



Your ultimate guide to

Disruptive Leadership

Solve the #1 reason why people quit
Master the habits of high performing teams





What is 'disruptive leadership'?

Disruptive leaders have transformational superpowers; and with these powers, comes great responsibility.

Disruptive leaders change the way people think, feel and act; and change the way work gets done.

Whether you're a CEO, C-suite pro, or rocking your sphere of influence as a cross-functional project leader with no direct reports, there are 10 traits that separate disruptive leaders from the rest:

1. They're deeply committed to lifelong learning
2. They intentionally disrupt their own mental models
3. They ask great questions
4. They challenge conventional wisdom
5. They choose best principles over best practices
6. They fearlessly pursue truth, striving to make the invisible visible
7. They articulate an inspiring, clear-sighted vision
8. They're highly adaptable
9. They're comfortable with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity
10. They're obsessed with quality

Armed with these traits, disruptive leaders are rewriting the pact between employer and employee, as a new world of work unfolds before us.

It's just as well, because let's get real: people are downright sick of being

overworked and undervalued. They're choosing life and voting with their feet.

The pandemic may have accelerated this change, but a generational tidal wave has been gathering pace for years.

This tidal wave is one of rising expectations of life and work, spurred on by complex shifts in technology and culture.

The *humanisation* of work has begun and disruptive leadership holds the keys to a better world - a world that balances people, planet and profit; a world that doesn't grind its people down and burn them out, but lifts them up; a world in which teams thrive, buzzing with meaning, belonging and connection.

If we can positively disrupt the way we lead, interact and get things done, the future of work no longer beckons as some scary place we're being forced to go to - rather it's a better place that doesn't yet exist, which all of us get to create.

So, disruptive leader, only one question remains: if not you... who? If not now... when?





Solve the #1 reason why people quit

Let's cut to the chase: attracting and retaining talent is getting ridiculously hard.

A whopping 69 million Americans quit their jobs in 2021, as companies haemorrhage talent amidst the Great Resignation.

Over 60% of companies are struggling to keep people vs just 15% a year ago* (and let's not forget the old adage: people don't leave companies, they leave managers).

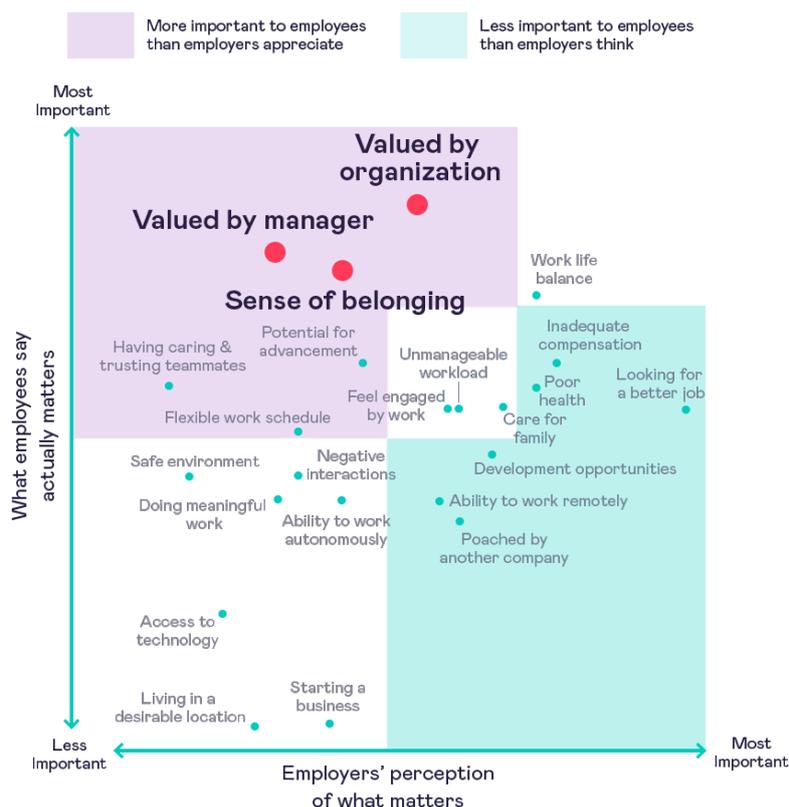
Talent attraction follows a similar story: the number of organisations struggling to attract employees has tripled in the past year.

