

Welcome to
G.R.O.W.

Growth, **R**esources and
Opportunities for **W**omen

Can Leaders Truly Make Employees Happy?

Thursday, January 8, 2026

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Mark Your Calendars!

Our next G.R.O.W. Special Interest Group Event:

Thursday, April 9, 2026



Speaker



Dr. Julia Wiener
JW Strategies
Private Investor



CAN LEADERS TRULY MAKE EMPLOYEES HAPPY?

THURSDAY | 08 JAN 2026
MAGGIANO'S LITTLE ITALY
DALLAS, TX



BVWD




TRUIST 



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Agenda

The Happiness Myth	01
What Culture Actually Is	02
The Psychology of Motivation (BPNT)	03
The Three Currencies of Culture	04
What Leaders Can Realistically Control	05
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TODAY'S TALK

THE QUESTION WE'RE ANSWERING TODAY

What's the point of culture if employees will never be happy?

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Leaders today juggle impossible expectations:

Drive Results

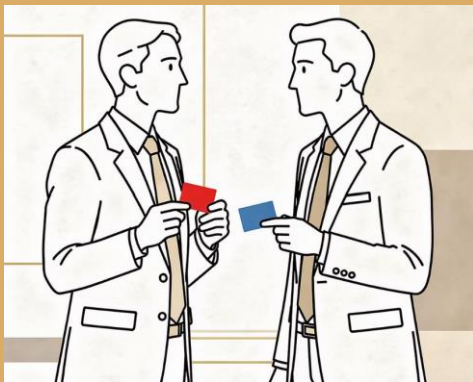
Reduce Turnover

Boost Engagement

Make People Happy!



KINESTHETIC OPENER



04

Partner Cards

- Find a partner
- **RED CARD:** Make your partner happy in 20 seconds
- **BLUE CARD:** Share something you enjoy doing at work and why it matters.

PURPOSE: Feel the impossible expectation leaders face.

The Tension You Just Felt

- How did it feel to be responsible for someone else's happiness?
- What did your partner actually need from you?
- What expectations do we — unconsciously — place on leaders?

DISCUSS WITH A PARTNER

Where in your leadership do you
feel responsible for someone else's
happiness?

THE HAPPINESS MYTH

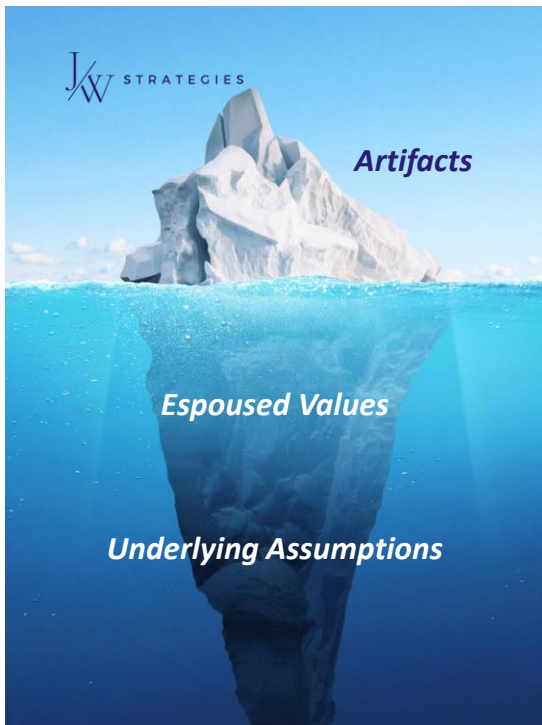
Organizational culture ≠ happiness.



