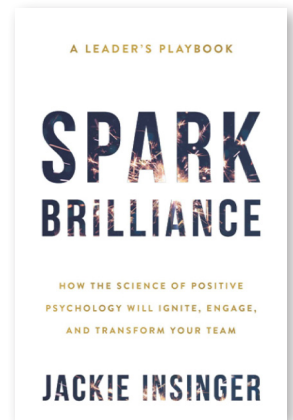


# Spark Brilliance

How the Science of Positive Psychology Will Ignite, Engage, and Transform Your Team

by Jackie Insinger



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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

What is brilliance? It's many things— performance, alignment, understanding, connection. It's what any organization is capable of when great leaders amplify the abilities of great people.

In *Spark Brilliance*, Jackie Insinger teaches from her over two decades of experience to introduce an approach to leadership and team management that's transformative when it comes to productivity, employee fulfillment, optimism, creativity, and much more. The result? Better results— and clearer definitions of what those results are meant to be.

It all begins with Positive Psychology, an often undervalued approach that dismisses negativity and 'doom & gloom' thinking with psychological principles that inspire an optimistic view of the future— and just so happen to be true. When you shift your perspective to embrace Positive Psychology, you'll not only transform your own leadership and the performance of your team; you'll also skyrocket results for your entire organization. You'll see higher performance in innovation, collaboration, employee engagement, and ultimately revenue and profit.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The Platinum Rule— the key secret to extraordinary leadership in any setting.
- Why psychological safety can enhance your team's performance or derail it.
- How to take tactical risks in order to supercharge growth.
- How build a culture of authentic connection at any organization.

## Introduction

The method you'll learn here is simple, and it works. But it's not always easy, and it takes time. It takes commitment. Eventually, it will become a mindset shift. The perspective you choose creates emotional contagion. It ripples through your team, person to person. As the leader, you set the culture with your perspective; you can choose a mindset and outlook that travels like a spark, leaving brilliance in its wake. You can spark connection, creativity, and joy in your team. You can choose your perspective moment by moment, and it will become second nature. It's going to require extra effort now, but that extra effort will pay passive dividends in the future. It begins with you.

## Discover

As a leader, your job is to support, nourish, and empower the potential and performance of the people you lead. According to Salesforce Research, people who feel seen and heard by their leaders are over four times more motivated to do their best work and perform to the best of their abilities. With this information, you can tailor interactions you have with them to how they want to be treated. They'll feel seen, validated, and deeply fulfilled; their confidence and performance will skyrocket. Their brilliance will spread.

Most importantly, their trust in you as their leader will be strengthened exponentially. They'll be more likely to open up to you about what they need in the future—which means you, as their leader, will be able to do your job that much better.

This isn't where your job ends, though. You're the sparkler that lights all the other sparklers. The mindsets and behaviors you want to see in your team begin with you. As leaders, we're so often focused on the people we serve that any focus on ourselves often falls by the wayside. Of all the hundreds of clients at Platinum Leadership, the percentage who had taken the time to truly think about and understand how they wanted to be treated before we began is remarkably small.

## Understand

To create a team culture built on great communication, all voices need space to be heard. Sure, each person has a responsibility to speak up. But take a moment to think about the environment you foster in the team you lead—are you making space for all those different voices? Or are a few of the loudest ones taking up all the space?

Amplifying all voices is active, not passive. Instead of leaving it to each person to speak up, actively create opportunities for all voices. Ask the quieter members of the team what they think. In front of everyone, bring up the insights a more gun-shy team member shared with you. Or just sit with the silence; often, the best nuggets of wisdom and connection lie in the moments of silence between the talking.

A great communication culture is one where every person on a team is secure in the value of their contributions, and is certain that their leader wants to hear and understand them. If you build it, they will speak.

## Align

50 percent of managers don't set effective employee expectations. Half of all leaders out there are trying to drive results with a team that isn't clear on what they're supposed to be doing. Yet, hardly do you hear from leaders that the people they lead aren't "meeting expectations." The word "expectations" usually comes up in a positive context: "I have high expectations for my team." Typically, when expressing dissatisfaction, leaders are more apt to say that they "aren't seeing" results, behaviors, or actions they want to see from their reports.

The question is: Are you sure they know what you're looking for? It's entirely possible (and common) for leaders to believe they're being crystal clear with expectations, while employees feel those expectations are murky at best.

Success, like everything else, is a matter of perspective. Without a leader who clearly states what they're looking for, employees are left to determine what success looks like via their own perspective and background of experience. This is a quick road to employee disengagement; and with disengagement comes reduced performance, missed business goals, and ultimately, stagnation.

## Connect

Authentic connection in teams makes them stronger—and leads us to greater business outcomes across the board. An authentic workplace is a top desire of engaged employees, with 75 percent saying they want their coworkers to share more about their true selves. Teams that report a strong sense of connection correlate to vastly higher employee engagement ratings; organizations that score highest on employee engagement are an average of 21 percent more

profitable. The vast majority of an individual's engagement at work is driven by their manager. The connection of the team is a crucial piece of the puzzle, too. People who report having friends at work consistently rank higher in both happiness and performance. Great relationships make us happier and better at our work, but on a deeper level they help us thrive as humans.

Leadership is connection. The key differentiator between approaching connection the right way and wrong way is authenticity. The authenticity in you as your team's leader will unite your team. How can you reveal your truest self to your team? What makes you you? Answering these questions is the beginning of a long investment, one that yields huge returns in true connection, and ultimately, a brilliantly connect, brilliantly performing team.

