

# FUTURE(S)

A leader's guide  
to rewriting  
→ *the rules of work*

# A CASE FOR CONNEC -TION



**Welcome  
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# Breaking up with our old ideas of company culture



When you think of a strong company culture, what's the first thing that comes to mind? Most of us will have an inspiring image of a united workforce, charged by purpose, motivated by the company mission—probably also a pizza party or two.

The reality is, we are disconnected. Disjointed. We are distanced by technology. We've given up on finding purpose at work. We've lost our sense of community. Company culture isn't resonating with us anymore, and it's time to investigate what's causing this shift, and the microcultures that are replacing it.

# MANI FESTO



By  
Jérémy Clédât  
Co-CEO of *Welcome to the Jungle*

What is work if not a journey?

A journey in which the final destination is never certain—nor is the road you take to get there. From traditional to innovative, well-established or off the beaten path, the route toward a better future of work is yours to choose.

As much as the job hunt itself is a journey, so is building and leading strong, cohesive teams—with plenty of forks in the road, to be sure.

At Welcome to the Jungle, our mission is to make that journey exciting, and to find the path forward that's right for you. By empowering your employer brand, connecting you to the right candidates, and building more trust and transparency into the job hunt, we aim to bring the insights and inspiration needed to shape the future of work together.

**FUTURE(S)** is your travel guide: with it, we hope to help you navigate the major trends transforming the workplace, and pave the way toward an inspiring, *exciting*, world of work.

MORE  
CONNECTED,

LESS  
CONNECTION

Author

Kammie Sumpter

Photographer

Thomas Decamps

Why is it that, though  
we are more connected  
than ever before,  
we've never felt  
so alone?



➔ The World Health Organization has deemed loneliness a growing global health risk, and the US Surgeon General, Dr Vivek Murthy, has equated the mortality impact of social disconnection to that of smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. The American Medical Association (AMA) says that social isolation and loneliness can lead to serious health consequences.

“Statistically, we aren’t connecting as much with neighbors and within our communities,” says Dr Tracy Brower, sociologist, author of *The Secrets to Happiness at Work*, and a senior contributor at Forbes, where she’s written on the intersection of work and loneliness. “Tech has enabled us to do more with less human contact.”

In today’s world, we speak to loved ones

through a screen, we order our morning coffee on an app—and we interact with colleagues majorly online. Though we’re digitally connected, we’re losing a sense of human connection, and it’s fueling a major health crisis.

At work, we have opportunities to meet others and create social connections, but distance, digital workplaces, and the changing landscape of company culture challenge our sense of togetherness.

### **The negativity loop**

Even if working adults are less lonely than their unemployed peers, Gallup reports that 20% of the global workforce fights daily loneliness, with higher numbers among remote workers.

“Relationships are built based on contact, familiarity, and consistency in our interactions,” says Brower. “When we don’t see each other as much, when others are just a face on the screen and we can’t read their body language, when virtual interactions don’t lend themselves to the catch-up before or after the meeting—all of this gets in the way of feeling connected or feeling a sense of belonging.”

A lack of connection can leave workers with higher rates of anxiety, depression, stress, and ultimately, burnout, which has been on the rise for more than a decade. Though a lack of connection can be a precursor to other conditions such as burnout, the other way around is true, too.

“In a negative loop, when you’re lonely, you may not have the gumption to reach out to others, which makes you more lonely. All of this can translate to lower levels of performance, follow-through, or investment in the job—which has an impact on effectiveness and also self-esteem,” says Brower.

### **A new culture club**

“The changing nature of work has damaged company cultures, making it critical for companies to manage their cultures intentionally,” says Brower.

One survey found that 65% of white-collar workers agree that employers have a responsibility to address loneliness. One way to do that is to instill a strong culture steeped in connection, which is directly correlated with higher performance, productivity, wellbeing, and talent retention.

For many, the workplace—online or in-person—is now a necessary source of com-

munity and connection. Brower adds that, “when cultures are stronger, people will have a greater sense of connectedness, meaning, learning, growth—and all of these can reduce loneliness.”



“It’s time to develop a culture that reflects the needs of workers.”

