



# THE NO LIMITS WORKPLACE

Aligning work with the human spirit  
Yielding enduring prosperity and individual reward like nothing before

## Tenet # 2 - The real drivers of high performance and employee engagement

“There’s only one path to enduring high performance and sustained excellence and that is through alignment with the human spirit”.

“For most companies, the alignment of work with our higher nature offers greater potential for improved business results than any other effort that can be undertaken”

While these two statements are true, the problem is that few understand what “alignment with the human spirit” means or if they do, then few know what actions to take, methods to apply, and what structures and practices to put in place to get that alignment between what is best in people and the workplace. That’s OK as it wouldn’t be expected that many business people would know that. Our business teaching and operational traditions have had little emphasis on human nature at the level we’ll discuss here and for good reason. That know-how simply hasn’t been a necessary ingredient for success. Why teach something no one wants to learn? And why learn something that doesn’t appear to matter?

But here we go. The business world has changed and continues to do so rapidly. And as we’ll make very clear, the combined business and human nature knowledge that enables us to answer questions such as;

- What motivates people to find what’s best in themselves and bring it to the moment?
- How is that best effort sustained?
- How do we ensure that it’s directed towards organizational objectives and success?
- How do we deconstruct current structures and practices that inhibit or defeat it?
- How do we install the things that promote it?

The ability to answer those questions is quickly becoming THE most important business knowledge an organization can have.

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It’s accurate to say, that almost all companies operate from highly flawed assumptions of what promotes high performance and maximizes individual and collective potential in the workplace. These flawed assumptions guarantee that great amounts of potential are left untapped. For years that’s been of little consequence because success hasn’t required it. But in today’s more complex and faster changing knowledge and idea economy, this underutilization of resources and missed potential is beginning to cause real pain. For companies willing to re-orient their practices to better align with the truth of our human nature, the opportunity to improve operations of all kinds and gain significant competitive advantage is very great.

### CAN HIGH PERFORMANCE BECOME THE RULE RATHER THAN THE EXCEPTION?

What entity doesn’t want their employees to exhibit performance characteristics such as commitment, initiative, innovation, teamwork, loyalty, desire to learn, creativity, and enthusiasm? We all know that if talent and skill are tied to those characteristics, a high level of performance will result. And while we’re at it, let’s ask... Do people want to exhibit these characteristics? Of course they do. And we all exhibit these characteristics in some of our life roles, at least sometimes.

So what we’re saying is;

- a) organizations want and need people to apply these behaviors,
- b) people want to do these things,
- c) and they can.

Given that, what the heck is it that prevents a high level of these behaviors from being the norm, especially in today’s knowledge and idea economy where they’re so badly needed?



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Good question. As we'll see that answer isn't so much in taking actions to stimulate these behaviors as it is in removing the barriers that defeat them.

As mentioned in the introduction, companies everywhere are seriously lacking when it comes to having a clear, comprehensive, and workable understanding of human nature. As a result, when we design our organizations, workplaces, roles and responsibilities, programs and practices, work processes, etc. we come up short to a tremendous degree compared to what is possible. It's in starting with that clear understanding of human nature and progressively building our workplaces around what is best in people that those previously mentioned descriptors of high performance become available. We can begin that de-construction and re-construction process anytime, anywhere, and people love it. And don't think that this in any way ignores or de-prioritizes customer needs or those of other stakeholders. To the contrary, this approach greatly enhances everything that customers care about and are most willing to pay for.

Our objective in this short article isn't to provide a full discussion of human nature (see my book Assembling the Happiness Puzzle and many other sources on human nature and behaviors). But we will offer some ideas that need to become part of the basic business acumen package for decision makers. Working without this knowledge is much like trying to grow plants in the wrong soil, sun, water and temperature exposures. It's always an uphill battle and exhausts energy and resources. Whereas when we plant in the right dirt, sun, water, and temperature exposures, things flourish naturally. That's the simple truth from which we want to operate. When we "build out" from the right stuff, many will flourish, not just those who know how to succeed despite a system that is far less supportive than it could be. In the right dirt, etc. high performance tends to come organically from everywhere. Flourishing, as in high performance, is normal (this is how regular folks collectively do great things).

### BASIC TRUTHS OF OUR HUMAN NATURE

Let's start off with what we might call "Human Nature Basics for Business Leaders". Though this is brief, it's chock full of powerful and applicable knowledge. Not too much and not too little. The NLW is all about offering just enough insight and then adding the connected up and downstream info that allows new found knowledge to become actionable. For the NLW, knowing is nothing unless it results in doing.

