The Culture Code:

The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups

(Daniel Coyle)

Summary

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The Culture Code
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Groups succeed, not because they are smarter, but because they work together in smarter ways.

There are three crucial skills that enable groups to create a culture which promotes success.

1. Build Safety: Generate bonds of belonging and identity.
2. Share Vulnerability: Establish habits of mutual risk to drive trusting cooperation.
3. Establish Purpose: Use narrative to create shared goals and values.

1-Build Safety

The Good Apples

Five factors drive team performance:

1. Everyone in the group talks and listens in equal measures, keeping contributions short.
2. Members maintain high levels of eye contact and have energetic conversations and gestures.
3. Members communicate directly with one another.
4. Member carry on back-channel conversations (expressions that indicate you are listening and understanding what the other is saying) within the team.
5. Members periodically break, explore outside the team, and bring back information to share.

The Billion-Dollar Day When Nothing Happened

Our social brains don't process safety logically. Group cohesion happens when members get clear, steady signals of safe connection. What we crave are cues that tell us we are close, safe, and share a future.

The Christmas Truce, the One-Hour Experiment, and the Missileers

Activities that build connection and identity create a foundation of psychological safety and belonging.

How to Build Belonging

Each person on the team needs these cues:

1. You are part of this group.
2. This group is special. We have high standards here.
3. I believe you can reach these standards.

How to Design for Belonging

According to the Allen Curve, people within 24 feet of one another communicate far more frequently than those beyond that distance. Close proximity promotes connection.

Ideas for Action

Creating safety is about recognizing small, subtle moments and delivering targeted signals at key points.

- Communicate that you are listening leaning slightly toward the speaker. Make good eye contact.
- Avoid interrupting a person. Use affirmations such as *yes* and *uh-huh*.
- Ask for others' opinions.
- Acknowledge that you need help or are uncertain of something.
- When someone delivers difficult news or feedback, let them know you appreciate their candor.
- Find a way to reference where people are to where they can be.
- Express appreciation. Thank-yous are crucial belonging cues that generate a sense of safety, connection, and motivation.
- Eliminate bad apples from the group.
- Create spaces that make it easy for people on the team to interact.
- Make sure everyone has a voice.
- Find simple ways to serve the group.
- Keep positive and negative feedback separate.
- Have fun. Laughter is a sign of connection.

2-Share Vulnerability

Tell Me What You Want and I'll Help You

In times of catastrophic failure, the best chance of survival is to combine the skills of the team. To do this, the leader and group members must ask for specific help.

The Vulnerability Loop

The purpose of groups is to combine strengths in a complementary way. For that to happen to the fullest requires vulnerability. Exchanges of vulnerability build trusting cooperation.

The Super Cooperators

Tightly cooperative teams are an exercise in the exchange of vulnerability and interconnection. They succeed or fail as a unit.

How to Create Cooperation in Small Groups

Having one person tell other people what to do is not a reliable way to make good decisions.
- Rather than give a command, give a proposed solution and ask people to poke holes in it.
- Instead of giving orders, ask questions.
- Do After Action Reviews immediately after an incident or failed project.
  ‣ Discuss the process and every decision along the way from each person's perspective.
  ‣ At each point, ask them why they did what they did.
  ‣ The point is not to blame. The point is to learn how what you do affects others and what each of you can do better in future situations.
- If someone in command insists on a decision that you don't trust, follow the command; however, create back up plans to protect the team and project just in case.

How to Create Cooperation with Individuals

- Be the listener rather than the talker.
- Use gentle questions to help them sort out their thoughts.
- People want you to understand and appreciate them.

Ideas for Action

- The group is unlikely to share vulnerability until the leader sets the example. Admit your mistakes. Give credit to those who help you.
- Give clear signals that you expect cooperation. Sample refrains:
  ‣ Collaborate and make others successful
  ‣ Going out of your way to help others is the secret sauce
- To avoid misunderstanding, create clarity, and maintain connection, deliver negative news face-to-face.
- When someone disagrees with you, discuss it to understand their perspective.
- When questioning, go beyond the first response. Find another way to dig deeper.
- Refrain from initially giving the person a quick fix. Give them space to sort it out for themselves. "Say more about that." Hold suggestions for later.
- Use Before and After Action Reviews.

Before Action Review	After Action Review
1. What are our intended results?	1. What were our intended results?
2. What challenges do we anticipate?	2. What were our actual results?
3. What have we learned from similar situations?	3. What caused our results?
4. What will make us successful this time?	4. What will we do the same next time?
	5. What will we do differently next time?

- Aim for candor. Avoid brutal honesty.
- Sometimes, let the team figure it out without the leader.

3-Establish Purpose

Three Hundred and Eleven Words

When groups have a clear beacon of purpose, they know how to react in a crisis. When we have a clear picture of where we are compared to where we want to be, we tend to put in effort to clear the path toward that ideal future.

The Hooligans and the Surgeons

High-purpose environments send a steady stream of clear signals that align with a shared goal. Consistency is key. The messages embedded in everyday moments help people sense the message: *This is why we work*.

How to Lead for Proficiency

- Identify the key priorities.
- Name the specific key behaviors that will support the priorities.
- Model those behaviors and push others to do the same.
- Create phrases to help members connect the behaviors to the priorities. Flood the environment with the phrases.

How to Lead for Creativity

Create an environment that brings people together in safe, yet high candor gatherings to point out problems, generate ideas, and move toward solutions. The leader's role is to provide tools, systems, and support.

Ideas for Action

- Name and rank your priorities. In-group relationships should be on your list.
- Be CLEAR about your priorities. Over-communicate. Keep them visible.
- Embrace the use of catchphrases. Keep them simple, action-oriented, and forthright.
- Measure what matters.
- Use artifacts to visually signal what matters.
- Reward small behaviors that set the bar for your expectations.

For Proficiency Skills	For Creative Skills
- Set clear, accessible models of excellence. - Provide high-repetition, high-feedback training. - Build memorable rules of thumb. - Spotlight the fundamentals of the skill.	- Take care with team composition and dynamics. - Define, reinforce, and protect the team's creative autonomy. - Make it safe to fail and to give feedback. - Celebrate when the group takes initiative.