

culture journey

Shifting Workplace Culture
from Accidental to Intentional





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from accidental
to **intentional**

a google search for “how to change workplace culture” yields **402 million** results.

Clearly, we’re interested in this topic – *and with good reason.*



Workplace culture is **ten times** more important than compensation in determining whether employees will stay in an organization or look for other work.

Sull, D. & Sull, C. & Zweig, B. (2022)

Ten times!

And if the data isn’t compelling enough, we can simply look to our own experience.

Think about the different places you have worked throughout your career. Reflect for a moment on how each workplace culture impacted your personal energy, your connection with colleagues, and your willingness to choose courageous action versus playing it safe.

Powerful, right?

So, we know culture is important. And most of us want to be part of cultures that help us work and live to our full potential.

The challenge is that most workplace cultures are accidentally developed and not intentionally designed and nurtured. Because of this, many workplace cultures are frustrating or mediocre at best, and some are even classifiably toxic.

Those that end up as “happy accidents” for a period of time are often unable to maintain a thriving culture over time as change happens and adaptation is required.

we work with organizations that are genuinely interested in optimizing their culture, but they are overwhelmed, confused, and frustrated.

The challenges our clients face are:

- 1 They don't know where to start on the journey of changing their culture, or
- 2 They have made some efforts to improve culture but are frustrated by lack of results.

For over two decades, we have been studying organizational culture. We've witnessed what works and what doesn't.

So, what does it take to create and nurture an intentional culture?

This paper on the CultureJourney offers insights on the answers to that question with a simple but powerful framework.

Before we dive in, here are a few hints:

- You can't dictate culture change.
- You won't have much luck if you just wait for the culture to change itself.
- Building an intentional culture requires a deep understanding of human beings, a willingness to be uncomfortable, and practical, concrete actions.
- No matter your position in your organization, YOU can either contribute to the problem, or be part of the solution. You choose.





what is
workplace
culture
anyway?

five things to know about **culture**

Culture is a term that's overused and often misunderstood, especially in business. To have any chance of improving culture, we first need to understand it. Because culture is inherently complex and full of nuance, it's difficult to fully encapsulate in a succinct definition. But, from decades of learning and experience, we find the simplest and most accurate way to define culture is through seven words:

The way we **relate** with each other.

Out of the seven words in this definition, the most important word is "relate", as in, "relationships."

Yes, optimizing workplace culture often requires changes in systems, policies, and processes. But systems, policies, and processes influence and are influenced by people's relationships with each other. We do not effectively improve the work experience or change big system issues by ourselves; we only do it in connection with each other.

At the heart of it, workplace culture is about human connection.

1 Every group develops one. A group of people spending any significant amount of time together will develop a culture. Cultures are developed in families, on sports teams, in neighborhoods, even in friendships. And cultures are most definitely developed in the workplace. Culture is just what happens between and among people.

2 Cultures are either accidental or intentional. The question is not whether you have a culture, but whether it's the result of happenstance or purpose-driven design and nurturing. The latter is better.

3 In the workplace, cultures are very team specific. If I were to ask you to describe the culture in your organization as a whole, you might think, "Well, which part of the organization? And from whose perspective?" This ambiguity is understandable because culture is most deeply experienced by humans at the level of the smallest unit. If, instead, I ask you to think about the culture among the team of people you work most closely with – say, your boss and the few colleagues you interact with most often – it would likely be easier for you to describe it.

4 The leader of the team is the cultural architect. Because of the inherent positional power of the formal leader of any intact work team, that person typically has the most influence on the team's culture and, thus, shapes how work "feels" and how it's experienced by others. If you are a formal leader of any team, you have an extra set of privileges and responsibilities around culture. (More on this later.)

5 Culture is everyone's business. While the leader has the most positional power and the most influence on culture, every single person on the team influences culture either positively or negatively. We influence culture by how we relate with others. (Again with the relationships!)



is investing
in culture
worth it?

is the investment in improving workplace culture worth it?

This is a wise question to ask. Any organization that decides to invest time, money, and human energy into an initiative should first ask: **“Why are we investing in this?”** If the initiative doesn’t serve a clear purpose, solve a problem, or meet a goal that is important to the organization, then resources would be better invested elsewhere. Until relatively recently, it’s been somewhat challenging to answer the question “Is it worth it to invest in designing and nurturing an intentional culture?” with empirical data. Culture is often confusing and previously perceived as difficult to manage. The more recent widespread interest in culture is a new phenomenon. Historically, there has been a lack of compelling data; however recently, there is more profound research. If any of the following are important to your organization...

- Reducing turnover
- Improving engagement (the degree to which people give discretionary effort)
- Reducing healthcare costs
- Improving the reputation of your company on job hiring sites and elsewhere
- Maintaining or improving the physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing of your people, or
- Navigating change effectively

.... then you need to pay attention to workplace culture.