Run-of-the-mill leaders are responding to the talent crisis by cranking up flexibility, pay and benefits... but disruptive leaders know that this isn't enough.

Obviously you need to pay people what they're worth, or more, to reduce flight risks and ensure energy isn't wasted stewing over money... but today, that's just table stakes.

It turns out that the crux of the talent crisis lies in a gaping chasm between what employers think their people want and what people actually want.

This McKinsey chart sums it up nicely:

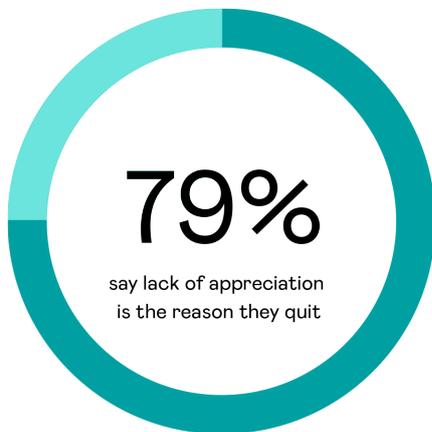


*Source: WTW, Sept. 2021



Employers believe that people care most about things like compensation, but in truth that's way less important than they think.

The number one reason why people quit their job is lack of recognition. People want to feel appreciated.

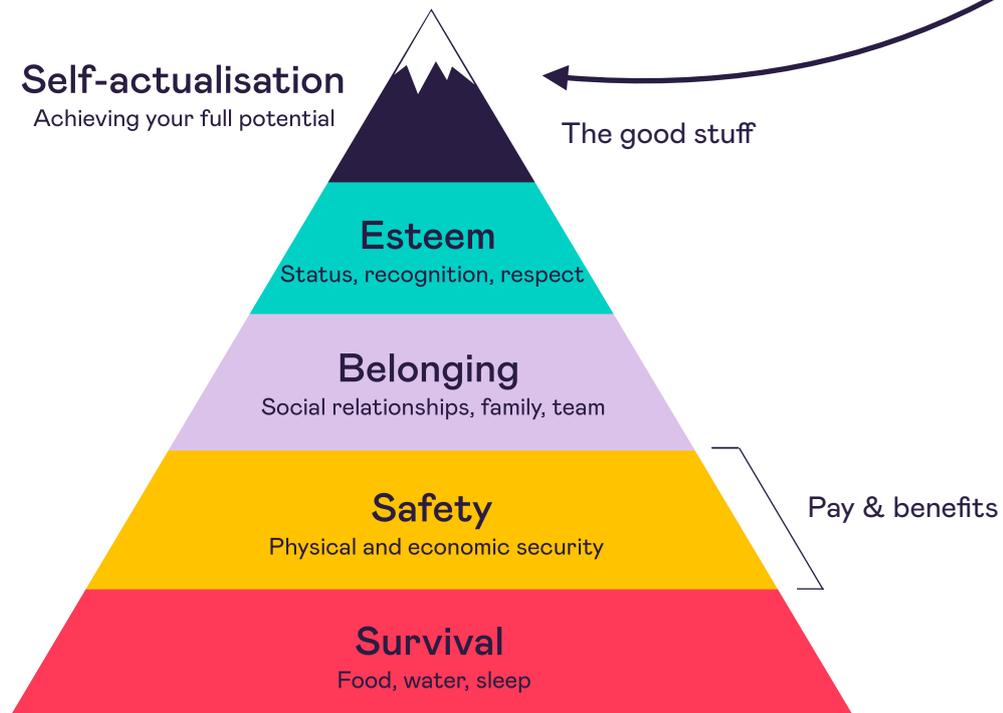


McKinsey's research reveals the top 3 factors that employees actually care about most:

1. Feeling valued by their organisation
2. Feeling valued by their manager
3. Feeling a sense of belonging

While average leaders focus on the bottom rung of the hierarchy of needs, disruptive leaders are reaping extraordinary competitive advantage by paying attention to the top.

