

3 Simple Words
to
Enable Joy
in
Your Team's Work

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I was new at the company. Invited to a meeting to observe from the rear, I listened as leaders described perplexing problems that they had wrestled with for years despite their PhDs and decades of experience. I couldn't help it...I broke the rules and spoke up. I suggested we give the problems some air, getting new perspectives to get the creative juices flowing. I figured what did we have to lose?!?! Long story short, these short-term, new employee apprentice teams did amazing things! Their ideas sparked others, and set off a chain reaction of problem solving teams that spread across the 2,000 person site, continuing for over a decade!

What was the secret? Three words... **Connect. Create. Contribute.**

Three simple and profound words enabled joy in the work of these teams, and they had a lasting impact on the workplace. By creating opportunities for our teams to do this, we can set off this chain reaction in our workplaces too.

These three words speak to what each one of us desires in our work to make it truly meaningful and enjoyable. As leaders, you need to translate these words into real leadership practices to enable joy in the work of your team. Joy, my friends, is magic pixie dust for any team.

We want to **connect**. Connect to the goals of the team and to our teammates...yes like all that vision, mission, and teambuilding stuff. Eliminate the barriers and impediments that connect your team to the purpose and goals, and to each other. Our biggest fears are loneliness and purposelessness; are your actions feeding those fears?

We want to **create something valuable**. This speaks to using our skills and gifts to create value for the benefit of the team goals.

We want to **contribute our creations**. Contributing our value to the goals of the team allows our value to be used and worth something. This brings great satisfaction to your teammates.

These three powerful words can help you diagnose a lack of joy (i.e. discontent) on your team. It surfaces as conflict, disengagement, and turnover. Have you found yourself wishing problems away, only to see them fester and grow? By taking a look at these three ways people relate, it can help you build a culture that values people, their gifts, talents, and contribution to the mission of the organization.

"But I'm not the boss" you say. This is definitely a trend, where positional authority is relied on less and less, as products are developed and delivered with cross-organizational product and project teams. These teams have assigned leaders who are not the team members' boss who controls his/her performance review and pay. This higher standard of leadership, enabling joy in work, requires this new form of leader to work with influence rather than command and control.

What are you, as the team leader, to do? Enable joy in work.

How, you say? Read on...

This foundation of a leader's job be enabling joy in work is not our idea; it is a time-tested theory of the quality revolution great W. Edwards Deming. Over the years working with teams struggling to work together on projects, we have found his words deeply true, though hard to apply without a pragmatic framework. That is where this idea of the 3 C's (Connect, Create, and Contribute) helps make enabling joy in work doable.

As you look at teams you've worked with that have been great, do you see clues of the 3 C's? Here's the type of things to look for.

- Connection: People sharing the "why" of the team's purpose. Teammates developing rapport, respect and psychological safety with each other.
- Creation: Each Team member seeing an opportunity for their skills and jumping in to apply them, while being interdependent with the other talents on the team.
- Contribution: Each member sees the fruits of the team's labor go to the purpose; designs become projects, projects become reality, products hit the streets.

It is also easy to see that the opposite also happens. When we experience conflict and disengagement on the team, the 3 C's can also help lead us back to joy in our work.

- Connection: Members saying they were "told" to join the team. Disrespect between team members. Members losing faith or sight of the purpose (whining "Why are we doing this?" or "This will never work!")
- Creation: Members don't believe they have anything valuable to provide. Members skills don't have a clear application toward the project goals.
- Contribution: The team's end results are dismissed, ignored or lost in bureaucracy. Team creations are dismissed, seemingly by whim.

If you can see the team is missing any one of these things: connection, creation, or contribution, you now have a framework for how to improve the team dynamics. Draw upon the great teams ways to connect, create, and contribute and you will be on your way to a team that has joy in work.

Do you think the power of Connect, Create, and Contribute could help your team? Soon we will be launching a book that unpacks this enabling joy in work concept. It is a fable that shows how to implement this idea from six different viewpoints. We hope it will help you take this idea and equip you to enable joy in your team. We just couldn't help getting a sneak peak to you. There will be more coming soon!