



## The Compromise Trap

### Digital Media Kit & Overview

#### The Compromise Trap

*How to Thrive at Work Without Selling Your Soul*

**By Elizabeth Doty**

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*313 pages, 5 ½" x 8 ½", \$17.95*

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A candid, timely, and constructive look at the double-binds and contradictions of organizational life, *The Compromise Trap* details a strategy for confronting unhealthy pressure to compromise -- enabling you to stay true to yourself and act as a positive force for whatever you define as the greater good.

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*"To say yes to our integrity, we need to say no to what is wrong. But how?"*

*In this insightful and practical book, Elizabeth Doty shows us how to engage constructively in shaping our work environment to create value for ourselves, our organizations, and the larger world. I recommend this book highly."*

*—William Ury, coauthor of Getting to Yes and author of The Power of a Positive No*

## The Core Ideas

*The Compromise Trap* is an “appreciative inquiry” into the dark side of work: the pressures people sometimes feel to compromise their principles, their values, their commitments, the quality of their work or the type of person they want to be.

Though not everyone has faced this sort of pressure, a surprising number have, even while working with companies and leaders they otherwise trust and admire. The experience usually begins as a subtle pressure to conform, to “drink the koolaid”, where it is difficult to tell whether going along is a positive or negative step. Regardless, most people feel they have no choice but to “play the game” and go along with the pressures they experience, if they want to keep their jobs or reach their career goals. Yet the author’s interviews with 52 business people and conversations with dozens more show that playing along with the game may become a trap, as each incremental concession takes a bite out of our sense of self-respect and passion for our work, and increases our dependence on external indicators of our success and worth. In retrospect, many people spoke of making a “devil’s bargain by degrees”, having lost their sense of mission, autonomy, and joy in life, mistakenly thinking they would find freedom and happiness once they “got to the top”.

Why would people make such self-depleting choices? A combination of factors contribute, including the misconceptions we tend to hold about work, compromise, and happiness, the physiological impact of being in survival mode at work, the power of social and authority dynamics, and the general insulation of the day-to-day workplace from the vivid realities of the outside world that tend to clarify and call out our true priorities and values.

Given these hidden dynamics, the more daring and seemingly risky path of “redefining the game” instead of playing along actually holds more promise as a way to thrive in our work. Redefining the game is about defining for ourselves what we consider “winning” and “losing”, what we consider enough, and what our work is meant to serve. It involves asking bigger questions and taking a more mature stance in relationship to authority – asking us to consciously bring into our awareness the experiences, people, and practices that reinforce the person we want to be. With this larger perspective and independent reinforcement system, professionals are far more creative, resilient and impactful, calling inspiring companies to live up to their potential and influencing less aspirational organizations to shift toward the positive.

Ultimately, those adopting this strategy do so because they see their work is bigger than a game: it involves their real lives and who they are becoming as a person, it involves real resources and the long-term health of their organizations, and it considers the possible futures we contribute to through the power of our professional roles.

*The Compromise Trap* gives professionals a place to turn for options for redefining the game which they can take on their own, independent of their leader or company. It focuses on the shifts in perception that happen when we have self-knowledge, support and skills, and how that leads to clearer choices, new options, and more satisfying paths.

In addition to hundreds of stories, quotes, and examples, the book provides frameworks and tools to help professionals reinforce their ability to redefine the game:

- [The Ten Misconceptions About Compromise](#) that can lead us into the trap
- [Six Personal Foundations](#) to build the courage and confidence to redefine the game
- [Five Positive Plays](#) for taking constructive action under pressure
- [Sample Tool: Is This a Healthy Compromise?](#) helps weigh critical choices

## Ten Misconceptions About Compromise

These ten common misconceptions are part of what leads people to fall into the compromise trap when they face unhealthy pressure, sliding incrementally into self-betrayal and regret, or a “devil’s bargain by degrees”:

