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# The Future-Proof Workplace

Six Strategies to Accelerate Talent Development, Reshape Your Culture, and Succeed with Purpose

## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Nobody can really be sure what tomorrow will bring — what game-changing technology, history-shaping demographic shifts or unanticipated market forces will emerge or how they'll impact the way we work and lead. But, what we do know for certain is that the future will be different from what we've known; it's already taking shape right before our eyes, and if we don't prepare for it now, we can surrender any hope of our organizations surviving or thriving tomorrow.

In *The Future-Proof Workplace*, you'll discover how emerging technologies and advances in neuroscience research are toppling 20th-century organizational paradigms and transforming the way we work. And you'll find out how yesterday's biases are being replaced by tomorrow's values, culture and relationships.

In addition, you will learn to look deep into the heart of your company to determine if it's ready and willing to adapt to the purpose-driven business paradigm of the future. You'll gain powerful insights into the new organizational models that are coming into being at the most successful, forward-thinking companies worldwide. And you'll learn to identify and seize the bold, new opportunities that 21st-century organizational structures will offer.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to assess and reshape your company for tomorrow's challenges, today.
- The six factors of change that must be addressed to remain competitive.
- How to adjust your leadership style for the 21st century.
- How to embrace technology rather than shying away from it.



by Linda Sharkey, PhD  
and Morag Barrett

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE FUTURE-PROOF WORKPLACE

by Linda Sharkey, PhD and Morag Barrett

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*The Future-Proof Workplace: Six Strategies to Accelerate Talent Development, Reshape Your Culture and Succeed with Purpose* by Linda Sharkey, PhD and Morag Barrett, copyright © 2017 by Linda Sharkey and Morag Barrett, has been summarized by permission of the publisher John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 224 pages, \$28, ISBN 978-1-119-28757-5.

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## Surviving and Thriving in Turbulence

The future of work is not tomorrow. The future of work is today! You, your career, and your company should be future-proof.

There are three waves of change that test the limits of human convention and create havoc — and opportunity — in the workplace: digital technology, demographics and globalization. These waves of change are having a profound impact on how society, politics, business relationships and innovation are shaping the 21st century.

### Six Factors of Change

Six factors are transforming the workplace from the 20th to the 21st century: leadership, culture, organizing principles, relationships, diversity and inclusion, and technology.

These factors require considerable reshaping of fundamentals in any enterprise, including how you develop people, how you organize work to deliver value to your customers and what human relations practices you put into place to advance your workforce. We may be in the midst of a digital revolution, but it's the people revolution that will determine whether we ride the waves of change or drown.

**1. Leadership:** In the end, company success boils down to leaders, what they value and how they behave. The 21st century demands a shift in leadership to be one of engagement, collaboration and adaptability. These are also the hallmarks of organizations that can innovate. Without a shift in our leadership mindset and our leadership behavior, none of the following factors will be future-proof.

**2. Culture:** In the 21st century, most organizations understand that culture and values have everything to do with profitability. If leaders want a culture that truly empowers people, they must behave consistently with those values. A healthy culture, and living the values in daily behaviors, is essential for growth, adaptability and innovation.

**3. Organizing Principles:** Today, a compelling and impactful purpose, around which teams can get excited, is key. Members of the younger generation assess a company based upon their views of the real purpose of the enterprise and how well it is living up to that purpose.

**4. Relationships:** Today, a greater understanding of the role of relationships, not only at work but in business in general, is coming to light. This is the secret glue that keeps people engaged and emotionally connected to the work while they are there.

**5. Diversity and Inclusion:** In order to create a truly inclusive environment with a level playing field for all, we need to understand the role of unconscious bias and the role the brain plays in our ability to connect with people who are different from us.

**6. Technology:** The 21st-century breakthrough in technology was largely missed: the ability to communicate, collaborate and enjoy our work. The 21st-century breakthrough in IT is about discovering patterns that were previously invisible. Because of these trends, the organizational basics need reinvention, retooling and, in some cases, rejection, never to see the light of day again.

