Psychological Safety
in a Virtual World

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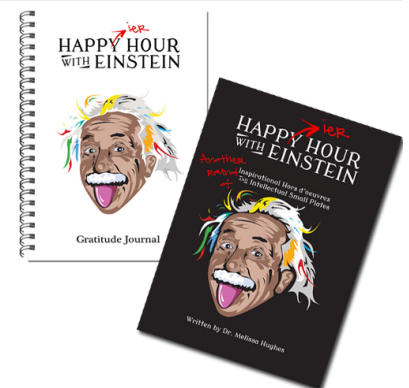
Executive Summary

If a team member approached you for clarification about a task, would you ignore his request and walk away? Would you tell an employee who came to you with a concern that she should not be so sensitive? If a subordinate asked for feedback on a project, would you drop it in the shredder and tell him it wasn't worth your time? Would you schedule a meeting and then blow it off as the employee waited in the conference room?

While ignoring, dismissing, and minimizing people is not the norm face-to-face, it's become an unintended by-product of the virtual workspace. Sadly, this is how many common behaviors are translating to remote employees who don't get the same visual indicators of social standing or emotional climate as in-office employees. Without those indicators, poor communication can morph into a powerful force that cripples employee engagement and chips away at company culture.

There is no question the pandemic has changed life and work as we know it. The boundaries between work and life have become more fluid, life stresses and work stresses have overlapped and intensified, and those micro-moments and social cues we picked up around the office have disappeared. The smiles you share in the hallway, the brief exchanges about a ball game or informal conversation about weekend plans are the kinds of interactions that have nothing to do with work. But they do have everything to do with making us feel cared for and connected - and that has everything to do with HOW we work.

Much organizational energy has focused on the logistics of remote work and the challenges of managing people from a distance. But one factor that has a significant impact on organizational success has received far less attention. What is the source of the emotional turbulence employees are experiencing and are leaders addressing it or perpetuating it? This e-book explores research around the impact psychological safety has on the well-being of employees in today's rapidly changing and uncertain workplace and the leadership behaviors that set the tone for organizational success — or not.

Melissa Hughes, Ph.D.

According to recent polls, employees are feeling a range of emotions about the changing workplace. Many are anything but conducive to a high-performing engaged workforce.

Leaders who are not making emotional needs part of the conversation will do so at the peril of company culture.
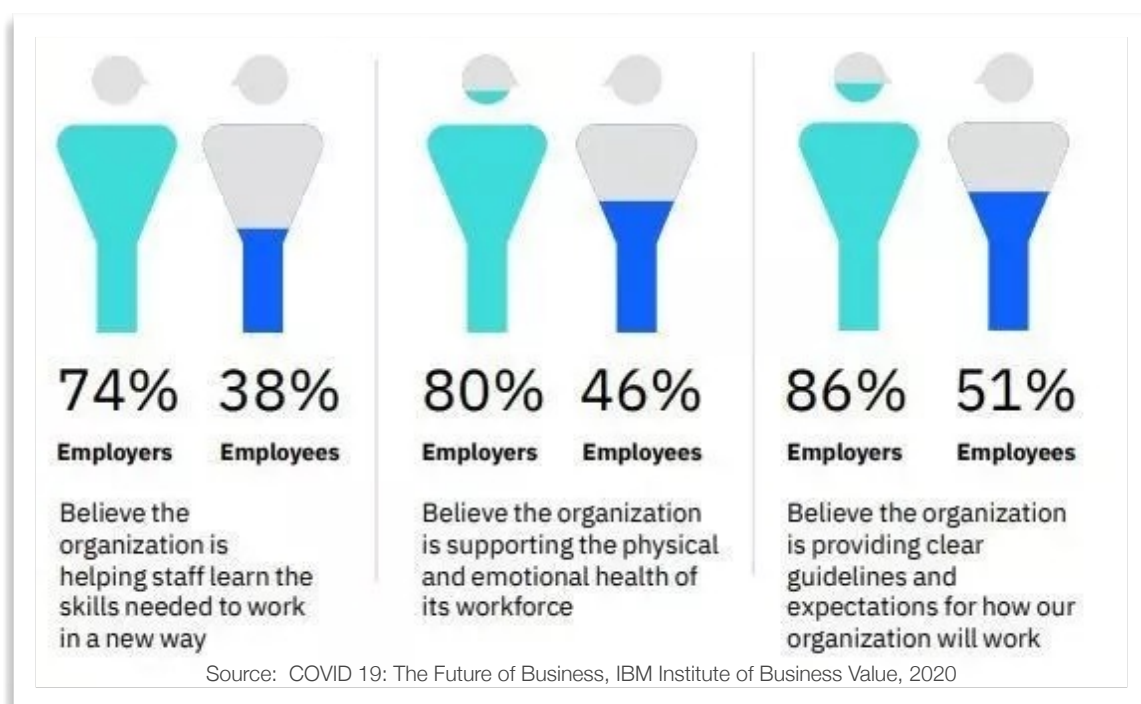
The Employer-Employee Disconnect

Managers believe they're supporting staff through changes to work wrought by the pandemic. But according to a new global survey, employees disagree.[1] Leaders recognize that their employees have been under intense pressure, and they contend that employee well-being is among their highest priorities. However, research conducted by the IBM Institute for Business Value and Oxford Economics analyzed data from over 60,000 leaders and employees in 22 industries and 20 countries shows a signifiant divide in the reality between leaders and employees.

