RE-IGNITE: REAL CHANGE

Re-ignite your organisations connection to purpose, re-engage your people, and re-align their performance expectations and commitment to an organisation's culture.

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RE-IGNITE: REAL CHANGE

My first thoughts when the pandemic hit and forced millions of office workers around the world to Work From Home (WFH) was – FINALLY!

Finally, everyone will catch up to what some employers had already known for years – that trusting your employees – allowing them flexibility to choose where and when they work – only enhances productivity, engagement and effectiveness. It opens-up the talent market because you are no longer constrained by geographical boundaries. And it forces managers and employers to manage to results, not time. To judge performance based on the quality of a person's output and contribution to the culture – not to how many hours they spend at work or their specific working style.

The global pandemic has been the greatest disruption to organisational norms of working that we have experienced since the advent of computers and high-speed internet. The events of 2020 and 2021 have propelled us forward by three to four years in adoption of digital technologies[1]. They have raised to the forefront the impact of mental health on workers and the responsibility that employers have in finding ways to support the mental, physical and emotional health of their employees[2].

In 2022, as vaccination rates increased and markets around the world start to emerge from the fog of lockdowns, government mandates and restrictions, the questions that many

1   McKinsey & Company: How COVID-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point – and transformed business forever, October 2020 Survey
2   https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/tackling-the-mental-health-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-an-integrated-whole-of-society-response-0ccafa0b/

leaders are asking themselves are; how do we **re-ignite** our connection to purpose and culture, **re-engage** our people, and **re-align** our performance expectations in ways that are conducive to sustainable growth?

In this whitepaper – I explore:

▶ The challenges we're all experiencing in a post-pandemic hybrid world

▶ The nature of the new paradigm – how we reframe these challenges as real opportunities for change

▶ A framework to **re-ignite** your teams.

The goal of this paper is to spark conversations between leaders and their teams that will enable organisations to effectively navigate hybrid.

The challenges we all face: Reluctance to return to the office

I don't know about you, but throughout 2020 and 2021, I'd been harbouring a dream about what abandoned offices would be like "once this was all over". I visualised people returning to workplaces, sharing breakfasts and lunches in meal areas, visiting local coffee houses and getting into meeting rooms to whiteboard plans and ideas together.

From the start of 2022, lockdowns were lifted in many countries and regions around the world. But office workers weren't rushing back. Instead, they were keeping themselves distanced. They were self-imposing invisible boundaries to stay safe. Who needs government mandates when you have real (justifiable) reasons keeping people at home?

And while this is completely understandable (not to mention safer, more time efficient for workers and better for the environment) it's not what many employers were expecting in the kick-off to 2022, nor was it what many workers, like myself, were imagining.

The virus is still in the community. The need to self-isolate continues to be a reality. And if employers were OK with people working from home during isolation; then why can't we be OK with it at other times?

It's very possible that office workers will never go back to the original paradigm of 9-5, 5 days a week. It's very probable in fact, that hybrid working is here to stay.

Disintegration of workplace culture

In a hybrid workplace where people spend a large part of their week working remotely, we become increasingly disconnected from our leaders, colleagues, even customers. This sense of disconnection is leading to a disintegration of workplace culture, as we knew it.

So, what is culture? Human Synergistics, a global organisation providing research and measurement tools for culture and leadership, defines culture as:

> *'The shared values, norms and expectations that govern the way people approach their work and interact with each other'.*

Simply, culture is "the way we do things around here".

We experience culture through observing the way people interact at work – by seeing how shared values and norms are expressed through behaviour.

The question is – can workplace culture be experienced through a two-square inch window on a screen? How real are people being when they're on camera – staring both at you, and at themselves through a self-projected image?

When we are in the presence of others, our brains are picking up on millions of tiny cues - the words others use, their tone of voice, their body language, the focus of their attention, who they choose to interact with, even how they walk and move in the space. We filter these messages and make judgements about what gets rewarded, what gets punished, and what is accepted as the "right" way to be in a chosen community.

When we interact with people through online mediums, the volume of data we receive is significantly reduced; body language is obscured,

and the brain's connection with smell and visual cues are disconnected. It's filtered, drip fed, through a tiny window. Trying to experience culture remotely is like watching a movie in black and white instead of colour. Over hundreds of interactions – this has the effect of slowly eroding the workplace culture experience.

High degrees of burnout & screen fatigue

It used to be that a meeting was a break from screens and an opportunity to move away from the desk. In a hybrid world, the switch to working from home has led to endless hours of sitting in the same spot, staring at screens.

During the height of the pandemic through 2020 and 2021, the constant nature of work with no delineation between work and home, increased pressure to perform, and uncertainty about the future, led to unprecedented rates of burnout and fatigue.

Asana surveyed over 13,000 knowledge workers around the world in 2020 and reported that 71% of knowledge workers experienced burnout in 2020.

In Australia, the story was not much better. Limeade, an ASX listed employee wellbeing platform reported 72% of the 1000 Australians surveyed were experiencing burnout, compared to 42% who said the same in the pre-pandemic Employee Care Report. And this is just the tip of the mental health statistics iceberg.

So what is Burnout? Burnout is the result of prolonged work stress. It feels like overwhelm, constant exhaustion and a feeling being ineffective at work no matter how hard you try. In 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) made the significant step in 2019 of legitimising burnout by adding it to its International Classification of Diseases.

Increased rates of burnout is bad news for business, and has been identified as one of the leading causes driving people to leave their jobs. But it also leads to disengagement – which can cost employers 34% of a disengaged employees annual salary, according to the Gallup State of the Global Workplace 2021 report.

People are questioning their work-life choices

It's been called The Great Resignation, The Great Discontent, The Great Reimagination, The Great Reset, The Great Realisation and The Great Reshuffle.

Whatever it is, it's a great big movement of people from jobs they don't like, into workplaces and lifestyle choices that suit them better.

Anthony Klotz, a business professor at Texas A&M University first coined this "The Great Resignation" early in 2021 in response to millions of Americans quitting their jobs at record rates in 2021.

The 2021 Gartner hybrid and return to work survey revealed that 65% of Australians surveyed are rethinking the place that work should have in their lives, and 68% are longing for a bigger change in their lives.

This echoed 2021 data from HR platform Employment Hero reporting 48% Australians said they were going to look for a new job within the next year, while 15% were already actively looking to split from their current employer.

Why are people quitting and moving at such unprecedented rates?

Some of the reported reasons are:

▶ leaving for new jobs with better pay or remote-friendly working conditions

▶ to drop the pay-check and start a business

▶ to re-educate or career-switch

▶ to simply take an extended break, prioritise family, and consider what's next

Ryan Roslancky, CEO of LinkedIn wrote *"It's clear that this #GreatReshuffle conversation is not just about how we work, but why we work. And isn't just about employees. It's about employers too, as they innovate to attract and retain talent with a new level of focus on employee fulfillment – which ultimately, will help drive better business outcomes".*
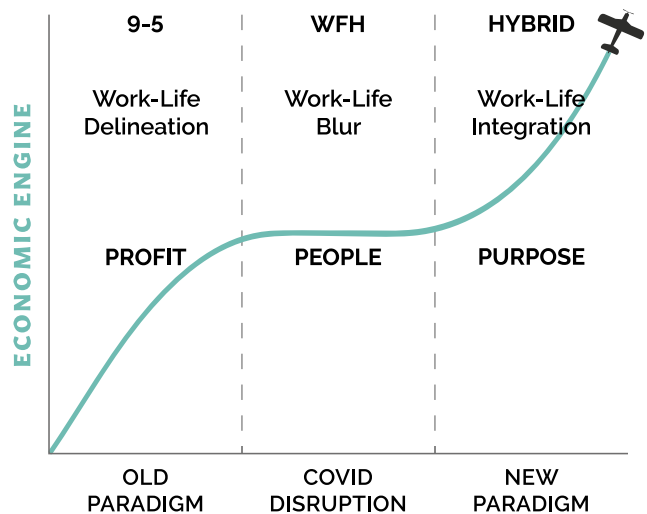
THE NEW PARADIGM

"Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next".

ARUNDHATI ROY

Arundhati Roy is an Indian author and winner of the Man Booker Prize for her novel, *The God of Small Things.*

She is inviting us to ask ourselves; How can we see this time as an opportunity for REAL CHANGE? How can we think of it as a portal from the old to the new?

We are now operating in a new paradigm. This is the time to reframe the problems we face as real opportunities for change.

	9-5	WFH	HYBRID
	Work-Life Delineation	Work-Life Blur	Work-Life Integration
	PROFIT	PEOPLE	PURPOSE
	OLD PARADIGM	COVID DISRUPTION	NEW PARADIGM

ECONOMIC ENGINE

The old paradigm

Think of the Old Paradigm as BC – Before Covid. The global economy was still growing, if not slowing. Office workers worked 9am-5pm, 5 days a week.

There was clear work-life delineation. Where we worked and where we lived were often different places. While the adoption of digital technologies before Covid was already starting to blur these lines; working from home during business hours was not yet a widely adopted practice.

Profit was our core focus. Success was judged based on fiscal metrics – revenue, margin and stock prices being the only real indicators of economic or business health.

COVID disruption

Then came the global pandemic. The GDP of the World Economy shrunk by a reported 6.7% in 2020[3] triggering the worst recession since World War II[4]. Millions of office workers rapidly shifted from offices to working-from-home (WFH).

But we weren't just working from home; we were living from home too. With mandated lockdowns, quarantining, home-schooling, and curfews – what ensued were two years of work-life blur (WLB). Where we worked, shared meals, did exercise, rested, schooled the kids, socialised – all happened under one roof – even sometimes at the same table!

During this incredibly challenging period, our core focus shifted to people. Keeping ourselves and each other safe became the priority for governments and businesses around the world. Empathy, care, compassion – for the first time in history – became the real currency that enabled organisations to survive, or even thrive, through the pandemic. Success was judged based on human metrics. Engagement, wellbeing, NPS (net promoter scores), and retention became the indicators of organisational health; held in the same regard as fiscal metrics.

3   Reported by statistica.com
4   https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/understanding-depth-2020-global-recession-5-charts

The new paradigm

The New Paradigm is Hybrid, where workers and businesses adopt a flexible approach to how, when and where employees work.

Gartner (2021) called this a switch to "human-centric design"; where work is designed around the individual; as opposed to "office-centric design"'; where work is designed around location.

This new human-centered approach is characterised by work life-integration – allowing workers flexibility to choose how they integrate their work and personal commitments to suit both the work and their individual needs.

In the new paradigm, our core focus is purpose. Our priority now is about more than just keeping people healthy and safe; is about employee fulfilment and corporate responsibility in a world dealing with not just post-pandemic recovery, but escalating social, political and environmental macro factors.

Living through a pandemic has reminded us all that life is precious and time is short.

Increasingly, we're learning how to see our work not just a way to make money – but as a vehicle for creating meaning and purpose in our lives and communities.

In the new era, progressive organisations measure success on how they create value across their whole stakeholder ecosystem – for shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and the environment – because they understand how this approach leads to long-term, sustainable results.

It's time to RE-IGNITE

Following two years of disruption to our organisational norm, now is the time to re-think how we work, live, and lead in a hybrid environment. Now is the time to RE-IGNITE our workforce.

Hybrid is here to stay. And it's not a compromise.

Gartner (2021) research demonstrates that a hybrid environment will actually;

▶ Reduce fatigue by 44%

▶ Increase intent to stay by 45%

▶ Boost performance by 28%

But navigating this new terrain is not straight-forward. There are pros and cons to both businesses and individuals in a hybrid norm. Every business is unique. Every individual is unique. There is no one size fits all approach.

The RE-IGNITE framework below offers an effective way to for leaders and their teams to have the conversations that will allow them to navigate hybrid in their unique context.

In each section of the framework are a set of reflection questions intended to stimulate discussion and enable a pathway towards agreement on the best solution to enable workplace thriving.

The RE-IGNITE framework

Hybrid affords individuals more flexibility. But with greater flexibility, comes greater freedom; and with greater freedom, comes greater responsibility.

To thrive in the new paradigm –we need to reconsider:

▶ How we work

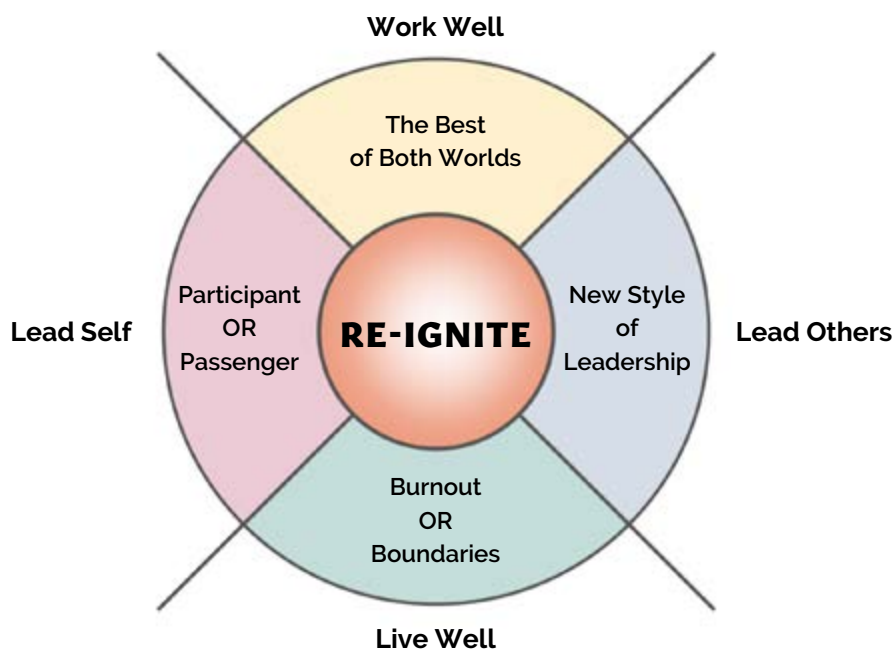▶ How we live

▶ How we lead ourselves

▶ How we lead others.

The RE-IGNITE framework invites us to think about how we adopt new strategies, to:

▶ work well

▶ live well

▶ lead self

▶ lead others

Work Well

The Best
of Both Worlds

Participant
OR
Passenger

RE-IGNITE

New Style
of
Leadership

Lead Self

Lead Others

Burnout
OR
Boundaries

Live Well

HOW TO WORK WELL: THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

How do we get the best of both worlds? That is, how do we get the best of working from home with the best of working from the office?

There's a continuum here:

Office Centric ← HYBRID → Radical Flexibility

On one end of the continuum is the Old Paradigm, the 9-5, 5-days a week, so called "Office Centric" design. Companies reverting to this approach as soon as it is safe to do so include Goldman Sachs, Netflix and Amazon.

One the other end of the continuum, companies like Atlassian, Canva, LinkedIN and Spotify – have made a permanent switch to radical flexibility – giving their employees freedom to work wherever, whenever and however they want; so long as they keep producing results as individuals and teams.

Then there are companies who sit somewhere in the middle; Adobe, Apple, and Google who've adopted a hybrid approach with mandates to return to the office about half the time; on average 2-3 days per week.

So how do you make the right call for your business?

How to find the best of both worlds...

Choose the right modality for the work

Working out what's right for your team means discussing the modality that best serves the work.

Typically – people want to work from home, not just because it affords them more flexibility to manage their own time, but because they can get more done! They're more productive because they experience less random interruptions and have more hours in the day to work (sans the commute).

The advantage of coming to the office is – interaction with colleagues, building social connections, and allowing opportunities for innovation that breeds from both planned and random connections.

The Gartner (2021) report highlighted four modes of working:

1 Working together, together: in the office, in meetings	**2** Working alone, together: in the office, at a desk
3 **Working together, apart:** at home, in online meetings	**4** **Working alone, apart:** at home, at the desk

Choosing the right modality depends on the type of work the team or individual needs to get done and building your weeks of meetings and activities around these modes.

Manage to results, not time. Remote working also depends on how well the team is set up to **manage to *results,* not *time*.** In high performing teams, every individual understands how what they do drives a result. They are connected to the vision, mission and strategy of the business, and effectively setting KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) or OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) that drive performance outcomes.

When teams manage to results; they empower individuals to manage their own time and effort according to business priorities. How they work, when they work, almost doesn't matter so long as they are delivering results and collaborating with colleagues in positive ways.

Questions to discuss in teams:

The only way to figure out how to get the best of both worlds is to have a conversation with your people and reach an agreement on what the right balance is.

▶ What work should we be together for? What work can we do apart?

▶ For the work we need to be together for – when does it work better for us to meet online? When does it work better for us to be in-person?

▶ How can we manage to results (outputs), not to time (inputs)?

HOW TO LIVE WELL: BURNOUT OR BOUNDARIES

It turns out, flexibility is a double-edged sword. To live well in the new hybrid paradigm; individuals must learn new ways to create boundaries, or they will burnout.

In a remote or WFH environment, we don't have the commute to and from work forcing a natural delineation. We don't even have a reason to leave the desk for meetings.

With rising rates of burnout and lack of work/life delineation, all indicators point to the fact that – we're working harder.

A CIO shared with me that productivity and work hours of his software engineers increased by 15% during lockdowns. To him – this was a warning sign. His people were already working hard enough; his main objective now was to avoid a burnout epidemic in his team.

How to set boundaries and avoid burnout

In a flexible working environment, more than ever, individuals need to take personal responsibility for boundary setting; negotiating within teams to establish the boundaries that work for both the business and their lives.

To establish positive boundaries:

▶ **Set aspirational, yet achievable goals**. Most of us are in a habit of setting goals at work – and if we're effectively managing to results, not time – we're setting measurable goals that clearly drive results. However, to avoid burnout– goals need to be achievable. We want people to be at their performance edge – the place

where they are working at full capacity – but not to the point of constant stress. To avoid this scenario we have three options; re-set expectations; increase resources in the team; or build skills and capabilities in people so they can effectively meet goals.

▶ **Set balanced goals.** If you only set work goals, you'll only ever prioritise work. In addition to setting work goals set holistic goals for your health and wellbeing. Setting goals across all life domains ensures we prioritise time and energy allocated to each bucket. Managers who insist on asking teams to set goals outside work and take an interest in what people are doing to sustain themselves, signal that taking care of ourselves outside of work is important.

▶ **Establish healthy habits.** A habit is a daily routine that we perform almost without thinking. To set boundaries, we need to put in place habits that sustain our energy reserves and protect us against stress. There are **proactive** habits that build energy reserves; like doing regular exercise; meditating; taking lunch breaks; and celebrating wins at the start of each meeting. And there are **reactive** habits that serve as circuit breakers and help us bounce back from a stressful experience; like taking a 10 minute walk; deep breathing; drinking a cup of tea; or debriefing with a trusted colleague.

We all have habits that work for us – the key is sharing these and agreeing on both personal and team habits to support effective boundary management in teams. For example, some organisations are adopting no-meeting Wednesdays; or turning off notifications after 7pm.

Questions to discuss in teams:

Generate a conversation within your team to find out what will sustain a positive, productive environment where individuals set and manage personal boundaries to sustain high performance.

▶ Are our work goals aspirational yet achievable? How can we effectively and regularly prioritise our efforts?

▶ What is important to me outside of work and how can I set goals across all domains of my life?

▶ What personal habits best support healthy boundaries in my line of work?

▶ What team habits best support healthy boundaries in our line of work?

HOW TO LEAD SELF: PARTICIPANT OR PASSENGER

What kind of person do you want to have at a party? The kind who turns up late; who hangs back and waits to be introduced; who criticises the food and music?

Or do you want the kind who turns up with bottle of champagne; introduces themselves to all your friends; and gets the dance floor started?

Of course – we all want the fun guest, not the whinger.

The same goes for workplace culture.

Culture is everyone's responsibility. Executives set the strategy for culture. People Leaders set the example and the direction. But individuals and teams need to come to the party.

Leading yourself in the new paradigm means being a participant, not a passenger. It means taking responsibility for the contribution you make to culture and owning your own career trajectory; not waiting for someone to hand out great perks and free lunches.

Self-leadership is taking ownership for yourself, owning your results, and being a voice for change. It means leading from your level, no matter what your job title is. It means taking your career in your own hands and being unafraid to ask for the opportunities you need to grow.

How to be a participant, not a passenger...

