

## The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups

By Daniel Coyle (Bantam Books, 2018)

### S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

#### *The main ideas of the book:*

- ~ This book introduces three key skills that organizations with extraordinary cultures have mastered – build safety, share vulnerability, and establish purpose.
- ~ Luckily, these successful cultures are not the result of magic – great cultures *can* be built and the book includes action ideas to help you build your own successful culture.

#### *Why I chose this book:*

Daniel Coyle spent four years researching eight of the world's most successful groups from a variety of fields. I find that reading books outside of education brings fresh ideas into our field, and I appreciate Coyle's work (see The Main Idea's BookBit on his book, *The Talent Code*).

I am also becoming more and more of a believer in the power of the team to move schools forward. The head of Pixar captures this when he says, "Give a good idea to a mediocre team, and they'll find a way to screw it up. Give a mediocre idea to a good team, and they'll find a way to make it better."

Coyle presents some extremely do-able and compelling suggestions for improving the culture of our schools and teams.

### The Scoop (In this summary you will learn...)

What a team looks like when its members feel safe and how to build this safety

- ✓ The skills successful teams use so members feel: *We are safe, we are close, we share a future.*

The skills successful teams use so members are willing to trust each other and take risks.

- ✓ How successful teams create a culture in which members are willing to trust each other and take risks.

How successful teams relentlessly focus on purpose

- ✓ How high-success teams build a strong connection to *purpose*.

- ✓ The Main Idea's professional learning suggestions and discussion questions for use with this book

## Introduction

The key question that this book answers is, “Why do certain groups add up to be greater than the sum of their parts, while other add up to be less?” Coyle finds that the reason lies in the *culture* – “Group culture is one of the most powerful forces on the planet.”

The power of group culture is exemplified in the following amusing experiment. The designer and engineer, Peter Skillman, gave the same task (building the tallest structure with dried spaghetti and a marshmallow) to four-person teams of business school students and kindergarteners. Of course, the business school students had more intelligence and experience than the kindergarteners, but after numerous trials, it was the groups of kindergarteners who built towers that averaged 26 inches tall while the business school students’ towers averaged less than 10 inches. How is this possible?!?! The business school students got sidetracked into worrying about “status management” – *Who is in charge? Is it okay to criticize someone’s ideas? What are the rules here?* Rather than focusing on the task at hand, they were managing their uncertainty about their interactions. The kindergarteners – who were *not* competing for status – were able to more efficiently and effectively solve the task together.

To help us learn to be as effective as those groups of kindergarteners, Coyle spent four years researching eight of the top-performing groups in the world and distilling the key skills that created these cultures. He found that these successful cultures: (1) build safety, (2) share vulnerability, and (3) establish purpose. The good news is that Coyle found that cultures can be *built* and these three skills are within reach. Each part of the book focuses on one of the three skills and describes how the skill works, provides examples of the skill in real organizations, and then ends with suggestions to implement the skill with your own group.

## Skill 1 – Build Safety

The Three Skills That Produce Extraordinary Cultures		
Skill 1: Build Safety	Skill 2: Share Vulnerability	Skill 3: Establish Purpose

### What Building Safety Looks Like in a Team – Why Nick Couldn’t Disrupt Jonathan’s Team

A man who studies organizational behavior, Will Felps, conducted one experiment in which four-person groups were tasked with creating a marketing plan for a start-up company. However, Felps sent “Nick” into each of these groups to disrupt the team effort. Nick acted out typical group-disrupting behavior – sometimes he’s aggressive, other times he plays a slacker, and at other times he’s a depressive Eeyore type. Nick successfully diminished the performance of every group, *except one*. He was thwarted by one person – “Jonathan.” Jonathan made simple, almost invisible, adjustments to deal with Nick’s behavior. When people were speaking, Jonathan would lean forward, use body language, laugh, and smile – all to defuse the situation and create a safe space to draw others out. Jonathan exuded warmth, listened closely, and asked simple questions to engage others in the group.

Jonathan’s success was surprising for two reasons. First, rather than relying on larger skills like intelligence and experience, he prevailed because of relatively small behaviors that shifted the tone of the group. Second, Jonathan didn’t display what you might typically expect from a leader – taking charge, telling people what to do, strategizing, and presenting a vision. Again, it was the small behaviors that created the *conditions* for the group to succeed. And the group did succeed – not because they were smarter than the other groups, but because they felt *safer*.

Highly successful groups describe themselves as feeling like a *family*, and observers see that there’s some sort of *chemistry* among the group members. However, what has made these groups successful is far from magic. In fact, there is a consistent pattern of interactions – studied by scientists at MIT – that shows that these groups engage in transmitting *belonging cues* to each other. Examples include: proximity, eye contact, energy, mimicry, turn taking, attention, body language, and vocal pitch. These types of cues create a sense of safety by addressing basic concerns: *Are we safe here? Is there danger? What is our future with these people?* The belonging cues fit into three basic categories:

1. Energy: They invest in the exchange that is occurring right now
2. Individualization: They treat the person as unique and valued
3. Future orientation: They signal the relationship will continue

Psychological safety is a much bigger issue in groups than one might think. Amy Edmondson studies this issue at Harvard and says, “We have a place in our brain that’s always worried about what people think of us, especially higher-ups. As far as our brain is concerned, if our social system rejects us, we could die. Given that our sense of danger is so natural and automatic, organizations have to do some pretty special things to overcome that natural trigger.” One researcher, Alex Pentland, goes so far as to say that he believes it is possible to predict a group’s performance *solely* by looking at their belonging cues and ignoring their other attributes completely. In fact, Pentland’s studies found five measurable behaviors to look for to determine the success of groups:

1. Everyone in the group talks and listens in approximately equal measure, and contributions are short.
2. There is a high level of eye contact and gestures are energetic.
3. Group members communicate with each other as well as with the leader.
4. Members carry on side conversations within the team.
5. Group members regularly break to explore outside the team to bring back information to the team.

## Examples of Building Safety – A Stranger in the Rain, Suicide Attempts, and Retention at a Call Center

This section includes several examples of how creating a sense of belonging had a significant impact on groups

### A Stranger in the Rain [\*\*\*\*\*my subheading – do I want subheadings in each chapter?]

It doesn't take a lot to send a signal that lets someone know this is a safe place. Take the following example. If you were standing in the rain at a train station, to which of the following strangers would you more likely give your cellphone?

Scenario 1: A stranger approaches and politely says, "Can I borrow your cellphone?"

Scenario 2: A stranger approaches and politely says, "I'm so sorry about the rain. Can I borrow your cellphone?"

While these scenarios seem almost identical, a Harvard Business School experiment showed that simply adding those six words in the second scenario increased the likelihood someone would lend a phone by 422 percent! The second stranger was able to signal, *this is a safe place to connect*.

### Belonging Cues in a Study of Suicide Attempts

In a study concerning a much more serious situation, small cues were enough to save lives. An Australian group studied 772 patients who had been admitted to the hospital after a suicide attempt. A few months after the patients were released, half of them received a postcard that read:

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]

By sending this message – a belonging cue – the hospital cut the readmit rate for those who received the postcards by half of what it was for the control group. The more we can understand the role of these types of belonging cues, the more we can use them to create a sense of safety so that the social brain registers, *We are safe, we are close, we share a future*.