Looking ahead, how we manage and develop people will have to be dramatically rethought. With the rapid pace of change, people will need to learn improvisation to build on each other's ideas. We are being challenged, as humans, to rethink and redefine our role in this world and especially at work. ●



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Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries® (ISSN 0747-2196), 511 School House Road., Suite 300, Kennett Square, PA 19348 USA. Published monthly. Subscriptions starting at \$99 per year. Copyright © 2017 by Soundview, Inc. **Available formats:** Summaries are available in several digital formats. To subscribe, call us at 1-800-SUMMARY, or order online at www.summary.com. Multiple-subscription discounts and corporate site licenses are also available.

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## Leadership: Leading the Future

Command and control leaders truly believe they have all the answers. This style has been honed over the centuries through feudal systems, royal dominance, and bureaucratic organizations. It may well be unconscious behavior on the part of many leaders, which is why it is so hard to change. Historically, this dysfunctional management style did not ultimately thwart human creativity. It just made it harder to bring innovation to the workplace.

You don't have to read many business headlines to see greed in action. It is this culture of greed that puts average, honest workers under stress to deliver results at all costs. In order to get compliance, leaders resort to command and control, and followers comply.

Today, with social media, word gets out quickly about where to work and who to work for. Command and control and greed often go hand in hand and aren't sustainable in a future-proof world of today and tomorrow. Today's workforce is not asking to be engaged, it expects to be engaged.

### 21st-Century Leadership

Leadership of the future is really the same kind of leadership that's always been effective. The 21st-century leader understands that business is also about values, purpose and solving problems.

Leadership is a privilege. Great leaders lead wherever they are and whatever their career level. As a leader, you have a great responsibility, not to yourself but to those you lead.

Leaders need to be clear on their personal values first before adopting and modeling company values. Values must be internalized. Solid personal values give you the platform and the confidence to translate those convictions into authentic company values. Authentic values create a vibrant company culture.

### Defining Values

Value is no longer defined by how much money a company makes, but rather it is moving toward how much good it contributes to society.

Five critical dimensions set great leaders apart from everyone else: they are purpose driven even in times of great ambiguity, they act with heart and love toward those they lead, they are team builders but not in the traditional sense, they are highly perceptive, and they are crystal clear about their values.

The greatest leaders have three things in common: passion, the ability to attach whatever their task is to that higher purpose and they find time to develop people.

When you practice these three behaviors, not only will you help others and show you care, you will feel great about yourself. This is the power, privilege and purpose of leadership. ●

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## Culture: The Key for Innovation and Speed

Cultural innovation should be a top priority for your company. Culture is critically important to any organization, especially one that needs fresh ideas and speed to succeed — which is every industry and every organization today.

Speed and creativity, with more readily available data, are the bywords of this century's organizations. Leading companies today are realizing they can't unleash the creativity of their employees with slow, bureaucratic cultures.

### Fast-Forward Culture

Job markets are changing rapidly, with fewer factory workers and more knowledge workers. More entry-level employees have different expectations, are technologically savvy and want to work on meaningful projects. Companies like Google, Facebook and PwC are the new normal. These companies know they can't be fast and flexible with cultures rooted in industrial thinking.

The two areas that worry CEOs the most, according to recent PwC studies, are talent and technological disruption. Culture is a critical part of both of these concerns. Companies must be fast, but they also have to be flexible learning organizations in which innovation can happen quickly — in every part of the organization, not just in the places where the research is done. And execution must be flawless.

Cultures that are toxic by their very nature are not innovative. If you're not purposely investing in a healthy culture, your business is already declining, whether you realize it or not.

Culture is rooted in values. It's the unspoken set of assumptions, values and beliefs that dictate, often subtly, how people relate to each other in organizations. It defines how people in the organization think about their work and contribute to the overall organization.

### Bringing Culture to Light

Culture is the DNA of a company that happens whether you want it or not. Culture shapes how employees act, not only with each other but also with the customer. It informs how decisions are ultimately made about

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everything from who you hire and reward to how you shape strategy and execute it.

Culture is king for the 21st century. Successful companies are breaking all the rules we believed in the past about how companies need to be run. This means fewer rules, more trust and more freedom for employees to unleash their intelligence and gifts, no matter what roles they play in the organization.