▶ **Be a role model.** Do you know what the values of your organisation are? Do you make decisions based on what values the company holds in high regard? To be a participant – find the sweet spot where your personal values intersect with the company values; and find ways of living them in your day to day by talking about them, giving feedback to others, and judging your own behaviour by them.

▶ **Add measurable value.** Do you know what the company mission and vision is? Do you know what your boss' performance is being measured on? What the company's performance is being measured on? If the company isn't great at publishing an annual strategic plan – don't let that be a barrier. Go and ask. Set yourself measurable goals that directly link to the company goals and shamelessly share your results with key decision makers. When you're under-achieving – share the lessons learned and how you're rectifying it. When you're performing – share the wins. Don't wait to be spoon-fed a clear strategy. Demonstrate how you add value.

▶ **Drive your own career growth.** Do you have a development plan? Have you highlighted to your manager the learning experiences you need to advance your skills to the next level? Employers want people who are keen to grow. But they need individuals to ask for what they want and make it clear how the investment in their learning will deliver a benefit to the business.

By doing these things, you make yourself an absolute asset to the organisation and you actively contribute to the kind of culture you want to work in.

In a hybrid world where people are empowered – it's up to individuals to take more of a role in creating great places to work and bettering themselves.

Questions to discuss in teams:

Have a conversation with your team about how every individual is going to contribute to a culture of performance, accountability and professional growth.

▶ How can we participate in our culture better?

▶ How can we participate in driving our strategic mission better?

▶ What do we each aspire to in our careers?

▶ How can we individually and collectively contribute to achieving those goals?

HOW TO LEAD OTHERS: NEW STYLE OF LEADERSHIP

Leading others is about adopting a new style of leadership – one that transforms potential and inspires high performance.

In today's workplace, competitive advantage springs from innovation and adaptation. The organisations that thrive are the ones that rapidly adapt – to exponential growth in digital technology, gaps in the market and tightening supply-chain dynamics. The modern era demands leaders who inspire, motivate, and activate the intelligence in their teams.

In my book, *Purpose, Passion & Performance* I talk about **inspiring leadership** as the most effective leadership style in the modern era.

Inspiring leaders are not just focussed on who you are – but on who you have the potential to be. These leaders share purpose and ignite passion. For these leaders, we're capable of producing extraordinary results over sustained periods without burning out.

How to adopt a new style of leadership

Inspiring leaders learn and demonstrate a system for leadership – a series of deceptively simple behavioural codes for unlocking performance. In The Leadership System they:

▶ **Set standards.** Inspiring leaders set high standards for themselves and each other – they reach for stretch goals and targets that keep them working to their performance edge – the place where performance meets potential –

where learning and growth occurs as a natural part of the performance process.

▶ **Normalise feedback.** Inspiring leaders never miss an opportunity to reinforce positive results with positive feedback. They create cultures where feedback and speaking up is encouraged because it contributes to learning, and deepens trust and respect. Feedback is both given well and received well because it's heavily weighted towards recognising positive effort and sharpening the application of strengths. When we normalise feedback, we create cultures where people are receptive to holding themselves and others accountable to results.

▶ **Coach strengths.** Inspiring leaders adopt an "ask vs tell" mentality to activate the innate intelligence and creative problem-solving capabilities of their teams. They appreciate individual strengths and build teams with complementary strengths – able to achieve team synergy – where the whole is better than the sum of its parts.

When leaders continually set standards, normalise feedback, and coach strengths, they enable their people to quickly move through cycles of growth and amplify performance in a structured and supported way.

This is good for them and it's good for the business. Leaders who learn and systematically apply these behaviours create cultures of psychological safety, where it's safe to set and hold each other accountable to high standards in the shared interests of the individual, and the business.

