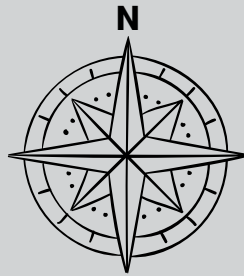


□ “A whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” □
– Aristotle



chapter 1
**PLUG INTO
GREAT CULTURE**

By Theresa M. Beeckman

Plug Into Great Culture

Culture is one of those concepts that means many different things to different people. Culture is omnipresent in that it exists within every team all the time. It also has the potential to be an extremely powerful force for good as well as bad, making the need for this workbook in the coaching world absolute.

This book may feel different from other books about culture. Before I share examples or ideas about what makes a good team culture, you will be introduced to the components that make up all team culture. This will allow you to identify the best parts of your culture for reinforcement, and the worst parts for renovation. Although coaches can and should strive for it, there is no perfect culture, only perfect aspirations.

We hope to bring to the coaching profession a greater understanding about what defines culture, and how coaches can intentionally create their team's culture in a way that reflects the timeless values that guide their lives.

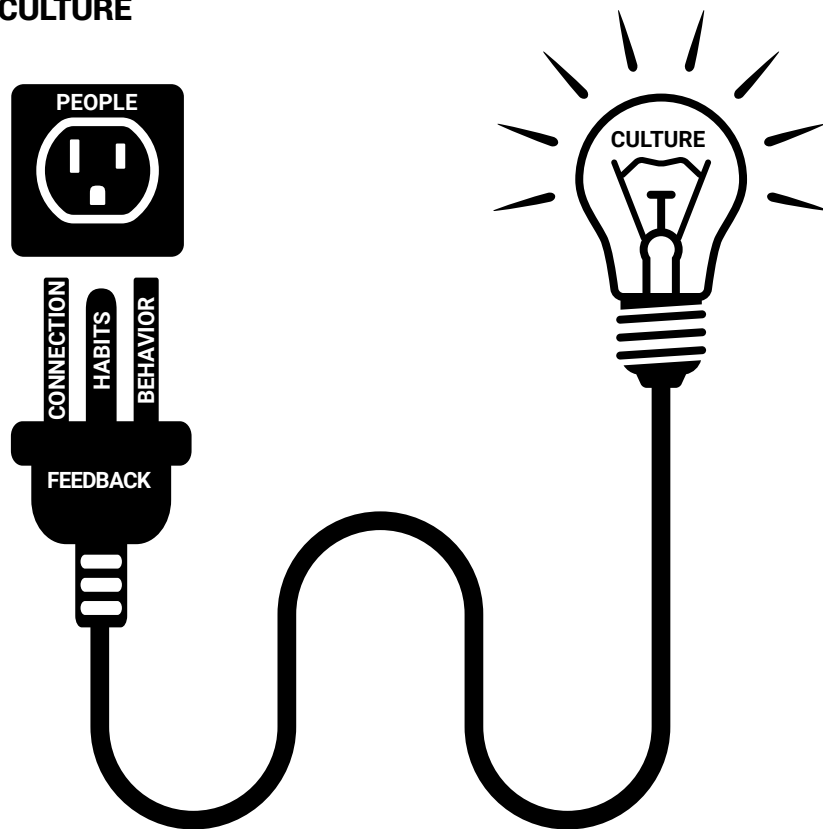
With that, here they are - the basic components of team culture:

- 1a. Connection among the people on the team
- 1b. Connection of those people to the team's purpose
2. Standards of behaviors that support those connections
3. Habits or norms that teams establish in how they connect and behave
4. Feedback loop among everyone involved

These components are universal and timeless. They exist within every team, whether the team's culture is good or bad, high performing or dismal.



A MODEL FOR CULTURE



People: These are all the stakeholders, that is anyone impacted by your program: student-athletes, coaching staff, other staff, administrators, club directors, fans, parents, and the local community. People hold the energy that culture plugs into, the energy that powers the team.



Connection: This is the 'hot' prong on the plug and it consists of two parts: connection with and between the people on and around your team, and connection among those people to the team's narrative or purpose.



Behaviors: This prong consists of the observable ways with which your people behave on and off the court, pool, or field of play. This includes behaviors such as how hard people work, whether they're on time or not, the decisions they make in social settings, their attention to detail within a drill, and whether they cut corners or run through the line as they push themselves. The standards of behaviors or norms a team develops determines the overall level of your team's success or failure.



Habits: In our brain's quest to conserve energy, we naturally create and reinforce habits in many aspects of our daily lives, often without our conscious awareness. The habit prong is the round grounding prong of the plug because, like that prong's function in an electrical device, habits can either cement your team's progress or its destruction. The habits our people form in the two main prongs - how they connect to each other and the team's purpose and how they behave - will determine a team's up or down hill trajectory.



