The Culture Code

Daniel Coyle
Skill 1: Build Safety
Chapter 1: The Good Apples
Except for one group.

"It's the outlier group," Felps says. "They first came to my attention when Nick mentioned that there was one group that felt really different to him. This group performed well no matter what he did. Nick said it was mostly because of one guy. You can see this guy is causing Nick to get almost infuriated--his negative moves aren't working like they had in the other groups, because this guy could find a way to flip it and engage everyone and get people moving toward the goal."

We'll call this person Jonathan. He is a thin, curly haired young man with a quiet steady voice and an easy smile. Despite the bad apples efforts, Jonathan's group is attentive and energetic, and they produce high-quality results. The more fascinating part, from Felps's view, is that at first glance, Jonathan doesn't seem to be doing anything at all.

" A lot of it is really simple stuff that is almost invisible at first," Felps says. "Nick would start being a jerk, and [Jonathan] would lean forward, use body language, laugh and smile, never in a contemptuous way, but in a way that takes the danger out of the room and defuses the situation. It doesn't seem all that different at first. But when you look more closely, it causes some incredible things to happen."

Over and over Felps examines the video of Jonathan's moves, analyzing them as if they were a tennis serve or a dance step. They follow a pattern: Nick behaves like a jerk, and Jonathan reacts instantly with warmth, deflecting the negativity and making a potentially unstable situation feel solid and safe. Then Jonathan pivots and asks a simple question that draws the others out, and he listens intently and responds. Energy levels increase; people open up and share ideas, building chains of insight and cooperation that move the group swiftly and steadily toward its goal.

"Basically, [Jonathan] makes it safe, then turns to the other people and asks,'Hey, what do you think of this?'" Felps says. "Sometimes he even asks Nick's questions like, 'How would you do that?' Most of all he radiates an idea that is something like, *Hey, this is all really comfortable and engaging, and I'm curious about what everybody else has to say.* It was amazing how such simple, small behaviors kept everybody engaged and on task." Even Nick, almost against his will, found himself being helpful.

This is not just Lederman's opinion--it is fact. As we speak, a river of data from the group's performance is rolling across his computer screen, including the percentage of time each person spends talking, the energy levels of their voices, their speaking rates, the smoothness of turn taking, the number of interruptions, and the amount of each person's vocal pattern mimics the others. Lederman has captured this data using a small red plastic device the size of a credit card that contains a microphone, GPS, and an array of other sensors.

The device is called a sociometer. It samples the data five times per second and wirelessly streams it to a server, where it is rendered into a series of graphs.

iBelonging cues are behaviors that create safe connection tin groups. They include, among others, proximity, eye contact, energy, mimicry, turn taking, attention, body language, vocal pitch, consistency of emphasis, and whether everyone talks to everyone else in the group.

The task was to negotiate the terms for a new position, including salary, company car, vacation, and ehealth benefits. Pentland and Curhan found that the first five minutes of sociometric data strongly predicted the outcomes of the negotiations. In other words, the belonging cues sent in the initial moments of the interaction mattered more than anything they said.

Another experiment analyzed a competition in which entrepreneurs pitched business ideas to ya group of executives. Each participant presented their plan to the group; the group then selected and ranked the most promising plans for recommendation to an outside group of angel investors. Pentland found that the sociometers--which tracked only the cues exchanged by presenter and audience and ignored all the informational content--predicted the rankings with nearly perfect accuracy. In other words, the content of the pitch didn't matter as much as the set of cues with which the pitch was delivered and received.

"The executives [listening to the pitches] thought they were evaluating the plans based on rational measures, such as: How original is this idea? How does it fit the current market? How well developed is this plan?" Pentland wrote. "While listening to the pitches, though, another part of the brain was registering other crucial information, such as: How much does this person believe in this idea? How confident are they when speaking? How determined are they to make this work?"

Overall Pentland's studies show that team performance is driven by five measurable factors:

- Everyone in the group talks and listens in roughly equal measure, keeping contributions short.
- Members maintain high levels of eye contact, and their conversations and gestures are energetic.
- Members communicate directly with one another, not just with the team leader.
- Members carry on back-channel or side conversations within the team.

