

Let's get more people to love work .

At a time when lots of people are feeling burnt out, disengaged, and unhappy in their professional lives, we have an opportunity to change.

Let's talk about teaming - Like, how do we get people to work collaboratively with one another quickly, when they don't know each other, some of them will never meet each other, and yet we do a lot of our work together? So how do we do that? How do we team?

One of the things that we've got to be able to do better than we currently do is team joining.

It should be a discipline. If you're a team leader and you're listening to this, get good at team joining. What team joining is - it's like onboarding on steroids. Onboarding is, hey, a new team member.

Team joining is focused on who the heck you are?

Here's your password, here's your computer, here's how you get onto such and such. It's administrative. We're going to get together as a team. And if you could, we'd like you to share. And again, you don't have to use the language of red threads.

That might not be the language that fits you. But what you want that person to share is what do you love to do the most? When are you at your best? What can the team super rely on you for? Give us some detail.

And then please tell us where you're a bit of a deer in the headlights. Tell us where you struggle, and tell us where you might need help from someone. Let's just start people off knowing that on the best teams, we don't have a whole bunch of perfect people. We've got people that need one another. That's what a team is.

So team joining, building a discipline around when you enter a team, we do actually need you to share some of your red threads and some of the other colors. And hey, I'm your team leader. I don't expect you to have all red threads, because then I don't trust you. And you know what? The team

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doesn't either. It's like when you say to a waiter, "What's good here?" And the waiter goes, "Everything." And you now don't trust the waiter.

And so for you as a team leader, if you are one, start off with that. Bring the new team member on and then figure out the way that works for you and your team for them to say, hey, listen, this is when I'm at my best. And then over here, this is where I might need some help. Like that's just so great, now initially they might be a bit scared because they've never really done that before. So it might be good for you to have a session together, like a team blend session, where in order to make that new person feel comfortable, you go around the room and each person does that. This is where I'm at my best and this is where I might need some help. By the way, that's kind of fascinating.

Who I am, what I love most, where I'm at my best. And the language there isn't I'm the best at. I mean, some of this really gets into the language. Hey, team leader, don't get your people to claim what they're the best at. You don't need that sort of comparison anyway.

And that's, by the way, one of the problems we have with our performance management systems, is we introduce all these comparisons, you're a five, you're a three, you're a four. And as we've all discovered as parents, if we have kids, when you compare, you disappear.

So don't have people say, I'm the best at. Say I'm at my best when. Or I love it when. That's what I mean by a love note. I mean, tell people what your red threads are. Maybe it's a red thread note and you're just taking the moment to go, let's go around the room so that we can let each person be seen.

Cisco does 3 million of these check-ins a year. It's not complicated, it's not expensive.

It's just saying to every single team leader, that you need to be talking with each of your people individually about the near-term future every week. There's something super powerful about a week. Every single human society ever studied has a seven-day week, which is weird because

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there's no cosmological equivalent to a week. There is for a day; there is for a month. The cycles of the moon. There is for a year, Earth around the Sun. There's no cosmological equivalent for a seven-day week. It's just that every human society anywhere went seven days seems about right. There's something about a week. And our memories are good for a week.

Beyond a week, we suffer from the recency effect and we can't remember what we're doing.

You are my manager, you can't remember what I'm doing. So if you want to really help me, that check-in is the core ritual. It's 52 weeks of you and me with all the complexity we could ever need in my loves and my work, or my loathes and my work. And by the way team leader, that doesn't mean that you've got to try to make everybody do only that which they love. Remember the Mayo Clinic research that says the 20% is a threshold. But if somebody's sharing something they love and something they loathe, and you're talking about this upcoming week, you don't have to maneuver everything so that person gets 100% red threads that week.

Sometimes awareness is all that's required.

Sometimes a person shares something about last week, they loved and loathed. They don't want you to do anything necessarily. They just want to be heard and seen. And the frequent rhythm of that, they're not storing it up for a twice a year individual development plan conversation. That kind of simple routine... It's not you telling them either team leader, it's them telling you. What do you love? What do you loath? What are you working on? How can I help?

Each person is individual. Yeah. Well, when you run the data, once every 11 days, actually. If you're checking in once every 11 days, all the other outcomes we correlate to are engagement, resilience, employee turnover, productivity, and performance ratings.

