



# Creating *Joyful* Cultures

The key to solving today's leadership challenges

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**Radiate Joy. Transform how people feel, engage and perform.**

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# A note from Amanda

Leadership has never been harder. Your people are living with constant change, new technology, hybrid teams and economic uncertainty. And they want more from work than a paycheck. They want to feel that what they do matters, and that the people they work with genuinely care about them.

Here's what I've seen across 30+ years of working with leaders in more than 20 countries. The organizations that handle all of this best aren't the ones with the biggest budgets or the cleverest strategies. They're the ones where people feel safe, valued and connected. They're joyful places to work.

Joy isn't soft. It's a business advantage. When people feel good, they think more clearly, connect more easily, sell more and stay longer. The research backs this up, and you'll find the numbers in the Joyonomics chapter.

The so-called soft skills of leadership are so rarely taught, and they're now the skills that make or break a team. In this ebook you'll see the three biggest challenges leaders face today, why joyful cultures solve them, and exactly how to start building one this week.

Let's get started.

*Amanda*





## Chapter 1.

# The three challenges every leader is facing

## 1. Engagement and retention

**The problem.** People are tired, overwhelmed and disengaged, and many are quietly looking for work that feels more meaningful.

**What the research shows.** Gallup's global research finds that most employees aren't engaged at work. Gallup also estimates that replacing an employee costs anywhere from half to twice their annual salary.

**The root cause.** A lack of connection, appreciation and genuine care, in cultures that treat joy as optional.

**The impact.** Lower profits, costly hiring, knowledge walking out the door, and morale that slides across whole teams.

## 2. Change and innovation

**The problem.** Leaders have to keep innovating while keeping the business steady.

**The pressure points.**

- Resistance to change.
- Keeping up with new technology, including AI.
- Communication breaking down at every level.
- Hybrid teams drifting apart.

**The root cause.** Fear. When people are afraid of failing or looking foolish, they stop offering ideas, and creativity dries up. Many leaders are running on empty too, managing their own energy and emotions while trying to support everyone else.

**The impact.** Teams that resist change fall behind faster competitors. They also stop growing, and when people stop growing, they leave.

### 3. Belonging and resilience

**The problem.** A resilient organization depends on connection, teamwork and leaders who bring everyone with them. People want to feel they belong, and many workplaces still find it hard to make that true for everyone.

**The pressure points.**

- Low trust in leadership.
- Little attention paid to emotional resilience.
- Emotional intelligence that rarely gets developed.

**The root cause.** Poor communication, and leaders who haven't learned how to bring people and teams together. Unconscious bias makes it harder still.

**The impact.** Without belonging and resilience, trust and creativity wear away, and teams struggle when times get tough.



## Chapter 2.

# Why joyful cultures solve them

## What is a joyful culture?

A joyful culture is one where people feel safe, valued, cared for and connected, and where their work has meaning. They have permission to have fun, and they're encouraged to. It's built on trust, gratitude, care and real relationships.

In a joyful culture, leaders are good at the skills that matter most and get taught least. They're authentic and transparent. They communicate and present clearly, in ways that inspire. They connect heart to heart, so people feel acknowledged. And they have the self-awareness to manage their own state and every interaction they have with others.

## How joy solves each challenge

**Engagement and retention.** Joy builds connection, so people feel appreciated and motivated. Gratitude practices reduce burnout and support wellbeing. When people feel their boss genuinely cares about them, it changes how they feel about work. Humans run on feelings! Facts and figures rarely motivate anyone. Care, support and recognition do.

**Change and innovation.** A joyful environment lowers the fear of failure, so creativity comes back. Psychological safety gives people the confidence to take smart risks and try new ideas.

**Belonging and resilience.** Joy builds belonging, and belonging makes a workplace work for everyone. Teams that put joy first are more resilient, so they handle a crisis better. Joyful cultures grow community, connection, supportive behavior and honest communication.