Misconception	Alternative Proposition
<b>1. Compromise is always healthy.</b>	<i>Compromise can be unhealthy too.</i>
<b>2. Good companies and leaders don’t create unhealthy pressure to compromise.</b>	<i>Even good companies and leaders create unhealthy pressure to compromise.</i>
<b>3. Unhealthy pressure is the leader’s fault.</b>	<i>Your own integrity can’t depend on your leader’s.</i>
<b>4. You have to go along to survive.</b>	<i>Going along can become a self-depleting trap – and there are much better options!</i>
<b>5. You’ll always know if you’re crossing a line.</b>	<i>Compromise is more likely to be gradual because blinders make it hard to see at the time.</i>
<b>6. The company sets the terms.</b>	<i>More is negotiable than you think.</i>
<b>7. You should just say no.</b>	<i>You need more than a “just say no” strategy to be ready when the pressure hits.</i>
<b>8. Refusing to compromise means fighting back.</b>	<i>Fighting is one option, but there are many other ways to influence a situation.</i>
<b>9. You thrive when you get to the top.</b>	<i>You may or may not thrive at the top; the key to thriving is being engaged in a meaningful pursuit that uses your talents and allows you to meet your real needs.</i>
<b>10. Individual integrity adds up to organizational integrity.</b>	<i>Organizational integrity is much harder to accomplish than individual integrity – yet it has a much larger impact.</i>

### Why does compromise matter?

Knowing the difference between healthy and unhealthy compromise is critical to:

- Individual health, sanity, pride, and self-respect
- Organizational intelligence and effectiveness in retaining customers, engaging employees, and delivering for shareholders
- Organizational integrity in meeting commitments and obligations to the larger society and the natural world

## Building Courage: The Six Personal Foundations

Your personal foundations provide the internal reinforcement system that enables you to act creatively and independently in challenging situations. They help you keep a broad perspective and take courageous action, uncovering ways to “redefine the game” in situations where there seem to be few options. The stronger your foundations, the more you are able to influence effectively and thrive regardless of the circumstances.

There are six personal foundations that create this internal reinforcement system:

1. **Reconnect to your strengths:** The ability to access confidence, creativity and self-awareness to guide your choices.
2. **See the larger field:** Sustaining a broad perspective so you recognize choicepoints, act on your true priorities, and see all your options.
3. **Define a worthy enough win:** Having a sense of mission and a reason for courage to help you focus your efforts and weigh hard choices.
4. **Find your real team:** Having strong relationships with your family, close allies, and other professionals to give you well-being, perspective, and reinforcement.
5. **Make positive plays:** Having a broad range of constructive actions you can use under pressure – including the ability to say no.
6. **Keep your own score:** Developing internal guideposts to evaluate your progress and determine what is “enough”.

## Taking Action: The Five Positive Plays

Redefining the game is like approaching a situation from a higher altitude. From this vantage point, you have a broader perspective and can see more creative options.

These five positive plays allow you to translate those options into action to help the right thing happen, for yourself and others involved:

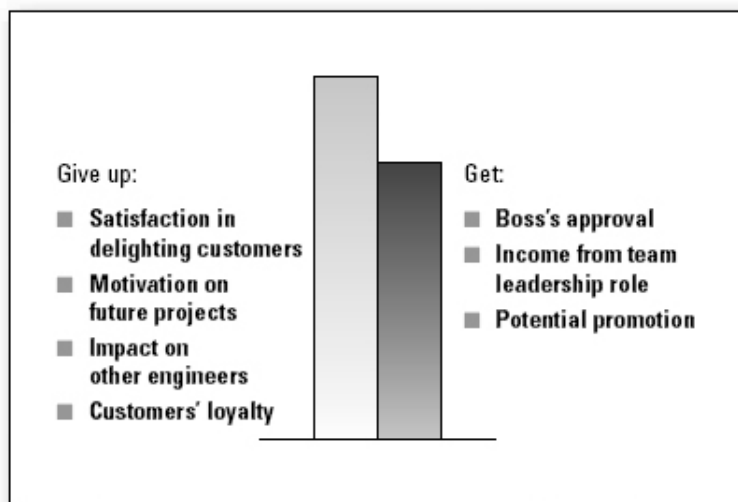
1. **Healthy compromise** Being willing to go along with a decision if it is truly in your best interests, considered from the broadest possible perspective.
2. **Candid conversations** Being willing to admit where you have made a mistake, when you made an unhealthy compromise, or when you can no longer keep a commitment.
3. **Positive limits** Saying no in a constructive, effective way that does not invite retaliation when agreeing to a practice or request crosses a line for you or sets a dangerous precedent.
4. **Skillful influence** Initiating actions that contribute to addressing the root cause of the unhealthy pressure, or raising awareness, while taking care of your real needs.
5. **Constructive exit** If it is necessary to leave, doing so in a way that makes as much positive difference as possible and pursuing your next engagement in a way that reflects what you have learned.