Still, a BetterUp survey showed that nearly half (47%) of people didn’t feel connected to their coworkers, with only 23% of individual contributors—as compared to 40% of leaders—strongly agreeing that they felt connected to their company culture, according to Gallup.

Knowing this is the key to connection, companies are still struggling to respond. A survey from Airspeed of 800 C-suite executives and 800 staff at remote or hybrid companies found that 92% of leaders acknowledged that their company culture and sense of connection need improvement.

### **Flexible culture for flex work**

One of the biggest challenges to implementing a strong culture lies within the digital work environment. Brower reiterates the dangers that remote, hybrid, and flex work pose when culture isn’t managed intentionally. “If culture is fragmented or if the signals of culture are largely absent, it can reduce a sense of connectedness and exacerbate loneliness.”

Culture is even more important in hybrid work models than on-site ones for 61% of US HR leaders, agreeing that the weakening of culture in this environment has led them to reinstate return-to-office measures.

However, nearly the entire workforce desires some form of remote work options, with 65% preferring full remote. So, the solution certainly isn't bringing everyone back to the office to conform to our aging ideas of what a company culture should look like. It's time to develop a culture that reflects the needs of workers.

### **A center of gravity**

Connection and culture are rooted in a sense of belonging, and are, in many ways, antonyms of loneliness. *Do I fit in? Am I valued?* "Belonging isn't just being with other people. It's driven by a shared sense of identity," says Brower.

A top-down company culture might not be able to bring these interpersonal powers back to hybrid employees. Though company culture is important for macro alignment on shared values and missions, the real impact lies in the micro.

Workers tend to create stronger relationships with their immediate colleagues and teams in hybrid work models than with their overall organization, fueling a greater sense of togetherness and belonging.

Brower puts it this way: "Developing stronger team cultures can help with loneliness, because people will have a 'center of gravity' for their work. People tend to be happier and less lonely when they have a sense of how their work matters—and how their teammates are depending on them. People will also feel less lonely when they feel seen and known—and stronger team relationships can help with that." ♥

## **WHAT IS A MICROCULTURE?**

Be it local, regional, bi-coastal, or global, your company has a culture, and that culture is probably expressed uniquely between offices, departments, and even between teams. This is the work of microcultures, encompassing shared rituals, norms, values, and ways of working that are unique to their subgroup. In short, it's more than a culture, it's a *community*.

A bustling NYC office might not share the same work rhythms as their more relaxed, San Franciscan sister. The software development team might have a different approach to collaboration than, say, HR.

Many companies build a corporate culture with a fiscal goal in mind—when employees are more engaged, they are more productive. Though true, engagement starts from the ground up. An engaged employee is not only empowered by their company's values, but connected to their peers.

A macroculture, when correctly implemented, acts as the umbrella, the glue that reunites the biodiversity within the corporate culture ecosystem. When a company relies strictly on an inflexible, stagnant corporate monoculture, it's denying the diversity that makes a company unique, and ultimately, allows it to thrive.

STUCK  
IN

THE  
SAVANNA

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Thomas Decamps

How our brains  
are primed to prefer  
community





➡ Every aspect of who we are as humans has an evolutionary history. We have body parts—the tailbone, appendix, and tonsils, for example—that, though they no longer serve their original function, remain as a reminder of where we come from, a souvenir of the path that brought humanity out of the Paleolithic Age and into the 21st century.

The brain, in particular, is an adaptable organ, but it still carries our evolutionary past with it. Community, culture, and the way we interact with our peers are integral parts of what it means to be a member of the big-brained, bipedal human race.

Hilary Scarlett, an international speaker, consultant, and author on neuroscience and organizational change management,

says that she once read an article that said, “We now understand enough about the brain to apply it to the world of work.”

So, why haven't we? Can understanding the way we are hardwired teach us more about how we can best work together? Scarlett breaks down the evolutionary neuroscience behind the way we work through the history of humanity.

### **Vibing with the tribe**

“Our brains are, in many ways, still stuck in the savanna. One thing that really mattered there is being part of a tribe,” says Scarlett. “The most important thing for the brain is survival, so if you're part of a tribe, you're much more likely to survive than if you're on your own.”

