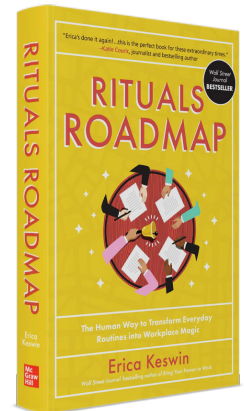


Rituals Roadmap

The Human Way to Transform Everyday Routines into Workplace Magic

by **Erica Keswin**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

From morning cups of coffee to Wednesday team meetings, our lives are steeped in rituals. *Rituals Roadmap* combines cutting-edge scientific research with examples from the most human companies, like Adobe, LinkedIn, and KIND, to show how they establish rituals during meetings, employee onboarding procedures, and daily interactions among co-workers.

Whether you give new employees a “Kickbox” containing a Starbucks card and a \$1,000 Mastercard, like Adobe does, or order pizzas on Friday from eight different pizza joints, like financial advice company Motley Fool does, or simply send welcome emails to new hires, rituals create community and change us in a way that conjures lifelong commitments.

If you're serious about employee engagement, *Rituals Roadmap* is your blueprint for creating a workplace full of engaged, connected employees who drive revenue and stay at their jobs long term.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How rituals can drive business success.
- The Three Ps that make rituals meaningful and inspiring.
- To use rituals for everything from onboarding, to meetings, professional development, breaks, and more.
- Strategies to create rituals that work best for your organization.

Don't Stop Believin': A Business Case for Rituals

We tend to think of rituals as things we do to punctuate important life experiences—like baby showers, bat mitzvahs, weddings, and funerals.

But rituals don't need to be reserved for big milestones, and just doing something again and again does not a ritual make. The transformational power of rituals lies in both our intention and how these activities make us feel. Rituals are rituals because they mean something to the people enacting them.

Technology has changed absolutely everything about the world of work as we know it. We're able to work anywhere, anytime. We're abandoning the traditional office, we're transient, and we're in a constant state of "on duty."

In the midst of all this hyper-connection, as former surgeon general Dr. Vivek Murthy has been telling us, one of the biggest health risks facing our country is—no, not smoking, not secondhand smoke, and not even sitting, but rather—loneliness and isolation. Left to our own devices, we're just not connecting. And it's hurting us. And our businesses.

Gallup found that in 2019, "based on a random sample of 4,700 full- and part-time U.S. employees working for an employer from January to August 2019," 35 percent of employees are engaged.

Rituals: Tools of the Human Workplace

Rituals are elemental to our lives. Scientists say that one of the reasons we humans love rituals is to "maintain group cohesion." In this world of disparate disconnection, rituals come to the rescue.

The cost of most rituals is minimal, but their value is priceless. And the impact is significant: more connection (improved cooperation, social cohesion, and perceived social support), higher productivity (through regulation of top-down and bottom-up psychosocial processing in our brains), better engagement, and a decrease in anxiety and stress. In other words, a positive work culture.

The Three Ps of Rituals: Psychological Safety + Purpose = Performance

Rituals are so impactful because they harness two of the core elements every human needs to succeed: psychological safety (or a sense of belonging) and purpose. When we feel psychologically safe and connected to a purpose, our per-

formance improves. This is the Three Ps of rituals.

Psychological safety. Sharing rituals at work is the perfect way to help us feel included, and thus safe from the threat of social exclusion. Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson found that study after study from around the world linked psychological safety to worker engagement.

Rituals are the tools to help accelerate that sense of belonging, gathering all kinds of people together. True psychological safety has never mattered more.

Purpose. A 2019 Gallup study on purpose in the workplace states, "Astute leaders increasingly understand the effect purpose has on business outcomes. But purpose can't be limited to just a slogan. To advance, inspire, and unite a company, purpose must be actualized in the day-to-day work." What better way to tie employees directly to a company's purpose than through rituals?

Performance. When we put psychological safety and purpose together, what do we get? Better performance. A study at Google found that rituals were the key to more effective teams.

