DEVELOPING AN UNBEATABLE CULTURE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Peak performances require best practices. That's a definitive truth. After all, not using best practices assumes there's a better way and, as a result, better results. This is the beauty of strongly desired outcomes. These outcomes benefit from a sort of crowd-sourced effort to uncover the best practices to accomplish them. Weightlifting, the most participated sport by country in Olympics, has very few rules with regards to technique. However, the near indiscernible techniques that have become ubiquitous from China and Iran to Canada and Australia are the direct result of the pursuit of the best practices to get the most weight overhead in the clean and jerk and snatch. The techniques of the world's best group cultures follow in a similar step.

The same phenomenon happens when millions of young athletes have a strong desire to play Major League Baseball. They all seek out the best practices to accomplish the task of, say, throwing a baseball. The result is nearly identical throwing mechanics for all shortstops around the world. Why? Those are the throwing mechanics that work best.

The more arduous your desired outcome is to achieve, the less margin you have for error in your process to achieve it. When it comes to achieving peak performance in a group, we've seen time and time again that culture can make or break an organization.

The reason we're here is that the power of culture is an x-factor that continues to help produce remarkable outcomes in business, sport, and beyond. Having a great organizational culture is part of the set of best practices you'll need if you intend to accomplish the most meaningful, most utilitarian work possible in a group.

These stories will uncover the mechanics behind the world's best team cultures.

It all hit us that the magic we were feeling inside the group was making waves beyond the University of San Diego Torero locker room one morning in the spring of 2007. The latest issue of Baseball America was out and we had just moved into position as the fourth ranked NCAA Division I baseball program in the country. Our well-to-do baseball program had punched through and we were in a race for a national championship for the first time in school history. We were overachieving in ways that defied the best competition in the world.

More than ten years later, a 1,100 square foot, grimy garage in Venice Beach, California, seems to have similar results. DEUCE Gym has transcended itself into a brand that includes fitness but definitely isn't defined by it. With three physical locations and more than one thousand coaches seeking development under DEUCE's (pirate) flag, the organization seems to make waves with an extremely small boat.

What is it about this little gym that is inspiring people to quit their jobs and fly across the world just for a chance to be a part of the movement? And, what is it about a little private school baseball program that would take down the country's finest programs and go on to send rosters of players to the Major Leagues?
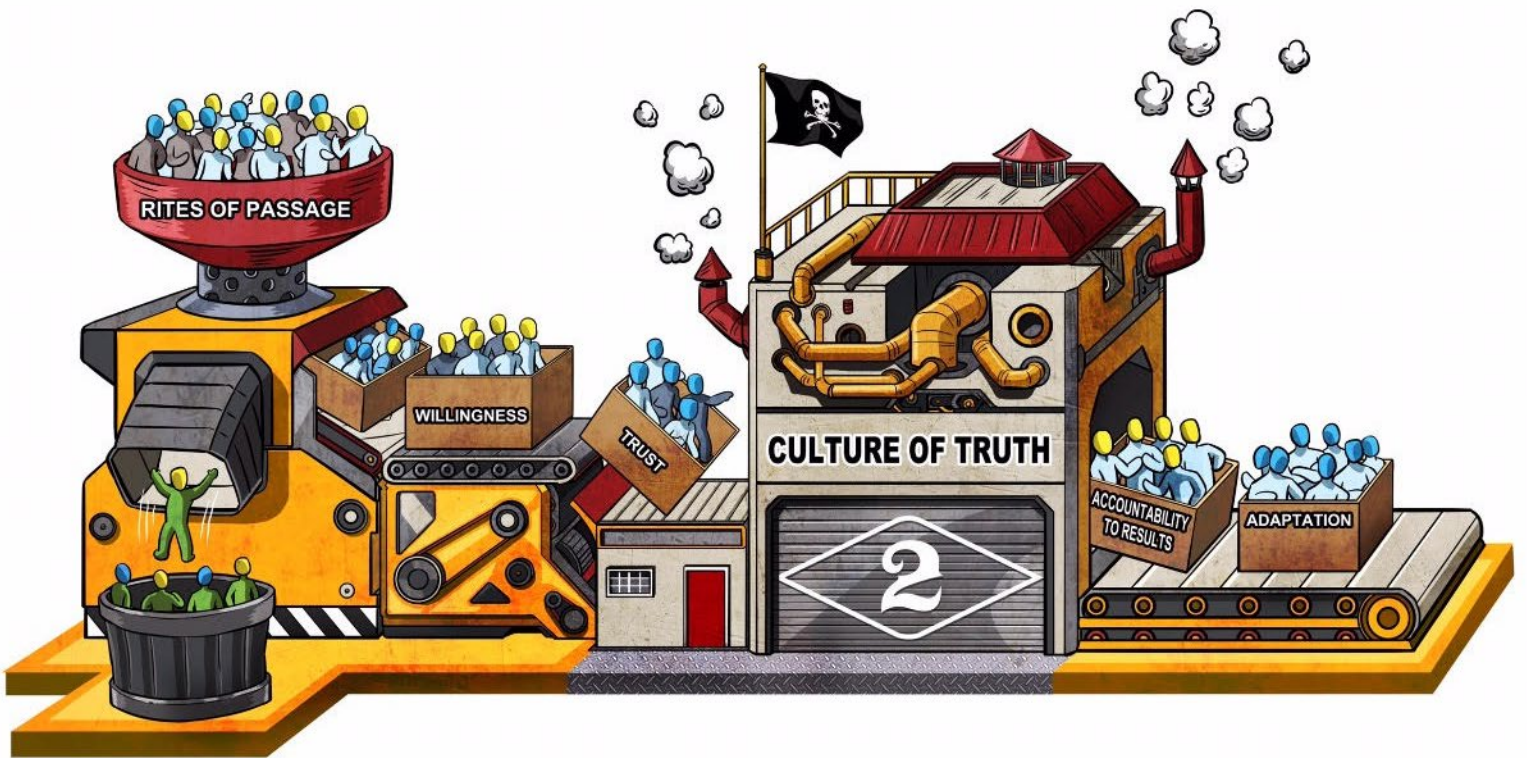
It's the culture.

