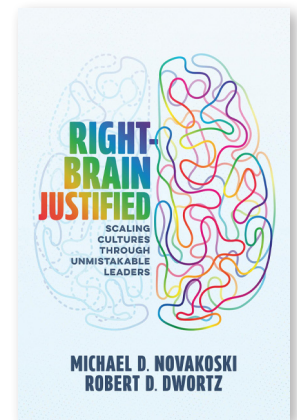


Right-Brain Justified

Scaling Cultures Through Unmistakable Leaders

by **Mike Novakoski and Rob Dwortz**



Contents

Identifying the Problem

Page 2

The Answer

Page 3

We Have a Theory

Page 4

It's All About
the Employees

Page 5

The Toggle Toolkit

Page 6

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

What makes some companies truly unmistakable? How can organizations tap into their people's full potential, creating spaces of trust, connection, and belonging, rather than relying solely on data, metrics, and output?

The answer, according to ***Right-Brain Justified: Scaling Cultures Through Unmistakable Leaders*** by Mike Novakoski and Rob Dwortz, lies in adopting a “right-brain-justified” approach to leadership. This means cultivating creativity, empathy, and authenticity as core business practices – not soft skills, but essential ones.

Drawing from neuroscience and decades of experience in cultural transformation, Novakoski and Dwortz offer a practical roadmap for building companies where people matter as much as performance. Their methodology centers on helping leaders “toggle right,” using both emotional and analytical intelligence to foster psychological safety, trust, and connection. Tools like their uMap™ manager upskilling platform and the Become Unmistakable (BU) framework offer tangible ways to drive engagement, retention, and productivity by putting people at the heart of business strategy.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Explains how emotional intelligence and brain science can elevate leadership impact.
- Teaches leaders how to build cultures where employees feel seen, heard, and valued.
- Describes the multiple ways in which the uMap™ platform can equip managers with relationship-based leadership tools.
- Invites managers to create psychologically safe environments that unlock innovation and performance.
- Shares real-world stories and exercises to develop your own unmistakable leadership style.

Introduction

In the Pixar film *The Incredibles*, Robert Parr, a.k.a. Mr. Incredible, toils away as an anonymous cubicle worker while he secretly possesses some amazing superpowers.

That's a pretty apt metaphor for the professional lives of many working people today. Most companies have yet to fully unleash the superpowers of their employees. Instead, they toil in almost cartoonish fashion – in black and white, down bleak, gray corridors in soulless cubicles or in faceless, interchangeable positions.

This disconnect between human potential and workplace reality is what inspired us, the authors, to create a different kind of company culture – one that celebrates and nurtures the whole person, including what we call the “right-brain skills” that make us truly human, and one that can be scaled.

We're Mike Novakoski and Rob Dworz, cofounders of Become Unmistakable (BU), a software platform and training company designed to build confident managers and unmistakable teams.

What we discovered along the way was remarkable: We could actually train people in human skills and people management, the right-brain skills associated with empathy and creativity. And the more we “right-brain justified” our workplace with these right-sided skills, the greater our success.

Old models of business management where employees are simply a tool or an asset that we plug and play clearly aren't serving today's workforce or businesses. Let's embark on a journey together – to embrace a right-brain-justified approach that enables leaders to develop people, and the organizations they're involved with, to their full potential.

Chapter 1: Identifying the Problem

THE UNINSPIRED ORGANIZATION

The first challenge many businesses face is a pervasive sense of disconnection and a lack of inspiration in the workplace. This lack of inspiration manifests in several ways.

Employee Recruitment and Retention Issues

Companies struggle to attract and retain top talent in a competitive market. What makes an organization a place where people clamor to work? If there *is* a secret formula for this, can it be replicated?

Underperformance and Average Results

Employees often operate in a myopic manner, focusing solely on their assigned tasks without engaging with the broader goals of the organization. Companies that empower employees and respect their autonomy attract and retain exceptional employees.

Missed Opportunities for Innovation and Collaboration

A lack of trust and vulnerability prevents employees from sharing ideas, collaborating effectively, and contributing their full potential.

