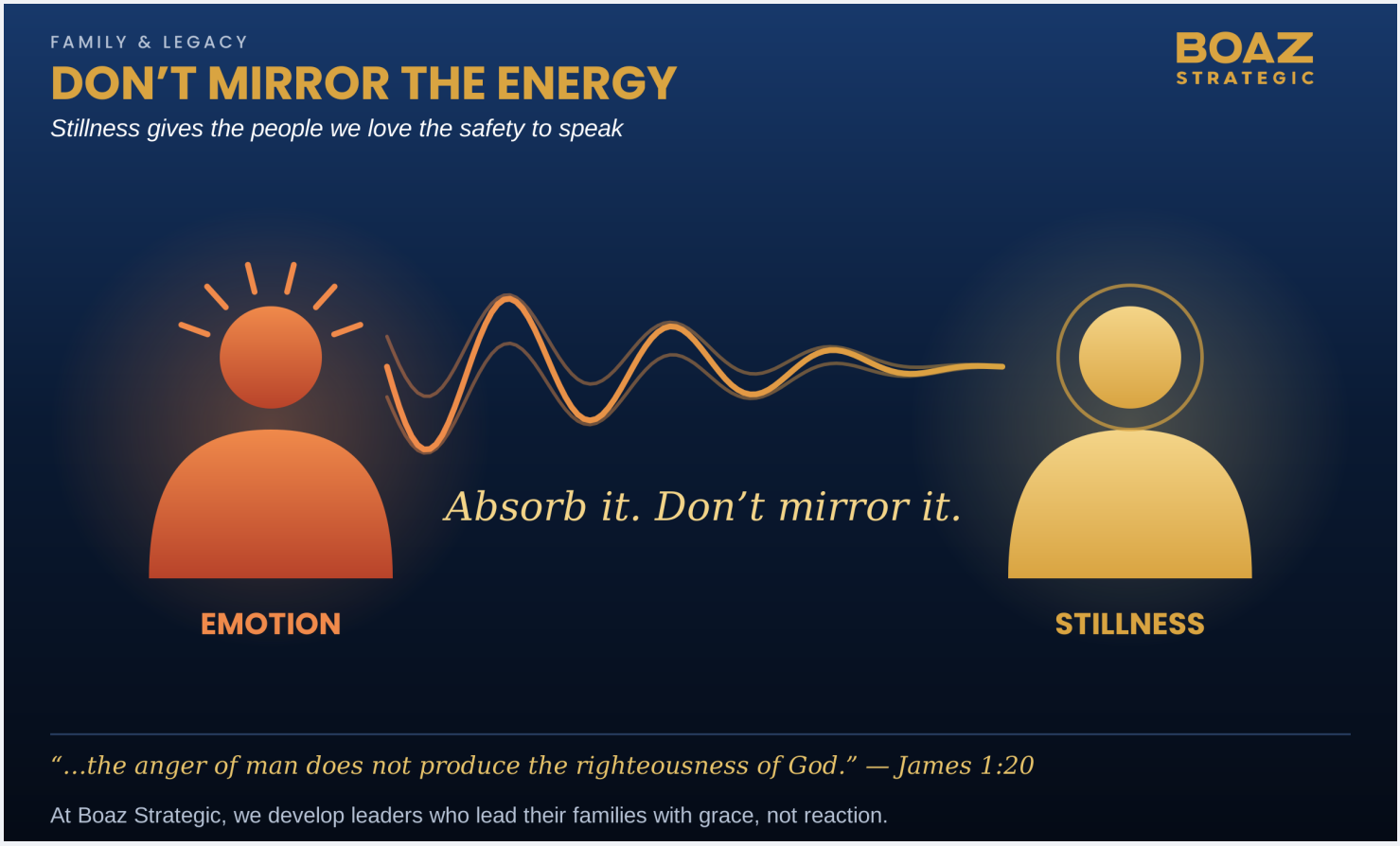


Don't mirror *the energy.*

> *Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. — James 1:19*

I once heard the story of a man with military training who met anger with anger. When a disagreement with his wife turned heated, his instinct was to answer verbal aggression with verbal aggression. Even on the days he kept himself under control, he was still answering emotion with emotion, and the heat simply stayed in the room.

Don't mirror the energy.

One day he decided to draw on that same training in a different way. When his wife began to speak, he stood at attention, hands behind his back, and simply took it. Discipline that had once been a reflex became a posture of listening.

A friend uses a quieter version. He slips his hands under his legs and sits on them, a physical reminder not to respond. You do not need the formal stance. What matters is the stillness.

Notice what they are really doing. They are giving a spouse safety. She can say what is on her heart, whether it comes out hopeful or raw, without meeting a counter argument. He has no need, and no right, to answer with anger or bitterness.

Emotion is contagious. Psychologists call the tendency to catch another person's feelings emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson, 1994). In a marriage the effect is the same, which is why one calm person can change the temperature of a whole conversation.

Then comes the second half. Let what she said settle. Be still with it. When you do respond, respond with grace and humility, not emotion. Scripture gives the pattern: be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19–20, ESV).

Tenderness is one of the greatest proofs of love in a marriage.

James 1:19–20 (ESV); Hatfield et al., Emotional Contagion (1994). Aaron D. Minard, co-founder of Boaz Strategic