

AUTOBAHN CONSULTANTS BOOK CLUB

PRESENTS

THE CULTURE CODE

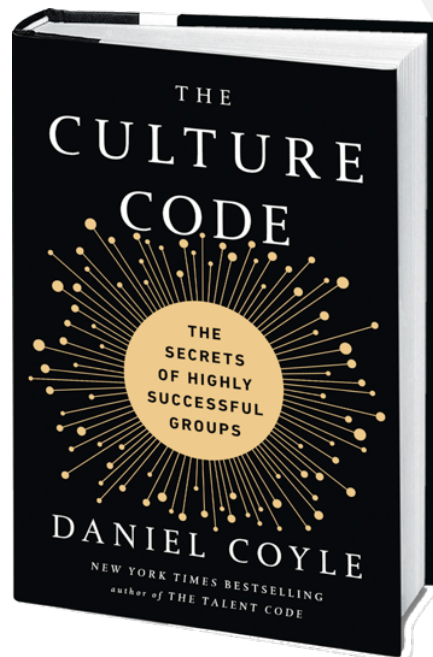
BY DANIEL COYLE

The Culture Code was recently published by Daniel Coyle. When I read it, I knew I had to share it with you. I hope you'll take the time to read this copy, listen on Audible, or download to your favorite device. If you're not a "reader" you can share this copy with another team member and read my notes, which I've enclosed. I've tried to extract my favorite nuggets from the book along with a few comments.

Best,



Jonathan Slain



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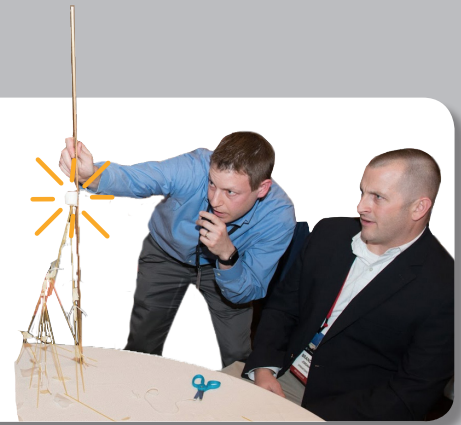
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THE
MARSHMALLOW
CHALLENGE



Daniel Coyle, the author, opens the book talking about The Marshmallow Challenge, which you know is one of my favorite team building exercises to conduct! If you are interested in running a Marshmallow Challenge go to www.AutobahnConsultants.com/marshmallow to download instructions.



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TRAITS OF
TOP PRODUCING
GROUPS

Daniel studied top producing groups and found this list of traits that set them apart:

"Close physical proximity, profuse amounts of eye contact, physical touch (handshakes, fist bumps, hugs), lots of short, energetic exchanges (no long speeches), high levels of mixing (everyone talks to everyone), few interruptions, lots of questions, intensive, active listening, humor, laughter, small, attentive courtesies (thank-yous, opening doors, etc.)"



Is your management team doing any/all of these behaviors?

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HIGH
PERFORMANCE
TEAMS

What to look for on high performance teams:

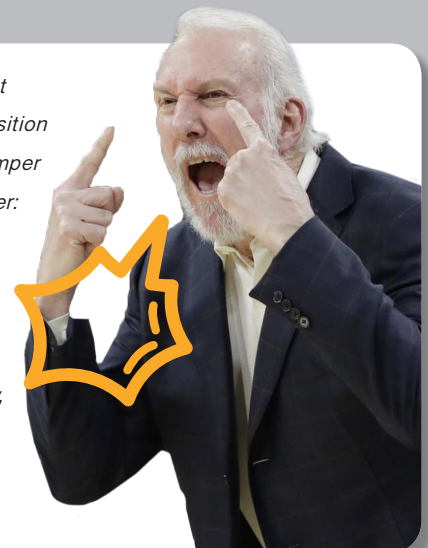
"... team performance is driven by five measurable factors: 1. Everyone in the group talks and listens in roughly equal measure, keeping contributions short. 2. Members maintain high levels of eye contact, and their conversations and gestures are energetic. 3. Members communicate directly with one another, not just with the team leader. 4. Members carry on back-channel or side conversations within the team. 5. Members periodically break, go exploring outside the team, and bring information back to share with the others... Group performance depends on behavior that communicates one powerful overarching idea: We are safe and connected."

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GREGG
POPOVICH

"Gregg Popovich, Coach of the San Antonio Spurs... Spurs rank as the most successful team in American Sports over the last two decades... His disposition has been compared to that of a dyspeptic bulldog, and he possesses a temper that could be described as "volcanic..." He delivers two things over and over: He'll tell you the truth, with no bullshit, and then he'll love you to death... The Spurs eat together approximately as often as they play basketball together. Popovich plans them, picking the restaurants, sometimes two a night, to explore. (Staff joke: Bulimia is a job requirement.) One misconception about highly successful cultures is that they are happy, lighthearted places. This is mostly not the case... many moments of high-candor feedback, uncomfortable truth-telling, when they confront the gap between where the group is, and where it ought to be."