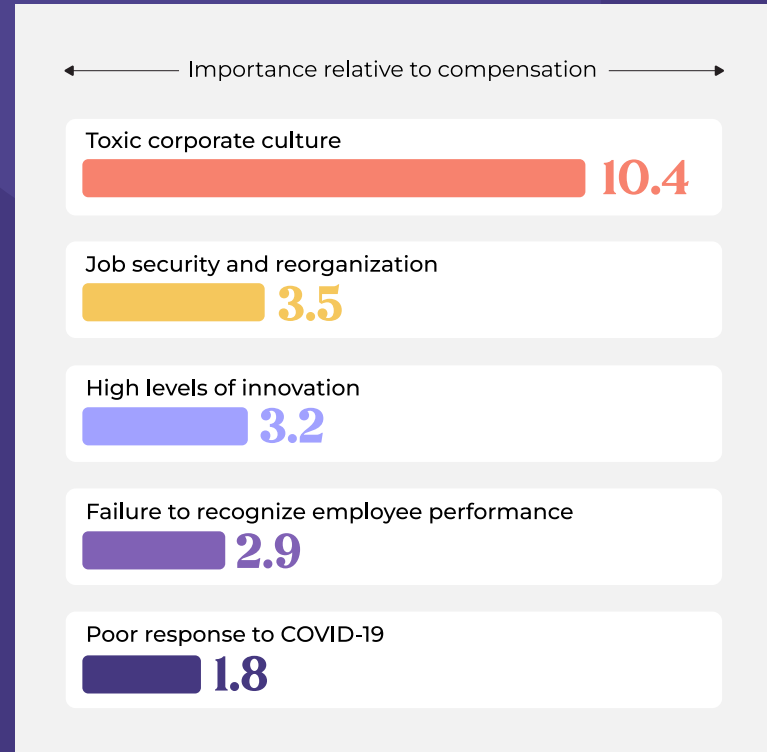


Here are a few takeaways from a recent study published in MIT Sloan Review:

- 1 The single best predictor of high turnover is a *toxic culture*.
- 2 Toxic culture is ten times more important than compensation in determining whether an employee will stay with the organization or find employment elsewhere.
- 3 Looking at more than 125 variables related to culture, this study classified a toxic culture as one where the following five words describe the characteristics of at least some of the organization’s members and teams at least some of the time:
 - Exclusive
 - Disrespectful
 - Unethical/lacking in integrity
 - Cutthroat
 - Abusive leaders



“Toxic Culture is Driving the Great Resignation”
MIT Sloan Management Review



culture on a continuum

On these last points, you may find yourself thinking, “Those are strong descriptors. I wouldn’t classify our company or team culture as that bad. Our culture isn’t toxic; it’s just more mediocre or frustrating.” Or, you might even be thinking, “We have a really great culture at work.”

That’s understandable because cultures exist on a continuum, ranging from what we classify as “thriving” to “toxic”. Most fall somewhere in between. And even the organizations with healthy overall cultures still have work to do because they will have “pockets” of toxicity on specific teams, or they’ll need to ensure that they continue to nurture their culture as the organization changes over time.



Toxicity is accidental culture at its worst. Thriving is intentional culture at its best.



how do we
intentionally
design and
nurture
culture?

how do we transform workplace culture?

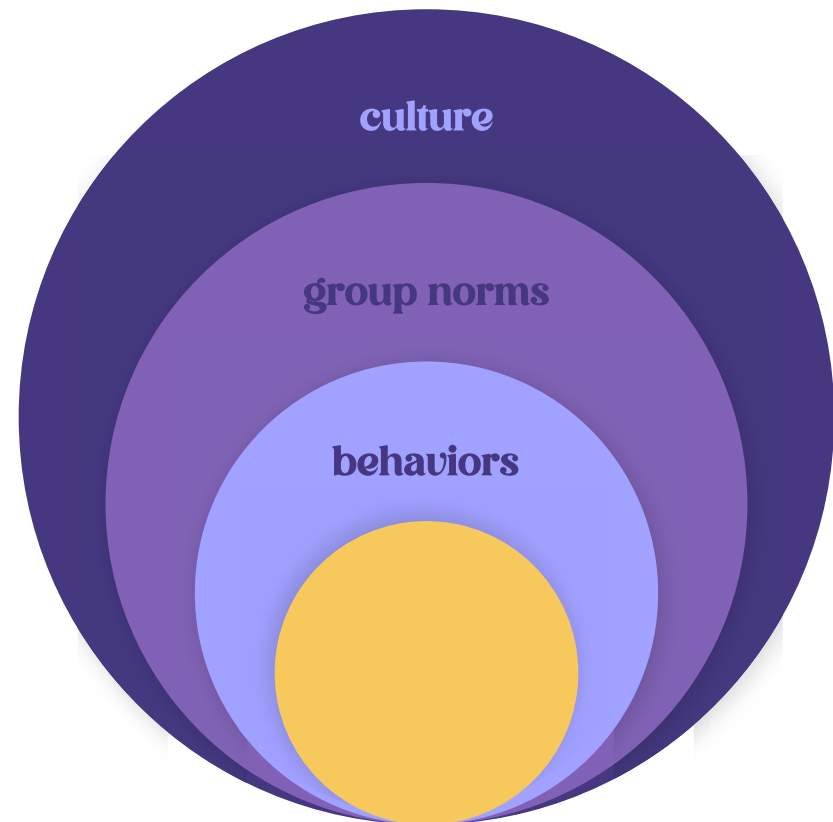
To answer this question, we need a better understanding of where culture comes from. Let's start with an image of four concentric circles.²

Culture sits in the outermost circle. We define culture as “the way we relate with each other.” In the circle just one layer in, we find “group norms”. Norms are sets of behaviors that a group of people has agreed are valuable, acceptable, or at least tolerated. Often, this “agreement” happens without deliberate discussion or decision-making. We just passively agree that “this is the way we do things around here”, even if the way we do things is not sensible, productive, or healthy.

