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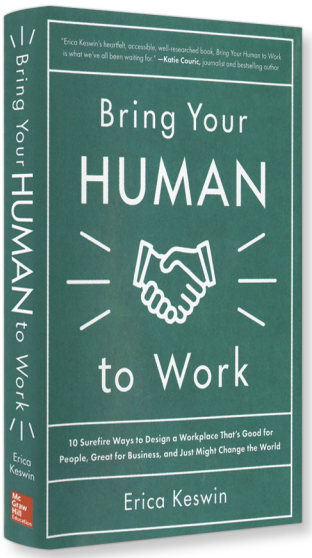
Management

Bring Your Human to Work

10 Surefire Ways to Design a Workplace That's Good for People, Great for Business and Just Might Change the World



by Erica Keswin

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

As human beings, we are built to connect and form relationships. So, it should be no surprise that relationships must also translate into the workplace, where we spend most of our time! Companies that recognize this retain the most productive, creative and loyal employees, and invariably seize the competitive edge.

Paying attention to the effects people have on one another other is key to developing a winning culture where people perform at the top of their game. *Bring Your Human to Work* shows that the most successful leaders actively form quality relationships with their employees, honor fundamental human traits — authenticity, openness and basic politeness — and apply them day in and day out.

Author Erica Keswin distills the key practices of the most human companies into advice that any business leader can use to build a "human workplace." The lessons in *Bring Your Human to Work* foster fairness, devotion and joy in the workplace. By bringing your human to work, you can design a workplace that is genuine, aligned, true to itself — and just might change the world.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to honor relationships in your organization.
- To embrace sustainability and make work practices intentional.
- To find the right balance between technology and human connection.
- Inspiring stories of companies that put gratitude to work every day.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: **BRING YOUR HUMAN TO WORK**

by Erica Keswin

The author: Erica Keswin is an expert in helping businesses, organizations and individuals improve their performance through honoring relationships. She was previously a consultant at the Hay Group and Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc., and worked as an executive director at Russell Reynolds Associates. She contributes regularly to *Forbes*, the *Harvard Business Review*, *Entrepreneur* and *Quartz at Work*.

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Introduction

Many CEOs, entrepreneurs, managers and employees around the country have realized that, in light of the digital deluge occurring around us, we all need a more human workplace. People are no longer willing to accept work as a soul-crushing, Dilbertesque, cubicled nightmare.

Bringing your human to work is not rocket science, but that doesn't mean it's easy. It takes hard work and discipline. It requires honoring relationships in everything we do — creating our values, running meetings, deciding who we hire, using technology, choosing whom we partner with, and evaluating and rewarding talent.

It's about putting technology in its place in order to build strong relationships and about inviting technology to the table, making good use of everything that can create a more human workplace.

Honoring relationships is the theme that brings everything a human workplace stands for together. What does this mean, on the ground, in your particular company? And even if you get it right, will all this human business help the bottom line?

According to the American Institute of Stress, $300 billion is lost in our economy every year to stress. Imagine the human impact we could make if we could get that money back. Or, better yet, if that stress hadn't happened in the first place. By working human, we can begin to literally cut our losses and cultivate a more human world.

There are 10 surefire ways to approach the challenge of the human workplace, depending on the needs of your company and your stage of growth. Prepare to change the way you do business.

Be Real

Speak in a Human Voice

In order for a human company to flourish, it has to be genuine, aligned and true to itself. A real company actually flaunts its humanity; it doesn't hide it.

Here are three ways smart companies are bringing their human to their brands by being real.

Know your brand's values. The thing about values is that they are hard at work, calling the shots of your business, even when they are implicit. That's why it's so important to make our values seen and heard.

The ride-sharing market is worth billions and was originally dominated by Uber. Then along came Lyft, a San Francisco–based ride-sharing company identified by a glowing pink moustache on the front dash. How did they manage to break into the space?

They let their values drive them, that's how. Lyft emphasizes human connections. Lyft's mission is "to reconnect people through transportation and bring communities together." It sounds lofty, but a mission has to be. Like any strong brand, Lyft knows that developing and embracing core values is the way to manifest that mission, however aspirational it may be. Their official core values apply to passengers, drivers and employees alike:

- Be yourself.
- Create fearlessly.
- Uplift others.
- Make it happen.

