



# ***The Culture Code***

## ***The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups***

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By: Daniel Coyle

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### **NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY BLOOMBERG AND LIBRARY JOURNAL**

Where does great culture come from? How do you build and sustain it in your group, or strengthen a culture that needs fixing?

In *The Culture Code*, Daniel Coyle goes inside some of the world's most successful organizations—including the U.S. Navy's SEAL Team Six, IDEO, and the San Antonio Spurs—and reveals what makes them tick. He demystifies the culture-building process by identifying three key skills that generate cohesion and cooperation and explains how diverse groups learn to function with a single mind. Drawing on examples that range from Internet retailer Zappos to the comedy troupe Upright Citizens Brigade to a daring gang of jewel thieves, Coyle offers specific strategies that trigger learning, spark collaboration, build trust, and drive positive change. Coyle unearths helpful stories of failure that illustrate what *not* to do, troubleshoots common pitfalls, and shares advice about reforming a toxic culture. Combining leading-edge science, on-the-ground insights from world-class leaders, and practical ideas for action, *The Culture Code* offers a roadmap for creating an environment where innovation flourishes, problems get solved, and expectations are exceeded.

Culture is not something you are—it's something you do. *The Culture Code* puts the power in your hands. No matter the size of your group or your goal, this book can teach you the principles of cultural chemistry that transform individuals into teams that can accomplish amazing things together.

### **My Synopsis:**

As a former D1 college athlete, I've seen firsthand the power of good teams: the death of bad ones; and have recognized (in hindsight) the roles I've played in each. Now, as a builder of teams and individuals through my business, I'm excited to see that a couple of small things I've been doing have been backed up by research, but this book gives me so many more ideas on how to serve my clients best. If you're serious about building teams, you'll want to check this book out.

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## The Culture Code

### The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups

- p. xv **When Two Plus Two Equals Ten**
- p. xvi We presume skilled individuals will combine to produce skilled performance in the same way we presume two plus two will combine to produce four.
- p. xvii ...individual skills are not what matters. What matters is the interaction.
- p. xx Culture is a set of living relationships working toward a shared goal. It's not something you are. It's something you do.
- p. 1 **Skill 1: Build Safety**
- p. 3 **The Good Apples**
- p. 6 (Jonathan's) group succeeds not because its members are smarter but because they are safer.
- p. 6 Safety is not mere emotional weather but rather the foundation on which strong culture is built.
- p. 10 Belonging cues are behaviors that create safe connection in groups.
- p. 11 Belonging cues possess three basic qualities:
- 1) Energy: They invest in the exchange that is occurring
  - 2) Individualization: They treat the person as unique and valued
  - 3) Future Orientation: They signal the relationship will continue
- p. 11 These cues add up to a message that can be described with a single phrase: You are safe here.
- p. 12 We are built to require lots of signaling, over and over.
- p. 13 It's possible to predict performance by ignoring all the informational content in the exchange and focusing on a handful of belonging cues.
- p. 15 Words are noise. Group performance depends on behavior that communicates one powerful overarching idea: *We are safe and connected.*
- p. 16 **The Billion Dollar Day When Nothing Happened**
- p. 20 Google was a hothouse of belonging cues; its people worked shoulder to shoulder and safely connected, immersed in their projects.
- p. 23 ...little cues that signal a relationship, and they totally transform the way people relate, how they feel, and how they behave.
- p. 24 ...belonging needs to be continually refreshed and reinforced...
- p. 24 If our brains processed safety logically, we would not need this steady reminding...But our brains did not emerge from millions of years of natural selection because they process safety logically. They emerged because they are obsessively on the lookout for danger.
- p. 25 Belonging feels like it happens from the inside out but in fact it happens from the outside in.
- p. 26 Our social brains light up when they receive a steady accumulation of almost invisible cues: We are close, we are safe, we share a future.
- p. 26 Cohesion happens not when members of a group are smarter but when they are lit up by clear, steady signals of safe connection.
- p. 27 **The Christmas Truce, the One-Hour Experiment, and the Missileers**
- p. 33 ...both (sides) experience the relief and gratitude of safe connection – they saw me.
- p. 33 The trenches became a petri dish of belonging cues.
- p. 39 ... (these signals) made a huge difference because they created a foundation of psychological safety that built connection and identity.
- p. 44 Belonging cues have to do not with character or discipline but with building an environment that answers basic questions: Are we connected? Do we share a future? Are we safe?
- p. 48 **How to Build Belonging**
- p. 51 That's the way Pop (Gregg Popovich) approaches every relationship. He fills their cups.