Humans found strength in numbers in our early years, allowing us to hunt larger game, protect ourselves from predators, care for our growing families, and contribute more working hands for labor.

Today, our brains still reach for community as a survival instinct. Even though we can get our own food and sleep alone without the threat of attack (most of the time), our brains are still wired to associate togetherness with safety—which might also explain why loneliness can lead to such serious health concerns.

So, how do our brains define community? Scarlett cites Dunbar's number, which is the suggested cognitive sweet spot for community group size, generally topping out at about 150 people.

However, the larger the group, the more incentive is needed to stick together. Dunbar observed tribal villages across the world, and the groups that were closer to 150 people, did so out of survival. Scarlett notes that beyond 150 people, organizations tend to break into subcommunities with their own traditions and norms.

### DUNBAR'S NUMBER

Coined in the 1990s by Robert Dunbar, a British anthropologist, Dunbar's number theorizes that 150 is the maximum number of people our brains can have stable relationships with—or, as Dunbar put it, "the number of people you would not feel embarrassed about joining uninvited for a drink if you happened to bump into them in a bar."



They feel less connected to the umbrella culture and begin to create their own within their immediate circles.

"People need to feel they've got some influence, some ownership. And with culture and values, it's important that these discussions happen with the people around them, rather than organizations creating values in a top-down way," Scarlett adds.

She explains that the ideal small group size for an intimate community is about four to five people. Beyond this number, it becomes challenging to maintain eye contact, hindering connection. A Gallup study found that, though it largely depends on the managers themselves, teams with fewer than 10 people have the highest levels of engagement.

### Born to belong

One of the things that makes humans unique—and gives us such big brains—is that we are a social species.

The brain has two states of being: engagement, and non-engagement. Scientists have found that social connection is so hardwired into the brain that, in an fMRI scan, when completing a social task and moving back into a non-engagement state, the parts of our brain that are active in social situations remain lit up; meaning, *our brain's default mode is social.*

However, research suggests that most people in organizations are more in task mode, says Scarlett: "But to be successful at work or life in general, we need both and we need to switch quickly between the two." To do so, we need to balance team culture, or community, with our job descriptions.



“We now understand enough about the brain to apply it to the world of work.”

What's especially interesting is what happens in the brain when we face social rejection—imagine not fitting in with your team's culture, not aligning with the norms of a company, or simply lacking a sense of belonging within a small group. "Neuroscience shows that in the brain, physical pain and social pain look very similar—pretty much the same parts of the brain are activated," says Scarlett. Because of the importance to both our wellbeing and survival, our brains have developed in such a way that it processes the pain of social rejection, or social distance, with physical pain.

The feeling of belonging within a community is a deep notion that also comes from

our tribe-dwelling time. Belonging means tribal acceptance, and thus, a greater chance of survival. "We are still constantly subconsciously checking, 'Do I fit in? Do I belong?' If I do, I'm okay. If not, I'm not okay," says Scarlett.

### **Syncing with the squad**

The beauty about applying neuroscience in the workplace is that it's relatively simple, says Scarlett. "It's not just the latest management fad. These are our brains. They have been that way for hundreds of thousands of years, and they don't change that fast."

Incorporating more laughter into the day, giving employees a greater sense of choice and certainty, or even the simple notion of regular breaks, these are all things that are conducive to healthy brain function.

However, technology might be inhibiting this, and Scarlett says our brains don't sync up in the same way when we're online. "We created this world in many ways, which is fantastic, but we have got to learn to manage it," says Scarlett. "Because our brains aren't evolved for emails and mobile phones and social media."

In fact, they're evolved to simply *be together*. 🌟

# Is corporate

# culture dead?

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Finding purpose over  
pizza parties

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PICTURED:  
HEBBA YOUSSEF

I recently hosted a virtual event where I asked 600 plus HR leaders, “What era of work do you think we are currently in?” The majority of the audience said, “The era of suffering.” I had to pause for a second and ask myself, “Are we well?”

But the reality is, we’re not.