Feedback: This makes up the casing that holds the plug and all three prongs together because giving and receiving constructive feedback is both necessary and important for the growth and evolution of a team's culture. How the people within the team give and receive feedback directly affects the stability and growth of a team.



Culture: This is the combined energy of the people that make up your team. Whether you work to influence that combined energy or not, culture exists whenever you have a team of people working toward an outcome.

Very often culture has a synergizing effect on teams. That is that *'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'* idea. Synergy is often understood to be a powerful positive force, but as you look at that simple definition again, exchange the word *greater* with *more*. Culture and its synergizing effect can amplify the good as well as the bad energies among your people. While it is true that when a team is synergizing in a positive way, $2 \times 2 = 1,000$; it is also true that 2×2 can = $-1,000$. Among the greatest rewards for working to build a high performing team culture is seeing your team achieve **positive** synergy. However, failing to be intentional about your culture leaves the direction of the synergy to chance.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Like the air we breathe, culture permeates every organization, whether that's a team, family, or business. Every single organization has a culture. Team culture impacts everything -- from player recruitment, to staff cohesiveness, to performance in competition, to the way your community interacts with your team.

Team culture is the blended energy of team members. This energy is revealed by how a team connects, behaves, and experiences feedback. This energy will either drive a team *toward* or *away* from their shared vision or purpose.

Just as air quality is difficult and complex to control, the same is true with culture. As I write this, the world is experiencing a global pandemic. There is no simple stop to the coronavirus' spread because the virus is airborne and easily transfers from person to person.

This pandemic is a tragedy that will forever change our collective futures. The pandemic is also a metaphor for culture. It illustrates how we are all connected, often in unseeable ways, and the energy of that connectedness can range from toxic to high-functioning.

This model adds value to the existing resources that coaches can call to mind for direction to help drive athletic coaching forward. If successful, this mental model will make creating team culture more accessible and help coaches sort through the myriad of meaningful decisions they need to make.

Again, whether coaches are aware of it, culture exists within every team, group, and family. In athletics, coaches set that culture. This is an irrefutable fact. What is up for consideration is *how* coaches will spend their energy by recognizing and intentionally choosing the types of influences within their program's culture.

ROW WHAT NOW?

Coaches often confuse loud or otherwise notorious cultures with what it means to have a team culture at all. Bill Belichick and his New England Patriot football team have a culture, just as much as PJ Fleck, the head football coach at the University of Minnesota does. However, since Belichick is a mostly quiet and understated guy, many people think he doesn't do this culture stuff. Nothing could be further from the truth. Belichick just presents his culture in his authentic way which doesn't garner as much attention from the media.

Meanwhile, PJ Fleck, the boisterous head football coach at the University of Minnesota presents his culture with the fanfare of a Blue Angels Air Show. Prior to joining the Golden Gophers program, he spent 4 years in his first head coaching role at Western Michigan University. While there, he led the Broncos from a 1-11 record in 2013, to 13-1 in 2016 with the lone loss coming to Big Ten Conference's Wisconsin at the Cotton Bowl. The close defeat was a very big deal for a team from the Mid-America Conference. At Minnesota, Fleck set out to implement the same culture with early success. The program went from a 2017 record of 5-7 to a 2019 11-2 season. The success on the field tells only a small part of the story. The larger story is how Fleck and his teams have achieved that success. It has been through the conduit of great culture.

I believe people observe pervasive and very intentional cultures like Fleck's and see those as being the only teams that have an existing culture at all. This leads many coaches to write off the idea of culture entirely. However, culture is not an all or nothing equation, where either culture exists intentionally or not at all. Whether culture is a spectacle like in PJ Fleck's program or quiet and subdued like Bill Belichick's, culture always exists.

Fleck sums up his culture in three words, "*Row the Boat*." Oars, which symbolize this Row the Boat culture, are found everywhere around the schools where he has coached. While one cannot easily see what an oar has to do with either a Bronco or a Gopher, the alignment with the mascot is not what's key to the message. He tirelessly defines and explains what "row the boat" means; uses the phrase whenever it applies, whether that's on or off the field; and places the symbol everywhere to remind the people on and around the team, the goal that everyone's working toward.

Woven into Fleck's culture is the steady and consistent drip of timeless messages that blend the uniqueness and energy of his culture with its high octane implementation. His message seems outlandish to casual observers. Yet, Fleck's definition of success is one every person in his program knows by heart. This definition is the same as legendary coach John Wooden's definition. "Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best you are capable of becoming."

Fleck's relentless dedication to the importance of language and specific definitions of important words provides a clear window through which the interested learner can grow.

The point is that one cannot take another coach's culture and implement it as their own. Therefore, this workbook's goal is to create a distinction between what makes up culture and examples of culture.