- Members periodically break, go exploring outside the team, and bring information back to share with the others.

Chapter 2: The Billion-Dollar Day When Nothing Happened
These Ads Suck

One of his most vivid examples of the power of belonging cues is a study by an Austrailian group that examined 772 patients who had been admitted to the hospital after a suicide attempt. In the months after their release, half received a series of postcards that read as follows:

Dear _____

It has been a short time since you were here at Newcastle Mater Hospital, and we hope things are going well for you. If you wish to drop us a note, we would be happy to hear from you.

Best wishes,
[signature]

Over the next two years, members of the group that received the postcards were readmitted at half the rate of the control group.

"A small signal can have a huge effect," Walton says. "But the deeper thing to realize is that you can't just give a cue once. This is all about establishing relationships, conveying the fact that I'm interested in you, and that all the work we do together is in the context of that relationship. It's a harrative--you have to keep it going. It's not unlike a romantic relationship. How often do you tell your partner that you love them? It may be true,.. But it's still important to let them know, over and over."

*Here's a handy use of this effect: Thinking about your ancestors makes you smarter. A research team led by Peter Fischer found that spending a few minutes contemplating your family tree (as opposed to contemplating a friend, or a shopping list, or nothing at all) significantly boosted performance on tests of cognitive intelligence. Their hypothesis is that thinking about our connections to the group increases our feelings of autonomy and control.

Chapter 3: The Christmas Truce, the One-Hour Experiment, and the Missileers
The One-Hour Experiment

The experiment went like this: Several hundred new hires were divided into two groups, plus the usual control group. Group one received standard training plus an additional hour that focused on WIPRO's identity. These trainees heard about the company's successes, met a "star performer," and answered questions about their first impressions of WIPRO. At the end of the hour, they received a fleece sweatshirt embroidered with the company's name.

Group two also received the standard training, plus an additional hour focused not on the company but on the employee. These trainees were asked questions like *What is unique about you that leads to your happiest times and best performances at work?* In a brief exercise, they were asked to imagine they were lost at sea and to consider what special skills they might bring to the situation. At the end of the hour, they were given a fleece sweatshirt embroidered with their name alongside the company's name.

Staats didn't expect the experiment to show much. High attrition is the norm in the call center world, and WIPRO's attrition rates were firmly in line with industry averages. And besides, Staats wasn't inclined to believe a one-hour intervention could make a long-term impact. A former engineer who spent the first years of his career as an analyst at Goldman Sachs, he isn't some pie-in-the-sky academic. He knows how things work in the real world.

"I was pretty sure that our experiment was going to show a small effect, if any at all," Staats says. "I saw the onboarding process in rational, transactional, informational terms. You show up at a new job on the first day, and there's a straightforward process where you learn how to act, how to behave, and that's all there is to it."

Seven months later the numbers came in, and Staats was, as he put it, "completely shocked." Trainees from group two were 250 percent more likely than those from group one and 157 percent more likely than those from the control group to still be working at WIPRO. The hour of training had transformed group two's relationship with the company. They went from being noncommittal to being engaged on a far deeper level. The question was why.

The Opposite of Belonging

Are we connected? Do we share a future? Are we safe?

Chapter 4: How to Build Belonging
The Relationship Maker

_____"A lot of coaches can yell or be nice, but what Pop does is different," says assistant coach Chip Engelland. "He delivers two things over and over: He'll tell you the truth, with no bullshit, and then he'll love you to death."

One misconception about highly successful cultures is that they are happy, lighthearted places. This is mostly not the case. They are energized and engaged, but at their core their members are oriented less around achieving happiness than around solving hard problems together. This task involved many moments of high-candor feedback, uncomfortable truth-telling, when they confront the gap between where the group is, and where it ought to be. Larry Page created one of these moments when he

posted his "These ads suck" note in the Google kitchen.

A few years back a team of psychologists from Stanford, Yale, and Columbia had middle school students write an essay, after which teachers provided different kinds of feedback. Researchers discovered that one particular form of feedback boosted student effort and performance so immensely that they deemed it "magical feedback." Students who received it chose to revise their papers far more often than students who did not, and their performance improved significantly. The feedback was not complicated. In fact, it consisted of one simple phrase.