Know your current culture. Understand it not as you would like it to be but as it really is. Define what the culture and values of the organization must be. Then, use those values to guide all your business decisions.

So, how does a company, or division, crystalize its values and create a future-proof culture? Start by assessing your own personal values and answering the question: What is the culture our company needs to execute a successful strategy? Then, look at the behaviors you see every day — in your staff and yourself. Identify the disconnect and begin to articulate the values you aspire to in order to have the success you envision. Leaders create the culture they love. The future-proof culture is one that everyone can love. ●

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## Purpose: Navigating Turbulent Waters

### Mission and Vision

In the 21st century, work can shift in nanoseconds, and complicated missions can become obsolete overnight. The days of occasional whitewater for a company have given way to perpetual rapids with hidden rocks all along the way.

Instead of building a ship to sail with the changing tides, companies often build massive management machinery that can't move, gets swamped by change and rusts.

Why is Amazon so successful? One main difference is that it has a compelling purpose that drives all other strategies, tactics and activities: Deliver what the customers want to buy, when and where they want it.

Markets change. Technology disrupts. Culture evolves. People learn. Relationships grow. Purpose remains.

Old-fashioned planning and mission statements do nothing to propel a company forward in today's markets. Dump them and replace them with a simple purpose statement. A clear purpose statement unleashes the intellect of employees to meet the needs of team members and customers.

### The Power of Purpose

Purpose begins with the promise to customers — not giving the customers everything they want but rather living up to the promise they make to customers. Having a customer-centric view ensures you are delivering on what you say you will deliver.

The best purpose statements are timeless and adjust with changing technology and changing circumstances. However, an effective purpose also has another very important role: to create an authentic emotional hook for the betterment of society.

Purpose aligns people's behaviors around something that makes a difference to others. A command-and-control leadership style, coupled with a focus on greed, causes questionable practices that actually hurt people. Add a mission statement that is solely market-driven, and you have the perfect storm for corruption.

Today, there are more than 2 billion people under 20 years of age in the world. Why is this important? These 2 billion people have a different drummer that motivates them. We have raised children to give back and to be less compelled by making vast amounts of money at others' expense. If companies are to attract these young people, they must also have an awe-inspiring purpose.

In the 20th century, people came into work, but their emotional purpose was outside the workplace — usually back at home. In the 21st century, it's the emotional purpose that causes people to *come* to work.

Purpose is powerful. It appeals to our inner need as humans to contribute to the greater good. What is your real purpose on Earth? It can be hard to live your purpose 100 percent of the time — we are human after all — but good leaders strive to do so. And great leaders regularly reflect on how well they are aligned with, and living, their purpose and make changes accordingly. Purpose is a leadership journey, not a destination. ●

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## Relationships: Our Connected Future

Business is built on relationships, whether with employees, customers or other key stakeholders. You cannot be successful in business, or in life, unless you are also successful in cultivating the personal and professional relationships on which these depend.

We are in a transitional phase in terms of how relationships are valued in the workplace. The future of work will center on the fluid workforce, which consists of teams and

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individuals who can come together rapidly, build trust, enable information sharing and collaborate to deliver a successful result.

## Relationship with Work

We've moved from a local perspective to a global perspective. Our relationship with the workday, and work itself, has expanded from 9 to 5 to 24/7. The lines between work time and personal time are blurred. The evolving expectation is that work and life are a braided system that is blended, overlapping and seamless.

The key to future-proofing both your own social time and the work that needs to be done is providing the resources that allow for both work and play. The millennial generation is drawn to opportunities in which they can work when inspiration strikes them — as long as expectations are met and results are delivered.

The traditional career ladder is no more. With the flattening of organizations, the career ladder is more of a career lattice — where success isn't only about vertical movement. Success is about the horizontal opportunities that provide new experiences and expand skills. We now work in a series of interconnected and interdependent networks, even if they are difficult to chart. To future-proof your career, you need to be connected at multiple levels, to multiple people, and actively cultivate those connections.