Only about half of employees say they believe that their employer is genuinely concerned about their welfare and even less believe they are receiving the training they need to learn the skills they need to work in a new way. In addition, prioritizing cost-management often impedes workforce support and more remote work makes it harder for people to enjoy the personal connections that help define healthy company culture. Think about how you engage with people face-to-face to connect and communicate care. You smile and make eye contact. Maybe you have casual conversation or simply ask them how they are?

Now, think about the last time you did any of those things with remote workers. Do you care about them less because they are remote? Of course not. But, when we don't share the same physical spaces, those informal exchanges don't happen organically. And they are powerful indicators that we are safe, cared for, and connected to others.

It's not rocket science. It's human science. Employers want engaged employees, and employees want to be respected as contributing members of the team. That requires open dialogue, clear expectations, trust and respect. It is recognizing that we are humans first and as humans we have basic needs that must be met.

74% Employers / 38% Employees
Believe the organization is helping staff learn the skills needed to work in a new way

80% Employers / 46% Employees
Believe the organization is supporting the physical and emotional health of its workforce

86% Employers / 51% Employees
Believe the organization is providing clear guidelines and expectations for how our organization will work

Source: COVID 19: The Future of Business, IBM Institute of Business Value, 2020

What Employees Want

Despite the challenges of a virtual environment, many organizations discovered that productivity and employee engagement actually increased throughout the pandemic. One study found that 94% of more than 800 organizations reported productivity was the same or higher than before the pandemic.[2] Another two-year study of more than 800,000 employees at Fortune 500 companies found that "most people reported stable or even increased productivity levels after employees started working from home."[3]

What was the secret of maintaining productivity and engagement in remote workspaces? The biggest impact on work productivity came from the same factors that influence in-person productivity: a focus on healthy company culture and people-centered leadership.

While greater autonomy and flexible work time may have bolstered employee productivity through the early months of of the pandemic, it was the care, camaraderie and a sense of belonging - *we are all in this together* - that actually strengthened the culture and improved productivity and employee engagement. It was as if employees were suddenly seen as 3-dimensional people with lives and families and pets rather than simply workers filling a chair in the office.

A decade-long study involving more than 100,000 participants in 26 countries including all major job titles across all major industries identifies the eight attributes that employees worldwide value most in managers that create a healthy culture with support and consideration at the top of the list.[4]

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH RESULTS: WHAT EMPLOYEES VALUE MOST IN MANAGERS

- 26% Support & Consideration
- 13% Recognition
- 9% Dignity & Respect
- 12% Clear Performance Expectation
- 8% Reward Performance Contribution
- 12% Problem-Solving & Decision-Making
- 11% Fair & Just
- 8% Honest & Trustworthy

5 BEHAVIORS

1 SKILL

2 VALUES

"

When we feel dismissed or ignored, problems feel like barriers. When we feel valued and respected, we embrace problems as challenges.
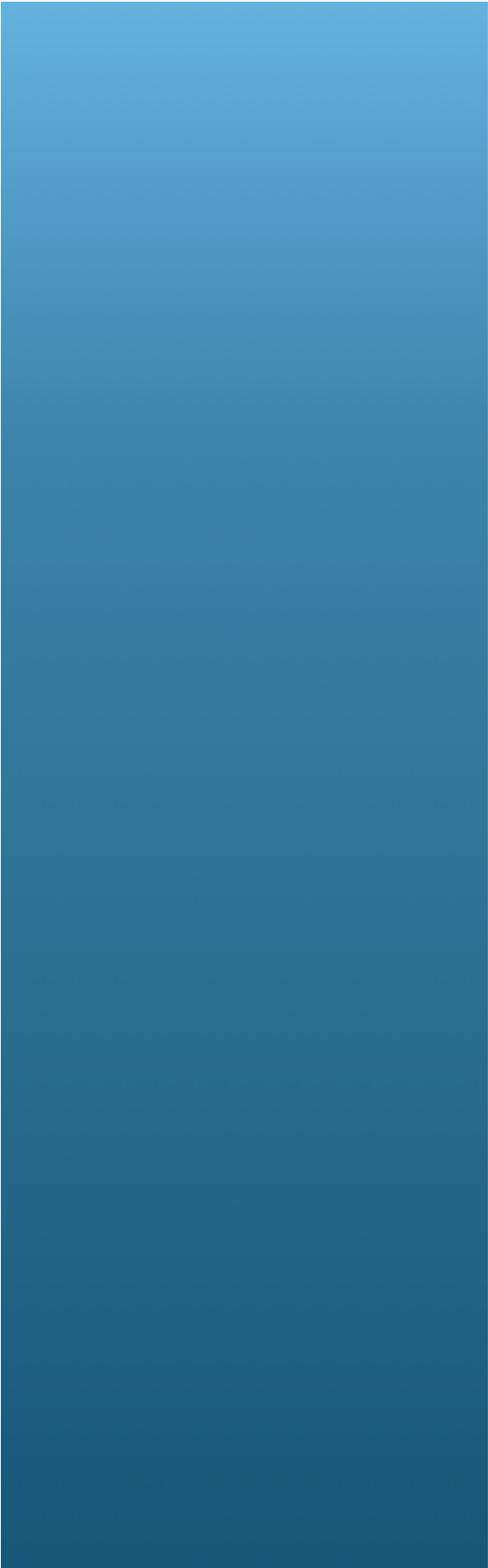
Leadership Behaviors Set the Tone

A wealth of research supports the assertion that positive team climate — in which team members value one another's contributions, care about one another's well-being, and have input about how work is done — is the most important driver of psychological safety and, ultimately, organizational success. When employees feel comfortable asking for help, making suggestions for improvement, admitting mistakes or challenging the status quo without fear of negative social consequences, organizations are more likely to innovate, adapt quickly to change, and recover from setbacks.