The Happiness Myth

Happiness is Individual

- It's internal and deeply tied to personal purpose.
- Leaders can provide perks, swag, flexibility, pizza parties, but someone will always be unhappy because **preferences and values differ.**
- Leaders can bend over backward...but **leaders are not responsible for another person's happiness.**
- *The burden was never yours.*



What Culture Actually Is

Culture exists whether leaders design it or not. It is a living, breathing partner in the organization that:

- Helps leaders adapt
- Shapes problem-solving
- Influences strategy
- Impacts employee satisfaction or discontent

Why Culture Still Matters

1 Culture Can:

- Support success
- Enable adaptation
- Strengthen organizational functioning

2 But it can also:

- Hinder progress
- Generate dysfunction
- Fuel employee discontent
- Lead to stakeholder dissatisfaction

REMEMBER THIS

Culture is powerful — and neutral — *until leaders shape it.*



If happiness isn't your job, what is?

Leaders are responsible for the environment in which:

- Motivation can thrive
- Relationships can form
- People can grow
- Work can matter

This brings us to *the psychology behind human motivation.*

Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT)

Positive functioning requires three universal needs:

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>1 Autonomy</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Sense of choice, ownership, agency</p> | <p>2 Competence</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Sense of growth, mastery, capability</p> | <p>3 Relatedness</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Sense of belonging, connection, acceptance</p> |
|---|---|--|

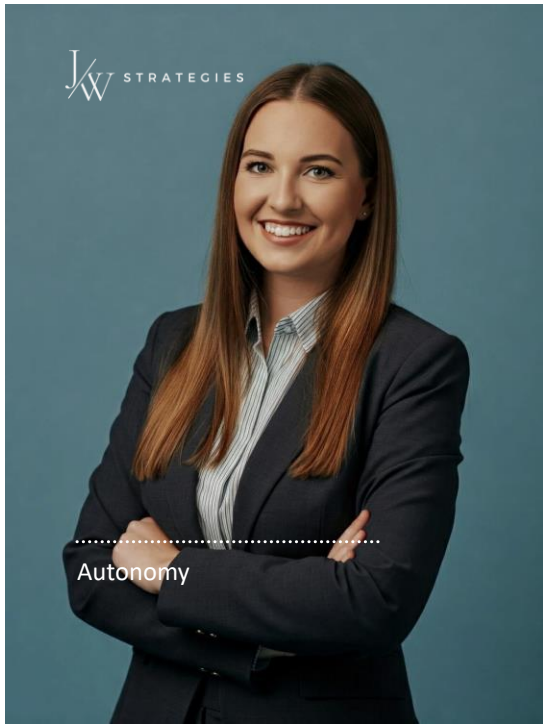
*When these needs are met → people feel fulfilled.
When unmet → disengagement, withdrawal, dissatisfaction.*

REMEMBER THIS

Happiness is a byproduct, not a goal.

AUTONOMY

Employees feel **empowered and trusted** when they have **clearly defined expectations** and **freedom** in how they achieve them.



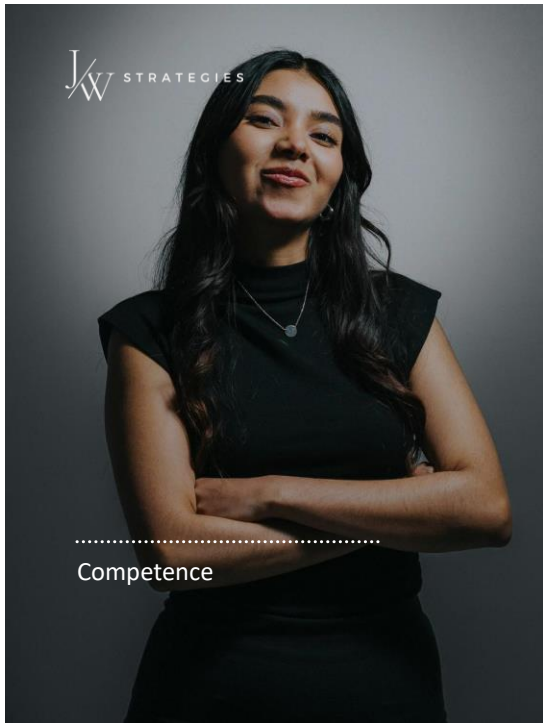
Autonomy requires:

- Clear goals
- Space to execute
- Trust-driven delegation
- Ownership of process

Without autonomy → micromanagement, frustration.