### The Impact of Building Belonging on Job Retention

WIPRO, a call center in Bangalore, India, is another example of how powerful belonging cues can be. WIPRO is a call center like many others in which people field questions from customers who have problems with a product or a service. By all accounts it seems like a good place to work – the company treats employees well by providing food, transportation, and even social activities. However, a decade ago up to 50 to 70 percent of employees were leaving each year. So, the company tried a few fixes – they increased salaries, added perks – but nothing worked. In 2010, with help from researchers, they began an experiment. They divided the new hires into three groups:

- (1) **Group one** received the standard training plus one hour focused on WIPRO's identity. They met a "star performer," heard about the company's successes, and answered questions about their first impressions of WIPRO. At the end they received a sweatshirt with the company's name embroidered on it.
- (2) **Group two** received the standard training plus an extra hour *not* focused on the company, but on themselves. They were asked questions such as, "What is unique about you that leads to your happiest times and best performances at work?" They were asked about the special skills they brought to the job and at the end they received the same embroidered sweatshirt but it included their name next to the company's name.
- (3) **The control group** received the standard training.

Since these differences in training were so subtle, people did not expect much to occur. But seven months into the job, those in group two were 250 percent more likely to continue working at WIPRO than those in group one, and 157 percent more likely than the control group. The difference was that the extra hour provided belonging cues that decreased the distance between WIPRO and the employees and transformed those relationships. Their training was individualized (about their individual skills and uniqueness) and oriented toward the future (what skills they would bring to the job and their name next to the company's).

## How to Build Belonging – The Three Ways Coach Gregg Popovich Builds Belonging on His Basketball Team

Based on the metrics of player performance, one writer determined that Gregg Popovich, coach of the San Antonio Spurs, is the best basketball coach of all times. Given the players on the team, the Spurs have won many more games than expected – in fact, twice as many as the next-nearest coach. Somehow, Popovich is able to get the players to put the team's interest above their own and consistently engage in unselfish behaviors. How does Popovich get the team to do this? It goes far beyond selecting the right players for the team. Popovich constantly communicates the following three types of *belonging cues*:

*1. Personal* - To help players feel they personally belong, he gets extremely close when he speaks to them – practically nose-to-nose – and ends interactions with, "Love you, brother." When he was recruiting a new college star, Tim Duncan, he flew to Tim's hometown and didn't just meet him, rather, he spent four days getting to know his family, talking, and swimming in the ocean with him.

2. *Performance* - Popovich also develops the players' sense of belonging by having high standards for performance. It's a misconception that highly functioning groups are happy and lighthearted places. In fact, Popovich delivers incredibly honest and uncomfortable feedback to players when necessary, but the way he does it is effective. As one assistant coach reported, "He delivers two things over and over: He'll tell you the truth, with no bullshit, and then he'll love you to death." His approach fits into a category that researchers call "magical feedback." Researchers coined this term after studying middle schoolers and finding that those who most improved their academic performance were those who received feedback that conveyed this message:

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

This type of feedback is filled with belonging cues – it sends the message that you are part of this group, this group is special because we have high standards, and I believe you can reach those standards.

3. *Big Picture* - To foster a sense of belonging to something bigger than a basketball team, Popovich does things like surprise the team by showing them a documentary about the Voting Rights Act or engaging the team in a conversation about Syria. Personally he is a big food and wine aficionado and he regularly brings the team out for dinner and introduces them to wines - showing them that basketball isn't the only thing that's important. In fact, the Spurs probably eat together as frequently as they play basketball together!

#### Using Physical Proximity to Create a Sense of Belonging

When you think about a great team, you may imagine an inspiring and outspoken leader. In contrast to this lofty vision, Coyle found that one of the things that makes groups work has to do with the physical *proximity* between people. For example, Tony Hsieh, founder of the successful online shoe store, Zappos, knew he wanted to create a physical community that would foster personal emotional connections. He purchased 28-acres in downtown Las Vegas and worked on building a "city" with a creative commons, a dog park, a community garden, and more.

In addition to having his own connections with staff, he wanted them to forge connections among each other. This is based on his theory of what he calls "collisions" – serendipitous personal encounters, or the lifeblood of an organization that drives creativity, community, and cohesion. His goal is to create a physical locale in which 1000 "collisionable hours" will occur each year. This is part of why he closed a side entrance to Zappos – he wanted everyone to enter and exit from the same entry. This is how Hsieh describes his role, "This place is like a greenhouse. In some greenhouses, the leader plays the role of the plant that every other plant aspires to. But that's not me. I'm not the plant that everyone aspires to be. My job is to architect the greenhouse." He was obviously successful in creating a thriving culture, because, as Coyle writes, "It is easier to get into Harvard than to get a job at Zappos."

Coyle shares another example of the importance of physical proximity in building successful cultures. One research project looked into why some engineering projects were successful and others were not. Was it because of the participants' intelligence? Their age? The number of degrees they attained? The experience or leadership skills they possessed? None of these factors played a role in the success of the engineering teams. Instead, what stood out for the successful teams was *the distance between desks*. The researcher plotted the frequency of interactions and found that when coworkers were within 8 meters of each other, the communication frequency flew off the charts. In fact, he found that in some organizations, even if people were on a different floor, "they might as well be in a different country." Instead, when you see people face-to-face you are reminded they are there, you have more opportunities to communicate, and you tap into your ancient human nature that says you must be safe if you are so physically close to others.

#### Build Safety: Ideas for Action

This chapter provides a number of tips you can use to build safety. However, this isn't a step-by-step guide. Instead, building safety is about tuning in to small moments and reacting with the right signal at the right time. Although the suggestions below are for the workplace, they apply to personal interactions as well. As Amy Edmondson, introduced earlier, said,

"I used to not think about whether I was making people safe at all. Now I think about it all the time, especially at the beginning of any interaction, and then I constantly check, especially if there's any change or tension. I bend over backward to make sure people are safe."

Below are highlights from the tips in the chapter:

1. *Overcommunicate Your Listening*: When Coyle visited workplaces with successful cultures, he observed people communicating with bodies leaning in, eyebrows arched, and the sounds of regular affirmations, "yes, uh-huh, gotcha...." This body language encouraged the speaker to keep on speaking. As one person said about these gestures, "It's the way we prove that we're in sync with someone." Furthermore, it is absolutely crucial not to interrupt because this shatters these reinforcing interactions.

2. *Spotlight Your Fallibility Early On*: While it might be our tendency to hide our weaknesses, it is particularly important in building safety to share those vulnerabilities, especially for leaders. This vulnerability helps to forge a deeper connection. One way leaders can do this is by asking for input, "I could be wrong here. What am I missing? What do you think?"

**3. Embrace the Messenger:** When a group shares bad news or tough feedback, the leader needs to do much more than avoid “shooting the messenger” to build safety. In fact, you should go out of your way to hug the messenger so that people feel safe bringing difficult news the next time.