Yet a McKinsey Global Survey conducted during the pandemic indicates that only a small percentage of leaders exhibit the behaviors that set the tone for psychological safety, and positive team climate has a stronger effect on psychological safety in teams that experienced a greater degree of change in working remotely.[5] The researchers conclude that leaders can increase the likelihood of team members' psychological safety by demonstrating certain behaviors. Moreover, the following specific characteristics are highly predictive of a positive team climate necessary for psychological safety.

- Healthy group dynamics
- Open dialogue
- Self-Awareness
- Cultural Awareness
- High-quality social relationships
- Mindful listening
- Situational awareness
- Awareness of unconscious biases
- Situational humility (growth mindset fueled by curiosity)
- Sponsorship (enabling the success of others above one's own)

It takes both intention and attention. Leaders set the tone by example and reinforce the value team members place on others' contributions as well as the care they have about one another's well-being. Here are four simple yet powerful ways leaders can create a positive team climate and foster psychological safety for their people.

Support them. Be present and accessible. Provide encouragement and understanding about their stressors and challenges. Reinforce the importance of asking questions and sharing concerns by actively listening when they do so. When people feel supported, they are much more likely to ask for help when they need it.

Recognize them. Recognition isn't not just about celebrating wins. It's also about recognizing effort, growth, and lessons learned. In doing so, people are not criticized for mistakes or missteps, rather they are encouraged to share them so others can learn from them.

Communicate with them. Employees want leaders who communicate clear expectations and honest feedback about their performance. This is essential to employees who work remotely. Leaders who are mindful that remote employees don't benefit from the informal cues we get in and around the office prioritize regular check-ins and respond promptly to employees who reach out for direction or clarification.

Respect them. Treating employees with respect means recognizing that they are competent people striving to make valuable contributions to the organization. It is not micromanaging them, dismissing them, or ignoring them. It is acting with integrity and transparency, building trust and acknowledging diverse perspectives. In addition, when leaders demonstrate situational humility, they cultivate a community of teaching and learning that builds collective intelligence and maximizes impact at all levels of the organization.

A wealth of research over the past two decades has identified psychological safety as the critical driver of team dynamics, ideation and collaboration, and a healthy organizational culture. Given the pace of change and disruption combined with the need for creative, adaptive responses from teams at every level, psychological safety is more important than ever.

Is your team culture one where new ideas are welcomed and built upon or ridiculed? Are people encouraged to share concerns and challenges? Or do they feel their thoughts and opinions don't count? Is there a level of trust that enables people ask for help when they need it?

A lack of psychological safety in the workplace has powerful repercussions. If people don't feel they have the freedom to discuss obstacles or problems, the company is not operating as a learning organization proactively preventing mistakes and failure. And when people aren't fully engaged because they don't feel their voice is heard or their needs aren't being recognized, the organization isn't utilizing its collective intelligence and full range of talent.

WORKPLACE STRESS

9 IN 10
EMPLOYEES REPORT THAT THEIR WORKPLACE STRESS AFFECTS THEIR MENTAL HEALTH.

3 IN 5
EMPLOYEES ARE NOT RECEIVING ADEQUATE SUPPORT FROM SUPERVISORS TO HELP MANAGE STRESS.

EMPLOYEE BURNOUT

4 IN 5
EMPLOYEES FEEL EMOTIONALLY DRAINED FROM THEIR WORK, AN EARLY SIGN OF BURNOUT.

56% OF EMPLOYEES SPEND TIME LOOKING FOR A NEW POSITION, COMPARED TO **40%** OF EMPLOYEES IN 2018.

Work Health Survey, Mental Health America, 2021.

Now more than ever, the stress of uncertainty and a lack of trust is a huge problem often resulting in a decrease in employee engagement and job satisfaction. According to the State of the Global Workplace: 2021 Report, employee engagement decreased by 2% globally from 2019 to 2020, and employees reported higher worry, stress, anger, and sadness in 2020 than they had the previous year.[6] In addition, Mental Health America's Work Health Survey show that the pandemic has made it difficult to be as engaged with work and has amplified workplace stress and burnout.[7] As we continue to adapt to changes that are out of our control, understanding how employees' needs change must be integral to the process.

During the pandemic, many employees enjoyed the flexibility and autonomy they did not have before and expect that same level of independence in their future work experience. But employees also felt the impact of isolation and missed the social interactions that connect people and teams. The O.C. Tanner Institute assembled and analyzed the perspectives of over 38,000 employees, leaders, HR practitioners, and executives from 21 countries around the world.[8]

They discovered a significant shift in what employees need now to be engaged and successful. Participants cited opportunities for professional development, flexibility, clear expectations and opportunities to connect socially as the key aspects of effective hybrid experiences. Leaders who recognize how they engage with, support, develop, and interact with hybrid workers to meet those needs and expectations are more likely to create the conditions for them to thrive.

When we feel safe and connected with others, we have more positive emotions and we are more motivated and resilient when faced with challenges or obstacles. Positive emotions like trust, curiosity, collaboration, and inspiration open the mind to be more receptive to new ideas, diverse perspectives thus making us better problem solving.

