AVOID THE

COVID

CULTURE

CRASH

STAY CONNECTED AND BOOST YOUR CULTURE DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

WRITTEN BY

DWAIN RICHARDSON

**"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success"
- Henry Ford**

A REFLECTION ON OUR CURRENT WORLD

As I sit here writing this book the world is experiencing a global pandemic. Australia is in stage 3 lockdown and the world as we know it has changed significantly. Unemployment is rapidly increasing, working from home and home schooling is the norm and virtual catchups with workmates, friends and family are all that is allowed due to social distancing rules. AFL, NRL, Cricket, Baseball and all our favourite sporting codes are banned on all levels from social through to professional; we are all trying to adapt to this new world that we find ourselves living in.

Virgin Australia is on the brink of collapse, and many other long-standing brands have succumbed to the pressure we now face. Fear, anxiety, stress, and sadness have become the new norm as we all come to terms with the uncertainty of our futures. Although some industries are thriving the majority have been significantly impacted with many workplaces laying off large numbers of employees.

The reality is that our workplace teams and cultures are collapsing in front of our eyes and we feel helpless and confused with what to do about it.

Ta Eph'henim Ta ouk eph'henim
What is up to us, what is not up to us.

I am no different. I too have experienced every emotion and challenge mentioned above. After 25 years I have found our business, industry and the career that I love come to a complete stand-still. I had to ask my team to take leave without pay while I worked through a plan moving forward. Sitting in that zoom meeting that Monday afternoon telling the team that I was unsure what the future looked like for us was one of the hardest moments of my career. I had no answers, I was afraid and for the first time in my life I could no longer see a clear path forward. I was shit scared.
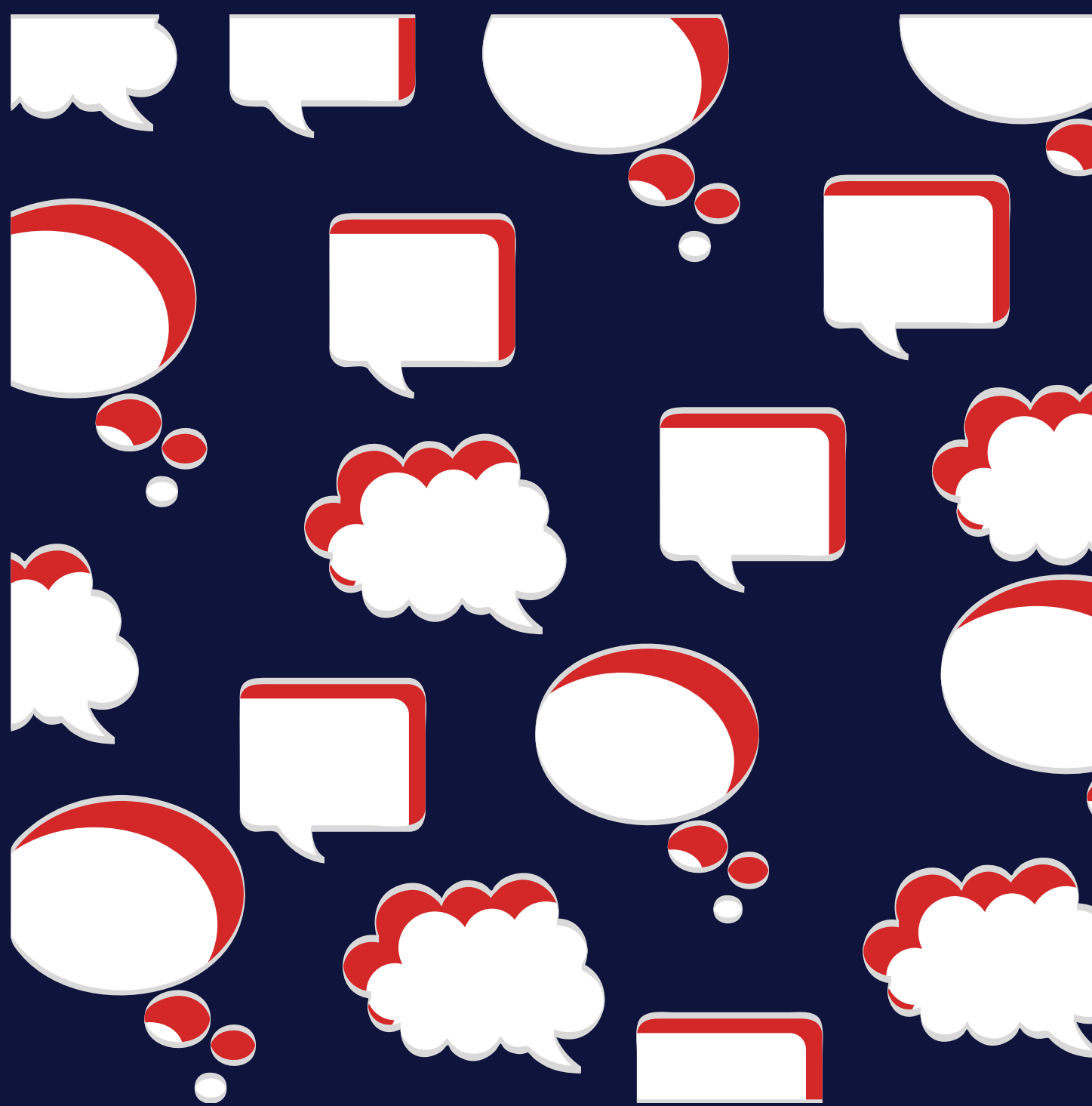
"Remember upon the conduct of each depends the fate of all."
- Alexander the Great

What I witnessed from the Corporate Challenge team that day will live with me forever. I had just asked everyone to take up to 3 months leave without pay, effective immediately. I was totally expecting anger, frustration and certainly some abuse. What I received was compassion, selflessness and understanding. Don't get me wrong people had questions and fears, but everyone was there to support each other and the business to survive through this.

The Corporate Challenge team united like never before that day, and amongst all my fear I realised that Positive Team Cultures really do create success.

In times of upheaval and disruption it is easy to forget the importance of the team around us. The below guide is written with some simple tools to help you keep your team connected and feeling valued by you their manager, leader or business owner. Now more than ever we need to embrace those around us. In order to survive these times, and we will, we need to do it together.

SOME IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

The beauty of this eBook is that it's short, it's simple and it's to the point! We all live and work in an increasingly busy and cluttered world and there are endless amounts of content and material to be found on any one topic. Yet there are still the same 7 days per week, 24 hours per day and 60 minutes per hour. I have designed this eBook as a simple reference tool for you to use and apply. I'm only a phone call or email away if you ever need more detail on any of my tips. Now before we get into 'how to create a positive team culture', allow me to define a couple of crucial terms in the context of this eBook – CULTURE and SUCCESS.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Scientifically speaking, it is the collective habits that we form as a group; our collective behaviour. Collective habits across a group create the culture.

For me in the time of COVID-19 the best description of culture is the connectedness of a team/organisation. I have created the acronym FUMISH to help determine whether you have a positive culture.

Friendly
Understanding
Motivating
Inspiring
Supportive
Happy
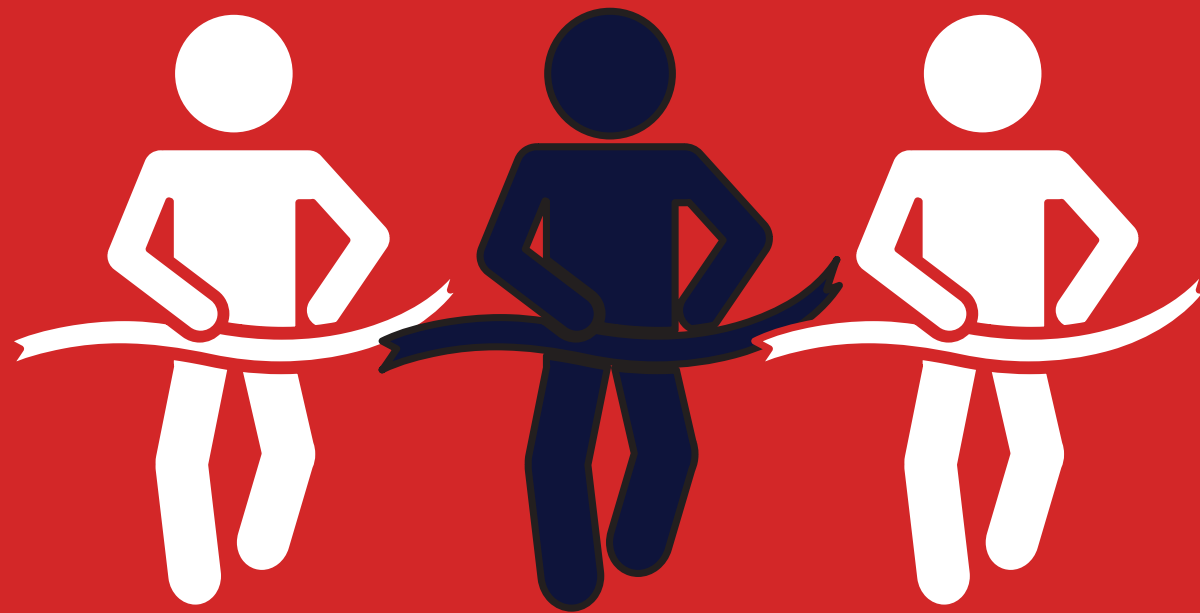
Do the staff in the organisation feel this? Do visitors to the organisation feel this?

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

For most organisations success is determined by profitability, and fair enough too!

Being profitable is an important part of staying a viable business; but financial gain shouldn't be the only indicator of success.

Building a sustainable, long lasting business that supports your purpose, your community within the business and gives back to your community outside the business are high on my indicators of success.

Job satisfaction and staff retention are also important indicators of success.

THE 3 E'S OF A POSITIVE TEAM CULTURE

I believe practising a positive team culture requires...

Education
Engagement
Environment

The following guide is broken into three main chapters - Education, Engagement and Environment.

Each chapter will provide the 'nuts and bolts' of 'how to create a positive team culture for success' – some simple strategies that you can implement straight away to get you on the path to creating success for your organisation.

ENVIRONMENT

POSITIVE CULTURE

EDUCATION

ENGAGEMENT
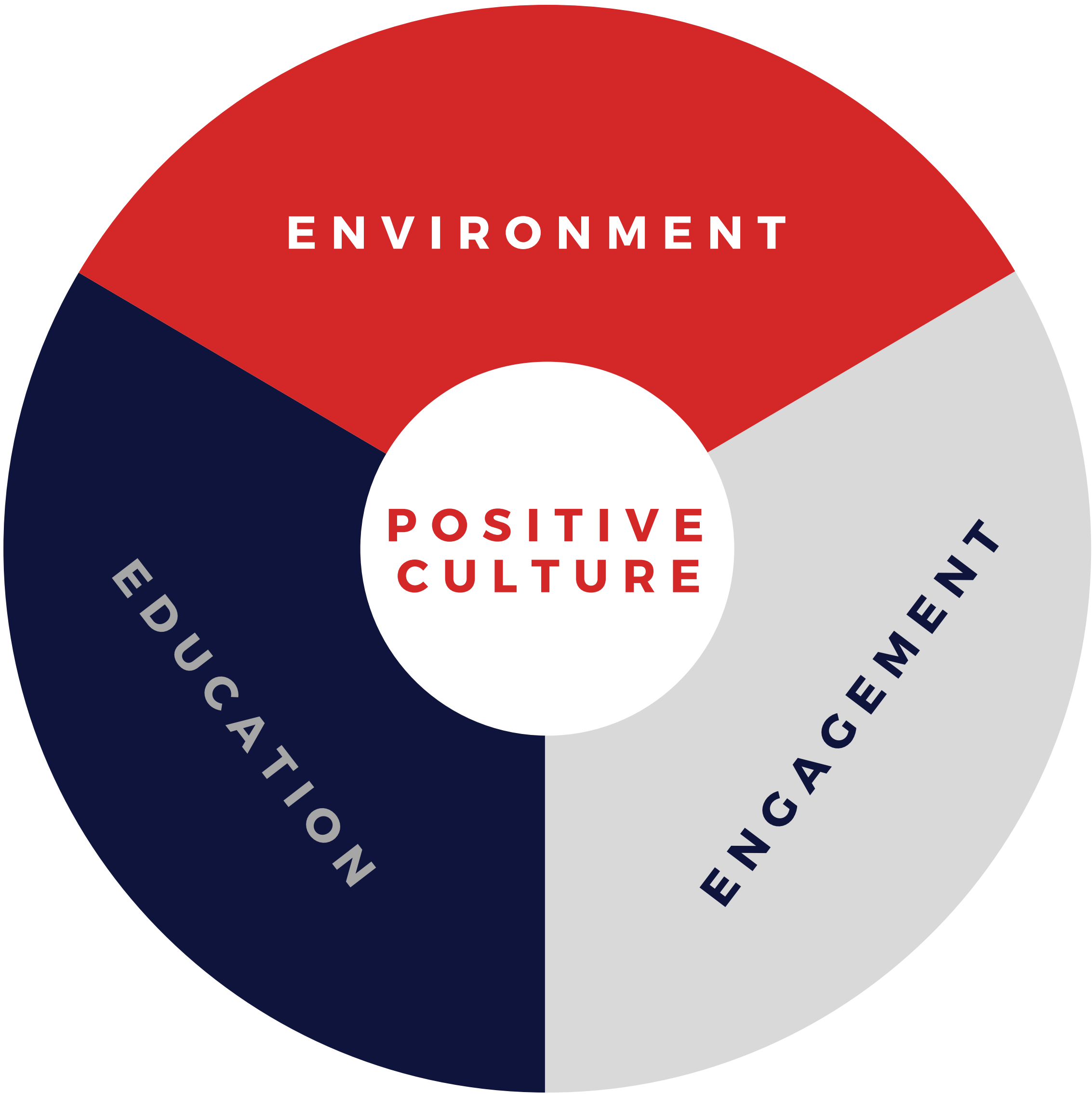
CFO says to the CEO: "What if we train staff and they leave?"
CEO responds: "What if we don't and they stay!"

You will find career growth, opportunity and challenge in many articles by industry professionals and scholars as three leading reasons why employees stay with an organisation.

Staff like to learn to be better at what they do. The more you upskill staff, the better they will perform for you. Thus, regularly educating and training staff will lead to improved performance and a more positive work culture.

Here are my strategies for education...

EDUCATION

01 Purpose.

COVID-19 is the perfect time to revisit the company Purpose with your team. What is the difference your business is trying to make to its customers, to the world? Do all your team know this? In times of crisis one of the most powerful tools of survival is to reconnect your team with what you are trying to achieve. And no, I do not mean profit. If you don't feel you can do this yourself, engage a facilitator to help you.

02 Profile your team.

A fundamental part of improving a team's culture is to help everyone better understand themselves, the role they play within the team and importantly each other. No one person is the same and the more we understand what make those around us tick, the better we can work together. There are many behavioural profiling tools available, my personal favourite is Belbin Team Roles. Belbin profiles can be completed online with easy to use resources to help you facilitate a session, sharing and discussing each other's results. Again, if required engage a qualified facilitator to assist.

03

The Fish! Philosophy - Online.

Mindset matters! In these challenging times providing your team with the tools to help manage their mindset has never been more relevant. The four practices of this internationally recognised book are very simple yet will have a profound impact on your team culture.

1 – Choosing one's attitude.
2 – Playing at work.
3 – Making someone's day.
4 – Being present.

I'd advise getting each member of your team to complete the Fish! Online course or reading the Fish! Philosophy book. As a team, make some time to sit down and discuss the practices and how to best apply these within your business. If you need a little extra help to get the message across I recommend engaging a facilitator.
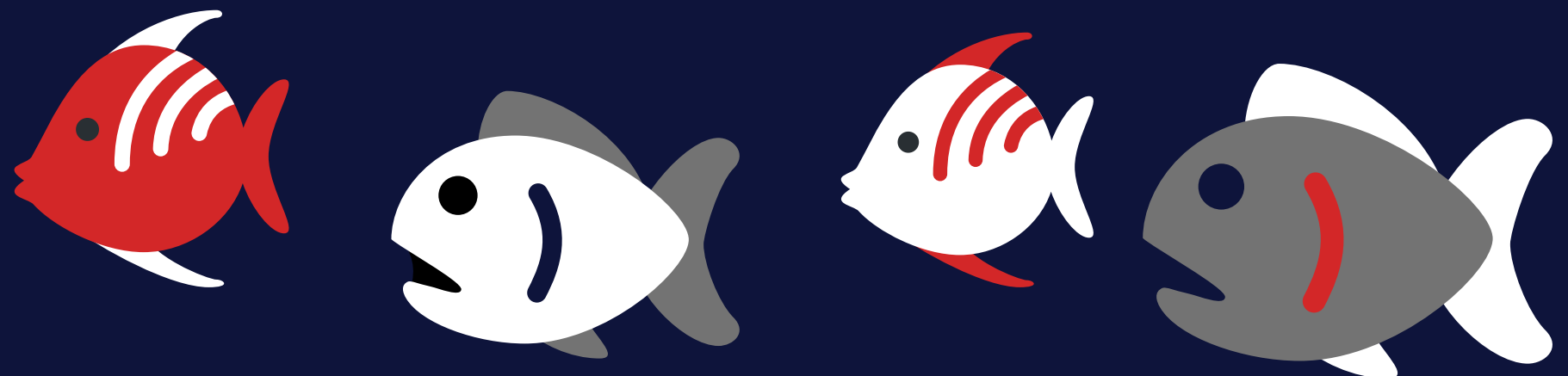
04

Useful belief.

This book authored by Chris Helder showcases the approach of 'Useful Belief' compared to 'Positive Thinking'. In our current climate this is a powerful concept. Once understood and practiced, this simple principle can transform how your team see each other and the challenges ahead. Have each of your team read this book, possibly as part of a book club, and discuss how a 'Useful Belief' can be used within your team.

05

Know your 'why'.

We all choose our careers for many and varied reasons. Explore, with your team, the 'why' behind what attracted you all to the same business and industry. This concept created by Simon Sinek can be facilitated online during a team day and will create a powerful point of connection and purpose within your team.

06

Understand mindset.

We have all developed into who we are today via our years of experience. COVID-19 and this new world we find ourselves in is also providing additional challenges to everyone's mindset. Understanding the differences between a fixed and growth mindset and discovering how to practice a more growth mindset will help your team survive and prosper together. Undertake a facilitated session aimed at understanding and exploring these mindsets and how they can impact positively on your workplace.

07 Coaching.

A coach or mentor can be invaluable in helping you or members of your team see the world differently. Most coaches or mentors will incorporate self-reflection into their sessions which can be an eye opener for many leaders and managers. Engage a coach for your leaders to help them better understand themselves and manage their team during this challenging time.

08 Appreciative inquiry session.

Business looks very different for many moving forward. The saying "What got us here, will not get us there' is probably more applicable now more than ever. Find the time to involve all levels of the business and conduct an Appreciative Inquiry session. This session will enable everyone to celebrate the exceptional moments that have led the business to where it is today and will engage the whole team on where to take the business into the future.

09 Trust matrix.

One of the most important elements of any team is to trust each other. Uncertainty and fear can create and challenge peoples trust of each other and the business. The Trust Matrix identifies two key components of trust- character and competence. It links the importance of these components in creating team cohesion and the ability to have authentic and critical conversations. Consider scheduling a session exploring character and competence using The Trust Matrix.

10 Difficult conversations.

We achieve success or failure at work and in life one conversation at a time. The problem is – when we 'wing' it (especially if we don't feel comfortable about it or in stressful times), conversations don't always go as we hope they might. By exploring difficult conversations, your team will have the courage to challenge their current reality, listen to their instincts and make conversations work all through understanding how to plan the conversation carefully.

Engagement is being involved and invested in the team you are in. It requires an attentive focus and an active willingness to work towards the goals of the team.

Imagine having a team of employees that are completely engaged with their role and in the business. Now envision the culture of the organisation with all employees engaged.

With current physical distancing and remote working environments, this has become more challenging.

Here are my strategies for engagement during COVID-19...

01 Facebook/Whatsapp .

In these times of restricted human contact we need to be creative with how to stay connected to each other. Create a closed Facebook group or private Whats App group that only your team are invited to join. Encourage everyone to "Choose their Attitude" and publicly (to the team group) declare it every day, or share what they are doing to promote a positive culture in your business. You will be surprised the connection this will create and how it will also inspire all team members to contribute.

02 Online team building events.

Social distancing and remote working is preventing traditional team building from occurring, but don't let this stop you from bonding your team. A well planned and executed online team building program will not only lift the energy of your team but allow individuals to have some escape from the challenges we are all facing. These programs provide a means for your team to reconnect and can also become fun and creative ways to develop ideas or strategies for the business.