We are trying to change work when we have done work a certain way for over 100 years amid so much societal constraint: record-high inflation; talent attraction and retention struggles; managing five generations in the workplace; mass layoffs and retirement; heightened political polarization; and, not

to mention, surviving a global pandemic. We’re living through one of the world’s worst adjustment periods. And so, we’re in the era of suffering.

It’s dramatically changing our relationship with work and how we get work done. In the broader scheme of things, company culture might be dying a little bit. And what might be taking its place looks more like community—and, honestly, that’s a lot easier to connect with than a big, corporate machine.

#### **Pushing the boundaries**

Gen Z is the first generation to be truly, fully online. I’m envious

of them and, at the same time, they terrify the bejesus out of me because they know things that I didn’t know when I was their age at work, and they’re pushing the boundaries.

They’ve demystified the things that we never used to talk about at work. We’re having more honest conversations around things like work-life balance, mental health, pay transparency, all of it. Previous generations probably wanted the same things, they just didn’t know how to express it.

We need to start creating a human-first culture. Companies, and HR leaders in particular, have



“When I talk to my team, I’m not going to tell them, ‘This is the best company ever. We’re going to change the world.’ Instead, I ask, ‘What do you want to get out of this experience?’ ”

to understand the workforce’s wants and needs. Otherwise, we are going to lose the talent war. We are at a point as employers where we’re asking, “How do we get the younger generations to care?”

It’s by seeing employees as people—*humans*, and not just cogs in the machine. It’s an approach to culture that’s tailored to a specific team, to an individual. And, even better—it’s mutually beneficial to the company and the workers themselves, because we know that wellbeing and satisfaction are directly tied to retention and engagement.

### Where is our purpose?

Throughout our lives, most of us seek purpose and mission. Gen Z, especially. I think people built company culture into this thing that was supposed to give us that, but to be honest, the average employee isn’t coming to work and saying, “Your culture is going to

give me purpose in life.” Those of us who work for companies where that does align are the lucky ones.

I don’t want your ping-pong table or your fancy merch. That’s what we used to think of when it came to culture. I don’t need any of those things. I don’t want your pizza party. What’s going to give me purpose and value is the life I live outside of these walls.

And so, is corporate culture dead? Maybe.

### So, why are we really here?

We’re all adults. We recognize that we operate in a capitalist society where the main goal of a corporation is to make money. We’re all here to serve the company, but we also need to remember what we get out of operating in this system. It’s not just a paycheck. It’s experience. It’s projects under the belt. It’s bullet points on the resumé. So when I talk

to my team, I’m not going to tell them, “This is the best company ever. We’re going to change the world,” because, in most cases, that’s not what we’re doing. Instead, I ask, “What do you want to get out of this experience?”

It’s this disassociation that needs to happen, this realization that most companies do not give us purpose. We—and what we want—give us purpose in life. So how can the company support that?

It’s the problem I have with the “What’s your dream job?” question. My dream job is to have no job. It’s to exist in this world with an abundance of wealth with which I can make a difference. To be clear, I love what I do. But still, if you asked me, “Do you want no job and a boatload of money to do whatever you want with?” I would say “Yes.” Who wouldn’t?

If we started treating our employees like real people, with real



“I think there is potentially more to life—and more to work—than culture, and I think it’s in connection.”

hopes and dreams and desires, what kind of a workplace culture could we build? If we were honest with them about why we’re all here, and created an environment where we’re not only serving the company, but also fulfilling our own needs, what would the world of work look like?

#### Connection over culture

Knowing this, we have to start rethinking what it is we’re really offering people. Is it an environment to learn and grow? Is it financial stability? Or is it community?

I think there is potentially more to life—and more to work—than culture, and I think it’s in connection. Our rates of connection as a society have drastically decreased. We are really, *really* lonely.

Company culture, in most cases, is aspirational, not reality. That disconnect gets us into so much

trouble at work. And I think about connection as a better means to creating culture, because connection with a person is based on who we are, not just who we aspire to be.

Because I’m connected with my team, because we operate as a community, we have full honesty and transparency. They hold me accountable, as I hold them. We see each other as human beings, and we understand how we best work together. Is that not the ideal working relationship?

It’s more than saying, “Here’s a value we should all believe in.” Instead, we’re saying, “Here’s what I bring to the table, and here’s what you bring to the table. We’re humans. We’re all connected to one another. Now, let’s go do great work.”