When you get less frequent than once every 11 days, everything starts sliding south. Maybe not with you because everyone is unique. And as a team leader, by the way, a good thing to do would be to check in with people to see whether or not a week works for them.

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All I can tell you is the data suggests really strongly, that frequency matters. And the frequency that seems to work best for us, once every 11 days, is how the numbers shake out. But in terms of the rhythms of most of our work, once a week is what that turns into.

There may well be some managers who are such great individualizers, that their span of attention could extend to 15 to 20 people. I will tell you that when you run the data on this at scale meta analytically, the chances that you'll be in the 90th percentile of engagement are inversely correlated to the size of the team.

So I'm not suggesting that you don't have some team leaders that are that good at keeping individuals feeling like they've paid attention to with teams north of 15 or 20. I'm just saying it's the exception that proves the rule. We should be thinking about org structure through the lens, frankly, of the check-in, which is why the hospital example of one nurse supervisor to 60 nurses. It makes sense for the CFO. It just doesn't make sense for the way that human beings work, which is why just last week I was talking to the CEO of a hospital, who's got 13,000 people and 750 nurse openings and that's not just the pandemic. If you get north of 10, then you better be a really good chess player in the sense that you, the team leader, better be able to keep that uniqueness. So all that fantastic unique set of loves, you better be super, super good at keeping all of that uniqueness in your mind, which a few people are.

So the best CEOs will have to deal with the fact that we are changed. We are changed people and we're coming back to work saying, I've actually found quite a lot about myself.

And I want to go back to a workplace which at least accommodates that as a design principle. It doesn't have to be perfect. They probably won't use this language, but no one's really saying I want to do only that I love. Like most of us are realistic, but we want the design principle to be, we are super curious about you, who you are, how you're wired, and how you can

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contribute it. We want that. So if companies want to deserve the best people, one of the most important things that they could do is have a talent brand that is explicit about that.

What we are seeing is some of the stuff inside of companies where you can see when you do something as simple as a check-in about what a person loved and what they're working on next week, just that simple, you get reductions in turnover in the following three months, 90 days, 67% reduction in turnover, even during this whole Great Resignation thing that we've sort of been going through in the last 18 months. 67% reduction in employee turnover, 77% increase in employee engagement.

Simply by doing just a ritual, that's just one manager seeing, not even acting on. Just listening to an employee go, what'd you love? How are you using it? What do you love, and how are you using it? How can I help? It's just that simple. So you can see really dramatic changes and quite quickly. We do this once-a-year employee survey stuff, and then we wonder why our survey moves one percentage point up or one percentage point down.

You start looking at team by team. And you find very, fast movement deltas on some critical metrics like engagement, like resilience, like employee turnover. I would say this though; there isn't anyone company at the moment that I've looked at that I think has got all of this lined up perfectly. I do think we're moving much more intelligently in this direction because the labor markets are so tight, but there's undoubtedly more that we need to start. And then there's a bunch of stuff we need to stop.

The fundamental design principle needs to be that love fuels learning, fuels innovation, fuels expertise, and powers contribution. Loveless excellence is an oxymoron.

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So we need to build organizations where the point of finding out what you love is so that you can contribute more intelligently. And then when you contribute that, that informs what you love.

You'll see less emphasis on homogeneity and conformity: so less standard regulations, and fewer traditional competency models. You'll see fewer 360 feedback tools to measure against said competency models. There'll be less feedback that tells you which bits of the competency models you don't have. All that's ... Fewer ratings because no one trusts ratings. You'll have fewer cascaded goals because no one trusts goals, and they're blind to what you love.

So quite a lot of the existing human capital management infrastructure, which is really well intended, flies completely in the face of the unique loves that each of us have. They're loveless.

So we'll see all of that go away in those companies that want to attract people who are prepared to take their love seriously and turn it into contribution. We'll see a lot of that infrastructure change. And in its place, I think we're going to have organizations built around small, lightweight, agile teams where the team leader is trained upon, trained upon trained to be super curious about the unique loves and loathes of each person. Again, not for narcissistic reasons, but so that we can be more creative, more collaborative, and more productive together. That's what you'll see.