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Connect to “Why”

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When I started working with John, his morale was at an all-time low.
“I feel uninspired,” he told me. “I know my team can sense it and I’m afraid it’s going to rub off on them.”

John was the founder of a profitable horticulture company. On paper, things were going well. But in the day-to-day rush of client demands, staffing and constant execution, John had lost touch with the reason he started his business in the first place.

John had once been driven by a clear “why”: To bring joy and beauty into people’s lives through plants, and to give back to the local community that supported him. But somewhere along the way, that vision had gotten buried under the weight of an ever-growing list of to-dos.

So I asked John a simple question: What would inspire you again?

He didn’t hesitate. He told me he wanted to give a significant portion of the company’s profits to a nonprofit that built community gardens in food-insecure neighborhoods. It wasn’t a marketing idea; it was a return to the heart of what mattered to him.

Within a year, John and his business partner not only implemented the plan, but were constantly speaking about the initiative with both their team and their customers. Furthermore, they made it part of the company’s identity by sharing it on their website, sponsoring team picnics in the community gardens and organizing paid volunteer days for their employees to help out.

The effects were immediate and measurable. Community loyalty grew as customers and partners recognized the company’s commitment to local impact. Internally, employees felt a renewed sense of pride and motivation. John’s energy returned, and with it, the emotional tone of the entire organization shifted.

Being Part of a Bigger Purpose

John’s story illustrates an important truth: The “why” matters at every level of an organization. People want to feel like they’re part of something meaningful. They want to know that their effort is building toward something bigger than

the next deadline or the next deliverable. And when that sense of purpose fades, burnout isn't far behind.

A 2025 Gallup article, "Purposeful Work Boosts Engagement, But Few Experience It," makes this point with compelling evidence: "Employees with a strong sense of purpose at work are 5.6 times as likely to be engaged in their jobs as those with a low sense of purpose. They are also much less likely to feel burned out or be watching for or actively seeking a new job. These outcomes reflect better individual experiences at work and are associated with improved organizational outcomes, including productivity and profitability."

I've seen this dynamic across many industries in my work as a leadership coach. One of my favorite examples comes from a company I support in the space sector.

One of their teams was doing extremely unglamorous work: basic prototype engineering involving duct tape, repetitive testing and brute-force problem solving. Over time, morale deteriorated. The work felt inconsequential. People quietly counted hours. The team wasn't lazy or incapable; they were simply disconnected from meaning.

Then everything changed when the CEO introduced a bold and specific vision: the company aimed to capture a particular asteroid by 2025.

Suddenly, the duct tape had a purpose.

That routine work became a contribution to something extraordinary. The same tasks were still difficult, but now they were infused with direction. Employee morale soared. People told me they'd never been so excited to work there. That shift wasn't about higher incentives or new perks; it was about connection to a meaningful future.

So ask yourself: Do you have a vision that's genuinely inspiring to your team? And if so, does your team actually know that mission?

Because the truth is, in the day-to-day urgency of meetings, deadlines, Slack messages and shifting priorities, the bigger reason behind the work can quietly fade into the background. People get stuck in execution mode. They focus on tasks instead of purpose. Over time, that creates drift—a slow disconnection from alignment or the company's ultimate goal.

Furthermore, teams can slip into one of two modes that undermine performance: compliance mode and chaos mode.

In compliance mode, people do what they're told, but without full engagement. They execute, but they don't innovate. They check boxes, but they don't feel invested.

In chaos mode, people work hard, but in fragmented ways. Everyone is busy, but no one is aligned. Different departments optimize for different outcomes. Communication becomes reactive and trust erodes.

A clear "why" brings coherence. It gives everyone a shared north star, helping teams identify the priorities and actions that will most effectively move the organization forward.

Creating the Impact

If this article is inspiring you, keep this in mind: A shared "why" only creates impact when it's woven into culture, not just stated once. So how do you embed purpose into the heart of your company?

1. **Center your vision in team discussions.** Whenever your team is working on a project—especially if it's long or complex—remind people how this effort connects to the larger vision. Regularly connecting daily effort to this larger goal is one of the simplest ways leaders sustain morale and shared momentum.
2. **Revisit your vision at set intervals.** Teams need designated reflection points, such as bi-annual offsites or monthly all-hands meetings where you explicitly assess how current priorities tie back to the vision. Without periodic alignment, busy work creeps in. Use these moments to encourage honest dialogue. Invite your team to name what supports the mission and what distracts from it. Cultures of purpose are built through ongoing reflection, not perfection.
3. I**nclude your vision in onboarding.** New employees should understand from day one not just what the company does, but why it exists and how their role contributes.
4. **Highlight your vision in external communications.** Make your purpose visible to customers, partners and prospective hires on your website, in social media content and in annual reports. This can act as accountability, create customer loyalty and attract strategic opportunities.
5. **Embed vision in performance conversations.** In mid-year and year-end reviews, ask your employees: How connected do you feel to our company vision on a scale of 1 to 10? How do you feel your work supports our collective purpose? If employees don't feel connected, or don't understand how they contribute, treat that feedback as valuable data. Work with your leadership team to identify what's unclear, and co-create stronger alignment between daily work and the organization's purpose.

Sometimes, reaching an ambitious goal isn't about pushing people to improve the bottom line—it's about bringing the life force back to your team through a shared vision.

John didn't transform his company by working harder. He transformed it by remembering why the work mattered in the first place. The same was true for the space engineers building prototypes with duct tape: the tasks didn't change, but the meaning did.

When purpose is woven into culture, teams don't just execute. They align, commit and build something they truly believe in. **GP**

Megan Taylor Morrison is a Professional Certified Coach who has worked with leaders across many industries—from space to horticulture to interior design. Her clients include trailblazers at Meta, Syngenta, NASA, Columbia University and beyond. She has served as a professional coach for more than 10 years, after work as a science journalist. Her work is holistic and based in well-researched approaches to change. She works 1:1 with clients, creates bespoke trainings for companies, and runs a women-in-horticulture leadership program. To learn more about Meg, visit megantaylormorrison.com.