

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? TRANSPARENCY

People in glass houses shouldn't get undressed with the lights on, as the wise person said. Transparency is great if you've got nothing to hide, or when all your actions are in a visible arena. This, of course, is what we expect of public servants. All well and good, so long as it doesn't make them cautious, correct and forever on their guard. Meanwhile, in the soap opera of corporate life, we see nearly the complete opposite. It takes acts of gross calumny to get a CEO fired. Much greater than risks of exposure are threats from markets, share performance and colleague assassins. Transparency is bound up with trust. It is irrelevant until trust is broken, but promoting transparency is no guaranteed solution to problems of trust, especially in matters of fairness in pay and justice in decision-making. These are both areas where in recent years we have increasingly seen governments legislating. Openness is good and healthy, but life is not always conducted in the arena. We are entitled to private space and time, even at work. Transparency is easy if you're doing nothing, and

Dominique Byron



the safest course of action is to be blameless. As a US president was once parodied: 'I promised you open government. I have given you the next best thing, empty government.'

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