## Sample Tool: Is This A Healthy Compromise?

This simple thought process helps you sort out healthy and unhealthy compromises, weighing what you could be giving up and gaining, in terms of tangible & intangibles.

1. **What exactly am I being asked to do or go along with?** *(What are the surface elements of the situation and what is implied?)*
2. **What do I have to gain if I go along?** *(Be sure to include uncomfortable situations you might be trying to avoid by going along. How important are those gains? How certain are they? Is going along the best way to get there?)*
3. **What would I be giving up if I go along?** *(How important are those? Be sure to include the needs, commitments, responsibilities, obligations, or values you might be relaxing, and any "hidden costs" of the compromise such as stress, tuning out, setting precedents, etc. How happy will you be in the long run about this decision if you go along?)*
4. **Is this a healthy compromise?** *(Does this amount to giving up something less important for something more important, considering all of the factors?)*

You might draw a graph to weigh your decision out, not as a quantitative exercise but a thought process to help you think through each element carefully. In the example below, a manager leading a project that he believed took advantage of customer trust decided it was an unhealthy compromise.



Once you have worked out whether the compromise is healthy or not, you can identify which Positive Play makes the most sense. In this case, the project manager hosted a "failure party" to celebrate their learning, outline why the project did not meet the company's customer service values, and close the project. His actions were one of several signals that prompted an incoming executive to make recommitting to the customer a strategic priority, with dramatic business impact over the next few years.

## About Elizabeth Doty

### Business storyteller in the trenches.

Elizabeth Doty is a consultant, coach, and facilitator specializing in how people participate in large organizations while staying true to themselves and being a positive force – however they define those.

Since earning her MBA from Harvard and joining a reengineering firm in 1991, Ms. Doty has both subscribed to the "official story" of business and lived through the contradictions and absurdities of everyday organizational life. Prior to business school, she worked in the hospitality industry, where she served as a manager for more than eleven years, mostly in four-star hotels.

In late 1993, Ms. Doty founded WorkLore, a consulting firm that partners with leaders and teams to help make their missions real -- using story, systems thinking, and constructive conflict to untangle complex problems that hide goldmines of opportunity. Current and past clients include Risk Management Solutions, Camp, Dresser, McKee, Stanford University, Skillssoft, Hewlett Packard, Archstone-Smith, and CTB/McGraw-Hill.

A chronic interviewer, Ms. Doty has spoken with more than four hundred people about their day to day experiences at work. She is convinced of the enormous potential for individuals to engage more actively and constructively in the systems of which they are a part, as a critical element in their own well-being, for better organizational performance, and for greater alignment of organizational actions with the needs of the larger world.

Ms. Doty received her BA in economics from the University of California at Berkeley in 1985 and earned her MBA with honors from Harvard in 1991. She has presented at Systems Thinking in Action, the Business Ethics Network, and the Bay Area Society for Organizational Learning. She has been published in the Pfeiffer Human Resources Management Annual and Strategy + Business Magazine. From 2004-2006, she assisted Dr. William Ury in researching examples for his book, "The Power of a Positive No".