The Three Ps are just a way of pointing out what rituals do for us—they help us feel connected in an increasingly disconnected world. Rituals are the tools of the human workplace.

The rituals roadmap that follows traces the employee lifecycle from the first day to the last and everything in between, as well as a day-in-the-life of employees today—meetings, eatings, and taking breaks.

All Aboard: Rituals for Recruiting, Hiring, and Onboarding

Our first stop on the rituals roadmap is—where else?—getting people on board. And in case you haven't heard, the race for talent is on. Getting it right from the beginning impacts everything else down the line.

A beginning isn't just another random moment in time. The beginning sets the tone for everything that follows. Kickoff rituals have a lot of power.

Because the Three Ps work together, it's crucial that we elicit a feeling of psychological safety and purpose from the very first touchpoints in the employee relationship.

One of the ways rituals work best is by creating a container around the most mundane activities, thereby elevating them.

Preboarding with rituals. Consider Zappos's approach to picking up potential hires at the airport. Someone from Zappos is assigned to fetch the out-of-towner in a Zappos-decorated van. The candidate is driven to the lobby for the interview, offered a drink of water and some snacks, and has some chitchat to help put him at ease.

Seems like pretty run-of-the-mill stuff, but here's the interesting part. The people at the front desk and the driver know that the recruiting team wants feedback, good or bad, about the potential hire, so they're all super-engaged, paying extra close attention to the personal behavior of the potential employee.

One of Zappos's core values is "Be Humble," so they want to know if their interviewee is treating certain employees one way and their potential new boss or colleagues another. This clever ritual helps to ensure that new hires are a good fit. Sometimes a ride from the airport isn't just a ride from the airport!

Day one rituals. The first day of school is an iconic experience for all of us. We can all relate to the butterflies, great expectations, and stress about what to wear and where to sit. Will people like us? The first day of work is no different. And it only happens once. Smart companies use rituals to get it right.

New employees at Adobe receive a "Kickbox" containing a Starbucks card and a \$1,000 Mastercard. Adobe's box also comes with a checklist of what to do in order to start pitching new ideas to the company. This onboarding ritual is so popular, Adobe has created an online guide for other companies.

Simpler, low-cost welcomes work, too. John Deere employees receive a simple email from a buddy on the current staff, giving first-day tips about what to wear and where to park. Who wants to show up in a suit when everyone else is wearing Hawaiian shirts?! Or to circle the employee parking lot worrying about being late?

This first-day buddy later shows up at the newbie's desk with a welcome banner in tow.

March Through the Arch: Rituals for Beginnings

Okay, job seeker, you've got the job. Congratulations! And you, Manager—you've hired the next rockstar cohort. Well done! After the balloons have deflated, the music video has been viewed, and the empty bowl of candy has been moved from the new person's desk, everyone defaults to just showing up at work. Then what?

One of the ways rituals work best is by creating a container around the most mundane activities, thereby elevating them. There's the requisite business of being in business, and then there are the rituals that help us power up and through the day—the work of work. So this next stop on our roadmap shines a light on beginnings and endings.

Opening ceremonies. For most of us who report to an office, our opening ceremonies kind of naturally evolve—we walk out of the elevator into the office, grabbing a coffee along the way. For those who work from home, it's helpful to think about how to create personal opening ceremonies to help start the day and delineate home from work. Not an easy task! But rituals can really help us create the transitions that have never mattered more.

Jodi Kovitz is the founder and CEO of #movethedial, a company devoted to changing the story of women in tech. At 9:30 a.m. on Monday mornings, her team comes together for what Kovitz calls a "grounding ritual," in order to "connect on a human level, and to invest in the culture and connectivity of the team." Each person shares three things: (1) something they're grateful for, personal or professional, (2) something they're proud of, and (3) something that they're struggling with.