**4. Overdo Thank-Yous:** In highly successful cultures, the thank-yous may seem over the top. The Spurs coach, Popovich, takes each player aside at the end of the season and personally says, “Thank you for allowing me to coach you.” At the KIPP Infinity school in Harlem, the teachers seem to be continually thanking each other and once the administrative assistant bought all of the math teachers Pi Day t-shirts as a way to thank them. These motions aren’t just niceties; they signal a sense of safety and connection. In fact, Coyle often saw the most powerful people thanking the least powerful members of a group. In one instance, at the opening of a restaurant, a world famous chef started by thanking the dishwasher, noting that the success of the restaurant depended on the work of everyone.

**5. Eliminate Bad Apples:** In successful cultures, the leaders know how to name behavior that runs contrary to the group and eliminate it. In fact, one rugby team in New Zealand had one simple rule about this, “No D-ckheads!”

**6. Create Safe, Collision-Rich Spaces:** The leaders of the successful cultures Coyle visited were emphatic in their belief that physical design is a means of orchestrating interactions. Whether this meant redesigning conference rooms or buying nicer coffee machines so people would gather over breaks, the idea was to enhance physical proximity in order to maximize encounters between people.

**7. Make Sure Everyone Has a Voice:** This is a goal that is easy to have, but difficult to enact. The successful cultures had different ways of ensuring that everyone’s voice was heard. Some had a rule that no meeting can end without hearing from everyone. Others held forums in which anyone could bring up a question or a concern. When one navy captain took command of a ship that received some of the navy’s lowest performance scores, his first action was to hold 30-minute, one-on-one meetings with each of the 310 sailors to ask what they liked about the ship and what they would change. After acting on these suggestions, the ship became one of the navy’s highest ranked ships within three years.

**8. Pick Up Trash:** When John Wooden, one of the most famous basketball coaches of all time, walked around the locker room, he picked up trash. He was already a Hall of Fame player and an incredibly successful coach, and yet he picked up trash. The founder of McDonald’s, Ray Kroc, also picked up trash. This small act of humility sent the simple message, *We are all in this together.*

**9. Capitalize on Threshold Moments:** People are particularly attuned to whether they belong when they enter a group. When people are hired at Pixar – even the baristas – they are invited to a movie screening and sit in the fifth row because that’s where the directors sit. Then they hear a voice, “Whatever you were before, you are a filmmaker now. We need you to help us make our films better.” When you are hired as a player or an employee of the Oklahoma City Thunder, an NBA team, you are taken to the Oklahoma City National Memorial which commemorates the 168 victims of the 1995 bombing. The general manager reminds players to look out into the stands during games because many of the people there will have been personally affected by this tragedy. Examples like these send powerful belonging cues at the crucial time when a person is entering a new group and is deciding whether to connect.

**10. Embrace Fun:** If people in a group can laugh together, then this is the surest sign of safety and connection.

## Skill 2 – Share Vulnerability

The Three Skills That Produce Extraordinary Cultures		
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### Examples of Intentionally Structuring Opportunities to be Vulnerable – Pixar’s BrainTrust Meetings

In examining successful cultures, Coyle found a surprising attribute of these groups, something that may seem to go against natural instincts: members share vulnerability. The previous section focused on how successful groups create a sense of belonging. This section adds to this by showing that when a group shares vulnerability, the members are able to act as one and be more effective. For example, Pixar conducts BrainTrust meetings that require that staff to open up and make themselves vulnerable. In these meetings, the film’s director gets together with all the other veteran directors and producers to dissect each movie. The group goes into painstaking detail when they honestly share which characters lack heart, which jokes fall flat, and which storylines are confusing. It is an excruciating meeting. At the same time, the president knows how essential these meetings are to improving their films, “The BrainTrust is the most important thing we do by far.”

In a very different example, a top New York restaurant, the Gramercy Tavern, also intentionally structures opportunities for its staff to share vulnerability. The restaurant trains its front waiters for six months before they hit the floor. When one waiter had completed this training and was about to start her first shift as a waiter, she was excited but nervous. The manager approached her and said, “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.” Then the manager followed up with this comment, “So here’s how we’ll know if you had a good day. If you ask for help ten times, then we’ll know it was good. If you try to do it all alone...” his voice tapered off suggesting that *it will be a catastrophe.*



Both the Pixar Braintrust meeting and the comments from the manager are examples of how organizations *intentionally* structure ways for staff to be vulnerable and open up, even if it is uncomfortable.

### The Vulnerability Loop

While we may know in our gut that vulnerability sparks cooperation and trust, how does this actually work? Dr. Jeff Polzer, a professor of organizational behavior at Harvard, confirms that seemingly small and insignificant social exchanges in which people share vulnerability can have a significant impact on groups. He says, “People tend to think of vulnerability in a touchy-feely way, but that’s not what’s happening. It’s about sending a really clear signal that you have weaknesses, that you could use help. And if that behavior becomes a model for others, then you can set the insecurities aside and get to work, start to trust each other and help each other. If you never have that vulnerable moment, on the other hand, then people will try to cover up their weaknesses, and every little microtask becomes a place where insecurities manifest themselves.”

Polzer emphasizes that it’s the *second* person who is key. One person reveals a vulnerability, but it’s up to the second person to share her own as well and not cover it up. This interaction forms what is known as a *vulnerability loop*; it functions as the basic building block of cooperation and trust:

1. Person A sends a signal of vulnerability.
2. Person B detects this signal.
3. Person B responds by signaling his/her own vulnerability.
4. Person A detects this signal.
5. A norm is established; closeness and trust increase.

This vulnerability loop changes the way we traditionally think about building trust in a group. Most groups think they need to build trust and *then* people will be willing to participate in risky or challenging tasks. However, science suggests the opposite: vulnerability comes *before* trust and in fact, helps to build it. Vulnerability becomes a requirement in order to have trust in a group. As Polzer says, “Being vulnerable gets the static out of the way and lets us do the job together, without worrying or hesitating.” Coyle sums it up this way: “Exchanges of vulnerability, which we naturally tend to avoid, are the pathway through which trusting cooperation is built.”

### How to Create Cooperation in Small Groups – Dave Cooper’s Rules

Coyle cites Navy SEALs Team Six as one of the highest-performing teams on the planet. Within this team, if you ask about effective leadership, the name that surfaces most frequently is Dave Cooper. He is not your typical leader. He’s not the strongest, the best swimmer, or the best marksman. What he’s the best at is creating great teams. In fact, one team Dave led was so effective, that this was the team that successfully raided Osama Bin Laden’s compound.