1. We have three somewhat integrated components to our human nature, biological, intellectual, and spiritual. Within these components we all have potential for higher nature tendencies and lower nature tendencies.
2. Higher nature tendencies are related to personal growth, advancement of capabilities, contribution, and connection with others (becoming our best self and serving others). The list of these is long but beyond the work performance ones mentioned previously we can include positive energies such as love, inner peace, thankfulness, inspiration, and others. And also values such as honesty, courage, trust, integrity, responsibility, respect and more. All we'll call higher nature energies and actions.
3. Lower nature behaviors align with a needy, self-centered, "what's in it for me" view. That view translates into behaviors such as such as a pursuit of ease, comfort, and ego-satisfaction. Examples are laziness, disinterest in others, interest in one's own need fulfillment, a need to be seen as better than others, and in general motivations towards selfish ends. Negative energies such as worry, anxiety, frustration, anger, jealousy, fear, hate and others are common outputs of unfulfilled needs. Values are often set aside for expediency of need fulfillment and behaviors that seek to promote one's self, devalue others, or even be hurtful are more routine.
4. Sustainable high level performance comes from our higher nature. Great organizations and great leaders in all fields of endeavor figure out how to promote higher nature behaviors and link these things to organizational objectives. Importantly, the ability to do this is more critical to success today than ever for reasons we'll continue to point out. Lesser entities have more of the lower nature behaviors throughout the organization. People can tilt either way depending on the environment around them.
5. Everybody, yes everybody, wants to do more higher nature stuff and less lower nature stuff. Everyone wants to find what is best in themselves and use it to contribute to something worthy (key to know this for NLW leadership). Yet people can and of course do gravitate towards their lower nature for all kinds of reasons.
6. Organizations that provide a workplace environment that helps people find that "higher and most contributing self" will earn a very high level of commitment from their people and all the positive and constructive behaviors



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and results that go with it. This ability to tap into people's higher nature will be a very significant differentiator between companies in the knowledge and idea economy going forward.

In order to lead effectively (see definition of leadership, Tenet 6) in today's knowledge and idea economy, leaders have to develop a good "feel" for that human nature knowledge and how to apply it to bring out the best in people.

### THE END-TO-END BUSINESS EQUATION

Now that we know some basic truths about our human nature, let's ask... How do we promote higher nature behavior in the workplace? And how do we connect all of this to work output?

Once again, it's those good questions that set us up for success. Working from the above knowledge, let's link to another practical truth of our human nature. What drives high performance is meaning. To the degree that something is meaningful is to the degree that we will apply what's best in us towards it. Think about it, people will pour every fiber of their being into something, even sacrificing their lives, if it's meaningful enough. So what we want to do, and for all the right reasons, is make work meaningful. We'll start with this simple equation.

#### High Meaning = High Performance

No amount of money or anything "transactional" motivates people like meaning. Money, fear of job loss, desire for promotion, status, etc. will motivate different things in different people and not always good things. But the sustained high level application of the types of behaviors we're looking to promote (the higher nature behaviors that businesses need more than ever) come only from high meaning. This is just a fact of human nature. It's nothing that you or I or anyone can change. We can deny it or ignore it but that truth will remain as it stands. Truth is like gravity, it's just there and it isn't going away. Our job is to understand it and act in accordance with it. And the truth is that meaning will bring out the best in people.

So, next question. How do we create meaning in the workplace? Well, we can't cover all there is to know about that subject here. But as we've indicated in the info above, things that associate with what's best in us, with our higher nature, align with meaning. As we'll continue to point out, these things fall into two categories. One is "best self" the other is "serve others". So at work, when we expand our capabilities through acquisition of knowledge and development of skills and abilities (KSA) and we're engaged in important efforts that are challenging yet possible, that's meaningful because we're making the best of ourselves. From these KSA acquisitions and challenges we become more than we were before having them. And why does that have meaning? Because now we can contribute more to the world around us because we have the expanded capability to do so. There we go - best self and serve others. These two components of meaning are never separate, always a function of one another. Summarizing, when we have the opportunity to put that continually improving self towards making a difference by contributing to something important and worthy... That's meaningful. Surely we can see the work-related potential of this.

So meaning aligns with our higher nature which is defined by our highest / best self and contribution to something worthy. Extending our equation.

#### Best self and contribution = high meaning = high performance

In workplace terms, "best self" has to do with work-related knowledge acquisition and development of skills and abilities. And "contribution or serve-others" has to do with engagement in important and challenging work that has impact on company results. People want to learn, they want to develop their skills, they want to be challenged, they want to contribute and be part of something they feel good about. Yet companies do a poor job of leveraging these positive tendencies thinking so often that it's the easier road, more pay, benefits, and time off that people want. People may say they want those things. But that's for two reasons. One is because few can articulate what we just said above, though most know it intuitively. And two, because, as people so often see their



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workplaces as lacking meaning, they don't care enough to prioritize growth and contribution above these more self-centered (lower nature) things. Our workplaces ask for mediocrity and it is given. Once we realize that what people really want is to be part of something that helps them find what's best in themselves, their list of wants will evolve from "what can I do to make my life easier" to "what can I do to ask more of myself to contribute to this effort". Again, that's a fact of human nature. So continuing to build out our equation.