Mental models provide a framework which humans use to create their unique culture. These models are extremely important when creating the uncreated. Crafted over time, based on consistent and timeless principles and through shared experiences, a mental model can provide the framework for a group to perform as if they have one, shared mind. Or, as Daniel Coyle refers to it in his book, *The Culture Code*, "create a group mind," a mind he describes as then being able to "perform to the team's potential." (Coyle, 2019)

The clearer and better understood the model, the faster the team can adapt and move through issues they face.

POWER YOUR TEAM

Think of the three pronged plug for an average appliance. It's not always super convenient, it looks messy, and it's a trip hazard, but without this piece, nothing else in the appliance works. Imagine a microwave with no cord: the appliance is useless without connection. A friend told me about a time her family had inadvertently left their bunny home alone roaming the house. Upon their return, they discovered the bunny had chewed through every electrical cord within its reach. The bunny somehow survived unharmed, but the appliances were useless until the cords could be replaced. Those cords and plugs don't heat the oven or cool the refrigerator. Yet, without power or energy in the form of electricity, these appliances are just large metal boxes not fulfilling a purpose. For teams to run efficiently, they need similar conduits of energy.

The conduit of energy for teams is culture.

The outlet on the wall that we plug into contains electricity. In terms of teams, the outlet we plug into is the energy of our people.

Great culture, like electricity, can be tapped into by anyone. However, to tap into it, coaches must construct the plug and cord that will act as a conduit for energy. If there is failure to plug in, your team can still have a culture, just like the appliances still have dormant mechanical functions. The team will be fully operational, just like the appliance, but it just won't exert much in the way of power or growth. Additionally, as time goes on, it is possible for the energy flowing through the conduit to become unbalanced. Therefore, it is important to do routine diagnostics and maintenance. Just as an electrician carries with them at all times a voltage tester, coaches intentional about culture, create assessment and feedback tools that continuously check their culture's voltage.





Stop and Assess

What is the current state of your program's culture?

Is it open and safe for everyone to express their ideas and concerns or are unspoken rules promoting silence and secrecy?

Is the current culture designed by intent (active) or culture by consent (passive)?

Results aside, what is your team about?

Without referencing a written guidebook, what are your team values?

If someone were to watch your team practice or play, what types of things would they notice that your team values? (*i.e.: respect, hard work, enthusiasm, details, etc.*)

What things would your players and coaches have done during the above session to express those values?

We Teach What We Know

If connection and culture are such obvious drivers of high-performance programs, then why doesn't every coach make culture more of a focal point? That barrier is human nature as people tend to focus on what they know best.

For example, take a regular visit to the doctor's office. A doctor may ask their patients about the reason for their visit with a few follow up questions. They run diagnostics then give a treatment plan that focuses on drugs or devices. Yet if those doctors had been taught to listen a little while longer, they may find that this patient rarely eats, has little contact with friends or family, and feels little sense of community. In this case, the physician may be likely to prescribe an antidepressant versus suggesting a program that provides human contact like Meals on Wheels because they went to school to be a doctor, not a social worker. Even though there is overwhelming evidence that loneliness is the root cause for many ailments and human connection is the most effective therapy for treating many afflicted patients, doctors can sometimes only see what they know and mistreat the true ailment (Murthy, 2020). Coaches often make the exact same mistake with their players.

Coaches, who often lack formal training and licensing, are apt to focus on the coaching aspects they know best because that is what they are comfortable with and addressing culture can be quite uncomfortable.

But discomfort is where the growth takes place.

Even those coaches who played for the best coaches are likely to coach how they were coached, or more accurately, how they perceived they were coached. And since so much of great coaching is hidden in timing, tone, and subtle guidance, players often don't realize the true and full extent of their experience. This means that a coach who was once a successful athlete may unconsciously perpetuate the culture style of their own coaches. For example, if their coach had a winning record but that success was achieved through fear and intimidation, then this new coach may bring that baggage to bear in leading their program without even realizing it.

Since culture is often misunderstood and ill-defined, it's easier for coaches to focus on the things they have the greater competency to correct: players' vision on the field, positioning during play, or if their shoulders are forward when they're passing. These easy, simply defined skills are accessible to even the most inexperienced coaches and, therefore, take priority as correctable during practice and post game analysis. When stressed during a season, many coaches will call for two hours of fundamental training in a practice following a contest with poor passing or shooting because those skills are all they knew how to see

during the loss. Like the doctor who missed the bigger picture for their lonely patient, this coach is not looking at the components of culture -- connection, communication, habits, or the way they provide feedback -- as the path to finding their team's struggle. In fact, this coach often pours over stats sheets following tough games feeding their own confirmation bias about where team performance went wrong. This coach is only able to see the most obvious and observable aspects of the game, the physical skills.

To coaches who do understand the unseen powerful force that is culture, body language, bad assumptions between teammates and ineffective, mistrusting communication often reveal themselves to be the actual culprits of poor team performance. Those coaches will waste less time solving the wrong problems and are more likely to lead high trust environments. Bottom line, understanding culture so that you can be intentional about creating one of your choosing is harder, but a worthy pursuit.