One of the factors that most strongly influenced Dave Cooper’s leadership style was an event that occurred on New Year’s Day in 2001 in Afghanistan. He was on an extremely dangerous reconnaissance mission and needed to cross a desolate 110-mile stretch between Bagram and Jalalabad that was more like a hiking trail than a paved road. They barely made it to their destination by nightfall traveling in their reinforced, armored Suburban. When they arrived, the commander said they would be driving back that same night. Cooper felt this was an extremely unsafe idea and they argued back and forth. Eventually, the commander pulled rank and had them return. They ended up getting ambushed and were within inches of losing their lives when their captors decided not to shoot them. As Cooper recalls:

“That night put me on a different path. From that moment on, I realized that I needed to figure out ways to help the group function more effectively. The problem here is that, as humans, we have an authority bias that’s incredibly strong and unconscious—if a superior tells you to do something, by God we tend to follow it, even when it’s wrong. Having one person tell other people what to do is not a reliable way to make good decisions. So how do you create conditions where that doesn’t happen, where you develop a hive mind? How do you develop ways to challenge each other, ask the right questions, and never defer to authority? We’re trying to create leaders among leaders. And you can’t just tell people to do that. You have to create the conditions where they start to do it.”

To answer his own questions, Cooper discovered that it wasn’t enough to simply give people space to cooperate. He had to create the right conditions. So he started to do a few small things. First, he got rid of hierarchical titles. The first time someone tried to use his formal title he said, “You can call me Coop, Dave, or F-ckface, it’s your choice.” In addition, he became careful with his use of language. Rather than giving orders, he found ways for people to question his decisions, “Now let’s see if someone can poke holes in this,” or “Tell me what’s wrong with this idea.” To make team members vulnerable to one another, he put them through some extremely difficult training – having them hang off a cliff in the wet and cold. To further develop this vulnerability, he conducted After-Action Reviews (AARs). Like the BrainTrust meetings at Pixar, these meetings are held after every mission to review all decisions, from the beginning to the end, to get at the heart of what needs to be improved. These meetings are *not* run by commanders, but instead are run by enlisted men in order to create a space in which it is safe to talk. Everyone needs to come to the table, leave their rankings at the door, and turn their humility switch on, especially the leaders. In fact, Cooper argues that “I screwed that up” might be the four most important words any leader can utter. The goal of these meetings is not just to get at the truth for the sake of the truth, nor is it to assign blame – rather, it is to build a shared understanding that can be applied to future missions.

Cooper trained his team relentlessly to deal with any possible problems on the Osama bin Laden mission. During the raid, it was messy with crash landings, helicopters skidding, and more. But because of the way they had been trained to work together, they captured Bin Laden in 38 minutes.

### How to Connect People in Teams -- Roshi Givechi's Empathy and Listening Skills

In another organization with a highly successful culture, one individual stands out: Roshi Givechi. Givechi works for IDEO, an international design firm that has designed, among other things, the original Apple mouse, insulin pens, and the standup toothpaste tube. The 600-person company is organized into teams that work on different design tasks. While Givechi serves as a designer, the company unofficially calls her the “roving catalyst.” She has a knack for working with teams that are stuck. By asking questions, she is able to open up and connect people in teams.

Like the AARs the Navy SEALs use, IDEO has Flights – meetings at the beginning, middle, and end of projects. In these Flights, Givechi is able to help groups with two key tasks: uncovering tensions and gaining clarity about themselves and their tasks. It’s interesting that Givechi sees every conversation as basically the same, “It’s about helping people walk away with a greater sense of awareness, excitement, and motivation to make an impact.” She has to be creative to find different ways to do this since each individual is different. Her goal is to get people to share what they are *really* thinking about and explore possibilities, rather than just make decisions. While her approach isn’t confrontational, “You’re doing the wrong thing,” it is also not just soft – she provokes and she’s hard. One of the ways she does this is by her intensely effective listening. In another example in the chapter, one neurologist fascinated with listening makes the observation, “It’s very hard to be empathetic when you’re talking.” Through listening carefully, Givechi picks up on the tiniest amount of tension and asks a question to explore that tension, *Maybe you’ve had an experience like this... Your work might be similar... The reason I was pausing there was...* Somehow this approach, like magic, makes staff feel comfortable opening up, taking risks, and telling the truth.

When IDEO tried to scale up Givechi’s work, they asked her to design a series of three questions that all design teams could ask themselves. Note that these are incredibly simple and have nothing to do with tasks; instead they focus on emotions:

- 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 \_\_\_\_\_

These questions show that Givechi understood what makes people tick. And it isn’t always about being nice to them – in fact, sometimes she understood that they needed a little push to move forward, a nudge to try something new. It was through digging deeper and listening that she was able to help people connect and move forward with their teams.

### Share Vulnerability: Ideas for Action

Like with Skill 1, creating a sense of belonging, it takes more than one attempt to help a team build habits of group vulnerability. It is something you must work on repeatedly, over time. Below are some tips to help with this:

**1. The Leader Should be Vulnerable First and Most Often:** When the leader admits his own vulnerability, it carries the most weight in a group. Dave Cooper confirms this with his belief that, “I screwed that up” is the most important thing a leader can say. Another important way a leader can make herself vulnerable is by honestly asking for feedback – simply ask for one thing you should continue to do, one thing you should do more of, and one thing you can do to help staff become more effective.

**2. Deliver the Negative Stuff in Person:** Whether it’s a small comment or a larger piece of difficult feedback, the informal rule in successful cultures is to deliver that feedback in person, face-to-face. In one incredible example, when a Chicago Cubs teammate violates a rule, the coach has him draw a piece of paper from a bowl filled with slips of paper with the names of expensive wines. The player must then purchase that wine, and share it with the coach. Here, when you break a rule, you need to reconnect.

**3. Focus on Two Critical Moments When Forming Groups:** Make sure to have norms in place to address two critical moments in a group’s formation: (1) the first vulnerability, (2) the first disagreement. The way a group responds says a lot about how the group will function. Do we dig in our heels and become defensive, or do we take a curious stance and try to learn, “Hey, that’s interesting. Why don’t you agree?”

**4. Listen Like a Trampoline:** Good listening is key to helping people open up and become vulnerable. Two leadership experts have found that effective listeners are like trampolines. That is to say, it is far from passive. Instead, you need to actively respond, absorb what the other person says, support them, and add energy to keep the ideas and the conversation going. As Roshi Givechi, introduced earlier, says – you don’t usually get an answer to a question right away. It takes time to ask the same question over and over, in different ways, and by building even more questions from the response you do get.

**5. In Conversation, Resist the Temptation to Reflexively Make Suggestions:** To create vulnerability so people feel they can take risks, you need to let people feel heard. You can’t do this if you are jumping in with, “Hey, here’s an idea...” Instead, try one simple phrase, “Say more about that.” It’s not that you shouldn’t give suggestions, but it is important to listen *first*.

**6. Use Candor-Surfacing Practices like AARs and BrainTrusts:** It helps to have structured ways to help people build the habit of opening up vulnerabilities like the AARs and BrainTrusts introduced in this section. You don't need a complicated tool, you can just get the group together and ask the following questions (if you remove leadership, this will increase the likelihood of honesty):

1. What were our intended results?
2. What were our actual results?
3. What caused our results?
4. What will we do the same next time?
5. What will we do differently?

**7. Aim for Candor but Avoid Brutal Honesty:** While you want the people in your group to be open and honest, brutal honesty can lead to hurt feelings. Aim for candor – that is, when feedback is smaller and more targeted rather than an indictment of the person.