Wouldn't it make more business sense to launch the week with projects and bottom-line projections? Well, in case you haven't heard, the soft stuff is the new hard stuff. And for Kovitz, "It's more important for people to feel glued together, connected, grounded, valued—like they have a reason to be there. And to ease into Monday is really a beautiful thing."

Bookending rituals. Morty Schapiro made the move from the president of Williams College to Northwestern University

in the summer of 2009, and soon realized that Northwestern didn't have a ritual to welcome incoming students.

A colleague suggested, "Let's walk the kids through the arch that's on campus." A ritual was born. Schapiro and his team rushed to quickly organize a march through the arch in September 2009. They didn't bother getting permission from the city that first year, which turned out not to be a problem, since only about 20 kids participated, and they just dodged the cars to march through the arch.

By year three, every single incoming student—over 2,000 kids—marched through the arch. Today, it's a ritual not to be missed. The marching band leads the students through Weber Arch, so named by Schapiro for his predecessor and the fourteenth president of the university, Arnie Weber.

These days parents, told in advance where to find their kids in the sea of purple, line the streets and take pictures. The kids feel like they are part of something special as they walk through the arch like all those who came before them, and begin to come together as their own class.

Students said that the march makes them feel more connected to their classmates and the university. It's likely the same goes for the parents who are kvelling from the sidelines.

Meetings: Rituals for Gatherings That Matter

Before the COVID crisis hit, experts like Harvard Business School professor Nancy Koehn estimated that approximately 11 million formal meetings were held in U.S. workplaces each day. Average employees sat through roughly 62 meetings every month.

People frequently check out of these meetings. And when we're sitting through that many meetings a month, who could blame them? Doodle, the online meeting service, reported that meetings cost the United States over \$399 billion in lost productivity in 2019.

We humans still love to meet, even when it's making us crazy and/or unproductive. That's why it's so important that we bring rituals to our meetings, making the most of the human urge to sit together, face-to-face, and collaborate. We can do this in two ways: first, by having a purpose, and second, by inviting presence.

More Than Assembly Is Required: Have a Purpose

The word "meeting" is defined as "an assembly of peo-

ple, especially the members of a society or committee for discussion or entertainment." But here's the thing: "assembling" is for Ikea furniture. Mere assembling is not going to make magic happen. With rituals we can transform everyday assemblies into workplace magic.

In *The Art of Gathering*, Priya Parker writes that in determining our purpose, "The more focused and particular a gathering is, the more narrowly it frames itself and the more passion it arouses." We ought not to have a meeting to discuss something that can be sent out in an email or viewed on a company dashboard.

Your Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Presence Is Requested

Now that you know that your meeting has to have a purpose, you have to be sure people actually show up, not just in body but in mind, and even spirit. Presence is a prerequisite for psychological safety and helps ensure that your purpose manifests.

The best meetings invite people to bring their presence into the room, and there are rituals to help us do that. Chiming in and chiming out of meetings is a way of waking people up and bringing them to the present.

Before jumping into the news and status-of-the-day part of your meeting, it's always a good idea to take a moment to gather people together, asking them to leave whatever they were doing before at the door. A chime is like an "Enter Here" signal.

Eileen Fisher, the fashion queen of comfy-chic, rings a literal chime at the beginning of meetings. The chime signals a minute of silence and meditation prior to a meeting commencing.

Fisher asserts, "I think when people start to pay attention to themselves, they start to pay attention to their relationships, to the people around them and how they treat each other, and they start to notice the people in the supply chain."

With one tiny ritual, people begin to feel psychologically safe and connected to purpose, which helps their performance.

Eatings: Rituals for the Most Important Meal of the Day: The One We Share

Four professors from the Cornell School of Management have found that eating together is strongly associated with

unit-level performance. Organizations that sit down for a meal together—even without cooking it together—strengthen “social glue.” Yet, elevating the meal to ritual status is only applicable for situations “where cooperation, communication, and organizational citizenship [have] value.” Eating together is only important for the kind of workplace that values the Three Ps: Psychological safety, a sense of shared Purpose, and increased Performance.