Maybe we should just say it. Corporate culture is dead. ✨

When employees are strongly connected to company culture, they report that they are

**62%**

LESS LIKELY

to feel “burned out at work very often or always.”

# APAX: "DEEP CHANGE

## STARTS FROM WITHIN"

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United by purpose,  
driven by connection



Author  
**Kammie Sumpter**

Photographer  
**Betty Zapata**

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PICTURED FROM LEFT  
TO RIGHT:  
MAULUDA SAEED,  
ISRAA QADDOURAH,  
CHARLES PADIE,  
CLARE GRAY,  
MIRIA PAPASOFRONIOU

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➔ A company is a living organism, constantly evolving to align its own mission with the needs, strengths, and vision of its workforce. There is a delicate balance between heterogeneity and unity—creating either a multi-faceted culture that celebrates diversity and connection, or a rigid, empty promise that distances its workers even further.

At Apax, they are pushing the boundaries on the traditional idea of company culture. Based in London, Apax is a social enterprise with the mission of providing premium, people-first assisted living services to individuals who have experienced social exclusion or disadvantages like mental health challenges or homelessness.

Their mission is clear: bring humanity back to the people, and that mission flows through every department, every team,

every worker. Their values drive them toward that vision, yet remain malleable to account for every person's individuality. And the culture, both at the team and company level, remains rich and relevant.

### **The Apax vision**

"Our culture comes from our clients," says Israa Qaddourah, project manager. At Apax, culture is driven by a shared sense of purpose: to bring residents, who they call "clients," out of their past and into independent living as active contributors to society.

"No matter how we approach them, what we communicate about, there must always be compassion and kindness in communication," says Mauluda Saeed, accommodations manager, who works directly with clients in Apax's assisted living facilities.



“Being human-centered to clients, means being human-centered to each other.”

She explains that Apax’s vision bleeds into the organization itself—being human-centered to clients, means being human-centered to each other.

Qaddourah heads the marketing department and manages much of the branding at Apax. “All we want to do is shed a light on the culture we already have, this culture that we’re proud of, to attract more and more like-minded people,” she adds.

**Driven by values**

*‘United we shine’* is one of the core values at Apax. This principle, says Qaddourah, emphasizes that when individuals from different backgrounds and perspectives collaborate, their collective strength becomes a driver for progress. “Just as it is in music, where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord, Apax celebrates how unity and cohesion enriches the community and fosters collective growth,” she continues.

Charles Padie, support services lead—and Saeed’s manager—recognizes the power in diversity. “We’ve got differences in opinion, differences in understanding things. We’re people. But, despite our differences, our values give us the roadmap to achieve a common purpose.”

In his large team of five direct reports and 23 indirect reports, though Padie encourages diversity in team dynamics, he understands the need for a central driving force. “If you look at the human body, we’ve got different organs, with different functions. But if we don’t harmonize, or if there are infections, then you’ve got disorder in the body,” he says.

50%

OF EXECUTIVES

report that an organization’s culture is most successful when there is a moderate degree of variation.





PICTURED: MAULUDA SAEED

The values were created knowing that each team would interpret them in their own way. In fact, Clare Gray, quality management leader, is building what she calls the “golden thread initiative,” a framework that visualizes everyone’s unique role in fulfilling the Apax mission.

“It starts with the values, then the departments, the teams, and the individuals. It links everyone together through the values, spreading right through everything that we do.”

### **A bilateral culture**

One of the reasons everyone at Apax is so connected to the culture, is that they all have a role in building it. At Apax, they take a non-adversarial, consultative approach to management and decision-making, welcoming feedback from those affected by the decision, valuing every voice, at every level. The Apax culture is a medley between top-down mission, and bottom-up motivation—and both are necessary.

If culture didn’t come from the bottom, says

Padie, “it would be like trying to nourish a tree by watering the leaves. The water is needed at the roots.” The roots of Apax, he says, are the clients and the client-facing workforce. “If they don’t feel valued or that their voice is necessary, no matter how far down the line it is, the tree will suffer. The culture will suffer.”

