



The *Joyful* Leaders Playbook

How to Build High Performing Teams, Boost Engagement and Create a Thriving Workplace

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

How to be the best boss anyone has ever had!

To reinforce what you learned in my training, consider these statistics from Gallup and McKinsey. They show that what you do as a leader really matters!

People leave bosses, not jobs.

75% of people are thinking of leaving their jobs and find the boss the most stressful part of their job.

How leaders and managers affect engagement and life satisfaction

1. Gallup research: a leader's impact on engagement and well-being

70%

of the variance in team engagement is tied directly to the manager

Gallup, 2015

50%

of employees say they have left a job because of their manager, not the company

Gallup, 2019

7x

more likely to be engaged when you have a best friend at work

Gallup, 2022

Your manager is the #1 factor in your job satisfaction. A bad boss means high disengagement and job dissatisfaction.

Managers influence overall well-being, not just work performance. Employees who have meaningful relationships with their managers are more likely to be thriving in life overall, not just in their jobs.

The “best friend at work” effect. Employees who say they have a best friend at work are 7x more likely to be engaged, and manager relationships play a huge role in this dynamic. (Gallup, 2022)

Psychological safety starts with leadership. Teams with high psychological safety, where employees feel safe to express ideas and concerns, perform 27% better and are 50% more productive. (Gallup, 2021)

2. McKinsey research: leadership's role in engagement and retention

3x

higher engagement
when leaders connect
work to a bigger
mission

McKinsey, 2021

54%

of employees who quit
in 2021 cited not feeling
valued by their manager

McKinsey, 2022

63%

more likely to stay long-
term when they feel
their leaders genuinely
care

Toxic leadership is the #1 reason employees quit. McKinsey found that toxic workplace behavior from managers is the biggest predictor of employee attrition, even more than compensation. (McKinsey, 2022)

Employees need meaning and purpose, and that starts with leadership. 70% of employees say their sense of purpose is defined by their work. Leaders who help employees connect their work to a bigger mission see 3x higher engagement rates. (McKinsey, 2021)

“The Great Resignation” was really about bad leadership. McKinsey found that 54% of employees who quit in 2021 cited “not feeling valued by their manager” as a major reason for leaving. (McKinsey, 2022)

Caring leaders retain top talent. Employees who feel their leaders genuinely care about them are 63% more likely to stay at their company long-term.

Final takeaways: why this matters for leaders and organizations

- Managers don't just affect performance, they influence overall life satisfaction.
- Bad leadership is the #1 driver of disengagement and turnover.
- The best leaders create purpose, psychological safety and real human connection.
- Organizations that invest in leadership development see higher engagement, retention and productivity.

All this says that what you do as a leader or boss really matters.

A leader's job is to... (and a parent's job!)

1. Change people's behavior

which you can do in a heartbeat if you tell them a story that touches their heart

2. Create an environment

in which people can be the best they can be

3. Help people believe in themselves

because belief in your own ability is a better predictor of success than any level of skill

How to be the best boss anyone ever had!

Remember: you are leading people. Think about the best boss you ever had or the best school teacher, and why they were the best. It's usually something like:

- They cared about you
- Believed in you
- Inspired you
- Grew and developed you

People have not changed in thousands of years. They still want to be seen, heard, valued, recognized and cared for, and to feel that they are growing, developing and special. They want heart to heart connection, authenticity, transparency and genuine caring.

Forget about B2B and B2C! Go for F2F! Feeling to feeling.

It's more potent, and an often ignored aspect of business, yet it affects every aspect of leadership, sales, customer service and profitability.

You are truly dealing in most cases with toddlers in grown up bodies! Epigenetics shows us that by the time we are 7 years old, we have embedded the core fears or stories that will unconsciously rule the rest of our days, until we become conscious of them.

Everything in business (and life) is about feelings. As Professor John Duradini (Professor of Psychiatry) said, "Life is not about feeling good. Life is about being good at feeling." As humans, it is

not a strong point, and in business, feelings have been discounted for way too long with dire consequences, such as a disengaged and detached workforce.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) has been talked about forever but few really understand what specifically it means, which is: **know yourself, manage yourself and manage relationships**. That is what this entire ebook is about.