I'm giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them.

That's it. Just nineteen words. N one of these words contain any information on how to improve. Yet they are powerful because they deliver a burst of belonging cues. Actually, when you look more closely at the sentence, it contains three separate cues:

- You are part of this group.
- This group is special; we have high standards here.
- I believe you can reach those standards.

These signals provide a clear message that lights up the unconscious brain: *Here is a safe place to give effort*. They also give us insight into the reason Popovich's methods are effective. H is communications consist of three types of belonging cues.

- Personal, up-close connection (body language, attention, and behavior that translates as *I care about you*)
- Performance feedback (relentless coaching and criticism that translates as *We have high standards here*)
- Big-picture perspective (larger conversations about politics, history, and food that translate as *Life is bigger than basketball*)

Chapter 5: How to Design for Belonging
The Architect of the Greenhouse
All these factors would seem to make sense, but Allen could find none that played a meaningful role in cohesion. Except for one.

The distance between their desks.

At first he didn't believe it. Group chemistry is such a complex and mysterious process that he wanted the reason for it to be similarly complex and mysterious. But the more he explored the data, the clearer the answer became. What mattered most in creating a successful team had less to do with intelligence and experience and more to do with where the desks happened to be located.

"Something as simple as visual contact is very, very important, more important than you might think," Alan says."If you can see the other person or even the area where they work, you're reminded of them, and that brings a whole bunch of effects."

Allen decided to dig deeper, measuring frequency of interactions against distance. "We could look at how often people communicated and see where they were located in relation to each other," he says. "We could see, just threw the frequency, without knowing where they sat, who was on each floor. We were really surprised at how rapidly it decayed" when they moved to a different floor. "It turns out that vertical separation is a very serious thing. If you're on a different floor in some organizations, you may as well be in a different country."

As scientists have pointed out, the Allen Curve follows evolutionary logic. For the vast majority of human history, sustained proximity has been an indicator of belonging--after all we don't get consistently close to someone unless it's mutually safe. Studies show that digital communications also obey the Allen Curve; we're far more likely to text, email, and interact virtually with people who are physically close. (One study found that workers who shared a location emailed one another four times as often as workers who did not, and as a result they completed their projects 32 percent faster.)

All of which gives us a lens to understand what Tony Hsieh is up to. He is leveraging the Allen Curve. His projects tend to succeed for the same reason the creative cluster project succeeded: closeness helps create efficiencies of connection. The people in his orbit behave as if they were under the influence of some kind of drug because, in fact, they are.

Chapter 6: Ideas for Action
The learning curve applies even to the scientist who study belonging. For example, Will Felps, who did the bad apple study (see Chapter 1), described how insights from his research affected the way he communicated in his

personal life. "I used to like to try to make a lot of small clever remarks in conversation, trying to be funny, sometimes in a cutting way," he says. "Now I see how negatively those signals can impact the group. So I try to show that I'm listening. When they're talking, I'm looking at their face, nodding, saying 'What do you mean by that,' 'Could you tell me more about this,' or asking their opinions about what we should do, drawing people out. Felps and Edmonson are speaking to the same truth: Creating safety is about dialing in to small, subtle moments and delivering targeted signals at key points.

Overcommunicate Your Listening: When I visited the successful cultures, I kept seeing the same expression on the faces of listeners. It looked like this: head tilted slightly forward, eyes unblinking, and eyebrows arched up. Their bodies were still, and they leaned toward the speaker with intent. The only sound they made was a steady stream of affirmations--*yes, uh-huh, gotcha*--that encouraged the speaker to keep going, to give them more. "Posture and expression are incredibly important," said Ben Waber, a former PhD student of Alex Pentland's who founded Humanyze a social analytics consulting firm. "It's the way we prove that we're in sync with someone."

Relatedly, it's important to avoid interruptions. The smoothness of turn taking, as we've seen, is a powerful indicator of cohesive group performance. Interruptions shatter the smooth interactions at the core of belonging. They are so discohesive, in fact, that Waber uses interruption metrics as sales training tools. "When you can show someone numbers that the top salespeople hardly ever interrupt people, and then rate them on that scale, you can deliver a powerful message," he says. Of course, not all interruptions are negative: Creative sessions, for example, often contain bursts of interruptions. The key is to draw a distinction between interruptions born of mutual excitement and those rooted in lack of awareness and connection.