## Relationship with Employer

The rules of the employer–employee contract, whether implicit or explicit, are being rewritten for the 21st century. There has been a shift from the paternalistic employer to the self-sufficient employee and from employee for life to the more flexible workforce.

Welcome to the social contract. Relationships matter, and the quality of our working relationships matters even more in the modern world. The future of work is less of a chore or a place we have to go to. Instead, work becomes something we choose to do because we want to.

In today's hyperconnected world, it's becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate between friends and colleagues. Building relationships and connections quickly, and paying attention to how we bond so that everyone is included, is paramount. Who you know and what you know is much more important than the formal role you play.

It's the quality of the connection that matters, not the quantity. In the future, success will be achieved through the subtle but high-value combination of mastery and connectivity. The defining factors will be what you know, who you know and how well you can work with others. You must intentionally connect or risk becoming disconnected.

In the future — and more importantly, today — we need to be even more diligent in balancing the needs of the relationships we have with work and the relationships we have with others. Most of all, we must recognize that we have no excuse for not enjoying the kind of working relationships we aspire to. ●

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## Diversity and Inclusion: Future Inclusion

Prejudice, bias and exclusionary behavior have always played a role in human society. Young people today have been raised to believe they can achieve their dreams regardless of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or age. But as a people, we have not been able to get out of our own way in providing paths for a more inclusive society.

Stereotyping is personal because we apply our own experience and intent to the situation at hand. Advancement for women and minorities — and for that matter, anyone who does not fit our Western view of leaders — has been a slow trickle. Why? Because even well-intentioned programs don't fully address unconscious bias.

Make a tally sheet and, in most cases, those who are perceived to lack executive presence are minorities, women, LGBTQ people, introverts, and foreign nationals. The leaders making these decisions are not necessarily bad people. They just don't realize that the subliminal messages and context they are drawing from to make decisions about others are exclusionary. We have set patterns, images and context for what we believe people should be like, and often, these are so subtle we don't even realize it.

The changing demographics of the new workforce make inclusive hiring an imperative. The opportunity to be included at the top levels of organizations is still slim. If you can't include others who are different, your business will not survive.

## Brain Science, Bias and Diversity

We all have unconscious bias that causes us to embrace some and discriminate against others. And this distinction happens unconsciously and instantly. This is the root cause of why programs and processes to increase diversity in the workplace have not worked and will not work — until we come to grips with our own unconscious bias.

If your brain has been conditioned to believe that males hold executive roles or that women can't do certain types of work, you will react and make a decision before

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you're even aware of it. You will react before you realize that you had a negative or positive response. The brain stores memories and emotions. It captures every story you have ever been told and categorizes it. Unconscious brain function makes up approximately 80% of the brain's activity. It is not that we inherently dislike other people, but we have been programmed with subliminal and not-so-subliminal messages.

Parents unwittingly pass on their bias and stereotypes to their children, causing an unconscious reaction in their children that can either help them or hinder them as they move into society. This is one explanation for a current phenomenon among women shown in recent research. Many women don't aspire to the most senior roles, despite the fact that more women have advanced degrees than ever before. They were conditioned to believe they could not attain these jobs.

The good news is that the brain can rewire with repetition. All your neurons, circuitry and synapses can respond differently if you can rewire your thinking.

The action we must all take is to dump the focus on diversity and all the programs devoted to shaming and blaming others for lack of diversity. Instead, let's focus on inclusion as the positive, and more accurate, alternative. Creating a culture that fully embraces and includes all participants is essential for a future-proof organization. ●

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## Technology: Resistance Is Futile

Technology is ever present, ever advancing and ever pernicious. We are firmly in the embrace of the fourth industrial revolution, a digital revolution that impacts every aspect of our lives — at work, at play, and at home. Technology will continue to both disrupt industries and create new opportunities. You can be a casualty of the disruption or reap the benefits of applied innovation.

### Technology: The Disrupter and Enabler

Technology isn't just providing existing services in new ways, it's connecting what were once disparate processes to provide an even more seamless and pleasant customer experience. It's not only disrupting what is created and delivered to consumers, it's also disrupting what is captured and understood about consumers and nonconsumers.

