

THE DEEPLY HUMAN WORKPLACE



Tap into What People Need,
Build Commitment on Your Teams, and
Create a Workplace that Employees Love

SAL SILVESTER

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5.12 Solutions Consulting Group

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Here's What's Inside...

Introduction.....1

Preface

The Case for a Deeply Human Workplace.....5

Chapter One

Connection with People..... 13

Chapter Two

Certainty As a Result of Safety..... 29

Chapter Three

Contributions are Valued..... 46

Chapter Four

Clarity of the What and How 59

Chapter Five

Challenge and Growth 77

Chapter Six

Community Impact..... 91

Summary

The Deeply Human Workplace 103

6 C's Summary 107

Additional Resources 116

About the Author Sal Silvester 117

Introduction

My vision for the workplace of the future is deeply human. What is a deeply human workplace? To me, it's a place where people can bring their whole selves to work. It's a place where people feel connected and feel safe to take an interpersonal risk by expressing a new idea or challenging the status quo. It's a place where people find their true purpose and can make a positive difference. It's a place where people feel valued both emotionally and financially.

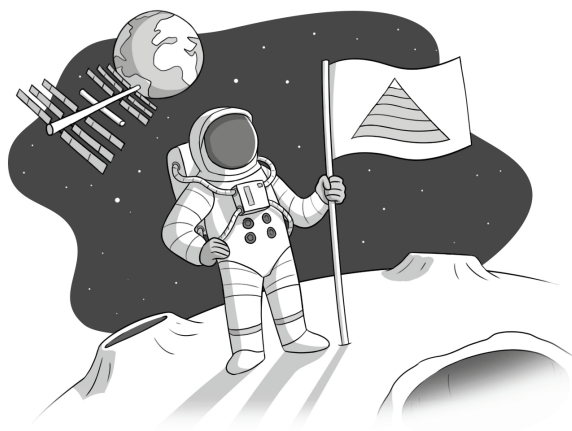
This vision has turned into my mission:

Help organizations create a healthy, aligned, and more deeply human workplace.

I believe that we can put humanity back into our workplace by recognizing that people have deeply rooted human needs. When organizational leaders create an environment that meets most of those needs, people will

demonstrate unparalleled levels of engagement, commitment, and contribution.

When people feel they can “just be real,” when they can bring their full human selves to work every day, they are more likely to connect with their colleagues. The result? A workplace full of people who trust, collaborate, and work together toward a common set of goals.



Purpose and Goals of this Book

In our work coaching and training tens of thousands of leaders globally, I’ve noticed there’s an underlying pattern among most people at work. Regardless of gender, demographics, or geography, I have observed that people have a common set of needs. If we

can understand and tap into those needs, we can create a healthier, aligned, trusting, committed, productive, and human workplace.

The purpose of this short book is to share a proven model — the 6 Cs of Human *Workplace* Needs — that we have tested with global clients to give you a pathway for creating a healthier, aligned, and deeply human workplace.

I hope that after reading this book, you will be able to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of what is important to you personally and professionally.
- Utilize a framework to help teams focus on both results and relationships to create a healthy team environment.
- Assess your organizational culture so that you can implement tangible steps to create a deeply human workplace that people love.

You Can Expect

I am confident that a workplace that embraces humanity will be prepared for the future.

- People will more readily be able to address the unprecedented pace of change and unpredictability.
- People will take the necessary risks to experiment and develop mechanisms that enable organizations to thrive in a complex environment.
- Your organization will be poised to address employees' changing attitudes and expectations in the post-pandemic era.

This book is packed with ideas, strategies, and tips. So, let's jump right in!

To Your Team's Success,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sal". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'S' and a trailing flourish.

Preface

The Case for a Deeply Human Workplace

The Pace of Change and Complexity

Today's pace of change is the slowest you and I will experience for the remainder of our careers.

Business is increasingly unpredictable. There is no secret playbook.

In the past, we've looked to previous solutions or leveraged experts who knew how to handle a situation. In today's complex world, the answers to many of our questions do not exist. There are no experts who have been through what we are currently experiencing.

Take, for example, the transition out of the COVID pandemic and into the post-pandemic work environment. No one in recent history has been through this transition, and we can only guess how it might play out.

A more human workplace will help enable people to deal with the unpredictability of our workplace by creating a positive environment where people feel connected and support each other through uncertainty.