CRAFT OF COACHING VS THE ART OF COACHING

As it is with all difficult things, the rewards to this undertaking are pretty high. In his book *Creativity, Inc.*, Ed Catmull, the Co-founder and President of Pixar Animation and Disney Animation wrote "Craft is what we are expected to know; art is the unexpected use of our craft." Just as it is in the production of the best animated movies, likewise, it is in athletic coaching. The craft is on display when a coach is coaching a quarterback's footwork as they drop back to pass, or when teaching a goalie to account for angles in soccer, or what the catcher should look for in a batter when calling a game. The craft includes those things that are required of coaches to know how to impart to players, the basic fundamental aspects of hanging the whistle around your neck.

The art in athletic coaching is the unseeable connection when a coach meshes the various aspects of the craft together so that the team can perform in synergistic and unexpected ways. It is when an environment is created that allows all athletes on the field to be so connected that they all just know where the ball is going to go, or how to collectively adapt their defense at just the right time, or which teammate needs to be reassured after a mistake.

Examples of Coaching Craft:

- Teaching the proper tackling fundamentals
- Breaking down an opponent on film
- Generating a scouting report
- Drawing up a play
- Teaching a pitcher to throw a rise ball
- Training players in the fundamentals of your sport (passing, throwing, kicking, etc.)
- Managing the clock

Examples of Coaching Art:

- Methods and timing of feedback to players as they train, learn and grow
- Clearly communicating the team vision
- Setting/upholding the standard for daily behavior
- Guiding the language used during play
- Developing leaders on a team
- Inspiring buy-in among team members during times of adversity
- Working in concert with the community/growing love for your team from the people around it

Meanwhile, creating synergistic culture for an athletic team requires artful application of the craft, and that application is often much more subtle and indirect. If a coach is a former player, these perceptions are included in the parts of coaching that you may not have directly observed or if directly observed, you may not have thought a lot about them at the time. The irony is that when the art of culture is understood and executed, the craft of coaching becomes exponentially easier as everyone in the program becomes active drivers of team solutions throughout the journey.

Take Away for Coaches:

- Every team has a culture.
- Coaches either choose to intentionally influence it or not.
- Culture affects every part of your team.
- There is a difference between the *craft* and *art* in coaching.
- Culture is a part of the *artful* side.

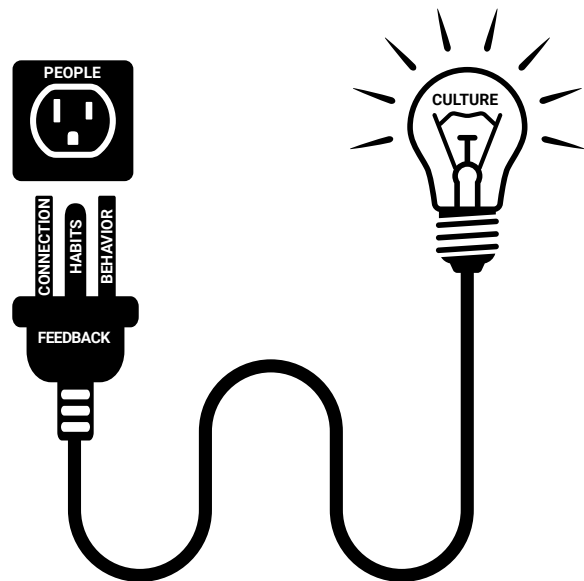


Notes

Creating a Mental Model

BUILDING THE CONDUIT

Let's dissect this model. Team culture can either electrify a team with positive, synergistic energy or electrocute it with toxicity and shorted-out signals. For coaches, managers and leaders to be intentional about culture, they must think of themselves as the conduit of that energy. Coach, you are responsible for building and maintaining the plug that transfers the energy of the people on and around your team to the combined source.



In the model, the outlet on the wall represents the people who make up your team. The energy for all team effort comes from the people that make up the team. A great leader whose foremost interest is building a healthy and synergistic culture must focus on harnessing the individual energy from all those people and transferring it into something that is larger and better than each of the parts. One of the most exciting things about teams, whether in athletics or business, is when a group outperforms what any individual could have accomplished on his/her own. When healthy culture is created, it can quite literally feel at times like electricity flowing through high performing cultures powering them to achieve unimagined heights.



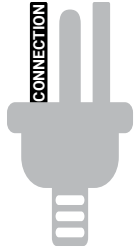
WORKSHEET

Whose energy does your culture depend on?

List the people who are in an around your program that will directly or indirectly influence the energy of your team's culture.

Coaches: (remember to add yourself, your energy flows to the total team, too)
Players:
Families of Players:
Support Staff:
Fans:
Others:

To carry the energy of your people to your combined team culture, the plug must contain a few components to work properly. The components are timeless but also customizable to each individual leader.