Spotlight Your Fallibility Early On--Especially If You're a Leader: In any interaction, we have a natural tendency to try to hide our weaknesses and appear competent. If you want to create safety, this is exactly the wrong move. Instead, you should open up, show you make mistakes, and invite input with simple phrases like "This is just my two cents." "Of course, I could be wrong here." "What am I missing?" "What do you think?"
"To create safety, leaders need to actively invite input," Edmonson says. "It's really hard for people to raise their hand and say, 'I have something tentative to say.' And it's equally hard for people not to answer a genuine question from a leader who asks for their opinion or their help.

Embrace the Messenger: One of the most vital moments for creating safety is when a group shares bad news or gives tough feedback. In these moments, it's important not simply to tolerate the difficult news but to embrace it. "You know the phrase, 'Don't shoot the messenger'?" Edmonson says. "" In fact, it's not enough to not shoot them. You have to hug the messenger and let them know how much you need that feedback. That way you can be sure that they feel safe enough to tell you the truth next time.

Preview Future Connection: One habit I saw in successful groups was that of sneak-previewing future relationships, making small but telling connections between now and a vision of the future.

Overdo Thank-Yous: When you enter highly successful cultures, the number of thank-yous you hear seems slightly over the top. At the end of each basketball season, for example, Spurs coach Gregg Popovich takes each of his star players aside and thanks them for allowing him to coach them. Those are his exact words: *Thank you for allowing me to coach you*. It makes little logical sense--after all, both Popovich and the player are amply compensated, and it's not like the player had a choice whether to be coached. But that kind of moment happens all the time in highly successful groups, because it has less to do with thanks than affirming the relationship.
While all this thanking seems over the top, there's a strong scientific support that ignites cooperative behavior. In a study by Adam Grant and Francesco Gino, subjects were asked to help a fictitious student named "Eric" write a cover letter for a job application. After helping him, half of the participants received a thankful response from Eric; half received a neutral response. The subjects then received a request for help from "Steve," a different student. Those who had received thanks from Eric chose to help Steve more than twice as often as those who had received the neutral response. In other words, a small thank-you caused people to behave far more generously to a completely different person. This is because thank-yous aren't only expressions of gratitude; they're critical belonging cues that generate a contagious sense of safety, connection, and motivation.
In my research, I sometimes saw the most powerful person in a group publicly express gratitude for one of the

group's least powerful members. For example, the chef Thomas Keller, who runs French Laundry, Per Se, and other world-class restaurants, has a habit of thanking the dishwasher at his restaurant openings, highlighting the fact that the performance of the restaurant depends on the person who performs the humblest task.

Create Safe, Collision-Rich Spaces: … A few years back, Bank of America was struggling with burnout in its call center teams. They brought in Ben Waber to do a sociometric analysis, which found that workers were highly stressed and that the best reliever of that stress was time spent together away from their desks. Waber recommended aligning team members' schedules so they shared the same fifteen-minute coffee break every day. He also had the company buy nicer coffee machines and install them in more convenient gathering places. The effect was immediate: a 20 percent increase in productivity, and a reduction in turnover from 40 percent to 12 percent. Waber has also overseen interventions in company cafeterias: Merely replacing four person tables with ten-person tables has boosted productivity by 10 percent. The lesson of all these studies is the same: Create spaces that maximize collisions.

Make Sure Everyone Has a Voice: Ensuring that everyone has a voice is easy to talk about but hard to accomplish. This is why many successful groups use simple mechanisms that encourage, spotlight, and value full-group contribution. For example, many groups follow the rule that no meeting can end without everyone sharing something." Others hold regular reviews in which anybody can offer their two cents.

- What do you like most about the *Benfold*?
- What do you like the least?
- What would you change if you were captain?