The more we studied the brain science and our own data, the more we understood that these issues are often rooted in traditional, left-brain business models that view employees as mere assets or numbers rather than as individuals with unique needs and aspirations.

Making the Shift

We often encounter companies who feel great about their chosen business-operating system, who feel really good about how they are running the business side of their company, but who don't know what they're missing on the human side of operating culture. They don't know that they have not really leveraged the energy of their people yet. They have not found a way to create the active engagement that BU facilitates.

The solution lies in embracing a right-brain-justified approach. Creating that space involves shifting from a solely data-driven, KPI-focused mindset to one that prioritizes:

- **Meaningful connection.**
- **Engaging employees beyond their core tasks.**
- **Empowering managers as relational leaders.**

By adopting these principles, companies can create a work environment that is not only more fulfilling for employees, but also more productive and successful in the long run.

Mike's company, EV Construction, serves as a compelling example of the transformative power of right-brain justified. The company has implemented dozens upon dozens of initiatives that foster connection, including Mike's favorite – the ice cream truck, a Future Builders program, and other innovative but heartfelt and personal ways people at EV connect.

Right-brain Justified: A Platform for the Future

Right-brain justified is not merely a set of feel-good initiatives; it's a comprehensive platform for building a sustainable

Companies that empower employees and respect their autonomy attract and retain exceptional employees.

and thriving business. By integrating this approach with existing “left-brain” systems and industry-specific software, companies can create a holistic and powerful operating model.

This involves:

- **Recognizing the limitations of traditional “left-brain” systems.**
- **Using right-brain principles to bridge the gap.**
- **Investing in training and development.**

By embracing this holistic approach, companies can transform their workplaces from cold, transactional environments to vibrant communities where employees feel valued, inspired, and empowered to contribute their best.

Chapter 2: The Answer

RIGHT-BRAIN JUSTIFIED

Many businesses operate in a left-brain world, prioritizing profits and shareholder wealth above all else, often overlooking the human element. As a result, many employees feel disconnected, uninspired and unfulfilled in their work, leading to average results, underperformance, and missed opportunities.

The BU approach offers a solution to these challenges by advocating for a leadership style that embraces the right side of the brain. This approach emphasizes:

- **Human-centered leadership:** BU cultivates a culture of trust, vulnerability, and authenticity, transforming the workplace into a joyful and fulfilling environment.
- **Unleashing creativity and innovation:** By encouraging employees to tap into their unique talents and passions, BU unleashes a wave of creativity and innovation, leading to exceptional results, improved performance, and a competitive edge.
- **Building a legacy of success:** By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and deep connections, BU creates a sustainable model for success that

extends beyond short-term profits, ensuring a positive impact on the company, its employees, and the community for years to come.

- **Connect, Align, Coach:** Embracing the right-brain approach, we realized, means connecting as authentic people, aligning our goals, and coaching our managers. We upskill leaders.

Accessing the Right Brain to Become Unmistakable

For us, being unmistakable is tapping into, at its deepest level, an authenticity that cannot be replicated. People have a tendency to believe that psychological safety, authenticity, and meaningful connection cannot be taught. But the science does not support that.

Some people may naturally have high levels of “emotional intelligence” (EQ). However, no one is *all* right brain or *all* left brain – and we can learn, with tools, coaching, and training, how to “toggle” the brain to access more of the right when we need to – which is often when we are leading people.

The Power of Vulnerability and Authenticity

At the heart of the BU approach lies the power of **vulnerability and authenticity**. By encouraging leaders and managers to share their whole selves, including their struggles, shortcomings, and aspirations, BU creates a safe space for genuine connections and deeper understanding within the workplace.

The characteristic of being unmistakable, of being unforgettable, is founded on the concept that each of us can exceed the norm in our careers, in society, in our marriage and relationships, or in being neighborly – that’s the level BU wants to strive for. And then, we want to scale it and train people and teach it.

We challenge you to think of unique ways that you can meaningfully connect with your stakeholders.

While stakeholder connections often involve grand gestures and formal programs, the true spirit of BU reveals itself in everyday moments as well.

Chapter 3: We Have a Theory

THE TRANSITION FROM EV TO BU

Puppets and ice cream trucks are nice. Having meetings where people can own up to mistakes and get support mid-way through a big project are even better. But could the BU company we founded take the lessons of EV – this special organization with a special leader – and scale them?