Rituals can help companies bridge the personal and professional.

A Pizza Friday Like No Other

Motley Fool, the wild and wacky investment firm founded by brothers David and Tom Gardner, have turned an ordinary pizza day into a ritual to write home about. On the last Friday of every month, Motley Fool buys 80 pizzas for the office.

But what makes this Pizza Friday different from all other Pizza Fridays is that they buy 10 pizzas from eight different beloved pizza joints in the area. Describing how they make it dramatic, Lee Burbage, the chief people officer, says, “People are very passionate about their pizza. We open Pizza Friday at noon on the dot. If anyone tries to get pizza at 11:59, it’s not there. The line curls around the corner, and at noon everybody floods in. It’s chaos because everyone knows the pizza that they want.”

On offer are all kinds of pizza, from gluten-free, to vegan, to a Mexican pizza, the most popular from a restaurant just down the street. According to Burbage, Pizza Friday is Motley Fool’s oldest tradition.

As Burbage put it, “There is no employee survey that would get me that pepperoni preference and be able to deliver that to them.” Which is to say that some rituals are so powerful they go way beyond the details and straight to the heart, as well as the stomach.

Rituals for Taking Professional Development Personally: Spotlight on LinkedIn’s InDay

A sense of being linked to one’s personal purpose and human potential is a must-have for people at work, and it’s often ranked higher in importance than salary. Deep, relevant professional development is where it’s at. For many employees today, growing on the job is a must-have, even more important than money. According to data collected by Culture Amp, a company devoted to developing software solutions for workplace culture, learning is more important than compensation.

Rituals can help companies approach professional development in a way that’s engaging, inspiring, and keeps people coming back for more. Rituals can help companies bridge the personal and professional.

LinkedIn InSpire: Happy InDay!

LinkedIn’s 16,000 employees take a day off every month for their personal-professional development. InDay began in 2010 when just 1,000 employees worked at LinkedIn. The company had been in such “insane hyper growth,” LinkedIn’s cheerleader/culture champion Nawal Fakhoury recalls, since its founding in 2003, that leaders were worried about burnout. The team searched for ways to keep their talent a number one priority. “The coolest part is that in 2010 we invented InDay, which is short for Investment Day.

InDay includes things like a mindfulness class for employees, guided by a leader from wise@work, the developers of an app that helps people learn the “soft” skills needed to succeed at work, one of which is mindfulness.

What we previously relegated or even disregarded as “people” skills are now front and center as we begin to see how important people’s experience at work truly is. In today’s complex, demanding workplace, it’s more important than ever for everyone to be emotionally intelligent and self-aware.

InDay also offers the “Git Up Dance Class.” Maybe you’re wondering how on earth learning a line dance can be considered professional development. Mindfulness—maybe—but dancing? How does Steve Sordello, the CFO who envisioned InDay, justify paying employees to meditate and dance?

Mindfulness and exercise are two of the most important ways to stay healthy, happy, and engaged. According to a 2016 survey conducted by Limeade and Quantum Workplace, 88 percent of employees that report having higher

well-being feel engaged at work versus 50 percent of those with lower well-being. Since happy, healthy employees are more engaged, more productive, and less likely to leave, the bottom line sees a cumulative benefit.

#InDay

InDay is not just a ritual but maybe even a prototypical ritual. Not only does it pass the Three Ps test with flying colors, but people would lose their minds if it went away.

An interesting characteristic of rituals is that they have a cadence, a rhythm, a life of their own. Because InDay happens every month, it shapes life at LinkedIn—there's before InDay, InDay, and after InDay. There's life leading up to InDay, then life coming down and preparing for InDay, like a Friday Shabbat or a birthday or a weekly breakfast. It's a shared marker people and teams use to feel connected to their lives at work.

Christina Hall, LinkedIn's former head of HR, said that the cadence makes the ritual feel "elevated beyond a perk."