The Impact of Unpredictability

If organizations, teams, or individual leaders aren't able to adapt when faced with unpredictability, they will not succeed in work.

The good news is that the single most unique characteristic that has defined the human race and enabled us to survive over time as a species has been our ability to adapt.

A more human workplace will help support our natural adaptability.

A Shift in Thinking is Needed

To succeed, leaders and teams must shift their thinking.

Instead of looking for solutions that don't exist, we must experiment, learn from those

experiments, and then put the right solutions in place that reflect what we've learned.

It's an iterative approach, where the process of experimentation, learning, and adapting is not just one-and-done but circular and continuous.

A more human workplace will enable the risk-taking required to experiment more as people will feel safer challenging the status quo and sharing different opinions and ideas.

From Hierarchal to Inclusive

To enable this shift in thinking and accelerate our ability to adapt, our organizations will have to step away from hierarchal approaches to leadership where a few leaders at the top are relied on to make the significant decisions.

It's a shift away from a controlling style of leadership where those central people exert power over others, instead of sharing power with others, to drive everything that happens in the business.

A more human workplace will help create a more inclusive environment where differences

are appreciated, people will know their contributions matter, and power will be shared with others.

Stop Missing the Opportunities

With the increasing complexity and unpredictability of our world today, we must draw upon other people's insights, creativity, and innovative ideas. That means a lot of dialogue and collaboration. It means constructive debate. It means being open to what other people have to say, especially when their point of view is different.

The absence of robust dialogue and debate inevitably leads to missed opportunities.

A more human workplace will help equip people to engage in the conversations that matter most because behavioral norms that guide those conversations will be clear.

Shifting Attitudes and Expectations

As organizations emerge in the post-pandemic era, leaders need to think differently about

engaging their workforce. Employees' attitudes and expectations about work have changed, and they will be counting on their leaders' attitudes and expectations to have changed as well.

Before the pandemic, most people were used to going into the office every day. It was routine. During the pandemic, workers experienced new levels of flexibility when it came to where and when they worked. Home and work have become much more integrated.

People spent time during the workday helping their kids with online learning or taking care of older adults. They weren't shy about taking time to focus on their health and well-being. We watched each other's dogs, cats, and kids in the background of our daily video calls. It's truly been a very human experience.

People have now realized that they can be at work and home at the same time—while maintaining the same, or even higher, productivity levels.

The change in perspective that occurred with people during COVID resulted in a personal and professional shift in priorities.

A more human workplace will help organizations address employees' changing attitudes and expectations of their future by enabling people to grow and connect their work to a meaningful purpose.

The Human *Workplace* Needs Model

When psychologist Abraham Maslow introduced his concept of “the hierarchy of needs” in 1943, it changed how we viewed and appreciated human growth and motivation. In short, once you square away food, water, warmth, and rest, higher-level needs can follow — all the way up the pyramid to self-actualization.

I propose that every person has a core set of hierarchical needs in the workplace to perform well and achieve maximum success for themselves and their organization.



The 6 Cs of Human *Workplace* Needs model provides a roadmap toward creating a deeply human workplace. Such a workplace is one where everyone can ignite their potential. The model is a game-changer for organizational life and will fundamentally change the world of business when leaders embrace the idea of humanity in their organization's culture.

The first four C's in the model represent the Core human needs – needs that everyone has. They include:

- Connection with people
- Certainty as a result of safety

- Contributions are valued
- Clarity of the *what* and *how*

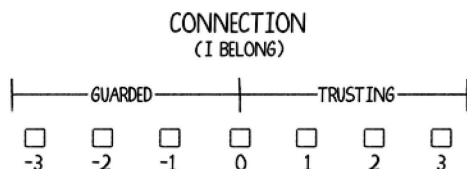
The last two needs are the needs of Fulfillment. They are higher-level needs that, when met, result in remarkable levels of engagement and fulfillment. Those needs include:

- Challenge and growth
- Community impact

Let's explore each level of the model.

Chapter One

Connection with People



An 8-person leadership team from a global resources company had the challenging role of de-merging two major mining operations from the parent company. As a result, the ripple effect would impact 2,000 employees in addition to the larger community of suppliers, vendors, local retail store owners, and an unknown number of families.

On top of it all, neither the parent company nor the purchasing company could guarantee jobs for these seasoned executives after the completion of the sale.