Digitization of information is pervasive. Big data can be described as vast, growing stores of information that can be analyzed by computers to reveal trends, patterns and associations. Analyzing this information is a burgeoning

industry in itself. This abundance of valuable information is driving the emergence of new businesses.

Artificial intelligence is already here, driving our cars, providing real-time translation services, reducing language barriers and providing new delivery mechanisms through drones and virtual assistant services like Google Home, Alexa, Cortana and Siri.

Whether AI and robotics will eventually replace jobs is an ongoing debate. It would seem that AI and robotics can only create long-term value if the new processes, systems and apps *augment* the economic system as it currently operates. The time-saving and cost-savings that automation provides is a short-term benefit if the long-term impact of less employment (and hence, less money to spend) is not considered.

The careers and companies that stay focused on the human benefits of technology will live long and prosper.

Technology will redefine the expectations of workers and performance management. Like it or not, people work in small chunks of time, not huge blocks. Technology is driving byte-sized attention spans. Digital transformation impacts what we know and how we analyze data. This allows for increased flexibility, not standardization. To thrive in the midst of rapid technological change, we've got to make work simpler, not continue to add complexity.

### Future Workforce

The workforce of the future is one that's iterative and agile. This agile mindset, skill set and organizational structure with flash teams is not just the future, it's the mainstream of today.

Everything is connected and transparent. There are no boundaries. Initial expertise and first-to-market gets you a seat at the table. But keeping pace and growing keeps you there.

As leaders, we have to admit that the problems we face are too big to tackle without collaboration. The winners will have the best human interface.

The future of work will be informed by insights from neuroscience, game design, new expectations of work and life (not work or life) and what it means to be a happy, productive member of society.

With the never-ending flood of data and increased connection, the new risk is cognitive overload, and the next shift will be to intelligent technology, which will sort through information and recommend informed decisions.

Every company, including yours, is now a technology company. To future-proof your company, you must first future-proof your mindset. We have all the shiny objects at our disposal. Instead of restricting access, encourage

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a culture of playing with all the toys to connect and do great work.

Resistance is futile...because whether you realize it or not, you've already been assimilated. Stop worrying about technology and start enjoying the benefits. ●

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## Learning: Curious Learners

When it comes to navigating the creation of a future-proof workplace, the skill of unlearning and relearning becomes even more paramount. The irony is that the industry of *learning* is perhaps the least prepared to meet the onslaught of the future-proof workplace. It's not just what we are learning that needs to change. We also need to transform the time it takes to acquire knowledge.

If our best and brightest are spending 12 years in secondary school and then feel pressure to spend eight more years in higher education, our ability to respond quickly to change is vastly reduced. The next iteration of graduate education will include not just timeline flexibility (the traditional degree course condensed into a shorter time frame) but also content flexibility to allow learners to pick a more a la carte approach to the content of their degrees.

The future of learning needs to be tipped on its head, a focus on how knowledge is going to be used, the context in which learning will be applied, that will determine the priority of what needs to be learned.

Scarcity drives value. Today, it's not information that's scarce, it's people who know how to use it at work. Learning agility and a healthy curiosity are going to be key skills for future success. The need is there for all of us to become increasingly flexible and to have an understanding across disciplines. There has to be a major change in how we capture, assess and value learning.

## Modernizing Talent Management

If lifelong learning and midcareer relearning is the new normal, then the question becomes, "Who owns the learning contract?" A one-size-fits-all or a one-size-only-fits-a-few approach is no longer appropriate. Everyone must be up to the task.

Not only is the time until moving to a new role shortening, but so is the patience level of millennials who are being asked to wait for advancement opportunities. We need a different way to think about readiness for the next big role or promotion.

In the future-proof workplace, investing in your employees will be the differentiator that makes you an employer of choice. Investing in yourself, proactively

learning and seeking new experiences will differentiate you from other potential candidates.

## Build a Learning Culture

The best way to build a learning culture is to hire the right people. Use behavioral interviewing, and look for clues in job candidates' previous experience. Learning has to move from being an event to being a process. Everyone needs to be a coach and mentor.