**8. Align Language with Action:** Choose words your group can use that will convey cooperation and interdependence. For example, IDEO doesn't have "project managers" they have "design community leaders." At Pixar they don't offer "notes" on films, they "plus" them, meaning they offer solutions.

**9. Build a Wall Between Performance Review and Professional Development:** Whenever possible, separate performance review from professional development. Reviews are just too high-stakes to have a conversation about growth. Set aside separate time to talk to individuals about their strengths and areas for growth.

**10. Use Flash Mentoring:** Coyle states that this is one of the best ways he has seen to quickly create cooperation in a group. Rather than setting up mentoring relationships that last months or all year, people pick one person they want to learn from and shadow them for just a few hours. In this short amount of time, barriers are broken and relationships develop.

### Skill 3 – Establish Purpose

The Three Skills That Produce Extraordinary Cultures		
Skill 1: Build Safety	Skill 2: Share Vulnerability	Skill 3: Establish Purpose

#### An Example of Creating Purpose – Three Hundred and Eleven Words

In 1943, Robert Wood Johnson, part of the founding family of the company Johnson & Johnson, wrote a one-page document called the "Credo." It was a statement of the company's values that prioritized the following four stakeholders in this order: (1) customers, (2) employees, (3) community, and (4) company stockholders. The document began like this:

We believe our first responsibility is to doctors, nurses, and patients; to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services. In meeting their needs, everything we do must be of high quality. We must constantly strive to reduce our costs in order to maintain reasonable prices. Customers' orders must be serviced promptly and accurately.

In the 1970s, James Burke was president of the health care company. According to Burke, the problem was that the Credo just didn't seem to matter to many employees, "It wasn't a unifying document." Burke held several meetings to discuss and get people to re-commit to the document. However, it wasn't until September 30, 1982, that the significance of the document surfaced. Six people died because a Johnson & Johnson product, Tylenol, had been laced with cyanide. At the time, there was no public affairs division or system for recalling pills. So the executives flew to Washington, D.C., and the FBI and FDA encouraged Burke to limit the recall to Chicago so they wouldn't frighten the whole country. Instead, Burke and his company decided to do a *complete* recall – 31 million pills at the cost of \$100 million. The company introduced tamper-resistant packaging and sent out teams to listen to the concerns of people. Rather than breaking the company, as many had expected, after the market share dropped to zero it experienced "the greatest comeback since Lazarus" as a pundit phrased it. This is an example of a company responding to a crisis with incredible cohesion and focus – stemming from the 311-word Credo at the heart of the company.

The first two sections of the book focus on how safety ("You are safe here") and shared vulnerability ("We share risk here") help people feel connected and act as one. This section focuses on what this is all for – what is the shared purpose we are working toward? Coyle found that groups with successful cultures boldly announce their purpose through their *surroundings* and their *language*.

For example, when you enter the SEAL headquarters in Virginia you see a leftover girder from the World Trade Center bombing and a flag from Mogadishu. At the Pixar headquarters the entrance feels like one of its movies with a full-size Woody and Buzz made of Legos. At KIPP schools each classroom is decorated with the name of the college the teacher attended to inspire students along with signs that say: *Where will YOU go to college?*

Language is also important in highly successfully cultures. For example, the three organizations above all use simple mottoes: Pixar has *Technology inspires art, and art inspires technology*, the SEALs have *Shoot, move, and communicate*, and KIPP's motto is *Work hard, be nice*. Together, the words and the physical surroundings provide the foundation so these high-purpose organizations can continually tell their *stories* and send the simple message: *Here is where we want to go*.



Stories are also a powerful way to shape culture. Brain scans have shown that when we hear stories our brain lights up and translates these stories into change. One example of this is a 1965 experiment conducted by psychologist, Robert Rosenthal, at a California public elementary school. Rosenthal said he had an intelligence test that would predict the performance of the children. After giving the test to the students, he provided the names of those who scored in the top 20 percent to the teachers and said they would excel academically. What the teachers didn't know is that these students had been selected randomly; there was no intelligence test. The outcome was that the 20 percent deemed "special" outperformed the other students in terms of their IQ as well as other measures (they were happier and better adjusted). Rosenthal showed that changing the narrative – these kids are special and destined to succeed – changed teachers' behavior in ways that prepared students for a successful future in the following ways that Rosenthal found:

1. Warmth – teachers were kinder and more attentive to the "special" students
2. Input – the teachers provided more materials for those students
3. Response-opportunity – the teachers called on these students more frequently and listened to them more
4. Feedback – the teachers provided more feedback to the "special" students, particularly when they made a mistake

The examples above show ways that high-purpose cultures flood the environment with images, language, and stories to suggest *This is why we work* and *This is what we put our energy into*.

### **How to Establish and Nurture a High-Purpose Environment – Small Signals Help Doctors Learn a New Technique**

Coyle writes, "One of the best measures of any group's culture is its learning velocity – how quickly it improves its performance of a new skill." This was shown by a study conducted by Harvard researcher, Amy Edmondson. She examined 16 surgical teams as they attempted to learn to perform a new heart surgery technique after the same three-day training program. You would assume that the team from Chelsea Hospital (not the real name) would have learned the new technique the fastest and the most skillfully. This team was led by a renowned expert who had helped design the technology behind the technique and had performed over 60 procedures with it, was part of a top teaching hospital, and was located in a large metropolitan area. Surprisingly, they were outperformed by a small rural medical center led by a young surgeon who had no experience with the procedure. How did the team with less expertise and less experience learn the technique so much faster that they could complete it an entire hour faster and more effectively than the Chelsea team?

In fact, the 16 teams fell into two groups: those that had *high* success and those that had *low* success. What was the difference between these two groups? The high-success groups were those with the strongest connections to the *purpose* of the work. The following is a list of the five types of signals that encouraged a sense of *purpose* that Edmondson found in the successful teams:

1. *Framing*: Successful teams saw the technique as one that would benefit patients and the hospital. Unsuccessful teams saw it as an addition to existing practices.
2. *Roles*: Members of successful teams were explicitly told why their skills were important to the team's success.
3. *Rehearsal*: Successful teams prepared in detail by explaining and practicing the new protocols and the necessary communication.
4. *Explicit encouragement to speak up*: Successful teams were told to speak up if they detected a problem and were coached to do so.
5. *Active reflection*: Between surgeries, successful teams reflected on performance. One team leader even wore a camera to facilitate this process.

On the surface, it might seem unnecessary to remind surgeons why cardiac surgery is important, that it will benefit patients, or that they should speak up if they see a mistake. However, what Edmondson found is that this is absolutely necessary. These vital cues oriented the team to the purpose – reminding them of the importance of the task and their relationship to one another. This study exemplifies what is important in a successful, high-purpose environment: to regularly send messages about the value of the work. Rather than having one, inspiring introductory speech, it is necessary to continually remind people *This is why we work; this is what we are aiming for*. The next two chapters provide guidance for *how* to create an environment like this.

### **How to Lead for Proficiency – Danny Meyer's Catchphrases**

Maintaining a successful restaurant in New York City is a rarity – only twenty percent of restaurants that open survive to year five. Given these statistics, it's close to a miracle that restaurateur, Danny Meyer, has opened twenty-five restaurants over the past thirty years and all but one have been successful. Is this due to the outstanding food? Service? Leadership? Location? More than anything, the success can be attributed to one key element – the connecting feeling of *home*. When he first started opening restaurants, Meyer admitted that he didn't know anything – how to run a kitchen or read a balance sheet – but he notes that, "I did know how I wanted to make people feel. I wanted them to feel like they couldn't tell if they had stayed home or gone out."

When you go to one of his restaurants and say you like more butter with your bread or that you prefer a seat by the table, they relentlessly track this information in their reservation system and you will find extra butter at your table the next time you visit. Not only is the connection the customers feel to the restaurant key to the restaurant's success, but the connection of the staff to each other and the restaurant is perhaps even more crucial. When Coyle was interviewing Meyer at his restaurant, a waiter accidentally dropped and broke some water glasses. Meyer started watching – not for how efficiently the waiter cleaned it up, but for how the other waiters responded and worked together. Meyer commented, “The number-one job is to take care of each other. I didn't always know that, but I know it now.”

When Meyer opened his second restaurant and he could no longer be in both places at once, things started to slip. It was no longer enough for him to model the behavior he wanted. He needed to build a language and teach behavior that would convey the appropriate values: *What were they really about? What did they stand for? Who came first?* Meyer arranged a retreat for staff and had everyone rank what they thought the restaurant's priorities should be. This is the list they came up with in this order:

1. Colleagues
2. Guests
3. Community
4. Suppliers
5. Investors

Again, Meyer reiterates the same sentiment from above, “I realized that how we treat each other is everything. If we do that well, everything else will fall into place.” Next, Meyer gave catchy names for the behavior he wanted to see in his restaurants:

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <i>Read the guest</i>    | <i>Making the charitable assumption</i>            |
| <i>One size fits one</i> | <i>Collecting the dots and connecting the dots</i> |
| <i>Finding the yes</i>   | <i>Are you an agent or a gatekeeper</i>            |
| <i>Skunking</i>          | <i>To get a hug you have to give a hug</i>         |

On the surface, these phrases seem like vapid clichés. But each one helps create a mental model to guide staff toward the organization's core purpose: *to take care of people*. For example, *making the charitable assumption* means even when someone behaves poorly, give them the benefit of the doubt. *Collecting the dots and connecting the dots* is about gathering information about guests (like the note about butter above) and using this to help people feel happier. Furthermore, Meyer was intentional about using, modeling, and embedding these catchphrases in all trainings, meetings, and communications. Although interactions among humans are complex, Meyer showed that you can use a few simple rules to drive behavior and address problems, like when a customer is rude, make a charitable assumption.

Meyer is not alone in this approach. A number of highly proficient cultures create priorities, name keystone behaviors, and infuse the environment with simple rules that connect the two. For example, KIPP charter schools use phrases like these: “No shortcuts,” “Work hard, be nice,” “Don't eat the marshmallows,” “If there's a problem, we look for the solution,” “Read, baby, read,” “All of us will learn,” “KIPPsters do the right thing when no one is watching,” and “Prove the doubters wrong.” While these may sound corny or forced, when aphorisms like these become used regularly, they end up having a powerful role in shaping culture.

### **How to Lead for Creativity – Pixar's Focus on Teams**

It might be surprising, but in a high-creativity field – like film making – success also comes from prioritizing people, just like Danny Meyer did, above. Ed Catmull is a cofounder of Pixar, a company with one of the most successful cultures of all time. For several years, before Pixar created *Toy Story*, the company struggled. Catmull was aware that most companies at the height of their game usually stumble and fall. To ensure that this didn't happen, Catmull decided that Pixar's next goal was *not* a film. Instead, it would be to create an environment to handle upcoming problems. He realized that rather than focusing on the next great idea, he needed to focus on people, or in particular, teams. “There's a tendency in our business, as in all businesses, to value the idea as opposed to the person or a team of people,” Catmull says, “But that's not accurate. Give a good idea to a mediocre team, and they'll find a way to screw it up. Give a mediocre idea to a good team, and they'll find a way to make it better.”

Because of this belief, he realized he needed to put structures in place to support the work of teams to help them address problems. For example, Pixar initiated one particularly successful organizational habit – the Dailies. These were regular morning meetings that allowed people to meet in order to provide candid feedback on the previous day's footage. Pixar also finds other ways for staff to mix and learn together. For example, they provided a cooking class when creating *Ratatouille* and an archery lesson when creating *Brave*.

Furthermore, although Catmull is quite different from Danny Meyer and doesn't like the idea of catchy mottoes to guide behavior, you can still hear some “Ed-isms” at Pixar such as:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Hire people smarter than you.</i>      | <i>Fail early, fail often.</i>                                       |
| <i>Listen to everyone's ideas.</i>        | <i>Face toward the problems.</i>                                     |
| <i>B-level work is bad for your soul.</i> | <i>It's more important to invest in good people than good ideas.</i> |

After Catmull sets up the structures and culture for teams to thrive, he steps out of the way. In fact, he has almost no involvement with creative decisions. He does this because he believes that teams are in a better position to solve problems than he is, and furthermore, if a more powerful person provides a suggestion, even if it's a poor one, it tends to be followed. Instead, he is often heard saying, “Now it's up to you.” Overall, his task is about building ownership and providing support but then stepping back and pointing the group toward the goal of creating something new.

### **Establish Purpose: Ideas for Action**

None of the successful cultures mentioned in this section carved their mission into stone once and hoped a flourishing culture would result. Instead, it was the result of a never-ending process of failing, trying again, digging themselves out of a hole, and continuing to revisit and recommit to the purpose over and over in small and large ways. Below are some ways to help you do just this:

**1. Name and Rank Your Priorities:** In order to focus a team on a clear purpose, you need to have one. List your priorities, put them in order, and focus on the top of the list (fewer than five). Note that the successful cultures featured in this book put relationships first as a top priority.

**2. Be Ten Times as Clear About Your Priorities as You Think You Should Be:** In one study, employees at 600 companies were asked to name their company's top three priorities. Executives guessed that 64% of employees would successfully do so. However, only 2% could! Don't be shy – spread your priorities however you can: paint them on the walls, stamp them on emails, drop them in conversations. Whatever you do, be sure to overcommunicate them.

**3. Figure Out Where Your Group Aims for Proficiency and Where it Aims for Creativity:** Every skill is either a matter of proficiency (consistently high quality each time) or creativity (doing what has never existed before). For tasks that involve proficiency, be sure to provide: clear instructions, models of excellence, high-repetition and high feedback, and rules of thumb (*if X, then Y*). To foster creative skills: consider team dynamics, support the team, protect the team's autonomy, and make it safe to fail and give feedback.

**4. Embrace the Use of Catchphrases:** Don't dismiss mottoes as corny. Build simple catchphrases that are action-oriented and clarify the behaviors you wish to see (Ex. KIPP's "Work hard, be nice" or Zappos's "Create fun and little weirdness.")

**5. Measure What Really Matters:** Zappos measured success by the number of calls call centers handled per hour until they realized that's not what they wanted to emphasize – they wanted to build customer relations. They replaced this with a measure of "Personal Emotional Connections" and when a customer service agent logged a 10-hour call, Zappos celebrated and sent out a press release!

**6. Use Artifacts:** In the same way the Navy SEAL headquarters displays the battle gear of soldiers killed in combat, use your own artifacts to put your purpose and identity on display.

## THE MAIN IDEA's PD Ideas and Discussion Questions for *The Culture Code*

### ACTION IDEAS

In addition to *discussing* the book with a leadership team or teachers (see the next section for discussion questions), the book points the way to some very specific *action steps* you can take. Take a look at the chart below with the compiled action ideas from the book:

The 3 Skills That Produce Extraordinary Cultures		
Skill 1 – Build Safety	Skill 2 – Share Vulnerability	Skill 3 – Establish Purpose
<b>TIPS – WHAT YOU CAN DO</b> <i>1. Overcommunicate Your Listening</i> <i>2. Spotlight Your Fallibility Early On</i> <i>3. Embrace the Messenger</i> <i>4. Overdo Thank-Yous</i> <i>5. Eliminate Bad Apples</i> <i>6. Create Safe, Collision-Rich Spaces</i> <i>7. Make Sure Everyone Has a Voice</i> <i>8. Pick Up Trash</i> <i>9. Capitalize on Threshold Moments</i> <i>10. Embrace Fun</i>	<b>TIPS – WHAT YOU CAN DO</b> <i>1. The Leader Should be Vulnerable First and Most Often</i> <i>2. Deliver the Negative Stuff in Person</i> <i>3. Focus on Two Critical Moments When Forming Groups</i> <i>4. Listen Like a Trampoline</i> <i>5. In Conversation, Resist the Temptation to Reflexively Make Suggestions</i> <i>6. Use Candor-Surfacing Practices like AARs and BrainTrusts</i> <i>7. Aim for Candor but Avoid Brutal Honesty</i> <i>8. Align Language with Action</i> <i>9. Build a Wall Between Performance Review and Professional Development</i> <i>10. Use Flash Mentoring</i>	<b>TIPS – WHAT YOU CAN DO</b> <i>1. Name and Rank Your Priorities</i> <i>2. Be Ten Times as Clear About Your Priorities as You Think You Should Be</i> <i>3. Figure Out Where Your Group Aims for Proficiency and Where it Aims for Creativity</i> <i>4. Embrace the Use of Catchphrases</i> <i>5. Measure What Really Matters</i> <i>6. Use Artifacts</i>

As a leadership team, plan to conduct three meetings, each of which will focus one of the 3 skills in the chart above. Go through each of the following steps for each skill. As you do this, have participants fill out the chart below (it's based on the Frayer Model teachers use with their students for building vocabulary).

*Step 1:* Discuss the tips for the skill you are focusing on. Give leaders time to read the summary of that section, and then have a discussion to flesh out what each tip means.

*Step 2:* Now that the team has a good understanding of what each tip means, discuss what it does *not* mean. This step helps build understanding and prevent confusion. (For example, 'Pick up the Trash' does not mean to fire the maintenance crew ☺ )

*Step 3:* Discuss how this tip might look in the field of *education* since many of Coyle's examples are from other fields.

*Suggestion:* Look through the tips and identify a few tips your team does well and a few that need improvement. Discuss.

*Step 4:* Once you have done this for all of the tips, choose 2-3 tips you would like to implement. You may want to start with a few areas you feel need a lot of improvement or you might want to start with areas in which you already have some strengths. Create a plan for who, what, when, where, and how in the last box of the template for each tip.

Tip to Implement:	
<u>Step 1: What this TIP means</u>	<u>Step 2: What this TIP does <i>not</i> mean</u>
<u>Step 3: Examples of what this TIP would look like in education</u>	<u>Step 4: Plan for how we would like to implement the tip</u>  <i>Who:</i>  <i>What:</i>  <i>When:</i>  <i>Where:</i>  <i>How:</i>

## Discussion Questions for a Leadership Team or Faculty

### Introduction

• Ask everyone to think about the uncooked spaghetti experiment with the kindergartners and business school students in the introduction to the book. Have you ever been in a group and found yourself focused more on issues of “status” than on the task at hand? Did you ask yourself questions such as: *Who is in charge? Is it okay to criticize someone’s ideas? What are the rules here?* Share this experience and the impact it had on your participation in the group. Discuss.

### Discussion Questions – Skill 1: Build Safety

- In the first chapter, Coyle argues that psychological safety is a much bigger issue in groups than one might think. Amy Edmondson studies this issue at Harvard and says, “We have a place in our brain that’s always worried about what people think of us, especially higher-ups. As far as our brain is concerned, if our social system rejects us, we could die. Given that our sense of danger is so natural and automatic, organizations have to do some pretty special things to overcome that natural trigger.” (In the summary and on p.12 of the book.) What is your reaction to this quotation and this idea – is psychological safety as important as they say? Do you think it influences the work of teams at your school?
- Re-read the note that was sent to some patients who had been admitted to the hospital after a suicide attempt (in the summary and p.24 of the book). What message does this note send? Do you agree that it only takes small signals to impact a person’s sense of belonging to a group?
- Look back at the WIPRO call center experiment (in the summary and pp.36-39 in the book). What was it about Group two’s training that had such an impact on job retention? Think about the training and onboarding you provide for new hires at your school. Is there any way you can take a lesson from this experiment and apply it to your own process?
- Gregg Popovich, coach of the San Antonio Spurs, spent four days getting to know a prospective player before inviting him to join the team (in the summary and p.52 of the book). While a school leader doesn’t have the time to do this for prospective teachers, what else might we do before hiring teachers and other staff to achieve some of what Popovich did?
- Coyle writes that it’s a misconception that highly successful cultures are happy and lighthearted. Instead, he writes, they are “energized and engaged.” Discuss the difference between the two.
- In studying feedback to middle schoolers (in the summary and pp.55-56 in the book), researchers found that one type of feedback was particularly effective -- “magical feedback” -- feedback that sends the following message below:

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

Why do you think the researchers called this “magical” feedback? What are some phrases we can use to help our feedback to teachers become more “magical”?

- Tony Hsieh, founder of Zappos, believes he can foster personal emotional connections by creating a physical locale in which 1000 “collisionable hours” will occur each year. “Collisions” are serendipitous personal encounters, or the lifeblood of an organization that drives creativity, community, and cohesion (in the summary and pp.63-67 in the book). What do you think about this concept of “collisions”? Is it something you can promote in your school? If so, how can you increase our “collisions”?
- What do you think of Hsieh’s view of leadership (from the summary and pp.66-67 in the book): “This place is like a greenhouse. In some greenhouses, the leader plays the role of the plant that every other plant aspires to. But that’s not me. I’m not the plant that everyone aspires to be. My job is to architect the greenhouse.” How similar or different is this to how you see your role as leader?