1. Connection – There are two parts that make up this prong. First it includes how the people on and around your team connect. It is how they communicate, resolve conflicts, trust each other, are vulnerable, feel safe to risk failure, share the good news and bad. It is all of that, plus everything else related to how human beings connect with one another. The second part of this prong is how connected people feel to your team’s story or purpose.

Describe some of the common practices your team uses when communicating (text, phone, Facetime, face to face meetings):
Describe some ways your team resolves conflict?
List things you would like to change about your team’s conflict resolution habits:
List things about your team’s conflict resolution habits that are helpful:
How is compassion expressed within your team?
How is accountability expressed within your team?

How do you and your staff send signals of psychological safety to your team?

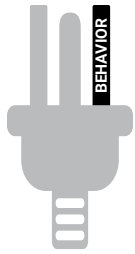
What are some things related to this prong that you would like to see improved in your culture?

Can you, your staff and your players explain your team's core values without the aid of written materials?

How deeply do the people on and around your team connect with and believe in your vision for your program?

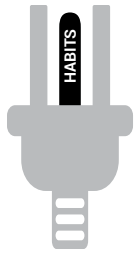
What is the 30 second elevator pitch of what your program stands for?





2. Behavior - This prong includes how the people in your program do things. It's not how they should do things; it is how they ACTUALLY do things. It's the normal behaviors that make up a team in the pursuit of a goal. This includes what time they show up for practice, how they wear their uniforms, what type of response to failure they exhibit, how they leave the visitor's locker room and team bus, etc. This also includes how they interact with the community, how they hustle up the court after a turnover, how they celebrate a win or cope with a loss. Simply put, it is how your team does things, on and off the field of play.

Examples of Behaviors that Reveal Culture	
Situation	Behavior
Giving up a fast break in basketball	Hustling so that everyone made an effort to be to at least ½ court by the time the opponent made it to the basket
First contact in volleyball is shanked	At least 2 players on the court hustle to attempt a save
Coach or teammate talking in huddle	Absence of side conversations, no one standing with closed off body language, and all are looking at the speaker
Conflict between teammates	Face to face, direct, in person communication to work toward resolution
Questions exist about directions given by coach	Players feel safe to ask clarifying questions
Preparation for practice	Players look for ways to help set up and tear down equipment
During time outs	Players and staff are engaged in team huddle, eyes aren't wandering toward the fans



3. Habits - The Grounding Prong is that third round prong of a plug. In this model, this prong represents the habits that teams practice related to the Connection and Behavior prongs. We are constantly deepening the grooves of habits and working to form new ones. As humans, our brains are designed to work as efficiently as possible, so habits are a necessary function of our daily lives. We are constantly deepening the grooves of habits and working to form new ones.

We develop habits in almost every area of our lives. Habits even exist in how we connect with others. Some habits are obvious, like a catchphrase or the way we insert a placeholder or verbal tic, such as “um” “ah” or “like.” Some habits are a little harder to readily recognize as they may be unconscious or unintentional; for example, the way we approach our work colleagues with either a win/win or win/lose posture or by becoming indirect during difficult conversations. All of these habits have been formed, can be reformed and all of them influence the way we connect with and work with others. Behavioral habits are a bit more obvious, but habits definitely affect almost every waking moment of our lives. For the best team culture, special care should be made to recognize and create or reinforce habits that reflect the culture you aspire for your team to have.



4. Feedback - Creating and maintaining culture is an iterative process, meaning that once the components are in place, they need to be observed, reviewed for what’s working and what’s not, and then adjusted so it is constantly improving. This is accomplished through the round part of the plug that represents the feedback loop that should be established and constantly practiced in order to diagnose the working status of your team’s culture. An open and honest feedback loop is vital to healthy cultures. In

fact, the surest and quickest way to identify a toxic culture is to identify the level of honesty and authenticity all team members can display with their head coach. The level of authenticity is often hard for coaches to identify. Authenticity happens when words match actions. Coaches can sabotage this aspect of their culture by doing things like stating the value of “open and honest two-way communication” then publicly ridiculing or reacting negatively to the messenger brave enough to raise a hard topic.

Indirect communication or the holding back of hard truths equals trouble with culture every time. This feedback part of culture is represented by a round object because once you start this process, it is never done; it never ends. This should be ongoing and constant with both formal and informal processes using a variety of approaches. A once a year or once a career approach will only scratch the surface and will leave coaches with after the fact answers that will only serve to help extinguish fires and confirm biases rather than aid in the building of positive cultural habits daily.

To tie this model together, think of it as a conduit of energy. When built and maintained effectively, this conduit serves the team culture by bringing the energy of the individual people on the team to the collective team. In our model the team is represented by a lightbulb.

