consequences in its wake. Unfortunately, the desire for increased power through the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was discovered much faster than expected, and it led to a termination without notice for the first two managing directors of the Enterprise Humanity.

*“Objection, Mr. Chairman, we’ve been set up.”*  
*“Weak plea. Ever heard of free will and personal responsibility?”*  
*“Yeah, but...”*  
*“No way, it’s your fault. End of discussion. Objection overruled. So sorry.”*  
The ultimate consequence—dismissal. The expulsion of man from paradise.

If we follow the story a bit further, we realize that that’s when all the trouble really started. As if the expulsion wasn’t bad enough, there was a whole series of other inconveniences for the rest of humanity. The nudity that had been considered natural until then suddenly caused a shame unknown previously, and from then on it had to be covered. Also, the boss delegated the responsibility for the food procurement and the procreation departments to the employees forever.

Yet everything could have been so simple. Just imagine what we would have been spared if Eve had simply made a different decision at this significant juncture in the history of human development. What if she had shown a little more loyalty and compliance to her CEO, or paused for a moment just before this emotionally driven rush to action, and perhaps asked for a day to think things over?

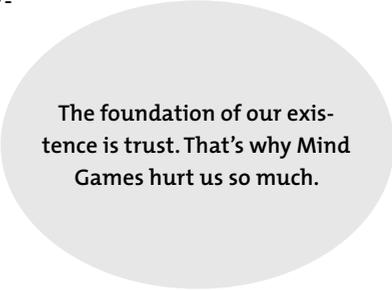
*“Thank you very much for the interesting offer, Mr. Serpent. I think I’ll sleep on it.”* Perhaps she would have taken the opportunity to have an open conversation with her husband.

*“Adam, you won’t believe what this shady salesman suggested to me today. Do you think I should go for it?”*

And after careful consideration, weighing all the pros and cons, she would have probably decided against stealing the apple.

*“No, I think I’d rather not.”*

What a great show of character would it have been to resist that temptation! And how might the history of mankind have developed then! Maybe we would still be living in paradise today and would be at peace with nature and our self-esteem. We wouldn’t have to spend endless amounts of money on clothes, hairdressers, cellulite creams, or plastic surgery. How wonderful would it be not to have to worry about our livelihood! We would not be confronted with such burdensome questions as to what to wear today or which new car to choose when the leasing contract expires. Thank you very much, Mrs. Eve! We wouldn’t have to worry about psychological tricks and I wouldn’t be giving any lectures on this topic, wouldn’t have written this book, and you wouldn’t have been able to buy it... Well, yes. I guess that would somehow present some disadvantages. Anyway, enough of the wishful thinking. As you know, things turned out quite differently.



**The foundation of our existence is trust. That’s why Mind Games hurt us so much.**

Since the slightly unsuccessful start of the human enterprise, our reality is now generally such that we’re born into this world as infants. Just a moment ago we were inside Mom’s warm belly—this uterus paradise with a pleasant temperature where we were

completely taken care of. In our amniotic sac of happiness, we didn't need to worry about food supply or disposal and weren't bothered by shady apple seducers. Unfortunately, at some point it got too tight for us in there and we had to see the light of day, even though we were not yet fully developed. Basically, we got thrown out of paradise again, even though this time we hadn't even misbehaved in any way. Tenancy expired, move out required. Lights on! Let go! And...breathe! No sooner have we recovered from the strains of our move than we're suddenly born into a completely strange environment. In this new environment, we're confronted with the everyday hardships of our new existence and hopelessly overwhelmed. Previously unknown sensory impressions such as hunger, thirst, or digestive activities weigh on us—this must be quite a shock for such a tender child's soul. There's only one saving thing that helps to get by: trust. That is the very foundation of our existence even before we know what it is or how it is pronounced. In our vulnerability, we have no choice but to trust that we'll be taken care of and that our needs will be met, even if at the moment we can only express them through inarticulate sounds. Otherwise, we'll die.

Unlike other mammals, we're not yet able to stand on our own feet and be nearly autonomous shortly after birth. To be fully developed we would have to spend about one more year in the womb before we'd be big enough and ready to walk upright. But not even the most self-sacrificing mother with the most flexible pelvis in the world has such capability. So, unfortunately, we must be born in the middle of our half-finished development process, because otherwise we would simply be too much of a heavyweight to arrive through the natural distribution channel. That's why this early birth must be followed by an extensive phase of brood care, and even after that, we're far from finished with our development. Instead, we must laboriously realize through socialization and schooling that we're not the center of the world, and that we cannot simply take the shovel away from someone else in the sandbox.