COMPETENCE

Leaders can provide growth and development opportunities... through training, mentorship, coaching, job-shadowing and **creative low-cost approaches.**



Competence

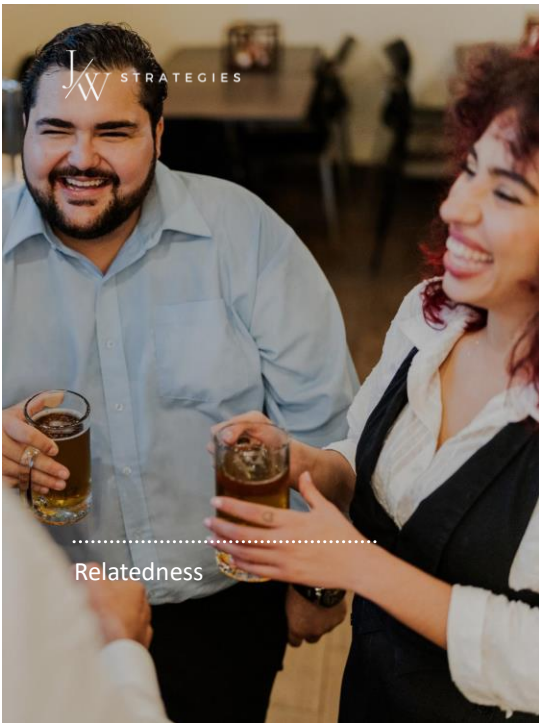
Competence flourishes through:

- Stretch assignments
- Challenge
- Gamified learning
- Peer learning
- Coaching and feedback

Without competence → **stagnation, low confidence.**

RELATEDNESS

Employees want to feel accepted and welcomed
for who they are.



Leaders foster relatedness by:

- Recognizing effort and milestones
- Encouraging peer friendships
- Building psychologically safe teams
- Aligning rewards to real values

REMEMBER

You cannot buy happiness or hand it to someone else.

QUICK TABLE DEMO



Currency Exchange

Try to hand someone at your table happiness through this dollar.

...but you can invest in these Culture Currencies:

1 Autonomy Currency
.....
Choice, trust, clarity, ownership

2 Competence Currency
.....
Coaching, development, challenge

3 Relatedness Currency
.....
Connection, belonging, recognition

Happiness is not legal tender. You can't transfer it. You can't purchase it. You can't distribute it.

But these three currencies reliably produce thriving.

Which currency are you currently under-investing in? What is **one tiny deposit** you could make this week?



1 Autonomy Currency
.....
Choice, trust, clarity, ownership

2 Competence Currency
.....
Coaching, development, challenge

3 Relatedness Currency
.....
Connection, belonging, recognition

What You Cannot Control



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- 01 Someone's happiness
- 02 Their personal values
- 03 Their emotional history
- 04 Their home life
- 05 Their internal sense of meaning
- 06 Their mood on any given day

You influence environment, not emotions.

What You Can Control



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Culture Levers:

- 01 Structure and clarity
- 02 Development opportunities
- 03 Team connection rhythms
- 04 Expectations and feedback
- 05 Psychological safety
- 06 Modeling aligned behavior

Culture Design

- Purposeful expectations
- Development pathways
- High-trust norms
- Real conversations
- Consistent leadership behavior



Happiness Chasing

- Perks, freebies
- Trendy amenities
- Endless fun events
- Short-term morale spikes
- Leader exhaustion



REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

SHAPING TEAM CULTURE

One **Leadership Intention**
I'm setting for 2026:

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SHAPING TEAM CULTURE

One leadership intention you will set for 2026

1. Where am I trying to create happiness instead of designing culture?
2. Where can I increase autonomy?
3. Where can I support competence?
4. Where can I strengthen relatedness?