**The more efficient and effective the conduit,
the brighter your culture will shine.**

When building your culture, authenticity reigns supreme. When coaches take the example of someone else's culture and try to execute it as their own, I think it is both a mistake and doomed to fail in the long term.

Some years ago, I knew of several teams that attempted to do exactly that with John Wooden's Pyramid of Success as they set out to insert his cultural framework as the construct for their team. In every case, it failed. Why? While Wooden's Pyramid is a great model for life, business and athletic teams and was genius enough to sustain maximum success for the UCLA Bruins in the 1960's and 1970's, it cannot serve as the complete cultural construct for any team led by someone other than John Wooden. Regardless of how complete or well structured: cultural constructs must be based on the *lived* values of the person leading the culture. Done in any other way and it will lead to inefficiency and distrust among the team because of inevitable inconsistent decisions made based on circumstance rather than principle. This will lead to a corroded plug and a toxic culture.

So, rather than spending a lot of time on examples of cultures, we instead are setting out to provide coaches with a model for building their own. A model that accounts for the timeless elements that exist within all team cultures while allowing for coaches to easily insert their own lived values. Spending time in workbook one of this series, ***Managing Yourself***, will take you through the necessary steps to explore your values if you have not already clarified them.

Coaching is a creative endeavor in that although there are clearly laid out guideposts for winning and losing, the road teams can choose to take to their desired destination vary wildly. Therefore, charting the best route for your team requires creativity. And, in creative endeavors, mental models are extraordinarily helpful. As humans, we all use mental models constantly to help us process the vast amount of information our brains must process. In addition to their required presence for daily life, mental models act, without our knowledge, to help us interpret the things around us. This includes the actions or intent of the people around us. That is crucial to understand when you are a part of a team. At times, mental models are built with wrong or outdated assumptions based on our best understanding. I suggest to you that the model that many athletic coaches have for team culture is one of those wrongly built mental models. In an attempt to update the model, we are presenting a straightforward one through which to understand team culture.

Although we are striving to make it as simple as possible, oftentimes simple is hard to accomplish. The story of Edward Everett and Abraham Lincoln is among the best illustrations of the power and difficulty of making complex ideas simple. Everett spoke for two hours prior to Lincoln's two-minute Gettysburg address. After both men spoke, legend has it that Everett said to Lincoln, "I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes." In other words, the genius of Lincoln's Gettysburg address lies in its simplicity. Coaches are often guilty of over-coaching, over-talking and over-complicating the simplest things either because of insecurity, lack of discipline, experience or knowledge. We are hoping this model will help you achieve the difficult goal of simplicity as you create your team's culture.

Remember, the top two goals in creating culture are that it is simple and authentic. Going into this workbook, it is important that you have taken the time to understand yourself as a leader. The resources in ***Workbook 1, Managing Yourself*** are important prerequisites to set oneself up to build and implement your own successful cultures.

The most important aspects of sustaining great culture are that it is simple and driven by the lived values of the leader.

Positive culture thrives when values are communicated and consistently reinforced. Because people communicate, sense, and learn differently, it follows that messages are best sent in various forms that touch all human senses and include all learning styles. Too often, leaders believe that their opening meetings with teams or that the handbook with the team's guidelines are enough in terms of messaging for culture. However, culture is ongoing and much like the electrical current that powers whatever machine it is connected to, it must continue to flow as long as the machine is expected to run. Rather

than only verbally sending signals, great leaders send them in a variety of modes so they can be consumed using as many of the senses as possible: touch, smell, eyesight, hearing, and taste. These signals deliver the values that act as your program's anchor points. Anchors make up the foundation and values become the lens through which all decisions made by coaches, their staff, and athletes. Being crystal clear and overly communicative about those things that we aspire to is important, but most important is that those values and anchor points are *authentically* you.

Among the challenges in creating this workbook are remaining vigilant about keeping examples of culture separate from a model for culture. It is the hope that this workbook takes you on a journey to create a team culture specific to your values, character and personality. What is right for PJ Fleck and his Golden Gophers may not be right for you. That said, there are common elements that exist within the cultures of great athletic teams. In this workbook, I will attempt to bring those forward for your adaptation in a simple, organized and usable way.

Before we go on, there is an important point I must make. Culture is created or lost with little tiny signals happening moment after moment stacking up over the course of time. These include little signals of joy, safety, trust, distrust, excellence, mediocrity, and every other adjective that applies to good and bad team and human behavior. This is why it is not possible to fake your way to great culture. Great culture is worthwhile work as it will absolutely help you create consistent and sustainable success on and off the field of play. However, if you're only embarking on this culture journey to get a few more wins, great culture will probably elude you.