Speak in an authentic voice. Once a company knows who they are and what their values are, that

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service@summary.com

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Rebecca S. Clement, Publisher; **Sarah T. Dayton**, Editor in Chief; **Ashleigh Imus**, Senior Editor; **Kylie O'Connor**, Graphic Designer; **A. Imus**, Contributing Editor

identity must be shared with customers, employees and the world. This is a company's voice, and like all voices, it must be heard. In order to breathe life into a brand, companies need to confidently broadcast what that brand stands for.

Telling stories — personal stories, professional stories and brand stories — is the perfect vehicle for expressing the truth of your company's brand. Stories are free, are always available and are such a core part of our human DNA that they automatically make us feel good. Especially when they're true.

Best of all, when a company brings true stories to light, the culture becomes more attentive to stories, and it's a virtuous cycle. Leaders and managers learn to keep their eyes and ears on what's most important: the real experiences of real people.

Empower employees to be brand ambassadors. "Engagement" is what happens when an employee is in front of a customer. What happens when no one's looking? Should companies provide a script, guiding an employee's response based on values and voice? No way. That would be inauthentic and the opposite of a human interaction. Instead, employees need to be educated, mentored, supported, rewarded and then empowered — it is up to them to bring their human to work with your mission in mind.

Since a core value at Lyft is to uplift others, it is up to employees to actually do this important heavy "lyfting." One of the most incredible stories is about a driver who picked up a passenger on Valentine's Day and handed the passenger a card that read "Be My Valentine." The passenger started crying. The driver pulled over, turned the meter off and talked with her, and when she seemed ready, the driver took her to her destination.

A few weeks later a friend of the passenger wrote to Logan Green, Lyft's CEO: "Your driver saved my friend's life." Apparently, that passenger was contemplating suicide, and that human touch made her reconsider.

There is nothing in an employee handbook that could have instructed someone to have the heart and mind to reach out and help customers in this way. Except maybe, "Bring your human to work."

Play the Long Game

True Sustainability Is a State of Mind

Not long ago, the word "sustainable" conjured images of recycling tree huggers, people who were so focused on saving the planet and its critters that they lost sight of us bipeds. Today, the concept of sustainability has evolved to include all the inhabitants of the earth, and a human workplace is about creating an ecosystem of sustainability for all of us.

Sustainability is playing the long game, and playing the long game is not easy. Not only is investing in the future the right thing to do for the world and your company, but top talent is also looking for companies that are willing to embrace sustainability.

Playing the long game requires changing the way we think about everything.

Make work practices intentional. To stay ahead of the curve — to play the long game — we must craft vital, intentional work practices that account for the complexity of people's real lives. Let's start with the ground-level, employee experience and the way we ask people to spend their days. Top talent is demanding a more human schedule. So what does that look like?

Technology has made certain aspects of progress look so easy. Much of our work can be done virtually, but what happens to our company culture when we're texting from home or from the local Starbucks? We have to be strategic in our flexibility.

Raytheon, an innovator in defense and cybersecurity solutions, implemented a popular program called the 9/80, which allows employees to work nine-hour days and get every other Friday off. This way, employees can "take care of personal business, see family, travel, take a dance class and have a life outside of work."

Diversify and include. The data is clear: Studies reveal that truly heterogeneous teams (think age, race, gender, sexual orientation, work experience, technical expertise and level of education) are more accurate and accountable than homogeneous ones.

EY is a global professional services firm with 250,000 employees in over 150 countries. It was named number one on DiversityInc's 2017 Top 50 Companies for Diversity list. Karyn Twaronite, global diversity and inclusiveness officer at EY, says, "We understand that [aligning with sameness] feels easier, faster, but we want and expect our people to lean into bumpy and to try to explore differences on their teams."

"Leaning into bumpy" is what it takes to effect change as we aim to bring our human to work. Challenging assumptions, creating new paradigms — this is important, impactful, bottom-line work. And it's personal. Consequently, we are bound to have personal, emotional — bumpy — reactions all along the way. Instead of letting the bumps throw us off, we must lean in and learn.

Enlighten your supply chain. On April 24, 2013, a five-story commercial building in Bangladesh called the Rana Plaza collapsed. More than 1,100 garment workers were killed and over 2,000 were injured. The prior year, factory fires in Pakistan and Bangladesh killed 350 workers and left many disabled. These tragedies, along with a list of similar tragedies, led consumers to demand transparency from the garment industry.

