

CREATING CONNECTION BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND TEAMS:  
UNDERSTANDING HUMAN BIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY FOR HIGH  
PERFORMANCE

By

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CREATING CONNECTION BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND TEAMS:  
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## ABSTRACT

This capstone is a result of four questions formulated around a central theme focused on understanding what it is that makes teams and environments high performing today, and additionally, how leaders connect with others in order to set high performing environments. In the first question (Chapter 2), exploration of our human biology shows our genetics are wired for connection and collaboration although this may be in contradiction with many aspects of American society today. The second question (Chapter 3) explored human motivation. Instead of understanding the individual, we have to look further to understand how the cues from the environment are impacting motivations. With focus on creating better environments—those rooted in purpose and fulfilling human needs—performance improves. Question 3 (Chapter 4) examined examples of leaders who create high quality motivational environments and how it impacts people and teams. In the final chapter (Chapter 5), Question 4 there are some applied ideas for leaders to begin to understand how to better build teams. Through this Capstone, it becomes clear that in order to perform at a high level, leaders have to create environments where individuals are connected to both a strong purpose and the people around them. In order for this connection to occur individuals must be willing to accept vulnerabilities and take risk. Psychologically safe environments (created by leaders) encourage individuals to show up authentically as themselves and perform to their potential.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Great appreciation is extended to each reader in this project. Readers selected were previous instructors of courses I had taken in the Organizational Dynamics program. Each course greatly impacted the way I think about leadership and the environments in which I work and attempt to create. Each instructor's course has shaped my growth as an individual and my philosophies as a leader and coach, and I am grateful each agreed to oversee a chapter in my Capstone.

I would also like to thank my classmates throughout the Organizational Dynamics program. I looked forward to each class meeting because it meant I would have the opportunity to learn from so many wonderful people from diverse backgrounds. Through these connections many conversations ensued that expanded my learning and shaped my leadership philosophies. I think fondly of my classmates that I have been able to connect with throughout my time in the program.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Four Question Format

The four question format is an option for the final capstone in the Organizational Dynamics program at the University of Pennsylvania. In this format, the student reaches out to four different faculty members they studied with in the program. The format should be an integrative theme. This thesis is my research in regards to four questions connected to a single theme of understanding how high performing teams are created, and the leaders that succeed in building them.

As an undergraduate student, I majored in Biology, but in attending Kenyon College, a liberal arts school, I had the opportunity to take courses across many disciplines. As I started in general Biology, courses in neuroscience, anthropology, and psychology piqued my curiosity in the connection between these fields. My greatest study interests were in Animal Behavior—why species behave in different ways based on their genetic makeup and their environment, and I concentrated many courses in this area. After college, I began a career as a collegiate coach and enrolled in a Master's program in Kinesiology concentrating in Sports and Exercise Psychology. Again, there was another connection directly between the “science” of training, and the environments that the training took place in. My love of sports psychology came from a curiosity in understanding how to connect and create environments where people were motivated to perform. In my most recent years of coaching, I have begun to seek a better understanding of myself, what I struggle with, and how I can improve as a leader.



Throughout my coursework in the Organizational Dynamics program, I have developed a deeper self-awareness and as I move through my career as a collegiate coach, and consistently work to understand where I can get better as a leader and motivator. Brené Brown's books and research on vulnerability have also greatly impacted me as a leader and coach in the last few years. Before reading much of her work, I thought that being a strong, confident leader was about being consistently tough and impenetrable. Over the past years through, that belief of mine has drastically changed. Great leaders show moments of vulnerability to those that they lead—something very difficult to do in today's world of social media perfection and American climate.

This topic made most sense to break down into four parts that really allowed me to explore and connect research and ideas into an argument. I hope to be able to use it as a reference for other coaches and leaders to challenge their beliefs about their own styles and how it connects to the culture and environment they are creating.

The first question was formulated with Steven Finn and it looked at our own biological history and wiring, and how our environment today potentially causes tension to our biology. The second question was developed with Amrita Subramanian, and looked at the impacts that environments have on our motivation and how this is connected with our innate needs as human beings. The third question was examined with Syd Havelly to look at how leaders connect with individuals and teams. The final question was examined and read by Rod Napier and influenced by previous coursework I had done with him regarding how to actually build teams and environments as a leader.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIOLOGICAL WIRING OF HUMAN SPECIES AND THE TENSION CREATED BY TODAY'S WORLD

Background to the Question: This question is read by Steven Finn. It was in my final paper for his course on the food-water-energy nexus that I began to think about how today in America we are “disconnected”—from our food, from self-awareness, and from an understanding of what we really need to be happy. We think to ourselves “if only I achieve more, obtain more materials, and more money, I will be happier.” But it seems, this belief we hold is causing us much unhappiness. When we think about leaving our future generations better off, we often focus on financial resources—but we forget about the importance of leaving behind a habitable environment. This question argues that we are wired to connect with other people, but in today's age it is often difficult because of what we are told we should value, and due to the fast pace at which things move.

Statement of the Question (Q1): As humans, how are we wired for connection, and what are the consequences to environmental disruption of these normal human tendencies?

Response:

As cooperative group animals, human beings are wired to connect. We are a social species, and our connection to others dictates much of our health and happiness. The Harvard Study on Adult Development followed 724 teenage men from 1938 and found

that those who had closer relationships with family, spouses, and friends, were healthier and happier eighty years later (Mineo, 2017). Empathy is a tool that allows us to connect and systems that lack empathy are harmful to our health, detrimental to the individual, to relationships, and to groups. Our ability to have empathy influences how we connect to others and is essential to maintaining strong relationships and teams.

In today's world—specifically in the United States—empathy is endangered. We are bombarded by distractions, making it increasingly difficult to generate authentic connection. Technology may trick us into believing that we are connected when in fact we are not connected in ways we need to be to satisfy our humanity. Technology does not always allow us to build relationships in ways that allow mutual vulnerability; we are not truly being seen and heard in a reciprocal fashion. Additionally, when we look down at our phones, we miss chances for face-to-face connection, our mirror neurons don't fire and we miss the opportunity to understand the emotions of others.

When we are stressed, our stress response systems activate the reptilian parts of our brains. The thinking part of the brain becomes hijacked and it becomes impossible for us to use the higher levels of the brain that allow for rational thinking. Our stressful, fast-paced lives can make it nearly impossible for us to meaningfully contemplate our world. It becomes difficult for us to connect with our deepest thoughts and values, and most importantly, we lose our ability to be creative, nurturing, and empathetic (Szalavitz and Perry, 2010). If we want to reconnect ourselves and with others, we have to take moments to slow down and pause and reflect deeply.

As technology creates fast pace changes to our daily lives, the stability to our relationships becomes even more important. In America today, 80% of people say that

they only feel close enough to confide in their family members and a quarter of all people don't trust anyone with their most intimate secrets (Szalavitz and Perry, 2010). In just 20 years, the number of people stating that they have no close friends or family numbers has tripled, and only a third of people believe that people in America can be trusted. Failure to examine and understand why connection and empathy is so difficult in today's world will have long term consequences to our health and happiness. Our livelihood as human beings depends on our ability to understand how to fully connect with others and how it impacts our health, our lives, our teams and our organizations.

### Human Evolutionary Beginnings and Selection for Social Genes

As human beings, we are social species. Our brains are built for us to connect to the values and beliefs of others. By evolutionary design, we are meant to feel the pain of being disconnected from our peers. Our survival as a species previously depended on our ability to collaborate and connect with those in our tribes (Lieberman, 2013). Our greatest ideas require teamwork and collaboration. Today's world may allow for and may even promote a more individualistic society, and as a society there are signs that we may be paying for this. Biologically, how does our evolved brain give way to the way we function? What happens to our well-being when our society values individual success and compromises our focus on building strong teams and communities?

The most primitive reptilian brain is driven by motivations (Lieberman, 2013). This part of the brain is responsible for our moment to moment monitoring and immediate correction (Szalavitz and Perry, 2010). The midbrain surrounds the reptilian brain, developed later in evolution, and is responsible for appetite, pleasure, motivation,

and attention. The stress response begins in this area, simultaneously sending signals to the reptilian brain and to areas of higher processing. The limbic system surrounds the midbrain and it is involved in relationships and regulating our emotions. This is the uniquely human part of our brain as it allows for language, abstract thought, and planning.

Encephalization, is an evolutionary process by which the complexity and size of the brain increases in its proportion to body mass. In our most recent ancestors, *Australopithecus afarensis*, changes in the brain structure started to occur—the neocortex began to expand (Sherwood et al., 2008). *Homo habilis*, the first genus of *Homo*, developed a language center called Broca's area in the pre-frontal cortex. Finally, with the emergence of our earliest *Homo sapien* ancestors, the brain size increased again, with more regions dedicated to advanced cognitive functions (Sherwood et al., 2008). One theory is that this allowed us as a species to have higher levels of thinking, allowing us to connect and cooperate with others (Lieberman, 2013). In dealing with problems together, we were more equipped to deal with the pressures of environment. The brain size of the human species allows us to live in communities that together avoid predators, and find food. In the 1990s, Evolutionary anthropologist Robert Dunbar hypothesized that our brains evolved to be able to effectively socialize and live in large groups. As a human species, we have the ability to maintain about 150 relationships at one time. Many optimal organizations operate around this size or smaller (Lieberman, 2013).

As our ancestors lived as hunter gatherers, it appears that they were able to survive based on their cooperation with non-kin and cultural transmission. Cooperative activities included sharing food, child care, cooperation of food acquisition, and

maintenance of living spaces (Hill, Walker, Bozicevic, Eder, Headland, Hewlett, Hurtado, Marlowe, Wiessner, and Wood, 2011). Early *Homo* traits involved a shared intentionality, abilities for teaching and learning, equitable distribution, and a willingness to punish norm violators. These were absent in other apes. In order for a group to survive, it was necessary to be “eusocial”—group members had to perform altruistic acts as part of a division of labor. Evolving *Homo sapiens* had to have the ability to feel empathy for others, and to measure the emotions and intentions of a friend versus foe. There was competition between groups resulting from the evolutionary truth that some of the species must live, and some must die (Wilson, 2012).

Some of the theories regarding the evolution of human species support the idea that cooperation and cultural adaptation were a result of natural selection. The claims are supported by the information that:

1. Rapid variation in the climates in the Middle and Upper Pleistocene eras required cumulative cultural efforts for humans to adapt to environments quickly (more quickly than genetic adaptation could handle).
2. Cultural adaptation increased the adaptation abilities between groups. Human reciprocity and reputation allowed for a range of behaviors to occur from spite to cooperation. Cultural adaptation allowed for cooperation within social groups, while competition between groups enhanced innovations.
3. Culturally evolved social environments favored genes that gave rise to more pro-social motives and moral systems. Reproductive success occurred within individuals who functioned well in pro-social environments—supporting traits

like empathy to connect and social shame to hold individuals accountable (Boyd and Richerson, 2009).

As a human species, we have the ability to exist in diverse social systems, yet without any real speciation. Cultural adaptation happens much more rapidly than genetic adaptations. Social transmission is what has allowed populations of humans to be able to adapt to rapidly varied and changing environments. Individual insights are expressed and sent to others, and this forms the basis for our innovations for survival. Some theories support the evidence that people have the ability and the tendencies to imitate those that are successful (Henrich and Gil-White, 2001). Today, our biggest successes as a species come from our abilities to collaborate, specifically with inventions such as the steam engine, the light bulb, and x-rays (Lieberman, 2013).

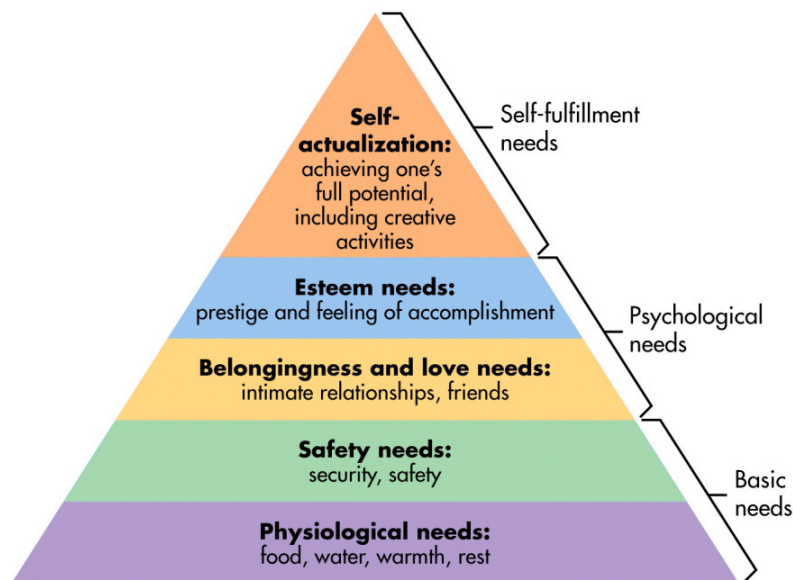
Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of the human brain, compared to other species, is that areas highly involved in cognition and higher level thinking are less accounted for by genetics. At birth, our brains are much less developed than our primate cousins. Researchers suggest that this is so that we have a long period in which we can be shaped by environment (Kwon, 2015). Epigenetics, then, combines the Greek prefix *Epi-* meaning on top of, or in addition to, and suggests that the rules of development are not just dictated by genetics, but also have the ability to be shaped by our environment (Wilson, 2012). Behaviors are learned, but our behaviors are what psychologists refer to as “prepared”. Evolutionary Biologist Edward Wilson and Physicist Charles Lumsden (Wilson, 2012), suggest that while there are innate instinctive human behaviors, the key for our species as a whole is that ability to learn and unlearn behaviors based on cultural adaptation. The theory they developed is that genetic evolution is what allowed for

culture to be produced, but it is through culture that we have the ability to learn and unlearn behaviors.

### **Our Adaptive Brains and the Need for Connection**

In 1943, Abraham Maslow developed a theory of human motivation in his journal describing the *Hierarchy of Needs*. His theory suggested that we needed to satisfy the most basic needs first, and only then could we move up the ladder. At the bottom of the ladder, are the most fundamental physiological needs—food, water, and sleep (Figure 1, Lieberman, 2013).

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Maslow's pyramid though, may miss out on an essential fact—human infants (and other mammalian infants), from the moment of birth require a caregiver that is committed to



the infant's needs. With this in mind, food, water, and shelter cannot be the most basic needs—instead, social needs become even more important.

Through a mother's connection to her infant, we can see how the roots of empathy are born. The process called attunement illustrates the beginning of the relationship between a mother and her baby. If a baby squeals, the mother gives the baby a gentle shake, and matches the pitch of her voice to the baby. As a baby shakes his rattle, the mother may make a shaking movement in response. These small reciprocal actions give the baby signals that they are emotionally connected to their mothers. Through his video analysis, psychiatrist Daniel Stern of Cornell University found that mothers send signals of attunement about once every minute during their interactions with their babies (Stern, 2001). Psychologist Harry Harlow's experiment in the 1950s supports the idea that mammalian infants search for psychological need satisfaction before physiological needs. In a study of newborn monkeys, Harlow substituted a real mother with two surrogate mothers. One surrogate was a wire-mesh frame in the shape of an adult monkey that provided milk for the newborn. The other was a wooden block covered with a rubber sponge and a terry cloth. One monkey was a source of nourishment while the other felt more like a real mother monkey. Infant monkeys spent 18 hours a day in contact with the cloth monkey and almost no time with the wire surrogate that provided food (Lieberman, 2013).

Psychologist John Bowlby conducted a series of experiments in the 1940s and 1950s which further illustrate that mammalian infants are wired to connect with their caregivers. He believed that babies are innately born with an attachment system. The system only stays intact if the primary caregiver and the baby stay connected. We have

an intense need for social connection throughout our entire lives, just as we need food and security. The first goal for an infant is to stay connected to their caregiver—before food, water, or security. In Bowlby's 44 thieves study, he found that maternal separation in the first 5 years of life caused permanent emotional damage. This damage was expressed through a lack of concern for others, a lack of guilt, and an inability to form meaningful and lasting relationships (Pearl and Bowlby, 2005). Browne (2014) highlights the cost of extreme disconnection crisis for children of migrant workers in China. Many travel hours across the country to factories where they live in dorms, tents, and bomb shelters. Children are not permitted to go as there are laws to prevent the movement of people across the country. In rural China, over 61 million children have not seen 1 or both of their parents in three months, and 70% show mental health problems. One teacher notes that he spends much of time comforting children who feel like they are not given enough love from their parents. This is extreme for American Culture, but it illustrates the result of a focus on supporting children financially with no regard to love and connection.

Through the studies of Harlow and Bowlby, it is clear that mammalian infants are born incapable of caring for themselves, and they all have a need to stay connected to a caregiver. Separation distress vocalizations are made when infants become separated from caregivers, which lead to caregivers to connect with their infants. Prolonged separation leads to increased production of cortisol, a stress hormone, and potential for long-term social and cognitive effects (Lieberman, 2013). Stern (2001) suggests that it is through the process of repeated attunements that infants start to develop the trust that other people can share their emotions. If the primary caregiver fails to connect and

empathize with the child, the child will stop expressing their feelings, and perhaps and stop feeling the emotions of needs, and ranges of emotions can be destroyed (Goleman, 1994).

On the flip side of this phenomenon, a baby can be impacted greatly by their caregiver's mood as well. A three-month-old baby has the ability to mirror their mothers' moods. Cells called mirror neurons allow for babies to understand other people. They have the ability to imitate facial gestures as well as cry in response to other infants (Szalavitz and Perry, 2010). If the mother is depressed the baby will express more anger and sadness compared to infants whose mothers are not depressed. There is hope for babies whose mothers experience difficult emotions during the initial stages of life. Relationships through life, with other friends and relatives, and therapy, have the ability to reshape a working model of relationships. While an imbalance has detrimental effects, there is some potential for repair (Goleman, 1994). Our mirror neurons fire when we do something, but also fire when we see someone else act in the same way as us. This reflexive response allows for empathy—for us to feel the emotions of others. If someone smiles, we feel that smile. If someone cries, we feel that cry.

Empathy researcher Martin Hoffman suggests that the roots of morality are found in empathy. It is through our ability to empathize with people in pain or danger, that moves us to action. If a child's needs have been met, they start to become aware that their own feelings and emotions are distinct from another's, and they become sensitive to cues of how others feel. In his book *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (2006) Goleman notes that our most routine encounters act as regulators in the brain which prime our emotions—both positive and negative. The more strongly that

we are connected with someone, the greater the force. Our connection to others, and the strength of that connection impacts how our own brain performs. Connection is in our DNA, we are wired for it. We have a need to be connected to others through our emotions, our values, and our experiences.

### **American Culture Makes Connection Difficult**

American culture tells us that the purpose of our lives lies in achievement. Reaching the top though, often does not leave us with the happiness we thought we might find. Instead, the top levels of achievement leave us in isolation. Many Americans think about their lives in terms of individualism—they believe that a fulfilling life is one of independence and self-reliance above everything else. These qualities mean success in a competitive American society (Bellah, 2008). American culture praises toughness and strength while qualities of softness and weakness are reserved for the “losers.”

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur was a French settler and in 1782 published *Letters from an American Farmer*. He is the first to speak of American character and culture:

From nothing to start into being; from a servant to the rank of master; from being the slave to some despotic prince, to become a free man, invested with lands, to which every municipal blessing is annexed! What a change indeed! It is in consequence of that change that he becomes an American (St. John de Crèvecoeur, 1959).

Here Crèvecoeur describes a new type of man defined by self-reliance and personal initiative. He goes on to describe the progress of man’s self-interest in the process of labor and states “We are all animated with the spirit of an industry which is unfettered and unrestrained, because each person works for himself.”

As the American economy became industrialized, our working lives became even more specialized and organized. With industrialization, different industries and geographic locations had to become more competitive than ever. Interdependence became even more difficult to perceive (Bellah, 2008). Life's major problems become individual matters, and the new American character became one for the self-sufficient entrepreneur who was perceived to be competitive, tough, and freed from external constraints through his wealth (Bellah, 2008). The reality is that many of the deep rooted beliefs of a Westernized American culture go against our deepest needs as humans—our interdependence and connection to others. Real fulfillment lies in our ability to reconnect with our social nature.

### **Our Deepest Fears**

Today's American culture is one that teaches us that we should be strong, that we should not reveal any weakness, and acknowledgement of that weakness is unacceptable. This makes our world disconnected. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook describes cultural pressures to mask our deepest emotions after her husband unexpectedly dropped dead. American culture demands that the answer to "How are you?" is always "Awesome." We are told to mask our true feelings. Admitting that things aren't great and that we are having a rough time is inappropriate. Yet, evidence supports the idea that opening up about traumatic events is good for our mental and physical health (Sandberg and Grant, 2017).

We are just beginning to see the emergence of awareness around the implications of a lack of vulnerability in today's world. Lewis Howes, a former professional football

player, author, and entrepreneur writes in his book *The Mask of Masculinity* that in interviewing some of today's most successful entrepreneurs, they state that their biggest mistakes and regrets were selfishness, ego, and aggression—which came from their inability to be vulnerable (Howes, 2017). It is only from a place of vulnerability that we are able to act with honesty, compassion, and heal our wounds.

In her TED Talk *The Power of Vulnerability*, Brené Brown, a researcher on human connection and vulnerability, attempts to understand our ability to connect with other individuals. She argues that it is through our connection to others that gives our lives purpose and meaning—it is why we are here. Brown discusses that shame is what we feel when we do not want others to see things about ourselves that may give clues that we are not worthy of connection. Shame is what we feel when we think “I’m not good enough”. This is why one of the greatest human fears is public speaking. In a survey of over 2500 people, 41% people noted that they feared public speaking, while only 19% feared death (Lieberman, 2013). It’s the idea of standing in front of many people we don’t know, and letting them “see” us. We have deep-rooted fears of others finding out that we are foolish or incompetent.

Through her research, Brown finds that those who feel a strong sense of love and belonging believe that they are worthy of love and belonging. They live in a wholehearted way, and have the courage to be imperfect. It is only through this love and belonging that they are able to find real, authentic connection with others. It is only when we are able to let go of who we should be, are be able to show up as who we are. This idea is fundamental to human connection. Brown’s research supports Howe’s theories on vulnerability—vulnerability is the birthplace for joy, creativity, belonging, and love.

Why is vulnerability so hard? It is at the core of our struggle for worthiness, the shame we feel, and our deepest fears that we are not good enough. We live in a culture that numbs these feelings—we praise the strong, successful individual that knows no weakness. But the truth is that we cannot selectively numb these emotions. If we do not pay attention to the tough human emotions, we also become unable to experience real joy, happiness, and gratitude. Because we do not want to sit with the discomfort of the world today, or have hard conversations, we numb our vulnerability—our polarized political environment is evidence of this, and we are the most in debt, obese, addicted, medicated adult cohort in American history (Brown, 2010).

Vulnerability is defined by uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. It is not about just sharing our deepest fears, emotions, values, and experiences with those who do not deserve to hear them. Instead, it is about building trust and bonding with those that have earned the right to hear our stories. In our society we are surrounded by messages that we are never good enough. Ordinary life, we are told, is a meaningless life. Our fears of not being good enough make it hard for us to accept that we are worthy of being loved. Instead we turn our focus to doing more, gaining more, and building up our own individual personas. This is only exacerbated by social media as individuals are able to feel their own inadequacies at an even deeper level when they compare themselves to the perfect facades posted by their peers. Narcissistic personality disorder diagnosis in the United States more than doubled in the last ten years (Brown, 2012). Brown argues that deep shame and feeling “I am not enough” is the cause of this.

As adults, we walk around searching for meaning, and think we will find it when we reach individual success, climb the next rung on the ladder, and sit at the top of the

ladder. It starts in how we raise our children—if we pretend that they should be perfect, and accept them only when they reach our ideals of perfection, we are not allowing them to feel love and belonging. But the job of a parent should be to teach a child that they are imperfect, but regardless are still worthy of love, connection, and belonging. As humans, we are wired for this, and it is only through our connections that we become resilient.

Jonathan Fader, a leading performance coach who has worked as a Sports Psychologist for the NY Mets and the NY Giants, talks about how the norm in our society makes it tough to be vulnerable:

Maybe your heart tells you that you should really focus on your relationships, and your heart tells you that you should stand up for certain values you have. But then you're kind of fighting against the predominant norm in our society. In the same way that someone who is trying to eat right is fighting homeostasis, or fighting all the delicious food that's out there. It's the same thing. You're fighting this chocolate cake that's everywhere. It's on every table, with the words "man up" spelled out in delicious tempting sugary icing (Howes, 2013, p. 165).

An individual named Brian Palmer, a successful businessman, comments on the lessons he learned from his failed first marriage (Bellah, 2001). He would stay up in the office to work until midnight, then go to bed and be back in the office at 6am to continue working. The process would continue day in and day out at the cost of being with his family. Brian's shift in thinking came from his revelations after his marriage ended. He started asking why he lived in this way and comments that it may have been his fear of failure, his success-at-all-cost orientation. His reexamination of this life found that his true sources of joy and satisfaction come from the ability to receive and give affection freely. He notes that he has to be able to share his experiences, goals, feelings, and to work with a partner to solve his problems. In his new marriage, he has found joy in a life outside a material focus. Only through Brian's shift from a single-minded devotion to his



career to asking himself what real happiness was allowed him to find joy and a deep sense of life fulfillment. His priorities were re-established.

Howe (2013) writes on men dealing with the need to be stoic and invulnerable:

Sometimes it's not just the women in your life or your family whom you lock out when you hide behind this mask of strength and unflappability. Sometimes it is the entire world you lock out, and what you are keeping from them is your true, authentic self. The real you. Taking off that mask to show vulnerability is one thing, but when you do it to show the world who you really are, that is something else entirely, that is true strength (p. 26).

What it means to be successful in today's society—to be tough and solitary—is just leading us down a lonely lost road. Deep down, we are missing a sense of fulfillment and finding the road we are wired to go down. When we numb our feelings and emotions, it is hard to connect to our purpose. What's more, if we cannot understand our own emotions, values, and needs, how can we begin to understand these in another individual? We become disconnected from others but also disconnected from ourselves. When we are so caught up in what other people think of us and what other people think we should be, we lose touch with our authentic selves.

Brown (2012) notes that we all experience shame. We all have good and bad. But if we cannot come to terms with this, if we keep these emotions inside, we start to believe that there's something wrong with us. Without acknowledging our shame, we will lack the ability to be fully engaged and connected with other people. Until as a culture we learn how to receive with open hearts, we won't be able to give with an open heart; we will continue to lead lives that are plagued with disconnection, and harmful to our health.

George and Gergen (2015) in *Discover Your True North* discuss vulnerability as a key to being free. Only when you have nothing to hide can you truly feel comfortable in your own skin. We try to cover up our fears and deepest emotions and live in false personas. For the workplace this means we tend to hide how we really feel.

As will be discussed further in Q4, when we feel threatened and vulnerable, it oftentimes becomes easier to develop false protective layers—leading us away from authenticity and making it harder to connect with others. Both Q2 and Q3 will further illustrate how environment plays a role in an individual’s willingness to be vulnerable. When an individual does not feel safe, they are less likely to actually expose their true selves to others; making real, authentic connection a challenge.

### **Connection is essential**

In today’s American culture we are “connected” with others 24/7. The paradox is that this leads to disconnection. It is a challenge to take moments for introspection in order to understand ourselves better. This limits our ability to generate real, authentic connection with others. In order to fully understand ourselves, our purpose, and what fulfills us, we have to leave the space to understand our own vulnerabilities and fears. Otherwise, as humans we may fall prey to a “win at all costs” attitude where we attempt to cover up our truths. When we focus on the perfect story of success, we tear out the roots—literally lose the connection—to what it is that keeps us grounded: our character. As Lance Armstrong stated when he finally admitted to using performance-enhancing drugs, “This story was so perfect for so long. It’s this mythic, perfect story, and it wasn’t true” (George and Gergen, 2015).

Awareness of how our brains are evolved gives us an idea of what we need to function at our best. Changing our perspective on what will make us happy may help us to live more fulfilling lives as a society, and the change in one individual can cause a domino effect. Brown (2012) shares that vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity, and change. Without vulnerability, tough conversations don't happen. We have to open up with our fears and have empathy when listening to the fears of others. In a Harvard Business Review article of 2011, researchers found that a leader's ability to be vulnerable with their subordinates caused a snowball effect. In turn, team members saw their leader's behavior as courageous, and they followed suit with the rest of their team members. Vulnerability in one leader opens up the connection between individual relationships and within the entire team.

In her Book *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010), Brené Brown describes connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, hear and valued; when they give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship. It is from our relationships that we gain strength and resilience. Reaching out to others and asking for their support when we need it is a powerful act of resiliency. It is through this process that we learn that the things that make us feel the most alone are truly universally human experiences. We are all wired the same, and we all have a choice we can make. We can live our lives in the pursuit of success and temporary pleasure; a life of disconnection because we are afraid to be truly seen—or we can choose love and connection. In his Book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl, a holocaust survivor writes about surviving the holocaust and his transformation. It was love that saved him—noting that humans are built for “self-transcendence” or

relationships with someone other than the self (Lehrer, 2016). The best relationships save us, they allow us to be resilient in the toughest moments of our lives. Sheryl Sandberg talks about this in her book *Option B*, in order to find joy after the death of her husband, it required consistent interaction with people she loved and trusted. She writes that our greatest resiliency is in our people, and we find our humanity in our will and ability to love. There is a reason that we are wired for connection—as a species we are stronger and more resilient when we work together and support the lives of others. Our existence and happiness depends on the strength of our connections to others.

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## CHAPTER 3

### ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS TO MOTIVATION

Background to the Question: This question is read by Amrita Subramanian. It was in the course “The Art and Science of Understanding Paradox” that I took with her and Alan Barstow that I began to think about “The Golden Rule 2.0”—the idea that we should treat people how they want to be treated, not how we want to be treated. Treating people how they would like to be treated requires that we step into their shoes and see the world from their frame. In the following question, several motivational theories point to the idea that in order to stick with an activity for the long term, the environment must connect with specific human needs.

Statement of the Question (Q2): What are optimal environmental conditions to satisfy our innate human needs?

Response:

“You are only free when you realize you belong no place—you belong every place—no place at all. The price is high, the reward is great.” At first, Maya Angelou’s 1973 quote appears confounding. How can we belong every place and no place at the same time? The desire to belong is something that is rooted deep within all of us, but what does it truly mean to belong? In her book *Daring Greatly* (2015), Brené Brown defines belonging:

Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval, which are not hollow substitutes for belonging, but often barriers to it. Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance (p. 145).

In her research on belonging, Brown (2017) found that people wanted to be able to experience connection with people, but didn't want to give up their authenticity, freedom, or power. Their concern today was that in today's American society often it is fear that binds us together, not shared trust, respect, and love. The lack of tolerance to stand alone in your beliefs makes it difficult to decide between being loyal to the group versus being loyal to yourself. Real connection built on love and respect gives people the freedom to express their beliefs while still feeling deeply connected. Brown describes spirituality as the ability to be grounded in our love and compassion for one another in throughout the human experience we all share.

Through this lens, Maya Angelou's quote can be understood. When we are in environments that make us feel connected but also give us the freedom to stand alone in our beliefs, our human needs are met. These environments are only created through compassion, empathy, and love. While keeping Brown's research on belonging and empathy in mind, exploration of some motivational theories can really shed light on how we do our best work when our human needs are met. Often an individual's behavior is reliant on environmental cues. We have the ability to create stronger teams if we understand what environmental conditions are necessary for optimal performance. Furthermore, examination of the cultures of Enron and FedEx show what happens when a culture is built on fear versus when it is built on empathy and compassion. While we are



all unique individuals, we all share the same neural circuitry that wires us for connection, and makes us human.

### **Goal-Orientation Theories**

How do we empower people on our teams to get things accomplished?

Environmental factors are crucial in determining the overall motivation of the group, and are much more effective than focusing on changing the individual (Roberts and Treasure, 2012). It is up to the leaders of our teams and organizations to create an environment where people show up excited to do their best work. Achievement goal theory states that there are two types of goals—mastery approach goals and performance approach goals (Nicholls, 1984). **Mastery-oriented goals** focus on learning and mastering a task. The goals are centered around growth, new skill development, and trying to gain new understanding and insight. **Performance-oriented goals** are much more based on gaining status or power, and often are motivated by external reinforcement.

Nicholls' work attempted to understand the connection between success and the individual's interaction with their social context. Mastery-goal orientation was found to be connected to an individual's concern for their society and the well-being of the community. Performance orientation involves prioritizing one's own interest relative to others.

Duda and Hall (2001) have found throughout multiple studies an association between mastery orientation goals and persistence in a sport setting, where as a performance orientation goals did not show the same over the long term. In a study of swimmers, mastery approach goals at the beginning of the season had a positive effect on

their motivation at the end of the season (Conroy, Kaye, and Coatsworth, 2006).

Performance orientation can have positive outcomes like job promotions and increased performance, yet it can be detrimental, especially over the long term. Focus on performance goals can also cause more anxiety and worry, and result in less enjoyment of the task. Some research even suggests that if one began initially in a mastery oriented environment, that orientation remained even if they returned to a performance environment (Keefe, Ben-Eliyahu, and Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2013)

Overall, the takeaway to this research is that the environment matters in setting an individual's motivation. For consistent, long term commitment and performance, leaders and managers should invest in creating an environment where mastery-goal orientation is supported. Empathy can be used in order to create this environment. In cultures of cooperation, social interaction, and help seeking, individuals are much more likely to adopt mastery-goal orientations (Butler and Ruzani, 1993).

### **Self-Determination Theory**

In giving a reward solely to an individual for completing a task, feelings of autonomy are diminished. Threats, deadlines, imposed goals, evaluations, and competition have been found to decrease intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1972). One is said to be intrinsically motivated when they participate in an activity because it is enjoyable and satisfying. Those that are intrinsically motivated are curious, seek novel stimuli, and work to master challenges. Those that are extrinsically motivated on the other hand, engage in an activity because it leads to another specific outcome (Deci and Ryan, 2008). In seeing the parallels of intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation to a mastery-oriented

environment vs. a performance-oriented environment, it becomes easier to understand why long-term motivation is linked to an environment that focuses on process over outcome.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation that investigates our natural or intrinsic tendencies and was developed by researchers Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. Their theory has direct applications to education, healthcare, psychotherapy, organizations, sports, exercise, and health and well-being. Coaches, managers, and leaders can have a profound impact on the quality of the motivation of those that they manage. While many are motivated by extrinsic factors such as rewards, grades, and evaluations, intrinsic motivation can sustain passion, creativity, and effort over the long term.

SDT makes the assumption that it is human nature to be self-motivated and curious, and that success is personally satisfying and rewarding. It also recognizes that people have the ability to be mechanized and alienated. SDT explores the relationship between the environment and how it impacts performance. The theory states that intrinsic motivation comes from the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs in an individual's environment. These needs are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Contexts that facilitate the satisfaction of these three human needs will help optimally motivate people, and positively impact their psychology, behavior, and development (Deci and Ryan, 2008).

Autonomy is the need to have decision-making capabilities as the origin of behavior. It should not be confused with independence, but rather, the ability to choose. Competence is the ability to master tasks efficiently and effectively based on an

individual's beliefs about themselves in a particular environment. Finally, relatedness is the ability to have a meaningful connection to others and feel a sense of belonging. Environments that have these three needs as their center point show high levels of intrinsic motivation (Schüler & Brandstätter, 2013). Individuals that are on teams with leaders that create this type of environment are more self-motivated and will be persistent throughout the long term.

Creating these conditions require that the leader is able to step into the shoes of those that they lead. In order to see things from another perspective, one must use empathy. In each case, the leader has to develop relationships and collaborate with those that they lead—as will be seen in future chapters. Understanding this theory is crucial in understanding why empathic leaders have the ability to create conditions for success.

While both competence and autonomy are tied to empathy, relatedness is necessary in order for high-quality relationships to be possible. When a leader is able to understand an individual's need for belonging and connection to the group, the relationship becomes stronger. In the sports world, it has been noted that relatedness is the first of needs to be pushed aside because it is the hardest need to satisfy if a coach is pressed for time (Iachini, 2013). In today's fast paced, digital world, it is easy to understand how relatedness can slip through the cracks. Connection is essential for high performance, and relatedness is the desire to be connected to a purpose greater than the self.

Internalization is the process by which human beings transform the values and behaviors absorbed from the environment into tools to regulate themselves. It is how human beings learn the norms and behaviors that are necessary to co-exist in the

environment (Gagné and Deci, 2014). In environments of high pressure and control, individuals begin to associate the activity with their own worth. Extrinsic motivators, or motivators that are used to get an outcome, become associated with one's sense of self. Autonomy-supportive contexts satisfy the needs of Self-Determination Theory, and are environments where leaders use perspective taking, provide meaningful rationales, and give choice—all requiring the use of empathy. These environments result in the internalization of the activity and an increase in intrinsic motivation.

Individuals have the ability to behave with volition and choice. If the environment supports conditions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, the activity begins to become associated with personal value to the individual, and is integrated into their core “self”. This is where the name “self”-determination theory originates from. The research supports the idea that leaders who have empathy and the ability to create this type of environment will outperform those that are disconnected and controlling. Teachers who create conditions supporting needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness have students who are more confident and enjoy learning. Doctors who support this environment have patients that exercise regularly and take their medications, coaches have athletes that persist longer, and teams that work more effectively together. Bosses have subordinates who perform better, and are better adjusted in the workplace. Finally, parents who support these conditions have children with better mental health, better grades, and cooperation with others (Deci, 2013).

A study at The University of Rochester asked students about their life goals following graduation, then followed up with them between 1 to 2 years into their careers. Initially, some had extrinsic aspirations and focused on becoming wealthy or achieving

fame, while others had more intrinsic, purpose goals. The students who had purpose goals had higher satisfaction their jobs, and were more well off. They had lower levels of anxiety and depression. Graduates with profit goals had increases in anxiety and depression, even when they were maintaining their goals (Pink, 2009). Satisfaction then, seems to depending not only on having goals, but on having the right type of goals. As researcher Richard Ryan states: “One of the reasons for anxiety and depression in the high-achievers is that they’re not having good relationships. They’re busy making money and attending to themselves and that means that there’s less room in their lives for love and attention and caring and empathy and the things that truly count” (Pink, 2009). The impact of having a company that values extrinsic goals over intrinsic goals may be one of high stress, anxiety and a lack of care for relationships and empathy.

It is not to say that a company’s profit does not matter, because it does. Profit motives are important, but they can’t be the only thing. A healthy society and organization has to begin with a purpose, then consider profit as a by-product of striving towards this purpose. The “if-then” reward system has the potential to destroy creative, conceptual abilities that are important to social progress. As human beings, we are not wired to be passive or compliant. We are wired to be engaged and connected. In order to affirm our own humanity, we have to find what matters most and commit to a cause that is greater than ourselves.

### **Enron**

As discussed, environments that support intrinsic motivation and connect to a purpose result in consistency and reliability over the long term. Extrinsic motivators can

be important too, but a focus on those motivators can cause anxiety, and stress—negatively impacting performance and well-being. Additionally, when motivation is controlled by extrinsic motivators, there is a tendency to take the shortest path to the desired outcome (Deci, 2013). Examination of Enron’s downfall shows exactly what happens when a company lacks empathy, is not connected to a purpose, and whose leaders commit to an environment driven by reward.

From the outside looking in, it appeared that Enron as a company was a great success. A closer look, however, reveals how an organizational culture supported the bottom line (extrinsic motivation) over ethics. The company began as a merging of two Houston pipeline companies in 1985. As they faced financial difficulty early on, deregulation of electrical power markets allowed them to turn things around (Sims and Brinkmann, 2003). The shift allowed the company to change from operating within the lines, to being able to innovate and test limits. As the contracts became increasingly diverse and complex, the company’s culture shifted.

CEO Jeff Skilling cultivated a culture that would push limits. His motto was “Do it right, do it now, and do it better.” This statement in itself is contradictory in itself—doing things right and doing things now have an inherent tension. Employees were encouraged to be aggressive, and said of the culture “...you were expected to perform to a standard that was continually being raised...”, “the only thing that mattered was adding value” (Bartlett and Glinska, 2001).

Short term, this culture worked. Enron was a huge success. The company received much positive reinforcement from the business press and financial analysts, and this gave them confirmation that the culture was working. This is called confirmation

bias—the company had confirmation of its culture because of the company’s success, yet perhaps overlooked and ignored other information that may have casted doubt on the culture (Nickerson, 1998). Confirmation bias is most likely to happen in environments of anxiety and numbs the ability for employees to see the harsh realities of the company culture.

Negative earnings for Enron would have been a red flag to investors, in order to avoid any sign of failure, the executives at the top maintained the culture. Executives likely felt that they were doing the right thing for the future of the company. They acted in line with company norms. Unfortunately, while there were returns in the short term, keeping up the growth became harder and harder. Employees had to stretch further until they gave up their ethics (intrinsic motivators) in the pursuit of success (extrinsic) (Sims and Brinkman, 2003).

Eventually, Enron began stretching their earnings. They recorded predicted profits of revenues early and hid their debt from analysts by creating “special purpose vehicles” or SPVs which were pseudo-partnerships. Through this, the company was able to hide over 1 billion dollars of debt, while also manipulating power and energy markets. When the extent of their debt came to light, lenders demanded their payments, and the company went bankrupt.

Enron’s culture starts and ends with its leaders, Jeff Skilling and Kenneth Lay. After setting the tone for the company’s culture, as indicated by Skilling’s motto, Skilling and Lay bailed when the company needed them most. In August 2011, Skilling resigned as President and CEO of Enron and sold shares of his stock for 66 million dollars. Two months later, when the company stated their true earnings, stock dropped and shares were



frozen in order to stabilize the company. Enron employees, who were encouraged to invest heavily in the company, were unable to pull out their investments. Lack of compassionate, empathic leadership, and a focus on extrinsic goals led to the downfall of Enron.

The focus of a leader often become the focus of the greater organization. When leaders focus on the financial success of an organization above all else, employees in the organization believe too that this is what they should value (Sims and Brinkman, 2003). Just like we connect and mimic emotions with social mimicry, our values and beliefs can be transmitted to our subordinates. Skilling had said “All that matters is money. You buy loyalty with money”. Executives, influenced by Skilling, also became focused on profits, power, and influence. These messages were reinforced day in and day out to employees, until employees began to emulate these values.

Michael Josephson, President of Josephson Institute of Ethics described what happened:

“People may produce spectacular results for a while, but it is inevitable that techniques depending so heavily on fear as a motivator generate survival strategies that include cheating, distortion, and an internal competitive ethos characterized by a look-out-for-number-one attitude...just as the destiny of individuals is determined by personal character, the destiny of an organization is determined by the character of its leadership. And when individuals are derailed because of a lack of character, the organization will be harmed” (Sims and Brinkman, 2013).

### **FedEx**

Unlike Enron, FedEx focuses first on its people, and on its bottom line second. FedEx contains the world’s largest cargo airlines with over 290,000 employees that move over seven million packages a day. It has been on the Forbes Top 20 list for over a

decade (Freedman and Daniel, 2014). The company has a reputation for their employee relations, strategy, and motivation. They seek support their employees by giving them the tools to develop their careers. According to the company website ([www.FedEx.com](http://www.FedEx.com)) they believe that success depends on their people, and their commitment to relationships.

In 2014, a company called six seconds published a study of multi-year research done at FedEx on emotional intelligence called “Emotional Intelligence for People-First leadership” (Freedman and Daniel, 2014). The study states that:

The company sees that the people side of leadership has grown more complex, and looking forward to the future is committed to developing leadership capabilities to manage the changing workforce. The goal is leaders who are better at influence, make decisions that are both quick and accurate, and are able to build a culture where people feel the dedication and drive for exceptional performance in a way that's sustainable and creates real value for all stakeholders.

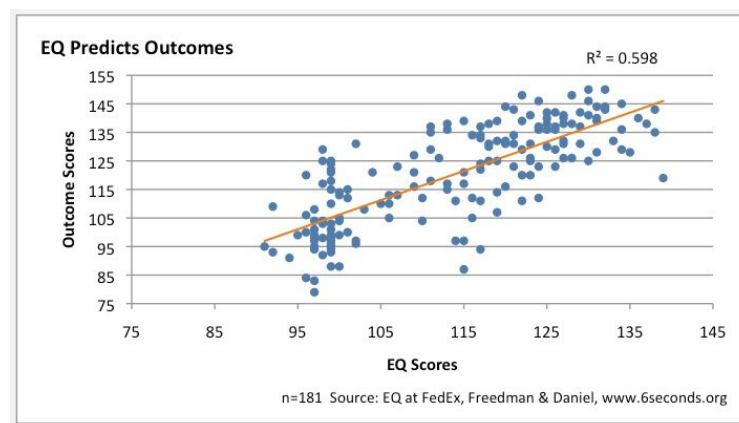
The Six Seconds model was created as a three-step process that had learnable, measurable competencies. The first is know yourself: increase your own self-awareness of emotions and reactions. The second is choose yourself: shift from unconscious reaction to intentional response. The third is give yourself: align your moment-to-moment decisions with a sense of purpose. Competencies of the third step involve increasing empathy. The first two steps of the process are important in getting to the empathy piece. In order to be empathic towards those that one must first understand and be aware of their own emotions.

FedEx believes that in the fast pace, task-focused environment it becomes very easy for managers to lose sight of their relationships that sustain performance over the long term. They believe that people-leadership is essential to create emotional connections between people. The emotional intelligence leadership program allows

manages to focus on how to first manage themselves, and then effectively work with others.

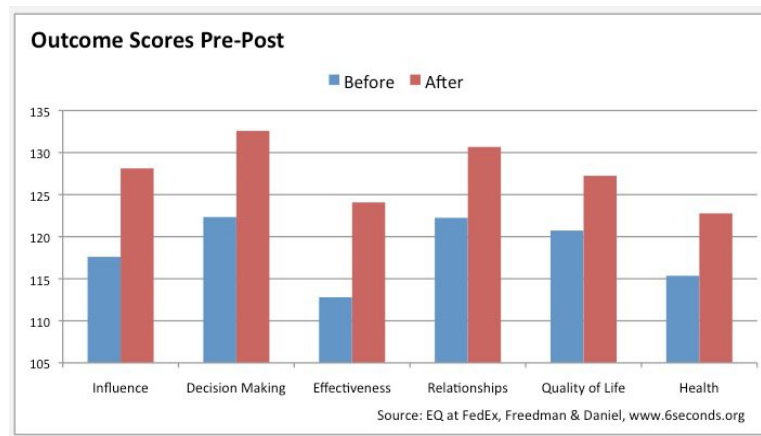
Emotional Intelligence was measured by looking at measures of emotional literacy, recognizing patterns, apply consequential thinking, navigating emotions, engaging intrinsic motivation, exercising optimism, increasing empathy, and pursuing noble goals. It was found that over 59% of the variation in performance outcome was associated with EQ as shown below.

Figure 2. Emotional Intelligence and Performance (Outcome) Scores



Outcome scores for performance increased dramatically after a six-month training period. 72% of the participants had increases in decision making, 60% had increases in Quality of life, and 58% had increases in influence.

Figure 3. Outcome Scores Before and After Emotional Intelligence Training



Qualitative data showed that there was a 20% increase in relationships, with increased trust in teams. One manager finally started understanding that people create value in an organization and he has to change the way he treats people. The training also permeated into other areas of life—helping people have better relationships with family and improve their well-being.

FedEx CEO Fred Smith, has led the company for over 46 years, and in May 2017 the company had a record of \$60 billion in sales (Kuehner-Hebert, 2017). Smith sets the precedent that the company has to have “reputational intelligence”. This means that they are selling trust. As an example he says that there have been years where they could have taken 2% away from the quality of service where people may not have noticed and put it towards the bottom line. But he said that they have never made that decision because of the culture they have tried to create (Dumaine, 2012). They call it the Purple Promise—putting their customer’s at the center of everything they do and vowing “I will make every FedEx experience outstanding.” At the core of its culture, FedEx’s shared values

are People, Service, Innovation, Integrity, Responsibility, and Loyalty  
([www.purplepromise.van.fedex.com/](http://www.purplepromise.van.fedex.com/)).

### **Comparing Enron and FedEx**

Enron and FedEx have very different approaches and it impacts how employees were motivated and how they performed. Enron focused on outcome first (extrinsic motivator) with little care for their people. Empathy was not at the company's core. While there was a lot of initial success, a lack of loyalty and commitment to people ultimately led to the company's huge downfall. FedEx focuses on the development of its people and connection to a purpose first. As a byproduct, the company has been able to maintain success for over 40 years. The company's core culture can be traced back to its leadership; Enron's leaders were focused on their own gain of power and money, while Smith puts his focus on others, his customers and the people in his company. Enron had a performance-oriented goal environment which was based on status and power, and motivated by external reinforcement. FedEx, in contrast is based on a mastery-oriented goal environment, motivated out of a concern for employees to grow and develop new skills, and a focus on the well-being of the community. Leaders within the company have to exercise empathy in order to make sure subordinates feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in order to foster intrinsic motivation and long term commitment. Additionally, empathy is essential in the company's purple promise—the ability to have employees consistently stick to a purpose of serving the customer first, it has allowed for success over the long term.

### **Balancing Empathy, Organizational Frames, and Performance**

As illustrated by Self-Determination Theory, focusing on employees and understanding what they need is essential to their long term motivation, and ultimately, their performance in an organization. In order for a leader to increase an individual's intrinsic motivation they have to build a person's autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This requires that they are able to step into the shoes of another, to see their perspective, and to understand what the values and purpose of the people they manage are.

How should empathy be quantified within an organization? Harvard Business Review (HBR) has started to attempt to break it down. They looked at a company's ethics, leadership, culture, brand perception, social media, CEO ratings, diversity, accounting infractions and scandals, and are even starting to add sustainability ratings (Parmar, 2016). The companies that were ranked were global companies, emphasizing the U.K. and the U.S. The top 10 companies on the Global Empathy Index in 2015 had increased their earnings by 50%, more than twice as much as the bottom 10%.

As seen with Enron, lack of empathy can lead to disastrous decisions, lack of care for the individual, and lack of company resiliency. Empathy is at the heart of today's successful companies. It is an essential skill for leadership, and it is used in any design thinking that helps to understand external customer's needs. At the same time, there are limits to empathy, and it has to be balanced. Jobs that require constant empathy can lead to burnout. As noted in the HBR article "The Limits of Empathy" (Waytz, 2016), hospice nurses whose jobs require excessive empathy led to the intention to leave their jobs, and increased error in administering medication. It's also a constant challenge for

manager's to step out of their own perspective in order to understand their employee's experiences. It is exhausting to constantly put someone else's needs above your own.

Also interesting is that the more a profession requires taking the time to listen to the perspectives of coworkers, the less able a person is to give empathy towards connecting with their families. When our jobs require too much empathy, our home life can suffer. This can also happen with groups. When we use all our empathy reserves on those in our immediate circle, it can be more difficult to create connections with those who are outside (Waytz, 2016).

Behavioral science studies show that empathy can also lead people to cheat in order to benefit the person that they care about. Empathy towards another employee makes it easier to identify with wrongdoers and can inhibit whistle blowing. In a study at Boston College, individuals were initially asked to write essays on either loyalty or fairness (Waytz, 2016). They were then put in a position to expose inferior work performance of someone else. Those that wrote about loyalty were less likely to expose the inferior performance. A sense of group belonging leads to more tolerance of poor behavior—there is more diffusion of responsibility to the collective and less assignment to the individual. While empathy is a big piece of a company's success, it can have costs.

### **Organizational Frames and Change Management**

Organizations have different frames that can be used to understand the behavior of the collective versus the individual. In *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performance* (Hackman, 2002) a story of a flight's final approach is told from two frames:

**Frame One:**

*There was a flock of geese having a tea party right over the end of 22 Left, so the tower switched them to 31 just when Charlie (the copilot) was getting lined up on the ILS (instrument landing system). Well, the weather was a mess, they were vectoring old Charlie all over the place, and he got confused and got behind. Three times Phil (the captain) had to remind him about something, and eventually Phil got so frustrated that he took the airplane and landed the damn thing himself.*

**Frame Two:**

*As they got ATIS (recorded airport information) they just assumed it would be a routine ILS approach to 22 Left and they started chewing the fat. They didn't hear the talk on the radio about the geese over the runway, so when the tower switched runways at the last minute it was scramble time. Charlie was flying and he had his hands full because of weather and the new vectors he was getting. Phil started changing the radios to set up for the new approach, but he didn't tell Charlie what he was doing, and Charlie couldn't quite figure out what was going on. Nobody got things organized, everybody got confused, and eventually Phil got so frustrated that he took the airplane and landed the damn thing himself.*

In the first frame, the blame is placed on the individual (Charlie). The tendency of an



organization that uses this frame is to give credit or blame to an individual. Human tendency is to assign credit or blame for a collective performance to a single individual. In order for team performance to improve under this frame, each individual must understand what they should do in order to promote better functioning. Hackman (2002) argues that the opposite frame—the way to get an individual to behave well in a group is to support the group itself—is more effective. Healthy groups have healthy behaviors, while unhealthy one invites poor individual behavior. From this frame we have to understand and act on a group level of analysis. This frame takes practice, it is not something that we can do easily. From this perspective, it also becomes easier to understand how empathy can spread poor individual behaviors within a group.

Hackman (2002) found no evidence to support the idea that a team can improve and perform at high levels by singling out one individual for praise or for criticism. From this perspective, leaders that support themselves as the end all be all of a company's success are likely to eventually fail when leading a team. Grant (2013) points out signs that Enron's former CEO Ken Lay had a taker mentality. Takers are likely to use singular pronouns such as I, me, mine and myself. They see themselves as superior in an organization. In the Enron's company report, there were two giant full-page images of Ken Lay and current COO Jeff Skilling. Takers post information that is self-promoting, self-absorbed, and self-important. Takers are like black holes, they suck life and energy from other people, while givers give life to the organization. Givers support the second frame—they have the ability to build opportunities for collaboration and for all colleagues to contribute, and they do not take credit for their ideas or achievements. Instead, they show respect for the group as a whole.

Evidence suggests that viewing groups and potential for improvement from the second frame is the only way to create high performing teams (Hackman, 2002). Leaders that build organizational culture where employees see their organization through frame two, would likely fit Grant's (2013) definition of a giver. Understanding that conditions have to be created environmentally will give leaders a better change at creating change in their teams and organizations.

Grant (2013) also suggests that empathy is a force behind a giver's behavior, but that it also can be a source of vulnerability. Social psychologist Adam Galinsky shows that if we focus on another's feelings and emotions we can risk giving too much away, another fact that points to the limits of empathy. Yet, if we focus on another's perspective, without just focusing on our perception of what they may feel, then we are better able to balance our needs with another person's. If we solely focus on empathy, without taking a pause to consider perspectives—our own and other's—we will likely act on emotions. The key is to use empathy to take another's perspective, pause, then to consider how to best proceed. It is also better to actually ask people how they may be feeling then to react on emotion alone. When participants in a study completed physical tasks while blindfolded, they assumed that a blind person was much less capable than those that had not just taken part in the blindfolded tasks. Instead of understanding another's perspective as a blind person, they assign their own emotional experience to another's reality. Gathering real information about how people feel is a smarter way to empathize than to just act on emotion alone (Waytz, 2016).

As human beings, we have evolved to respond to the feelings of being pushed to the outside. When we feel isolated and disconnected from the group, we focus on

protecting ourselves. We desire to connect, but our brains override this desire with self-protection. This means we act with less empathy. To override our fears, we have to find ways to be vulnerable and loving. As Brown (2017) suggests in her research, fear cannot be what unites us. We have to find ways to build connection around our differences. Brown believes that if we reach a threshold of people that operation through empathy and compassion, it has the ability to change much of our world and make for a better human experience. This shift has to start with our leaders.

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## CHAPTER 4

### LEADERS AND CONNECTION

Background to the Question: This chapter was read by Syd Havelly. In the course “Social Media and the Organization” Syd presented many times on human connection and its relation to social media, and I believed he would be helpful in my exploration of leadership and connection. This question’s response makes the argument that connection requires vulnerability and empathy from a leader. This connection, contributes to resilient teams that continue to work towards goals.

Statement of the Question (Q3): How do Leaders Create Connection Between Individuals and Teams and What are the Neuropsychological Benefits of Empathic Leadership?

Response:

#### **Our Evolved Brains, Self-Determination Theory, and Empathy**

The image of ultimate success is often imagined by an individual reaching the top of the mountain, standing valiantly in triumph, occupying a lonely perch at the top. Seemingly triumphant, one has to ask along the way, what did the individual give up to get to where they are, who did they abandon and what did they lose in their pursuit? While reaching the top alone seems an incredible and even an enviable feat, reaching the top with the support and help of others what brings us real, long-lasting happiness. Human beings are wired to complete great feats together, and many great leaders have

the ability to connect to others, understand and empathize with their challenges, and partner with them in overcoming those challenges. If leaders can better understand how we are wired and the benefits to connecting with those they lead and work with, the groups they lead will perform at higher levels.

The human brain is highly evolved, and the result of millions of years of evolution. But the earliest evolved portion is called our reptilian brain (Patnaik, 2009). This part of our brain takes in information through our senses of touch, sight, pain, temperature, and balance. It tells us when we are hungry and produces our most primitive emotion: fear. This is the basis for the fight or flight response. This part of the brain is driven by motivations (Lieberman, 2013). The more recently evolved part of our brain—the part that makes us human—is called the neocortex, and it allows our more complex ways of thinking and accounts for more than 80% of the brain (Patnaik, 2009). This part of the human brain allows for language, analysis, deduction, and abstraction. The limbic system is what connects the reptilian brain and the neocortex and allows us to interpret the emotions of others. It allows for us to care and connect with the needs of others and handles emotional information.

Our amygdala processes emotions—both ours and others, and the hippocampus commits these emotions to our long-term memory. The more emotionally charged material is, the more vivid the memory becomes. This is how we form long-term emotional connections with other people. Over time, our loyalties, values, and beliefs are shaped. The limbic system allows for close connections to form with friends and family, and as we move through our experiences, this system helps us evaluate new circumstances and situations. Our limbic brains are wired to care about the feelings of



other people and animals. It is what makes us a collaborative species, and also gives us the ability to pick up on environmental cues that are not explicitly stated. As discussed more in depth in Q1, early *Homo* traits involved a shared intentionality, abilities for teaching and learning, equitable distribution, and a willingness to punish norm violators, and were absent in other apes. In order for a group to survive, it was necessary to be “eusocial”—group members had to perform altruistic acts as part of a division of labor. Evolving *Homo sapiens* had to have the ability to feel empathy for others, and to measure the emotions and intentions of a friend versus foe. There was competition between groups resulting from the evolutionary truth that some of the species must live, and some must die (Wilson, 2012).

Empathy is the glue, the connective tissue that allows us to make sense of others feelings and allows us to “read” their emotions. To be able to step into the shoes of another and to understand what they need is crucial to developing a relationship. In moving from a frame of “me” to “we”, leaders possessing empathic qualities have the ability to better motivate those they lead. While we don’t have to necessarily agree with another’s perspective to show empathy, we have to at least be willing to step into their shoes. Duff (2017) talks about empathy as the ability to sense, perceive, and conceptualize another’s experience of the world. As discussed in Q2, according to Self-Determination Theory, if a leader can support an individual’s need for autonomy, build their competence, and help them connect to purpose—they can build long-lasting, motivation and capabilities in those that they lead.

Leaders that excel in creating a strong culture focus on fulfilling a collective purpose and connection to something meaningful. As supported by interviews from a

previous independent study of Organizational Dynamics and sport (2018) leaders suggested that consistent cultural messaging and reinforcement was critical to developing a successful team culture. Norms are what define culture within groups and organizations. They are the rules for behavior and tell individuals which behaviors will be accepted by other members of the group (Napier and Gershenfeld, 2004). Norms come from the ideas that group members hold; they are learned behaviors, and they can shift based on who is in the group. Roles within groups are defined by norms—which behaviors are expected for each individual, and if (and for whom) transgressions are accepted. We pay attention to norms because we are a social species. By evolutionary design, we are meant to feel the pain of being disconnected from our peers. Following these norms are how individuals attempt to fit into a group, and thus these norms define the culture.

In order to align the purpose of employees that they lead, the corporate leader should spend some time getting to know each individual on the team as best he or she can or at least set the example by spending meaningful time with direct reports. They should attempt to understand the purpose that drives each individual. For this to happen, ideas and feedback need to be solicited as a starting point. When leaders act with empathy, they imagine an action, think about who it affects, and then image how it would make them feel if we were on the receiving end. What's more is that for true empathic reactions, leaders have to further understand how an individual's reaction would be different based on their experiences and backgrounds, not based on their own. When leaders fail to step into the other's shoes, they are likely to misjudge their fellow employees and colleagues and by this disconnect invite or at the least fail to notice

behavior which may be unethical. In other words, the out-of-touch leader is also the leader who can be ethically challenged. Time spent knowing others leads to and facilitates empathic leadership.

There are three types of empathy, as defined by psychologist Paul Eckman (Goleman, 2008). The first is called **cognitive empathy**. In this type of empathy, the individual has the ability to know how the other person feels and what they are thinking. They have the ability to take the perspective of the other. **Emotional empathy** is the ability to feel what other people feel. In this type of empathy, the emotions are contagious. Mirror neurons fire when the emotional state of another is sensed, creating an echo inside an individual. The third type of empathy is **compassionate empathy**, which moves us to take action. This type of empathy is a skill that can be improved, especially as we gain knowledge that as human beings, we are all connected through our needs for connection.

Empathy is a key part of Goleman's model of emotional intelligence and in the past 5 years, 60% of senior leadership development programs have been around helping leaders overcome challenges related to a lack of empathy. Leaders, above all else, need to connect and build relationships with others; anticipate others' reactions, listen effectively, and understand others' views when making decisions (Duff, 2017). Consistent with examples of Enron vs. FedEx elaborated on in Q2, Duff (2017) states that low empathy may be correlated with a fixation on results.

This encourages strong task delivery, but has implications for a lack long-term effectiveness. When the leadership creates a culture of connection, work becomes meaningful. As explored previously in Q2, leaders who create conditions that support the

needs of Self-Determination Theory (Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness) use perspective taking, provide meaningful rationales, and give choice to those they lead (Deci, 2013). People choose to stay with empathetic organizations because they add meaning to their lives. Teachers who create conditions supporting needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness have students who are more confident and enjoy learning. Doctors who support this environment have patients that exercise regularly and take their medications, coaches have athletes that persist longer and try harder, and teams that work more effectively together. Bosses have subordinates who perform better, and are better adjusted in the workplace. Finally, parents who support these conditions provide their children with tools and foundations that foster better mental health, better grades, and closer cooperation with others (Deci, 2013).

As previously discussed, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation that was developed based on studying our natural human tendencies. Brown (2017) further supports the ideas that humans need to feel a sense of belonging and connection in order to bring their best selves to the world. “Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval (Brown, 2017).” If leaders can connect with subordinates, and make them feel as though they belong, they will allow individuals to feel safe enough to bring their authentic selves to the team. Coaches, managers, and leaders can increase the quality of the motivation of those that they lead by supporting autonomy, competence, and relatedness. First, to follow up on Q2, we will explore how specifically leaders create environments that satisfy these needs.

Iachini and Amarose (2010) interviewed high school coaches and found key things coaches do to promote autonomy in their programs. Some of these were providing a choice within specific rules and boundaries, explaining the reason for these tasks and boundaries, seeing others' perspective and feelings, and providing individuals with non-controlling feedback. The key takeaway in providing an autonomy-supportive relationship for individuals is to help them feel like they initiated their own behaviors by giving a choice of tasks.

Competence is the cognitive representation, or the self-perceived ability that a person has (Spinath & Steinmayer, 2012). It can be the way an individual interacts with their environment, eventually leading to the desired outcome (Goose & Winter, 2012). The need of competence can be satisfied in an individual by getting feedback and continuing to experience progress (Schüler & Brandstätter, 2013). Continuously giving opportunities to express one's capabilities in the environment can also contribute to satisfying the need of competence (Iachini, 2013). Interviewed leaders said that ways to satisfy competence are to provide contingent feedback and instruction when mistakes are made, and to encourage positive thinking by rewarding effort and improvement versus only performance outcomes (Staley & Moore, 2016).

This ties back into the final need: relatedness and the emotional umbrella of belonging in a specific environment. It is a feeling that leaders and team members respect and care for each other (Goose & Winter, 2012). When successful high school coaches were interviewed, they said that promoting positive interactions between the coach and player and between the other team members was most important in developing a sense of relatedness (Iachini, 2013). According to Lauer and Smith (2012)

championship environments develop over time, with lots of trust building. Culture has to be continuously created by enhancing the relationships between leader and team members, which will to satisfy the three psychological needs of Self-Determination Theory.

### **Psychological Safety, The Spurs, and Greg Popovich**

Leaders that act with empathy create conditions of psychological safety. Our unconscious brains are obsessed with signals of psychological safety. In order to know we are safe, we have to receive unconscious messages over and over again (Coyle, 2018). Daniel Stern, a psychiatrist at Cornell University describes this process of attunement (Goleman, 1994). Of all moments between a parent and child, the most basic lessons of emotions occur when a parent lets the child know that her emotional needs are met with empathy. These emotions are accepted and reciprocated. Specialized cells in our brains called mirror neurons sense and mimic the feelings and actions of another person (Achor, 2010).

Group performance depends on the communication of one idea from a leader—you are safe and connected (Coyle, 2018). Biologically, we are wired to connect. In our human history, our sense of belonging and connection to a group was essential in facing the dangers of our environment. Endorphins and dopamine are the “selfish” chemicals of our brain, they are released so that we will accomplish tasks (Levitt, 2017). Dopamine is a quick result of reaching a goal on the way to an even larger goal. Serotonin and oxytocin are considered the “selfless” chemicals of the brain. Serotonin is released when we are valued by others, while oxytocin promotes empathy and trust, allowing bonds to

deepen. The more we trust and earn trust, the more oxytocin flows, creating long term effects. It's even nick-named "the cuddle hormone" because it is released when people snuggle up or bond socially. Due to oxytocin and serotonin, we find comfort in groups. These two neurochemicals allow us to build trust, build teams, and do difficult things because of the connections we feel. Our confidence in ourselves comes from the idea that we can face dangers around us when we feel safe in a group. This is why being on the outside can be dangerous and detrimental—it can trigger fear and anxiety responses in the amygdala that counteract psychological safety and an us versus them response.

Mirror neurons are the reason by individual attitudes are contagious within a group. Emotions are also contagious. Our brains are continuously processing the emotions of people around us. The amygdala can identify another's emotions in 33 seconds, and then it reciprocates the feeling within us. Studies show that if three strangers are to meet in a room, the mood of the most emotionally expressive person is transmitted to the others in just two minutes. This means that we have the ability to infect people with our toxic states (Achor, 2010).

We also have the ability to be impacted by positive emotions. In a team environment where one person had a positive emotional contagion, the group had less conflict, more cooperation, and greater overall performance. Leaders have the ability to make a huge impact. If leaders exhibit positive behaviors, then employees are likely to reciprocate that mood and to exhibit helping behaviors towards the group (Achor, 2010).

In the world of the NBA, the San Antonio Spurs rank as the most successful team in American professional sports based on the metric of winning a higher percentage of games than the New England Patriots or the St. Louis Cardinals (Coyle, 2018). In search

of the best coach in the NBA, Neil Paine used an algorithm to look at player performance metrics in order to predict how many games a team should win (Coyle, 2018). Of every coach since 1979, one is a clear outlier. While most coaches win about the number of games predicted, Gregg Popovich, head coach of the San Antonio Spurs, is in a league of his own. The spurs won 117 more games than Paine's model predicted—double over what the next outlier achieved. The Spurs have won over 117 games than they shouldn't have, which is over double that the next coach has done.

The first thing that is clear about Popovich is that he has a curiosity for the world. In his early career as a head coach at Pomona-Pitzer, a liberal art college in California, he also served as an assistant professor in 1979 until 1989. He chaired the fraternity investigation committee, played a role in women's issues on campus, and also was a member of the women's commission that looked into issues of gender equality, discrimination against gays, and abuse in athletics. Popovich's love of understanding the world is the foundation that allows him to really connect with his players —much of this he does through things outside the basketball court (Leadership Case Studies, 2017).

Watching Popovich's teams play can be equated to listening to Mozart (Coyle, 2018). His players' consistently participate in unselfish behaviors, as many players have ball time throughout the roster—not just the best player on the team putting the collective above their own (Morris, 2014). To the outside world, Popovich is often described for his eruptions on the court, possessing a volcanic temper and a palpable arrogance off the court when he loses a big game. But, As Aristotle said, "Anyone can become angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time,



for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not easy.” A closer look, shows that Popovich may have some method behind his madness.

As Popovich walks into a practice, he connects with his players. He speaks their languages, exchanges words and jokes. The Spurs’ General Manager says of Popovich, “That’s the way Pop approaches every relationship. He fills their cups.” In order to connect, he moves in close. In her book *Daring Greatly* (2015), Brené Brown uses a jar of marbles to describe trust building. She writes, “Trust is a product of vulnerability that grows over time and requires attention, and full engagement. Trust isn’t a grand gesture—it’s a growing marble collection.” For each positive interaction with a team member, Popovich adds a marble to the trust jar. The stronger the level of trust, the more resilient a relationship becomes, and the more likely it is to weather external forces. Trust grows gradually over time. Empathy is at the root of creating this trust.

During warm-ups, Popovich talks to his players, asking about their lives, and reminds them of his love for them. The first thing Popovich does as a leader is to create conditions of psychological safety. Gathered in the video room after a loss to Oklahoma City, Popovich does not play videos of the previous night’s game. He puts on a video of a CNN documentary on the Voting Rights Act. After the film was over, he asks each player individual, personal questions. He asks his players “What did you think?” and “What would you have done?” What is Popovich’s message? There are things that are bigger than basketball to which we are all connected. In these moments, Popovich is fulfilling the third need of Self-Determination Theory—he is helping his players connect to each other, and connect to something greater than themselves. One of his players’ comments on exactly this environment that Popovich creates, “Pop uses these moments

to connect us. He loves that we come from so many different places. That could pull us apart, but he makes sure that everybody feels connected and engages to something bigger.”

Former Assistant Coach Sean Marks says of Popovich:

You’ll be sitting on the plane, and all of a sudden a magazine lands on your lap, and you look up and it’s Pop. He’s circled some article about your hometown and wants to know if it’s accurate, and where you like to eat, and what kind of wine you like to drink. And pretty soon he’s suggesting places where you ought to eat, and he’s making reservations for you and your wife or girlfriend. Then you go, and he wants to know all about it, what wine you had, what you ordered, and then there’s another place to go. That’s how it starts. And it never ends. (Coyle, 2018, p. 55).

These small, consistent positive interactions that Popovich creates between he and his players build trust and also stimulate the production of oxytocin. This neurochemical stays active in the brain for 30 minutes after an interaction and causes our self-other boundary to be reduced (Zak, 2018). In reducing this barrier, individuals are able to more effectively see another as an extension of self and see their perspective. This barrier reduction allows for higher levels of collaboration and cooperation between teams. When a leader creates conditions for empathy and psychological safety, teams become more connected.

When leaders put their people before the outcome, the group begins to build a sense of trust. When individuals in the group begins to look out for others, both serotonin and oxytocin create feelings of security, fulfillment, belonging, and trust. These feelings help to ease stress and we act the way we are wired to as human beings—together. This gives teams the ability come together to solve complex challenges. Furthermore, it can actually reduce the need for quick, immediate gratification (an extrinsic reward) and our search for dopamine (Sinek, 2017). This also supports Self-Determination Theory, as

satisfaction of the three psychological human needs results in a love for the activity itself (intrinsic motivation), and less focus on extrinsic rewards.

Psychological safety involves not only creating conditions of mutual respect and trust, but also one that allows for individuals to express their differences. Popovich is what Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) would describe as an ethical leader: “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making.” These types of leaders have clear standards and hold followers accountable for ethical conduct.

Brown et al. (2005) also supports the idea that ethical leaders promote beneficial employee benefits such as interpersonal helping. Relationships between ethical leaders and followers are characterized by a social exchange, as well as trust and reciprocity. This can be expected to create prosocial behaviors. An ethical leader pays close attention to how another is “being” not just what they are “doing”. In acting as an ethical leader, Popovich creates conditions of psychological safety, while still being demanding. One of his players’ states “Pop just wants the best out of you. He’s going to be on you hard, I mean really hard, so if you have the mental toughness to take that, you’re going to develop as a player (Coyle, 2018).”

In psychologically safe environments, team members work together while being able to handle critical feedback. Popovich encourages and invites players and staff to offer suggestions on how to improve the team. There is respect for everybody in the organization, and the group faces adversities together. Popovich has the rare ability to combine his sincerest care and empathy for others with his demanding nature. In this

way, Popovich keeps his empathy in check, and considers how he should react in order to help the Spurs organization be as successful as they can be.

In an interview with Forbes Top 50 Leader (2014) George Kennedy, he speaks to his thoughts on leadership and psychological safety. Kennedy was the Head Coach of Swimming at Johns Hopkins University for over 30 years. Kennedy describes his own leadership as one of empowerment—empowering staff, and athletes to be leaders and recognizing that it was not about him. In order to do this, first, Kennedy discussed the necessity of being comfortable in his own skin as a crucial starting point. Second, he says “the key to encouraging others to speak up is to try to create an environment where all crucial conversations begin with a sense that it is safe.” He also spoke that only 1 out of 8 in a group will confront a leader or boss, and in most cases this is because of the assumption that the boss won’t care, and they will put them down. In other words—it is not safe to share. Conditions of safety are necessary to empower others to bring their ideas to the table, to bring feedback to their bosses, and for the team to grow.

### **Further Exploration of Psychological Safety**

Google did a series of 200 interviews in order to better understand team performance. The hypothesis was that they were going to find a perfect blend of teams and skills for high performing teams. Yet, that’s not at all what they found. The skills of the individuals on the team didn’t matter. It was how the team members interacted and viewed their contributions. The number one thing necessary for success? Psychological safety: the idea that team members feel safe enough to take risks and to be vulnerable in front of each other. As explored in Q2, Maya Angelou’s 1973 quote sums up

psychological safety and rings true here: “You are only free when you realize you belong no place—you belong every place—no place at all. The price is high, the reward is great.”

For high level performance, we have to feel like we belong, while also trusting that if we take risks to stand out, we will still be supported by the group. Google found that safer teams had members that were more willing to admit they made mistakes, and more willing to take on new roles. Also, they found that those employees that were on teams with psychological safety were less likely to leave Google. Psychologically safe teams listed to diverse ideas, brought in more revenue, and they were twice as effective (Rozovsky, 2015).

In a study of organizational behavior by Will Felps (2006), a man named Nick was interjected into teams to see how the group responds. It was called the bad apple experiment—stemming from the idea that a bad apple emits the hormone ethylene, a ripening agent, which triggers the same response in the other fruit. Once a part of the team, Nick acted as a Jerk, a Slacker, and a Downer. In each case, the productivity of the group was compromised 30-40%. Yet, it only took one apple to save the whole barrel. Out of the 40 groups observed, there was one outlier. In one of the groups, there was one individual who consistently mitigated Nick’s effect. Coyle (2018) refers to this individual as Jonathan. Jonathon deflected Nick’s negative behaviors with warmth. He made others feel safe, he asked people for their ideas, and consistently checked in with the group. His signals of belonging and safety to other members of the group allowed them to continuously open up, share ideas, and work effectively towards the end goal.

Jonathan allowed for oxytocin to counteract the high-stress environment, and kept individuals motivated over the long term.

### **Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella and Empathy—Walking the Talk of Introspection**

Satya Nadella took over Microsoft as CEO in 2014. The role of empathy is clear in his leadership. In order for us not to suffer, Nadella suggests that we have to be comfortable with the idea of “impermanence” in our lives. If we understand that things are constantly changing, and that we will consistently experience ups and downs, Nadella suggests that we will develop a deeper sense of empathy and compassion for the world around us (Nadella, 2017). Sheryl Sandberg, COO at Facebook, noted a similar phenomenon in her book *Option B* book after the unexpected loss of her husband. As human beings we are wired for connection and for grief. The idea that humans have felt love and loss allowed Sandberg to connect to something larger than herself—a universal human experience (Sandberg and Grant, 2017). Writer Anna Quindlen suggests that grief is discussed among “those of us who recognize in one another a kindred chasm deep in the center of who we are.”

Through understanding of his own grief, Nadella developed his ability to lead through empathy at Microsoft. He seeks to put empathy at the center of everything the company does—from products launched and markets entered, to employees, partners, and customers. Nadella sought to create a renewal at Microsoft where there would be no hero at the company, but where success would be a result of all parties. Nadella remarks that empathy is a driving factor for the culture at Microsoft. “In fact, the phrase we use to describe our emerging culture is ‘growth mindset’, because it’s about every individual,

every one of us having the attitude—that mindset—of being able to overcome any constraint, stand up to any challenge, making it possible for us to grow and thereby, for the company to grow.” He is not talking about the bottom line growth here, but instead the focus is on individual growth. Nadella sets the precedent that the company’s success will follow as a result of focus on each individual and aligning a great sense of purpose within the company.

Nadella was focused on his own growth and development, without a focus on status and power of becoming CEO and when he was appointed to lead the company; it was just a by-product of the work he was already doing. The culture at Microsoft is a platform to pursue individual passions. In speaking to the company, Nadella asked each person what their deepest passions and values were and then challenged them to connect it with the mission and company of the company. Through his compassion and empathy for those in the company he leads, Nadella sets the stage for a company where people are connected through a shared sense of purpose. Nadella includes empathy in his definition of trust, and pulls together what we have seen throughout our exploration thus far:

$$E + SV + SR = T/t$$

Translation: Empathy + Shared Values + Safety and Reliability = Trust Over Time. As we are reliant in developing trust and safety through repeated environmental cues, in today’s fast paced, digital world, this becomes even more important. How do we ensure that technology is intertwined with human empathy and compassion as we gain the ability to use AI and big data to move society forward? Cynthia Brazeal at the MIT Media laboratory argues that we don’t spend enough time thinking about empathy when

we design technology. Nadella insists that empathy is going to be even more essential in future generations because it is so difficult to replicate in machines.

We still will have a crucial need as humans to perceive other's thoughts and feelings, and to collaborate to move forward through challenges. As (Patnaik, 2010) suggests, today's fast pace world often doesn't allow employees enough time for us to step outside of their own perspective to find out what other people are feeling, thinking and seeing. Our mirror neurons often become cut off from the information we need. We have to be mindful of ways to reconnect. As Dale Carnegie famously said in his classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People* "If you want people to be interested in you, take a genuine interest in other people." If we are curious about the experiences of another, what they like, and what they value ultimately we will be able to find better connections.

According to Goleman (2017) empathetic leaders get along well with people from different backgrounds and cultures and have the ability to express their ideas so that others can understand them. Empathy is essential for relationship management, and is the basis for influencing others, having a positive impact, mentoring others, managing conflict, inspiring people, and good teamwork. In the business world, executives that can use perspective taking as a tool are able more quickly pick up norms for behaviors in cultures they are not directly a part of. Goleman (2017) also suggests that empathy is key for leaders to be aware of how others perceive them.

In studying Emotional Intelligence of teams (Goleman, 2017), norms of trust, psychological safety, and team efficacy led to higher levels of team performance. Additionally, the team leader's empathy was related to norms of promoting



understanding of team members, and demonstration of support and care for others on the team. These are the norms that lead to psychological safety and allowed for all members to be willing to speak up and take risks in front of the team. Perhaps even more interestingly, limits to empathy were also found. When the team leader could not emotionally self-regulate themselves, oftentimes this reduced the ability for honest feedback to occur. As seen with Popovich, leaders must be able to provide constructive feedback, and create a culture where members are forced to continuously develop, learn, and take risks. The key, as we have seen before, is that empathy is essential, but it has to be balanced.

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## CHAPTER 5

### BUILDING CONNECTED TEAMS

Background to the Question: This question was overseen by Rod Napier. After spending the first three questions examining the research and building arguments around optimal environments for high-quality motivation in individuals and teams, and actions leaders take to create these environments, this question allowed for some creativity. This question uses team building prompts taken from some of Rod's previous works and from others, around how to build teams as well as a deeper exploration of vulnerability and connection.

Statement of the Question (Q4): How do you build connection within teams?

Response:

Through the exploration of the ways in which humans are wired, it becomes clear that in order to reach our highest potential individually and in groups we have to tap into our human needs for connection and purpose. As human beings, however, we are also creatures of habit. We tend to have knee-jerk reactions; when prompted we revert to our predictable ways of responding, and frustration builds when the end result is the same.

How can a leader begin to get outside of their own comfort zone and change the end result? First, It is critical that each leader has a general awareness of who they are

and how they have become who they are. Otherwise they are doomed to respond in the same way time and time again. Self-awareness allows us to see challenges are new opportunities for responses. After a leader understands themselves, then they can begin to understand the people on their team, diagnose what the group needs to move forward, and then use team building exercises to better connect the group.

### **1. Connecting with the “self”**

If a leader is to connect with others, they must begin with themselves first. The leader must be able to stay rooted in authenticity and commitment to their values when situations arise that may pull them in different directions. Development and understanding of the “self” is crucial for development of a leader. In order for a leader to truly understand who they are they must understand the experiences that have shaped them, their values, and their behaviors. As Silsbee (2008) says: “To know ourselves is to understand our nature as biological organisms who received certain stories we came to hold as true, as people who have unique genetic endowments and histories, and as the inevitable cumulative products of both our own deep histories and every choice we have ever made (p. 38).”

As we become self-aware we store information about the self. A leader who is self-aware has the ability to think about their past, and on their future. Self-Reflection is defined as a curiosity of the self, where the individual learns about their emotions, values, thought processes, and attitudes (Morin, 2011). Individuals that are self-aware have more accurate information about their own self-concept—their self-reports are more accurate. The better our ability to self-reflect, the better we are able to self-regulate and navigate

our social environment (Morin, 2011). Recollection of past personal events activate the medial prefrontal cortex and peripheral brain structures which make us more self-aware (Morin, 2011). Journaling has been shown to be an effective way to improve one's self awareness and promote reflection of the self which in turn influence the individual's ability to make changes in their thoughts, mood, and perceptions (Fritson and Mandernach, 2009).

**Below are some journal prompts to begin the self-exploration process:**

1. What are parts of your upbringing that shaped you? Give three positives and three negatives that came as a result.
2. Describe three particular challenges in your life that shaped who you are. How did you overcome the challenge and what did you learn?
3. What is your biggest fear in life and why?
4. What are three of your most proud moments? Why?
5. Describe your relationship with your immediate family members. What are positives of each and what is the hardest part of each of these relationships?
6. What is a lesson you have learned in the past year?
7. If you could tell your younger self one thing what would it be and why?
8. Reflect on your hardest memory as a child, teenager, young adult, and adult.  
What made it so challenging?
9. How would you describe yourself?
10. What is your biggest weakness?
11. Think about a time when you really felt like you were on a roll in life. What do you see? What were you doing, feeling, and thinking? Why was this so exciting?

A good test and online analysis that can be used to better understand self is the Keirsey assessment. As Keirsey states: the first step toward seeing others as distinct from yourself is to become better acquainted with your own traits of character. If we are to understand how to work effectively with others, we must first understand ourselves, and a temperament assessment can be a useful tool.

Mindfulness can also be a useful tool for self-awareness. In order to be self-aware, leaders have to set aside time for self-observation. Here's an activity adapted from Doug Silsbee's Presence Based Coaching that can be used for mindfulness:

*Sit up straight in a chair that supports your back. Keeping your back straight, allow your feet to rest comfortable on the floor. Keep your head erect and over your shoulders, but don't strain. You may close your eyes or let your gaze rest softly on a blank wall several feet in front of you.*

*Bring your awareness to your breath. Depending on what's more noticeable for you, you might choose to attend to your abdomen rising and falling as you breathe. Or you might focus your attention in your nostrils, where the air moving in produces a certain coolness. Either location is fine. Simply bring your attention to the place you select.*

*Don't try to do anything in particular with your breathing. Begin to observe the sensation as the air moves in and out. To yourself, speak the words "breathing in" during your inhale and "breathing out" during your exhale. If you find your attention wandering (and you will—that's part of the game!), observe that your attention is elsewhere and bring your*



*attention back to your breath. If you notice any self-criticism about not being good at this, notice that and bring your attention back to the breath.*

*Do this ten minutes a day. Twenty is better than ten, and five is better than none. If you can, sit twice a day: in the morning and again in the evening. Consistency is important. Just the act of sitting for some time each day has significant benefits: relaxing your body, slowing your pulse, letting go of stress, and training your attention.*

*While sitting, you're practicing the act of bringing your attention back to the present. Over time you'll notice a significant difference in your ability to be present with others, with a task, and with yourself. This is mindfulness (p.136).*

Mindfulness can help a leader start to understand emotions and experiences without feeling overwhelmed. It will help the leader become more self-aware of their emotions and mood orientations (Silsbee, 2008).

In line with other research throughout Q1, Q2, and Q3, leaders who want to get closer to others and be more intimate with people are more likely to be successful and they are more likely to be healthy (Silsbee, 2008). It is through heart that the deepest connections are formed. As this question began, the most important part of understanding another is first in understanding the self. A leader must learn to love themselves—self-compassion is a key quality to building relationships.

The term “vulnerability” is mentioned time and time again in its relationship to building trust, but there are few studies that have actually explored vulnerability and sought to understand its relationship with trust. What is vulnerability exactly?

Neinaber, Hofeditz, and Romeike (2015) look into definitions of vulnerability according to various fields. The United Nations definition says “The conditions determined by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards.” The field of social science refers to vulnerability as: “exposure to contingencies and stress, and difficulty in coping with them. Vulnerability has thus two sides: and external side of risks, shocks, and stress to which and individual or household is subject; and an internal side which is defenselessness, meaning a lack of means to cope without damaging loss.” The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that if something is vulnerable, it may be wounded. It is susceptible to injury and not proof against weapon (Tsai, 2016).

In order to practice self-love, one must first learn to accept their own vulnerabilities. Self-awareness is the first step as it allows the individual to truly understand their own characteristics. The individual must accept both the positive and negative traits that make them unique. Additionally, when we reflect on the unique experiences that shape who we are—both the good and the bad—we can accept our stories. Self-love and self-compassion allows for us to be vulnerable to the tough experiences that have shaped our lives. As we accept our own past experiences, we have less we feel we should hide from others—giving us the freedom to act authentically as ourselves. As we show love for ourselves and our pasts, we generate compassion and understanding for others in recognition that many of the toughest human experiences are universal.

There is a distinction to be made between high self-esteem and self-love, and narcissism. Narcissistic leaders are described as having high self-views, but they lack

empathy towards others and may be hiding feelings of worthlessness and a lack of self-love. Those with high self-esteem also have high views of themselves, but they also have high concerns for community (Horvath and Morf, 2010). Narcissists are not concerned with communal traits and a key difference is that they will exploit others in order to gain superiority and power.

The difference between high self-esteem and narcissism seems to come down to love. We can only love others to the extent that we truly love ourselves. The apparent self-love shown by a narcissistic leader is inauthentic, as true self-love indicates an individual has empathic understanding, awareness, and compassion for themselves and for others. Narcissists lack the ability to handle or accept their own weaknesses and do not acknowledge criticism—because they lack the ability to practice self-love.

John Hope Bryant, who was homeless for 6 months, and is interviewed in *Discover Your True North* by (2015) states that we fear that many will reject us if we show our vulnerabilities. He states:

Healing is the only path forward, but it is the most courageous and most terrifying. To heal, you've got to get over the fear of just being yourself. Most adults we're dealing with are reliving pains of their childhood—a domineering mother, an abusive or absent father, or experiences of being ignored, chastised, molested, teased or bullied (George and Gergen 2015, p. 91)

As a leader learns that self-judgement, loneliness, perfectionism, and feelings of being overwhelmed are universal human experiences, they allow themselves the opportunity to connect to others through empathy and acceptance. In the words of Kouzes and Posner (1998) “We’ve found no better secret to becoming the best leader you can be than to stay in love. When you’re in love with the people you lead, the products and services you offer, and the customers and clients you serve, you just pour your heart into it.”

Love is rooted in teams that are truly connected. This love has to come first from the love that the leader or leadership has for themselves, those they lead, and the purpose that drives them. The purpose is key as we have seen in the earlier chapters it increases the quality of our motivation and it drives the connection between a group. Purpose is the driver that motivates individuals to take risks to show their teammates who they really are.

Tsai (2016) discusses the idea of valuing. While friendships and relationships are some of the most precious things in life, what does it mean to value them? What does it mean to value anything? Why do we care about a purpose? In order to value something (X) the following have to be true:

1. A belief that X is good or valuable or worthy
2. A susceptibility or vulnerability to experience a range of context-dependent emotions regarding X
3. A disposition to experience these emotions as being merited or appropriate
4. A disposition to treat certain kinds of X-related considerations as reasons for action in relevant deliberative contexts

To go back to what was previously stated: to value something we must become vulnerable to it, we must believe that it is worth becoming vulnerable to, and it must move us to action. The above criteria can be applied first to a purpose and a reason for behavior. To truly be drawn to action is to truly love and have conviction for our purpose—and to be open to the vulnerability that comes along with the commitment for that purpose. The same can be applied to the relationships that we become connected to around this purpose. For relationships to form, vulnerability has to exist, and we find

vulnerability through love—for others and for a purpose. As C.S. Lewis states in *The Four Loves*:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable (Lewis, 1960).

Here lies the paradox—in order to love someone or something, we have to become vulnerable. High reward requires great risk. Without the risk, great things cannot be accomplished. It is up to the leader of the group to connect to individuals and to a purpose to start to build the foundation of something great. They have to get individuals to a place where they too are willing to become vulnerable—and it has to be done authentically.

Every leader should have a defined purpose. When we work with purpose it can help energize us during challenges, and we inspire others to action along with us (Sinek, 2013). The majority of people do not know why they do the work they do. Sure, we find happiness from reaching outcome goals—quick hits of dopamine. But this is not deep fulfillment. Deep fulfillment and satisfaction comes from connection to a purpose (Sinek, 2013). As previously discussed in Q2 and Q3, Self-Determination Theory states that autonomy, competence, and relatedness need to be cultivated in order to generate high quality, sustainable motivation. Relatedness is the ability to have meaningful connection to your work and to others while partaking in an activity. This is what makes it crucial for a leader to understand their purpose—to connect to their work, and ultimately, to connect with others who share the same purpose.

As Sinek (2013) illustrates every person and organization operates on three different levels: The What, the How, and the Why. Most people know what they do: the job and the products that they will offer to others. Many people know how they do it—the things that make their products stand out from the others. Yet, few people can actually articulate the Why—the purpose and the value gained from the product they are offering. This connects right back to the theories discussed in Q2 relating to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Those that are extrinsically motivated participate in an activity for the final outcome—the what. Intrinsically motivated people do things because they feel a deep sense of fulfillment. They are curious about their work, seek novel tasks, and work to master challenges (Sinek, 2013). The truth is, without knowing our purpose, we won't sustain our efforts over the long term. As Sinek discusses in his TED Talk, the Why of what we do taps into the limbic part of our brain—which is responsible for our sense of trust, our feelings, and emotions. This is what moves us to action. While the neocortex is the most recent part of our brain evolutionarily and allows for language, it is the rational part of our brain. To find true motivation and purpose, we have to go deeper to the why—our purpose.

## 2. **Connecting with the Individual**

As a human species we are all wired for connection—to other people and to fundamental motives. Yet, we do all have differences. Carl Jung was the first to discuss this differences, explaining that people act from “architects” or different instincts (Kiersey, 1998). As the Keirsey test can be used to understand the self, it also is a great tool for a leader to begin to better understand a team of people. As human beings we are very

unique in the ways we view and experience the world. Our instinctive response is often to assume that people act differently than us because of their own flaws. The concept of trust is one that is difficult to understand—but without trust between two people strong relationships and connections will be impossible.

Two sets of questions, when asked to a stranger, lead to a different level of connection:

Set A:

- What was the best gift you ever received and why?
- Describe the last pet you owned
- Where did you go to high school? What was your high school like?
- Who is your favorite actor or actress?

Set B:

- If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?
- Is there something you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?
- What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
- When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?

These questions are directly from Daniel Coyle's *The Culture Code* (2018), and an excerpt of the questions asked in a study by Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, and Bator (1997). While it seems like both of these questions may ask for an individual to disclose personal information about themselves, set B makes people much more uncomfortable.

They can cause an increase in heart rate, hesitation, and nervousness. Set A allows for more comfortable answers, but does not create the same type of connection between the individuals who are sharing responses. The second set of questions break down barriers and generate vulnerability.

Vulnerability is about shared risk—about sending the message that you have imperfections and that a partnership of partnership and help can be created. It begins with a small exchange. One person sends a signal of vulnerability, the second person detects this and responds with their own signals. The first person signals the mutually shared trust and closeness established, and then trust and closeness is built.

According to Tsai (2016), a relationship with another renders someone susceptible to distress and sorrow when the beloved is harmed and the loving relationship is impaired. Intimacy in relationships is only developed through a set of intentions and expectations that both parties hold about the other, and they require sufficient engagement over time.

In terms of defining relational vulnerability, it seems trust and vulnerability go hand in hand. Vulnerability in terms of relationships seems to be an openness for one party (the trustor) to form a relationship and connection with a trustee with the possibility that trust may be broken. This broken trust leads to potential emotional, economic, and social stresses detrimental to the trustor. Vulnerability in relationships could be measured by the magnitude of a loss experienced by broken trust, the probability that trust has the potential to be broken, and the trustor's ability to cope with it. Neinaber et al. (2015) states that people who are lower in self-esteem are less able to show vulnerabilities. Strong personalities generally show a greater willingness to be



vulnerability. In order to fully understand vulnerability, it's essential to further understand trust.

As defined by Neinaber et al. (2015), trust is “the willingness of a party (the trustor) to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the trustee will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor and control the other party.” Trust is an expectation that we hold that a partner will behave in a mutually acceptable manner.

There are two types of trust as defined in the study by Neinaber et al. (2015). These are cognitive trust and affective trust. Cognitive trust is a rational assessment of whether an individual is trustworthy or not, while affective trust is based on emotions and developed through interpersonal relations. Cognitive trust can be understood in terms of a rational exchange theory: trust decreases when there is a perceived imbalance in the exchange. As suggested earlier, individuals that have lower self-esteem are less likely to have a willingness to be vulnerable—this could stem from their belief that there is an imbalance in the exchange due to the perception of their own abilities to cope with a loss (emotionally, economically, socially). As discussed at length in Q2 and Q3, however, environments that send cues of belonging and psychological safety may allow for individuals to feel more confident to take risks.

Trust can be built in five stages—engaging, listening, envisioning, framing, and committing. Engaging is the most essential in developing an initial connection with a person. Without connection, individuals will not openly share information. In the listening stage, it shows that there is care for the other person. It is about being quiet while the other person talks. Listening is important in showing the other person

authenticity and helps to build affective and cognitive trust. Envisioning allows the leader to create an image and a path forward for the future relationship based on consistency of behaviors. Framing allows the leader to demonstrate that they understand. The final stage of committing means that the leader lives out the promises that they make. The follow through has to occur for trust to be built—which out this final stage the first four are unavailing (Martin, Naylor, Jefferson, David, and Cavazos, 2015).

Research suggests that the more two individuals interact, the more willing they are to be vulnerable to each other Neinaber et al., (2015). This is likely due to affective trust being built through interaction and is an important message for leaders to understand in terms of building their teams: in order to develop strong connections leaders must spend time with the individuals they lead and team members must spend time with each other. High quality relationships have high levels of vulnerability. Leaders can express their vulnerability through showing themselves as vulnerable through both trust based behavior and disclosure based behavior (Neinaber et al., 2015). Trust based behavior is shown by reducing control mechanisms and reducing monitoring behavior in those that they lead. Disclosure based behavior includes a leader's sharing of important strategic information with those that they lead.

As discussed earlier in Q1, accepting and becoming vulnerable in today's world can be exceptionally difficult, so understanding how to create this connection is exceptionally important to creating connection and trust first within individuals, and then within teams. New research is showing that the better we can connect when we feel vulnerable. In an experiment called the Give-Some game, participants were more likely to give away tokens and cooperate after a vulnerable experience. And the feelings of

vulnerability and cooperation were transferred to all parties that are in the environment. Contrary to common thought, vulnerability should precede trust. Shared risk creates trust (Coyle, 2018).

As an example, vulnerability can be created by the asking of personal questions. In the study by Aron et al. (1997) sustaining, escalating, reciprocal, personal self-disclosure was associated with developing close relationships. Here is an example of such questions:

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
2. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
3. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
4. Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
5. Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?
6. What do you value most in a friendship?
7. What is your most treasured memory?
8. What is your most terrible memory?

9. Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

As Silsbee (2008) suggests, if a leader can extend their presence towards those individuals that they are working with, they have opportunities to allow for new experiences and choices to occur. As the leader extends their presence they have the ability to create opportunities for spaciousness—the absence of conditioned habits, compassion—the recognition of a shared humanity, unconditional positive regard—nothing comes from the leader as a defense, resonance—the ability to connect and understand, and finally, neutrality—a freedom from an attachment to an outcome.

### 3. **Connecting the Group/Team**

When we value something enough, we have reason to become vulnerable in our relationships with our team members. Just as it seems that when we connect with our purpose we find love for ourselves and as we find love for ourselves we can better connect with our purpose

The reptilian part of the human brain acts primarily in a stimulus-response manner. The mammalian brain, including the limbic system is responsible for emotions and motivational systems. It is responsible for fight or flight and the root of emotions such as distress, nurturance, anger, happiness, and love. The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that allows for the solving of complex issues and innovations. It allows for social connections, language, and to make meaning of the information taken in by the other parts of the brain.

Comaford (2018) suggests that the human brain has two states—critter state and smart state. In critter state, we are not able to access each part of our brain and are largely reactive. Our fight or flight systems hijack the system. In critter state, teamwork is nearly impossible—people are aggressive and territorial and respond in an “every man for himself” way. In critter state—there is very low trust within the environment, there is high uncertainty, poor communication. We are not innovative in critter state and we are just trying to survive.

The second state is called smart state. In this state we have access to all resources of the human brain and the ability to make choices about how to respond. In smart state, all parts of the brain are working together in a functional way. We have the ability to choose our responses to situations. This is the brain state Silsbee (2008) is hoping for when we use mindfulness and presence. And in groups, continuously activating the smart state is about making people feel safe, and like they belong. Consistently connecting people to both their purpose and to each other is essential. When the stakes are high and people are deeply committed to others and to driving towards goals together, teams will perform at a high level.

Without safety, belonging, and mattering, it is hard for humans to operate at their most optimal states. As mentioned throughout previous questions, when environments promote safety, individuals are more likely to take risks (Comaford, 2008). When people feel safe in an environment that is initiated by a leader, they feel free to act authentically as themselves. Belonging is the feeling that everyone in the team has an important role in regards to an important mission. In order to truly feel safe, a hint of belonging is not enough; these signals need to be reinforced over and over. It is about the small, subtle

moments that occur in day to day interactions. And, as laid out earlier, when members give up their control, they become vulnerable to the members on the team by trusting that they will perform their particular role towards the group's purpose.

In order to create an environment of safety, the leader of the group has to invite input from others. Coyle (2018) notes that in cultures of safety, there is an overabundance of “thank yous.” In this way, relationships are affirmed. Expressions of gratitude for an individual's involvement in a team are belonging cues. When Urban Meyer coached Ohio State football to a National Title in 2015, in the celebration, he thanked a defensive back named Nik Sark who gave up his scholarship to a player that helped the team more. In this way, Meyer cues belonging and to the unsung heroes—each person matters.

Some other vulnerability influencing phases the leader can use are the following:

1. What if...
2. I need your help with...
3. Would it be helpful if...
4. Can you help me understand...?

Coyle (2018) suggests for leaders to overcommunicate how much they are listening. In giving a “yes, uh-huh, or gotcha” it encourages the speaker to keep going. Interruptions should be avoided, a smooth turn taking is a sign of a cohesive group conversation. Additionally, the leader should be open with their weaknesses instead of trying to hide them. They should show their mistakes and note that they do not always have the right answer. Again, this is difficult because if a leader shares their weaknesses they could be taken advantage of. Authenticity is an important piece of the leader's

communication. The team needs to feel that the leader's actions are in line with what they say their values are. The leader's authenticity impacts the level of trust in the group. This not only goes for the leader but also for each member in accordance with their role. When members do not perform up to the expectations of others, members of the team may feel they are taken advantage of. Tsai (2016) calls this wrongful exploitation in relationships: when one participant in the relationship unfairly uses or takes advantage of the other's vulnerability. Narcissistic leaders destroy team functioning because they take advantage of trust.

### **More on Developing Norms and Defining Purpose**

High performing groups set strong expectations for who is in the group and who is out. Those that gain membership adhere to the norms set by the group. Norms are what define culture within groups and organizations. They are the rules for behavior, and tell individuals which behaviors will be accepted by other members of the group (Napier and Gershenfeld, 2004). Norms come from the ideas that group members hold; they are learned behaviors, and they can shift based on who is in the group. Roles within groups are defined by norms—which behaviors are expected for each individual, and if (and for whom) transgressions are accepted. Following these norms are how individuals attempt to fit into a group, and thus these norms define the culture.

We pay attention to norms because as human beings, we are a social species. Our brains are built to connect to the values and beliefs of others. By evolutionary design, we are meant to feel the pain of being disconnected from our peers. Our survival as a species used to depend on our ability to collaborate and connect with those in our tribes

(Lieberman, 2013). Membership into groups is important for our sense of self; we are driven to be accepted, so we conform to the norms for the group (Napier and Gershenfeld, 2004).

Group norms become accepted and define a strong culture when:

1. Continued group membership is desired
2. There are strong cues that tell individuals to conform
3. The group is cohesive
4. There an underlying rationale and purpose for the norms.

If individuals are attracted to the membership in a group, they are more likely to be invested. They will attend more meetings, and persevere in working towards long, difficult goals. Additionally, individuals are more likely to listen and be influenced by other group members and the connection becomes stronger (Napier and Gershenfeld, 2004).

A group of people come together due to a common set of goals and beliefs. This is called a “tribe”. It is the leader’s job to simplify and help connected each individual to this why. If a leader wants to define the “why” for a group, they should search for defining stories. The more stories that the leader can understand of the team or organizations past, the more data they will be able to draw from in order to see if there are recurring ideas or themes. Stories should reveal the contribution the organization makes to the lives of others (Sinek, 2013). The idea is that each individual will work for a team that they share visions and values with, which contributes to their own feelings of value for being a part of the group.



The following is an exercise designed to harness stories from groups and adapted from Sinek's Find Your Why (Sinek, 2013).

1. Finding your stories (20 minutes)
  - a. Divide the group into three teams of the same size
    - i. Try to make sure the teams are broken up with people of varying roles
  - b. Tell specific stories of when you have felt most proud to work for this organization.
    - i. Organization can be replaced with “Team” or “Group”, whatever is appropriate. Stories should be something human that elicits an emotion.
  - c. Each team should write down on a flip chart one sentence or phrase that helps team members recall their stories
    - i. Stories should be specific and emotional
    - ii. Each team should come up with at least 3
2. Sharing the stories (20-25 minutes)
  - a. Each team will report out their top 3 or 3 stories. Emotional reactions are cues to dig deeper—the person telling the story can say more about what is leading to an emotion reaction
3. What is the contribution? (10 minutes)
  - a. Each team should write down ten 10 verb and action phrases that capture the stories

- i. Examples: to engage, to enrich, to build, to connect, to inspire, to trust, to enjoy
  - 4. Report out all of the verbs within each group on a single page (5 minutes)
- Add asterisk to any that are repeated. Consistent/similar themes can be consolidated.

While Sinek (2013) goes deeper into this development, this activity should begin to connect a team in purpose and should be visible for each member as they are working through challenges. Connecting to a purpose will help to keep a team resilient when they might want to give up.

The **Seven/Seven Team Building Activity** can be used to build trust within groups. Adapted from Napier and Gershenfeld (2005). In this activity, group members share experiences of their lives that have shaped who they are. In this design, there should be groups of 2-15, and by members having the opportunity to take equal risk and provide emotional support, they can build trust quickly. This design can be used to quickly move people into trust. While, Napier and Gershenfeld (2005) note that people often believe that it takes time for them to trust others, Coyle (2018) suggests that vulnerability is what leads to trust between people and groups. The key is that vulnerability must be built in a way that is authentic. Our brains have the ability to register subtle cues when we try to hide where we really are—making connection more difficult (Seppala, 2014). The following design allows team members to see others as human and approachable.

**Step 1:** Ask participants to identify seven events in their lives that have had biggest impact on their lives and who they are. Tell individuals to be as specific as possible. Each participant will be given 20-30 minutes to describe each of their events. Each reveal should be followed with questions about why and how the event had impacted the sharer's life.

**Step 2:** The facilitator should be ready to start and share their own events in order to model the depth that is wanted.

**Step 3:** The facilitator should identify two individuals who will not be afraid of sharing their stories and tell them you would like for them to go first. They will set the norm for the emotion and openness that occurs.

**Step 4:** Usually people don't share all seven events, but each story should take as much as 30 minutes if there are good follow up questions.

If there is a big group, participants can be divided into smaller groups. The facilitator can make sure to practice active listening and ask the group if they have any questions or reactions to the people who are sharing. Issues of confidentiality can be discussed, and members can be asked how they want to handle it, as it will be helpful in making sure it is a safe environment for participants.

### **Addressing Feedback**

Feedback is essential as it allows us to continue to grow as individuals, and helps teams perform at high levels. Kroger CEO David Dillon says "Feedback helps you take the blinders off, face reality, and see yourself as you really are" (George and Gergen, 2008). The environment and way that the feedback is given and received in may play a

role on whether it is interpreted as a threat or as an opportunity for growth. In psychologically safe environments, team members work together while being able to handle critical feedback. Popovich encourages and invites players and staff to offer suggestions on how to improve the team. There is respect for everybody in the organization, and the group faces adversities together. Popovich has the rare ability to combine his sincerest care and empathy for others with his demanding nature. In this way, Popovich keeps his empathy in check, and considers how he should react in order to help the Spurs organization be as successful as they can be. Dillon also notes that while initially his first reaction is to become defensive when given feedback, he holds individuals who share feedback information with him in higher regard (George and Gergen, 2008). Having a support team of people that will give you honest feedback is essential for growth. Napier and Gershenfeld (2004) suggest that feedback is a way to clear the air, to raise important discussions, and to focus on future behavior. In environments where feedback is handled immediately and there is trust and openness, the feedback becomes a tool to move the group forward.

Feedback is an important part of growth but there is a tension in it because it threatens our need to be accepted. This anxiety can be reduced, however. Managing received feedback is about maintaining your presence and emotions. Research shows that seeking out feedback is connected with higher job satisfaction, higher creativity, better adaptation in a new position, and lower turnover (Stone and Heen, 2014). When an individual does not receive feedback well, there is no opportunity for growth, and the relationship stagnates as problems are not dealt with. As a receiver of feedback individuals can learn to keep things in perspective, and not let emotions throw

relationships off balance. In connection to what was discussed throughout this chapter, feedback allows us to have a greater awareness of ourselves. At the same time, being open to feedback allows for relationships to be stronger and connections deeper (Stone and Heen, 2014). Feedback seems to be another way for individuals to be vulnerable with others and an opportunity to develop trust, as it opens up the door to share and acknowledge our weaknesses and address blind spots.

There are a few types of feedback—appreciation, coaching, and evaluation (Stone and Heen, 2014). It is important to know the difference between the three. The first, appreciation, is about feeling appreciated by others, for the giver of this type of feedback it can go a long way in making an individual feel like they are a valuable member of a team. This helps to motivate the individual. This type of feedback gives the receiver the idea that they are noticed and seen. Appreciation feedback has to be specific, it has to be addressed in a way that the receiver values and hears, and it has to be authentic.

Coaching feedback helps individuals learn and grow. The first type of coaching feedback is skill based and helps to build skills and knowledge in order to tackle new challenges. The second, however is more personal and the feedback is given to the receiver to change. This type of feedback can be perceived as an imbalance in the relationship and oftentimes is based on how the giver is feeling. Additionally, almost all coaching feedback can be seen as evaluation based on how the receiver takes it

Evaluation type feedback is focused on telling an individual exactly where they stand in terms of performance. They can be comparisons against a set of standards. Statements such as “you can do this” and “I believe in you” fall into this category (Stone and Heen, 2014).

In order to satisfy human needs, leaders should successfully manage giving and receiving all three types of feedback. The hardest part about feedback is understanding what the receiver may need in the moment. Here are some additional ideas given by Stone and Heen (2014) to sort through feedback for both the giver and the receiver:

1. what's my purpose in giving/receiving this feedback?
2. Is it the right purpose from my point of view?
3. Is it the right purpose from the other person's point of view?

Is the primary goal supposed to be appreciation, evaluation, or appreciation? Is the leader seeking to say thank you, improve, or assess a person? As the giver of feedback, reflecting on the purpose of the feedback can help to be clear during the conversation. Additionally, checking in with the receiver and asking how they are hearing the feedback and if it is what they need will help.

As the receiver of the feedback, it is good to ask the giver where the feedback is coming from. Where is the data that supports the feedback specifically? Oftentimes, feedback is not based on unbiased data, instead it is interpreted or filtered by the giver's past experiences and assumptions. Most advice offered is based on the giver's own life lens, which means that advice given is often based on them, not based on the receiver. Because of this, the more sources that data can be gathered from, the more accurate it will be. Additionally, how feedback is received is influenced by the receiver's relationship with the giver (Stone and Heen, 2014).

One of the best ways to receive feedback is to specifically ask for it—both good and bad. This will help build relationships and open up discussions. It is important to also make sure that feedback is understood correctly and that specific examples are given

to support feedback. Recognizing that feedback is an important part of growth for anyone and if we are taking risks as individuals and teams then we have to get comfortable with feedback. As Theodore Roosevelt said in The Man In the Arena Speech, anyone who strives to do things they are passionate about is opening themselves up to feedback and criticism:

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”  
(Roosevelt, 1910).

As for giving feedback, it can actually be a stress reliever for the receiver but as suggested earlier, the way the feedback will be received is largely determined by the relationship between the giver and the receiver. Because as human beings we care so much about being accepted by our peers, for feedback to be well received, the giver and the receiver must have a relationship (Hathaway, 1997). As we saw in the previous chapter, Popovich is able to be hard on his players because they understand and trust his love for them first.

Below are some steps to consider during the feedback process using the DASR script (Hathaway, 1997).

1. In order to give feedback relating to another's performance, there first must be clear expression from the leader of standards and expectations.

2. Before feedback is given the giver should make sure they have accurate information about the feedback they are giving. Additionally, when the feedback it is given the receiver should understand why. Is it to help improve the team's performance, is it to correct the individual's performance, or is it to help motivation them?
3. Both positive and negative feedback should be given—positive feedback can be given immediately, while negative feedback timing should be considered, although still given in a timely fashion. The negative timing should be given when the other person is able to sit and listen without distractions.
4. Feedback should be given in a specific way. Here's a script to follow:
  - a. **Describe** the behavior observed (use quantity—duration, frequency, size—and sensory language—what was seen, counted, heard).
  - b. **Acknowledge** the reactions and impact of the behavior (avoid you statements)
  - c. **Specify** the preferred behavior
  - d. **Reaffirm** your belief that they can do things correctly and acknowledge their worth.



Table 1. DASR Script Feedback Examples From Hathaway (1997)

<i><b>DASR Script Examples</b></i>		
	<i>Poor Version</i>	<i>Better Version</i>
<b>DESCRIBE</b>	"You never get the data to me on time."	"When you turn in the staff absentee reports after noon on Monday..."
<b>ACKNOWLEDGE</b>	"You make me so angry I could scream."	I feel frustrated and I rushed...
<b>SPECIFY</b>	"Can't you get the numbers to me on time for once?"	What I would prefer is that you get the data to me by noon on Mondays so that Personnel can utilize the information for planning with the temporary agency.
<b>REAFFIRM</b>		I appreciate your consistent attention to details and look forward to seeing your report next Monday by noon. Thanks."

The above figure is an example of how to use the DASR formula. It is especially important to make sure to be specific about the corrective behavior instead of reacting to our emotions and expressing our negative feelings to the receiver.

Some of the challenges in giving feedback are thinking that if the conversation waits then it will resolve itself. Ignoring the problem often leads to build up anger and resentment—and it does not give individuals or teams the opportunities to become stronger. A simple way for leaders to make feedback not feel so threatening is to ask for three pieces of feedback from the receiver in exchange for three pieces of feedback. This opens a conversation of sharing. Feedback handled properly is essential to moving individuals and teams forward.

Creating high-performing, connected teams truly is about love—for self and for those that are on the team. As the leader gains a better understanding of themselves, they will better connect with those that they lead, and as they connect with those they lead, they gain a better understanding of self through use of feedback. This connection between the leader and on a sets the stage for teams to connect at a deeper level. Feedback must be handled effectively and be a part of the team in order to help move the group forward. Building successful teams is a day in-day out process. There is no “end” goal, only a constant striving for improvement. The leader should demonstrate their dedication to individual growth to help set the example for those on the team.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In May of 2007, Lord John Browne, who was then the chief executive of British Petroleum (BP) was forced to resign by giving a false testimony about how he had met a lover. For over four decades, he had hid his sexual orientation which ultimately led to his firing. He writes about how his fear of coming out was from a lack of his own self-confidence, and holding in this secret led to more inner turmoil. It is a complicated place to be in, as Q4 shows that in order to really connect with others we have to be vulnerable and share who we really are—Browne never had the opportunity to do so because of the pressures of rocking the boat with those who would find his sexuality an issue. Our culture is one that is highlighted by the “perfection” we see on social media—a sign that we often try to hide our deepest struggles. As we have seen in the first question, human beings have a strong desire to be accepted and our relationships affect our long-term

health and happiness. Questions 3 and 4 teach us that being connected to others through a strong sense of purpose and a shared goal help us perform at higher levels.

There is still much work to be done in our culture, but it is only recently becoming more acceptable to speak our truths—to share with people who we truly are. In 2014, Apple CEO Tim Cook addressed his sexuality which encouraged many other high level CEO's to follow suit. Tim said of being gay “It’s made me much more empathetic, which has led to a richer life. It’s been tough and uncomfortable at times, but it has given me the confidence to be myself, to follow my own path, and to rise above adversity and bigotry. It’s also given me the skin of a rhinoceros, which comes in handy when you’re the CEO of Apple (George and Gergen, 2015). It is a baffling paradox—our social media world makes us more connected and disconnected than ever before. We can post our “truths” to Instagram and Facebook, but rarely to we have real, vulnerable conversations with each other about our views and perspectives. We have to take the time to understand the perspectives of others without judgement or telling them that their perspective is wrong.

Great leaders take the time to listen to others—by giving the cues that it is okay for team members to open up about who they really are and how they really feel. They can do this through acknowledgement that they too, are not perfect, and have their own struggles. More and more leaders are opening up about their struggles and it is creating a culture where people have a right to be heard regardless of their race, background, gender, or status. These are important conversations and they have to be continued with empathy and understanding—great leaders set this stage and empower others to follow suit—and they lead teams that will outperform over time.

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