

The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups (Book Review)

Coyle, D. (2018). *The culture code: The secrets of highly successful groups*. New York, NY: Bantam. 280 pp. ISBN: 978-008042-7698-9. \$25.20 suggested retail price.

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In the book *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups*, Coyle discusses how people work together as part of a group that achieves excellent results. As opposed to this being a book on how individuals lead, the author focuses on how people interact successfully and productively with each other; thereby, giving leaders three skills that can help hone successful teams. His research identified three skills that propel effective teamwork:

1. Build Safety
2. Share Vulnerability
3. Establish Purpose

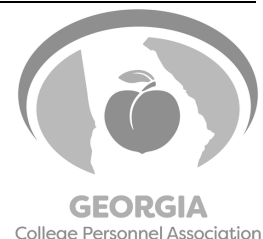
Skill one, Build Safety, is what Coyle calls “the foundation on which strong culture is built” (2018, p. 6). This skill, in particular, shows how successful teams form strong emotional connections and function as a family unit where they feel comfortable with

each other. For a leader to create a safe environment like this, he or she must indicate he or she is fallible and open to input. Coupled with a variety of other tactics, such as communicating one’s listening, over-communicating gratitude, and ensuring everyone has a voice, a leader building safety also has to be visionary in terms of relationships and connections to the future.

Skill two, Share Vulnerability, is what he identifies as a trust builder. Where most people are afraid to show vulnerability, Coyle states that vulnerability is contagious in successful groups because it exemplifies people’s need for each other (2018). A simple act of showing vulnerability, like not being afraid to state what one needs or that one does not know the answers to everything, has even saved lives in the cases the author studied. To employ this skill

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successfully, a leader can, for example, make themselves disappear to give the team an opportunity to work together without the leader present. The leader trusts the team to make informed decisions without them needing to hold people's hand every step of the way.

Skills three, Establish Purpose, is perhaps the most basic of the three skills and one that we have all seen time and time again. Simply put, people need to have a reason to do the work they do every day and must have a roadway or guide with which to do it. Coyle states that a leader has the responsibility of making sure his or her priorities are ranked. However, they should also hear from where the group wants to go and what they believe to be priorities. This not only ensures people feel heard, but it also ensures his or her company goals are living things people feel connected to, thus propelling the drive behind accomplishing these goals (2018).

These three skills provide a good roadmap for both people seeking to work better with colleagues and those who lead teams. The examples that he used throughout the book were on-point and provided a good mixture of historical and current examples. While he discussed both kinds in detail, I do think he spent more time discussing some of the historical examples than some of the current issues. Though

useful, this added a heaviness to the text that did not necessarily fit the tone of the overall text and message.

As a leader, I am always looking for ways in which to improve my leadership. So much of this book resonated with me because it reminded me of the core of servant leadership. I can imagine a leader employing these three skills being a servant leader at heart. He or she is, after all, sharing power and giving it to the group of people he or she is leading while creating an environment where he or she can thrive as a team. I cannot imagine very many other kinds of leadership styles being okay with employing these skills are they are intended.

This book was also refreshing to me as a servant leader because I am usually focused on serving an individual, not how that focus and service impacts the team and our purpose.

One of my favorite takeaways from the book, and one that equally challenged me, was the emphasis on showing vulnerability. Even as a servant leader and someone who is more than willing to state they do not know the answer to something, showing vulnerability is something many of us, especially those of us in leadership positions, are conditioned to try and hide. The book gave thorough examples and reasons why the conversation on vulnerability needs to go deeper because it

is really the basis of trust. A person can easily apply this to their everyday work or even team building exercises more often to try and remove the stigma on vulnerability.

In all, I think this book ties well into the topic of group interaction as the basis for success. It certainly adds value to the overall subject of leadership because there is so focus on the self in leadership that we don't take the time to truly consider HOW successful groups work together and what leaders did to create these teams. This book may be a very good one to consider for any organization to tackle leadership, conflict management, and human development issues and it would make a great addition to

curricula inside the classroom. It has certainly become one of my favorite leadership books to date

I would, without a doubt, recommend this book to anyone, both new and veteran professionals, because it provides a more holistic view of leadership. Leaders are always asking themselves the million-dollar question, "How can my team work better together?" Instead of answering the question through individualized professional development plans for people that often do not have follow-up or ties to the group, the book provides essential skills with which to build successful teams by nurturing them as a whole.

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Lucero Aradillas is a doctoral student pursuing her Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership at Georgia Southern University. She currently serves as the Director of Diversity Education at Agnes Scott College.. She holds her bachelor's degree in political science from Kennesaw State University and her master's degree in professional communication and leadership from Armstrong State University, now named the Armstrong Campus of Georgia Southern University, where she served in various leadership roles within the Division of Student Affairs. Lucero's research interests include retention practices and models for underrepresented students, particularly Latinx students, and leadership profiles within Latina administrators in higher education.

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