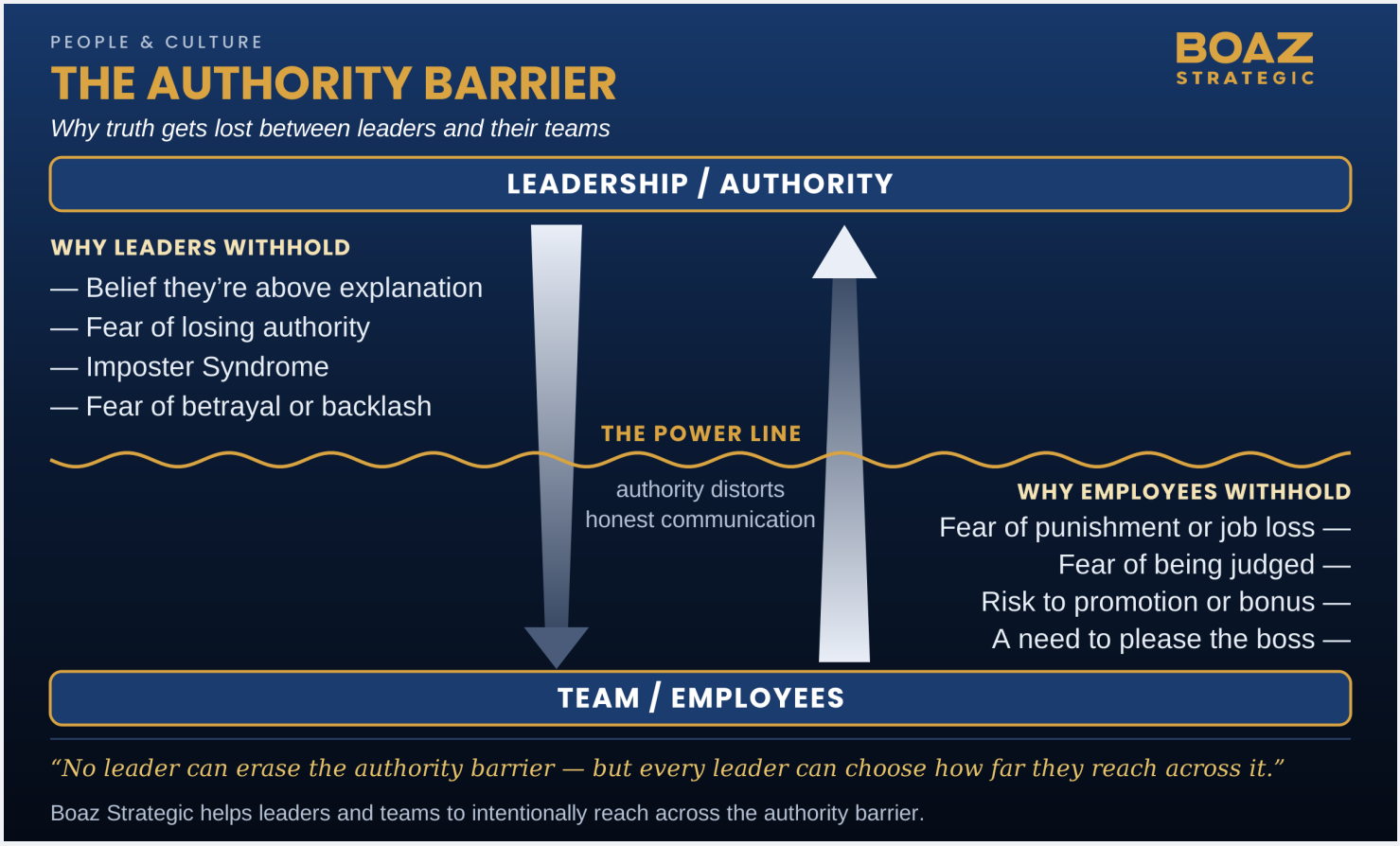


What aren't they *telling you?*

> *"No leader can erase the authority barrier — but every leader can choose how far they reach across it.*
>
> — AARON D. MINARD, CO-FOUNDER OF BOAZ STRATEGIC

Spend enough time with a leader's direct reports and one theme surfaces again and again: they tell us things they would never tell their boss. We call it the authority barrier, the place where rank quietly distorts honest communication.

Wherever there is authority, a barrier forms.

Employees hold back for understandable reasons: fear of punishment or job loss, fear of being judged, risk to a promotion or bonus, a need to please the boss, and a reluctance to be seen as a failure.

The research agrees. In a small but telling study, Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin interviewed 40 professionals; 34 of them, 85 percent, had at least once felt unable to raise an important issue, fearing most to be seen as a troublemaker or to damage a relationship.

The barrier is not built from below alone. Leaders are not always fully transparent either: distrust of the team, fear of losing authority or facing backlash, a pride that says they are above explanation, and the pressure to keep everyone believing all is under control.

We not only see this in the workplace, but also in the home. Children will often share with each other or friends what they may feel a reservation about sharing with their parents.

Our "Engagement Pulse" exercise is one way to cross it: a safe place for people to speak, and clear insight for leaders.

Boaz Strategic helps leaders and teams to intentionally reach across the authority barrier.

Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, "An Exploratory Study of Employee Silence," J. of Management Studies 40(6), 2003

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