THE POWER OF YOUR NARRATIVE

Early in my coaching career, I took part in a meeting with a player who had displayed some troubling behavior on the bench during a match. She was looking up toward her parents in the stands with eyerolls. She was unengaged during timeouts attempting to have side conversations during crucial coach instructions and was visibly closed off and upset during celebratory times when her counterpart teammate had success on the court. We were discussing this behavior and its underlying causes in this meeting. When these behaviors were brought up, the player protested, arguing that she knew for a fact that she wasn't guilty because, happy or not with her playing time, she had intentionally refrained from those things she was being called out for. While I don't doubt her effort, it was clear that there were moments that her intentionality failed her. My advice for her and for those coaches giving culture a half-hearted effort without really believing in it is: get your heart right.

In other words, tell yourself a new and updated narrative about this pursuit.

If you really do care deeply for your players, if you really do believe the best about them, if you really are interested in creating trusting connections, if you really are interested in giving your student-athletes both a joyous experience and one full of growth, then, read on. But if culture is this goal you have only because everyone says it's a good thing or if you sincerely only see it as a means to more wins on the scoreboard, the endeavor to establish a successful culture won't work. The story you tell yourself will sell you out in little moments, and your student-athletes will see through you and lose trust. There will still be a culture, just not one that you intentionally created.

Take Away for Coaches

- Culture is the conduit that combines the energy of your people to power the entire team.
- Culture is made up of four parts:
 - Connection (between people and of the people to the vision)
 - Behaviors
 - Habits
 - Feedback
- Every culture is influenced in either good or bad ways by every person that gives energy to the team.
- Sustaining truly great culture over time is impossible for those coaches who see culture building as only a means to the end of winning more games.



FINDING JOY

As we get ready to dive into the various aspects of what makes up culture, I need to point out an often-misunderstood concept that affects the execution of high functioning culture. It is a misunderstanding that great culture means that your team is completely happy and having fun all of the time. Experts on culture agree that a certain amount of joy is an essential requirement for successful cultures to flourish. Because this is sometimes misinterpreted by coaches to mean goofy or fun, it is imperative that we take a moment to unpack what joy means in this context.

For the sake of culture, especially culture on athletic teams, let's define joy in two parts. It is one part happy-happy-fun-joy. It's the knowing laughter among teammates with shared experiences and creating surprise and wonder and mixing it in during the grind of training. It is the goofy moments that are both planned and spontaneous among players and coaches. There is another aspect of joy brought about by our commitment to growth and challenging ourselves. Players must experience constant growth and progress and feel challenged regularly along the way. Both parts of joy must exist for your people and thus your culture in the process of reaching the team's full potential.

Further, great culture doesn't come by way of diminishing standards. Often coaches equate building great culture and psychologically safe environments with lowering team standards. Quite the contrary, the more trusting and safe the environment and the deeper the connections, the more you can demand of your team, and them of each other, in pursuit of greatness.

The United States National Women's Volleyball team experienced this exact recalibration after an intentional culture shift took place following the London Olympics in 2012. As the next squad began, a new culture was established. A culture that put an emphasis on building human connections in order to drive performance. Coach Karch Kiraly worked closely in conjunction with sports psychologist Michael Gervais to construct and establish the most healthy and high performing culture possible. Toxic players who refused to buy in were dropped from the program completely.

The results were mixed that first year. On one hand, the players felt safe to take risks and better about the daily environment. On the other hand, they found that as a team, they had sometimes lost their competitive edge. The edge of growth that leads to achievement is elusive at times, especially when a premium has been put on relationships. In the balance of task and relationship, it is important to remember that if you focus too much on the task at hand, the relationships will suffer, but that if your concern is too heavily focused on relationships, the task will suffer. High performing

athletic team cultures must account for and balance both. After all, what purpose does great team culture have if it fails to drive performance?

Daniel Coyle addressed this in his book *The Culture Code*, “One misconception about highly successful cultures is that they are happy, lighthearted places. This is mostly not the case. They are energized and engaged, but at their core their members are oriented less around achieving happiness than around solving hard problems together.” Coaches who think culture is just all about fun, miss an important ingredient, one essential to their team finding its edge in competition.

The 6 Steps of Building and Maintaining High Performing Team Culture

In upcoming chapters, we will dive into this model, giving you resources and tools to help create and maintain a highly successful, challenge seeking, problem solving culture. Before we close this chapter, let me leave you with six steps you can take to intentionally build a team culture that will steadily move in the direction of your goals.

The following steps are preceded by the idea that you, as the team’s leader, have a vision for how you will lead your team. No one else is qualified to tell you what your culture should look and feel like, but there are timeless truths and foundational elements you must consider as you build your culture so that it will stand through the tests and storms along the way. Being clear on your coaching philosophy will allow you clarity as you set out to create the best culture possible. You will find all the help you need with that in the first workbook of this series ***Managing Yourself***.