These days, it's not just the garment industry that is under careful scrutiny for its humanity. Now, instead of caving to consumer pressure, companies are wearing their transparency on their sleeve, touting their corporate responsibility as part of their offerings. This makes for good business. In everything from toys to food, glasses, shoes and more, companies are seeking ways to shine a light on their supply chains as part of what they're selling and who they are.

Once you change your state of mind, you will see that the long game is the only game in town. A long-game state of mind means honoring all the relationships connected to our business — not only the people we work beside at the office every day but also the people, animals, land and natural resources affected by what we do.

The Sweet Spot

Finding That Special Something Between Tech and Connect

These days, technology plays a supporting role in pretty much everything we do and especially in how we communicate. Our communication options for making ourselves heard are dizzying, but they are not all created equal.

We need to think of how we communicate as being along a continuum. Today, we have quick-exchange platforms such as Snapchat, WhatsApp, IM and text messaging on one end, email kind of in the middle, snail mail further down the line, and at the very end, the old-school reliability of picking up the phone, walking across the hall or even hopping on a plane.

To figure out which mode of communication is best, it's important to think about what you are trying to convey. As a rule of thumb, match the medium to the message. The higher the stakes, the more we should invest. In any given situation, ask yourself, "What is the best medium of communication to honor this relationship?"

We must understand the trade-offs and how to find the sweet spot between tech and connect. If we let technology serve as a stand-in for real, human relationships, we miss the point. Big time. Digital discipline is important for all of us to practice, personally and professionally.

High-Tech for Human Touch

Walking up to the ticket agent at the airport was once a routine (and even exciting) part of the travel experience. Back in the day, this was a time to exchange pleasantries and amp up the excitement of a big trip. More recently, this interaction has gone the same way as too many customer service experiences and now feels stiff, rushed and sometimes even hostile.

As a result, when JetBlue introduced self-serve kiosks, some customers loved how these slick ATM-like machines helped them save time and avoid an unnecessary trip to the counter. Others, though, flustered and frustrated by having to print their own bag tags and check themselves in, felt like they were witness to the utter demise of civilization.

Joanna Geraghty, JetBlue's executive vice president of customer experience, has set out to please both types of customers. Her goal is to automate those features that don't require a personal touch by using self-serve kiosks for check-in and bag tagging, so crew members have more time to identify the people who really do need (or simply want!) the help, thereby deepening those connections.

This means that crew members have more time to help passengers by doing things like grabbing coffee for an overtired mother and ensuring that customers in need of wheelchairs get the extra TLC they require to make it safely to their gates.

For companies looking for ways to improve performance and the bottom line while looking for balance in their embrace of technology and customer engagement, JetBlue is a powerful example of using technology wisely and well.

Mind Your Meetings

Honoring Relationships with Purpose, Presence and Protocol

Each year, we waste an estimated $37 billion on unproductive meetings, with executives spending up to 23 hours of their work week in meetings.

It is interesting to note, however, that most people still believe that meetings are fruitful, and they don't want to give them up. After all, humans do love to connect. This means that the problem might not be with the number or length of meetings but, rather, with the fact that most

meetings don't respect people's time, leaving them feeling fatigued and, worse still, abused. All too often, our meetings don't honor relationships.

Meetings, almost by definition, are our opportunities to make those connections that are good for people and great for business.

Have a purpose. When you call people together, it's up to you to honor the relationship you aim to build. Before sending that invite, ask, "Is this meeting really necessary? If so, what is its purpose?" Meetings are most useful when they are linked directly to a company's values, which then trickle down into preferences and ways of working. If your company values a meticulous process over quick-and-dirty decision-making, then schedule think-tank-type gatherings periodically, and let go of the more aimless status meetings.

Be present. When it comes to meetings, like it or not, we must curate connection and add a little cruise director to our manager mentality. You don't have to hire a magician to grab your employees' attention. Even simple efforts and little tweaks work, too. Centro, a digital advertising firm in Chicago, begins each meeting with a simple round-robin check-in, asking each participant to share a bit about how she or he is feeling. This allows people to be present by addressing where they are emotionally as well as physically.

Create protocols. The good news is that there are many ways to set protocols for a meeting. You can send a checklist of "pre-work" to give the meeting context. You can send a clear agenda, with enough advance notice for everyone to read and reflect upon it before the meeting, which is a great way to engage introverts. You can also assign someone to keep time against an agenda, making sure the meeting stays on task.