03 Gamified learning.

We all know we learn better when we are having fun. Gamified learning solutions are an extension to 'Online Team Building' and are targeted at helping your team grasp a new idea or concept. Think of ways to create a game that will help pass your message to your team or engage a professional who can build it for you. To tackle the inner creativity of your team, Ideo is a global design and innovation company that has developed some useful tools that help gamify innovation.
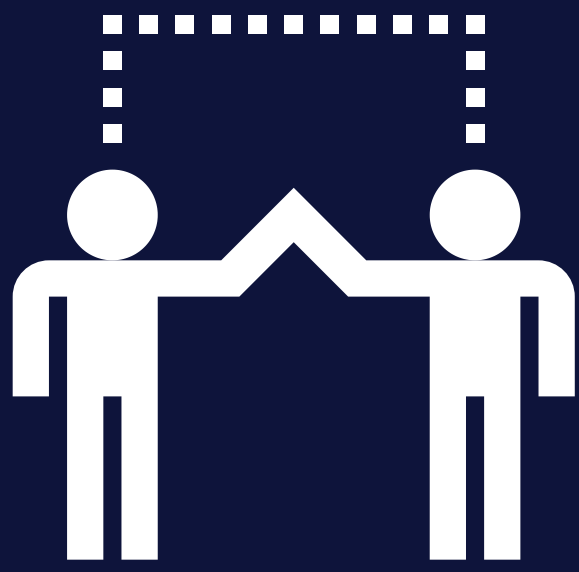
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Buddy system.

This concept was introduced to most of us in school. Try pairing team members up for a week at a time, ask them to catchup twice a day for a minimum 10 minutes, via your preferred online platform, it could be for a morning coffee, lunch or after work drink. Challenge them to find out something new about each other throughout the week and share this with the wider team at your 'Virtual Friday Night Drinks', then swap partners. So simple yet a powerful tool of connection.
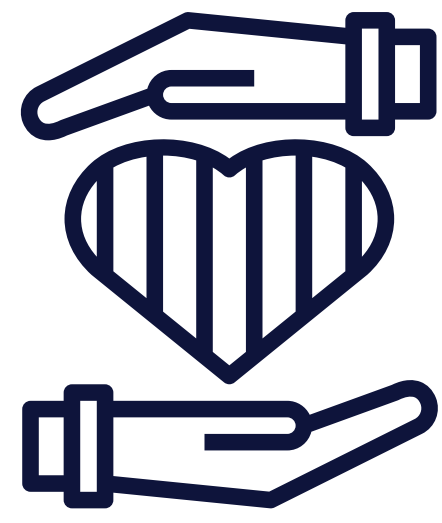
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Promote selflessness.

"Everyone is fighting a battle you know nothing about, be kind ALWAYS'. This has never been more relevant than now! Encourage everyone to do something for someone else every single day - not for what they will receive in return but for the sole purpose of giving. Watch how this can transform your culture. Many organisations are struggling right now, charities included, investigate what you could do to involve your whole team working together to 'give' to a central cause.
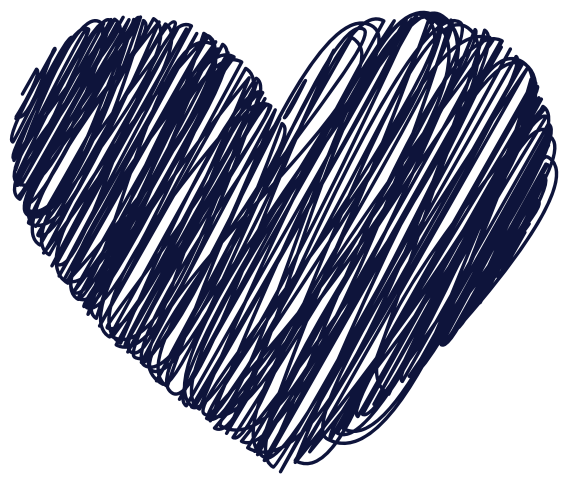
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Celebrate occasions.

In an informal way, get to know the wedding anniversaries, children's birthdays, individual birthdays and other personal milestones of your team members. Make an effort to acknowledge and celebrate these. Surprise them with a virtual cake or a home delivered cake with instructions on what time to log on to a virtual party in their honour. It's a small effort for the reward it will provide.

07

Acknowledgement.

While not working in offices and around each other it is more important to remember to acknowledge people's efforts. Make sure you don't fall victim to 'out of sight out of mind' syndrome. Your team are still working hard at home so make an effort to recognise a job well done or milestones. However, remember some people like public recognition at a team meeting, and others would prefer a quiet email or a one on one acknowledgement. Either way this simple strategy will boost morale.

08

Book / Wine club.

There is an enormous resource of books covering all aspects of business available these days. Why not promote the reading of a particular book related to an area of interest or issue in your organisation. Then schedule some meetings to discuss what has been read as well as its potential application to improving your business. Mix it up and add a social element by having team members all purchase the same wine, so you can complete a tasting and share your thoughts on this as well.

09

Promote PLAY.

Little known Kiwi 'Play Theorist' Brian Sutton Smith once said 'The opposite of play is not work; it is depression'. Make an effort to include 'Play' in your team environment every single day. Remember 'Play' doesn't have to mean 'mucking around', it means having a light-hearted approach. Challenge your team to be creative with how to include Play in your business.

10

Innovation projects.

Create small project teams that involve staff interested in that project even if it is outside of their general area of employment. Focus these projects around the future of the business and allocate time for these teams to work on them. You just never know what new ideas and innovations will develop. Not only does this create opportunities and necessity for people to connect online it may just result in some new innovations for your business in our changing world.

Environment, as the third E in creating a positive workplace culture, relates to how you feel in your workplace.

When I refer to workplace, it is the everyday workplace for each individual within your business whether that is an office, the kitchen table, a vehicle or even online.

In our current climate we need to ask what environment will create the most comfort, efficiency and productivity for each member of the team? This is an important question to ask yourself and your team.

Here are my strategies for environment...

ENVIRONMENT

01 Online team meetings.

More than ever regular team meetings with interesting, relevant and structured content is important to keep everyone engaged, informed and focused. Involve your team by asking for their ideas on topics or issues to cover in these meetings. You may also consider a guest speaker on occasion to provide another perspective into an area that impacts your business.

02 Create a goals board.

How has Covid-19 changed the bar for your business? How have your goals for the year changed as a result of Covid-19? Creating a goals board becomes a visual representation of what you and your team are trying to achieve. It also makes it easy for everyone to keep track of progress. If things are tracking well, it can be motivational. If things are behind, it can prompt teams into greater action. Encourage team members to print a copy of what you create and display it in their remote workspace or insert it as screen saver on their desktop.

03 Online motivational speaker.

Motivational/keynote speakers are an industry that has been significantly impacted right now. Many have pivoted to online presentations so why not inspire your team and schedule a speaker focusing on topics of interest or motivation to help your team through these challenging times. With reduction/limitation in travel costs you may even find this is more affordable than you first thought.

04

Standing desks.

Encourage standing desk options for your team where ever they are. There is a lot of research that suggests standing at your desk rather than sitting is significantly better for your health and will improve productivity. Not everyone can afford the fancy adjustable desks, and with offices empty all across the country, consider loaning desks and resources to your teams while they are working from home. But also don't be afraid to get creative, it's amazing what an upside-down plastic tub and piece of MDF can create.
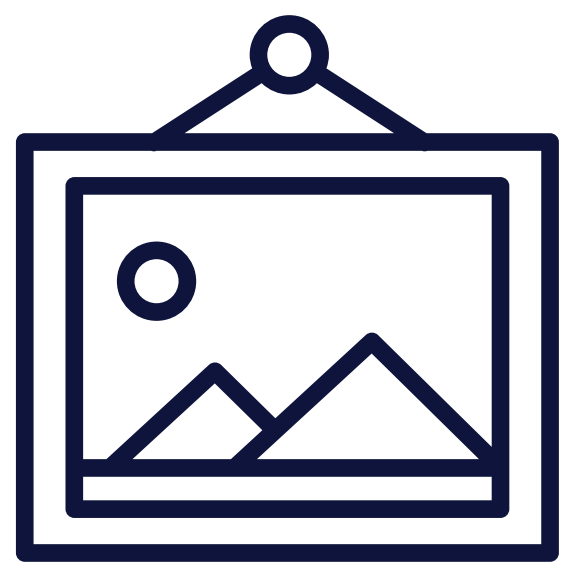
05

Creative Space.