EMBRACE
THE
MESSENGER

"Embrace the Messenger: One of the most vital moments for creating safety is when a group shares bad news or gives tough feedback. In these moments, it's important not simply to tolerate the difficult news but to embrace it. "You know the phrase 'Don't shoot the messenger'?" Edmondson says. "In fact, it's not enough to not shoot them. You have to hug the messenger and let them know how much you need that feedback. That way you can be sure that they feel safe enough to tell you the truth next time."

BAD APPLE
BEHAVIOR

"The groups I studied had extremely low tolerance for bad apple behavior... The leaders of the New Zealand All-Blacks, the rugby squad that ranks as one of the most successful teams on the planet, achieve this through a rule that simply states "No Dickheads." It's simple, and that's why it's effective..."

THOUGHTS
ON HIRING**Thoughts on hiring:**

"...suppose you are hired at Pixar, whether it's as a director or as a barista in the company cafe. On your first day, you and a small group of fellow newbies are ushered into the theater where screenings are held. You are asked to sit in the fifth row---because that's where the directors sit. Then you hear the following words: Whatever you were before, you are a filmmaker now. We need you to help us make our films better."

It's incredibly powerful," said Mike Sundy, who works in data management. "You feel changed."

DELIVERING
FEEDBACK

"Avoid Giving Sandwich Feedback: In many organizations, leaders tend to deliver feedback using the traditional sandwich method: You talk about a positive, then address an area that needs improvement, then finish with a positive."

Instead, here is how to handle positive/negative feedback:

"[handle] negatives through dialogue, first by asking if a person wants feedback, then having a learning-focused, two-way conversation about the needed growth. [Handle] positives through ultraclear bursts of recognition and praise."

BUILDING
TRUST**How to build trust & why I think that team building activities are more important than we give them credit for:**

"Normally, we think about trust and vulnerability the way we think about standing on solid ground and leaping into the unknown: first we build trust, then we leap. But science is showing us that we've got it backward. Vulnerability doesn't come after trust—it precedes it. Leaping into the unknown, when done alongside others, causes the solid ground of trust to materialize beneath our feet. That's why good teams tend to do a lot of extreme stuff together," DeSteno says. "A constant stream of vulnerability gives them a much richer, more reliable estimate on what their trustworthiness is, and brings them closer, so they can take still more risks. It builds on itself."

LEADERS INVITE
DEBATE**How a top Navy Seal Commander introduces himself and invites his team to challenge him:**

"You can call me Coop, Dave, or Fuckface, it's your choice." When Cooper gave his opinion, he was careful to attach phrases that provided a platform for someone to question him, like "Now let's see if someone can poke holes in this" or "Tell me what's wrong with this idea." He steered away from giving orders and instead asked a lot of questions. Anybody have any ideas?"

TEAM
COHESION**How Navy Seals build their teams:**

"One of the best things I've found to improve a team's cohesion is to send them to do some hard, hard training. There's something about hanging off a cliff together, and being wet and cold and miserable together, that makes a team come together."

**How Navy Seals conduct post-mortem meetings to discuss how they can improve:**

"One of the most useful tools was the After-Action Review (AAR). AARs happen immediately... There are no agendas, and no minutes are kept. The goal is to create a flat landscape without rank, where people can figure out what really happened and talk about mistakes---especially their own. It's got to be safe to talk... Rank switched off, humility switched on... the most important four words any leader can say: I screwed that up. You have to do it right away... You talk about every decision, and you talk about the process. You have to resist the temptation to wrap it all up in a bow, and try to dig for the truth of what happened, so people can really learn from it. The goal of an AAR is not to excavate truth for truth's sake, or to assign credit and blame, but rather to build a shared mental model that can be applied to future missions."

How Navy Seals build their teams:

While AARs were originally built for the military environment, the tool can be applied to other domains. One good 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?*

AFTER ACTION
REVIEWBUILDING
VULNERABILITY

"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."

DELIVERING
NEGATIVE NEWS

"Deliver the Negative Stuff in Person: This was an informal rule that I encountered at several cultures. It goes like this: If you have negative news or feedback to give someone---even as small as a rejected item on an expense report---you are obligated to deliver that news face-to-face... One of the best methods for handling negative news is that of Joe Maddon, the coach of the Chicago Cubs and avowed oenophile [wine connoisseur]. In his office, Maddon keeps a glass bowl filled with slips of paper, each inscribed with the name of an expensive wine. When a player violates a team rule, Maddon asks them to draw a slip of paper out of the bowl, purchase that wine, and uncork it with their manager. In other words, Maddon links the act of discipline to the act of reconnection."