Questions to discuss in teams:

If you lead a team; it's time to assess your style of leadership and invite feedback about how you can inspire high performance. Here are some questions to get you going:
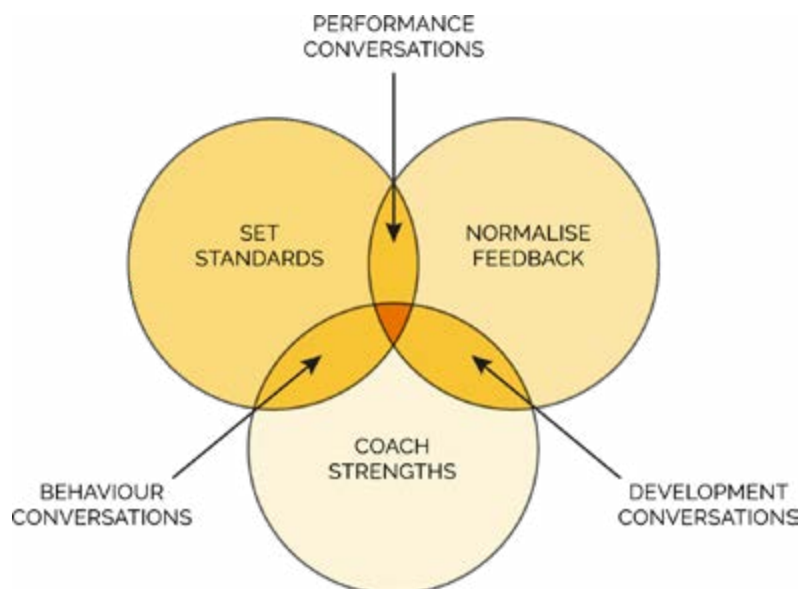
▶ What inspires you and what can I do more of to help you feel more inspired?

▶ How can I get better at normalising a culture of feedback? How well do I receive feedback?

▶ What would make you feel more comfortable to speak up and challenge ideas openly in this team?

▶ How can we get better at harnessing the talents and strengths in our team? How can we further develop our strengths?

THE LEADERSHIP SYSTEM

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

We are living and working in a new Post-COVID era. It's an opportunity to thrive in a new economic and social environment if you can harness it. This is not just about personal change – it's about societal change.

To emerge from the covid disruption into the new paradigm of hybrid working, we need to create clarity and dialogue between leaders and their teams.

Book my RE-IGNITE keynote

To get the conversation started, I've designed a 60-90minute RE-IGNITE keynote and optional 1-day workshop.

It asks employers and their people to think about how they want to work well, live well, lead themselves and lead others in a hybrid working environment.

It challenges individuals to take personal ownership over their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing as well as honouring and respecting the needs and expectations of their colleagues and employers.

Drive a new agenda and open the lines of communication.

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ABOUT STEPHANIE BOWN

Stephanie Bown is obsessed with performance and helping people move from simply functioning to fully flourishing.

Stephanie is a business performance specialist. She is obsessed with building workplaces where people thrive. Stephanie delivers talks, workshops and training sessions that lead to engaged, aligned, inspired teams!

She is the author of one of Australia's Top 3 leadership books in 2021 – *Purpose, Passion & Performance: How systems for leadership, culture and strategy drive the 3Ps of high performing organisations.*

Having completed over nine years of tertiary education in psychology and organisation dynamics; as well as professional accreditations in validated psychometric tools; Stephanie has devoted her life to helping leaders create the conditions for thriving, high performing teams.

After 10 years as a management consultant at Australian based values-led firm Nous Group, Stephanie joined Australia's #1 supplement brand Swisse Wellness as their in-house Performance Partner. There, Stephanie was the architect of performance systems that supported the company through a rapid turnaround and record sale for AUD $1.6 billion to Hong Kong listed Biostime.

In 2015, Stephanie relocated her family to Byron Bay, NSW, to start her own practice. Her purpose is to deliver *life changing learning experiences*.

Qualifications & Accreditations

▶ Bachelor of Applied Science - Psychology and Psychophysiology, Swinburne University of Technology

▶ Honours in Neuropsychology, Swinburne University of Technology

▶ Masters of Organisation Dynamics, RMIT University

▶ Certificate IV in Training and Assessment

▶ Diploma of Positive Psychology

▶ Young Presidents Organisation (YPO) Certified Forum Facilitator (CFF)

▶ Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) Personality profile tool

▶ Human Synergistics Life Styles Inventory (LSI); Organisational Culture Inventory (OCI), and Customer Service Styles (CSS)

▶ Genos Emotional Intelligence (EI) Accredited Practitioner

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