Working from home not everyone has the luxury of a home office. In fact, many people find themselves at the kitchen or dining room table. How do we make this an inspiring workspace? My suggestion is to think of your workspace in the office. What photos, inspiring quotes, pen holders, plants, sticky note pads or even coffee cup do you have at the office. Pack a small box with all those small things that make you feel like you are at work. Every morning, "setup your desk" and "go to work". Also try setting up in different rooms every now and again to mix it up.

06

Music.

Now is the opportunity to crank up the tunes that work for you. No one else around, except for the kids of course. Background music affects our mood and energy which in turn affects our productivity. Some research suggests that different music is better for different tasks, for example music with words is not recommended when deep concentration is required. Personally, my preference is Brain FM in the morning and upbeat hits in the afternoon, this caters to my energy throughout the day. I encourage you to explore music that works for you and even challenge your team members to create their own playlist to share with the team.
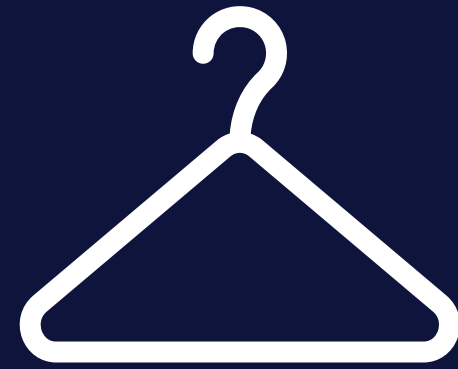
07

Dress.

This is the simplest of all the tips in this book and it plays to the heart of mindset. When I'm working from home I dress "for work". I'm not suggesting put on a full suit and tie or a work dress. For men do your hair, have a shave and put on a work shirt; women put on your makeup, do your hair and dress to go to work. My rule of thumb, is waist up, this means you are then always ready for an online call. Although this may sound trivial it is very powerful in preparing you and your mind for work. Try it!

08

Exercise & nutrition.

Ever tried putting unleaded in a diesel car? Or let your car sit unused for weeks on end? Fun fact, neither of these will make your car operate very well. Similarly, we must treat our bodies well if we want them to operate at their premium. Exercise; this doesn't have to be strenuous every day it just needs to be. Even just a quick walk to get some fresh air is perfect. Nutrition; I know when faced with stress I need my body as strong and healthy as can be. Dr Michael Mosley's "Clever Guts Diet" is my go to. Make exercise and nutrition a part of your work environment and it will help you stay focused and energised while completing the tasks at hand.

09

Internal awards.

Friendly competition is a great motivator for every business. Awards recognising individual and team performance are great ways of driving success in a fun and friendly environment. Just make sure the awards cover all areas of the business and staff. Highlight the importance of these awards at monthly online meetings. Recognition and appreciation are powerful motivators.

10

Lighting.

Lack of sun light exposure has been closely linked to vitamin D deficiency. In turn, vitamin D deficiency has been linked to depression. Where possible, create the opportunity for you to have exposure to sunlight in your workspace. If it is not possible to work near windows, think of alternative options such as login on your phone and go for a walk outdoors during meetings, have lunch outside or go for a walk during your breaks. Even a quick 10 minutes can make a world of difference.

THE END IS YOUR START

The science of emotions proves that people who experience positive emotions perform more efficiently and effectively, think more clearly and are more productive than those who experience negative emotions.

Similarly, we know that the fitter and healthier we are, the more positive and alert we will be.

Yet many of us don't focus on this and COVID-19 has created additional challenges to enable us to achieve this.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this eBook, I believe one of main reasons we don't spend enough time improving the positivity of ourselves and our teams is due to not knowing how.

Hopefully this been a useful guide to show you 'how' it is possible to improve or maintain your workplace culture, during COVID-19, and continue a positive team culture for success.

I understand that not all of my tips and strategies are applicable or feasible for all businesses, however the important thing is that you do something to create a more positive culture in your workplace. It WILL make a difference!

You now have the 'how', you just need to make the 'time' and 'commitment' to implementing a plan that will transform your culture into one that creates success for your organisation even during the times of uncertainty COVID-19 has brought us.

My dream is that we can all learn to create more positive teams in all areas of our lives. Imagine the ripple effect this would have on our communities globally!

CONTACT MY TEAM ANYTIME

If you would like more information on any of these strategies, you are most welcome to contact me or any of my team at Corporate Challenge Events.

We are focused on creating positive team cultures! We can provide further advice, or deliver a team building program, team building workshop or staff conference for you!

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