Miria Papisofroniou, learning and development (L&D) leader, describes their process of goal-setting, which has flipped the traditional corporate way of doing things on its head. On a quarterly basis, they start by creating individual goals, which then form the basis for the team goals, then the department goals, and finally the company goals. Of course, the company will have their priorities and overall vision, but they allow the space to be influenced by every worker’s personal goals.

Saeed, as a member of Padie’s team, says with this structure, there is no strict hierarchy to follow. “We have access to everyone. There’s not a chain of command where a member of my team can’t go above me and speak to someone else if they need that expertise.”

Both in Padie’s team and at Apax as a whole, this system helps to keep everyone in check, from leadership down to individual contributors, and vice versa. “I have had situations where people hold their managers accountable, and that’s the beauty of this symphony. If we can’t defend our values, even to our managers, then what are they there for?”

### **Developing team culture**

Encouraging and developing team cultures is a key initiative for Papisofro-

niou and the L&D team who help strengthen Apax's culture through initiatives that inspire the team to collaborate, embrace diverse talents, and participate in a unifying movement.

In addition, Gray and the quality management team developed a team charter framework to strengthen team collaboration and align it with Apax's values. The charter is centered around two key questions:

*What's important to you as a team?*

*How do we want to work together?*

Each team reflects on these individually and as a group, ensuring their unique strengths contribute to the broader company vision. This initiative helps teams stay connected, while balancing Apax's goals with the needs of its employees to cultivate a more aligned and motivated workforce.

### **The human-centered approach**

One of Apax's core principles is the Japanese 'ikigai,' which, Quaddourah says, instructs you to, "do what you love and what you're best at, and at the same time help society, which then helps you reflect on your day-to-day life and why you go to work to begin with." Ikigai, which literally translates as "a reason to live," is all about finding purpose, connection, and joy.

In alignment with ikigai, Gray and her team have made it a recent mission to help colleagues get to know each other better. "We need to start seeing each other like real people. Yes, I'm Clare, the quality management lead. But I'm also Clare, the dog lover. That's as important to me as my job title. And that tells you a lot about

who I am as a person, not just as an Apax employee."

This has inspired them to create the 'one-page profile' initiative, where each Apax member is tasked with creating a personal introduction that fits on a single page. It not only includes their preference for furry friends as Gray's did, but it can also include what they hold most important in life and how to best support or motivate them, so it becomes a tool for workplace collaboration as well.

"I think on an individual basis, if you feel that your manager completely understands how to support and motivate you, that's what gives you a spring in your step," she says. "You walk into work in the morning and start working more collaboratively, communicating with openness and freedom—and that benefits the entire culture," she says.

### **Maintaining connection**

Because they work directly with clients, the support team works every day on-site together, but the teams at their HQ are mostly hybrid with set days where everyone will be in the office. Gray, Apax's most hybrid worker, lives outside of London and comes into office only eight days a month. However, she doesn't feel any less connected to her team.

"I emphasize checking in, not checking up," she says. For Gray, that means moving beyond the work, and focusing on the person: speaking authentically about how they can support each other, how they're doing—and vowing to give honest answers. "That connection means that I feel less isolated and less lonely, even though I'm

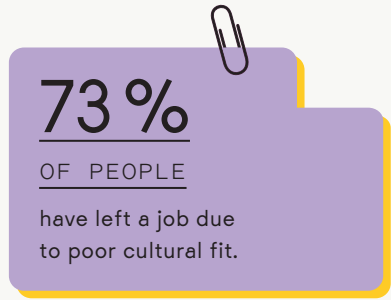
not sitting face-to-face with them in the office all the time."

**The impact of strong teams**

Qaddourah explains that at many big, traditionally corporate-style companies, you'll find some employees stuck in silent protest. "They stop collaborating. They stop creating new initiatives. They don't engage with their activities, or they're not motivated. They do the bare minimum." For Qaddourah, this is a clear sign of the health of a company's culture.

Papasofroniou summarizes what it's like working at Apax with this: "Because we believe in humanity, because we believe in our clients, because we see the best in them and in their future, we believe in each other. We see the good we can do." ✨

➔ "If culture didn't come from the bottom, it would be like trying to nourish a tree by watering the leaves. The water is needed at the roots."



PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: CLARE GRAY AND CHARLES PADIE

# SURVIVAL OF THE CULTURE FIT

How to *transparently* discuss culture with candidates

By Ginny Clarke

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former executive recruiter  
at *Google*, entrepreneur

Former WTTJ Lab expert on *talent acquisition and future of work*

Contributor  
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A job interview is like dating. The organization wants to appear congenial and warm, while the candidate just wants to know, justifiably, that they will feel comfortable coming into this environment.

From balancing team and corporate cultures, navigating a total lack of culture, to transparently presenting potentially toxic cultures, let's explore how to have the right discussion with candidates.



## **Be transparent**

I tend to be pretty honest with candidates. I'm not going to try to scare them off if the culture isn't strong, but I'm also aware of the fact that they've probably already heard things if they've done their research.

I'd offer my own insights on how I've dealt with one or more cultures in the company. You've got to make it personal.

While transparency is key, in the case of toxic cultures, you must remind candidates that there is a system of accountability. It's all about trust. Candidates need to be able to trust that there are systems in place to keep the culture in line with values, at the team level and at the leadership level.



## **Set clear expectations**

One of the things I've seen that can be really frustrating is that, between the time that you sign up and the time that you arrive on the job, the expectations of the role, or the dynamics within a team, can change.

We need to be honest and transparent about these evolutions. The recruitment process can take three to six months. The more senior the



PICTURED:  
GINNY CLARKE

**61%**  
 OF HR LEADERS  
 say that to achieve organizational goals, culture is more important in a hybrid work model than in an on-site work model.

role, the longer it can take. A lot can happen inside the organization in that time. Culture isn't a monolithic, static thing, it reflects the different moods, behaviors, and vibes of the people coming in and out.

The one thing that should remain stable are the values and mission. They give something to point to as a standard of behavior. You can tell a candidate, "Hey, things are changing, but our core beliefs and mission remain."

 **More than fitting in**

As a Black woman, I was usually one of a few, if not the only one. When I was a candidate, I needed to know that my future employer and my future team were able to deal with me.

Candidates need to know that employers and teams will support them. I'd tell myself, "I'm bringing my skills, my capabilities, my expertise, my personality, and my tendencies. So to the extent that I have demonstrated to you that I am effective in performing in this role—which includes interacting and collaborating effectively with team members—then that should be enough."

Culture is more than just fitting in. Culture enables capable people, diverse people, sure-footed people, to work toward a common goal that they believe in. It's top-down in that sense, but the motivation and trust come from the bottom.

 **Look out for influence and change agency**

When I was interviewing candidates as a recruiter, what I was really looking for was someone who was adaptable and resilient. I wanted to know if they had the ability to influence, to create a positive subculture. And so I would ask,

"Culture is more than just fitting in. Culture enables capable people, diverse people, sure-footed people, to work toward a common goal that they believe in."

"Give me examples of how you would deal with a team member who was disruptive," because that influence can be all it takes to shift the culture.

Try to understand whether or not they'd be able to adapt to the current culture, both within and outside of their immediate team, and how they'd react to potentially more complex culture environments. If the culture is still in a growth stage, will they remain resilient, sticking to their core values? Or, if your team culture is strong and tight-knit, will they be an advocate for that environment?

This is important because it can be one person's behavior that impacts the whole team dynamic—one bad apple can spoil the bunch. For me, the interview is less about, "Will they fit in?" but, "Can they be the change agents we need?" ✨

## HOW TO GET AHEAD OF A TOXIC CULTURE

— **Jérémy Clédat**,  
Co-CEO of *Welcome to the Jungle*

If I'm being honest, I don't think any leader can look you in the eyes and say, "I'm absolutely sure that there are no toxic cultures right now in the company." And maybe the most complicated part is that no one who has a toxic attitude will tell you that they think they do.

Culture is really about the principles that you have in the company and then the rules that people apply based on those principles, and it

can be quite different from one person to another, or one country to another.

