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Creating Meaning At Work Through Rituals



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Rituals are an important part of who we are as humans. When people attend religious ceremonies, celebrate a birthday or cook Thanksgiving dinner, we are engaged in rituals. These gatherings

are opportunities to pause the day-to-day hustle and bustle of life and be present for a moment as we engage in something special. A ritual is a marker of appreciation, contemplation and presence.

In the workplace, rituals are especially important to company culture because they help everyone in the organization feel that sense of belonging. When leaders ritualize certain experiences, they diminish the likelihood that work feels like a constant grind.

A *Harvard Business School* [study](#) indicated that ritualized group bonding activities “led to a 16 percent increase in how meaningful employees judged their work to be.” Interestingly enough, these employees were found to be more likely to “go the extra mile for the company.”

Why Workplace Rituals Matter

When leaders promote—and employees participate in—rituals in the workplace, they create connections that help each find meaning in their roles. *HBR* outlines the [three major benefits](#) that workplace rituals have: psychological safety, purpose and performance.

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Let's break down each element:

- **Psychological safety:** When everyone is included in workplace rituals, they feel empowered to voice concerns, share new ideas and

take ownership of challenging situations.

- **Purpose:** Increasing the meaningfulness people feel in their jobs helps them connect to a greater purpose—and to the company's purpose.
- **Performance:** The natural outcome of psychological safety and purpose is increased performance. Individual excellence leads to organizational excellence.

How To Create Meaningful Workplace Rituals

Here are some actionable tips for creating rituals at work to make people feel connected.

Create an employee journey map.

Leaders can begin creating opportunities for employees to feel a sense of belonging and connection even before they are hired. Optimize the employee experience from start to finish by focusing more on purpose. In the same way you would map out a customer journey, you must map out the entire employee journey. The map should include ways to ritualize the following transactions, with examples:

- **Recruiting:** The interviewer should consider sending a follow-up email to the candidate highlighting summarized bullet points of what the interviewer liked about the conversation.
- **Onboarding:** Take each new hire out for a celebratory lunch with their new team and manager during their first week, or send them a welcome gift basket.

- **Frequent feedback exchanges:** These should regularly occur between peers, between leaders and those they manage, as well as among the leadership team. To ritualize this experience, one might set a trigger for the feedback; for example, every time the team misses a goal, it's time for a round of feedback in which those from all levels participate.
- **Stay interviews:** Conducting these on a regular cadence is good, but how is the cadence decided? Again, it can be triggered by another event, such as work anniversaries.

The employee journey map can be a tool to create moments that are special by finding opportunities for ritual. For example, when someone celebrates a work anniversary, giving them a shoutout in front of the entire company creates connections between the employee, their peers and the organization as a whole.

Foster connection through meeting rituals.

Meetings are a chance to connect with colleagues and leaders to make decisions, offer insights into the status of various projects or simply share information. Regardless of the purpose of the meeting, creating a ritual—something meeting attendees can always expect to participate in—fosters connection. There are many experiences leaders can create, but to name a few:

- **Gratitude:** Everyone mentions one thing they are grateful for. Gratitude can range anywhere from a good cup of coffee to someone's favorite sports team winning an important game.
- **Company goals and results:** This is a good opportunity to bring everyone back to the goals the company is working to achieve or the results it has already achieved.

- **Purpose:** Every company has a purpose statement, a reason why it exists. A meeting is a good time for the leader to restate the purpose and ensure it is engrained in the company's vocabulary.

Create opportunities for peer recognition.

It's nice to be recognized by a leader for our performance, but peer recognition can be even more impactful on the organization's performance than manager-only recognition. There are many fun, creative ways for peers to recognize one another:

- **Meeting openers:** Take some time at the beginning of weekly transactional meetings to formally recognize a team member for something they did to help a co-worker or the organization.
- **Awards:** Some companies have awards that can be passed from person to person. Consider making a trophy out of an unusual object—maybe a toy—that employees can give and receive. This is even possible when working from home. The object can be mailed from place to place. This might take more effort, but receiving an award in the mail unexpectedly creates quite a positive experience.

Celebrate with annual rituals.

Finally, as with annual holidays or birthdays, create annual rituals, such as a yearly all-hands meeting (especially beneficial for remote workers), fundraising activities or leadership development workshops. These experiences should feel special to the participants, as well as help them connect to the organization's larger purpose, whatever that may be.

Experiences are everything.

In company culture, experiences are king. The way leaders and employees exchange information is an experience, even for those

not involved in the conversation directly. So, intentionally creating positive experiences—workplace rituals in this case—only benefits the entire organization through connectedness. It helps companies and employees reach their full potential. [Forbes Human Resources Council](#) is an invitation-only organization for HR executives across all industries. *Do I qualify?*

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