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## Brilliance

Our society tends to place a high premium on status, accomplishment, and praise—and it starts when we're young. Raise your hand if you were ever deemed an “overachiever” as a kid. Many of us are trained from a young age to chase after those gold stars, tick off the next goal, never stop moving, driving, pushing toward the next big win. In all that pressure and drive, it's easy to mix up the high we feel from getting the wins with the actual spark of joy that comes with doing something we truly love and are passionate about. And often as I've experienced with many of my clients—we're so busy climbing the ladder faster and faster that, when we get to the top, we might look around and realize suddenly, uh oh—do I actually love this view?

As a leader, finding your spark and focusing as much time and energy into that place where you're uniquely passionate and productive is of paramount importance. The spark of each of your team members begins with you—and by finding yours, you can help them find theirs, too.

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## Trust

Trust in leadership is one of the strongest indicators of a high performing, engaged organization. Study after study shows that when employees don't trust their leaders, their productivity, happiness, and commitment to the company plummet, and happiness, their likelihood of looking elsewhere for employment rises precipitously.

Trust doesn't happen by accident. As a leader, you have the

ability to directly create and impact trust with your team members. It begins with you, and like all other aspects of Platinum Leadership psychological safety is a direct result of your actions, practices, and communication as a leader.

Your best tool for creating psychological safety with your employees is to show them that you trust them—to model the safety and trust you want to create. The following practices are foundational to creating such an environment:

- Cultivate a judgement-free zone
- Share your mistakes
- Redefine feedback
- Follow through on feedback
- Promote autonomy
- Trust is essential. The sooner you begin cultivating it, the better.

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## Grow

Growth happens best in a psychologically safe environment. So why do so many leaders work against psychological safety by pushing their employees into an uncomfortable and fearful state in the name of growth?

The process of growth and learning definitely involves nudging yourself toward the edge of your comfort zone, but it doesn't require entering a fear state. In fact, when we're in a fear state, it's harder to learn and grow. In that state, our brains are flooded with stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. The amygdala, the part of the brain that governs emotions, becomes hypersensitive to threats, ready at any moment to tell the hypothalamus to activate a fight-or-flight reaction. Your brain's watchman is on high alert, seeing every shadow in every direction as an army of bears that threatens your very existence.

Growth doesn't need to mean getting completely out of your comfort zone. It's possible to have both—the strengthening effect of bumping up against discomfort and coming through it, and the safety of a calm, rational mind that can soak up new information and learn the lessons it offers.

The trick is to push yourself into discomfort while staying in the optimistic part of your brain where you can still see possibilities, overcome challenges, and make progress. That's the sweet spot.

## Win

Big goals are great, and the sweet victory of finally achieving them after years of hard work is definitely cause for massive celebration. Good things come to those who wait, and the buildup of energy and anticipation in waiting for a long-sought-after win does indeed feel amazing.

But how do you keep motivation, morale, and excitement high throughout the entire waiting period? How do you keep the energy up today, when the goal line is years in the future? The key is smaller incremental celebrations as you move toward the goal-defining wins as not just the big thing that happens at the end, but as everyday successes and positive moments that create the sensation of forward progress. Because it's progress, no matter how small, that has the biggest psychological impact on motivation.

## Play

Fun primes our minds and bodies for better communication and connection among coworkers. It bonds us, lightens the cognitive load, builds trust, and helps us understand each other better. Fun makes the workplace feel safe, happy, and motivating.

Professor and behavioral scientist Jennifer Aaker, MBA, and executive coach Naomi Bagdonas, MBA, created a popular Stanford Graduate School of Business course called "Humor: Serious Business." For six years, they ran studies involving more than 1.5 million people worldwide, pored over research, interviewed hundreds of leaders and comedians, and more.

"If there's one thing our research makes clear," they write in their 2021 book, "it's that we don't need to take ourselves

so seriously in order to grapple with serious things." On the contrary, their work suggests teams that laugh together are more bonded, creative, and resilient. Their authentic connection is powerful.

## Practice

Adult brains can not only learn new things, they can change and rebuild their structures, for better or worse. This creates an enormous opportunity. By changing our environment and our behavior, and by choosing to think differently, we are able to form new connections and pathways in the brain. We are able to fundamentally change how we see and react to the world. We're not aiming for perfection. We always have more room to grow; there's no endpoint to our spark.

## Conclusion

As a leader, your job isn't to make people happy. Your job is to lead. To nurture, to inspire...to spark brilliance. But isn't it nice to know that, in engaging in Platinum Leadership, in seeking to discover the way each person wants to be treated, you might also stumble upon what makes them happy?

With the methods and practices you've learned in this book, you have a whole toolkit for knowing people. You have a framework for building connection, fulfillment, and joy that will ripple outward far beyond what you yourself can see. You have what you need to create the spark.

Begin.



Throughout her career, **Jackie Insinger** has brought her expertise in Cognitive Psychology and Interpersonal Dynamics to the business world as a sought-after Executive and Team Dynamics Coach. Using her research-based, action-oriented methodology, Jackie helps leaders and teams focus on unique strengths and authentic connection in order to increase performance, results, and fulfillment. Her Positive Psychology-led framework, Platinum Leadership, has been a game-changer for thousands of people and businesses throughout the world.

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