Well-Being at Work

Finding the Human Side of Wellness

It's not difficult to make the argument that providing a path to wellness is just plain human. The *Harvard Business Review* reports on a study of organizations with highly effective wellness programs. These organizations have a 9 percent turnover rate, while organizations with ineffective programs have a 15 percent turnover rate.

What does it mean to have a "highly effective" wellness program? The authors of a study by the Health Enhancement Research Organization believe such programs focus on "social, financial, spiritual and mental wellbeing." That is to say, since we're bringing our human to work, our whole human selves need to be kept in check, not just our cholesterol.

One exemplary company personifies well-being in everything it does — in its mission, its values and its own wellness. Vynamic is a Philadelphia-based consulting firm that specializes in healthcare. The goal of its CEO, Dan Calista, is to build the healthiest company in the world. Most clearly, the Vynamic website says, "Healthy culture is our business strategy."

One of Calista's most foundational well-being initiatives is also his most radical. He allows consultants to choose their projects and their locations, instead of the more conventional "go where the job is" and "do what you're told" approach of most (if not all) other consulting firms.

By allowing his employees to have a say in choosing their projects, Calista is honoring his most important relationship — the one with his employees — and building kindness into the very fabric of the company.

About five years ago, Laura Pappas, one of Calista's consultants, approached him about her growing interest in the field of wellness coaching. Sensing an opportunity and wanting to encourage his employee, Calista invited Pappas to pursue that interest and even offered to pay for her to become a Certified Health Coach (CHC).

Having an on-site coordinator of health and care makes it clear to everyone that Calista means business in his commitment to well-being. From healthy snacks to treadmill desks, ergonomically correct chairs and special LED lights, Pappas now covers all the wellness bases for Vynamic.

Vynamic and Calista have also been recognized for one of their most important and influential programs, called zzzMail. The zzzMail policy eliminates work emails between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. and on the weekends. That's one doozy of a protocol!

Calista's entrepreneurial wisdom has been good for his company's business. In 2017 Vynamic's revenue was $24.5 million, placing it in line with similar-sized consultancies, which is darn impressive.

Give Back

You've Got Nothing to Lose, Only Inspired Employees to Gain

Giving back, volunteering, embracing the idea of corporate responsibility — these concepts are top of mind at companies big and small, and there is mounting evidence to support this wave as a strong business practice.

A recent study by Bain & Company showed that "inspired" employees are 225 percent more productive than "engaged" ones and three times more productive than those who are "disengaged." It's a beautiful thing, the way offering ourselves to others sharpens our focus and gets our wheels turning.

Giving back can be as simple as donating a portion of one's proceeds or product to the needy, or it can entail multiple organizations with large coordination efforts. Here are 10 specific ways to give back:

- Build giving back into your company values.
- Offer your specialty to a community that needs it.
- Go local: Connect with the community in your backyard.
- Do it your way: Give as an individual.
- Give as a group: We're all in this together.
- Leverage technology to amplify impact.
- Involve the whole family.
- Give on location.
- Include your virtual team in the give-fest.
- Wait and see: Give when so moved.

For example, Mack Weldon followed the "wait and see" strategy. In 2012, when the super-cool, online-centric men's underwear and clothing company Mack Weldon ("the Apple of underwear," according to the Huffington Post5) was initially launched, founder and CEO Brian Berger knew he wanted to weave giving back into his business. Still, he wasn't sure exactly how he wanted to do it.

On the one hand, Berger was just starting out, so the company couldn't really afford to start giving away free stuff. Berger didn't want to just dive into an approach he didn't feel truly connected to, either. So Berger and Mack Weldon waited.

In March 2017, Mack Weldon Recycles — "easy and effortless" — was born. Berger's authentic solution to the social impact opportunity was for Mack Weldon to partner with a third-party apparel and textile recycler called Community Recycle, a Philadelphia-based company whose objective is to keep all apparel and other soft goods out of landfills and send it to communities in need. Don't worry, the underwear itself is not recycled (that's just wrong). It's only the cotton that's recycled.

This is how it works: When customers place an order, Mack Weldon sends their wares in what they call a "two-way drawer" (drawer, get it?), which can be returned with up to 45 pounds of underwear or anything else from their closet at no cost to the customer. Upon receipt, Mack Weldon sends the used goods off to Community Recycle to be transformed and given a new life.