So our first answer is: Changing culture requires changing group norms.

Since group norms are sums of individual behaviors, it's logical to then assume that changing culture requires changing the behaviors of the individuals in the group, especially in regard to how they relate with each other.

This is true. Any group that is going to change its cultural norms will need many of the people within that group to change the way they behave in relationship to each other.



²Gratitude to Timothy R. Clark of the Leader Factor for first verbalizing the concentric circles visual as a way to describe culture.

But our thinking can't stop there. Human beings are complex, and positive behavior changes rarely occur without first addressing important underlying factors: our in-the-moment thinking and thought patterns, our feelings and emotional regulation practices, and our decision-making models.

In our work, we refer to these elements collectively as our "inner operating system".

If a person is going to significantly improve the way they behave in relation to others, they'll need to update or evolve their inner operating system. They'll need to begin to think differently about themselves and other people, which will change the way they feel and how they make decisions about what to do.

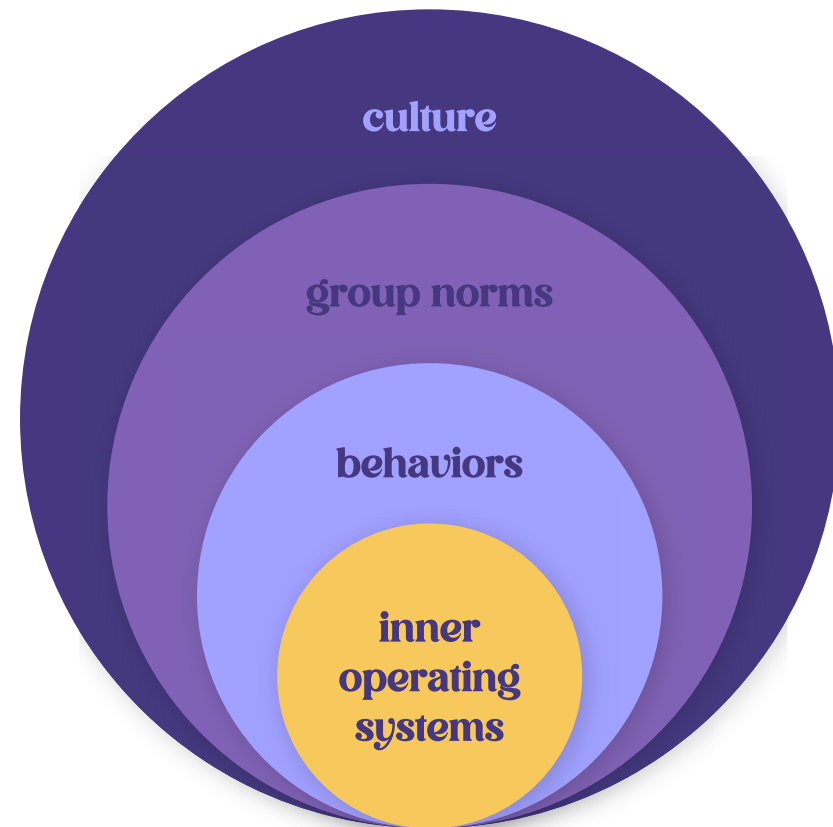
Ultimately, changing culture requires that a group of people update their inner operating systems, at least a little bit, so they relate more productively with each other.

Within the CultureJourney, we call this doing our **"Me Work"** and **"We Work"**.

Changing culture requires changing group norms. > Changing group norms requires changing individual behaviors. > Changing individual behaviors requires effectively doing Me Work and We Work.

If you are thinking, "That sounds complex and time-consuming", you would be right. Changing culture is complex because human beings are complex. And changing culture takes time because human beings usually make significant changes gradually over time.

But when this work does happen, it's amazing, inspiring, and rewarding.



the me work: updating our inner operating system

What does it mean to update an inner operating system?

To answer this question, let's think about the word **"update"**.

When something is updated – be it your phone, laptop, kitchen, or wardrobe – certain things are reduced or discarded because they no longer serve you well, and new things are added or enhanced that you didn't previously have the opportunity to use. In the case of technology, an update might remove bugs, glitches, and outdated software and introduce new services and features. In the case of your kitchen, the update might include removing old countertops and appliances and introducing new fixtures and features.

The same thing is true for human updates. Updating our inner operating system requires important self-development work to discard outdated thinking patterns and habitual reactions, thereby creating space for more effective mental processes and more productive ways of relating with each other.

This is the "Me Work":

"Me Work" is the personal work of updating my inner operating system that only I can do for myself. It results in an evolution in thinking, feeling, and decision-making that enables me to relate better with others and more effectively address the challenges and issues that inevitably arise. When I'm doing my Me Work, I am more equipped to contribute to the development and nurturance of a thriving workplace culture.

While "Me Work" might take many forms, common examples include:

- Becoming more aware of when I'm emotionally triggered and practicing skills to return to a calm, centered state
- Interrupting people less and listening with helpful intentions
- Noticing when unhelpful thinking arises and taking better charge of my own thoughts
- Generating empathy for others
- Learning about unconscious bias and noticing how it may be affecting my thoughts, feelings, and actions towards other people
- Leaning into the discomfort of speaking candidly rather than avoiding difficult conversations
- Shifting my mental focus from blame and judgment to curiosity and learning
- Taking things personally less of the time
- Checking my thinking to ensure I'm working with accurate information rather than incorrect assumptions
- Processing my emotional discomfort in healthy ways so that I don't project it onto others
- Reducing excessive connection to technology and/or work so that I can direct more of my energy to the people and things that matter most

the we work: developing ourselves in connection with each other

In terms of workplace culture, the most important result of consistent We Work is that it enables powerful “We Work”.

“We Work” is the interpersonal learning and growth that happens between two or more people in connection with each other. We Work results in healthier, more resilient relationships and the ability to navigate system issues more effectively as a team.

While “We Work” might also take many forms, a group of people might focus on practices, skills, and commitments such as:

- Purposefully incorporating moments of personal connection into meetings and interactions to stay in touch with each other’s humanity
- Developing shared guidelines for meetings to ensure they are effective and all voices are heard
- Asking more and better questions with each other to ensure our conversations get to the heart of what matters
- Increasing skill and confidence in identifying micro aggressions and naming them so others can learn
- Practicing navigating difficult conversations directly, with a blend of truth and care (rather than avoiding them or becoming reactive or aggressive)
- Establishing and protecting boundaries with each other and with our work commitments

what me work and we work have in common: reactivity to responsiveness

Ultimately, both Me Work and We Work are about the move from reactivity to responsiveness.

When we're relating with others in the workplace from the parts of our inner operating system that are outdated and unhelpful, we're more likely to be REACTIVE. Reactivity comes from habit, defensiveness, ego, or simply mindlessness. As human beings, reactivity is our natural default state unless we consciously choose to operate differently.

When the members of any group of people are frequently operating from automatic reactivity within themselves and with each other, the culture usually ends up somewhere between mediocre and toxic, depending on the prevalence and intensity of reactivity within the group.

In the workplace specifically, this normalized reactivity in relationship with others not only contributes to a mediocre or toxic culture, but also diminishes the team or organization's ability to deliver on important business essentials. Instead we end up:

- Unable to establish or maintain alignment
- Stagnating instead of innovating and evolving
- Avoiding conflict or getting stuck in unhealthy friction
- Producing and executing poorly or at least not to our potential



Responsiveness

When we're operating from a mindful responsive state, we are more likely to pay attention in the "now", stay open and curious, check our ego, and pause when we need to. When we're relating with responsiveness, we're more likely to exhibit behaviors in relation to others that contribute to a thriving culture and drive important business results. Collectively, normalized responsiveness allows us to better:

- Establish and maintain alignment,
- Ideate and problem-solve collaboratively,
- Resolve inevitable conflict productively, and
- Execute with quality.

The shift from accidental culture to intentional culture happens when many people in a group are willing and able to do their Me Work and We Work in an effort to move from reactivity to responsiveness.

Organizations can facilitate this growth and development through formal group trainings, individual coaching sessions, facilitated conversations, and programs and services designed to support their people in deliberately developing themselves.

from reactive to responsive



how this relates to business: me work, we work, and **system issues**

If you are thinking that this conversation about Me Work and We work feels “soft” or “woo woo”, think again and remember this:

No matter what business result or KPI you aim to achieve, the most direct route to success lies in fostering healthy relationships among your team members.

It's through these human relationships in the workplace that we do something all organizations – no matter their size, type or industry – have to do which is learn, evolve, produce, and, importantly, solve system issues.

System issues are the inevitable challenges and obstacles that will arise in our organization that cannot be solved by one person alone and that must be addressed collectively or they will undermine the ability of our organization to flourish.

Here are a few examples of system issues that will be better addressed or resolved when people are doing the Me Work and We Work:

- Your team is under-resourced so there are too few people to get the work done in a reasonable period of time. There is no plan in the near future to get more people or resources.
- Your organization doesn't have an effective employee review process in place so there is very little accountability and it's difficult to assess ourselves and each other.
- There's been a rapid change in your industry and you're being outpaced and out-innovated by competitors.
- Your company is going through a merger or an acquisition and it's confusing and uncertain. There's little communication and not enough structure or clarity about roles and responsibilities.

These are just a few examples. The list of possible system issues is endless – and all organizations have to address or resolve them in order to be their best.

The bottom line is this: it's not just that your people are your most valuable assets. It's that the relationships between your people are your most valuable assets. It is through these relationships that all the biggest challenges are addressed and all the most remarkable business endeavors are accomplished.



Maybe by now you are nodding your head and thinking, “This makes sense.” You might also be thinking, “This sounds hard and complex.”

And you would be right. It is! But hard and complex don't necessarily mean “bad”, “confusing”, or “unattainable”.

In fact, Me Work and We Work are simply what we do as human beings naturally. Throughout our lives, we continuously adapt in response to our life experiences. We react to our system issues – hopefully proactively. As humans, our brains are malleable; we are literally designed to change.

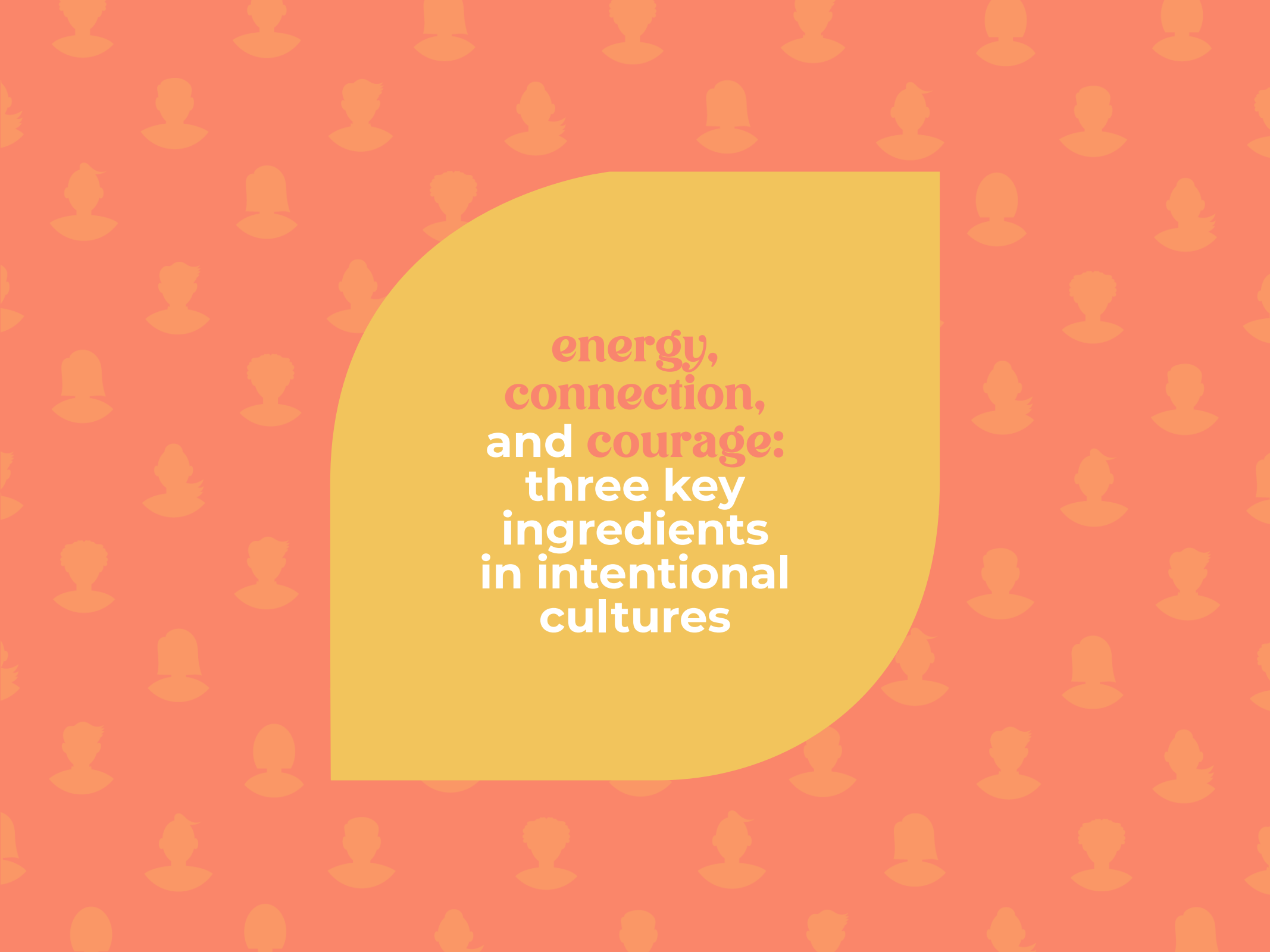
We either change for the better or for the worse. We either evolve or we devolve.

The work we're describing here is about supporting employees so they can more intentionally and more quickly evolve to:

- Think better
- Feel better
- Relate with each other better

And through these improvements they:

- Increase life satisfaction
- Solve challenges better
- More enthusiastically and effectively help the organization fulfill its mission



**energy,
connection,
and courage:
three key
ingredients
in intentional
cultures**

key ingredients: **energy,** **connection, and courage**

Let's say by now you are convinced that helping the people in your organization do their Me Work and We Work is a good idea because it produces a healthier workplace culture and better business results.

The next question we have to consider is:

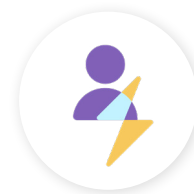
How do we do this? And how do we do it in the workplace?

It would be a major oversimplification and a disservice to all human beings to suggest that there is a single, linear pathway to shifting ourselves individually and collectively from reactive to responsive.

We could spend years in top-notch therapy, participate in every available workplace training, read every single “self-help” book on the planet, and still have work to do.