Not only did I sit in that locker room to witness the magic in San Diego, I also get to live the magic inside of DEUCE. It's no accident, either. I'm not reporting the news about two organizations that stumbled upon a proper alignment of the stars. This was a deliberate effort to achieve peak performance and the secret weapon in both cases was **culture**.

What I forgot to mention was that while we went from unremarkably "pretty good" in San Diego to an inexplicable powerhouse, I stumbled across the academic supporting research for exactly what were accomplishing on the field. While enrolled at the Leadership School at the University of San Diego, I began an academic crusade into what is happening in the best locker rooms of sport and boardrooms of business. This insight has led us here with a need and a solution. *Our need is to maximize the performance of our organizations and the solution is building an unbeatable culture.*

THE CULTURE OF TRUTH

WHY IS CULTURE IMPORTANT FOR GROUP PERFORMANCE?

Culture is composed of the norms and habits of a particular group of people. It's the glue and the system behind group dynamics. This sometimes is manifested as formal traditions and other times it's expressed as unwritten axioms that act as an invisible hand of leadership. When developed intentionally these norms and traditions can strongly aid in the positive efficiency of the group. Culture transcends individual leadership, which, in part, is why this is a compelling topic. The notion that a motivated and charismatic leader will out maneuver the powerful forces of an organization's culture is misguided. What's easier: one charismatic, hard-working leader cracking the whip on a population of people to do a thing better or a culture that naturally informs the same population to do better? Since culture paints with a much broader stroke brush than individual leadership, any effective leader will devote considerable energy into fostering a culture that flows in the direction the leader wants the group to swim.

Culture guides language and communication, as well. It will often inform a group how to respond to feedback in the world. In many ways, culture acts as the guardrails for behavior in a population of people, which is particularly interesting because it guides people's actions without specific requests and top down leadership. If you're a leader, this should be music to your ears.

Shower' to celebrate your motherhood, for example. For a young girl in Mexico who's about to have her fifteenth birthday, her culture may inform her to have a 'quincinera'. Culture, again, would influence things like acceptable attire, the food, and the activities at the event. This all happens without formal top down leadership instructing who does what.