Skill 2: Share Vulnerability

Chapter 7: "Tell Me What You Want, and I'll Help You"

All of which underlines a strange truth. The crew of flight 232 succeeded not because of their individual skills but because they were able to combine those skills into a greater intelligence. They demonstrated that a series of small, humble exchanges--*Anyone have any ideas? Tell me what you want, and I'll help you*-- can unlock a group's ability to perform. The key, as we're about to learn, involves the willingness to perform a certain behavior that goes against our every instinct: sharing vulnerability.

Well the seals and Pixar generate these moments in a structured way, other groups use looser, more organic methods. At Gramercy Tavern, a New York restaurant whose staff ranks as the culinary world's version of a SEAL team, I watched as Whitney Macdonald was minutes away from a moment she had long anticipated: her first-ever shift as a front waiter. The lunch crowd was lining up on the sidewalk, and she was excited and a bit nervous.

Assistant general manager Scott Reinhardt approached her--for a pep talk, I presumed.

I was wrong. "Okay," Reinhardt said, fixing Whitney with a bright, penetrating gaze. "The one thing we know about today is that it's not going to go perfectly. I mean, it *could*, but odds are really, really, really high that it won't."

A flicker of surprise traveled across Whitney's face. She had trained for six months for this day, learning every painstaking detail of the job, hoiping to perform well. She had worked as a back server, taken notes, sat in on lineup meetings, and shadowed shift after shift. Now she was being told in no uncertain terms that she was destined to screw up.

"So here's how we'll know if you had a good day," Reinhardt continued. "If you ask for help ten times, then we'll know it was good. If you try to do it all alone…" His voice trailed off, the implication clear--*It will be a catastrophe*.

Chapter 8: The Vulnerability Loop

Imagine that you and a stranger ask each other the following two sets of questions.

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 that 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?

At first glance, the two sets of questions have a lot in common. Both asked you to disclose personal information, to tell stories, to share. However, if you were to do this experiment (it's full form contains 36 questions), you would notice two differences. The first is that as you went through Set B, you would feel a bit apprehensive. Your heart rate would increase. You would be more uncomfortable. You would blush, hesitate, and perhaps a laugh out of nervousness. (It is not easy, after all, to tell a stranger something important you've dreamed of doing all your life.)

The second difference is that Set B would make you and the stranger feel closer to each other--around 24 percent closer than Set A, according to experimenters*. While Set A allows you to stay in your comfort zone, Set B generates confession, discomfort, and authenticity that break down barriers between people and tip them into a deeper connection. While Set A generates information, Set B generates something more powerful: vulnerability.

* The questions were developed by psychologists Arthur and Elaine Aron. In its full form, the Experimental Generation of Interpersonal Closeness also includes four minutes of silent gazing into each other's eyes. The original experiment was done with seventy-one pairs of strangers, and one pair ended up marrying. (They invited the entire lab to the ceremony.)

Consider the situation of Al Haynes on flight 232. He was the captain of the plane, the source of power and authority to whom everyone look for reassurance and Direction. When the explosion knocked out the controls, his first instinct was to play that role--to grab the yoke and say, "I got it." (Later he would call those three words "the dumbest thing I've ever said in my life.") had he continued interacting with his crew in this way, flight 232 would have likely crashed. But he did not continue on that path. He was able to do something even more difficult: to send a signal of vulnerability, to communicate to his crew that he needed them. It took just four words:

Anybody have any ideas?

Likewise, when pilot trainer Denny Fitch entered the cockpit, he could have attempted to issue commands and take charge--after all, he knew as much, if not more, about emergency procedures as Haynes did. Instead, he did the opposite: he explicitly put himself beneath Haynes and the crew, signaling his role as helper:

Tell me what you want, and I'll help you.

The mechanism of cooperation can be summed up as follows: *Exchanges of vulnerability, which we naturally tend to avoid, are the pathway through which trusting cooperation is built.*

Chapter 9: The Super-Cooperators

The Power of the Harold

- You are all supporting actors.
- Always check your impulses.
- Never enter a scene unless you are needed.
- Save your fellow actor, don't worry about the piece.
- Your prime responsibility is to support.
- Work at the top of your brains at all times.
- Never underestimate or condescend to the audience.
- No Jokes.
- Trust. Trust your fellow actors to support you; trust them to come through if you lay something havey on them; trust yourself.
- Avoid judging what is going down except in terms of whether it needs help, what can best follow, or how you can support it imaginatively if your support is called for.
- LISTEN.