### Brief Author Bio

Elizabeth Doty is a consultant, coach, and facilitator specializing in how people participate in organizations while staying true to themselves and contributing to their organization's effectiveness and integrity. Since earning her MBA from Harvard and joining a reengineering firm in 1991, Ms. Doty has both subscribed to the "official story" of business and lived through the contradictions and absurdities of everyday organizational life. For the past 19 years, her consulting firm, WorkLore, has helped companies such as Intuit, Hewlett Packard, and CTB/McGraw-Hill address complex leadership issues, and increase the alignment, integrity and engagement that make their work bigger than a game. A chronic interviewer, Ms. Doty has spoken with more than four hundred people about their day to day experiences at work. These stories form the background for her recently published book, *The Compromise Trap*.

## Interview Topics with Elizabeth Doty

*Elizabeth Doty is passionate about two primary topics:*

- **Healthy And Unhealthy Compromise At Work**
- **Saying No Effectively**

*She can be a resource to you for articles on:*

- Ethics, personal values, and integrity
- Being true to oneself vs. selling one's soul
- Standing up for what is right vs. being a team player for the business
- Business effectiveness: Quality, customer service, employee motivation, shareholder value
- Corporate citizenship: corporate social responsibility, corporate integrity
- Values-based business
- Work/life balance: health, stress, relationships, and family
- Women in leadership
- Diversity and leadership
- Office politics
- Bullies
- Constructive conflict
- Courage at work
- Followership
- Professionalism vs personal values: Reconciling one's job with beliefs as a democratic citizen, community member, parent or member of a religious community
- Happiness and positive psychology

*Elizabeth is unusual in her focus on:*

- Living up to values you already have
- What individuals can do directly, without their boss' help
- Increasing integrity, not punishing bad apples
- Unconscious factors in ethics: denial, self-justification, etc.
- Pushing back constructively

## Praise for *The Compromise Trap*

*"To say yes to our integrity, we need to say no to what is wrong. But how? In this insightful and practical book, Elizabeth Doty shows us how to engage constructively in shaping our work environment to create value for ourselves, our organizations, and the larger world. I recommend this book highly."*

—William Ury, coauthor of *Getting to Yes* and author of *The Power of a Positive No*

*"Doty provides an observant and critical analysis of the long-term destructive influences compromising can have on morality and effectiveness. All in all, this book will be good for your ethical behavior and your managerial performance."*

—Max H. Bazerman, Jesse Isidor Straus Professor of Business Administration, Harvard Business School

*"The Compromise Trap will confirm the experience of all who work in systems. It is insightful and well written and aims us in the right direction."*

—Peter Block, author of *Stewardship* and *The Answer to How Is Yes*

*"Human nature has a strong compassionate, cooperative base that needs to be rediscovered. Elizabeth Doty's systemic and realistic approach provides guidance on how we can make the world a better place for everyone, not just for ourselves."*

—Napier Collyns, cofounder, Global Business Network

*"The Compromise Trap is thoughtful, pragmatic, and provocative and a pleasure to read."*

—Joseph L. Badaracco, Jr., John Shad Professor of Business Ethics, Harvard Business School

*"Elizabeth Doty has brought greater depth of understanding to one of the major dilemmas of organizational life: what causes people to do what they believe is not right? I hope this book encourages everyone to avoid *The Compromise Trap* and provides leaders with insight that will help them create healthy organizations where people and the business thrive."*

—Nancy Southern, Chair, Organizational Systems Program, Saybrook Graduate School

*"The Compromise Trap clearly and directly addresses an essential principle for navigating toward a more sustainable economy—acting from the center. Without acting from what is true for each of us, our collective actions may not realize our intentions, which is a great risk indeed."*

—Stacey Smith, Managing Director, Advisory Services, BSR

*"An engaging and easy-to-understand analysis of the traps we weave at work and, frankly, in our daily lives. This book is relevant to anyone looking to 'redefine the game.' With the ethics breakdowns in business over the past decade, it is a must-read for every business school student and businessperson up to and including the C-suite and the board."*

—Steven F. McCann, retired Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, Longs Drugs Stores