The nuisance of the culture that made us world-class at the NCAA Division I level at the University of San Diego included rigorous expectations of effort and performance. The culture used toughness and a celebration of adversity to commit to difficult preparation. It was sustained by a culture that also embraced humor, for example, in a way that made the most difficult performance environment enjoyable. Not only would our unique sense of humor tie all the hard work and constant negative feedback together, we also had our own unique language and norms. Being a team member meant you understood what a "workman grey" t-shirt is or what the difference between "Try Week" and "Do Week" is. We share similar nuance at DEUCE Gym with cultural figures of speech and norms that don't make sense out of context.

We often look to extreme performers to learn best practices with universal application. Consider, for example,

➧ CULTURE DOES YOUR JOB FOR YOU AND IT IS FUELED BY A RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCE: PEOPLE'S HABITS.

These behavior-guiding habits are interwoven throughout various cultures. If you're an American female pregnant with your first child, the culture may inform you to host an event called a 'Baby

that the Toyota Racing division can drive innovation that can inform some applications for the Toyota Camry, but the Toyota Camry won't be informing the design of the racing team's cars anytime soon. The best tech start-ups, and the best communities all have a culture that supports the needs of their specific group. While each group manifests completely different cultural practices, we can observe what is common across the highest performing cultures. After all, we're not after the details of culture that don't serve us like the history of the piñata or whether or not the New York Yankees allow facial hair or not. We're looking for principles of culture that we can use for our own application.

While we've seen that culture has human behavior guiding attributes, not all cultures specifically seek to maximize the opportunity for the remarkable performances and remarkable relationships. For our purposes, however, we are interested in cultivating just

that. What things would we like the culture we're creating to provide? Most high performance groups, in business, on the field, in war, and beyond, have cultures that provide key drivers for positive results, individual and collective development, fulfillment, and quality control.

> ## CULTURE IS PARTICULARLY VALUABLE FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS BECAUSE CULTURE INFORMS HOW WE SOLVE PROBLEMS AND HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS CHARACTERISTICALLY SOLVE PROBLEMS WELL.

Bouts with adversity are a certainty in the future of any group. Those with the best culture surmount those challenges best.

CULTURE:
THE MOST SUSTAINABLE FORM OF LEADERSHIP

Effective leadership does two things: it drives individual and collective adaptation and it holds accountability for results outside of one's control. The spiraling forward of development, or adaptation, is a cornerstone of responsibility for effective leaders. This goes on to say that the leader and her team will be more capable next year than they are this year. The accountability of leadership is to results. Period.

LEADERSHIP

↓

ADAPTATION & **ACCOUNTABILITY TO RESULTS**
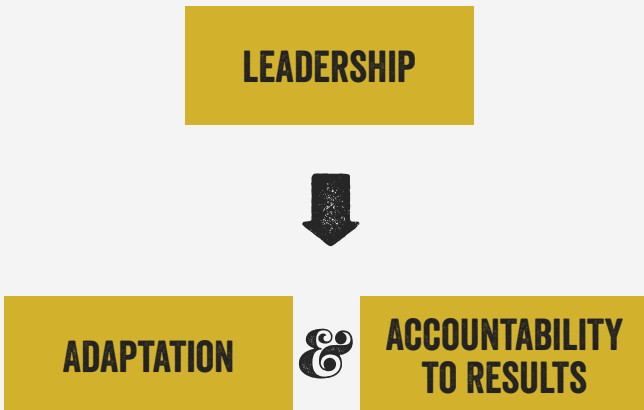
In order to understand what accountability looks like for effective leadership, we first need to discuss how to get positive results. For the sake of our conversation, we'll declare that peak performance maximizes our positive results. Getting favorable outcomes comes with a challenging conundrum, which says that since we live in an uncertain world all outcomes are, in part, outside of our control. Whether the task at hand is in sport, business,

or otherwise, we can assume that there are some variables that contribute to the outcome that are in our control and there are others that are outside of our control. This is why leadership is a characteristically vulnerable act.

With this important and basic assumption we can quickly decipher how to maximize performance. This, of course, is done through mastery and attention to the elements that are inside of our control. In addition, peak performance is achieved through relinquishing of a sense of responsibility for that which is outside of our control. It's worth noting that while this is the sure fire, Stoic approach to maximizing positive outcomes, it will never guarantee a positive outcome. No one can do that in an uncertain world. The best performers most literally just maximize their chances.