Good old Maslow, in his 1943 paper 'A Theory of Human Motivation', describes how we, as humans, need to satisfy basic physiological needs like food, water, warmth and rest to survive. Once these needs are met, we can focus on safety and security. When that's taken care of we can concentrate on psychological needs like belonging and relationships, then esteem, social status and feelings of accomplishment...





and once all of those needs are sorted, finally we're free to focus on self-actualisation - or in other words, fulfilling our potential, expressing our creativity and living the best life we're capable of (which includes doing our best work).

Satisfying low level needs that are *expected* isn't going to cut it. Disruptive leaders strive for the peak of the pyramid, focusing energy on belonging, authentic appreciation and supporting their teams to realise their potential.

Too often, organisations think they've nailed high level needs because they've communicated a solid purpose, mission and values... but if all we had to do was agree on that stuff to make performance soar and kiss goodbye to talent problems, we wouldn't have been banging on about visions, missions and values for the past

hundred years only to find ourselves in a perpetual pickle when the rubber hits the road.

The reason we struggle at the top of the pyramid comes down to a missing link: *behavioural change*.

Leadership behaviours need to change with the times, because leaders normalise group behaviours.

And guess what? That's culture. Culture is the culmination of group behaviours.

The trouble is, even for the world's most awesome disruptive leaders, *behaviour change is hard*.





How to master the habits of high performing teams

We all know we should eat less cake, drink less beer and go to the gym... but in the moment, our lizard brain kicks in and overrides our well-intentioned prefrontal cortex. We eat the cake. We drink the beer. We forfeit CrossFit for Netflix. Behaviour change is hard.

But alas, disruptive leadership is all about instigating behavioural change: starting with yourself, then emanating awesomeness throughout your entire sphere of influence, which in turn expands.

This is about way more than employee engagement, it's about culture: creating the culture you need to successfully deliver your strategy.

Think of it this way: engagement is all about how people feel, while culture is about what they do, how they behave and

interact... which in turn produces engagement or disengagement (a contagious and toxic beast) as an outcome.

In a world where high-end talent can pick and choose where they work and live; where people expect autonomy, dignity, flat hierarchy, work life balance, personal development and meaning... slapping some values on the wall does diddly squat if nobody behaves any differently.

In fact, it's likely to make things worse, prompting eye-rolly skepticism if your team's lived experience of work clashes with leadership rhetoric.

"Don't we just need a rewards and recognition scheme to help people feel valued and appreciated?" I hear you ask.

Well, yes... but no, but....

Did you know...

2% of payroll goes into recognition in the US, mainly recognition tenure, with 87% of companies having tenure-based reward programs, despite research showing that this drives very little value. Meanwhile, companies with a 'recognition-rich culture' vastly outperform others. The top 20% of companies getting it right achieve 31% less voluntary turnover... which is clearly worth... zillions.

[Source: Bersin]



If lack of recognition is the #1 reason why people quit - if people are no longer willing to suck up being undervalued and unappreciated for their pay cheque - how come perks and financial, transactional rewards largely pan out to be damp squibs?

The reason is that true recognition and appreciation isn't a top down, broad brush, transactional thing.

Rather, what we need to get right are the hundreds of tiny micro interactions that we have with people every day, every week, week in week out.

This is the stuff of high performance culture. This is disruptive leadership.

Leaders who aren't mindful of the impact they have on others, in their seemingly minor interactions, are losing people and strangling success. If their team members aren't quitting, they're likely to experience increased absenteeism (which cost UK companies £14 billion in 2020*), including genuine health problems; and presenteeism, i.e. they're there, but not doing their job - or at least not doing their best (which cost UK companies £15 billion in 2020**).

So, young Jedi of positive disruption... what to do?

Well, it starts with education and awareness. We can't fix what we're not aware of, so deepening our understanding of the impact we have in our everyday interactions is crucial, not least because almost everyone underestimates it, particularly when busy or under pressure.

Tip #1 - emanate belonging cues

When you see a disruptive leader in action, you'll notice that they constantly signal 'belonging cues'. The way they phrase their sentences, the way they position feedback - it all screams, "You belong here, you're a meaningful part of something that matters and we share a future together."