Work-related growth, challenge, and opportunity to contribute = best self and contribution = high meaning = high performance

The next piece of our equation goes on the downstream side of it. As we put things in place that appeal to our higher nature and promote what is best in us and we get high performance characteristics such as creativity, enthusiasm, supportive behaviors, determination, initiative, and others, the whole enterprise gains strength. These individual performance attributes are demonstrated collectively by enterprise-wide responsiveness, adaptability, innovation, and a higher level of intelligence at all levels of the organization. The very characteristics required in today's more complex, fast-changing and more competitive environment. We might say our enterprise as an organism becomes stronger and more capable of continuous upward evolution. This is the power of the organic self-evolving enterprise. So adding to the equation.

Work-related growth, challenge, and opportunity to contribute = best self and contribution = high meaning = high performance = stronger enterprise

And completing our equation is the part that everyone wants. That is, business results. Our problem so often is that managers focus on results without considering all parts of the "total equation" that needs to be in place to make those results happen. We are of course building that total equation. So with all these components in place, the last thing is to ensure that all this energy is directed towards organizational objectives. Alignment is key (see Tenet 6 on leadership). And with that alignment it seems obvious that this enterprise will put out good results. And importantly the company will be well-positioned to continue to improve results. And most importantly will be organically constructed with the capacity to adapt and innovate it's way through external changes, that we know are coming, in customer needs, industry trends, and the business environment. So completing our equation.

Work-related growth, challenge, and opportunity to contribute = best self and contribution = high meaning = high performance = stronger enterprise = improving business results

As we're making clear, it all starts with understanding human nature and then continually building as many aspects of the workplace as possible in alignment with our higher nature. And it all ends with our ability to do and be the following;

- capable of responding to the marketplace quickly
- adapt by quickly turning those responses into repeatable processes and standards
- be a smarter, more creative and innovative organization
- provide a rewarding workplace for employees
- with supportive and value-based behaviors the norm
- creating an "organically self-evolving enterprise"
- producing excellent results

Success by all meaningful measures.

### SUMMARY AND EXPANDING GOOD IN THE WORLD

Our discussion here and throughout the No Limits Workplace centers around the progressive creation of a workplace that promotes meaning, working from whatever one's current state might be. But as emphasized in Assembling the Happiness Puzzle, people "carry" a level of meaning within them. People who bring meaning into life, regardless of their circumstances, are the happiest people as meaning and happiness have much to do with one another. So learning to bring meaning into one's life in any circumstance is key to personal happiness. And surely we want to hire people who do that as they are most often positive and productive people.



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We mention that just to be sure that we understand that meaning is both an “internal-thing” and an “external thing”. But importantly, no matter how much meaning a person carries with them, their work environment will have much influence on how they turn that into work performance. Many high meaning and happy people are not high performers at work because, as we’ve discussed the traditional workplace does much to defeat these tendencies. And those who carry less meaning are even more significantly influenced by their surroundings. The point is we don’t want to talk ourselves into the false notion that we can hire our way to a meaningful workplace. Surely we can improve our hiring practices to increase the chances of getting positive energy people (see HR section). But it’s in creating an environment that encourages and promotes what is best in people that these top people will respond most favorably and that we’ll position those who aren’t at that level to locate what’s best in themselves as opposed to tilting the other way, as is so common.

Lastly, and this may sound a bit high-minded to some but... What the heck, if you’re not here to make the world a better place, then what are you here for?

From our view, implementation of the ideas, structures, and practices that comprise the No Limits Workplace will not only make for more successful business institutions and improved results but will also do much to help make the people within them better. Let’s ask ourselves. Will someone who finds what’s best in themselves and develops a serve-others / contribution mentality at work feel better about themselves and apply these higher level behaviors in other areas of their life? Well, yes, for sure, absolutely. People want these things. But the world, including the world of work, often influences us towards our weaker nature, convincing us that we will achieve happiness by fulfilling our “lower nature needs”. Workplaces traditionally have promoted more of that than the higher level behaviors we’re discussing here. So it’s entirely realistic for an institution (business or otherwise) and a leader within it to have as an objective to raise the bar both on their enterprise and the people in it whether at work or not. And isn’t this just the logical next-generation evolution of free-enterprise? For sure it is. We might say it’s free-enterprise in full and beautiful bloom, promoting what’s best in people and benefiting from it.