InDay is a ritual that helps people take professional development personally. Everyone can interpret and live InDay in their own way, without pressure or judgment. It's the truly human way to learn.

The No-Smoke Break: Rituals for Taking a Breather

You may not remember the days of the smoke break, inspiring people to gather a few times a day either in a lounge or outside, huddling together, offering each other a light, taking one big exhale in unison, then catching up on the latest gossip.

According to the director of the MIT Human Dynamics Lab, "Much of the important information about how to be successful and productive at a job is not going to be found in a memo or an employee handbook, but rather around the water cooler." So while we don't need cigarettes for social glue at work, we do benefit from rituals like water coolers.

It's been proven again and again that "downtime replenishes the brain's stores of attention and motivation, encourages productivity and creativity, and is essential to both achieve our highest levels of performance and simply form stable memories in everyday life." So what are some ways to turn a no-smoke break into a ritual?

Break With a Best Friend

Beauty and wellness company Moon Juice is a company on a nonstop mission to create a sustainable, healthy, beautiful world for all of us. When Moon Juice's director of e-commerce was hired, the company agreed to let her bring her dog to work. Now, her pup is the office dog.

Every day, around 2 p.m., the dog needs a walk. But here's the thing: When it's dog-walking time, it's not just the dog's owner who gets up and goes for a walk. A colleague or two or three always join in. As Moon Juice president Elizabeth Ashmun said during an interview, "I've never seen her go alone."

This ritual uses something as ordinary and necessary as a dog walk to unleash the team members to get up and move and connect. And what better way to get a jolt of joy than by walking with humans' best friend?

Another great way to create rituals that really mean something to people is to ride on the coattails of what's already happening in the office, especially if it's grabbing everyone's attention. Embracing cultural events, for example, is a powerful way for companies to gather together and bask in the glow of connection.

At Microsoft in Redmond, Washington, home to almost 40,000 Microsoft employees, Halloween has taken on supernatural proportions. Instead of people with small kids ducking out early for Halloween parades and to prepare for trick or treating, Microsoft invites spouses to load up the minivans with kids in costumes and descend on the campus in the afternoon. People decorate, give out candy—the whole nine yards.

We See You: Rituals for Recognizing and Rewarding

Millennials and Gen Zers have brought many things to the table that we all need. One of those things is an insistence on being recognized at work—for a job well done, for sure, but also feedback about what's working and what isn't. Ideally, feedback happens all year round and not just once a year at review time.

Here are three different kinds of rituals that can send the message "we see you": (1) rituals that reward individual performance, (2) rituals that reflect milestones, and (3) rituals that connect to the collective. Let's look at the first two.

Rewarding Kind Customers

If you ever see a man on the street or in an airport doling

Begin each meeting with a moment for employees to ground themselves or find their center.

out KIND bars from his backpack, don't worry. That's just Daniel Lubetzky, founder and executive chairman of KIND Snacks, philanthropist, Shark Tank entrepreneur, and lifelong devotee of being, well, in a word—kind. He doesn't just recognize customers through ritual, but he pays attention to his employees, too.

And kindness is always at the heart of it. Early on, Lubetzky launched a ritual and called it KINDOS, recognizing employees and rewarding them with KIND bars and cards of gratitude. He now has a long-standing tradition of awarding one employee every year with a KINDOS award.

Lubetzky continues to recognize kindness. Lubetzky told me, "So when I travel on a flight, I always bring 72 KIND bars, and I hand them out." Why 72? Each box has 12 bars in it, and six is the number of boxes he can carry with him.

Think about how seen these people feel when Lubetzky recognizes and rewards people for random acts of kindness from a brand that now has mass recognition itself. Through this ritual, the ordinary KIND bar becomes something else, something that connects people to Lubetzky's purpose of being kind.

We See You: Rituals That Reflect Milestones

Aimée Woodall asks people to create their own adventure on their first anniversary at the Houston-based marketing, strategy, and design agency Black Sheep. She and her team know how tough the first year can be, so they really go all out and take the entire 18-person company out for an evening "crafted around who they are, what they care about, what they like, and their personality."