Jim, the General Manager, had the foresight and vision to build the strongest leadership team that he could, knowing that the transaction

would be a two-year journey. So, as part of his overall plan, he recruited my consulting firm to help. Over those two years, we spent intentional time each month developing and enhancing relationships among the team members. During that time, the leaders made the consequential decisions that mattered most for people, processes, and the business.

But it wasn't easy.

There were intense debates, which occasionally crossed the line from direct and respectful to slightly ugly and a bit unprofessional. There were shared moments of anxiety and deep uncertainty. And there was a fear that the buyer wouldn't place the safety of their employees as the number one priority in the business.

But through all those challenges, this team persevered. They took care of their people. They established a next-level leadership group that could steer the business into the future. And when conversations grew tense, they were always able to reestablish their relationships.

To this day, this was the strongest leadership team that I have had the privilege to work with.

The shared experience and deep bond have kept us all connected.

Connection is the Foundation

Connection is the first human workplace need. It is absolutely core and central to our humanity.

Connection is about the need to belong and feel loved. While that may sound “soft” in the corporate workplace, it is anything but soft! The mining company leadership team knew this.

They knew that when people feel like they belong, they trust others, take more risks in conversation, engage in productive conflict, and move faster to decisions with less drama and politics.

Like members of that mining leadership team, when team members feel a deep connection, they become more open to operating from a place of positive intent.

And when people are connected, they speak up when speaking up matters most.

Connection is at the base of our 6 Cs of the Human *Workplace* Needs model because, in longitudinal studies, the quality of our social connections is the primary predictor of long-term physical and mental health and happinessⁱ.

The Foundation for Agility

With the increasing complexity in today's work environment, connection becomes the foundation for agility and speed.

When people feel connected, they're much more likely to take risks, tell you the truth, and engage in the meaningful conversations that matter most for the business.

And they'll do it faster.

Social Media Is Not Connection

Today, our society promotes the idea of connectedness through the highlight reels of social media and technology. However, just because people are "linked" or "friends" or "followed" doesn't mean they *feel* a connection. Perhaps counterintuitively, studies have shown

that tweets, posts, likes, and images of the seemingly perfect lives of others often leave viewers feeling inadequate and unfulfilled. Real connection in the workplace goes much deeper, where human beings find meaningful relationships with their manager and colleagues.

Connection in the Post-Pandemic Environment

Without a doubt, COVID resulted in an enormous amount of suffering for many people. It will be a historical marker in our lives.

Intertwined with that pain and suffering, there were so many glimmers of people connecting on a more human level.

I had the opportunity to interact with senior and executive leaders outside the veil of their corporate boardrooms and fancy offices. We met each other's children, spouses, and partners in ways we may not have before. And now, when Charlie the cat, who I met on a previous Zoom call, needs to go to her veterinary appointment, I may respond with more empathy and understanding.

COVID has given us an opening to simply be more human.

Watch Out for Efficiency

Before COVID-19, Gallup published a study stating that 67% of employees say they are sometimes, very often, or always burned out at work.ⁱⁱ I believe that the hyper productivity-focused virtual world—where people go from video meeting to video meeting and working days and nights without boundaries—comes at a cost to genuine connection, resulting in even more people feeling overwhelmed, stressed and burned out.

We must find ways to connect informally without the proverbial water cooler conversations and accidental hallway collisions.

Our Most Common Fear

The need for connection is universal. And like all the other human workplace needs, everyone seeks to get this need met in either healthy or unhealthy ways. So as leaders and team members, it's essential to understand the fear

that may drive behavior behind each need so that together we can create more constructive ways to get these needs met at work.

There are several fears related to the connections that drive human behavior in the workplace. They show up differently for different people, depending on life experiences and personality.

Like all other fears, they play out as voices inside our heads. “Am I being taken advantage of?”, “Does she like me?” “Am I good enough?”

These narratives usually boil down to the deepest and most common fear we all share as human beings. It is the fear of not feeling like we belong or are loved.

It’s a fear that stems from an evolutionary function. Our millions of years old brains are wired to enable us to survive as a species. As a result, our brains have taught us that the consequences of ignoring positive information are much less severe than the consequences of ignoring negative or threatening information.

When we detect a threat, our fight-flight-or-freeze response kicks in, and we might push people away or remain guarded or protective in relationships.

When team members operate out of fear, ineffectiveness in conflict is the norm, defensiveness and blame are commonplace, and turf wars and turnover are inevitable.