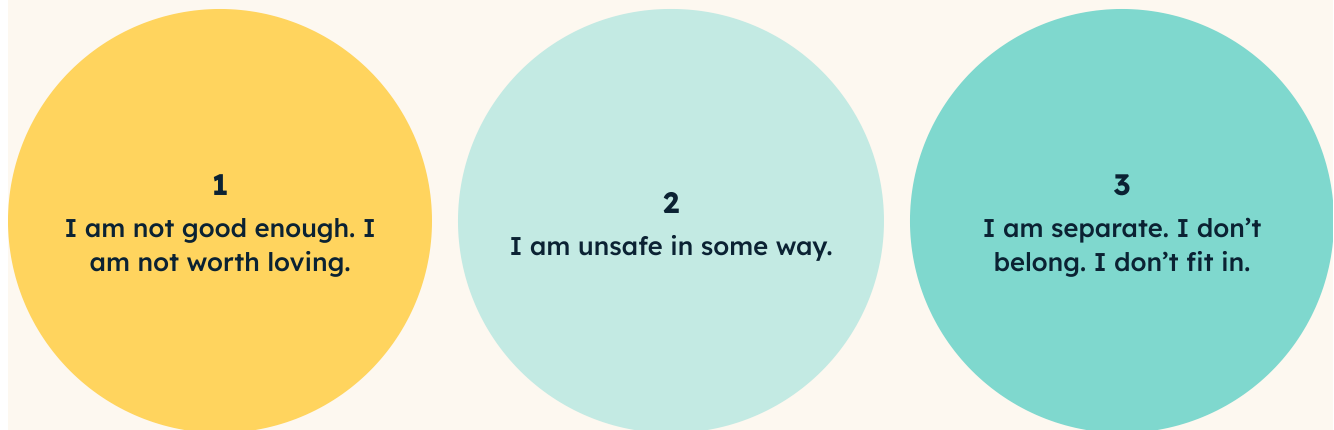
The two most critical issues to address to improve EQ

1. How you feel about yourself

2. How others feel around you

The three core fears

These stop us feeling good about ourselves, which then affects how others feel around us.



None of these are actually true. They are stories we have told ourselves, and that pretty much everyone has told themselves. We can change our stories once we know how much they are influencing every aspect of our lives. We told ourselves these stories somewhere between 0 and 7 years old, according to epigenetics, the science of going beyond the genes.

As a toddler, we have no capacity to understand different perspectives, and we interpret and give meaning to everything based on ourselves as the center of the universe. So if a parent yells at us, we can't say to ourselves, "Mommy or Daddy is exhausted because I haven't slept in 3 weeks, and nor have they! I know they love me, they are just tired!"

That does not happen. What does happen is that in that moment of shock, we tell ourselves Mommy or Daddy doesn't love me, or I did something wrong, or I am unsafe, or they will leave me. You get the picture! That becomes embedded in that moment, or we reinforce it over time so it becomes cemented in as "truth" and an unconscious core belief. It then rules our behaviors for the rest of time, until we become aware of it and can make conscious choices. Unaddressed, and remaining unconscious, these fears influence every choice or decision we make and every behavior we exhibit.

Three chairs in a row

Michael Grinder (michaelgrinder.com), one of my great mentors, gave me permission to share this with you.



For example, if someone is very controlling and bullying at work, you can rest assured that the fear driving it is a feeling of being unsafe, not good enough or not worth loving. If you understand that, and take time with this person to find ways to help them feel safe and better about themselves, you will see changes in their behavior. If you apply this principle to every one of your team, you will have a better understanding of how they each operate and how you can best lead them.

But first, apply it to yourself! Work out what your core fears are and work on eradicating them. Appreciate what you have learned from them and release them! Reassure your inner toddler that you are an adult now and you are there to keep them safe. They don't need the stories any more.

Go through this exercise

Ask yourself:

What story? Decide which of the core fears resonates with you (I had the trifecta!). What story is the most prominent one you told yourself?

When did it start? It's not necessary to relive unpleasant experiences, but you will innately know roughly when this story started once you look at it and explore. It's important to have that rough knowing.

