

**Jacob Morgan** 00:00

vulnerability and leadership, which will come out mid next year. So that's one of the things I wanted to talk to you about. I know that was probably like 20% of your book was on that, which I found very interesting. Yeah. But it's been good. You know, releasing a book during the pandemic is challenging, for sure. But now that the pandemic is over, and events are starting to pick back up, it's it's been it's been great. Yeah, good complaints. Do you have any questions that I can answer for you? Before we start?

**Daniel Coyle** 00:27

Tell me about what your audience struggles with the most?

**Jacob Morgan** 00:30

Well, so the podcast is called leading the future of work. And as you can imagine, they're very interested in both the leadership concept and just the workplace concept and how things are changing in culture is, of course, a big theme for a lot of people. How do we create a culture where people want to be there are challenges to culture? What is culture even? So people struggle with all sorts of stuff around that?

**Daniel Coyle** 00:53

They do? Yeah, yeah. Great. And then I might show me picturing people roughly, in their 30s. Managers, leaders, like where did they afford it? How would you want it qualitatively? Describe them?

**Jacob Morgan** 01:06

It's a big mix. I mean, I get some senior level executives who listen to the show, but there's also a fair amount of entry level employees and mid level leaders. So I'd say business professionals across all different geographies, seniority levels, and industries. Great. Love it. That's part of what makes it challenging. Yeah, I'll bet I'll bet. And I'll do a much longer intro later. But for now, I'll say Daniel Coyle, a best selling author of the culture code, the secrets of highly successful groups. And then when I do like, the longer intro, I'll have all your other books and stuff like that in there.

**Daniel Coyle** 01:37

That's awesome. Yeah, this culture playbook that just came out and other publisher would, would want me to tell you that, you know, to be sure to mention,

**Jacob Morgan** 01:43

okay, when did that one come out? Two weeks

**Daniel Coyle** 01:45

ago? May 3, okay, and may 3, so it's really a practical guide. It's an extension to the culture code.

**Jacob Morgan** 01:53

The culture playbook. Oh, yeah. Okay, cool. All right. So I'll make a note of that. I'll mention that right now in the intro to fish record on my camera there. And then let's see anything else? I'll just jump right in, if that works, how long you want to go for? So all the episodes are around 60 minutes? Yeah. Okay.

It won't feel like it. I promise. I just did one right before yours. And he's like, man that went by so fast. Oh, super cool. It always goes by quickly. Alright, I'll good for me to jump in. Let's do it. All right. Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of leading the future of work. My guest today is Daniel Coyle. He's the mega mega best selling author. It's one of those days, mega Best Selling Author of the culture code, the secrets of highly successful groups, and also the author of a brand new book, which came out just a couple of weeks ago called the culture playbook. Daniel, thank you for joining me.

**Daniel Coyle** 02:47

Thanks for having me, Jacob. It's really a delight to be here with you.

**Jacob Morgan** 02:50

Yes, that's what happens when you do too many interviews in one day, and coffee wears off, you forget how to speak?

**Daniel Coyle** 02:57

Well, vulnerability is really important. You know, I so you got to start with that. Right? You couldn't do anything better than to mispronounce something. Right.

**Jacob Morgan** 03:04

Exactly, exactly. So before we jump into the book, why don't we get started with just a little bit of background information about you? I mean, what was it like to be raised in Alaska and growing up there? And how did you get involved with all things culture,

**Daniel Coyle** 03:18

it was a gift. You know, the every writer sort of dreams of having an outside point of view, like the writing as an outsider seeing as an outsider, and that's what Alaskans are in a very deep bone level. It is, you know, so we'd go to visit my grandparents in Illinois, Missouri, and it was like coming into a new planet and all these strange customs. And just the idea of a business seems sort of strange to me. So we're the idea of professional sports or something like that's all of these things. I didn't grow up with them. They were they're really different and, and allowed me to kind of explore them. And I guess, I got in the sort of performance I was born into right between two brothers with three of us born within about 25 months. And so really early on learned the had a deep curiosity about how do I compete? And how do I get a little faster, better, smarter, whatever. And that just almost went to med school took this turn in journalism, and just developed this career, I guess, of visiting people who are really good at stuff people in groups and seeing what makes them tick. Like that's it, you know, just sort of everything looks like magic from a distance. You know, Mozart looks like magic from a distance Michael Jordan looks like magic from a distance all great performing groups look like magic from a distance. But you know, there's no such thing as magic. There's actually a thing there. There's processes there systems, there's habits, there's patterns, and exploring those patterns. I just find endlessly mysterious, like I can't seem to stop.

**Jacob Morgan** 04:53

And then I guess the one thing that you mentioned, you don't really have much darkness in Alaska. I spent the two weeks or many, many years ago, and I was just blown away by the fact that like three

o'clock in the afternoon, you know, during some seasons actually is just as bright is like 11 o'clock at night and you have blackout curtains. It was crazy.

**Daniel Coyle** 05:13

Yeah, yeah. There's no reason to stop ever, right? Like you want to do something? Let's Let's go do it. Why not? Why it's so

**Jacob Morgan** 05:20

good climate for writing, I guess because you never need to sleep.

**Daniel Coyle** 05:23

It's true. It's my editor would agree with that. Yeah. 100%. Just there's no excuse not to do anything. Just keep going.

**Jacob Morgan** 05:29

Yeah. And so how did you get involved with writing this book? Like, at what point did you realize this is the book that I want to write? And what was the research that went into creating it?

