

The message of “The Culture Code” by Daniel Coyle:

High group performance is achieved through group relationships more than individual proficiencies.

The way these relationships function is based on three learnable skills that feed performance-freeing belonging cues into the culture of your organization.

The cuing in your organization must be relentless, systemic, and systematic, implemented through visuals, language (corporate and individual), and organizational structures/procedures.

People can be bullied or threatened into working hard for a short time, but not into dedicated and creative sustained commitment to your organization, its output, and its long-term success.

From Pixar to Seal Team 6, organizations that have reached sustained levels of excellence purposefully and relentlessly cue three basic human needs into their organizational life. To build a sustained culture of dedicated excellence, you must:

1. Build Safety and Belonging

Human beings are wired to make safety the first priority. If you want your group to achieve maximum sustained performance, people must feel safe and feel like they belong.

How to safe do you help people feel in your organization? Rate yourself on Daniel Coyle’s suggestions on how to build safety and belonging.

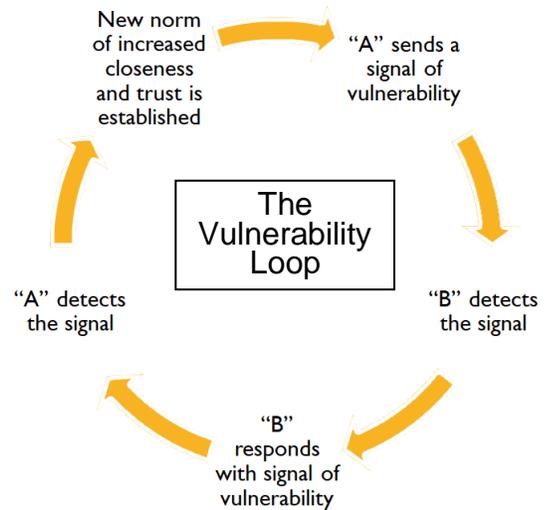
Overcommunicate Listening	I’m engaged and actively giving feedback while people are talking to me	1 2 3 4 5	I’m thinking about how to respond
Spotlight your fallibility	I readily share my past missteps and mistakes	1 2 3 4 5	Leading is about being strong and right
Embrace the messenger	I express thankfulness when people bring problems to my attention	1 2 3 4 5	I get visibly upset when people bring problems
Overdo “Thank-you’s”	I know people’s “love language” and express my gratitude regularly	1 2 3 4 5	They get paid. Why do they need thanks, too?
Don’t tolerate bad behavior (this doesn’t mean fire people)	If someone isn’t acting according to our values, I do what I need to do to be sure his/her behavior doesn’t derail the group.	1 2 3 4 5	I usually keep it inside until review time or I’ll say something to someone else hoping it gets to the person
Don’t give sandwich feedback	When I need to have difficult conversations, I get straight to the point so there is no confusion.	1 2 3 4 5	I believe in sandwich feedback and practice it.
Make sure everyone has a voice	I keep mental track of who has contributed and make sure to prompt people who aren’t speaking up.	1 2 3 4 5	I don’t mind if people tell me their ideas, but I’m the boss and I decide, so it’s not that important to me.
Everyone owns the outcome	Organizational outcomes are more important to me than my position	1 2 3 4 5	I worked hard to be the boss. I don’t intend to do jobs that are beneath my level.
Capitalize on threshold moments	I use important moments to reinforce our corporate culture in the people I supervise	1 2 3 4 5	I don’t really think about reinforcing our corporate culture during threshold moments.
Be painstaking in the hiring process	We have a lengthy, demanding process to assess fit, contribution, and performance. We involve many people in hiring decisions.	1 2 3 4 5	Hiring is pretty quick and dirty. A couple interviews and we make a decision.
Embrace Fun	We have a good time at work even as we are seeking high performance	1 2 3 4 5	We don’t have much fun.

2. Share vulnerability

“If safety is the glue that holds groups together, shared vulnerability is the muscle of how successful groups translate connection into trusting cooperation.” Until people can move beyond self-protection mode and allow themselves to be vulnerable, they are going to do two things that will prevent you from reaching excellence in your organization. First, they will hide their mistakes instead of owning them and learning from them. Second, they will hesitate to bring forward ideas and goals that are probably their best and most creative.

Ask yourself these questions with respect to your leadership roles:

Am I vulnerable first and often?	In conversation, do I resist the temptation to immediately add value?	Do I align language with action?	Do I embrace discomfort?
When forming new groups, do I focus especially on the first vulnerability and the first disagreement?	In what ways do I overcommunicate expectations?	Do I use flash mentoring?	Do I listen skillfully?
What candor-generating practices (Brain Trust, AAR, Red Teaming) do I use?	Do I separate performance reviews and professional development?	Do I disappear occasionally to let my team function without me?	



3. Establish purpose

The third component of “The Culture Code” has by far the most written about it. The key is to establish purpose. High-purpose environments are filled with small, vivid signals designed to create a link between the present moment and the future ideal. Leaders drastically overestimate how well the members of the organization even know the organization’s purpose, let alone buy into it.

Think about these purpose-establishing cues. Do you practice them?

Name and rank your priorities	Be 10x clearer than you think you should be	Embrace catchphrases	Use artifacts
Measure what really matters, even if it’s not very measurable	Focus on bar-setting behavior	Figure out where your group aims for proficiency and where it aims for creativity*	

*Note: Leading for Proficiency vs. Leading for Creativity

There are differences in leading creative environments vs. proficiency environments. But, be careful! Even the most proficiency-oriented environments (like a call center) need to be open to times of leading for creativity. Some of the best ideas will come from the ground-floor... if you let them.

Leading for proficiency calls for naming and clarifying values and goals. Use narratives, catchphrases, and environmental design elements. Never stop cuing the environment.

Leading for creativity calls for failing early and often, listening to everyone’s ideas, facing into problems, and understanding that b-level work is bad of the soul. Hire for people over skills.