### Chapter 3.

## How to create a joyful culture: five practices

### 1. Build trust through connection

**Try this.** Start “happiness chats”. Check in with each person regularly, on a personal level, and be genuinely interested in them. It’s one simple habit, and it changes cultures.

**Try this.** Model open, honest communication in every situation, and show your team what mature problem-solving looks like.

**Example.** Hold connection meetings where team members share personal stories. They connect people one to one, and they turn a group into a community.

### 2. Practice gratitude and appreciation

**Try this.** Start every team meeting with one question: “What’s the thing you’re most grateful for since we last met?” It changes the tone of the meeting and, over time, the attitude of your whole team. Do it virtually, hybrid or in the office, and be consistent.

**Try this.** Create a gratitude wall, or a digital board, where people can thank each other. It sounds simple. It’s extraordinarily effective.

**Try this.** Celebrate achievements publicly, and build what I call a TA DA culture, where every win, big or small, gets its moment.

**Example.** Encourage everyone to put on their gratitude glasses: to choose to look at people and situations with gratitude. Be a good finder, in others and in every situation.

### 3. Build psychological safety

**Try this.** Teach leaders to respond to mistakes with curiosity rather than judgment, and to ask, “What did we learn?”

**Try this.** Encourage people to choose joy consciously and to look for what’s good in a situation. Build compassion and care for each other into the way the team works.

**Try this.** Deal with bullying and bad behavior straight away. One person left unchecked can undo everything else.

**Try this.** Believe in people, and help them believe in themselves. In my experience, belief predicts success more than skill does.

**Example.** Google’s Project Aristotle studied what made its teams effective, and found that psychological safety mattered more than anything else.

### 4. Build belonging

**Try this.** Listen to everyone, genuinely, and especially to the voices you hear least. There’s a big difference between listening and hearing!

**Try this.** Pair people from different backgrounds and parts of the business with senior leaders as mentors.

**Example.** Hold town halls where people tell the stories of their lives. It connects people at a deep level and changes how they see each other, almost immediately.

## 5. Lead with emotional intelligence

**Try this.** Invest in emotional intelligence training for your leaders. Knowing yourself, managing yourself and understanding others is the foundation of high-performing teams and joyful cultures.

**Remember this.** People leave bosses, not jobs! How a leader behaves shapes retention, productivity and every other part of the business.

**Try this.** Teach self-awareness, empathy and how to manage your emotional state.

**Try this.** Teach leaders about nonverbal communication. So much of what people take away from you comes from how you say it: your face, your voice, your energy and your presence.

**Try this.** Teach leaders to present well, in meetings and in front of their teams. The difference between the content and the way it's delivered is the difference between inspiring people and boring them.

**Example.** Leaders who show vulnerability, authenticity and self-awareness inspire their teams to do the same, and the connections go deeper.

Everything in this chapter is part of Amanda Gore JQ®, the method I use in my keynotes and workshops to help leaders and teams build these skills and raise their Joy Quotient.



## Chapter 4.

# Joyful cultures in action

## Google: psychological safety comes first

Google set out to discover what made its best teams work, and studied 180 of them in a project called Aristotle. The answer surprised them. Who was on a team mattered less than how the team worked together, and psychological safety, feeling safe to speak up and take risks, mattered most of all.

**The lesson.** The most effective teams aren't the ones with the most talent. They're the ones where people feel safe.

## Microsoft: from know-it-alls to learn-it-alls

When Satya Nadella became CEO in 2014, he set out to change a competitive, insular culture. Drawing on psychologist Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset, he asked people to be learn-it-alls rather than know-it-alls, and put empathy, learning and inclusion at the center of how Microsoft leads. In the years that followed, Microsoft's innovation and results came roaring back, and it became one of the most valuable companies in the world.

**The lesson.** Culture change starts with the leader, and empathy is a business strategy.

## Patagonia: caring for the whole person

Patagonia has offered on-site childcare at its headquarters since the 1980s, along with paid time for employees to volunteer for environmental causes. It's regularly named one of the best places to work, and it's known for unusually low staff turnover.

**The lesson.** When people feel cared for as whole human beings, they stay.

## Barry-Wehmiller: the currency of care

Under CEO Bob Chapman, this privately owned global manufacturer built its whole business on the belief that everybody matters. It calls its approach Truly Human Leadership, and it runs its own leadership university to teach it. They truly have a culture of care.

I like to talk about the currency of care, because care is a currency that influences everything at work.

## Menlo Innovations: joy as the mission

Menlo Innovations, a software company in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has focused on joy since the day it started. Its cofounder, Richard Sheridan, wrote a whole book about it, Joy, Inc. The results speak for themselves: wildly successful, and wonderfully human.

**The lesson.** Joy really does make a difference to the bottom line.



## Chapter 5.

# Measuring and sustaining joy

## How to measure joy

- Employee engagement surveys.
- Retention rates, plus what people tell you when they leave.
- Productivity and innovation measures.
- Where people are during your happiness chats. This one is very revealing.
- The numbers joy moves: sales, productivity, profitability and turnover.

## How to sustain joy

- Connect with people regularly, so they feel valued, safe, acknowledged and that what they do is meaningful.
- Make sure leaders model joyful behavior consistently, and keep developing the skills it takes to lead humans and connect heart to heart.
- Put the five practices in chapter 3 into action, and keep them going.
- Ask for feedback, and adapt as you go.

# Joyonomics: the business case for *joy*

Joyonomics is my word for the bottom-line value of joy at work. Joy isn't a nice extra. It's great for business.

**23%**

**higher profitability**

Engaged teams, Gallup

**Up to 51%**

**lower turnover**

Engaged teams, Gallup

**31%**

**more productive**

Positive brains, Shawn Achor

**37%**

**better at sales**

Positive brains, Shawn Achor

Shawn Achor's research found that when the brain is positive, almost every business outcome improves.

## The skills that create joyful cultures

The more leaders learn these skills, the better it is for business. Here are a few of them:

- Communicating clearly.
- Connecting heart to heart.
- Building a team whose members are connected and support each other.
- Creating a culture where people feel valued and acknowledged.
- Treating growth and development as essential.
- Strong self-awareness.
- The so-called soft skills that every great leader needs.

In short: leaders who know themselves, manage themselves, and manage relationships well and gracefully.

# Your key takeaways

**The challenges.** Engagement and retention, change and innovation, and belonging and resilience.

**Why joy works.** It goes straight to the root causes: disconnection, fear, turnover and exclusion.

**How to create it.** Build trust, be authentic, truly connect with people, practice gratitude, build belonging and lead with emotional intelligence.

**Why it matters.** Joyonomics: joy shows up in the numbers.

# About Amanda



Amanda Gore makes joy a business advantage. She is a CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame leadership keynote speaker, and one of fewer than ten people in the world to hold the CPAE, CSP and Global Speaking Fellow designations.

Across 30+ years, she has spoken to more than 2 million people in more than 20 countries, for organizations including Google, McDonald's and American Express. Organizations bring her to corporate conferences, association events and sales kickoffs to inspire their people and lift performance.

Amanda began her career in physiotherapy and psychology, and she still spends a third of every year studying neurolinguistics, neuroscience, emotional intelligence and quantum physics. She turns what she learns into tools people can use at work and at home. That work became Amanda Gore JQ®, her method for bringing joy into the way people lead, work and sell. With it, every keynote is an amazing experience, and people walk away with new skills, tools and beliefs.

# Bring *joy* to your next event



Want great leaders, connected teams and better results? Amanda's keynotes and workshops bring the ideas in this ebook to life for leaders, sales teams and whole organizations, with humor, science and tools people use straight away.

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You're now receiving Wired for Joy, Amanda's newsletter: one idea a month to help you see differently, connect better and enjoy the ride.

**Radiate Joy. Transform how people feel, engage and perform.**

# Sources

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