Um. Wow!

As Woodall said, "It might be a very extravagant dinner, especially if they are a foodie. For some people, it's like, 'I want to go get hot dogs and go to the Astros game.' The greatest example of a totally different approach was when we brought picnic lunches and went to a bingo hall because that's what that person wanted to do."

Black Sheep, being the ones on the outside of the herd, have

an interesting take on what it means to belong. They certainly know how to create a ritual that makes a lifelong impression! Making a ritual personal ensures that it won't be forgotten.

Design Your Own Roadmap

You might ask, what now? How can you use rituals as the tools to create a human workplace?

Start by creating your own unique map. Discover the rituals that your organization—however big or small—already has in place across the employee lifecycle, paying close attention to the following:

- **Recruiting and onboarding:** Chances are, your company already has a set of processes for all of these things. So think about how you can add a little TLC to them. Maybe every new hire receives a welcome pack with candy and snacks. Whatever you choose to do, make sure it fits with your company brand and sets the tone for how you want potential and new candidates to view your company from the very first impression.
- **Beginnings:** Start as you mean to go on. You can easily take something you already do in the morning with your employees and make it a beginning-of-the-week ritual. Remember that a ritual is 100 percent intentional. So even something as simple as sending a morning check-in email with intention at the beginning of each week can be made into a ritual.
- **Meetings:** Begin each meeting with a moment for employees to ground themselves or find their center. Start off with a round robin show-and-tell with everyone in the room. The important thing to remember for meetings is to make everyone feel like they can contribute if they want to.
- **Eatings:** Transform your meals into rituals. Remember, it doesn't matter what you eat or where you eat it. The most important meal of the day is the one we share.
- **Professional development:** The best professional development is personal. What better way to say, "We

appreciate you” than to give employees the opportunity to grow themselves professionally and personally? You don’t have to dedicate a whole day to it like LinkedIn does, but think about what your company already does for professional development, and add in the personal touch necessary to make it a ritual.

- **Taking breaks:** Rituals that help us pulse our attention make us more productive. Whether it’s a one-minute dance party, a few pushups, or a walk around the block to get some air, regular breaks are good for the health of your people and your business.
- **Recognition and milestones:** It’s only human to want to feel seen and to feel recognized. Whether it’s once a year or every week, rituals are an important tool in the human workplace to reward performance, celebrate milestones, and connect individuals to the collective.

Perform a rituals litmus test to see—are they, in fact, rituals? Are the Three Ps at work?

- Do they provide Psychological safety?
- Are they linked to Purpose? If the first two are a yes, then you can be sure that your ritual is Performance-enhancing.
- Finally, would people Protest if it went away?

If you don’t have rituals, then what? Look for opportunities for rituals through the employee lifecycle in these ways:

- If you want to create rituals, start with your company values. It’s the best way to make rituals feel authentic and organic within your company.

- Remember that rituals can be top-down or bottom-up, so ask your team for ideas.
- Be willing to scrap rituals that aren’t working, feel inauthentic, or feel like a box check.

The world of work is always changing. But human beings’ needs remain the same. After food, water, and shelter, we need each other. Rituals, as the stories above show, are just the thread to sew us close.

In other words, this rituals business is not just a feel-good exercise. When we’re engaged at work—through rituals, through connection, through psychological safety and purpose—we outperform those who let go of the rituals and traditions that keep us connected and feeling like we belong.

Whether you’re facing a team, a global company, a day in your life, or an incredibly awkward task, rituals can turn your everyday routines into magic.

Once you experience the power of rituals for yourself and your company, you won’t stop believing.

IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *Rituals for Work: 50 Ways to Create Engagement, Shared Purpose, and a Culture That Can Adapt to Change* by Kursat Ozenc, Margaret Hagan
- *Pick Up the Gum Wrapper: How to Create a Workplace That Increases Performance While Improving Lives* by Joe Bertotto



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