Who benefited? Dr David Martin, another mentor, posed this as the most important question. It took me ages to decide that my trifecta of beliefs and core fears did not benefit me as a child but did benefit my parents! I was the goody two shoes child, the responsible, "perfect," easy child who unknowingly took responsibility for my parents' happiness (until I was 50!), was uber responsible with everything, worked incredibly hard at school and in jobs to prove I was worth loving and good enough, and never did drugs or alcohol or played up.

Becoming conscious of the answers to these questions will give you a lot more awareness and conscious control over your feelings and behaviors, and over those of others, whether they are your children, colleagues or team members.

It's a great idea to talk to your children about these core fears. If you have toddlers, reinforce them with the exact words: *you are so worth loving; you are so good enough; you are safe; you belong always with us.*



Happiness chats

The next two ideas are adapted from a brilliant leadership book, *The People Pill* by Ken Wright. He is an extraordinary leader and leadership coach with an outstanding track record of doing things very differently. In his book he talked about “coffee chats,” which I changed to “happiness chats”! His coffee chats were a get to know you, a way to find out how things were going and an opportunity to gauge how things were going for this person and in the team generally. Then he would zero in on how happy the person was at work.

Ask questions about how things are going and how they are feeling:

- What is working well? What isn't? Is anything frustrating you?
- Do you feel supported? Do you feel you are growing and developing?
- If you could change one thing, what would it be?
- What needs to change or happen for you to be more effective at what you do? What can I do to support you?

If you have these happiness chats once a quarter or more often, you will have a clear read on how this person is doing and most likely how things are in your culture and what you need to do about it, if anything. You will nip issues in the bud, or at least become aware of what is going on and take action before it's an issue. The other, non verbal message happiness chats send is that you actually care about the person!

Being authentic and genuinely interested are critical for the chat to be effective, and to send the message to the team that you truly care. If you agree to something during the chat, make sure you

follow through. Integrity as a leader is a crucial part of creating a great culture, and yet it's rarely talked about. **If you say you are going to do something, DO IT!**

Happiness chats are a powerful way for you to connect, re-engage, re-inspire, motivate and demonstrate you care. They are a small investment of your time for a massive result.

Self assessment of your leadership skills

This idea is adapted from Ken's attribute technique. Read about it in his book for the full details. It is absolutely brilliant how he coaches his direct reports in a particular way and then cascades it down through the whole organization. It is genius on so many levels and I have never seen anyone else do it.

He suggests you pick the top 10 skills or attributes that will make you successful in your current role and honestly rate yourself out of 10 compared to the best people you know in that particular attribute, then work on one monthly to improve by 10%. Or, if you have your eye on a promotion, ask the decision makers what areas you need to improve to be considered for the role in the future, then diligently work on improving these, ideally with them working with you as a mentor.

My version is not as comprehensive and is aimed more at you doing it for yourself than with your team. It gives you an opportunity to self assess, basically do your own happiness chat, and plan your own growth and development whether your boss is doing it or not!

If you are wise you will do this with your Joy Buddy from the event, or, if you were not at the workshop, find yourself a joy buddy. A Joy Buddy is not just someone to remind you that joy matters for success in both business and personal lives, but also a resilience and accountability buddy. We all want mentors, and often that is hard because everyone is so busy. Joy buddies can be mentors for each other. It's fun and powerful.

Working through this exercise is a wise thing to do no matter what your boss is like, as you are your own boss at all times! Mature adults take responsibility for themselves despite the circumstances.

How to use the table

- Look at each skill listed on the left
- Think of the person who exemplifies that skill (10)
- Rank yourself against that person (out of 10)
- Think about how your team members would rank you out of 10

Then pick the top skill you want to develop. Work out what has to happen for you to improve at least 10% in that area in the next month, and make an appointment with yourself or your joy buddy to assess your progress the next month.

There are a lot of attributes! Just assess yourself on all of them and pick your top 5 to work on. This is potentially years of personal and professional growth! To take it to the next level, pick your top 5 and ask your boss, your team members and your joy buddy how they would rank you.