**Daniel Coyle** 05:38

Well, you know, I had written about performance in the past. And I had focused on individual performance, I wrote a book called The Talent Code, which is about individual performers. And I visited these hotbeds where, like you just statistically impossible numbers of great performers like this little tennis club in Russia that produced more top 20 women in the entire United States out of one club. So what's going on there, so that book brought me into these spaces. And when you really zoom out, like, we've all had this experience, right? You walk into a certain school, and man, things feel cool here, if things feel different, like people are lit up, or you walk into a business, or you walk into a family, or a locker room, or sports locker room, and just like, man, there's a vibe, right? We have all this language to think about and talk about it. Like, they have great chemistry, right? It's a great vibe. And, you know, we have a great culture and and that's always been this sort of deep mystery, I think in our lives. And just like we were talking before, like, it feels like magic looks like magic at some of the peak experiences of life to be connected in groups like this, like we instinctively feel. And we recognize that. And so that was the mystery that got me into this, like the basically a really simple question of like, what's that made of? What's that? Is that made of great leaders sending great signals? Not really, is it just random chance? Nope. What it is, it's made of these these behaviors that we exchanged this pattern of the signature pattern of behaviors that we exchange that is deeply wired into us around being safe together, sending signals of safety, sending signals of shared vulnerability, and sending signals of purpose with our behaviors. So it's all about these three actions, that that build culture, and that's in discovering that was really kind of fun. Because it's a, it's a, it's a pattern and a process that maps on to every dimension of the human experience, whether it's being a parent, or being a coach, or working at any level in a big business.

**Jacob Morgan** 07:36

So how did you go about discovering that? Did you just interview a lot of leaders go inside a lot of organizations and just notice these different patterns and trends keep emerging? It's a

**Daniel Coyle 07:45**

mix. There's a lot of smarter people than I have been spending deep time into this. And so I read extremely widely visited the researchers who had done the most people like Sandy Pentland at MIT, you know, people who had gone very, very deeply into trying to build scientific models that explain why certain groups function well, in certain groups don't there's a tremendous body of research on it. So I sort of did deep reading on that. And then I combine that with sort of a set of fieldwork, where I just went and embedded myself in these places. And I tried to notice things, you know, I tried to pay attention. And there were, every time there'd be a moment, like in the San Antonio Spurs, where, you know, the day after I got there, they had lost the night before to their archrival. And one of the coach Gregg Popovich walks over to the player, right after he walks onto the court for the practice right after the big loss. And he goes straight to the player who had missed this shot the night before the Big Shot, and puts his hand on that player shoulder and starts talking about the dinner that Popovich had arranged for that player the night before and the bottle of wine, Popovich had ordered for that player like, Huh, that's kind of that's kind of different, right? What, what is happening there? And then when you map the research on the day, you say, Well, what he's doing is he's sending a belonging cue. That's what that's called, right? It's sending a clear behavioral signal that we share a future. You have a voice and you matter here. And those moments of creating that safety and recreating that safety and recreating that safety are why a team like the San Antonio Spurs, I think have had the success they have because they're continually building that foundation of togetherness. So that was my MO lay, like, do that. Do the deep breathing, and then go and kind of parachute into these places, and then see what what patterns, what patterns emerge and what patterns are consistent. And then challenge those assumptions by visiting really terrible cultures, too, and seeing Oh, are they doing the exact same thing? Because if that's the case, then we need to revise our assumption.

**Jacob Morgan 09:46**

Yeah. Well, so I guess to talk about culture, we first need to understand what culture is and what culture is not. So how do you define culture? Because there are a lot of different definitions about it. Some people say it's what happens when the manager leaves the room right? There's so many different ways, there's so

**Daniel Coyle 10:01**

many different, how the fact that there's so many different is really, that's really the key problem, right? Because right now we have this huge mush of words to describe cultures, this huge notion of words and concepts. You know, we think of culture as kind of values, identity, trust, teamwork, leadership, engagement, cohesion, honesty, Mission purpose, like it just, it goes on and on. So and we also think of it as being kind of, entangled in and meshed with the identity of the people, right, we think of it as being kind of something you possess, it's even in our language, we say they have good culture, in the same way, we would say that someone has blue eyes or curly hair. And actually, I think that's wildly wrong, I think we have focused, we have focused on the on the wrong stuff. And we've thought about it as a possession instead of as a set of actions. Culture, to me, is a group of relationships working together to move toward a goal, culture happens when people are adding up to more than the sum of their parts. Those are two kind of basic things, you're moving in a direction or a goal, and you're adding up to more than some of your parts. Culture is the result of behaviors is not the result of words, it's the result of

behaviors that that create connection, that that create shared risk, and shared information and transparency. And they create a sense of TrueNorth. So that I have a functional definition of culture that is really about these three basic functions have, you got to do three things. And the visual that I have in my head that I don't know, if I find it useful is like, culture in any group, especially today is like a flock of birds moving through a forest at high speed, you got to do three things to succeed, right, you got to stay together. If you start getting split up, you're not going to have a culture. Now you got to share information, you have to share information, you can't have one bird yelling at everyone and saying where to turn 20 degrees left. And now we're going to turn 20s, right? You got to self organize around these obstacles, the modern world comes at you very quickly, like our parents, if you were setting up an organization 50 years ago, you could just sort of have a set of rules and say, follow the rules do your job, we'll be successful, that world is gone, it worlds changing too fast. So you've got to share information. So you can have situational awareness and self organize around this obstacle and that obstacle, the next obstacle. And the third thing, you have to have his direction. And you do that by establishing purpose. So you got to know where true north is. So in every culture, these aren't things that are just like, oh, icing on the cake, like, let's have ping pong, and let's have an IPA at five o'clock on Thursdays or whatever this is, these are functional behaviors you have to have because you have to have the function of connection, you have to have the function of situational awareness. So you know when to turn left and when to turn right. And you have to have the function of navigation. So you know where true north is. So those that's, that's what culture is, it's the behaviors that create these group functions, and it lives not in any one leader, but in the space between people in the behaviors that they exchange continually. You never get culture to a spot where like you're done. Like, that's another misunderstanding about culture, I think that a lot of people have. We're done. We're all set, right? We're Pixar, right? We're Pixar, we're good. We're the Navy SEALs, we're good, we're good. We have a great culture, it can fall apart like that, because it is a living thing. You know, your body has all the systems to communicate and create connection and create information and create navigation. Well, culture is just like a big body, right? It needs to have this the systemic living flows, that create that connection, that create the navigation, like if you're, if your eyes stop working, you're going to bump into stuff. If a culture stops signaling its purpose, it's going to bump into stuff. If your heart stops pumping, you're going to lose energy. If a culture stops signaling, safety and connection, it's going to lose energy. So all of these things are just functional, they're systemic, and they need to be perpetuated continually, not just like, Oh, we're gonna get to a spot and then we can take our foot off the gas.