Simply put, the brain just works better in a positive state than a negative or neutral state.

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The human brain works better when we feel safe and connected with others.
When we lack safety and connection, negative emotions are intensified, obstacles are amplified and solutions to problems are harder to find.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs at Work

When we don't feel psychologically safe in the workplace, our brains react just as though we are in physical danger. Neurologically, there is little difference between being chased by a lion and stressing out over not knowing exactly what your boss wants or whether you've met his expectations.
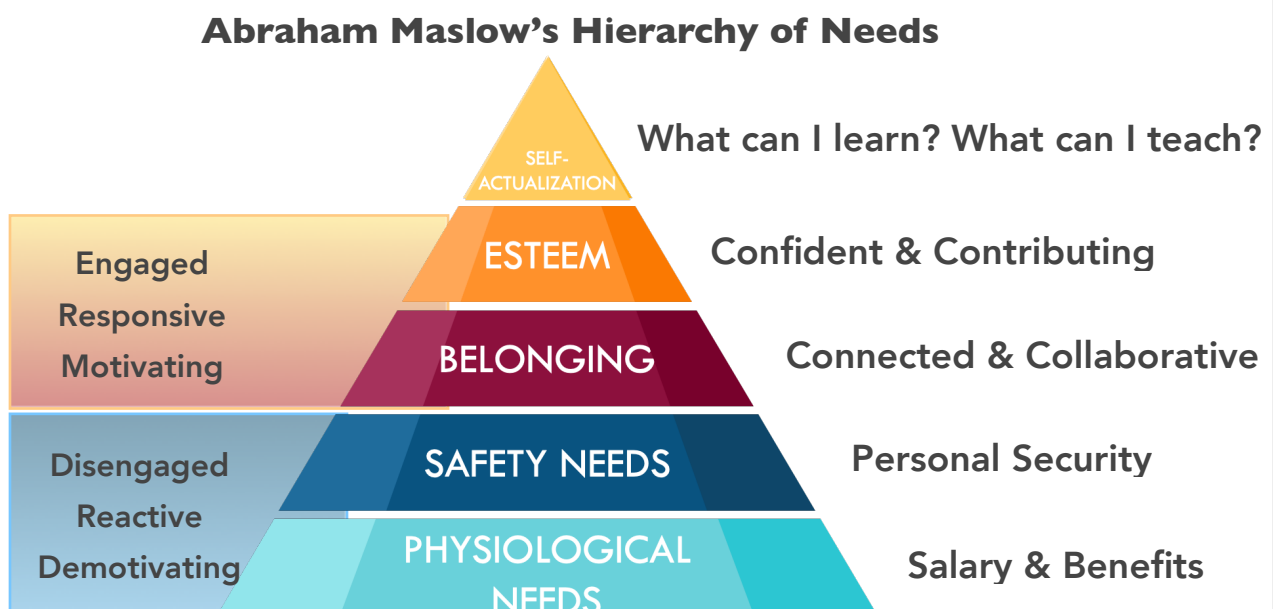
This emotional angst puts us into fight-or-flight mode creating a host of physiological changes in the body. When this happens, the brain prioritizes the threat and slows activity in the neocortex to allocate neural resources to deal with it. When we don't feel safe, we simply are unable to access our full mental capacity for focus, problem-solving or creativity.

Like Maslow's hierarchy of needs — which posits that until certain basic needs are met we cannot reach our full potential — employees must feel accepted before they're able to contribute and motivate others to contribute.[9] Only when physiological and safety needs are met can we

feel a sense of belonging. But without a sense of belonging, we lack the safety to share ideas, ask questions, and challenge the status quo.

Successful leaders – whether leading through a crisis or not – recognize that this safety is built over time through micro-exchanges that have a lasting impact. The smallest interactions – or lack thereof – can either build or deplete trust. A simple acknowledgment is uplifting while a lack of acknowledgement makes people feel insignificant.

Emotionally intelligent leaders are aware of this and intentional in their communication. They are cognizant that being unresponsive to questions and concerns conveys a lack of care and respect. A few minutes to answer questions, address concerns, praise accomplishments, or even just ask "how are you?" communicates to people that they are valued members of the team and conveys empathy and transparency, and ultimately, builds trust and psychological safety.

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

	Pyramid Level	Description
Engaged / Responsive / Motivating	SELF-ACTUALIZATION	What can I learn? What can I teach?
	ESTEEM	Confident & Contributing
	BELONGING	Connected & Collaborative
Disengaged / Reactive / Demotivating	SAFETY NEEDS	Personal Security
	PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS	Salary & Benefits

"Psychological safety is about candor, being direct, taking risks, and being willing to say, 'I screwed that up.' Being willing to ask for help when you're in over your head."

-Amy Edmondson

Amy Edmondson, professor at Harvard Business School and a leading researcher on psychological safety and team performance, first identified the concept of psychological safety at work in 1999.[10] Since then, she has observed how companies with a who create a safe, trusting workplace perform better. In her book, *The Fearless Organization*, she maintains that when an organization minimizes fear - fear of uncertainty, fear of failure, fear of asking questions or admitting they don't know something - performance at the organization, team and individual level is maximized.

It's short-sighted to believe that talent is the determining measure of the organization. In order to fully utilize the individual and collective talent of the workforce, employees must have the freedom to **contribute their talents** - in the form of asking critical questions, sharing ideas, and disclose mistakes so others can learn from them, too.

It doesn't matter if you hire the best thinkers if you don't create the conditions necessary for them to do their best thinking.