Berger's give-back strategy is a win-win-win. It helps customers rid their closets of old clothes, while helping them feel good about purchasing from the company. The program has already kept 11,241 pounds of apparel out of landfills. This is equivalent to a reduction of 65,197 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions and a savings of 12.2 million gallons of water and 72 trees. And, importantly, it supports Berger's goal of making Mack Weldon a profitable, growing enterprise.

Disconnect to Reconnect

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

Human beings need a break. They need time for their minds to wander aimlessly, to enjoy one another's company, to sleep in or to do nothing. Neuroscientists have confirmed this, showing that allowing our brains to take a break from the constant stimulation of productivity benefits us in many ways.

A so-called "social vibe" is what we humans need. Right? But how we resist! A recent survey from the employer-reviewing site Glassdoor identified that the average U.S. employee who receives vacation and paid time off (i.e., 91 percent of full-time employees) has taken only about half of his or her eligible vacation in the past 12 months.

While it's true that some people and some industries just skew toward high-octane work habits, we all wrestle with a certain problem. You guessed it. Project Time Off reports that "as internet adoption goes up, vacation usage goes down." The report continues, "America's culture of busyness has been driven in large part by connectivity, so much so that the Pew Research Center determined nearly half of office-based workers say that email has increased the amount of time they spend working."

Our technology, as incredible as it is, is keeping an already workaholic culture more tethered to our roving desks than ever. In a culture where we check our phones an average of 47 times per day, even a little disconnection is a lot to ask for.

Here's the good news: Where there's a will, there's a way. The first step is to incorporate disconnection into the company values. Next, be sure everyone does it — staff, managers and executives. Finally, don't disconnect on the sly. Celebrate the joys that come from disconnecting!

Encourage employees to go home without supper. While many Silicon Valley companies boast about their many and varied on-site restaurants or dining options, Slack, the fast-growing messaging connection platform, has taken a different approach. The motto that hangs on a sign in Slack's San Francisco headquarters reads "Work hard and go home." The idea is that if you don't serve dinner, it's more likely your employees will leave the office to have dinner with family and friends.

Send friendly reminders. One of Google's product managers reports that when he hits 20 days of unused vacation, he receives a reminder from the human resources department instructing him to take some time off. Seriously. He continues to receive a "nudge" every 10 days or so until he actually takes a vacation.

Leave loudly. Robbert Rietbroek, CEO of PepsiCo Australia and New Zealand, implemented "Leaders Leaving Loudly" to ensure leaders felt comfortable going home and to get them to announce it to their teams. He says, "For instance, if I occasionally go at 4 p.m. to pick up my daughters, I will make sure I tell the people around me, 'I'm going to pick up my children.' Because if it's okay for the boss, then it's okay for middle management and new hires."

Space Matters

Curating Connection Starts with the Water Cooler

If you want to get the most out of the people in your company, pay attention to space. A survey by Steelcase discovered that only 11 percent of workers surveyed were highly satisfied with their work environment. And we know what happens when workers are unsatisfied! On the other hand, an office environment that fosters connection can raise employee productivity by at least 25 percent.

Since the human company curates connection, that is how we should consider our space. Here are some tips from companies that have done just that.

For example, Anthony Casalena, CEO of web-design company Squarespace, enlisted A+1, a design firm in New York City, because he wanted the company space to reflect his belief that "design is not a luxury," which also happens to be their number-one corporate value. Casalena also wanted the new space to "line up" with his company by reflecting the way his employees worked — equal parts wild collaboration and intense solitude — a working style that architect Brad Zizmor referred to as a "binary state of being."

At Squarespace, nobody has a private office now, not even Casalena. However, people still need to do quiet work, so the entire exterior wall of the three-floored space is wide open, bright and quiet, available for everyone to use as they wish. All the common spaces — the conversation pods, conference rooms, etc. — are nestled into the interior space. As employees move closer to the exterior and closer to the light, the office provides more private space for working in quiet mode.

A design decision like switching offices for common space might not sound like much, but the experience is powerful and speaks very clearly to a culture of transparency, community and intentionality. This is evidently a place that both values the power of solo concentration while still honoring relationships.

Take Professional Development Personally

Empower Employees to Be Their Best Selves

The human workplace must take meaningful, on-the-job education seriously, whether it's related to a person's job description or not. Leaders must take it upon themselves to help their employees connect with the right opportunities. Then, instead of focusing on one or maybe two annual conversations, they must build development into the culture, the operations and the ongoing dialogue, tailoring experiences to actually fit their talent.