Now we know the sobering truth about peak performance.

⬤ **THE RESULTS ARE NEVER IN OUR CONTROL. WHAT'S OUR BEST CHANCE FOR POSITIVE RESULTS?**

FOCUS ON THE PROCESS.

This fits the process of deliberate practice

perfectly. The mental representation or the standard or the ideal outcome is peak performance. Because of external factors, the reality of our expression almost always exists somewhere below our ideal expression. The mechanism for inching closer and closer to the standard is made possible by revisiting and mastering the process. This is how leaders maximize their results and the results of their teams.

Unfortunately, the burden of leadership is one of accountability. After all, who is responsible for the results? The leader is. Since the expression of the standard is always, at least partially, outside of the leaders control, the leader must bear the burden of responsibility for results that

are not in her control.

Holding this space is how we get to the conclusion that leaders most simply "hold the standard."

◆ THE MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION IS, CAN CULTURE PROVIDE A COLLECTIVE PERSONIFICATION OF LEADERSHIP?

Time and time again in life, war, and sport, we've seen that it can hold the space between reality and the group's standard. Furthermore, world-class teams with world-class cultures show us that culture pays these dividends as good or better than individual leadership.

HOW TO DIAGNOSE CULTURAL EFFICACY
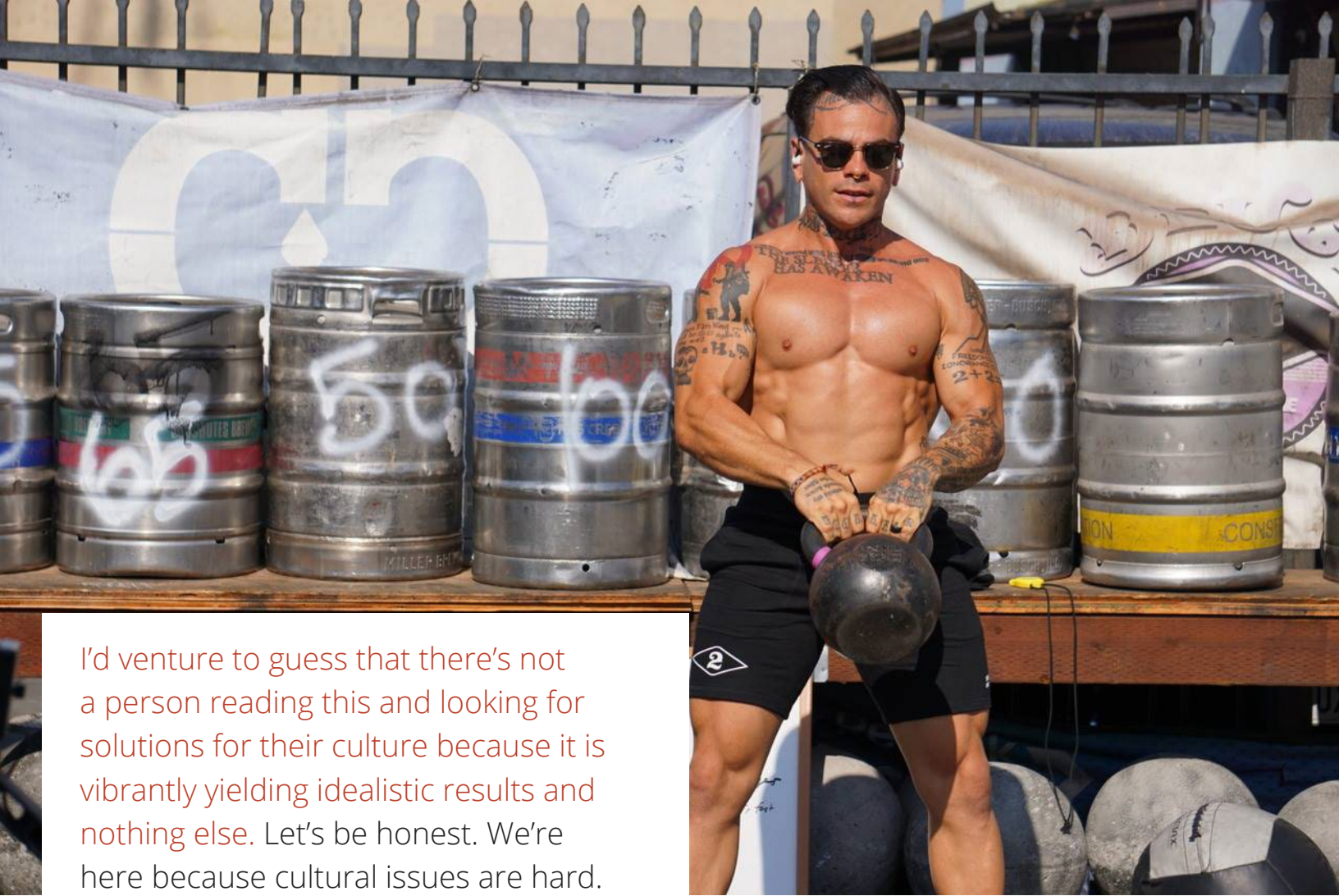
I'd venture to guess that there's not a person reading this and looking for solutions for their culture because it is vibrantly yielding idealistic results and nothing else. Let's be honest. We're here because cultural issues are hard. Achieving positive results in teams and communities is incredibly difficult because when two or more people work together to accomplish something remarkable complexities arise. It's par for the course. Group dynamics give us all trouble and great groups handle this trouble better than others. As a result, chances are you haven't yet developed an unbeatable culture and it's surely worth pursuing.

