

# WHOLE PERSON WORKPLACE CULTURES



A SYSTEM  
FOR HOW TO

Gerald R. Wagner, PhD.

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Why · How · What

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In this paper I present a system to help companies create a “whole person workplace culture” for their employees. The purpose is to plan, communicate and maintain environments where employees can flourish. What creates these kinds of workplaces is unique to each company; there is no such thing as a specific recipe or “best practices”.

We give thanks to the Gallup Organization for their book entitled “Wellbeing: The 5 Essential Elements”<sup>1</sup>. Their famous book has surely had an influence upon the explosion of interest in employee wellbeing and business culture in general. Attention to culture is now a top priority for business executives<sup>2</sup>.

## **WHOLE PERSON DEFINITIONS:**

The definition of “whole person” is well articulated by the National Wellness Institute, offering these dimensions for both personal and work life: emotional (thoughts, feelings and behaviors), occupational (work-life balance), physical (physical activity, healthy eating and personal responsibility for healthcare), spiritual (personal values and beliefs that provide purpose), social (meaningful relationships and

companionship), intellectual (creative and stimulating activities), environmental and community (understanding of one's impact on the environment and their community overall), and financial (understanding of and preparation for financial responsibility).

A Whole Person Culture is an organizational environment committed to supporting and nurturing fundamental human needs including emotional, physical, spiritual, social, intellectual, financial, occupational, and community.

Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota shows what is in Figure 1. as a part of their Wellbeing Initiative. It is beautifully tells a story for wellbeing<sup>3</sup>.

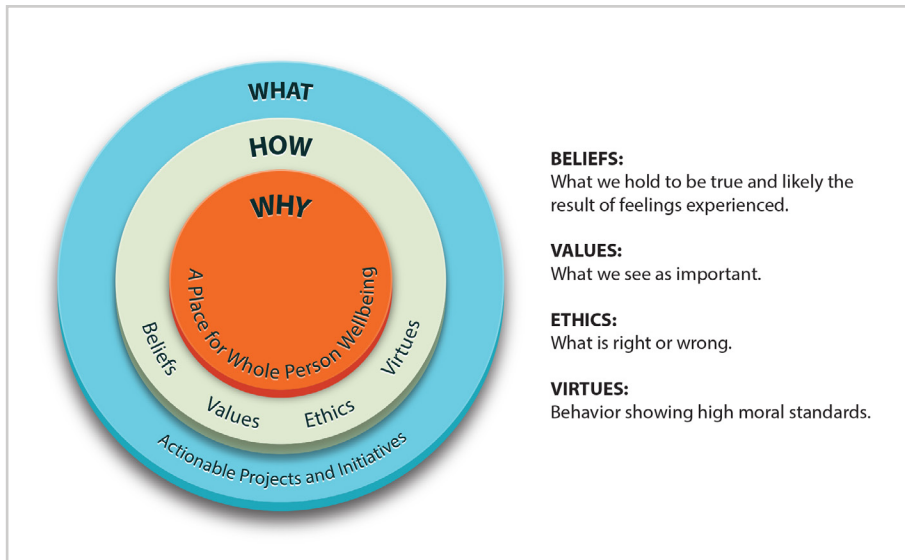


*Figure 1. The Wellbeing initiative, Gustavus Adolphus College, Minnesota*

## RESEMBLING GOLDEN CIRCLES

Figure 2 is my version of what Simon Sinek presents in his “Golden Circles”<sup>4</sup>. [A short video of his TED talk](#)<sup>5</sup> is a nice introduction. I love the simplicity of his concept and have chosen it as a model to describe

our system. I also love his words “taking care of people is good for business”<sup>6</sup>.



*Figure 2. A System for Whole Person Workplace Cultures*

His golden circles are called WHY, WHAT, and HOW.

- The WHY is the quest to create a workplace where employees flourish.
- The HOW are wellbeing elements that reflect values, behaviors, ethics, beliefs, and virtues practiced by employees. In today’s jargon the word most often used is simply “values”.
- The WHAT are projects and initiatives that actualize the WHY and HOW.

As Sinek suggests, the WHY is the starting point. It guides the HOW and the WHAT.

# THE HEART OF A WORKPLACE CULTURE

The wellbeing elements for the HOW are the heart and soul of every workplace culture. We suggest that this include seven or fewer elements. Here are a few examples.

Love  
Diversity  
Gratitude  
Health  
Lack of Fear  
Kindness

Innovative  
Empathy  
Trust  
Community  
Accountable  
Sustainable



A free online guide describes a collaborative process for teams of employees to arrive at the HOW elements<sup>7</sup>. The guide is simple and self explanatory; employee teams use a step by step world café conversation process to arrive at the HOW elements.

The same process is also used for arriving at behaviors expected for each HOW and also projects and initiatives for the WHAT.