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- p. 54 ...Pop is really intentional about making that connection happen.
- p. 56 ...provide a clear message that lights up the unconscious brain: Here is a safe place to give effort.
- p. 61 **How to Design for Belong:**
- p. 64 I try to help things happen organically. If you set things up right, the connection happens. – Tony Hsieh
- p. 66 Collisions – defined as serendipitous personal encounters – are, he believes, the lifeblood of any organization, the key driver of creativity, community, and cohesion.
- p. 67 When an idea becomes part of a language, it becomes part of the default way of thinking. – Tony Hsieh
- p. 68 Meet people, you'll figure it out.
- p. 70 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.
- p. 72 ...proximity functions as a kind of connective drug. Get close, and our tendency to connect lights up.
- p. 74 **Ideas for Action**
- p. 74 (Building safety) requires you to recognize patterns, react quickly, and deliver the right signal at the right time.
- p. 75 Creating safety is about dialing in to small, subtle moments and delivering targeted signals at key points.
- p. 75 Interruptions shatter the smooth interactions at the core of belonging.
- p. 77 To create safety, leaders need to actively invite input.
- p. 78 ...making small but telling connection between now and a vision of the future.
- p. 79 ...there's a strong scientific support that (thinking) ignites cooperative behavior.
- p. 80 ...thank you's aren't only expressions of gratitude; they're crucial belonging cues that generate a contagious sense of safety, correction, and motivation.
- p. 82 Create space that maximize collisions.
- p. 83 Make sure everyone has a voice.
- p. 83 ...the underlying key is to have leaders who seek out connection and make sure voices are heard.
- p. 86 ...they send a larger signal: We are all in this together.
- p. 87 ...threshold moments don't only happen on day one; they happen every day.
- p. 88 ...laughter is not just laughter; it's the most fundamental sign of safety and connection.
- p. 89 **Skill 2: Share Vulnerability**
- p. 91 **Tell Me What You Want, and I'll Help You**
- p. 97 The key...involves the willingness to perform a certain behavior that goes against our every instinct: sharing vulnerability.
- p. 99 AAR: After Action Reviews...the (SEAL) team members name and analyze problems and face uncomfortable questions head-on.
- p. 102 **The Vulnerability Loop**
- p. 103 At some level, we intuitively know that vulnerability tends to spark cooperation and trust.
- p. 104 ...how small, seemingly insignificant social exchanges can create cascade effects in groups.
- p. 104 Vulnerability loops seem swift and spontaneous from a distance, but when you look closely, they all follow the same discrete steps:
- 1) Person A sends a signal of vulnerability.
  - 2) Person B detects this signal.
  - 3) Person B responds by signaling their own vulnerability.
  - 4) Person A detects this signal.
  - 5) A norm is established; closeness and trust increase
- p. 106 The link between vulnerability and cooperation applies not only to individuals but also to groups.
- p. 107 The vulnerability loop, in other words, is contagious.
- p. 107 Vulnerability doesn't come after trust – it precedes it.
- p. 107 Leaping into the unknown, when done alongside others, causes the solid ground of trust to materialize beneath our feet.

- p. 111 It was rather about how effectively people created relationships of mutual risk.
- p. 111 ...because most of us instinctively see vulnerability as a condition to be hidden. But science shows that when it comes to creating cooperation, vulnerability is not a risk, but a psychological requirement.
- P 112 Exchanges of vulnerability, which we naturally tend to avoid, are the pathway through which trusting cooperation is built.
- p. 114 **The Super-Cooperators**
- p. 121 It adds up to a choice. You can focus on yourself, or you can focus on the team and the task.
- p. 129 These groups are cohesive not because it's natural but because they've built, piece by piece, the shared mental muscles to connect and cooperate.
- p. 135 **How to Create Cooperation in Small Groups**
- p. 139 Having one person tell other people what to do is not a reliable way to make good decisions.
- p. 145 ...that strength was built of a willingness to spot and confront the truth and to come together to ask a simple question over and over: What's really going on here?
- p. 145 The real courage is seeing the truth and speaking the truth to each other. – Dave Cooper, Seal Team 6
- p. 146 **How to Create Cooperation with Individuals**
- p. 151 ...you have to find different ways to make it comfortable and engaging for people to share what they're really thinking about. – Roshi Givechi
- p. 152 ...tiny shifts in tone and timing could transform meaning.
- p. 157 ...the most important moments in conversation happen when one person is actively, intently listening.
- p. 158 **Ideas for Action**
- p. 158 Building habits of group vulnerability is like building a muscle. It takes time, repetition, and the willingness to feel pain in order to achieve gains.
- p. 158 Make sure the leader is vulnerable first and often.
- p. 159 ...leaders (should) ask their people three questions:
- 1) What is one thing that I correctly do that you'd like me to continue to do?
  - 2) What is one thing that I don't currently do frequently enough that you think I should do more often?
  - 3) What can I do to make you more effective?
- p. 162 Good listening is about more than nodding attentively: it's about adding insight and creating moments of mutual discovery.
- p. 162 ...the most effective listeners do four things:
- 1) They interact in ways that make the other person feel safe and supported.
  - 2) They take a helping, cooperative stance.
  - 3) They occasionally ask questions that gently and constructively challenge old assumptions.
  - 4) They make occasional suggestions to open up alternative paths.
- p. 164 One good after-action review (AAR) structure is to use five questions:
- 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?
- p. 165 ...aim for candor and avoid brutal honesty.
- p. 166 Embrace the discomfort
- p. 169 **Skill 3: Establish Purpose**
- p. 171 **Three Hundred and Eleven Words**
- p. 178 ...now it's time to ask: What's this all for? What are we working toward?
- p. 179 ...devote a surprising amount of time telling their own story, reminding each other precisely what they stand for – then repeating it ad infinitum.