Skill or attribute	The person you believe is best at this	Your self ranking, compared to them	What your team members would rank you
Communication, verbal: clarity			
Communication, non verbal			
Authenticity			
Building rapport			
Integrity (do what you say)			
Valuing others			
Valuing yourself			
Listening skills			
Trustworthiness			
Self awareness			
Ability to connect, heart to heart			
Vulnerability			
Acknowledge others			
Create safe environments			
Have fun, laugh, joy			
Instilling a sense of purpose and meaning in work			
Ability to engage others			
Ability to inspire others			
Be present			
Emotional intelligence			
Sensitive to feelings, empathy			
Caring			
Foster growth and development			
Ability to create culture			
Realistically optimistic			

Skill or attribute	The person you believe is best at this	Your self ranking, compared to them	What your team members would rank you
Self care			
Gratitude			
Build and maintain relationships			
Belief in yourself			
Instilling belief in self in others			
Know yourself			
Difficult conversations			
Ask for help			
Asking questions			
Empowering			
Transparent			
Motivating			
Create community			
Story telling			
Fairness			
Consistency			
Confidence			
Creating a sense of belonging			
Praise effort (develops a growth mindset)			
Approachable (people feel safe to talk to you)			
Making hard decisions			
Generosity			
Foster collaboration and connection			
Celebration of others and achievements			
Judging vs using judgment			

The secrets of non verbal communication: *sparkly bits*

Ralph Waldo Emerson is often quoted as saying that who you are shouts so loudly we can't hear what you say. In my words: **what you think and feel shouts so loudly I can't hear what you say, and it influences everything and everyone around you.** The essence of who you are is communicated to the world far more than you imagine. That is why "sparkly bits," self awareness and self development are so important. Unhappy, angry people send out a "force field" that precedes them and inspires fear, stress and anxiety. It's why managing your own state as a leader matters so much.

People think that non verbal communication is just body language, and there is some research that suggests non verbal communication is 80 to 93% of everything we communicate. Body language is often misinterpreted. Much more non verbal communication comes through voice tones, vocal variety, micro muscle and micro color changes in your face, and your breathing.

When you walk into a room, think of the times when you "know" something is off. You ask "what's wrong?" and someone answers "nothing." Depending on how they say "nothing" tells you very clearly whether you were right or not! That's the power of non verbals.

We talked about how everyone walks around with an invisible fishbowl on their head. In these fishbowls are "sparkly bits"! My sparkly bits and your sparkly bits talk to each other all the time. Buy some tinsel and stick it where you will see it to remind you of this. It's one of the most significant things you can do to improve your communication.

If what is coming out of your mouth does not match what your sparkly bits are "saying," people will pick up the incongruence. They will know something is "not right," that you don't like them or you are not trustworthy. As authenticity is now one of the most critical leadership attributes, paying attention to your sparkly bits is a great idea! Your sparkly bits are essentially what you are saying to yourself in the moment, either about the other person or about yourself.

For example, if your least favorite person is walking towards you, are you saying to yourself, "fabulous, here is an opportunity to practice forgiveness, kindness, love and compassion"? Or are you saying, "oh no, not now, I just can't deal with you now"? Or worse! Either way they will "know." They will pick up something from your non verbals.

One way out of this is to become a "good finder." Before an interaction with someone who is normally a struggle for you, find one good thing about them and focus on that. You will be astonished at how this changes the interaction. It's a great mood manager, for you both!

Sparkly bits are far more significant than I have detailed here. Just remember that whatever you are thinking (and 95 to 99% of the time we are literally UNconscious of our thinking) is being transmitted to others. They may not always interpret it accurately, but they will have a sense or a feeling about you that determines much of the quality of your interaction. So go forth and consciously be a good

finder, and be constantly aware of what you are saying to yourself about others before and during your communication with them.

Being a caring leader

“Caring is the new *unfair advantage*”

A great leader genuinely cares about individuals and their team. One of the most powerful ways to create a great environment for your team is to consciously be caring. It's the real secret to managing yourself and your relationships with others. To help you appreciate all the aspects involved in truly caring for others, and having them feel it from you and feel safe around you, I have created a mnemonic.