Chapter 10: How to Create Cooperation in Small Groups
Dave Cooper's Rules

He started with small things: A new team member who called him by his title was quickly corrected: "You can call me Coop, Dave, or Fuckface, it's your choice." When Cooper gave his opinion, he was careful to attach phrases that provided a platform for someone to question him, like "Now let's see if someone can poke holes in this" or "Tell me what's wrong with this idea." He steered away from giving orders and instead asked a lot of questions. *Anybody have any ideas?*

Cooper began to develop tools. "There're things you can do," he says. "Spending time together outside, hanging out--those help. One of the best things I found to improve a team's cohesion is to send them to do some hard, hard training. There's something about hanging off of a cliff together, and being wet and cold and miserable together, that makes a team come together."

One of the most useful tools was the After-Action Review, the truth-telling session we referenced in Chapter 7. AARs happen immediately after each mission and consist of a short meeting in which the team gathers to discuss and replay key decisions. AARs are not led by commanders but by enlisted men. There are no agendas, and no minutes are kept. The goal is to create a flat landscape without rank, where people can figure out what really happened and talk about mistakes--especially their own.

"It's got to be safe to talk," Cooper says. "Rank switched off, humility switched on. You're looking for that moment where people can say, 'I screwed that up.' In fact, I'd say those might be the most important four words any leader can say: *I screwed that up*."

Good AARs follow a template. "You have to do it right away," Cooper says. "You put down your gun, circle up, and start talking. Usually you take the mission from beginning to end, chronologically. You talk about every decision, and you talk about the process. You have to resist the temptation to wrap it all up in a bow, and try to dig for the truth of what happened, so people can really learn from it. You have to ask why, and then when they respond, you ask another why. Why did you shoot at that particular point? What did you see? How did you know? What other options were there? You ask and ask and ask."

"They didn't miss a beat," Cooper says. "Once they got on the ground, there was zero doubt." Thirty-eight minutes later, it was over, and the entire planet had an opportunity to appreciate the team's skill and bravery. But in all the celebration, it's easy to miss the deeper skill, the chain of training and AARs that laid the foundation for that moment.

"When we talk about courage, we think it's going against an enemy with a machine gun," Cooper says. "The real courage is seeing the truth and speaking the truth to each other. People never want to be the person who says, 'Wait a second, what's really going on here?' But inside the squadron, that *is* the culture, and that's why we're successful."

Chapter 11: How to Create Cooperation with Individuals
The Nyquist Method

They possessed deep knowledge that spanned domains and had a knack for asking questions that ignited motivation and ideas. (The best way to find the Nyquist is usually to ask people: *If I could get a sense of the way your culture works by meeting just one person, who would that person be?*) If we think of successful cultures as engines of human cooperation, then the Nyquists are the spark plugs.

A year ago IDEO decided to scale Givechi's abilities across the organization. They asked her to create modules of questions teams could ask themselves, then provided those modules to design t4eams as tools to help them improve. For example, here are a few:

- The one thing that excites me about this particular opportunity is _____
- I confess, the one thing I'm not so excited about with this particular opportunity is _____
- On this project, I'd really like to get better at _____

He is demonstrating that the most important moments in conversation happen when one person is actively, intently listening.

Chapter 12: Ideas for Action
Make Sure the Leader is Vulnerable First and Often

Laszlo Bock, former head of People Analytics at Google, recommends that leaders ask their people three questions:

- What is one thing that I currently do that you'd like me to continue to do?
- What is one thing that I don't currently do frequently enough that you think I should do more often?
- What can I do to make you more effective?

Overcommunicate Expectations

… "'Say more about that.'"

Aim for candor and avoid brutal honesty. By aiming for candor--feedback that is smaller, more targeted, less personal, less judgemental, and equally impactful--it's easier to maintain a sense of safety and belonging in the group.
Skill 3: Establish Purpose
Chapter 13: Three Hundred and Eleven Words
What's this all for? What are we working toward?