I think every time there is an imbalance between your core principles and the pressure to achieve growth and financial performance, this creates toxicity. Because, in fact, achieving growth and performance is the best excuse for toxic behavior. This is a tricky balance, and this is why I think we all need to believe in those principles because every day, it's easy to forget them.



# PEOPLE VS. PROJECTS

How managers can take a human-centered approach to fostering team culture

By Hebba Youssef

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at *Workweek*

Creator of the *I Hate It Here*  
newsletter and podcast

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A [recent survey](#) found that for almost 70% of workers, their managers had as much of an impact on their mental health as their spouses.<sup>16</sup> That means that managers play a major role, if not the entire role, in building team culture.

The manager is like the nucleus, the middle man—they take the mandates of the company and bring them back to the employee in a way that makes sense for their own team dynamic.

So, how do you do it?



### **Remember who you're managing**

When you're a manager and you're being thrown 50,000 things, the last thing on your mind is, "How do I connect with my team?" But, if you start with that, everything else becomes easier.

Do your best to show up for them while also authentically showing them parts of yourself. When I'm struggling, I tell my team that I'm struggling. And I think that creates an environment where they also feel comfortable enough to be vulnerable.



### **Share your core values**

One of the best work relationships you need to have is with yourself, because how you show up every day has a massive impact on your team and your team values.

Start thinking about your own core values, and how they guide your actions and behaviors. It can be the first step to creating unity and equity on your team, because everyone will know what to expect from you.

Setting that groundwork also encourages them to investigate their own core values. When everyone in your team does this exercise, you can



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feel the culture shift. When we're all values-driven, we're respecting each other as individuals, while also creating a culture of mutual understanding.

 **Set boundaries that foster inclusivity**

I think boundaries are beautiful. You can be transparent to the people you work with, but there's still part of you that they don't necessarily need to know. Managers carry a weight of power, where our points of view can impact the sense of trust and belonging in the team.

As a manager, you should be working to create an equitable and inclusive environment. There are parts of my personal life that, if shared, I think could make it harder for colleagues who have different views to feel welcome. It could make them feel like I can't be unbiased in discussions and decisions.

I think politics is another great example. I'd never ask my team to stop talking about politics at work, but as a manager and an HR leader, I carry a different burden. If I said I'm voting for one candidate, and somebody at my company is voting for the other, I've potentially created a non-inclusive environment for them. ✨

**KEY QUESTIONS TO BUILD CONNECTION**

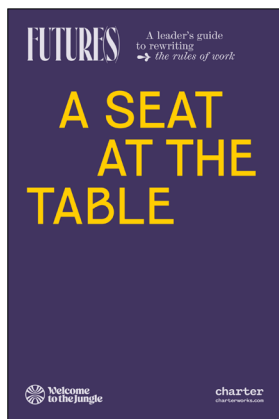
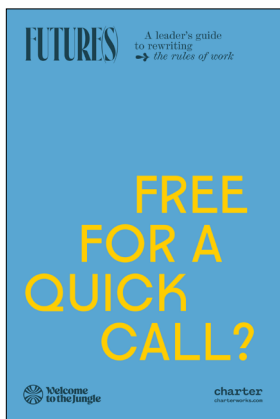
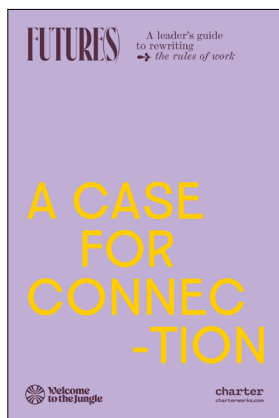
If you're really looking to build that connection, these are the two questions I think every manager should ask their direct reports:

- How do you prefer to receive feedback?
- How do you prefer to receive recognition?

  
**2 in 10**  
US EMPLOYEES  
feel connected to their organization's culture.

# FUTURE(S)

A leader's guide  
to rewriting  
→ *the rules of work*



As you embark on your journey toward the future of work, FUTURE(S) is your travel guide. Your roadmap. Your companion in understanding and navigating the major trends transforming the workplace.

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is produced by:

CORUSCANT SAS  
(Welcome to the Jungle)  
In collaboration  
with Charter Works Inc.



8-10 rue Saint-Fiacre  
75002 Paris  
France

January 2025