## AFTER WHY AND HOW

The WHAT are actions in the form of projects, programs and initiatives. Here are a few examples from Culture ROLE MODELS published by the Academy of Culture Ambassadors.<sup>8,9</sup>

- Home Instead in Omaha, Nebraska has a dining room with its own chef. Employees gather to share delicious, nutritious food, as well as fellowship. Relationships are built and nurtured around shared dining tables.
- Vibrant Credit Union in Iowa has new team members complete the Strengthsfinder assessment and complete a 30 minute introduction explaining how the approach is used throughout the organization. Each team member receives their own copy of the book StrengthsFinder 2.0.
- CornerBank in Kansas partners with a local radio station, KSOK Radio, to advertise and help deliver Random Acts of Kindness. The Good Guys from the radio station join CornerBank employees every month (sometimes more than once) to surprise a handful of lucky people with a no-strings attached surprise.
- Home Advisor in Denver, Colorado offers a volunteer benefit for employees to take paid days off to volunteer with a nonprofit of their choice.
- Infusionsoft in Arizona offers a Dream Manager Certification for its leaders which immerses them in the mindset and conversations that are the stuff of successful dream management. After their certification, they kick off dreaming with their teams and encourage them to share their dreams with each other.
- Every business day since 2007, all Firespring team members in Lincoln, Nebraska have gathered at 11:11 am for a meeting that never lasts longer than 11 minutes. At this meeting, they recognize one another for living their values and highlight key numbers that drive the business. Everything, including financial results, is shared with team members.

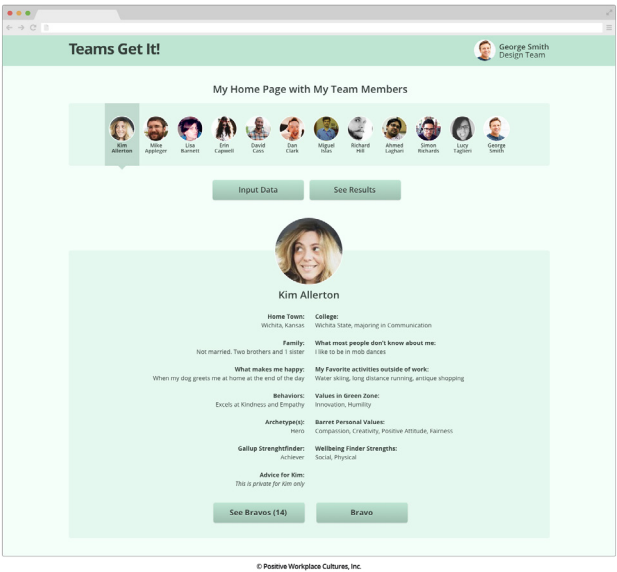
## **SOFTWARE**

Several software packages have been announced that are in some way related to employee engagement and happiness. Most are associated with more surveys, complicated analytics, employee recognition, rang-

ing from employees giving each other high fives to accumulating points for gifts. Accumulating points for gifts is reminiscent of S & H Green Stamps from the time of World War II<sup>10</sup>; the green stamps encouraged customers to purchase more. Now the points are to encourage employees to be “engaged”.

Reviewing software options can be overwhelming. Most products within a genre use the same words regardless of what the software actually does. You know software is well designed when it is intuitive and self explanatory; when user errors are forgiven and let the user return to their Home Page at anytime; and when there are only 3 main screens – home, input, results.

The software mentioned here is for employees to provide data that reflects their feelings and opinions about the extent to which the HOW elements are being practiced by team members<sup>11</sup>. The bases for this software are these 4 screens:



*Figure 3. The home page for George Smith a member of the Design Team. This is the starting place to input quarterly data about achievement of values for each team member. Here is also the place to give kudos to team members.*



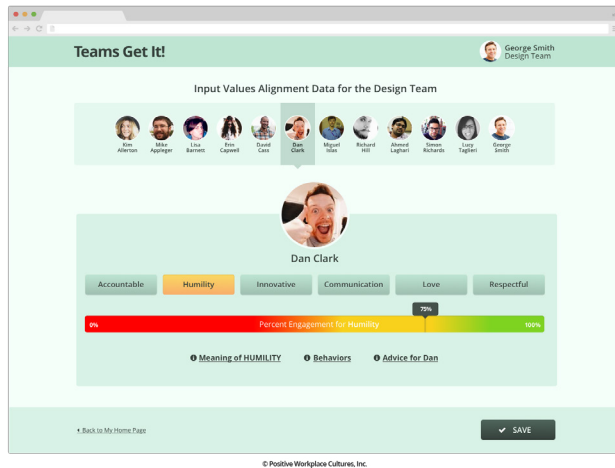


Figure 4. This shows team member George Smith providing his input for how well he thinks his team members are achieving the company values. Company value are provided by an actual company. The company would also provide a definition of humility and behaviors that are expected for high levels of humility. The user also provides advice for the team member



Figure 5. This shows the interaction between the software and user for selecting data to display.



by team members.

It is clear that more and more employees are expecting workplaces with whole person wellbeing. More and more, love is at the top of HOW priority list<sup>15</sup>.

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