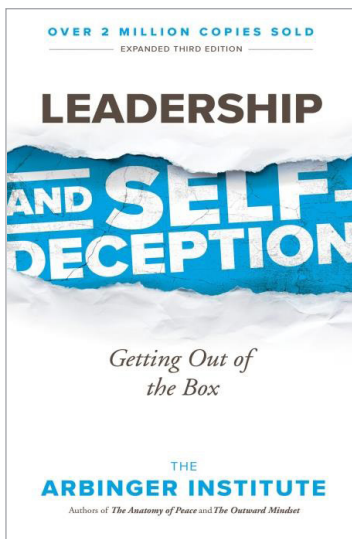


# EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### The Arbinger Institute

*The Arbinger Institute is an international training and consulting firm.*

## Leadership and Self-Deception THE NUTSHELL

Berrett-Koehler Publishers 2000, 2002

Self-deception is so pervasive it touches every aspect of life. “Touches” is perhaps too gentle a word to describe its influence. Self-deception actually determines one’s experience in every aspect of life. The extent to which it does that, and in particular the extent to which it is the central issue in personal and professional leadership, is the subject of this book.

Self-deception blinds us to the true cause of problems, and once blind, all the “solutions” we can think of will actually make matters worse. That’s why self-deception is so central to leadership—because leadership is about making matters better. To the extent we are self-deceived, our leadership is undermined at every turn. This book is about more than the problem—it offers a solution to self-deception as well.

### I. Self-Deception and the “Box”

“To begin with, you need to know about a problem at the heart of the human sciences,” Bud said. “Philosopher’s call it ‘self-deception.’ At Zagrum we have a less technical name for it—we call it ‘being in the box.’”

“Of all the problems in organizations, the inability to see that one has this problem the most common—and the most damaging. At Zagrum, Tom, our top strategic initiative is to minimize individual and organizational self-deception.”

# Leadership and Self-Deception

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What I'm suggesting, Tom, is the disease we call 'people problems'—problems in leadership to problems in motivation and everything in between—are all caused by the same thing. There is a clear way to attack and solve these problems—not one by one, but in one disciplined stroke."

"When we are in the box, we view others as objects," Bud said. "It's our desires that count, all others are secondary. We see their needs as less legitimate than our own. Out of the box, we see ourselves and others more or less as we are—as people. The secret of Zagrum's success is that we've developed a culture where people are invited to see others as people. And being seen and treated straightforwardly, people respond accordingly."

## II. How We Get in the Box

"So our baby is crying," Bud said, "and I start to wonder if Nancy is just feigning sleep. What kind of mother would do that? I start to think of myself as a sensitive dad. And a victim. And a good husband to put up with a wife like that. Once I betray myself—my sense of what I should do for her—I often find my thoughts and feelings will begin to tell me that I'm justified in whatever I'm doing or failing to do."

"What if you're right?" I asked. "What if she is lazy and inconsiderate?"

"When did Nancy seem to be worse to me, before I betrayed myself or afterward? The truth is that in self-betrayal, I'm making her out to be more lazy and inconsiderate than she really is. I'm using her faults to justify my misbehavior. And that's something I'm doing, not something she's doing."

"Her faults seemed relevant only after I failed to help her. I focused on her faults when I needed to feel justified in mine. In fact, I minimized my faults and inflated my own virtue. So my view of reality becomes distorted—I'm not seeing Nancy clearly, and I'm not seeing myself clearly. So—when I betray myself, I enter the box."

"Notice that I wasn't irritated when I first thought I should help her," Bud said. "But just moments later I viewed her as lazy and inconsiderate and myself as a victim. What's the only thing that changed in those moments?"

"Your choice to not do what you felt you should do."

## III. How We Get out of the Box

"But wait a minute," I said. "You're saying anything I try to do or any effort I make to get out of the box will fail?"

"That's what we're saying," he said. "You can't get out by continuing to focus on yourself—which is what you do when you try to change your behavior in the box. The box is deeper than behavior. If you can do it in the box, it can't get you out."

"So how do you get out of the box?"

# Leadership and Self-Deception

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"As I sat there regretting how I'd acted toward my wife, my son, and my coworkers, what were they to me? In that moment, was I seeing them as people or as objects?"

"In that moment, they were people to you."

"Yes. My blame, resentment, and indifference were gone. I was seeing them as they were, and I was regretting having treated them as less than that. So in that moment, where was I?"

"You were out of the box."

"Your success as a leader, Tom, depends on being free of self-betrayal. Only then do you invite others to be free of self-betrayal themselves. Only then are you creating leaders yourself—coworkers whom people will respond to, trust, and want to work with. You owe it to your people to be out of the box for them. You owe it to the Zagrum Company to be out of the box for them."