TRAMPOLINE
LISTENING

"Listen Like a Trampoline: Good listening is about more than nodding attentively... As Zenger and Folkman put it, the most effective listeners behave like trampolines. They aren't passive sponges. They are active responders, absorbing what the other person gives, supporting them, and adding energy to help the conversation gain velocity and altitude."

CONVERSATION
REFLEX

"I've found that whenever you ask a question, the first response you get is usually not the answer---it's just the first response."

In Conversation, Resist the Temptation to Reflexively Add Value

It's not that suggestions are off limits; rather they should be made only after you establish what Givechi calls 'a scaffold of thoughtfulness.'"

AIM FOR
CANDOR

In meetings, I sometimes hear team members really unload on each other in a direct way that feels very personal and maybe unnecessarily so. In meetings, I recommend that leaders take Daniel's advice and:

"Aim for Candor; Avoid Brutal Honesty: Giving honest feedback is tricky, because it can easily result in people feeling hurt or demoralized... aim for candor and avoid brutal honesty. By aiming for candor – feedback that is smaller, more targeted, less personal, less judgmental, and equally impactful – it's easier to maintain a sense of safety and belonging in the group. "De Steno says. "A constant stream of vulnerability gives them a much richer, more reliable estimate on what their trustworthiness is, and brings them closer, so they can take still more risks. It builds on itself."

QUARTERLY
CONVERSATIONS

Why quarterly conversations are better than quarterly reviews and why to talk about money separately:

"Build a Wall Between Performance Review and Professional Development: While it seems natural to hold these two conversations together, in fact it's more effective to keep performance review and professional development separate. Performance evaluation tends to be a high-risk, inevitably judgmental interaction, often with salary-related consequences. Development, on the other hand, is about identifying strengths and providing support and opportunities for growth."

*"One of the best measures of any group's culture is its **learning velocity**---how quickly it improves its performance of a new skill."*



I believe that leaders need to use phrases and core values that cause people to "stub their toe" on what is said in order to get their attention. We are bombarded by so many messages today that unless you use colorful language, your message will not be heard!

"Many leaders of high-proficiency groups focus on creating priorities, naming keystone behaviors, and flooding the environment with heuristics that link the two..."



KIPP, the network of highly successful charter schools, is similarly built around catchphrases like "No shortcuts," "Read, baby, read," "KIPPsters do the right thing when no one is watching," "Prove the doubters wrong."

At first encounter, a heuristic-dense culture feels slightly off-putting. "For the first few days I worked here, I heard... It's totally hokey and corny... Then all of a sudden they're not corny---they're just part of the oxygen."

Embrace the Use of Catchphrases: When you look at successful groups, a lot of their internal language features catchphrases that often sound obvious, rah-rah, or corny. Many of us instinctively dismiss them as cultish jargon. But this is a mistake. Their occasionally cheesy obviousness is not a bug---it's a feature."

According to Ed Catmull, President 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. The goal needs to be to get the team right, get them moving..."

I ask Catmull how he knows when a team is succeeding. "Mostly you can feel it in the room," he says. "When a team isn't working, you see defensive body language, or you see people close down. Or there's just silence... Catmull spends his days roving around Pixar and Disney, watching. He helps onboard new employees and observes BrainTrust meetings, hawkeyeing the interactions for signs... He cultivates back-channel conversations to find out what's going on behind the scenes. He worries when he sees awkward silences or people avoiding each other; he celebrates when a group takes initiative without asking permission. He defends teams when they make mistakes."

"This reflects the truth that many successful groups realize: Their greatest project is building and sustaining the group itself. If they get their own relationships right, everything else will follow..."

One of my core values is “Lagniappe” which I define as delivering a little something extra that you’re not expecting that brings you joy. I hope that I’ve delivered Lagniappe with this book in two different ways:



JS **First,** I chose this book because it resonated so strongly with me because it focuses on what we can do as leaders to improve the culture of our own team. When we get our leadership team rowing in the same direction, everything else gets easier. Once we get traction, the road to velocity is all about having a high-performance team. Often, the hurdle I see is that graduating from traction to velocity requires different skill sets from us as leaders. Traction is about process and procedure and accountability. Velocity is about people and safety and vulnerability! It is only by reading and learning and growing that we can make this transition in our own leadership abilities.

JS **Second,** I hope that you’ve enjoyed getting a book from me along with some notes on my favorite parts. (I don’t know if I’ll be sending out a book like this on a regular basis, but I would love your feedback on whether or not this “lagniappe” added value for you.)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Jonathan".

Please email feedback to jonathan@autobahnconsultants.com or call me at 216-870-4219!