## Discussion Questions - Skill 2: Share Vulnerability

- At the BrainTrust meetings at Pixar, directors and producers provide painfully candid feedback about each film as it is being created. While these meetings are painful, the president says “The BrainTrust is the most important thing we do by far.” (In the summary and p.99 in the book.) Why do you think the president says this?
- At the Gramercy Tavern, the manager says the following to a waiter who had trained for 6 months and is heading out to greet customers for the first time: “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.” (In the summary and on p.100 in the book.) What is the manager accomplishing with these words? Do we do anything equivalent for teachers heading out to teach their first classes ever? Should we?
- The manager above added the following: “So here’s how we’ll know if you had a good day. 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 suggesting that *it will be a catastrophe*. Is there any way we can do something similar in the education world?
- Discuss the following quotation: “People tend to think of vulnerability in a touchy-feely way, but that’s not what’s happening. It’s about sending a really clear signal that you have weaknesses, that you could use help. And if that behavior becomes a model for others, then you can set the insecurities aside and get to work, start to trust each other and help each other. If you never have that vulnerable moment, on the other hand, then people will try to cover up their weaknesses, and every little microtask becomes a place where insecurities manifest themselves.” (In the summary and on p.104 in the book.)
- Take a look at the 5 steps in the vulnerability loop. Does this seem to be a touchy-feely process, or do you imagine this can have a significant impact on a group? Why?
- In education, we often *begin* the year with trust-building activities (for students or staff). Coyle argues (in the summary and p. 107 in the book) that the vulnerability loop changes the way we might have traditionally thought about building trust in a group. Most groups think they need to build trust and *then* people will be willing to participate in risky or challenging tasks. However, science suggests the opposite: vulnerability comes *before* trust and in fact, helps to build it. Does this idea influence your thoughts about whether we should continue to start the year with trust-building activities? Discuss:
- Coyle describes why Navy SEAL, Dave Cooper, is outstanding at building teams. (In the summary and on pp.135-45 in the book) Can you think of anyone in your professional or personal circles who’s great at doing this? What is it about what Dave Cooper, or someone from your own experience, does that is so effective in building teams?
- Take a look at the quotation below, from Dave Cooper. Discuss the questions he poses as well as - Why it is so important not to just follow what superiors say? Why do we need to create “leaders among leaders”? Why is it unreliable to have one person tell others what to do as a way to make decisions if that person is a skilled leader? Now answer the embedded questions below:

“That night put me on a different path. From that moment on, I realized that I needed to figure out ways to help the group function more effectively. The problem here is that, as humans, we have an authority bias that’s incredibly strong and unconscious—if a superior tells you to do something, by God we tend to follow it, even when it’s wrong. Having one person tell other people what to do is not a reliable way to make good decisions. So how do you create conditions where that doesn’t happen, where you develop a hive mind? How do you develop ways to challenge each other, ask the right questions, and never defer to authority? We’re trying to create leaders among leaders. And you can’t just tell people to do that. You have to create the conditions where they start to do it.” (From the summary and pp.138-9 in the book.)
- Look at Cooper’s small gestures – eliminating titles, changing orders into requests for feedback, having enlisted men and not leaders run review sessions, etc. What do you think of these gestures? Are they enough?
- Cooper argues that “I screwed that up” might be the four most important words any leader can utter. Do you agree?
- Like the AAR (After-Action Review - p.140) meeting Cooper designed, do you have any review-style meetings to discuss student learning, curriculum, assessments, or anything else? What’s the goal of the meeting you have and how does it compare to the goal of the AAR – to build a shared understanding and help so people see the big picture and not just their own part?
- Roshi Givechi is assigned as a “roving catalyst” because she’s so good at helping teams function (in the summary and pp.149-54). What does she do so well? How is she both “soft and hard”?
- Roshi designed some very simple questions teams could ask themselves. Coyle notes that these questions are *not* about the work of the company. What, exactly, is the effect of these questions? Would questions like this work with leadership or teacher teams in your school? Why or why not? Below are the three questions:
  - 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 \_\_\_\_\_

### Discussion Questions - Skill 3: Purpose

- Discuss the following questions that Coyle poses (in reference to Johnson & Johnson's Credo) from p.177 in the book, *How can a handful of simple, forthright sentences make such a difference in a group's behavior?*
- Look at the mottoes of a few successful cultures below – what do you think works about these mottoes?  
Pixar -- *Technology inspires art, and art inspires technology*  
The SEALs -- *Shoot, move, and communicate*  
KIPP -- *Word hard, be nice*
- Take a look at the Rosenthal study (in the summary and pp.183-5 in the book). Do you really think it's possible to change teachers' warmth, input, response-opportunity, and feedback to students by providing teachers with a different narrative about their students? Why or why not? Do you have any ideas about how to change the stories we tell about our students?
- Coyle writes (in the summary and on pp.193 of the book), "One of the best measures of any group's culture is its learning velocity—how quickly it improves its performance of a new skill." Do you agree or disagree? Can you think of a recent example when teachers or leaders had to learn a new skill? What does this say about the group?
- According to Amy Edmondson's study (in the summary and pp.193-6 in the book), the following five factors were what made the surgical teams successful. Discuss what these mean and if you think there's any way these translate into the field of education:
  1. *Framing*: Successful teams saw the technique as one that would benefit patients and the hospital. Unsuccessful teams saw it as an addition to existing practices.
  2. *Roles*: Members of successful teams were explicitly told why their skills were important to the team's success.
  3. *Rehearsal*: Successful teams prepared in detail by explaining and practicing the new protocols and the necessary communication.
  4. *Explicit encouragement to speak up*: Successful teams were told to speak up if they detected a problem and were coached to do so.
  5. *Active reflection*: Between surgeries successful teams reflected on performance. One team leader wore a camera to facilitate this process.
- Edmondson's study shows the importance of continually reminding people of the importance of their work, rather than stating it in one grand speech. Rather than planning one speech at the beginning of the school year, how might you regularly send the message to teachers, other leaders, and students that their work is important?
- In the summary and on p.204 of the book, Meyer states that "The number-one job is to take care of each other." Would you say we have the same priority in the field of education? Does this mean the priority is for staff to take care of each other or the students?
- The following are examples of catchphrases Meyer created to capture the behavior he wants to see at his restaurants. First, think about the behavior you'd like to see as teachers interact with each other, the students, leaders and families. Next, see if you can come up with a few catchphrases that would describe that behavior in a few simple words.

<i>Read the guest</i>	<i>Making the charitable assumption</i>
<i>One size fits one</i>	<i>Collecting the dots and connecting the dots</i>
<i>Finding the yes</i>	<i>Are you an agent or a gatekeeper</i>
<i>Skunking</i>	<i>To get a hug you have to give a hug</i>
- Discuss this quotation from a cofounder of Pixar, "Give a good idea to a mediocre team, and they'll find a way to screw it up. Give a mediocre idea to a good team, and they'll find a way to make it better." (In the summary and on p.220 of the book.) What does this quotation suggest? What are the implications of this quotation for schools?