Especially for people who have experienced trauma, had dysfunctional or abusive childhoods, or have other life circumstances or genetic predispositions that make reactivity a stronger default, Me Work and We Work is both more necessary – and more difficult.

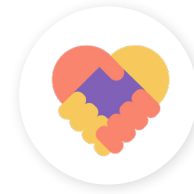
While there is no one “right” way to do this work, our experience with thousands of people across hundreds of organizations has taught us that most of the Me Work and We Work can be synthesized into three overarching principles:



elevate energy



prioritize connection



choose courage



focus point 1

manage energy

As human beings, the main force that fuels our lives, and thus our contributions to work and home is energy. Cars have gas or batteries. Humans have energy.

Without an adequate supply of energy, or the right type of energy, or the ability to direct our energy purposefully, it becomes significantly more challenging to do any of the important tasks we've been talking about that are necessary for a thriving culture:

- Respond instead of react.
- Relate with others productively.
- Address inevitable system issues.

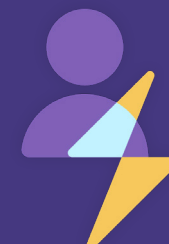
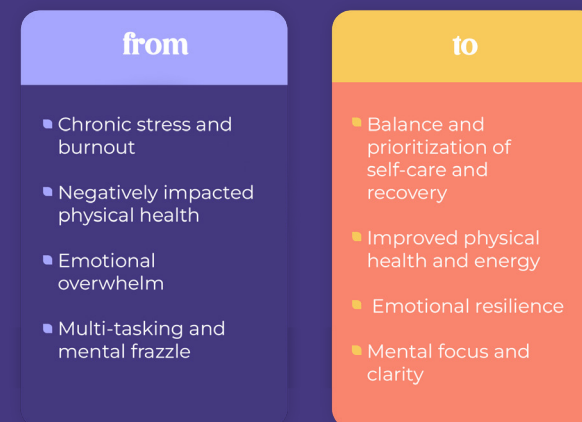
Even though energy is our fuel for life and work, most human beings learn very little about their own energy and how to cultivate, expand, regulate, replenish, and focus it. So adults enter the workplace ill-equipped to utilize their most precious resource to contribute at work and home in an effective and meaningful way.

This means it's essential for people in the workplace to have access to training and development opportunities around energy management. They need skills, shared language, and practices to:

- Cultivate, expand, and replenish their energy so they can build capacity to manage the demand that inevitably increases as we age.
- Regulate their energy so when reactive states arise, they can shift into responsiveness and thus maintain connection and courage.
- Focus their energy on what's most important instead of allowing it to be bounced around by the endless array of interruptions and distractions.

They also need systems, processes, policies, and norms in the workplace that make it easier for them to do these things instead of harder.

In our work with clients, we recommend and deliver energy management training and coaching as a foundational element in culture change work. We consider energy the first gateway organizations can leverage to help people move from:





focus point 2

prioritize connection

Human beings are hard-wired for connection with others – to feel like we belong and are accepted and valued. On one hand, this is a good setup for business because most significant achievements in business result not from a single individual but from the connection and collaboration between multiple individuals.

On the other hand, despite our innate need for connection, our reactivity often leads to behaviors that disconnect us from other people. We judge, prove, interrupt, take things personally, make incorrect assumptions, dismiss and disregard. We often choose being right or maintaining a self-image as the priority in our relationships with others, usually to the demise of connection.

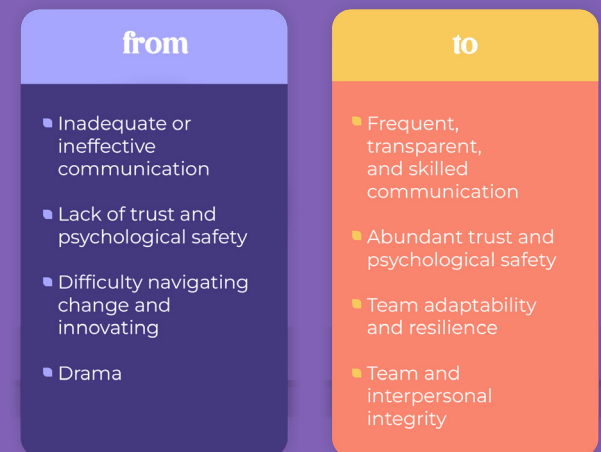
The trouble with disconnection is this:

When a group of people does not feel connected to each other's humanity, they cannot fully do all the things they want to do and that the organization needs them to do: collaborate, innovate, problem-solve, honor and leverage diversity, adapt to change, productively resolve conflict, work with a sense of purpose and cohesion.

The sense of being connected to and safe around others on a work team is the catalyst for high performance.

Any team or group of people that needs a culture update is going to need a connection update. The work of transforming cultures almost always includes a focus on bringing groups of people together – leadership teams, intact work teams, other groups of colleagues – to develop new ways of relating with each other that are grounded in connection and that foster and sustain connection, even during challenging times.

Organizations can guide and support this important connection work by offering training, coaching, facilitated conversations, policy changes, physical spaces, and other intentional efforts that help people move from:





focus point 3

choose courage

Courage is about choosing the now action or long-term path that is right, necessary, or most helpful, even when it seems risky.

When something feels risky, it inherently creates a sense of vulnerability. Choosing courage requires that we face vulnerable moments head-on, with a blend of confidence and humility, rather than avoiding or reacting automatically to them.

The challenge with doing this, for most of us, is that it requires us to experience some degree of fear or anxiety. If there was no fear or anxiety involved, then the act or path would not require courage.

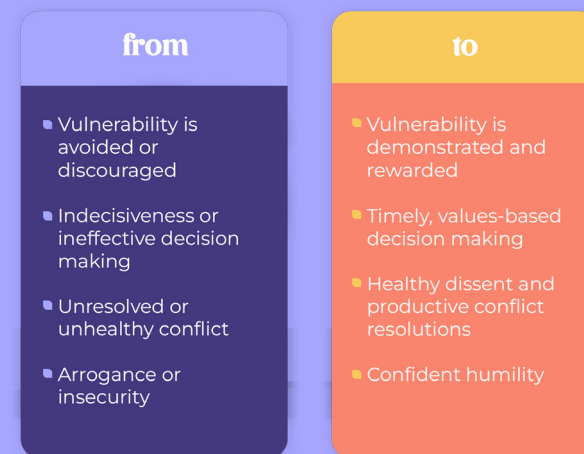
In reality, nearly all human interaction is vulnerable to some extent, as it carries the risk of rejection, disappointment, frustration, confusion, embarrassment, hurt, and a variety of other uncomfortable states.

Here are examples of vulnerable moments that require courage:

- Speaking up against unconscious bias requires courage because we risk experiencing an uncomfortable few moments or being perceived in a certain way by others.
- Saying “I don’t know” or “I need help” might require courage because we risk being judged as incompetent, inadequate, or needy.
- Disagreeing with someone’s opinion out loud might require courage, especially if there is a power differential that brings the risk of disapproval or negative professional consequences.
- Depending on our personality or the environment, it might even require courage to simply make eye contact, smile genuinely, and say “Hello, how are you today?” because we risk being ignored, dismissed, or viewed as “too enthusiastic”.

These scenarios and all the others like them that inherently involve vulnerability and risk, are the pivotal moments where culture is designed, redesigned, nurtured, or damaged. Workplace culture is determined by how people respond in these moments, over and over again.

In most organizations, there is teaching, learning, and practicing that needs to be done around courage to help employees shift:





leaders are
cultural
architects

leaders are cultural architects

By now, you know that culture is everyone's business – including yours – no matter where you sit in the organization. Ultimately, workplace culture is shaped by what people demonstrate, reward, and discourage *in relation to each other*.

Are the majority of people regularly doing the Me Work and We Work? Are they attending to each other and to system issues with responsiveness instead of reactivity?

Do the majority of the people in the group demonstrate the skills, characteristics, and behaviors of elevating energy, prioritizing connection, and choosing courage?

Are these skills, characteristics, and behaviors valued, and rewarded by others?

Or are they dismissed, undermined, or discouraged?

Here's what's important:

While culture IS everyone's business, if you are a formal leader in your organization, meaning people in the organization report to you or consider you their boss, you have an extra set of privileges and responsibilities. Your positional power means that you are the cultural architect of your team.

When we work with leaders in organizations who are interested in or responsible for culture, we give them these three key action words to remember:



demonstrate



reward



discourage

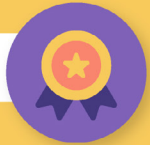


leaders are cultural architects

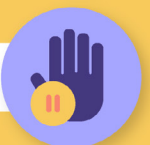
Demonstrate



Reward



Discourage





demonstrate

Be the Change You Wish to See

As a leader of a team, people are watching what you do. They are following your lead in determining what is okay, safe, valuable, accepted, tolerated, rewarded, etc.

For example:

If you want your team to ask better questions during meetings so learning, collaboration, and growth happens faster, the first thing you need to do is ...

Ask better questions! Demonstrate what curiosity looks like. Become a person who listens well and asks better questions.

If you want people to admit mistakes when they make them so that the team can learn collectively and reduce the likelihood of that mistake being made again, the first thing you need to do is ...

Admit your mistakes publicly and engage in conversation with others about your learnings from the mistakes.

Demonstrate what learning from mistakes looks like.

This “demonstrate” idea can be best summed up by a quote credited to Gandhi:

“be the change you wish to see in the world.”

When it comes to culture, your first order of business as a leader is to always ensure YOU are demonstrating the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes you want to cultivate on your team.



reward

Praise is Not a Finite Resource

When we verbally or physically reward someone for their actions, it triggers specific neural pathways in their brain that connect the rewarded activity with a pleasant feeling. As humans, we do more of what we know will feel good to us, and less of what we know will not. We are also always subconsciously looking for signs that we are accepted, approved, or that we belong – and rewarding someone for something signals acceptance, approval, and belonging.

So rewarding people for desirable choices and behaviors leads to more of the desirable choices and behaviors.

For example:

If there are two people on your team with a history of tension and unresolved conflicts. As a leader invested in improving workplace culture, what you want for these people is for them to be able to navigate their differences productively, in a way that prioritizes connection and courage over rightness, ego, or winning.

And if you observe these two people in a meeting have a difficult conversation with each other where they manage to successfully navigate their differences. They speak to each other directly, but with care, and reach a compromise that feels like a win-win for both. It is clear to you that these two people have done some important Me Work and they are doing their We Work together in real time in this meeting.

This exchange should be acknowledged and rewarded, especially if it is a first for the two people.

Depending on the situation, you might even choose to reward it publicly so that other people on the team also learn what is valued on your team when it comes to differences and conflict. As the leader, you might say something during the meeting like:

“Jamal and Paula, I know you both came to that conversation with different opinions and I really appreciate how you navigated the tension in a way that led to a win-win. Great work.”

When it comes to culture, your second order of business as a leader is to be sure you are subtly, overtly, directly, and indirectly rewarding the attitudes, energy, thinking patterns, and choices that support the culture you are designing. Your priority is to acknowledge and reward Me Work and We Work when you see it happening or you can feel the positive effects of it.

As Dean Phillips says:

“rewarding good behavior is good policy.”



discourage

What You Tolerate, You Normalize

The third action leaders need to be thinking about as they are supporting other people in Me Work and We Work is discourage.

The hard truth is this:

If there are attitudes and behaviors on your team that undermine the culture you want to build and nurture, those attitudes and behaviors must be respectfully but directly called out. We must be clear with our teams what interpersonal behaviors are okay and not okay, and people must be held accountable for meeting these standards. Full stop.

For example:

If there is one member of your team who tends to gossip frequently and who shares information that is not theirs to share. You could choose to discourage this behavior in any number of ways:

If you have not been explicitly clear with your entire team that gossiping is not accepted, you might bring this topic up in a team meeting and clearly set the expectation for everyone.

You might meet with this one team member privately and say:

“Jay, I want to discuss a behavior I’ve observed that is unhelpful to our team. I often notice you talking with colleagues about other colleagues’ lives in a way that resembles gossip. On a couple of occasions, I’ve overheard you sharing information that is not yours to share. That concerns me because this behavior undermines trust on the team...”

From our experience, most leaders find discouraging unwanted attitudes and behaviors to be the most challenging of the three actions. We often don’t proactively address unwanted behavior because:

- We don’t like conflict, or anything that feels like conflict.
- We’re worried about being perceived a certain way.
- We’re busy and don’t feel we have time or energy to dedicate to these types of conversations.

But, as Timothy Clark notes:

“what you tolerate, you normalize.”

Tolerating unhelpful attitudes and behaviors undermines culture, decreases the morale and engagement of our teams, and ultimately causes more frustration for the leader.



key takeaways

- Culture is the sum total of the way we relate with each other. Every group of people develops a culture after spending any significant time together.
 - Cultures are often developed accidentally, without intention. Especially in the workplace, this often leads to mediocrity at best or toxicity at worst. Sometimes organizations will end up with a “happy accident” – but usually not for long.
 - Shifting a culture from accidental to intentional requires changing group norms, which requires changing behaviors, which requires that the people in the group update their inner operating systems so they relate with each other better. We call this doing our “Me Work” and our “We Work”.
 - Me Work and We Work are both about shifting ourselves and our relationships from a state of reactivity to a state of responsiveness. Reactivity leads to habitual, automatic, or mindless interactions, often led with ego. Responsiveness results in presence, thoughtfulness, and curiosity, often led with our higher self.
 - In addition to making the workplace simply feel better, one of the biggest benefits to Me Work and We Work is that it allows people to address or resolve the system issues that inevitably arise in any organization and ultimately support the organization in fulfilling its mission. There is a direct correlation between the degree of Me Work and We Work happening on a team and its ability to perform well together.
 - As teams and organizations are focusing on supporting their employees in their Me Work, We Work, and addressing system issues, there are three key ingredients to focus on: managing energy, prioritizing connection, and choosing courage.
- As humans, energy is our main fuel for life and work. In today’s highly demanding world, most humans struggle to maintain enough energy, or the right type of energy, or the ability to focus their energy purposefully. Learning to cultivate, expand, replenish, and direct our energy is essential to being able to contribute to a thriving culture.
 - The sense of being connected to and safe around others is the catalyst for high engagement and a thriving culture. But most humans struggle to get and stay connected with others, often inadvertently undermining connection and trust through default reactivity. To design and nurture an intentional culture, organizations must support their people in doing the Me Work and We Work that helps them prioritize connection over rightness, winning, or maintaining an image.
 - Courage is an underpinning of an intentional culture. Since changing culture is about changing relationships – and human relationships are inherently vulnerable – employees must develop new skills and confidence designed to help them choose courage in the face of vulnerability rather than staying “safe” in the status quo.
 - While culture is everyone’s business, culture is very team specific and the person on the team with the greatest influence on culture is usually the formal leader because of their positional power and influence.
 - As the cultural architect of the team, formal leaders have an extra set of privileges and responsibilities when it comes to culture: demonstrate, reward, and discourage. While it’s important that everyone be working on the Me Work and We Work of energy, connection, and courage, leaders must consistently go first and model the behaviors that are necessary for an intentional culture. They must reward helpful attitudes, behaviors, and interpersonal skills – and discourage unhelpful ones. This is how norms are changed and cultures shift from accidental to intentional.