The six steps below are both circular and linear in nature. They are linear in that they usually follow a sequence and circular in the sense that they are ongoing, and that each step needs maintenance. In other words, if you're doing culture right, it is never done. Taking these steps in order makes it easier to connect your players to the team vision if you have first connected with them as people, just as it's more effective to activate high standards of behavior if they have already been connected to the driving purpose of the team. So, while all the steps will exist simultaneously and be ongoing, there is some order that must be considered as well.

<p>1. Connect with the people. Connect with the people in and around your program starting with those closest first and working outward (administration, players, players' families, support staff, students, donors, community). Build Trust.</p> <p><u>Thoughts and Ideas:</u></p>
<p>2. Connect the people with the vision. Where is this team going? Paint the picture. Hit all the senses. Call on and inspire the people in the program to share the story. Build Trust.</p> <p><u>Thoughts and Ideas:</u></p>
<p>3. Set and keep standards. Define and create habits of connection and behavior that make the team better. As you reach milestones, create new, higher goals to reach for. Catch and celebrate good behavior. Build Trust.</p> <p><u>Thoughts and Ideas:</u></p>
<p>4. Gather and give feedback. Build Trust.</p> <p><u>Thoughts and Ideas:</u></p>
<p>5. Evaluate everything. Including and especially trust.</p> <p><u>Thoughts and Ideas:</u></p>
<p>6. Rinse and Repeat. Repair trust.</p> <p><u>Thoughts and Ideas:</u></p>

Regardless of the culture, every step along the way includes a trust building component. Teams can be successful on the scoreboard without trust, but it is a high wire act that relies on a lot of luck. Teams at all levels of play most known for consistent excellence are also teams with high trust connections, behaviors, habits, and feedback loops.

What's more, the head coach must be a willing driver of a team's culture and trust or it will ultimately fail. Consultants and performance coaches can assist leaders in identifying patterns of culture disruption that may appear as blind spots. They can help to build bridges of connection, and they can help in the evaluation of standards and behaviors important to high performing cultures. However, they cannot be stand-ins for coaches in any of the six steps. There is much power in an outside voice, but no one can ever be a proxy for good leadership or trust.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT HABIT

In this chapter, a model for culture was outlined either to help build a new culture or work to pinpoint your current culture's positive and negative aspects. Many coaches avoid this assessment altogether because they are simply unable to put a finger on the source of the strengths or weaknesses of team culture. We hope you will apply the model regularly to bring about awareness and clarity so you can harness the power of culture.

Moving forward, we will unpack each of the elements that comprise the plug's individual components in their own chapters. The first, most complex, and potentially most powerful of the elements is the connection prong. For this 'hot' prong, there are four chapters to cover:

- Connection among people
- Creating a connecting environment
- Creating that connection with diversity, inclusion and equity in mind
- Connecting the people to the team's vision, or purpose

Following the connection chapters, we will present chapters on each of the plug's remaining components:

- Behaviors
- Feedback Loop

Finally we will pull it all together with the final chapter.

The grounding prong known in the model as the habits prong does not have its own chapter. This is intentional so as to underscore the idea that this aspect of culture is woven into every other part. Our habits truly "ground" us, as the model suggests.

The science of habit reveals that our brains are wired to work as efficiently as possible in all that we do. For instance, as we learn to drive a car, it becomes more and more automatic up to the point we barely think about the actions needed in order to successfully get around town. That is our brain's way of conserving energy for the other, new and complex operations that come along during the course of a day.

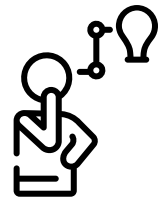
Habits serve to automate so many of our daily actions that, just like with team culture they can be either very good or very bad for our well being. Getting a hold of and activating good habits concerning how your team connects, behaves and gives and receives feedback is a sure-fire way to make the complex process of building and maintaining high performing team culture more consistent and deeply ingrained from year to year.

Take Away for Coaches

- Trust is the thread that binds all of culture together.
- Joy is part of good culture, but it is more than goofy, happy joy; consistent growth must exist, too.
- If you are doing culture right, it is never done.
- Outside voices are often helpful in the establishment and maintenance of team culture but cannot be substitutes for the coach's voice.



Chapter Reflection and Commitments



List your 3 biggest takeaways from this chapter:
1. 2. 3.
What resonated strongly for you from this chapter and why?
Think about a coach you played for or currently coach against. Can you identify various parts of their culture that fit into the model?
List some negative habits that currently exist within your team in each of the plug's components that you'd like to replace:
Connection among people (coaches/players, coaches/coaches, players/players): Connecting people to the team's purpose: Behaviors (on and off the court/field/pool/etc): Giving and receiving of feedback:
List some positive habits that currently exist within your team in each of the plug's components that you'd like to reinforce
Connection among people (coaches/players, coaches/coaches, players/players): Connecting people to the team's purpose: Behaviors (on and off the court/field/pool/etc): Giving and receiving of feedback: