The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series
“How to Equip and Cultivate Fantastic Teams in Any Organization”
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Doug Mazza

Male: Welcome to the Flourishing Culture Podcast, where you’ll learn how to build a flourishing workplace culture that drives the ministry impact of your organization, your church, or your company, brought to you by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. Now, here’s your host, BCWI president, Al Lopus.

Al Lopus: Hello, and thanks for joining us again on the Flourishing Culture Podcast. Today we have a special pleasure: visiting with Doug Mazza, the president and COO of Joni and Friends. In fact, at the end of 2018, this year, Doug’s title will change to president emeritus, as he officially retires, at least from this position. How many years would you say it is, Doug, that you’ve been in the senior leadership position at Joni and Friends?

Doug Mazza: It’ll be 20 years, Al, and they’ve been fantastic.

Al: Wow, 20 years. Well, congratulations, Doug, and I know it’s just been a great run. It’s been a pleasure working with you for many of those 20 years. And Doug, I must say, having worked with you, listened to the feedback of all of your staff, all of these years, your Christian character and seasoned leadership has really shined through each and every visit here on the Flourishing Culture Podcast. Year to year, you’ve continued to be one of our most popular guests on this podcast.

So, first, I want to acknowledge your years of Christlike leadership to the growing worldwide ministry of Joni and Friends but also the work that you’ve done with our podcast and Best Christian Workplace. So, I want to give you a sincere thanks for sharing with our podcast audience your knowledge, your wisdom, even some of the workshops we’ve done together, your stories, to help leaders grow their own flourishing culture. So, thanks, Doug.

Doug: Well, Al, I am deeply grateful for that. I’m honored that you would feel that way. I am humbled. This is the first time without an answer to you. I thank you for that.

Al: You know, Doug, since—
Doug: Somebody call my wife and read that to her.

Al: Yeah. Doug, since this will be our last podcast while you’re in this role, I really want it to be special. And with this in mind, I thought we’d spend a few minutes looking at something you’ve done to help build a trusting, vibrant culture at Joni and Friends, and that’s the importance of building fantastic teams.

And as we kick off the series on fantastic teams, I’d really like to talk about three things. First, how do you define and create fantastic teams? Second, what is it that every leader should know about cultivating and equipping fantastic teams? And then, thirdly, how do you equip fantastic teams to be nimble and effective, to be able to adapt to change and the challenges that face any organization? So, defining, cultivating, and equipping fantastic teams, as you know, fantastic teams is one of our eight drivers of a flourishing culture. So set the table for us. How would you define fantastic teams? What are some of the ingredients that you found to be helpful in creating such fantastic teams at Joni and Friends, as you’ve come to the organization and worked with them over the last 20 years?

Doug: I thank you for recognizing that. I work with fantastic people, first of all, but the blocking and tackling is really important as we become senior leaders and look for more complicated answers. I find that leading from the front is extremely important. That’s what I call it. The senior leadership needs to be visible, approachable, and engaged. If we’re not engaged, no one behind us is going to be engaged. I applied to a “follow me” leadership as opposed to a “go, do” leadership. People like to see us out front and enthusiastic ourselves.

Number two, I would say, be predictable, which means to do what you say and say what you’ll do, and be consistent about it. If people are asking, “How’s the boss feeling today?” in your organization, you’re never going to have a fantastic team. They’re just going to be answering your whims. They need to know who I am on a regular basis, that I’m the same each day, that there is a standard that we all hold ourselves to.

Then, the third one is equip the team. We have to, to the best of our ability, be transparent in what is possible and what we can do to equip them, to find out what their needs are, and do and be seen as the person that will do everything in your capability to see that they are given what they need to succeed.

I talk to our team all the time about the fourth one, and that is dream big. Dream really big. And then after you dream big, dream bigger. Just dream big. God is a big dreamer. He’s got such a future for us that we cannot even imagine it. And so we tried to come up with some real time to think about what is possible, what it could look like 10 years from now where we love strategic planning here.

And then, the fifth one is encourage people. That sounds simple, but it can be encourage people, encourage people, encourage people. In fact, it’s a lot like number six which is encourage people some more. People are dying for encouragement. They should be living for encouragement. And it is a force in nature that speaks to the psyche of people. And when you are an encourager, you will find out exactly what their value is because you’re letting them know what their value is.
I’m the president. When I come to work in the morning, I know I’m the president. They know I’m the president. I don’t need to convince them how smart I am. I need to convince them how smart they are, because with encouragement, people will exceed their own expectations, and they will find enjoyment in doing it. And that means engagement.

**Doug:** That’s enough to just close the podcast down now. We’ve got six traits. That’s fantastic, Doug. Wow. And I really love what you’re saying: lead from the front, be predictable, equip the team, dream big, encourage people, and then encourage people some more. I mean, six ways to build fantastic teams. And, you know, when I think about fantastic teams, I do think about Joni and Friends and your leadership, and you’ve surveyed with us since 2006. And you started off at a 410, which is at a healthy level, and now you’re finishing at a flourishing level quite a bit even more than that. Give us a favorite story of what you saw in your teams, both good and maybe where you needed to improve, kind of in that period over 10 years ago when you started and continued to build teams.

**Doug:** Well, when I arrived, I arrived from big corporate into ministry management, for the first time into a ministry that, frankly, was struggling a little bit. Had a visionary in Joni Eareckson Tata that was magnificent, and a vision that was equally magnificent. That was a lot to work with.

But the organization, which was much smaller then than it is now, was siloed. And the team was unmotivated in that they did not have a common cause. They were broken into projects that I have found too often characterize ministry. It needs to have one purpose, one focus, and then find 1,000 ways to do the mission statement, not 1,000 missions.

And so we began putting together what our focus was. And I think one of the keys, probably the number-one key, to the success of Joni and Friends was the right decision we made in the beginning was that Jesus was going to lead this organization and that we took scripture and found a mandate in Scripture that fit what we were trying to do. And we said, “You know, instead of having our own plan, why don’t we just do what Jesus said to do?” And that sounds, again, overly simple, but I know there’s a drift that can happen into good works.

We have tried to find our purpose and focus on it to the exclusion of all other things. To be specific, at Joni and Friends, so people will know what I’m talking about, Luke 14:21 and 23 said—Jesus was speaking—and He says go quickly to the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor and the lame and blind. And then in verse 23 He says go out to the roads and the country lanes and compel them to come in so that my house will be full.

And we have found the state of the church to be that Jesus had been waiting 2,000 years for somebody to commit themselves to fulfilling that. And so to the exclusion of all other purposes and good works, we have committed ourselves to that, and that kind of focus has caused us to understand what God’s purpose is for us. And I think that has a lot to do with the success of Joni and Friends.

**Al:** Yeah. So bringing the focus from projects that you’re working on, which can break people into silos, to really focusing on a higher purpose. That’s a great story. Doug, from your experience, what must leaders and organizations avoid if they want their teams to be effective, productive, and healthy, much like your describing?
**Doug:** We can get as detailed as any—any organization can get as detailed as they want. But again, I go back to the blocking and tackling and making sure we’re excellent at it. Do what you say, and say what you’ll do. Again, it goes back to the consistency, and be predictable. Maybe a lot of people listening were in the Boy Scouts. I’m not sure. But they said, “Be faithful, trustworthy, and kind.” You know, those three things as a leader can go a long way. And in fact, I don’t know where everybody else has worked, but I’ve worked in a lot of places where people aren’t faithful, trustworthy, and kind, and be consistent about it. It’s not that hard. It is not a weakness to have those three things. Again, being self-confident and being able to use all of those things in your management techniques, I want to emphasize that’s not a soft approach to management. That’s a practical approach. I can terminate someone very kindly. It doesn’t mean I’m not being kind. In fact, I may be doing you the greatest favor that could happen to you at this particular point in your life. So again, it’s not a weakness. It should be a trait.

And then push credit downward. Just constantly push it downward. Be confident that others can take the credit, and then get your leaders to push their credit downward. And that begins to permeate the entire organization. At Joni and Friends we are—again, I’m getting back to encouragement, but that’s a good way to do it. As we talk about—I will find myself talking about the same things from different ways, and what I’d like to say about that is if you think you’re an encourager, ask what else. And that’s not the only area we do that. When we do onboarding, we think, “What’s the best way to onboard somebody? What else can we do? What else can we do?” We’re constantly asking the “what else” question. Before you know it, you’ve gotten some pretty exciting ideas that have a real impact on whether it’s encouragement or onboarding or whatever it is, having a meeting that’s just called a “what else” meeting is a great way to brainstorm and bring other people into the project and give them ownership.

**Al:** You know, one of the things about our healthy communication theme is, as you just said, bring people into the conversation, to seek their opinions, to act on their suggestions. And that really does also really create fantastic teams as you’re doing that. Yeah, I just love what you’re saying. I really want to call out. You’re saying about being predictable, and you’re defining predictability with integrity, and integrity as one of our highest correlation questions to overall engagement, you know, where people do what they say they’re going to do. And that’s another theme that you really call out, and research proves that over and over and over again as we cultivate and equip a fantastic team.

So, the second thing we want to look at, Doug, is cultivating and equipping fantastic teams. Visioning productive healthy teams is one thing, but getting them to work effectively together is another. So tell us a favorite story of a team or a series of teams that epitomize this word fantastic, as we kind of put it in front of teams. Set the scene of what happens when they’re led effectively, where you can actually say, “Wow.”

**Doug:** Well, recently—I’ve got an example for something that’s about to be announced, and that is our logo is changing. Now our logo has been the same for 40 years. Actually, I think there was one logo change about 20 years ago, so our logo has been the same for 20 years. We’ve had two logos. Now your logo is hallowed ground. I mean, to change your logo, you’ve really got to think through why that would happen and is that a good idea and need to know when to change your logo.
So what is this got to do with your question? We had middle management in our creative department come to us and said, “We have an idea to change the logo, and here’s why.” And what they had done was they had listened to all that we were working on together in an integrated fashion. That meant that they were engaged. They were engaged in not just the creative process, but they were engaged in the ministry at every level. They knew what all of the goals were. They knew where we stood on all of these things. They knew what our succession plan was. And as they looked at our succession plan, they said, “Our logo is the signature, the handwritten signature, of our founder, who is beloved, by the way.” And the succession plan, though, was, what are we going to do for the next 50 years? And the succession plan is based on the fact that the work that we do has to overwhelm the founder. We have an extraordinarily dynamic founder with big vision, but someday that founder won’t be here. And our work all over the world is being carried on whether she is present or not. And we realize the future is the mandate of Christ. So they came to us and said, “We have an idea for a logo change that would more accurately describe what the future of Joni and Friends is worldwide.”

Now here’s why I was so ecstatic. This didn’t come from the president or the vice president. This came from middle management. This came from a supervisor and a manager, who went on their own to visual media, and they actually put together a short video process and presentation and then knocked on the door of the executive vice president and president and said, “We have a presentation we’d like to show you.” And with great excitement, they showed us their reasoning. Their reasoning was dead on. It was very exciting, I was so excited. Not only was I excited that they had a good idea, but I was so excited about where it came from. It came from engagement at that level. When you’ve got that kind of permission in your organization, most organizations I think, changing the logo, middle managers sitting around a luncheon table and said, “We should change our logo,” it would probably die right there. But here, it turned into a video and knocking on the door of the president and vice president. And only the two of us were invited to their presentation. They wanted us to see it. We were just so excited. And by the way, we have taken their suggestion word for word, item for item, presented it to our board. It has been approved, and will be the new logo.

This is an example of engagement. And that’s what thrilled me, that our middle management believes they have the permission to experiment on the most serious of matters and make presentations to senior management.

Al: Well, to, first of all, go and invest time to research, to create the video, and to know that their ideas would be at least listened to, that’s fantastic, Doug. And, you know, as your Employee Engagement Survey shows, you’ve got over 80% of your staff are fully engaged and engaged from our perspective, and that’s an example of that, for sure.

Doug: And I think that comes from all the things we've talked about, you know, a staff that will do that is encouraged. They've been given permission. They understand the vision and mission. They understand the plan, and they don't only understand their job for today, but in order to come up with the presentation they came up with, they had to understand the strategic plan for the future. I was very excited about that.

Al: Yeah. Clearly, they understood what it was, the direction you’re going in and, as you say, were fully engaged in the direction you’re going in. Doug, what you’ve been sharing really resonates with
what we like to champion in building fantastic teams. You know, things like establishing common goals and objectives together as a group, creating space for creativity, communicating well, managing conflict when that arises, learning to celebrate, taking time to evaluate. Boy, these are things that you’ve just described in this one example. In your mind, what do people need the most as part of a team to work successfully together?

**Doug:** We have developed four pillars of success at Joni and Friends. Those four pillars begin with lead like Jesus, which is our operating system. It’s not a bumper sticker; it’s not a book. We put everyone through the training, and it becomes our operating system.

The second one is integration, and that speaks specifically to your question, Al, and that is to identify integration by breaking down silos. Senior management needs to look for silos, and they need to take the task of breaking them down, working with those teams, finding ways to get teams to work together so that they’re only one team. We have actually taken some duties that are in one department that they need in order to be completely successful and transferred it to a second department so that they physically have to work together.

In other words, if—I’ll give you the example. A team that does international planning is now in charge of international travel, and that international travel informs teams that are in other departments travelling somewhere as to what the plan is, when we are going. And that becomes a very integrated plan as opposed to one department does all the international travel planning, and the other one does strategic planning for the organization from an academic point of view. Getting those two organizations to work together, getting them into one organization so you’d never have two organizations is really the key.

And so we believe in lots of Venn charts of overlapping circles and are always looking for ways of breaking them down. You know, sometimes integration feels inefficient because it calls for more meetings or communication. But I yet have learned of an organization that said, “We were unsuccessful because we communicated too much.” That’s never happened.

**Al:** And I oftentimes hear people say, “I just feel like I’ve said this once so I don’t need to say it again.” But you’re saying, Doug, that maybe people and leaders need to say these things over and over again.

**Doug:** Yes. I have one particular slide—by golly, I am the king of the PowerPoint, so I admit to that—but I have one slide that I showed in 1999 that every once in a while I still show. Things haven’t changed, and that is this black dot slide, and that is, this is our vision and mission. We do not want to creep away from that and have that black dot become light grey and then lighter gray and eventually white. We’ve seen other organizations that that has happened to, that over time, over a 20-year period that their vision and mission has changed. We are working on a vision and mission that was spoken by our Savior 2,000 years ago. We need to make sure we’re not the ones that creep away from that.

**Al:** I trust you’re enjoying our podcast. We’ll be right back after this brief word about a valuable tool that can pinpoint the true, measurable health of your culture.
Male: What if you could get an upper hand on unwanted turnover, relationship conflicts, struggling morale, and unproductive staff, and, at the same time, increase the effectiveness and impact of your organization? You can with the Best Christian Workplaces Employee Engagement Survey. This popular, proven resource pinpoints the true health of your workplace culture and ways to improve it.

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Al: All right. Now, let’s hear more from today’s guest.

Doug: You know, Doug, we’ve heard many leaders say over time that we can only bring to leadership who we are. What do you yourself, or what have you really learned about yourself as a leader and a follower of Christ as part of the leadership team at Joni and Friends, and how has that influenced your leadership as you’ve built such a great team?

Doug: Well, I believe that we can only be who we are, but I extend the “we” to all of us. It’s who we find out we all are together and having confidence in who we are individually. The more confidence that we give others, the more we talk about courage, the more we back each other up so that we can get more creativity from our teams, then the more we become the “we” in your sentence and not just the leader. Again, I think leaders must exude their own confidence in order for others to see it. I don’t mean hubris. There’s no room for hubris. But to be confident that things are going well, everything’s going to be okay, and when things aren’t going well, that we share it immediately and come up with a solution together, that things won’t be kept from our employees. It’s that same theme repeated in confidence and encouragement and consistency, in all things, not just in some categories. If you do it only in some categories, you might as well do it in none. It has to be the culture. That’s what we’re talking about. It’s the culture. That’s the way the culture operates, not the team operates.

Al: That’s fantastic. As we look at this, I’m just reflecting on what you’ve said and taking it in as it relates to fantastic teams. And I love the integration theme that’s just part of your four pillars, that you talk about how important it is to break down silos and work together, and that’s just part of the definition of who Joni and Friends is. It’s been a fantastic way of communicating to your team that this is what we expect. I’m sure as you’re even interviewing potential candidates at Joni and Friends that that’s described and discussed even before they’re hired. Is that right, Doug?

Doug: Yes. Our onboarding system has gone through the “what else” process I talked about. And we actually call it a “what else” process when we’re inventing. That gets us to go back to what I talked about, about dream big and bigger.

Our onboarding system begins with prayer for people we haven’t met yet. On our prayer list, the one prayer that never leaves our prayer list—we are a praying ministry, volunteer prayer every morning at 8:00, and employees come to that faithfully. Some of them come once a day, some once a week—but the one prayer that never leaves is a prayer for open positions. We are constantly praying for who God has
chosen for us, that we will have the discernment to know who they are. And so when somebody arrives at the front door at Joni and Friends, we receive them as an answer to prayer. That's a very different way to start a job than any job I ever started, I can tell you that, that being received at the front door by your vice president who has come in that day and waited at the front door for you to arrive, you are escorted to your department, introduced to everyone in the department. There's a gift on your desk, of welcome. You’re then taken on a tour and then brought to the president’s office, which is me, but where I have a private conversation and orientation and make them a cup of coffee and get to know who they are and talk about Joni and Friends from my perspective.

There's several things that are accomplished with that. One, the person is onboarded with a great day. Maybe they went home. “How was your first day?” “Well, the vice president was at the front door, waiting for me. There was a gift on my desk. I took a tour. I had coffee with the president. I had a pretty good day today.” That's what we want to do. What else can we do? How else can we make your first day better? The next day shouldn't be any less. They should be introduced to a culture where they expect to be treated that way and that's how we operate. So that “what else” idea is an interesting one. We always didn't do all of those steps. We added them slowly, and oh, what else can we do? And it has been very, very effective.

Al: Yeah. And those first impressions really make a big difference in engagement over time. You know, the third thing that I'd like to ask you about in terms of fantastic teams, and that is, how do they prove their worth when it comes to adapting or even excelling inside an ever-changing culture? You know, the world is changing fast. The culture outside is changing fast. Teams need to adapt and even excel. What are your thoughts about how does that happen?

Doug: Well, if the mission isn't changing and we're using a mandate from Jesus Christ that was spoken 2,000 ago and we have our standards that are clearly laid out, that's a foundation on which you can change all kinds of things. Our four pillars are pillars on purpose. It's not a box. It's not a building. You can enter the four pillars that we have, which are lead like Jesus, integration, excellence in your area of expertise, and best Christian workplace. And best Christian workplace is there, Al, as you know, because the first three pillars sound like a great speech from a president until you do best Christian workplace in which you can measure your culture and how well you're doing. And one way that we keep relevant here as things change, our population at Joni and Friends is 50% millennial, and to get an 82% engagement with the millennial population tells me that we're doing something right in our communication. So we're very excited about that.

Al: You know, Doug, we’ve mentioned your plan to retire soon. Can you give us a real-time glimpse of a team at Joni and Friends that has what it takes to be self-aware and also collaborative?

Doug: Well, I’m happy to say that I can’t, because I think we become one team. I think at the scores that we are currently achieving, I think it would be safe to say that Joni and Friends has integrated to the level that we are all on the same page. When I say “all on the same page,” virtually all on the same page. We're still made up of humans, but our integrative scores are, which are our engagement scores, the levels of best Christian workplace that we are now accomplishing is not my score. It is the collective score of this mastermind of scores of people that work here. When I say “mastermind,” I'm using a phrase that was used by Carnegie when he was a mastermind in the steel business. And when he was
asked, “How did you get your money?,” he said, “I didn’t get my money. All these other people that are a mastermind in my business, they got my money for me.” And we’re not talking about being a robber baron, but we are talking about, he had the right idea. The right idea is that when “I” becomes “we” at every level, then Philippians becomes true in that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Al: That’s fantastic, Doug. One team. Yeah, and I think a lot of top ministry leaders when they get that question, they wouldn’t think that the answer is that we’re all one team. It is one team. But I want to ask you one more question here, Doug, and that is, I think our listeners would love to know what Joni herself has said to you or has even taught you about what it takes to build and shape fantastic teams. What comes to mind?

Doug: Joni Eareckson Tata is our founder, the founder of Joni and Friends. What I have found over the years is that Joni is the most outwardly focused person I have ever met. I believe, and I’ve learned from working with Joni, that Christian maturity is a measure of your outward focus. None of us are born with outward focus; it’s inward focus. Jesus Christ was 100% outwardly focused. None of us will achieve that. But I have never met anyone that is more outwardly focused as a founder, and she is actually also our CEO. And I look at Joni—she spends her time as a quadriplegic currently, frankly, battling cancer at the same time—praying for others, serving others. What I’ve learned from Joni that fits so beautifully with the best Christian workplace is that the team needs to be outwardly focused. One of the oldest phrases in studying teams is the phrase “there’s no I in team.” Well, in Christian ministry, that phrase really means be outwardly focused, be focused on others, be focused on mission, be focused on vision, be focused on what’s best for the team. That is not a natural process; that has to be a faithfully learned spiritual process as well as an academic exercise.

Al: Yeah. That’s a great observation. And, you know, as I’ve seen Joni at various events and where she’s spoken and even met her personally, she is outwardly focused, clearly focused on others. And I love your definition that that really is the definition of Christian maturity in itself is being focused on others, not consumed with your own issues. Absolutely. You know, Doug, as you know, the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, we believe a healthy culture is a true and worthy end in itself. We also believe that a healthy culture leads to organizational growth and greater ministry impact. When you step back and reflect on your times at Joni and Friends, how has the importance and contribution of teams really spoken to the power of Jesus at work inside the organization and in your own life?

Doug: Well, I have been truly blessed to be able to work with the people God has brought to Joni and Friends, and that has, certainly knowing them, I have at the end of 20 years, I can genuinely say that despite the fact that I have consciously tried to give away a blessing, I am going to depart as the president here having received more than I gave. That can be very frustrating until you realize that that’s the way God intends it. The more we give away of ourselves, the more He blesses us.

There is a portion of lead like Jesus that I happen to particularly, especially, like, and that is a discussion about ego, EGO, and that is in our personal lives, in our professional lives, and in our lives as we meet people from around the world and every setting, are we (a) exalting God only—EGO, or are we edging God out—EGO? And those are just two very simple tests that when we get into conflict or
when we have differences among ourselves that we need to do a self-check or have someone point out to us, have you gone through the self-check of EGO, of ego? Is your ego exalting God only, or edging God out? And it can be a great bridge between people, between departments, or even a self-check of yourself.

**Al:** Yeah. That’s great. Doug, you know, I’ve really enjoyed what we’ve learned today, and I start off even with your six points: leading from the front, be predictable, and that really is also a person of integrity, equip the team so that they know exactly what they need to do to succeed, to dream big and then even dream bigger. Number five is to encourage people, and because you can never do that enough, number six, to encourage people even more. And the way you’ve integrated that into breaking down silos on projects and to really focus on and help your team, every employee at Joni and Friends focus on the big picture: to bring the poor, the lame, and the blind to the church, to Christ. That’s fantastic. And I think about the example of the team that built and has created your new logo and how their creative, independent, their full engagement, really helped to bring that about, that’s a great story. So, Doug, thanks so much for all you’ve shared with us today, and there’s even so much more, but given all you’ve experienced in the ongoing transformation and even greater health of Joni and Friends’ culture, give us one final thought that you’d like to leave with ministry leaders.

**Doug:** I think my final thought, Al, at the end of 20 years of ministry, of serving whether it be in the plains of Africa or the mountains of Ecuador or the slums of China and all that I have learned from the most wonderful people that I’ve learned in all of those places is to redefine courage, because the only fear that we should really be concerned about is the fear of the Lord which leads to wisdom, that God really can do all things and wants to and has this magnificent plan for our lives, and to be courageous and to be bold and to be confident. And I think if I were talking to my sons, if they’re listening to this, that would be what I would like to pass on to them.

**Al:** Be courageous, be bold, be confident. Doug Mazza, soon-to-be president emeritus of Joni and Friends, thank you for sharing your wisdom, insights, and stories, and thank you for extending your ministry to the leaders who have been listening and benefiting from all you’ve shared today. Thanks, Doug.

**Doug:** Thank you. And thank you for all you’ve done for us, Al. It has meant a great deal to us.

**Al:** It’s been a great pleasure.

And to our listeners, I want to thank you for joining us on the Flourishing Culture Podcast and for investing this time in your workplace culture today. If there’s a specific insight, story, or action step that you’ve enjoyed in these past few minutes, please share it with others so that they can benefit as well. And please, review the show wherever you listen to podcasts.

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