Entrepreneur

ENTREPRENEURS / THOUGHT LEADERS

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How I Completely Transformed My Company's Culture on My Own Terms

Here's how I leveraged the lessons I've learned to build a better company (the one I didn't know I wanted) and leaned into a cultural rebirth on my own terms.

BY TAJA DOCKENDORF | EDITED BY CHELSEA BROWN | FEB 21, 2023

Taja Dockendorf
Owner and Creative Director at PulprWire
Entrepreneur Leadership Network® Contributor

Founder, and creative director of PulprWire a 100% female-founded and run CPG strategic brand, packaging, and digital launch agency. Taja has consulted, created, and grown over 400 brands while fostering a culture around growth, and intuitive leadership for her female-forward team.

Case Examples

Great Place To Work

HOME » INSIGHTS » BLOG

7 Heartwarming Employee Stories You Won't Believe



2. Wegmans

Care and helping others is central to Wegmans' identity. One notable example of this is the company's support of marginalized groups in their local communities.


Wegmans works to give these groups access to decent food via company donations to local food banks and hunger relief agencies, employee-led fundraising and volunteer efforts. Last year, Wegmans' donations approached \$50 million and over 18 million pounds of food.

"I believe we have excellent community involvement. Customers want to feel like more than just customers and more like friends and family. We always (pre Covid) have fun events for the community and employees including ice cream socials, barbecues, kids events like Trick or treating and holiday activities, and all are welcome to participate.

I'm really proud of the fact that we donate to our local food banks and help our community. All these things make me proud to work for Wegmans."

- Anonymous Wegmans employee survey response

LEADERSHIP 10
A MARK MURPHY COMPANY



Microsoft's Cultural Transformation Under Satya Nadella

Satya Nadella faced a significant task when he became Microsoft's CEO in 2014. The company was struggling with a stagnant culture marked by silos and internal competition. Nadella set out to transform Microsoft into a more collaborative and innovative organization.

He focused on shifting the culture from a "know-it-all" mindset to a "learn-it-all" mentality. Nadella emphasized the importance of growth mindset, encouraging employees to embrace learning and risk-taking. This cultural shift was crucial in breaking down silos and fostering a more open environment.

Nadella also prioritized inclusivity and diversity in Microsoft's workforce. By promoting diverse perspectives, he aimed to enhance creativity and innovation. This initiative not only improved the company's culture but also contributed to business success.

Under Nadella's leadership, Microsoft's cultural transformation led to substantial improvements in employee morale and collaboration. These changes were reflected in the company's financial performance and technological advancements. Microsoft's transformation is a testament to the power of leadership in driving cultural change.

REMEMBER THIS

Happiness is personal.
Culture is collective.
Leaders shape culture.

**When leaders stop chasing happiness and start designing culture,
everyone wins.**



— CULTURE EXPERTS

HOW WE PARTNER WITH ORGS

- Culture audits & diagnostics
- Leadership development programs
- Executive coaching
- Team workshops
- M&A culture insights
- Book Club (post Spring 2026)

Invitation: *Let's design the culture your strategy deserves.*

2-HOUR NEW YEAR

CULTURE WINS

1

The 2026 Culture Reset

A Clarity Reset: Build a Best-Place-to-Work (without burning out your leaders)

MOST POPULAR

2

Remote + Hybrid Supercharge

Create a remote/hybrid operating rhythm that feels human, energizing, repeatable

3

Top Talent Retention

Gain simple, high-impact tools to keep great people - no perks, gimmicks or pizza parties required

Set Your Team
Up For
Success in
2026

4

AI Era Leadership

A grounded, modern approach to AI that elevates humans and performance - without panic or hype

5

Conflict Training

Teams leave with confidence, shared language and a trust-preserving approach to solving real problems

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Dr. Julia B. Wiener

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