Furthermore, we have to learn, with great effort, that we cannot have everything we'd like, and certainly not always on the spot. Our next developmental task is to understand that our wishes don't always get fulfilled immediately, and that some goals can only be achieved after a long and laborious journey. The childish pleasure principle (I want

everything, right now!) will be replaced by the reality principle if everything goes well for us. Sigmund Freud reported on this more than a hundred years ago. For this developmental phase, however, we need a good portion of confidence and the positive control conviction that we can achieve our goals with patience and determination. We have to realize that it may well make sense to postpone the short-term satisfaction of needs in favor of a later, even more attractive goal. It's very helpful and positively reinforcing for us if we have already had one or two successful experiences with this strategy. Even the occasional failure will not necessarily take us off course. No, quite the contrary. Sometimes we're even more encouraged by it because success is only experienced as such if it's connected to a corresponding effort. However, we shouldn't fail too often either because the positive reinforcing effect can otherwise turn into frustration and resignation. Or, as the former German Chancellor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Willy Brandt (1919-1992) put it: "Defeats strengthen us. But only if there aren't too many!"

Therefore, trust plays a central role in our development process. Not only as newborns, but also along our entire development path. We have to trust, and want to trust, but at the same time are ambivalent about whether we can really do it. Even long after we have grown out of our childhood dependency, the question of whether our trust will be disappointed in the end remains. This continues to have an influence on us and on our self-esteem, even if it's not as threatening to our existence later on as it was at the beginning. Humans are social beings. We're interdependent and cannot survive on our own. That's why we need trust, confidence, and those around us.



**So, it's probably in the nature of man to want to believe in an (even) better future, or sometimes even in miracles. But this makes us very susceptible to all kinds of psychological tricks.**

## Perpetrators and Victims: The Secret Attraction of Psychological Tricks

Our fascination with psychological tricks has different aspects. First, there's the part of the perpetrator—those who use mind games to increase their power, use other people for their own interests, or at worst, to keep them dependent and small. Having power over other people means being in a superior position, and that can really enhance one's self-esteem. The susceptibility to psychological tricks has been with us throughout human history. For as long as humanity has existed, there have always been representatives of a species of people who try to gain an advantage with trickery and malice. They do it by cheating others—often less clever members of their own species—using more or less subtle methods depending on their own intelligence and that of their victims.

History is full of frauds against humanity. There was, for example, the mysterious traveling healer who would sell his “miracle elixir” against all kinds of diseases at medieval markets to the gullible villagers (an example of which is magnificently played by Borat actor, Sacha Baron Cohen, in the movie version of the musical “Sweeney Todd – The Demon Barber of Fleet Street” starring Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter). This healer is the predecessor of the shady used car salesman, and of the dubious vacuum cleaner distributor.



**The unknown, the promising and mysterious, the almost reachable, the forbidden—all of these things continue to exert their unbroken attraction on us to this day.**

As human beings, this attraction makes us both extraordinary and vulnerable. It's this openness to new things that, in a positive sense, has made us such a unique and extraordinary species, driven by never-ending curiosity, a pioneering spirit, and confidence. We strive to discover, question, and develop ourselves and our environment. At the beginning of their journey, many great inventors and pioneers had to have the courage to question what had been considered impossible until then. Many of the achievements of the digital age probably wouldn't exist otherwise. Without doubts and visions, we would probably still

believe the earth to be flat and the center of the universe. However, it plays into the hands of the tricksters that we also like to be seduced and believe what we want to believe.

In addition, it seems to be easier for us to believe something that is presented to us in a credible way by competent experts or those we consider as such. When a certain kind of authority comes into play, it seems to open the gateway to insanity. Only in retrospect do we find anything wrong with statements such as, “The Titanic is unsinkable, dear passengers. Don’t worry about the few lifeboats and that little bit of iceberg.”

At a press conference in East Berlin on June 15, 1961, Walter Ulbricht, Chairman of the State Council of the German Democratic Republic, announced, “No one has any intention of building a wall.” That was a blatant lie, because the construction of the Berlin Wall began only two months later. Or just think of the reports about Saddam Hussein’s alleged poison gas installations and weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, with which the Gulf War was stirred up in 2003, and which nobody found afterwards.

However, we’re not always just the poor victim taken in once again by the insidious intrusions of nasty manipulators. Often enough we’re perpetrators ourselves, trying to manipulate and trick others to gain an advantage. Maybe we even do this without being aware of it. The line between loosely interpreting certain statements in our own favor and committing serious fraud hoping that nobody will notice and that we’ll enjoy the forbidden fruit with impunity, can be very thin. Ultimately, it makes no difference whether we’re talking about the well-meaning interpretation of your own tax statement or the strategy of your lawyer in court.

People in leadership positions, however, not only have to take into account the wishes of the individual, but also keep an eye on the big picture while trying to meet every kind of requirement. For example, it would make no sense for a CEO to grant all his employees the understandable wish for a generous salary increase, and thereby endanger the company’s liquidity for medium-term investments because in the end, this could lead to having to get rid of everyone.