What we've found is that when you invest in developing these human skills (psychological safety, authenticity, human potential, meaningful connection, etc.) in your managers, you create a ripple effect throughout your organization, one that is sustainable for years or even generations to come. Remember our initial theory:

The manager-employee relationship is the most critical in any organization. Relationship skills can be learned, practiced, and measured like any other job skill. With defined process, the manager skill can be scaled and sustained through distance and time. Finally, these critical relationships are the lifeblood of great cultures too.

Can a Theory Become a Mindset?

As we really examined what psychological safety and vulnerability in the workplace could do, we saw transformation was possible – and not just at EV Construction, but across many sectors. We developed our uMap™ software, and the process of upskilling managers to become BU leaders entered the equation. The BU transformation, we promise, is trainable, scalable, and infectious.

At the heart of this people-first approach lies a fundamental requirement: creating an environment where people feel safe to be themselves. This is where the concept of psychological safety becomes essential.

Creating Psychological Safety to Ignite Unmistakability

“Psychological safety” is the belief that one can take risks, express ideas, ask questions, and admit mistakes without fear of negative consequences in a team or social setting. This encourages open communication, innovation, and collaboration, as people are not afraid of being judged, punished, or embarrassed. Psychological safety is critical in fostering learning, engagement, and high performance, especially in complex or high-stakes work environments.

Formalizing Care and Creating Trust

Human skills associated with connection come naturally to

some, but others can learn them as long as they are provided with the right roadmap. By teaching managers to model behaviors, such as leaning into vulnerability to encourage others to open up and share in return. We train managers to share about themselves and uMap™ gives them a platform for doing so. Leaders always go first, modeling these behaviors to set the tone for vulnerability and create a safe, open environment for their teams.

Chapter 4: BU's Story

THE FORMULATION OF THE PROGRAM

In the first *Become Unmistakable* book, we shared the concept of uMap™ – a tool for building meaningful connection. Over time, and with the help of the talented team at BU, uMap™ has evolved into a manager upskilling platform.

It combines management training to elevate human skills with the information managers need about their people to apply those skills to formalize care. This care is delivered through regular feedback sessions about employee development and performance utilizing a repeatable process that enables managers to consistently connect, align, and coach their people to success.

While we knew our approach was working, we hadn't yet realized the scientific foundation that made it so effective. One of the most powerful frameworks we use to understand workplace behavior and emotional responses is the SCARF model, which helps leaders recognize and manage social threats in the workplace.

Coined by NeuroLeadership Institute (NLI) founder David Rock, the SCARF model measures the social drivers of people – and their vulnerabilities or triggers, depending on which of the SCARF elements is most important to their sense of self: status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, fairness.

Connect. Align. Coach.

How do we scale the BU vision? How do we help companies continue to improve – months and years down the road?

We do this by preparing the leaders and managers in the organization with the skills and process to deliver the culture consistently at scale. The foundation of our approach to upskilling managers can be described in three simple words:

- **Connect:** It all starts with connection, and nothing breaks barriers and creates connections like a good story. Storytelling begins with the leader.

The best results for your organization will not come from having people live within their very narrowly defined job descriptions, but from allowing them to use all of their talents to get the best outcomes.

- **Align:** Aligning around definitions of success is the key to any relationship. We at BU encourage managers to discuss success at both professional and personal levels, so they can support the whole person.
- **Coach:** Once managers and employees connect and align, coaching to successful outcomes comes naturally. Giving feedback is complicated and most organizations struggle with performance evaluations. So how do we create this really connected, aligned, and human feeling around performance management? We do that by first focusing on the strengths and development needs of the individual, and then we move into objective success measures like individual and team goals.

When individuals and organizations align around definitions of success, they can work together to achieve outcomes where both win!

Chapter 5: It's All About the Employees

CONNECTION AND VULNERABILITY AT SCALE WILL SUPERCHARGE YOUR COMPANY

Part of your job as a leader is to ensure your employees are getting to use their talents – that they feel free to bring their ideas and have those ideas valued on their very first day. To unlock this potential and create an environment where employees can truly be themselves, psychological safety becomes the foundation.

Psychological Safety for Employee and Human Potential

Psychological safety is the belief that you can take risks, express ideas, ask questions, be vulnerable, and admit mistakes without fear of negative consequences in a team or social setting.

Harvard Business School professor, Amy Edmondson, has done extensive work on the topic of creating the four quadrants of psychological safety and the five steps to creating psychologically safe environments.

The four quadrants:

- Learning safety
- Challenging safety
- Collaborating safety
- Inclusion safety

A Place to Be Authentic

How and where do organizations provide the space for teammates to express their authenticity? Organizations need a platform where teammates can share what is unmistakable about them and a culture that supports authenticity. The platform includes a physical place – team meetings, break rooms, jobsites, all-hands meetings, etc. – and a virtual space where information can be shared so we can learn about each other. Consider both to create an environment that lasts.

Leaders with Skills to Encourage Authenticity

Transparency in teams doesn't happen by accident. It takes human skills to build relationships and encourage candor. With a platform for sharing, people can practice connecting with others. Through deliberate practice and the right tools, managers can learn to create environments where authenticity flourishes.

Psychological Safety as an Operating Standard

All organizations have an operating culture they seek to consistently apply. You can add psychological safety to standard operating processes like performance management and employee development with relative ease.

Measure Effectiveness and Continuously Improve

Human skills can be measured just like any other operating metric. Trust building, employee engagement, feeling supported and heard – these sentiments and more can be measured with various survey tools offered at intervals. Measuring manager skills, effectiveness, and confidence is where we focus, because we believe that managers hold the keys to scaling and sustaining psychologically safe environments.

Reward the Behaviors You Seek to Create

Of the organizations we observe, those with the greatest levels of psychological safety (which is highly correlated

with organizational success) create manager development programs that build the human skills necessary to drive positive culture. They also value these qualities in succession planning. Reward managers who build trust in their teams and develop future leaders who can do the same.

Chapter 6: Company Impact

HOW THE RIGHT BRAIN IMPACTS RESULTS

Up to this point, we've talked a lot about connecting through uMap™ and how managers leverage the exercises we facilitate to create deeper connections among their teams. Let's turn our attention to why and how the emphasis on relationships leads to organizational results.

The more we explored and delved into the brain science, the more we realized that not only was this a powerful motivator and something transformative for organizations and their people, but it was also a force multiplier on the bottom line. The platform created an undeniable ROI. The right-brain toggle triggered left-brain results.

Why BU Companies Work

What BU makes clear is you must create an environment of trust and safety in order for your people to feel an exponential sense of energy about where they work and what they do. With that trust and psychological safety, people can fully develop themselves into superstars devoted to your organization and its mission.

But can the results be measured? In "The Neuroscience of High-Trust Organizations," Paul Zak states: "The effect of trust on self-reported work performance was powerful. Respondents whose companies were in the top quartile indicated they had 106 percent more energy and were 76 percent more engaged at work than respondents whose firms were in the bottom quartile. They also reported being 50 percent more productive."

Moving From Right to Left

On the flip side, for many, servant leadership focuses solely on that servant leader and not how to scale it, how to make it sticky, or how to prove it yields real results. In the end, you have a business or organization to run. When you formalize care, you make the difficult conversations easier. You head off problems sooner, you own them together, and you push for results, but in a way in which the teamwork

is so much stronger because you've already invested in the right-brain side. You have invested in the *trust* space.

Remember, the best results for your organization will not come from having people live within their very narrowly defined job descriptions, but from allowing them to use all of their talents to get the best outcomes. That raises both performance and outcomes. That's the theory behind the WHY of the right brain—and how it impacts results.

Chapter 7: The Toggle Toolkit

HOW TO MAKE BU'S IDEALS "STICKY"

Many of us remain left-brained in our tendencies (and this is OK). We knew this as we developed the tools to sustain the BU approach.

In fact, being left-brain justified can be exactly what organizations need in many critical situations, as these scenarios require strength in things like finance, risk management, planning, and operations.