In the human workplace, leaders and managers know that one of the best ways to foster an employee's loyalty and engagement is through showing a genuine interest. We can't throw a bunch of professional development options out there and hope people find something that suits them.

We need to slow down, pay attention to the individuals on our teams and make them an offer they can't refuse. Everyone is different and has different needs. Remember, there is no cookie-cutter model to employee engagement!

Ask. So how do we get started? Just ask your people what they want! Ask employees what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. If they aren't sure, they will be thrilled to give it some thought and get back to you.

Receive. Your very own workforce is an untapped wealth of knowledge, skills and insights that other people in your company will no doubt enjoy. After asking employees how they themselves want to develop, try asking them what

they'd like to offer to their colleagues. By trading knowledge, you are creating a network of people all taking their professional development personally — together.

Coach. More and more companies are offering coaching to employees at every stage in their career. While it might seem counterintuitive to offer coaching to employees who already seem qualified for their jobs, offering additional support says, "I care about you and your happiness." Having truly happy, actualized people on your staff is a great retention strategy. And coaching helps every employee develop — professionally and personally.

Say Thank You

It's a Human Thing to Do

The question of "how to be grateful" is so big these days that an entire industry has sprung up. Globoforce is a successful company devoted to helping companies find their own way of expressing gratitude. Saying thank you is the right thing to do, and just as Globoforce's CEO Eric Mosley makes clear, "The simple act of recognizing employees has a proven impact on your bottom line."

Let's look at some powerhouse brands that honor relationships by putting gratitude to work, broken down by Who, When and How.

Who. Everyone Can #Soulitforward. Offering gratitude is everyone's job. Receiving it should be everyone's opportunity. One of fitness company SoulCycle's values is "show gratitude." Soul Cycle defines gratitude as "We give thanks to our riders, our staff and each other. We are humble and remember it takes a village."

CEO Melanie Whelan and her employees express gratitude through their very cool (and contagious) pin program. Employees are "gifted" a package of pins after a year with the company, with each pin representing one of Soul Cycle's 10 core values. There's a "We Get Dirty pin" (i.e., every single employee is responsible for the day- to-day operations), a "Culture of Yes" pin (i.e., everyone is committed to saying "yes" to riders and doing whatever it takes to satisfy their desires) and an "Embrace Change" pin.

When an employee sees anyone embodying any of the company's values, he or she is encouraged to #Soulitforward — give the person a pin, and share with the recipient how the actions were inspiring and emblematic of the values. Giving thanks in this systematic way creates what Whelan described as "an ecosystem of celebration of core values."

When. Every Morning at 9 a.m. It's important to infuse your calendar with a culture of gratitude. This can be done in a variety of ways — by establishing regular feedback sessions and by developing good daily habits.

Indagare, a boutique, membership-based, travel community founded in 2007 by Melissa Biggs Bradley (Indagare's CEO) and Eliza Harris, holds regular, daily gratitude sessions. Harris says, "At 9 a.m., we grab whoever is around for our morning gratitude practice." The folks at Indagare take turns around the room, as each person is invited to offer one thing for which they are grateful and one wish of happiness to another person.

As Harris conveyed, "What we've discovered is it's the most delightful way to start the day when you see how people's faces light up when they're saying what they're grateful for."

How. Lift Employees to New Heights. JetBlue manages to safely shuttle over 38 million people from one place to another every year. But customers aren't the only ones getting a lift from JetBlue. Employees also get a "lift" that comes in the form of recognition for a job well done.

When crew members feel inspired, they can nominate one of their peers, their direct reports or even their boss for upholding the JetBlue values in some remarkable way. The person nominated is rewarded immediately with a gift card of their choice. The key to this program is saying "thank you" in real time.

It seems so simple. We should all do it. Every day. Just say thank you. It's good for people, great for business and, along with the other strategies for bringing your human to work, just might change the world.

MORE SV CONTENT ON MANAGEMENT

Summary: *The Age of Agile* by Stephen Denning. Companies that embrace Agile management learn to connect everyone and everything all the time to meet rapidly changing technology and customer needs. With this approach, global giants can learn to act entrepreneurially.

Webinar: *Fostering a Culture of Connection* by Michael Lee Stallard. In this Soundview Live webinar, Michael Lee Stallard provides a fresh way of thinking about leadership and offers recommendations for how to tap into the power of human connection.