When I visited the successful groups, I noticed that whenever they communicated anything about their purpose or their values, they were as subtle as a punch in the nose. It started with the surroundings. One expects most groups to fill their surroundings with a few reminders of their mission. These groups, however, did more than that--a lot more.

When you walk into SEAL Headquarters at Dam Neck, Virginia, you pass a twisted girder from the World Trade Center bombing, a flag from Mogadishu, and so many memorials to fallen SEASLs that it resembles a military museum. Similarly, walking into Pixar's headquarters feels like walking into one of its movies. From the full-size Woody and Buzz made of LEGOs to the 20 foot tall Luxo Lamp outside the entrance, everything gleams with Pixarian magic. As for the Upright Citizens Brigade comedy troupe, it's basement theater is less a theater than a makeshift Hall of Fame, its walls plastered with photos of the Harold teams that have made it big. (You can spot a not-yet-famous celebrity in almost every one.) KIPP schools, the highly successful inner-city charter schools, take a similar approach, naming and decorating each classroom to spotlight where the teacher attended college in order to inspire students to do the same, even adorning the bathroom mirrors with an important question: *Where will YOU go to college?*

What's more, the same focus exists within their language. Walking around these places, you tend to hear the same catch phrases and mottos delivered in the same rhythms.

Work hard and be nice   (written note: Post..? p 179)

High-purpose environments are filled with small, vivid signals designed to create a link between the present moment and a future ideal.

You can do [the most basic psychological experiment of all time] right now. It goes like this:
Step 1: Think about a realistic goal that you'd like to achieve. It could be anything:> Become skilled at a sport, rededicate yourself to a relationship, lose a few pounds, get a new job. Spend a few seconds reflecting on that goal and imagining that it's come true. Picture a future where you've achieved it.
Got it?
Step 2: Take a few seconds and picture the obstacles between you and that goal as vividly as possible. Don't gloss over the negatives, but try to see them as they truly are. For example, if you were trying to lose weight, you might picture those moments of weakness when you smell warm cookies, and you decide to eat one (or three).
That's it. It's called mental contrasting, and it seems less like science than the kind of advice you might come across on a late-night infomercial: *Envision a reachable goal, and envision the obstacles*. The thing is, as Oettingen discovered, this method works, triggering significant changes in behavior and motivation. In one study, adolescents preparing for the PSAT who used this method chose to complete 60 percent more practice questions than the control group. In another, dieters consumed significantly fewer calories, were more physically active, and lost more weight.

He approached a California public elementary school and offered to test the school students with a newly developed intelligence identification tool, called the Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition, which could accurately predict

which children would excel academically in the coming year. The school naturally agreed, and the test was administered to the entire student body. A few weeks later, teachers were provided with the names of the children (about 20 percent of the student body) who had tested as high potentials. These particular children, the teachers were informed, were special. Though they may not have performed well in the past, the test indicated that they possessed unusual potential for intellectual growth. (The students were not informed of the test results.)

The following year Rosenthal returned to measure how the high potential students had performed. Exactly as the test had predicted, the first- and second- grade high potentials had succeeded to a remarkable degree: The first-graders gained 27 IQ points (versus 12 points for the rest of the class); and the second-graders gained 17 points (versus 7 points). In addition, the high-potentials thrived in ways that went beyond measurement. They were described by their teachers as being more curious, happier, better adjusted, and more likely to experience success as adults. What's more, the teachers reported that they had enjoyed teaching that year more than any year in the past. Here's the twist: the Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition was complete baloney. In fact, the "high-potentials" had been selected at random. The real subject of the test was not the students but the narratives that drive the relationship between the teachers and the students.

What happened, Rosenthal discovered, was replacing one story--*These are average kids*--with a new one--*These are special kids, destined to succeed*--served as a locator beacon that reoriented the teach;ers, creating a cascade of behaviors that guided the student toward the future. It didn't matter that the story was false, or that the children were, in fact, randomly selected. The simple, glowing idea--*This child has unusual potential for intellectual growth*--aligned motivations, awareness, and behaviors. Rosenthal classified the changes into four categories.