**Jacob Morgan 14:14**

I when I wrote my book on employee experience, I think it came out in 2017 or so I talked about corporate culture as the side effects of working for a company. What the good side effects and the bad side effects, right. So yeah, there are a lot of different ways that people used to kind of visualize it, but I like the the flock of birds flying through the forest at high speed. I mean, you wrote this book in 2018. So it's coming up on five years, almost since it came out half a decade. Has anything changed since you wrote the book? Do you think you missed anything? Has anything evolved?

**Daniel Coyle 14:50**

Yeah, a couple of things that have really changed one is the vulnerability has gone super mainstream. Right. Thanks to the work of people. Brene Brown, thanks to your work. There is this sense of that that that once was really shocking in a way like the leader should be vulnerable that a leader should say I

as, as Navy SEAL Commander Dave Cooper says that the four most important words a leader can say are I screwed that up. But as part of that, I think there's been some kind of misunderstandings about vulnerability, there's this kind of the misunderstanding that vulnerability is about like emotional disclosure, like, I'm just going to tell you my secret truth. And we'll talk about my childhood. And that's not actually what it's about on a cultural level. Vulnerability is actually about me giving you visibility into my weaknesses and my strengths into what I'm good at what I'm bad at, into where I failed, and where I succeeded. And you're doing the same for me, so that we can work together more optimally, it's about it's about weakness and information, not about emotion.

**Jacob Morgan** 15:48

When one CEO that I talked to said, it's about insight, not drama.

**Daniel Coyle** 15:51

That's awesome. That's awesome. That is beautifully put. And it's kind of funny, because I was just at this, I was just talking to somebody who had been, who had access to this. He told me that they that he had seen CEO, media consultants, media consultants, training CEOs, to like, have more emotion on camera as they communicate to their group on Zoom, like to have a little tear in their eye or to let their voice gag, do that again, but with your voice cracking, and he was talking about how they were really, which is kind of a terrifying thing. But they're kind of attempting to manipulate with that, right? Using interesting things.

**Jacob Morgan** 16:30

But you can't you can't bullshit that because people are really good at telling when you're being authentic and genuine. So I don't know why that consultant is advising that to people. But I know, like, you can tell if somebody is genuine or not, I mean, for me, so as I mentioned, before I hit record, I'm working on a book on leadership and vulnerability, which will come out mid next year. It's really hard, because I find that a lot of business leaders define and think about vulnerability differently. And I can't really say that's wrong, or you're not being vulnerable, or you are being vulnerable. Because it's like, if you feel like you're being vulnerable, who am I to say no, you're not. Yeah. And so some of these CEOs are sharing stories about like, you know, personal going through divorce, other CEOs are just sharing simple things of like, yeah, I needed help with a webcam. And I asked, and I felt vulnerable. Yeah, and those are like, such different, like, complete opposite ends of the spectrum. But they made both of these CEOs feel the same way. So it's, at least for me, like that's, I'm struggling right now trying to like figure out how to, and I might create, like levels of vulnerability, we'll see.

**Daniel Coyle** 17:35

Yeah, but it's right. Oh, that makes sense. It's hard. And the other place to put focus is the impact of that vulnerability. Yeah, feel a million different ways to someone, it's so contextual. But what is the impact of that vulnerability? You know, I was one of the stories that I appreciated most out of the research for the culture code was a story. I was visiting Google. And there was an engineer there who told a story about something that had happened at Pixar. 15 years previous, this guy had worked at Pixar. And he said, we were all I was young engineer, we were working at Pixar. And Ed Catmull, the CEO came in the room. And we were really nervous. Like the see one of the most brilliant people in Silicon Valley is watching us work. And then right at the end of it, he said, hey, when you guys are



done, could you come up to my office, and teach me how to do that? Like, and the guy got goosebumps talking about it. And I get goosebumps thinking about it now, like the impact the vulnerability built around learning, like what a signal Catmull sent in that moment that echoed for 15 years, this signal of like, I'm really curious, I want to understand what you're doing. It's an act of empathy, but it's also really this act of curiosity that models and norms, sharing that your weaknesses and learning together.

**Jacob Morgan 18:52**

Yeah, I mean, it also brings up an interesting point of like, doesn't matter who thinks they're being vulnerable. So, you know, maybe in Ed's eyes, if you were to say, Hey, were you being vulnerable? He's like, no, what are you talking about? Like, that's just, you know, right. But for people receiving, it's like, Oh, my God, it is so vulnerable. I can't believe he did that. That's another challenge with vulnerability, right. And you could be in a vulnerable situation, right, and not necessarily be vulnerable. So there, like so many layers of this. And then I also think from a leadership perspective, it's different. So I talked to the CEO of American Airlines. Recently, he gave me this really cool story that in the 90s, the CEO of Continental Airlines, you know, the company was going downhill. And the CEO sent an email out to 42,000 of employees, 43,000 people and basically said, Pray for the company, were at war, internally and externally and basically said, I don't know if the company is going to make it. And Doug Parker, the CEO of American Airlines was like, Look, that's a vulnerable thing to do, but there is no leadership there. And so, you know, there's vulnerability, but then there's also being a vulnerable leader where you need to say, I don't know what we're gonna do. But yeah, I have an idea. We're gonna get through this. Here's my plan. Here's my vision. So specifically for leaders, it's more challenging because they have that responsibility. They can't just say, I don't know what to do.