- p. 180 Purpose isn't about tapping into some mystical internal drive but rather about creating simple beacons that focus attention and engagement of the shared goal.
- p. 182 ...motivation is not a possession but rather the result of a two-part process of channeling your attention: Here's where you're at and Here's where you want to go.
- p. 182 Stories are not just stories; they are the best invention ever created for delivering mental models that drive behavior.
- p. 183 The difficult choices they made weren't really all that difficult. They were closer to a reflex.
- p. 187 All that had changed was the fact that the workers had received a clear beacon of purpose, and it made all the difference.
- p. 189 **The Hooligans and the Surgeons**
- p. 193 One of the best measures of any group's culture is its learning velocity – how quickly it improves its performance of a new skill.
- p. 195 ...the pattern of real-time signals through which the team members were connected (or not) with the purpose of work. These signals consisted of five basic types:
- 1) Framing
  - 2) Roles
  - 3) Rehearsal
  - 4) Explicit encouragement to speak up
  - 5) Active reflection
- p. 197 What seems like repetition is, in fact, navigation.
- p. 199 High-proficiency environments help a group deliver a well-defined, reliable performance...
- p. 200 **How to Lead for Proficiency**
- p. 201 ...the number-one job is to take care of each other.
- p. 206 I could no longer just model the behavior and trust that people would understand and do it. I had to start naming stuff. – Danny Meyer
- p. 209 The results indicate that Union Square Café achieves its differentiation...through...three key practices: selection of employees based on emotional capabilities, respectful treatment of employees, and management through a simple set of rules that stimulate complex and intricate behaviors benefitting customers. – Susan Reilly Salgado
- p. 212 You can't prevent mistakes, but you can solve problems graciously.
- p. 212 The road to success is paved with mistakes well handled.
- p. 215 **How to Lead for Creativity**
- p. 215 The lighthouse method: They create purpose by generating a clear beam of signals that Link A (where we are) to B (where we want to be).
- p. 219 Building purpose in a creative group is not about generating a brilliant moment of breakthrough but rather about building systems that can churn through lots of ideas in order to help unearth the right choices.
- p. 220 The goal needs to be to get the right team, get them moving in the right direction, and get them to see where they are making mistakes and where they are succeeding. – Ed Catmull
- p. 222 It's more important to invest in good people than in good ideas.
- p. 225 The job of the executives was not to be all-deciding bosses but rather to support the directors and their teams as they undertook the painful journey from idea to workable concept to finished film.
- p. 226 It's strange to think that a wave of creativity and innovation can be unleashed by something as mundane as changing systems and learning new ways of interacting.
- p. 227 **Ideas for Action**
- p. 227 ...a surprising fact about successful cultures: many were forged in moments of crisis.
- p. 228 It's a never-ending process of trying, failing, reflecting, and above all, learning.
- p. 229 in order to move toward a target, you must first have a target.
- p. 229 ...the truth that many successful groups realize: Their greatest project is building and sustaining the group itself.

- p. 229 Leaders are inherently biased to presume that everyone in the group sees things as they do, when in fact they don't.
- p. 232 The main challenge to building a clear sense of purpose is that the world is cluttered with noise, distractions, and endless alternative purposes.
- p. 235 ...small efforts are powerful because they transmit, amplify, and celebrate the purpose of the whole group.
- p. 237 **Epilogue**
- p. 241 Every story should have VOW: voice, obstacles, and wanting.
- p. 241 The bigger the problem, the better the story.