- Warmth (the teachers were kinder, more attentive, and more connective)
- Input (the teacher provided more material for learning)
- Response-opportunity (the teachers called on the students more often, and listened more carefully)
- Feedback (the teachers provided more, especially when the student made a mistake)

The interesting things about these changes is how small they are, consisting of thousands of tiny behaviors over the school year. Every time the teacher interacted with the student, a connection lit up in the teacher's brain between the present and the future. Each time the student did something ambiguous, the teacher gave the student the benefit of the doubt. Each time the student made a mistake, the teacher presumed that the student needed better feedback. By themselves each of these behaviors meant little.

Chapter 14: The Hooligans and the Surgeons

Taming the Hooligans

Conventional police procedure is to immediately and forcibly intervene and confiscate the ball before any open fighting breaks out. But on Stott's advice, Portuguese officers were instructed to do something more difficult: to wait until the hooligans kicked the ball within reach of the police. Then and only then could the police take the ball and keep it.

"You have to play by the shared rules," Stott says. "The police can't just go take the ball, because that's precisely the kind of disproportionate use of force that creates the problem. If you wait until the ball comes to you and simply hang on to it, the crowd sees it as legitimate.

The Fastest Learners

One of the best measures of any group's culture is its learning velocity--how quickly it improves its performance of a new skill.

The answer, Edmonson discovered, lay in the patterns of real-time signals through which the team members were connected (or not) with the purpose of the work. These signals consisted of five basic types:

- *Framing:* Successful teams conceptualized MICS as a learning experience that would benefit patients and the hospital. Unsuccessful teams conceptualized MICS as an add-on to existing practices.
- *Roles*: Successful teams were explicitly told by the team leader why their individual and collective skills were important for the team's success, and why it was important for them to perform as a team. Unsuccessful teams were not.
- *Rehearsal*: Successful teams did elaborate dry runs of the procedure, preparing in detail, explaining the new

protocols, and talking about communication. Unsuccessful teams took minimal steps to prepare.

- *Explicit encouragement to speak up*: Successful teams were told by team leaders to speak up if they saw a problem; they were actively coached through the feedback process. The leaders of unsuccessful teams did little coaching, and as a result team members were hesitant to speak up.
- *Active reflection*: Between surgeries, successful teams went over performance, discussed future cases, and suggested improvements. For example, the team leader at Mountain Medical wore a head-mounted camera during surgery to help facilitate discussion and feedback. Unsuccessful teams tended not to do this.

Chapter 16: How to Lead for Creativity

Accordingly, Catmull has almost no direct involvement with creative decisions. This is because he realizes that (1) the teams are in a better position to solve problems, and (2) a suggestion from a powerful person tends to be followed. One of his frequently used phrases is "Now it's up to you." This is also why he tends to let a troubled project roll on a bit too long, as he puts it, before pulling the plug and/or restarting it with a different team. "If you do restart before everyone is completely ready, you risk upsetting things," he says. "You have to wait until it's clear to everyone that it needs to be restarted."

Chapter 17: Ideas for Action

Name and Rank Your Priorities

In order to move toward a target, you must first have a target. Listing your priorities, which means wrestling with the choices that defined your identity, is the first stop. Most successful groups end up with a small handful of priorities (five or fewer), and many, not coincidentally, end up placing their in-group relationships--how they treat one another--at the top of the list. This reflects the truth that many successful groups realize their greatest project is building and sustaining the group itself. If they get their own relationships right, everything else will follow.

Be Ten Times as Clear About Your Priorities as You Think You Should Be

A while back *Inc*. magazine ask Executives at 600 companies to estimate the percentage of their Workforce who could name the company's top three priorities. The executives predicted that 64 percent would be able to name them. When *Inc*. then asked employees to name their priorities, only 2 percent could do so. This is not the expectation but the rule. Leaders are inherently biased to presume that everyone in the group sees things as they do, when in fact they don't. That is why it's necessary to drastically over communicate priorities. The leaders I visited with were not shy about this. Statements of priorities were painted on walls, stamped on emails, and canted in speeches, dropped into conversation, and repeated over and over until they became part of the oxygen.

Epilogue

The writing team competed in Power of the Pen, a statewide competition

We adopted a "What Worked Well/Even Better If" format for the feedback sessions