Tip #2 - put tasks in big picture context

Disruptive leaders weave vision, mission, values and a sense of meaning and purpose into everyday conversations. This isn't about grand-standing and addressing the troops en masse, it's about the little things: putting the work - the tasks - in context.



*Source: Westfield Health
**Source: Vitality



Ever-so-masterfully, disruptive leaders sprinkle magic meaning dust all over their team's day-to-day work, so that even the most mundane of tasks is no longer another to-do, but a vital step on your journey towards world domination, saving the world, or <insert your purpose here>.

Tip #3 - create psychological safety

Disruptive leaders of exceptional teams - not just in companies, but basketball coaches, Navy SEALs - also create psychological safety.

Psychological safety is often misunderstood, because the word 'safety' conjures up notions of happy clappy cultures where nobody ever gets upset <shudder>.

In reality, it means precisely the opposite. In a truly excellent team, there's loads of conflict. And swearing. And sarcasm. And complaining.

I kid you not: a 2021 HBR [survey](#) of US office workers found 5 key things that high performing teams do differently:

1. Have better meetings
2. Pick up the phone
3. Bond over non-work topics

4. Give and receive appreciation more frequently
5. Show greater authenticity, including compliments, jokes, teasing, emojis, exclamation marks, gifs, swearing, complaining and sarcasm.

It turns out that taking the p*&\$ out of your teammates reduces the 'emotional labour' (yes, that's a thing, says [science](#)) that's expended on suppressing your feelings... thereby freeing up more mental bandwidth to focus on the work.

In a psychologically safe team, you can get upset, disagree and bring your whole self to work. You can screw up, 'fess up and learn... without fear of judgement or reprisal.

It's all about having a bunch of people around you whom you can trust.

Tip #4 - deliver tough feedback with love

Disruptive leaders aren't a soft touch, far from it: they hold people (including themselves) to a super high standard... but they do it with love.

Experts at [Columbia](#), [Yale](#) and [Stanford](#) agree that there's a formula for 'Magical Feedback' that goes something like this:

Woah... we've known this for a loooooong time

A 1949 study asked employees to rank what they cared about most, then ask managers to rank what they believed the employees wanted. Employees categorically stated that the most important thing to them was feeling appreciated. Managers, on the other hand, believed that employees put good wages and job security first. The study was repeated in 1980, with exactly the same result. For over 70 years, we've radically underestimated the power of authentic appreciation at work.



“Look [insert name] I want to give you feedback because I truly want you to succeed here. Your success and growth here are incredibly important. Our team is depending on you with this project. I have high expectations for us all and I believe you can meet them if you apply your strengths of [insert strengths].”

This wording is effective because it weaves in 3 vital components: Connection, Belonging and High Standards.

Tip #5 - sweat the small stuff

Disruptive leaders influence behaviour by changing the way people experience work, one moment at a time, which in turn, changes lives (and results).

Too often we're led to believe it's the big, bold moves that create positive disruption, yet in truth it's the small stuff that adds up.

Arnie abs don't spring forth after one workout - rather a consistent daily habit creates change that's barely noticeable day to day... until one day you turn around and see the transformation.

Same goes for disruptive leadership. Do you take the time to acknowledge your teammates' birthdays? Do you know their kids names? Do you keep track of their work anniversaries? Do you prompt

people to stop and reflect on their work, learning from what went right and what went wrong? Do you encourage everyone to share wins, big and small; and to celebrate success? Or is celebration sidelined as a waste of precious time?

The little things matter, just as they do in any relationship.

Then there are moments that punctuate the landscape of leadership: 121s, coaching sessions, status meetings, nurturing people to aim higher and developing plans together to create momentum and positive outcomes... giving people a clear line of sight to the top of the hierarchy of needs, taking into account that every path and every destination is unique.

Do you feel like these moments are fuelled by peer-to-peer feedback, recognition and meaningful reflection on highs and lows? Do you remember to say thank you?

Tip #6 - create habit loops

So far, so obvious, you might say. So if taking the time to make people feel recognised, valued and appreciated - helping people feel a deep sense of belonging and fulfilment - sounds so easy, how come we don't do it?

Okay, disruptor of status quos... it's time to face into the Knowing Doing Gap.

An illustration of a chasm between two cliff edges. The left cliff is labeled 'Knowing' and the right cliff is labeled 'Doing'. The chasm is filled with a light blue, wavy pattern, representing the gap between knowledge and action. The cliffs are green with some grass and dark brown at the base.

Knowing

Doing



Primitive limbic lizard brain be damned... we're gonna shoot that gap.

The secret lies in fostering new habits. Tincy wincy ones.

Dave Brailsford understood this. Back in 2003, he was hired by British Cycling to rectify their dismal track record, after 110 years of Brits failing to win the Tour de France.

Dave's strategy was all about 'the aggregation of marginal gains'.

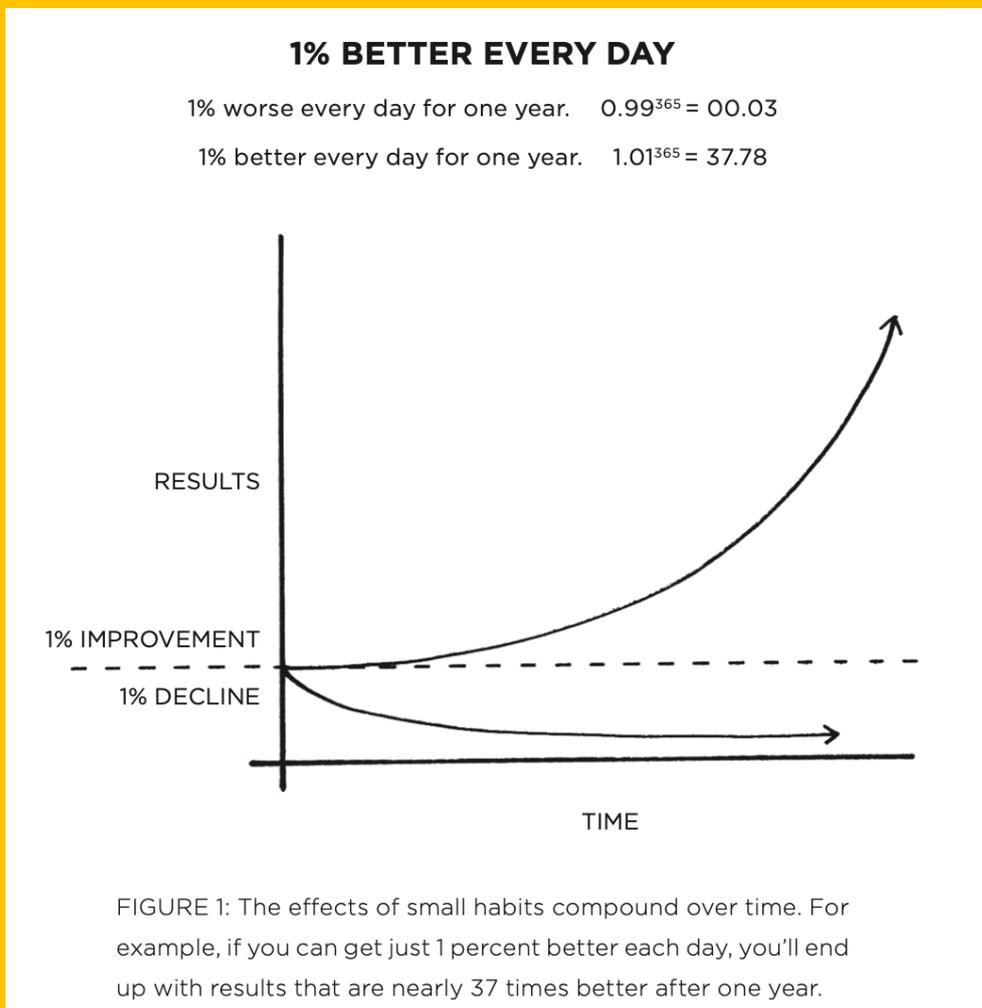
"The whole principle came from the idea that if you broke down everything you could think of that goes into riding a bike, and then improve it by 1%, you will get a

significant increase when you put them all together," he said.

A few years of tweaking seats, shorts, suits and goodness knows what else later... they had medals coming out of their ears. They won 60% of gold medals at the Beijing Olympics, set 9 Olympic records and 7 world records at the London Olympics and won 5 Tour de France victories.

How come all these tiny tweaks made such an epic difference?

James Clear, in his book Atomic Habits, paints a picture of precisely what's going on here:





It isn't the big, top down stuff that counts, it's the compound growth over time from consistently doing the small stuff.

Let's put this into practice...

For example, as a disruptive leader, say your team just fulfilled a big order. Yay!

Why not ask everyone to share their highs and lows from the project?

Small ask, big impact.

Let's dive into the detail of how this pans out in real life. Luckily, we have an app for that.

Introducing... Mo (short for 'moments')

Mo is a culture-boosting platform that helps disruptive leaders cultivate the behaviours of the world's top-performing teams.

In Mo, you can design the micro habits that you want your team to adopt, in order to create the culture you need to deliver your strategy.

Here goes...

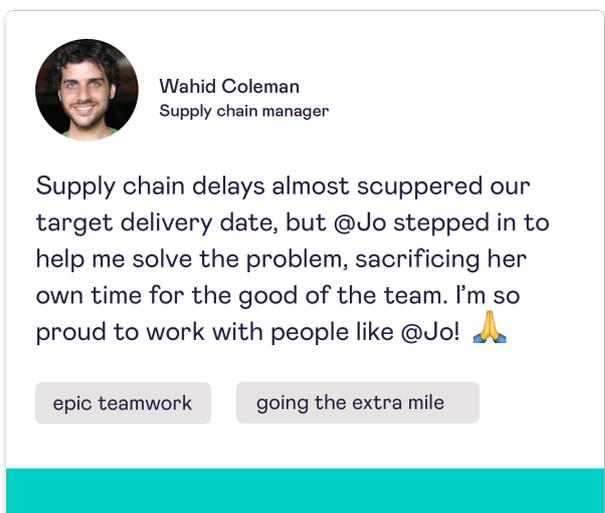
As a disruptive leader, Jane McManager picks a habit she wants to propagate. In this case it's the habit of reflecting on a project that was just delivered, then taking a moment to share a high or a low from that project.

In Mo, it only takes a few seconds to automatically ping out this request for everyone to share their highs and lows on the project.



A few minutes later, Jane's team starts to share their special moments from the project.

Wahid posts a moment thanking Jo for going above and beyond to get the order ready on time, helping him out with his tasks.





Wahid tags this post with the company values that Jo was embodying by going the extra mile. This subtly embeds these values in the day-to-day, putting the work in context and promoting the sort of behaviours that matter. It turns out everyone in the team can help make the values real (no need to paste them on the wall).

Invisible work is the enemy of motivation

Brian, the CEO, spots Wahid's post, looks at Jo's profile on Mo and sees that she loves jigsaw puzzles. Fair enough.



Interests

- Learning new things
- Water sports
- Jigsaw puzzles

[View more](#)

Brian is so impressed by Jo's efforts that he reaches out to her, offering his personal thanks and giving her an epic 5,000 piece jigsaw puzzle as a gift.

This means the world to Jo, whose work is typically invisible to the exec team.

By making the invisible visible, a tiny moment causes a tidal wave of positive reinforcement, creating a sense of belonging and authentic appreciation.

Disruptive leaders use vulnerability to build trust

Then suddenly, something unexpected happens. A senior leader, Rodrigo, posts about a mistake he made that caused a week's delay at the start of the project.



Rodrigo DeSouza
Director

In the first week I realised I'd screwed up. The data was wrong. I thought it would be impossible to hit the deadline, but with support from @Steve and @Ali, we got it back on track and together created a new process that will prevent errors in future.

fail fast be more together

This is a courageous, disruptive thing to do, that has a tremendous compound impact on culture.

By saying he screwed up, as a leader, Rodrigo is cultivating an environment of trust that makes it okay for others to be honest, try new things and learn from what happened... together.

This kind of social recognition and public praise - as well as private, personal, heartfelt appreciation - makes a remarkable difference to employees (humans); and you can weave in company values, purpose and stories of doing great things into these day-to-day moments.



Crucially, this kind of behaviour isn't one and done - consistency is everything. Just as your spouse or kids never really get sick of being told you love them, you don't just stop, reflect and appreciate teammates now and then... they need to hear it over and over, forever.