According to Gallup's most recent *State of the American Workplace* report, only 3 in 10 employees strongly agree that their opinions seem to count at work.[11] That means the majority of employees aren't sharing their experiences and insights with others. Imagine 70% of your workforce keeping their ideas, questions and suggestions to themselves! It doesn't just impact how people *feel* about their work; it impacts the work itself. Gallup calculated that "moving the ratio to six in 10 employees, organizations could realize a 27% reduction in turnover, a 40% reduction in safety incidents, and a 12% increase in productivity."

"Psychological safety is broadly defined as a climate in which people are comfortable expressing and being themselves. More specifically, when people have psychological safety at work, they feel comfortable sharing concerns and mistakes without fear of embarrassment or retribution. They are confident that they can speak up and won't be humiliated, ignored, or blamed. They know they can ask questions when they are unsure about something. When a work environment has reasonably high psychological safety, good things happen: mistakes are reported quickly so that prompt corrective action can be taken; seamless coordination across groups or departments is enabled, and potentially game-changing ideas for innovation are shared."
- Amy Edmondson

Why bother hiring the best thinkers if you don't create the conditions necessary for them to do and share their best thinking?

A Business or a Company?

Most of us don't need research or scientific evidence to know that when people belong to a group, tribe or organization, they have a strong intrinsic motivation to help that group, tribe, or organization succeed. It's just how we are wired. Neurologically, our brains work better when we belong. When we feel safe, we are able to tap into our optimum cognitive capacity to focus on both individual and collective aspirations. Leaders who recognize this are able to create a culture of belonging.

Paul Haury, an executive leadership coach who incorporates behavioral, psychological and neurological science into his practice, maintains that the majority of our work world relies on influencing just two of our base hardwired emotional states: aspiration and fear. But, he points out that there is another emotion that has a powerful influence on both: belonging. Without belonging, fears are larger, more intense, and more powerful than the reward of the aspirations. Moreover, aspirations ultimately turn into fears resulting in deficient thinking patterns. When people belong, they not only embrace challenges, they thrive on them as bonding agents that energize the team rather than deplete it.

Think of it as the difference between a business and a company. A business is focused on the business and the work required to get it done. The primary concern is the bottom line. Everything else - the people, the learning, and the teamwork - is secondary. Think about that. **Everything it takes to reach the goal is less important than the goal.**

On the other hand, a company recognizes people with individual strengths and experience that, when given the opportunity, each play a unique role in the success of the organization. In a company, the value is place on the people, the learning, and the teamwork because without all of that, success is nothing but a crapshoot.

> **CEO of Barry-Wehmiller, Bob Chapman, has made it his mission to change the way businesses treat employees. If you ask him what his company does, he will tell you, "We enable great people to do extraordinary things. If you ask him how he measures results he will tell you, "We measure success by the way we touch the lives of people."**
> **- Everybody Matters[12]**

6 Affirmations in a Culture of Belonging

How many of the following statements employees can affirm determines not only how engaged they are individually but also how the organization performs as a whole.

1. BELONG: "I belong with my company."
   People genuinely feel, own and care for other members' successes, goals and failures and they know others care for them.

2. BELIEVE: "I believe in my company."
   People genuinely believe in the organization's core values, shared purpose, leaders and teammates, strategic direction and in the products and services it provides.

3. LIVE VALUES: "I know and live my own core values and strengths in my work."
   People know their core values and are encouraged to actively live them to their fullest in deep personal accountability in their work.

4. JOIN STORIES: "I know and live my personal strategic story and can join it with my company's strategic story (without conflict)."
   People know their own unique strengths, and how to use them in shared pursuit the company's unique purpose to change the world where other companies can't or won't.

5. PRACTICE: "I understand, am given authorship and take ownership of my work, and welcome how I am measured."
   People know what good looks like. They clearly define their part in how they are measured fairly by the company. They know they are measured in ways that help them grow.

6. GROW: "I understand, define, and take ownership of how I grow and how I contribute to the growth of the company."
   People recognize that the company encourages and provides opportunities to grow. They understand the personal benefits in that growth as well as the opportunity for them to contribute to organizational growth.

*Adapted from 6 Affirmations for Your Belonging at a Crossroad by Paul Haury.[13]

A Team of All-Stars or An All-Star Team?

Imagine you just got hired for your "dream job" and as an added bonus, you were given the choice to work on one of two teams. The first team is a high-performing group of people all with exceptional accomplishments and a long list of successes. When discussing a problem or challenge, those with expertise on the matter share their opinions at length and without interruption. It is clear who is in charge and there is an understood protocol. Their meetings begin and end on time and are efficiently aligned to an agenda with no sidebars or extraneous conversations.

The second team is a combination of highly successful executives and middle managers with relatively few accomplishments. Their meetings are completely different in that they use an agenda as a starting point, but the conversation often gets off track as members freely share their thoughts, experiences, and questions. The level at which people participate in the discussion is not defined by their status or position in the company and meetings often extend past the scheduled end time.

Which team would you choose?

Research indicates that you should be more concerned with how the team works than who is on the team. Team dynamics are more impactful to organizational success than the individual players.

Studies also show that people working on *healthy* teams are more productive, better self-monitors, and more motivated than people who work alone…. **healthy** being the key word here.

Two interesting byproducts of psychological safety are trust and laughter. We share laughter when we trust and that laughter creates more trust. Both laughter and trust generate neurotransmitters in your brain that activate the neocortex and stimulate cognition. A growing body of educational research suggests that, when used effectively, humor combined with a sense of trust can improve learning and performance by reducing anxiety, boosting participation and increasing focus and engagement.

Other studies show that people who laugh at work describe their environments as more positive and innovative and less hierarchical and stressful. Moreover, when team members are comfortable enough to laugh together, they are much more likely to work in a culture of trust and be successful.

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A room full of all-stars doesn't magically create an all-star team. Anyone can find good players. Creating the conditions for them to play together to win is another story.

Project Aristotle

Google has studied the concept of team dynamics for years spending millions of dollars measuring everything from how frequently coworkers eat lunch together to which personality traits foster collaboration and effective communication. In 2012, they tasked a team of psychologists, sociologists, engineers, and statisticians with an initiative designed to find out why some teams were productivity and ingenuity giants while others struggled with the most basic tasks. Code-maned Project Aristotle as a tribute to Aristotle's quote "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," the goal was to determine whether collective intelligence is influenced by team dynamics and distinct from the intelligence of any individual member. [14]

With a sample size of 700 subjects randomly divided into small groups, the researchers gave them a series of tasks that required various types of collaboration. After analyzing the results they found that some groups were incredibly innovative and successful while others demonstrated low levels of cooperation and struggled to find viable solutions.

The most interesting finding was that despite the fact that the tasks were very different, teams generally succeeded or failed across the board. Success, therefore, had little to do with the task and everything to do with the team. In addition, it didn't matter how many smart people were on each team; the group dynamics impacted the collective intelligence and success more than the intelligence of the individual members.

The researchers drilled deeper to discover what characteristics successful groups shared. Two key findings emerged. The first was the proportion of time members contributed to the task discussions throughout the day. On the successful teams, everyone spoke about the same amount – something the researchers called an "equality in distribution of conversational turn-taking." Conversely, on the poor performing teams, one or two people dominated the conversation while others contributed very little. In essence, the "talkers" eliminated a percentage of the brain power and decreased the team's collective intellectual capacity.

The second common characteristic among the successful teams was that they had higher social sensitivity than their counterparts. Social sensitivity, or the ability to read the emotions of others, is a key component of social intelligence and linked to team-based performance. The researchers summarized that the team dynamics, or the level of psychological safety the members experience, directly correlate to how well people learn, solve problems, and recover from mistakes as well as the overall success of the team.

The Power of Acknowledgement

Most people agree that the best way to encourage a desired behavior is through positive reinforcement. But, a fascinating study conducted by Dan Ariely illuminates how powerful the simple act of acknowledging someone's effort can be.[15] The results may surprise you. Ariely is a James B. Duke Professor of psychology and behavioral economics at Duke University, author and TED speaker.

Ariely's team created sheets of paper with random strings of letters, and they asked participants to find and circle any pairs of letters they found. Once they finished, they would be paid 50 cents for the task and given the opportunity to do it again for 45 cents and the next time for 40 cents. They repeated the task each time lowering the pay until people decided it was no longer worth it to them to do the work.

Researchers created conditions in three groups:

- **The Acknowledged Condition:** The first group experienced an explicit acknowledgment of work. The subjects were asked to write their name on each sheet prior to starting the task. After completing the task, they would hand the sheet over to the experimenter who would examine it and file it away in a folder.

- **The Ignored Condition:** The second group was asked not to write their names on the papers. After completing the task, subjects handed their papers to the experimenter who placed the sheets face down without looking at their work.

- **The Shredded Condition:** The third group experienced an explicit de-valuing of work. After completing the task, they subjects handed their papers to the experimenter who didn't look at their work and placed the papers into a shredder right before their eyes.

Not surprisingly, the participants who got explicit acknowledgement continued to complete the task almost twice as long as the subjects in the explicit de-valuing condition. But what was more fascinating was that the people who were ignored exhibited almost exactly the same behavior as those whose work got shredded.

In his TED Talk about human motivation, Dan Ariely commented:

"Now there's good news and bad news here. The bad news is that ignoring the performance of people is almost as bad as shredding their effort in front of their eyes. Ignoring gets you a whole way out there. The good news is that by simply looking at something that somebody has done, scanning it and saying "Uh huh," that seems to be quite sufficient to dramatically improve people's motivations. So the good news is that adding motivation doesn't seem to be so difficult. The bad news is that eliminating motivations seems to be incredibly easy, and if we don't think about it carefully, we might overdo it. When we are acknowledged for our work, we are willing to work harder for less pay, and when we are not acknowledged, we lose much of our motivation."