But when we build connections in the workplace, people live less from fear and more from a place of expansiveness.





How to Build Connection on Your Team

Team Exercise #1: Share Your Top 2 Human Workplace Needs

One exercise that we at 5.12 Solutions Consulting Group encourage teams to do is identify their top two human workplace needs and then share those needs publicly with their team members so that team members can learn how to adapt to each other, and people can be more connected.

- What are your top two needs?
- What do those needs mean for you?
- What would your manager have to do for you to get those needs met?
- What would others have to do for you to get those needs met?

Team Exercise #2: Top and Bottom 5%

I first observed this exercise while working with one of the healthiest executive teams I've seen over more than 20 years as an executive coach. This team started their weekly operational meetings by sharing their top 5% of experiences

currently impacting their lives and the bottom 5% of their experiences. This deeply vulnerable exercise gave each person a greater sense of connection and a deeper level of empathy for each other because they knew more about each other's lives than most executive team members in our workplace today.

Team Exercise #3: Create a Shared Experience

The third exercise isn't much of an exercise at all. It's simply spending informal time together with colleagues. Something special happens between human beings when there isn't an agenda or a never-ending lineup of calls and meetings.

How Leaders Create an Environment of Connection

Creating an environment of connection requires leaders to shift their mindset, skillset, and habits.

Mindset

The first shift leaders must make to build a connection in the workplace is to change their thinking and realize that people seek love and belonging — in both personal and professional settings.

Leaders also must see that both results and relationships are essential to optimize their potential fully and the potential of their people.

Skillset

Leaders who create connection in the workplace have the people skills to build trust in their teams. They create an environment of open communication in meetings, 1-1s, and other settings. They know how to build vulnerability-based trust, where people can ask for help, offer help and admit mistakes without fear of being *disconnected* from others.

Connection Habits

A leader's habits demonstrate their mindset and skillset. Some examples of practices that build connection include:

- Creating space for people to spend time together consistently
- Making time for regular 1-1s, goal reviews, and coaching
- Demonstrating genuine interest and care in people
- Rewarding team members when they model interest and respect for others
- Developing team norms that bring out the best in people
- Setting behavioral expectations that align with clearly defined norms and values
- Organizing events outside of work where people can just be human
- Admitting their mistakes
- Giving team members a voice

Build Connection Yourself

You don't have to rely on others to build connection. Instead, you are empowered to take steps to get this need met in your own life.

First of all, tap into your narratives and notice the stories you might be telling yourself. For example, how are your fears related to love and belonging impacting your behavior? Do you spend time ruminating about what others think of you? Are you overly concerned about damaging relationships and, as a result, avoid important conversations?

Recognize that your fear of vulnerability might actually be getting in the way of having deeper and more meaningful relationships with people at work and home.

Secondly, take some small but meaningful steps to build connections with others.

- Find more unexpected opportunities to bump into people in the hallways or the proverbial water cooler. Or, in a virtual environment, reach out with an informal phone call to just check-in.
- Conduct meetings while taking a walk outside, either in person or virtually while the other person is on the phone.
- Go to lunch with team members once a week.

- Ensure the team has regular (and productive) meetings.
- Give yourself and others permission to disagree.
- Build team norms.
- Express gratitude.

Reflections for Your Team

Do your team members feel genuinely connected, especially when working remotely?

Assess your organizational environment here. For example, on a scale of 1 through 5, where 5 represents “almost always” and 1 represents “almost never”, how would you rate the culture of connection in your organization?

1. I feel like my team members genuinely care about me.
2. My team members give me the benefit of the doubt.
3. We have a positive climate that supports people in doing their best work.
4. Team members invite input from others about their area of the business.



About the Author Sal Silvester

Sal Silvester is the founder and president of 5.12 Solutions Consulting Group, a coaching, consulting, and training organization based in Boulder, Colorado. For more than 20 years, Sal and his colleagues have supported leaders and teams through grounded, real-world practices and techniques. Their best-in-class team development, executive coaching, and leadership development programs are centered around creating a more healthy, aligned, and human workplace.

Sal is a blogger, podcast host, keynote speaker, and author of three other books:

- *Stakeholder Centered Coaching: Maximizing Your Impact as a Coach* (with Marshall Goldsmith)
- *Ignite! The 4 Essential Rules for Emerging Leaders*
- *Unite! The 4 Mindset Shifts for Senior Leaders*