C

- Make conscious choices. Remember, 95 to 99% of the time science shows us we are literally unconscious of our thoughts
- Connect heart to heart
- Chat: have happiness chats
- Communicate clearly and consciously
- Celebrate wins, even small ones
- Courage: have the courage to have the hard conversations and do the right thing
- Be a CJF, a chief joy facilitator
- Create a culture of care, appreciation and acknowledgement
- Connect people to purpose and meaning at work
- Congruent: make sure all your communication is congruent
- Communicate clearly, honestly and transparently

A

- AI, the real AI: Awareness Inside. Be self aware
- Pay attention, and pay attention to your intention
- Acknowledge others and their contribution and the effort they make
- Be authentic
- Appreciate others and what they do. Have gratitude
- Be alert to the feelings of everyone around you
- Ask versus make assumptions
- Adapt and be open to change

R

- Resilience: self care is the key to this. Pay attention to how you feel and when you need time out
- Renew yourself: restore, recharge, create joy spots!
- Responsible: be responsible for your state and manage your emotions
- Reframe challenges into opportunities
- Respect: have reverence for who others are and respect them, because everyone deserves your respect at some level
- Recognition: create a TA DA culture!
- Re-inspire your team with purpose and meaning and the value they bring
- Focus on reality versus perceptions, beliefs or stories
- Remember to be present, to breathe under stress, to be joyful and laugh, to be grateful, to be a good finder, to be kind, to be in your heart and be open, to be trustworthy and act with integrity (do what you say), to observe feelings, to focus on growth and development, to observe your thoughts and the stories you are telling yourself, and to connect with your joy buddy, your accountability and resilience buddy

E

- Have empathy: be sensitive to feelings. Everything in business and life is about feelings
- Engage yourself and your team
- Excite and enthuse people about what they are doing and why it matters
- Eradicate fears and promote joy
- Have high energy
- Emanate your essence, which is love!
- Encourage others
- Enjoy every experience
- Emotional intelligence: know yourself, manage yourself, manage relationships
- Exercise: it's one of the best stress busters and mental clarity enhancers

S

- Sparkly bits: your non verbals are critical
- Self awareness: it's a crucial "soft skill"
- Stop judging: use discernment and judgment instead
- Stop making excuses or blaming
- Self care is also important. Think oxygen masks on a plane: if you don't take care of yourself you can't take care of others, for long anyway!
- Safety: create safe places for people and be a safe person for them to approach
- Be a Spirit Igniter, not a Spirit Foofer!
- Be conscious of your state, because it influences everything you do

So there you have it! Go forth and create a culture of care and love, and you will be the best boss anyone ever had!

Remember to *zoot*

At the last minute I told you the story about my mother coming to stay with me after her husband passed. She stayed for 6 weeks, and I was glad that she was leaving! When I arrived home and found a note on my pillow (I feel so guilty...) it started a trend that has changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

She left a note on my pillow that told me how much she loved me. She listed many of the wonderful times we had had together. After reading the note I was sobbing, of course. But at the very bottom she had drawn a great big heart on one side of the paper and a great big heart on the other side, with a whole lot of little hearts in between. That was her way of sending me love, and it became a tradition that I have taught many!

We called each little heart a zoot, and we would write “zoot zoot” or draw hearts like this, and we knew what it meant. It is a powerful and simple technique to use with anyone you love. Toddlers love this! They zoot everything once you teach them. Teenagers don’t let you know they love this, but they do.

So from my heart to yours: zoot zoot zoot!



Ready to take your leadership to the next level?

Leadership isn’t just about strategy. It’s about connection, engagement, and creating a thriving workplace where people perform at their best. Now that you’ve explored the Playbook, it’s time to put these ideas into action.

Want a deeper dive? Book a keynote or workshop to bring these strategies to life for your team.

Looking for expert guidance? Let's connect for coaching or consulting to tailor leadership solutions for your organization.

Join the conversation. Follow me on LinkedIn and Instagram for ongoing leadership insights, tools and inspiration.

Let's connect! Email amanda@amandagore.com or visit amandagore.com to learn how we can work together.

Your leadership sets the tone. Let's make it extraordinary.