Ariely's work has shown that human motivation is fueled by how deeply we feel connected to what we've created and the degree to which people appreciate us. Gallup research points out that employees who feel adequately recognized are half as likely as those who don't to say they'll quit in the next year. Yet, only three in ten employees strongly agree that they have received recognition or praise for doing good work in the last seven days. Even more, Gallup Poll shows that 65% of employees haven't received any form of recognition in the last year![16]
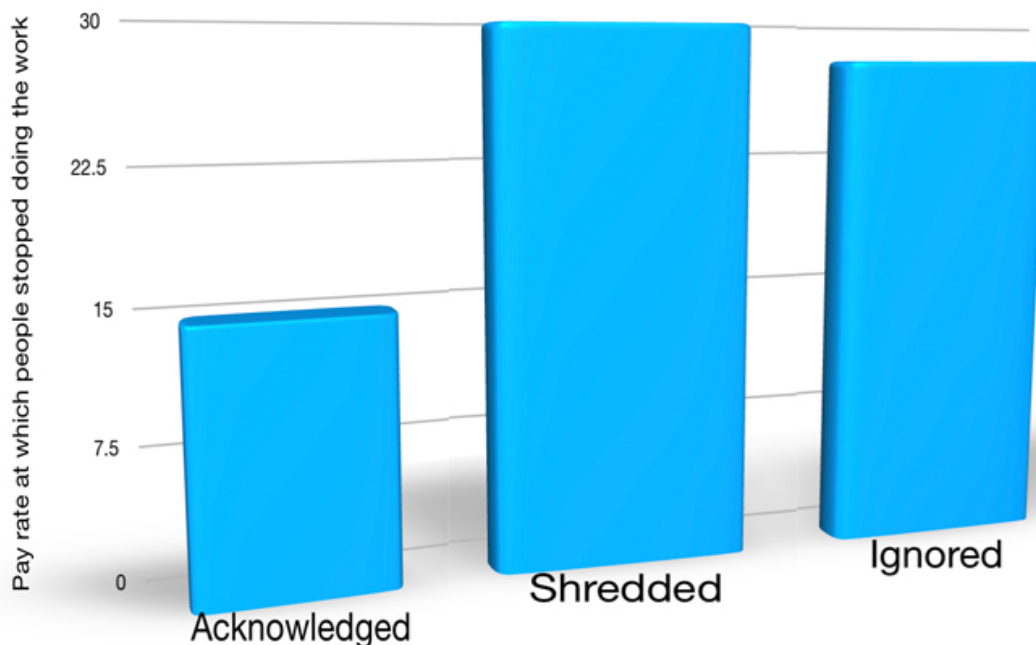
Payoff: The Hidden Logic that Shapes our Motivations [17]

Common Leadership Behaviors that Cripple Company Culture

Imagine an employee works hard on a proposal and brings it to you for feedback. Would you ignore the proposal and tell him his work isn't important? Would you ever assign a task and then tell the person that you have no confidence in him to get it done?

Of course, not! But, actions speak louder than words and there are some common behaviors that communicate those very messages resulting in unengaged, unhappy employees and an unhealthy company culture. Is it reasonable to expect people to be engaged and contributing members of the team if they feel no one has confidence in their abilities, what they do doesn't impact the success of the company…that *they* don't matter? Never mind that those perceptions may not be accurate.

Even the behavior of the most well-intended leaders can get lost in translation and erode the safety and the trust employees need to thrive. None of us know everything that happens in the course of another person's day. But the brain is quirky and has a tendency to make inaccurate assumptions that skew negatively. Even if a leader unintentionally marginalizes or dismisses people - perhaps due to overbooking, poor time management, or simple oversights, the natural inclination is to assume it's personal.

The reality is that people at all levels of the organization genuinely want to be engaged and contributing. Given the choice, everyone would much rather be part of a team and participate in the team's success than sit on the sidelines. Often, the team members who are disengaged are disengaged for a reason.

We are all humans first. And the best way to encourage people to be invested in the team is to make them feel that what they do matters… that they matter to the success of the organization.

Lost in Translation

When leaders do this:	It translates like this:
Consistently cancel or no-show meetings	You are not important.
Fail to provide feedback/guidance	Your work is not important.
Fail to recognize efforts or accomplishments	What you do doesn't matter.
Micromanage projects or meetings	I have no confidence in your ability.
Fail to ask for input or ideas	You add no value.

"

If you really want to demotivate people, shredding their work before their eyes is the fastest way, but ignoring them is almost as effective.

Human motivation is fueled by how deeply we feel connected to what we've created and the degree to which others value our contributions.

Building Brand Ambassadors in a Culture of Care

Organizations with cultures of care cultivate leadership qualities that build people up, motivate growth and treat them like stakeholders. When employees' performance development needs are met, they become brand ambassadors — emotionally and psychologically committed to their work, their colleagues and the organization.

Creating a culture of care is more than surveys to make people feel heard or perks to make people feel happy. While it's true that engaged employees feel their opinions count and are typically happy to be at work, true engagement is about an alignment of values. Organizations that claim to value their workforce address employee needs the same way they address customer needs. In fact, by treating their employees as their most important customers, they set the tone for the way employees interact with customers. The result of that level of care is the difference between people who do their work and people who own their contributions to the company

Think about the employee who feels ignored or unappreciated. Maybe his manager continually cancels meetings or just blows them off without notification. Maybe he has asked for direction or feedback only to be met with crickets, or he is so micromanaged that he feels his leaders have no confidence in his ability.

Now imagine if he treated his customers the same way. What if he blew off client meetings, ignored their questions, or didn't respond to emails. What if he made the customer feel unimportant and unappreciated?

The irony is that most leaders wouldn't tolerate an employee treating a customer the way so many employees report being treated by their leaders. And how many of them tout core values like trust, inclusion, kindness, and humility?

"Caring leadership is taking daily actions in ways that show concern and kindness to those we lead. The more leaders express care for those they lead, the more those who follow them will feel that care and go over and above, out of loyalty and deep gratitude, for the benefit of that leader, the team, and the organization."
-Heather R. Younger[18]

Ask yourself:

If our employees treat our customers with the same level of care and respect as they feel their leaders treat them, would our company thrive or struggle to stay alive?

PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT INVENTORY

ENGAGED OWNERS

12. I am proud to tell people about my work in the company.
11. I have opportunities for growth and advancement.
10. I get feedback and am recognized for my contributions.