Knowledge management matters not only because of the ticking demographic time bomb but also because of the new flexible, tour-of-duty mindset of the millennials. People will be coming and going from your organization, and it would be naïve to think you can retain someone forever. Instead, build the processes that help everyone to share knowledge while they are part of your team.

Throw out the HR rule book. These rules certainly don't reflect an educated workforce or the needs of the future-proof workplace. Many rules actually limit learning, initiative and creative thinking.

In the 21st-century workplace, performance management experiences a workplace makeover. The individual focus of performance management and rewards is at odds with the team-based approach that is required going forward. Short-term goals and milestones ensure meaningful feedback and progress in bursts while aligning to the overarching purpose and culture.

Treat your employees for who they are — adults. Provide them with challenging goals and the resources to achieve them. Then, set them free to deliver the results. ●

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## Workspace: The Future-Proof Workspace

Office space is a major capital investment for most organizations, and it's an important one at that. Design your workspaces well, and you'll have a 21st-century environment where people *want* to be and in which they can thrive.

The office of the future has to be designed around the active worker, encouraging people to get up and move around. Cubicle or office walls may not exist in the future-proof workplace. If the goal is to drive collaboration and teamwork, then let's start pulling down the barriers that get in the way. In redesigning the office, many organizations are paying close attention to how employees move about the space, deliberately designing opportunities for chance encounters to occur in which new ideas can be formed.

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## Anytime, Anywhere

However, one of the most compelling transformations of the workplace is not just for those who use it in person, it's also designed to help remote employees feel connected to the mothership. Remote workers need to be provided with all the necessary technology, training and access to work from anywhere, connecting seamlessly to office systems back at the traditional brick-and-mortar headquarters.

Just because we can work anywhere and anytime doesn't mean we should. A law was recently passed in France that gives employees the "right to disconnect" from email, smart-phones, and other electronic devices once their working day has ended.

Designing the new workplace has to account for employee health and wellness, not just productivity. Providing opportunities for employees to reduce stress and be more aware of their health choices can only benefit them and, ultimately, the organization — a healthier bottom line for all!

The final piece in the workplace puzzle is the increased focus on social and environmental impact. When it comes to community involvement, many organizations are throwing open their doors and encouraging employees to get out and connect with their communities.

There are steps you can take that will transform your office environment into one that more closely supports the needs of your future businesses and your employees. Start by involving your employees and asking what kind of environment would support collaboration, innovation and team building. Ultimately, the future-proof workplace is one that allows all employees to be present (in person or virtually), to work together and successfully deliver results. ●

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## Future-Proof Workplace: Waves of Change

Change often feels threatening, and when our livelihoods are threatened, we can often react with a fight-or-flight response. Helping people navigate the waves of change is our role as leaders in the 21st century.

The first step is to take a hard look at your leadership results — both in leading yourself and leading others. Leaders must have a clear set of guiding values and purpose in the 21st century. The future will be built by leaders who build up others and have a heart to serve others.

Having an outside-in, customer view is essential. This perspective keeps a culture fresh, flexible and innovative. If you want to grow, you have to understand what your culture really is, not what you wish it to be.

Your company needs a clear purpose. When you define your purpose, as a company or an individual, you create a barometer to judge your decisions.

Relationships matter. You cannot be successful in business, or in life, unless you are successful in cultivating winning relationships. Inclusion is an attitude, a worldview, not a number. And we all fall short to some degree. Anything that hinders healthy collaboration hurts us all.

Ironically, the digital revolution is placing the human side of business at the forefront. Technology is the primary impetus for a major shift in how work gets done and careers evolve. Successful leaders are those who balance not just the *what* of technology but also the *how*, the *who* and the *where*.

Instead of thinking a vibrant company culture can be built with a new color of paint and fancy desk chairs, understand that a workspace is the reflection of culture.

## Work Matters

It's time to retire the whole work/life balance debate. They are forever connected. Work can become someplace where we want to be, not where we have to be — a place that helps us to thrive, contribute to the organization's purpose and leave a legacy that benefits all.

Future-proofing your company and career might be challenging at times, but it's possible. The biggest challenge is to recognize that the future of work is today. The sooner you begin, the further ahead you'll be. ●

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