But how do we recognize those situations in which a brief (or sustained) lean to the right is needed to make good things great? That's where the Toggle Toolkit comes in handy.

The Toggle Toolkit combines learning with software to deliver culture consistently at scale in organizations. Sustainable distribution depends on manager relationships and managers' ability to deliver the type of support that creates psychologically safe environments. The training elevates managers' human skills so they can do just that – the technology delivers the skills smoothly across organizations regardless of size or industry. The microlearnings and automated communications create nudges to keep managers on task with their people. It is completely mobile so people can connect in any environment.

Chapter 8: Inspiration

WHERE PEOPLE MEET CULTURE

EV Construction was the incubator for testing the ideas of BU. We saw managers learn to right-brain justify and become leaders who inspired the best in others (and who stretched and learned a lot about themselves in the process). We got to see our ideas transform the lives of the people EV's team cared so much about—as EV itself soared. As we launched BU and further refined the brain science, the platform, and the training, the BU teams also got to see

what these ideas did for organizations with hundreds and thousands of employees. We got to see it up close and personal in our own lives!

When a company is fueled by BU, the results can be pretty amazing. Certainly, there are measurable elements—but again, those intangibles have a ripple effect through the organization, the lives of its people, and the stakeholders and broader community they serve.

Conclusion: Right-Brain Justified

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF HUMAN CONNECTION IN BUSINESS

In a world obsessed with metrics, KPIs, and automation, we've often forgotten the most powerful asset of any organization: its people. The BU mindset shift empowers leaders and managers to tap into the often-overlooked potential of authentic human connection.

Revisiting the Promise of the Big Six

Let's revisit the big six problems that BU can solve for organizations:

- Meaningful connection
- Build versus buy
- Upskilling manager talent

- Creating enthusiasm unknown to mankind
- Consistent delivery of culture
- Unleashing human potential

Companies that embrace BU see:

- **Increased employee engagement and retention:** People who feel valued and connected are more likely to stay with an organization, reducing turnover costs and creating a sense of continuity.
- **Improved productivity and performance:** Teams that trust and respect each other work more effectively, collaborating more readily and achieving higher levels of output.
- **Stronger customer relationships:** Happy and highly engaged employees are more likely to provide exceptional customer service, building loyalty and driving positive brand perception.

BU is a lifelong pursuit that requires ongoing commitment and a willingness to embrace vulnerability and growth. It's about constantly challenging ourselves to become better leaders, better communicators, and better human beings.

We encourage you to take the principles outlined in this book and make them your own. Adapt them to your unique context, experiment, and be bold in your pursuit of a more human-centered workplace. The world needs more unmistakable leaders—and it starts with you.



Mike Novakoski—also known as Mike Nova—is the president and CEO of EV Construction, EV Group, and Become Unmistakable (BU) Consulting. With 36 years of experience in the construction industry, he is known for his innovative leadership, culture building, and motivational approach. An accomplished author and international speaker, Mike addresses topics like organizational culture, innovation, and right-brain leadership. He is an active member of the Young Presidents' Organization, where he contributes globally through training and program development. Mike holds a BS in construction management, an MBA in finance, a certification in Innovation Management, and is a Harvard Business School alumnus.

Rob Dwortz is the CEO and cofounder of Become Unmistakable (BU), a former bank CEO, and the creator of the uMap™ platform and BU training programs, which help organizations drive cultural transformation through right-brain-justified leadership. With a career spanning roles as CEO, founder, board member, and advisor, Rob combines leadership experience with brain science to help leaders foster meaningful, people-centric workplaces. He specializes in large-scale manager development and speaks on topics such as connection-based leadership, brain science, and the future of work. A University of Michigan and Ross School of Business graduate, Rob is also a YPO member and currently serves on the boards of West Michigan Community Bank and Grand Rapids Label Company.

Right-Brain Justified: Scaling Cultures Through Unmistakable Leaders by Mike Novakoski and Rob Dwortz. Copyright by Mike Novakoski and Rob Dwortz. Summarized by permission of the Publisher, Forbes Books. ISBN: 979-8-89188-178-5. Summary published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries. Copyright 2025 Soundview, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. For permissions and reprints, please contact service@summary.com. 47SS09C