**Daniel Coyle 20:14**

It's not about a cry of weakness, it's there is the word ability and vulnerability, like there needs to be some ability in part of that, where you're asking for help with a problem. You're not just saying, I don't have a clue. Anybody can say that. Right? Yeah. Right. That sounds really true. So that was one big change, like to go back to your original question if I can. But the other big change obviously, is around the way we work today. You know that that's, that's it, right? Is it navigating hybrid, seeing exactly how the social contract is the power, the social character on work is changing. The role of social issues and work has completely changed a lot of that, too. So there's been this, it's been this fascinating. That's why it was sort of fun to go back and research and write the culture playbook, because these last couple years have really has really shown us what a moving heaving landscape culture is always on. And that we're reinventing and recreating these new ways of being together, that that are astonishing and fun. It's this period of this great experiment. And a lot of these experiments around the future of work are completely fascinating. And the, I guess, one of the big, you know, there's been a lot of takeaways from this from watching this happen. But it's been encouraging to see how many great experiences are and it's been interesting to see how much how ineffective sort of top down attempts have been to sort of dictate what it's going to be, as opposed to, let's figure out together what it might be. And we'll choose from several options.

**Jacob Morgan 21:46**

You mentioned that you had these three, three signals that you talked about, we touched on vulnerability, maybe just circling back to wrap up that one, why is vulnerability so important for for culture? What what does it do? What did you find? And what about people who struggle with it, because we all know leaders out there who basically say, You know what, I'm not vulnerable. But at the same time, a lot of these leaders are still in charge of multibillion dollar companies, they have successful teams, and they have no vulnerability at all. So why is this important? And do you have to be vulnerable as a leader?

**Daniel Coyle** 22:22

You don't you actually don't if you're solving simple, repetitive problems with people that don't change very much, and you know exactly how to do it. And your job is kind of like, I don't know, pit crew and Indianapolis 500 race, like, hey, when they pull the pitstop, these are the six things that have to happen. And then they pull away, and then we're done. You can absolutely, Ron, that that is a simple system, right? There's, as you know, there's linear cause and effect all the way down the line, and we can measure it and we can see it. So absolutely, you can keep up right, and there's no need to be vulnerable, except for whatever cosmetic purposes you want to or relationship building purposes you want. The vast majority of work does not resemble Legos, however, right? The vast majority of work is what is happening in a place that is best defined as complex. In, in, in complexity. Cause and effect are not necessarily linked. Like there's two kinds of problems in the whole world, right? There's complicated problems, which are basically Legos we can, there's linear cause and effect, it's very repetitive, we can figure out how to do it if we bring in the experts. But then there's complexity. And in complexity, there's not linear cause and effect, you've got stress, when you attempt to change the problem, the problem changes. So you're continually probing and experimenting, and the the easy mental sort of distinction is, is your problem more like building a car engine or raising a child? Right? If your job is like building a car engine, then that's complicated, then you can just be there's no need to build relationships, necessarily just get the information out and do it and things will work, right. But if your job is more like raising a child and involves relationships, and every time you you make a change, the system changes a little bit, and you can never quite distill everything down to linear cause and effect. Well, that's when relationships begin to really matter. That's when vulnerability and the sharing of information begins to matter. Vulnerability is important. And I would say essential, because relationships are essential and vulnerability. Shared vulnerability is the way relationships happen. It's the currency of relationships. Think about the people in your life, are your best friends, people you're the most vulnerable with, or the least vulnerable with. They're the people you're the most vulnerable with. Right? That's it's called a vulnerability loop. And it's really important because we're built to not be that way. We're built to protect our reputation. We're built not to share risk, especially in groups we're built to sort of put on a good face, and so any time we like finish a project with a group of people. There's a moment after the project's done, where there's this temptation to sort of mark it as a success and move on. Right? That was great. Good job, everybody walk away, and what good groups do. And I'd say the Navy SEALs are among the best. But I would say Pixar is really good at this is that they take a second and they pause. And they would have something called like an AAR. And after action review, where they would simply say, alright, what went well? what didn't go well? And what are we gonna do differently next time? And those are like, really hard conversations to have. Because I have to say, like, Hey, Jacob, I think I really screwed that up. Like, I think I screwed up our presentation by doing this. And then you have to say, Yeah, I think you did, too. And here's how we should do different next time. So we have to, like not do



that. Let's just declare victory and move on, we actually have to stop and open up and try to be as honest as possible, as candid as possible, about what actually happened. And that vulnerability, it's called a vulnerability loop. And it creates a space where you can actually figure shit out together, right? And it, it is, it's like, it's sort of like, you know, we know that exercise makes the body stronger, and that it's painful. Like, we didn't always know that actually, if you go back in 1800s, people didn't really realize that. But we now know, like, when you experience pain, if you go to the gym, and you don't feel anything, you didn't have a good workout, right? Yeah, you need to have that pain creates a compensatory response, and your muscle grows and you get stronger. Well, social groups are built along exactly the same lines, it's a pretty good way to build when you feel that pain of like, I don't know if I should tell you this, but I'm going to tell you anyway, I'm terrible. At execution. I can I can I'm really creative, but I'm terrible execution. That's painful for me to tell you, but it's going to make us better. So grew, but

**Jacob Morgan 26:55**

does it have to be a weakness? Or what if it's disclosing, I don't know, a personal challenge or something that you're going through? So that's what I'm trying to figure out. Is vulnerability, specifically about weakness, or is it about something else?

**Daniel Coyle 27:12**

It's contextual. It's contextual, like Jamie Dimon goes out, he used to do this. I don't know if he doesn't anymore. But he used to go out and visit the tellers on the West Coast operations and in a bus, and he'd bring them on the bus. And they would, I don't think this would happen anymore. But he said, he gave them beer and immunity. Like so like, tell me what's really going on your bank? Basically, right? Let's talk, okay. Is that vulnerability, I would say it is because he stopped what he was doing. He could be in New York, right? He's in Fresno, he's on a bus in Fresno. So he's making effort and care and connection to somebody normally wouldn't have to do and then they get on the bus. And they don't have to tell him anything. Right. Like, if they had a terrible day, and they're on a terrible team and a terrible manager, they don't have to tell him anything. But they're in that context, maybe gonna open up and say, Yeah, this bank is maybe they'll say, this bank is doing great. You know, this art, we have a superstar manager and you should know about this person. Right? I want to share that with you know, that's a type of openness to, I think it's, it's about openness. You know, it's about some form of openness in context where you would normally not be open. Okay, so I don't want to be too relativist here. But it is highly contextual. Jamie Dimon isn't like, here's what I'm bad at. And here's what my dad used to beat me up or whatever, you know, he's not, I'm not saying that that ever happened. But the, you know, it's it. I wouldn't think of it in terms of like categories of this is the emotional vulnerability. This is informational vulnerability, I would tend to think of it in these in these in what context? Does an aware openness help the group get better? Yeah. It's like openness to a purpose of clarity. Yeah, that help us perform?

**Jacob Morgan 28:58**

Yeah, the purpose matters. What happens if you're not good at that? Because a lot of leaders struggle, and they just say, You know what, that's not me. I don't want to open up I don't want to share, I don't want to talk about me, my myself or my family or my challenges, just, you know, I don't care.

**Daniel Coyle 29:14**

I'd say that's the that's a super short sighted way of looking at it. Because if you do look at the, at the research and if you look at the at the behaviors of good leaders in this modern setting, that we're talking about the fast moving flock moving through a fast changing world. What you find that vulnerability isn't actually about the person, you know, if their objection is this isn't me, that is a very personal identified way to look at it, where they're basically judging it by their preference, they would say I prefer not to do that. I'm not used to doing that. But when you really look at at the research on that doing that has got a huge effect on the group. So what they're saying when they say they prefer not to is they're saying I prefer not to help my group and, and that's becoming an increasingly in but impossible thing to say? Yeah, I would say they're looking at it through too short of a through shoot too small of a lens. Because when you do a vulnerable thing, like send an email, and again, that's where this, you're, you're, you're saying have Less drama, more insight is really, really powerful if you use vulnerability as a as an insight seeking tool, and that same CEO says, I'm not usually good at being vulnerable. But what can they do? Like maybe they can send a note, like this two line email suggestion that I have in the culture playbook. You send an email to your people saying, Hey, tell me one thing you want me to keep doing? And one thing you want me to stop doing? Right? Really simple email, but kind of a big signal of like, help me get better? I need I'm not perfect, right? I do not, I do not bat 1000 nobody bats 1000. There's some things that I that I want to I'd love to get some feedback from you to get better. So it's ultimately about learning. Right? It is learning about ourselves, learning about the group, learning about where we really are right now. And how can we get better? And that, to me, that drives the best vulnerability, this intense curiosity around the question of how can we get a little bit better? And what can i What don't I know about myself? And what don't I know? And of being a leader, the higher you go, the less you see? Right? You don't have visibility. So you really need to create that visibility and vulnerability is a great way to do that.

**Jacob Morgan 31:33**

All right, I think we talked a lot about vulnerability. Maybe we should talk a couple minutes about the the other two on there. Which one do you want to go to? First? I think one was purpose and meaning, right?

**Daniel Coyle 31:42**

Yeah, purpose is one and safety is the other. And I guess I'd start with safety. Because group life really does start with safety. You know, we're built to respond instantly, whether to behaviors to signals, whether we tell whether we share a future with a group, we've all walked into groups and instantly felt connected. And we've all walked into groups and instantly felt a little on the outs. And great groups take those critical moments very, very seriously with a lot of intention, if you go, person who embodies it, for me happens to be the manager of the Cleveland guardians, Terry Francona, who, in spring training will be studying pictures of dozens and dozens of young players, you know, so that when an 18 year old, walks down the hall, he can say, Jose, good to see you, right. And the guy has this moment of like, he knows my name. He knows my name, like I'm nobody, I just got signed for \$50,000 from Venezuela, and he knows my name. So that kind of intention, that kind of that kind of focus on an in critical moment theory as it's known. Like, there's really three moments where safety gets created. It's that first five minutes, like, are you in? Are you out? Does this person care about me? does it drive Elise here? That's one kind of miss understanding about safety. It's actually not about making people feel super

comfortable. It's about voice. It's about making sure they have a voice. So when that kid walks down the hall, you say everything. Okay, what can we do? What can we make your house? What would have made your first day better? Asking that question, right? And then maybe you find out a little something, that, that that first five minutes is huge. The second critical moment is the first disagreement. Like, what happens in this group, when we're not all on the same page? We'll shut down. And just the most powerful man makes a person makes a decision. That's it? Or is there a pause? And a moment where people use their voice? And well, let's let the best idea when, right, what happens at that first disagreement. And the third is what happens at the first moment of learning. Like when we really have some discovery or something new comes along, how do we behave? And if you get those moments, right, you can create a ton of safety in the group. And it it like with everything, it feels like magic, but it's not magic. It's it's behaving in interactive, sending a lot of belonging cues at the right moment.

**Jacob Morgan 34:15**

So what happens if you get those moments, right? But then there are periods in between those moments where safety is not created? Because there can be lots of times you know, maybe you execute well on those moments, but in a meeting, somebody takes credit for your work, or one of your leader throws you under the bus. Yep. Does that safety immediately get shattered? And is it easy to repair?

**Daniel Coyle 34:36**

Yep, yep, it's a living thing. It is. It is fragile, right? It's very fragile. You can be so in and then the next day you get somebody walks past you, and you think, oh, man, I got nothing from them today. What am I out like, even in the most secure relationships? It's got a name. Ben Gregory Walden, who studies this and he, when we were talking about psychological safety, he brought this up and he's pointed out It's kinda like telling your spouse that you love them. Like, can you do it once and forget about it? Like, no, you can't, like you do it all the time. And that's what happens in good groups is that they're continually reaffirming that at the end of every season, San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich goes to each player, and he says, Thank you for allowing me to coach you. It's a hell of a thing to say. Because they're both amply paid, right? They didn't, he doesn't have to do that. And yet, isn't that a great model for all of us, like for a manager to say, at the end of the year, say, thank you for allowing me to manage you, or thank you for the feedback you gave to me this, and it's one of the tips in the book. But there's this concept of like, overthinking, you see it all the time in good cultures, where they're connecting the dots, and saying, hey, everybody who's involved in this project, I just want to say thank you for the we had, you know, in the end, we gave this presentation, but there were the inputs of dozens of people, and I want to name and spotlight and thank them for the inputs that allowed us to get here. And those things aren't just courtesy. They're not just being nice, though they are nice. They are about reaffirming that relationship, thank you for allowing me to coach you. It's such a little thing. But it is such a huge thing. And it, it really points to the fact that you never get to a spot where you're done. You know, in any of these cultures, they never get to a spot where they say we're good. We're our relationship is solid. Nope, you keep saying it, you keep saying it, and and you say it over and over again. And there's another important distinction when safety gets shattered, sometimes. There's an important distinction between relational conflict and task conflict. You know, in great cultures, there's a ton of task, conflict, idea versus idea, right, we're gonna, we're gonna let the ideas fight it out. And there's very little

relational conflict. People think that in great cultures, everything is kind of happy and positive all the time. Like, there's this impression we have in our kids Island,

**Jacob Morgan 37:07**

free food. Everyone's happy, right? You're right,

**Daniel Coyle 37:10**

we're gonna get to Pixar, and everything's gonna be great. Like, we're gonna make great movies, and everybody's smiling all the time. And every idea is a good one. In fact, when you go into Pixar that in it, man, there are, it's hard. There are vivid arguments and discussions about these ideas, there's hurt feelings, there's, you know, there's things that don't pan out, there's frustration, there's all these emotions. And there's a lot of problems, there are more problems in good cultures than in bad cultures, because bad cultures walk past them. But in good cultures, they identify problems early, and they circle up around them to try to fix them, they get shoulder to shoulder around the problems. And so this, this idea that it's a lot of task conflict, but it never goes into relational conflict. So the model ends up being, we're going up, our ideas are gonna fight it out. And then we're gonna go grab a coffee together, you know, there isn't this, this lingering resentment or personalizing of, of arguments, it's all done in the service of letting the best idea win. And then that's what allows them to have such strong arguments, because they have this sense of connectedness and safety, that they know they're gonna be there for each other at the other side of this,

**Jacob Morgan 38:23**

you know, the safety piece is important. I mean, we keep hearing about a time and time again, where without that psychological safety without that trust, a lot of other things crumble, and I suppose vulnerability is a big part of that, right? I mean, it helps create that, that safety, that that trust to. And then the third pillar before we kind of wrap things up with maybe some action items, and some broader conversations on culture is purpose, which is another thing that we've been hearing about for many, many years. And I think, to your point earlier now, as a result of what's been going on with the pandemic, and you know, past few years, it's really risen. I think, along with vulnerability is something that a lot of employees and customers and staking shareholders care about a lot. So what how do you define and think about purpose? And why is that so crucial?

**Daniel Coyle 39:08**

Well, it's so crucial, because it's the function of navigation, if you're going to have a living culture, you need to be able to self organize around obstacles, right? Obstacles are going to come up, and they're going to knock you back. And you're going to have to sort of say, Wait, what really matters. You know, being in a group is like having a being in a jungle expedition. I've spent a lot of time not being able to see, right, the prob, the thicket, the problems of the day are in front of your face all the time. And so having a compass is really handy on an expedition, right, having a compass that says, Alright, wait a minute, we are, we've been going in circles here, where where's TrueNorth? Again, and that's what purpose does. That's the function of purpose. It is a navigational function. And the cool part of it is and kind of the magical part of it is that it's done with language, you know, distilling your language finding what that is for you. You know, and you'll find that the person who I think was the best at it that I wrote about in the in the books was is Danny Meyer, you know, the head of the, the Union Square Hospitality

Group started about 20 restaurants and he uses this sort of mantra map where he decided he was having is struggling with his culture early on in his career, and he decided what's TrueNorth? What's TrueNorth for us? And he decided it was two words, creating raves. That's it creating raves not think about what he didn't make it. He didn't make it like being successful, serving good food, making people happy, creating raves, that's really interesting, right? And then he started building these other mantras like athletic hospitality, or mistakes are waves servers are surfers, or the road to success is paved with mistakes well handled,

**Jacob Morgan 41:03**

right? So Steve built, he's the CEO of a company called Smile brands, and they're the dental providers. And there's this smiles for everyone. And he actually gave me this story where, you know, he founded the company with somebody else. And they eventually they left the company, they retired, and somebody else took over. And they changed smiles for everyone with something jargony business CV number one, and patient care and blah, blah, blah. And it didn't resonate with employees, it didn't resonate with customers, and the company started going downhill. And so Steve came back in with his partner who helped start the business, they took the business over changed everything back to smiles for everyone, you know, things shot back up again. So interesting. It really, really does matter. And it's, you know, to your point three words, right, yours was two, this is three words. And it's that purpose really does make a big difference.

**Daniel Coyle 42:01**

And this idea to that it doesn't need to be like one phrase that actually what works is kind of an ecosystem of phrases. I was just did an event out at a tech company. And there were smaller groups doing their sort of mantras, and one of them was do epic shit. Yeah, that was it, right? Really simple, kind of dumb, but kind of great like that, for that group. That meant a lot. It it evoked all kinds of stories, they could use it to kind of assess their work is this epic? Is this not epic? Like, we were gonna do it, right. So super powerful. And so this idea that, like, your purpose doesn't live in your heart, and it doesn't live in your gut, but that the, the leaders of the group have a responsibility to fill the windshield of the group with really rich, motivating, clear, corny, uh, statements, symbols, stories, stories are massive, right. And it's not just one big mission statement. I mean, it you know, as well as anybody that if you took the mission statements of the top 50 companies in the world in a baseball hat and mixed them up and picked them out, you couldn't tell, right? The big ones are all kind of generic and not useful. But the little ones, the set of little ones that emerge that from the bottom up that people actually use in their work. And it doesn't have to just be, you know, saying so I was at a, there was a company that made bolts and one of their bolts, there had been a helicopter accident. And because, you know, some some thing that the company did not make it failed, but they're bolted kept the helicopter sort of the rotor from from falling off, which saved the life of the of a pilot. Well, they brought the pilot and their family in did a for a conference, and everybody got to see the impact of the quality of what they do, and the attention to detail of what they do saved this woman and her family's futures. And, you know, there wasn't a dry eye in the house. Because that's simply that that's actually great. Navigation by them, right? That's great purpose. For me, they're building a compass, of saying what really matters is the detail and the attention we put in our work saves people's lives. And that storytelling ends up being an incredibly powerful way. That's not some poster you put on the wall. But giving people that a shared



experience creates that that compass that will allow them to navigate to a true north when they get in the jungle.

**Jacob Morgan 44:34**

Yeah, it's actually just what I was going to ask you because we keep hearing a lot about, you know, there's phrases and even when I give talks, I asked people to raise their hand like how many of you have this, you know, your value is innovation or put the customer first and you know, in a room of 1000 people, probably 40% of them are all going to raise their hand and you know, I tell everybody look around you guys have the same values. You have the same, you know, the same words that you use. And so really what makes it stand out is how the things come to life, not just the fact that you use those words or those phrases. So what have you seen? Like? how do organizations? How do leaders move away from just the phrase? Just the mantra to actually making it come to life? Because I think that's really where a lot of leaders and organizations struggle is what what does this actually mean? How do you bring it to life?

**Daniel Coyle 45:18**

Right? You got to think deeply about the impact chain of your work. You know, I was I was, and I think the ones who are successful do that they do have a few few things that I would spotlight. One is that they are very keenly attuned to the power of story. Right, when there's a story that encapsulate who they are, and the impact they have on the world, they find that story, They Share, They Share that story. When Square was first starting out, they found a user, I think it was somebody who lived in somewhere in the Middle East, and they were using square payment system to gradually get enough money to come to the states and their kid went to medical school or something like that. And they showed a video, again, not a dry on the house, but to show the actual impact to be really keen to that power. What is our benefit we're bringing to the world? How are we affecting people's lives, what stories and stories are uniquely powerful, because they really remain the strongest drug ever invented, you know, you can talk all you want about with these abstractions, innovation, that's an abstraction. You know, customer comes first, that's an abstraction. But stories render these things into concrete, memorable, sticky, shareable bytes, that, that allow a company culture to kind of resonate from the bottom up instead of the top down. And, you know, I think, you know, good cultures will good leaders will be alert for those. So they will harvest them, and they'll share them systematically. I think that's, I think that's massive. The other thing that I think, I think a lot of a lot of leaders that I've seen are able to magnify this is that they try a lot of stuff. Like they don't sort of feel locked in by whatever generic mission statement they have. If you go into Danny Meyer's office, he's got a whiteboard. And he's still like trying out different phrases and mantras almost like I when I saw it, it was almost like, I felt like I was in the office of someone who writes country songs and Nashville, you know, how they're always being like, you know, a dog and a truck in the rain. Yeah, he was doing a similar thing like recombining, like, you know, the bridge to success is paved with mistakes well handled. And he's continually doing that. So there isn't this sense of having it done and figuring it out. There's this curiosity about, oh, what is it now? What is it what resonates now? And and I think that level of curiosity is a really important, and they're also a little bit skeptical. That's another quality they share where they don't quite buy it. Like, you know, they're not. I think a lot of the leaders I've seen cultivate what Adam Grant calls kind of a productive disgruntlement. I'm not sure if that's precise language he uses, but they're kind of grouchy about it like, yeah, yeah, everybody, you know, I don't know if that's true, you know, they'll they'll sort of



be a little skeptical about their kool aid that they're putting out there. And I think that's kind of a healthy stance to make. Because, you know, your culture, the world is changing a lot. People are changing a lot, the new people you're bringing in are changing a lot. There's so much change that the second you sort of stop being curious or start being kind of guilelessly accepting of everything that you put out there. That's when it's going to come get you.

**Jacob Morgan 48:45**

Yeah, and we've seen lots of examples of that happening. I know we only have 10 minutes left, so maybe we can talk maybe a little bit more broadly on why is this something a lot of leaders struggle with? Because your book isn't the first book that's ever been written on culture. There have been lots of books written on this. And it seems like no matter how much we write, how much we talk about it, leaders still struggle with this. What are the main pitfalls that you're seeing in organizations as far as embracing these three? These three components of safety of purpose and of shared vulnerability? Yeah,

**Daniel Coyle 49:19**

well, there's one big pitfall which is just called life. You know, this is like, this is this immensely complex thing. If you're trying to do something in an organization today. And trying to get people on the same page and trying to execute and trying to adapt to these changing, you know, we're the flock of birds moving through the forest. That forest is getting bigger, more complex, more like a labyrinth all the time. We're moving faster through it. And so this idea of warbirds, more birds, more trees, more velocity, more disruption, more everything and it's raining. It's raining, it's ready. You can't see right it's raining and there was headwinds. And, and all of a sudden, yeah, it's it's, it's it is this VUCA, as they would say, environment, and the idea that you could sort of, you know, use a little recipe of culture tips, and then all of a sudden you're going to be able to navigate that is sort of like saying, you know, you're going to be able to, you know, read a recipe book and then go and then go cook, you know, the cord on blue or something like that? It is. It is a, it's a skill, I think, I think the ones who are so so to actually be tuned into your culture is to be forever, a little bummed out. Actually, that's interesting. Yeah, this idea that you're going to get to some place where everything's happy and great is, is often a mirage. Because the more you tune in to what's really happening, and the more visibility, you try to get into what's going on in the ground. The you know, the more patient you have to be, you know, you cannot This is not to go back to our earlier conversation. This is not like Legos, you know, this is not, this is much more like raising a child. And do you ever get to a place where you're raising your child where you say, like, I'm done, there, they're great. Like, you know, probably not, you know, there's always you tried it, you try your best, but you always know that no matter what you do, there's a certain amount that just life is going to bring, and they're going to do things that you don't understand. And that's okay. Right. And that's okay, so this, this idea to cultivate kind of an acceptance that you're never going to get it right. But by tuning into this, and by trying to be a better parent, if in this metaphor, you'll you'll create much better results, than if you kind of turn away and ignore it. So I think you know, the big thing that gets in the way is life. But there also is this amazing sort of power in, in tuning into these relationships with intentionality, the thing that happens when, you know, an old CEO expresses a little curiosity or vulnerability, it can open up whole new pathways to them, and all of a sudden, they feel like they haven't felt in years, because actually, to behave in ways that are top down command control, where you're always protecting your reputation where you don't take interpersonal risks, is a very heavy way

to go through life. Yeah, it's not easy. It's not easy. It's exhausting. It's not efficient. And so by tuning into this stuff, you end up having kind of a messier reality to earlier point like reality is it's not as clean and crisp, it's a little messier. But you can accomplish greater things, you can have more creativity, and you can have a lot more fun for what it's worth, when you actually have a set of relationships are moving together in pursuit of a goal, rather than sort of a set of obedient soldiers marching toward your goal.

**Jacob Morgan** 53:10

So where do we begin for people watching, listening? They're inspired by this. And you know, obviously, I'll ask you before we wrap up where people can go to grab your book and stuff like that. But any any action items that you think people can start to bring into their company right after listening or watching this?

**Daniel Coyle** 53:26

Yeah, I think the AAR to me is the first one where it's just after you finish any project, just take five minutes and say, Hey, let's circle up. Let's ask, we have three questions. And what went well, what didn't go well? And what should we do differently next time. It's like a gateway drug for. And the other thing I would say would be that to line email to say, look, just send an email to your team and say, Hey, tell me one thing you want me to keep doing. And one thing you want me to stop doing? Like that's it, just do that do those things. And what you'll find is that they're both sort of contagious, they both make you uneasy, because it's kind of scary. But you'll you'll find is past that fear. And past that sort of pain of being vulnerable together, what you'll find is that you'll get a new clarity about yourself and a new clarity about your team that will allow you to work better together.

**Jacob Morgan** 54:14

I love it. Great insights. And I love that it's a it's simple and practical and actionable. So I think the myth around corporate culture oftentimes is that it's, it requires this big crazy transformation. And we don't know where to start. But these types of simple actionable tips, like you said, the gateway and kind of open things up and and help transform things over time.

**Daniel Coyle** 54:38

Over time, and culture is the 15 feet around you at any time. And now this idea that we do have a lot more control over that than we think.

**Jacob Morgan** 54:45

Yeah. Well, where can people go to learn more about you to grab your book, Senator, you have a new book that just came out anything that you want to mention for people to check out?

**Daniel Coyle** 54:55

Yeah, Daniel coyle.com has got some stuff and yeah, there's links there. People can send me a note or whatever is whatever is easiest for them.

**Jacob Morgan** 55:03

Very simple. So Daniel coyle.com. And I hope everyone checks out the brand new book, The culture playbook. Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me.

**Daniel Coyle** 55:14

Super fun to talk to you, Jacob. Thanks so much.

**Jacob Morgan** 55:16

My pleasure. And thanks, everyone for tuning in. I will see all of you next week. All right, we're all done. Don't hang up yet. So we're going to do before we release it, can you just say, this is Daniel or Dan Coyle, and just your name title and you are listening to leading the future of work with Jacob Morgan, because then we're going to do like a promo before the podcast goes up. Lee and

**Daniel Coyle** 55:38

tell me what the name of the show is, again,

**Jacob Morgan** 55:40

leading the future of work with Jacob Morgan.

**Daniel Coyle** 55:44

Okay, got it. This is Daniel Coyle, and you are listening to leading the future of work with Jacob Morgan.

**Jacob Morgan** 55:51

Perfect. And maybe do one more but mention your your book in there so we can promote your your book. Do you probably say culture code and the culture playbook? We'll promote both.

**Daniel Coyle** 56:01

Okay, you bet. This is Daniel Coyle, author of the culture code and the culture playbook. And you are listening to leading the future of work with Jacob Morgan.

**Jacob Morgan** 56:10

Perfect. I'm at first tape usually doesn't. It's not so smooth. Let me let me play calling. Stop recording.