Taking the time to let people know that they're valued is a seemingly small, but incredibly powerful, daily practice.

You can weave in slogans and catchphrases too, in your own style (as cheesy as you like). For example at Zappos, a ridiculously successful online retailer that sells shoes, they talk about "creating fun and a little weirdness". They essentially have a bunch of people answering phones in what amounts to a call centre, but they get more applications for those jobs than Ivy League universities... because the day-to-day behaviours, the culture, is exceptional.

At Zappos, they famously celebrated someone spending 10 hours on the phone to a customer, because their culture is about service and when their people behave in ways that exemplify their values, powerful, viral stories become myths.

Most companies with a contact centre would be horrified if someone spent 10 hours on the phone a customer... but they're extraordinary and they know it (so did Amazon, when it bought them for \$1.2 billion).

Likewise at Pixar: if you get a job there as a barista, you're not told you're making coffee... you're told you're making movies.

Everyone at Pixar plays an important role in making movies, because that's what

they're all about. From day one, in your induction, this elevates your sense of meaning and makes you feel part of something important.

Imagine sharing a moment on Mo, on your new hire's first day, telling them they're not just making coffee, but making movies.

Imagine the sense of belonging they'd feel when colleagues pile in to welcome them.

Imagine how easy it would be to browse colleagues' profiles in Mo, to discover that you both flippin' love jigsaws: a shared passion that connects you.

Given that remote and hybrid working are here to stay, fostering connections between teams is the holy grail of disruptive leadership.

On video calls, we lack the ability to pick up on subtle social cues we'd naturally pick up in the office - so good habits and impactful language need to be executed with greater intention than ever.

Talk to your fellow disruptive leaders about this, work on it together as a thing, make it a priority to care for people beyond the bottom of the hierarchy of needs... to care about your comrades' level of energy and how they feel, what their life goals are and what matters to them.

Disruptive leaders understand that in every single interaction, we either give people energy or we take it away - it's rarely neutral.

Taking time to reflect, appreciate, normalise honesty (including failure... *especially* failure), to give feedback on the basis that you're a special team who

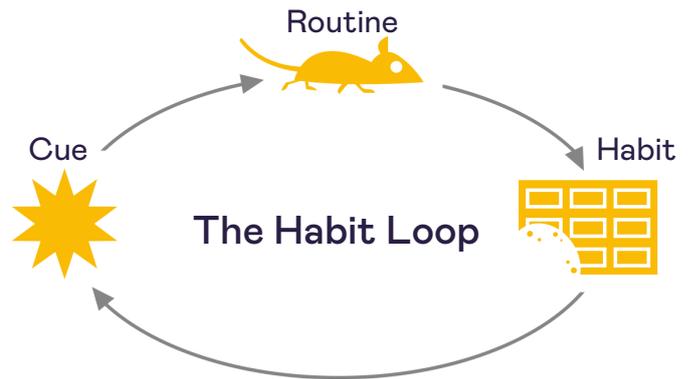


can do great things and hold high expectations... and to really inspire the people you interact with day in day out... that's where it's at. Do it like it's 2022.

The good news is that all of this is galvanised by automating disruptive leadership habits.

You don't have to cross the knowing doing gap through sheer will power (because we all know how that pans out: like Netflix over CrossFit, covered in Cheeto dust).

Mo provides the cues that trigger the routines that form the habits that will underpin your success.



[source: Charles Duhigg, The Power of Habit]

We're here to help you design, instigate and reap the incredible cultural riches of the world's highest performing teams... one moment at a time.

May the force of disruption be with you.

Brands like these trust Mo to help them build a thriving culture...



Make it happen (in days)

Mo helps disruptive leaders like you build the best team, one moment at a time, by cultivating the behaviours of the world's top performing cultures.



Build recognition habits

Create recognition habits that solve the top reason why rewards and recognition schemes fail to deliver results



Surface unsung heroes

Make invisible work visible, to boost motivation and make it easy for leaders to see who deserves to be recognised



Inspire better conversations

Replace uninspiring 121s and demotivating performance reviews with honest, real-time feedback and reflection

[Get a personalised demo](#)