TEAM BUILDERS

9. I have opportunities to share my talents and strengths.
8. I can count on my colleagues to care about our work.
7. My thoughts and opinions are valued and considered.

ACTIVE MEMBERS

6. I have opportunities to share my talents and strengths.
5. I know that my contributions are appreciated.
4. Others care about me as a person and an employee.

SOLO PLAYERS

3. I am free to ask for help/clarification when needed.
2. My roles and responsibilities are clear.
1. I have what I need to do my job.

The Performance Development Inventory is formulated in a scaffolding design. Much like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, each level provides the foundation for the next one. The first, second, and third are designed to meet basic needs to do the work and create an environment of trust and psychological safety — all of which are required for employees to assume ownership and pride in the company and their role in its success.

Solo Players: Basic needs required to perform work

Active Members: Personal satisfaction in contributing to the organization; a sense of trust

Team Builders: Collaboration and cooperation with others; belonging and psychological safety

Engaged Owners: Brand ambassadors proud of the company and their role in its success

"Change is more rapid and more significant than at any time in history and we are not preparing people for the journey ahead. Intelligent, market-leading companies recognize these significant shifts and are acting to transform the future of work, shifting the focus back to the most critical component — people."
-Mike Vicanti[19]

"

The world of work is more complex, more uncertain and ambiguous than ever. Companies must be able to harness the passion, engagement, commitment and loyalty of their workforce to succeed. The kind of leadership that worked in the past is no longer effective with today's workforce.

-Kimberly Davis[20]

I AM RESPECTED

I AM VALUED

I AM CAPABLE

I MATTER

I BELONG

Employees are humans first with basic needs that must be met before they will can contribute to organizational goals. When these five human needs are met, people are engaged and motivated to do their best work and thrive in pursuit of organizational success.

Five to Thrive

PURPOSE

VALUES

Organizations that put people above profits and care above cost create healthy cultures that prioritize these five principles. They recognize that the essence of the human spirit is what enables a group of people to come together, do purposeful work and find meaning and reward in organizational success.

TRUST

CLARITY

RECOGNITION

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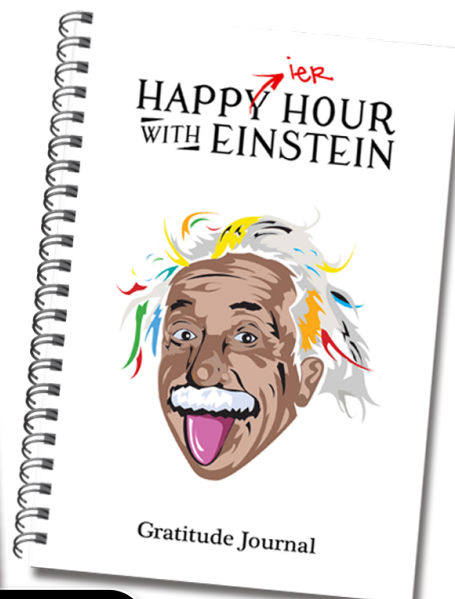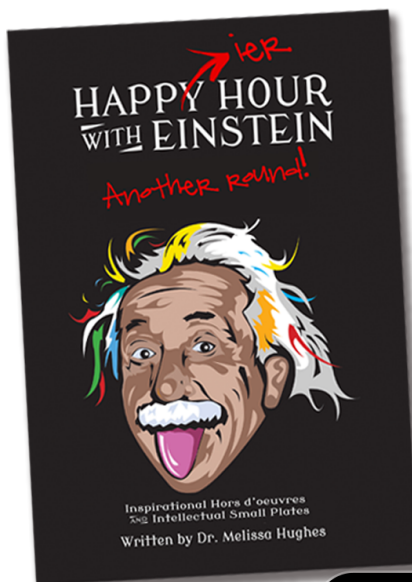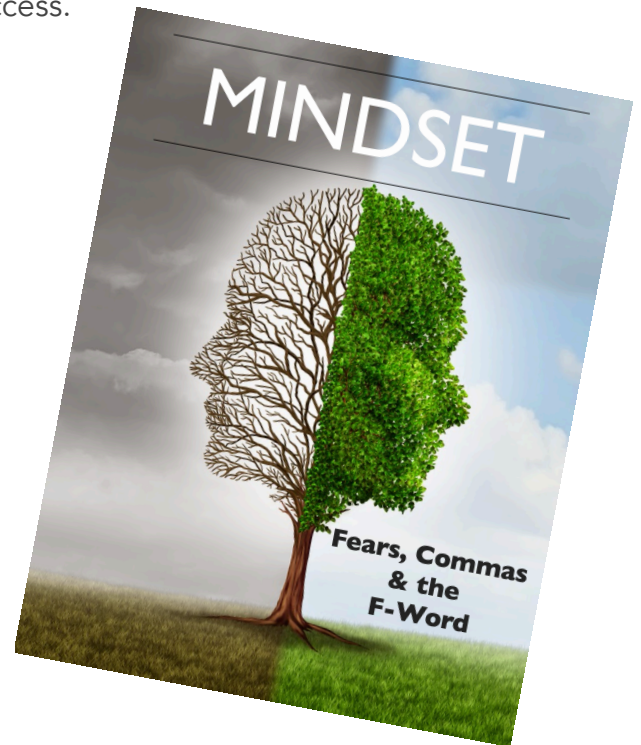
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