➡ HOW, THOUGH, DO WE UNCOVER THE ELEMENTS OF OUR CULTURES THAT ARE INEFFECTIVE?

Here we'll provide tools for inquiry into this exact kind of diagnosing. We will begin with a question in order to simplify how we will uncover these:

"What happens in this culture when there is a problem?"

The answer to this question (and the worksheet below) will lead to important insights about power, impact, growth, and how feedback is sent and received in a particular culture.

I invite you to complete the following exercise courageously.

EXERCISE 1 ➡️

Complete the following questions in the context of the organization, family system, or team that you'd like to develop an unbeatable culture in.

Describe a time when something went wrong in the group.

Who took blame? Who gave blame? How was blame received? How was blame given? Look for patterns of coping, appeasement, deflection of responsibility, projection, etc.

SCORE YOUR CULTURE

Based on your observations, make a selection on a scale of 1 to 10 regarding the level of group dynamics in the culture
(1=Low Level Group Dynamics, 10= High Level Group Dynamics)

1 ◀ — — — — — — — — — — — ▶ 10

LOWER LEVEL GROUP DYNAMICS

- Seeking compromise
- Basic apologies
- Passive aggressive communication
- Mediation
- Seeking confirmation

HIGHER LEVEL GROUP DYNAMICS

- Mutual responsibility taking
- Listening for understanding
- Appreciative inquiry
- Seeking truth

SCORE:_____

THE FILTER
FOR AN UNBEATABLE CULTURE

Time and time again we see that the most dynamic group cultures and teams utilize rites of passages as a tool to filter their populations. The harder it is to earn a place in the group, the better the team is. Furthermore, these arduous transitions check for and develop key ingredients for an unbeatable culture.

Regardless of the specific culture in question, we know that an effective filter, or rite of passage, sets the stage for cultural opportunities that are not otherwise possible. As it turns out, effective rites of passage filter for the ideal ingredients for adaptive change work.

SINCE WE'VE NOTED THAT THE BEST GROUPS IMPROVE WITH TIME, IT WOULD FOLLOW THAT WE'D LIKE THE CULTURE TO FACILITATE EXACTLY THAT.

ENTER: ADAPTIVE CHANGE.

When undertaking the evolution that happens in any adaptive process, we need our subjects to embody two elements: willingness and trust. Coincidentally, willingness and trust are not just requisite ingredients for adaptive

change; they are the most effective component for organizational cultures as well. Rites of passage deliver willingness and trust extremely effectively.

If we seek to discover how effective rites of passage filter for willingness and trust, we must first look at how they work. Whether we examine classics from the Spartan's Agoge where young boys begin training at age seven. The rite of passage culminates when they are sent out alone with nothing but a knife to kill as many state-owned slaves as possible. Then, there's the classic military example with prospective Navy SEALs who take on BUD/S and the infamous 'Hell Week'
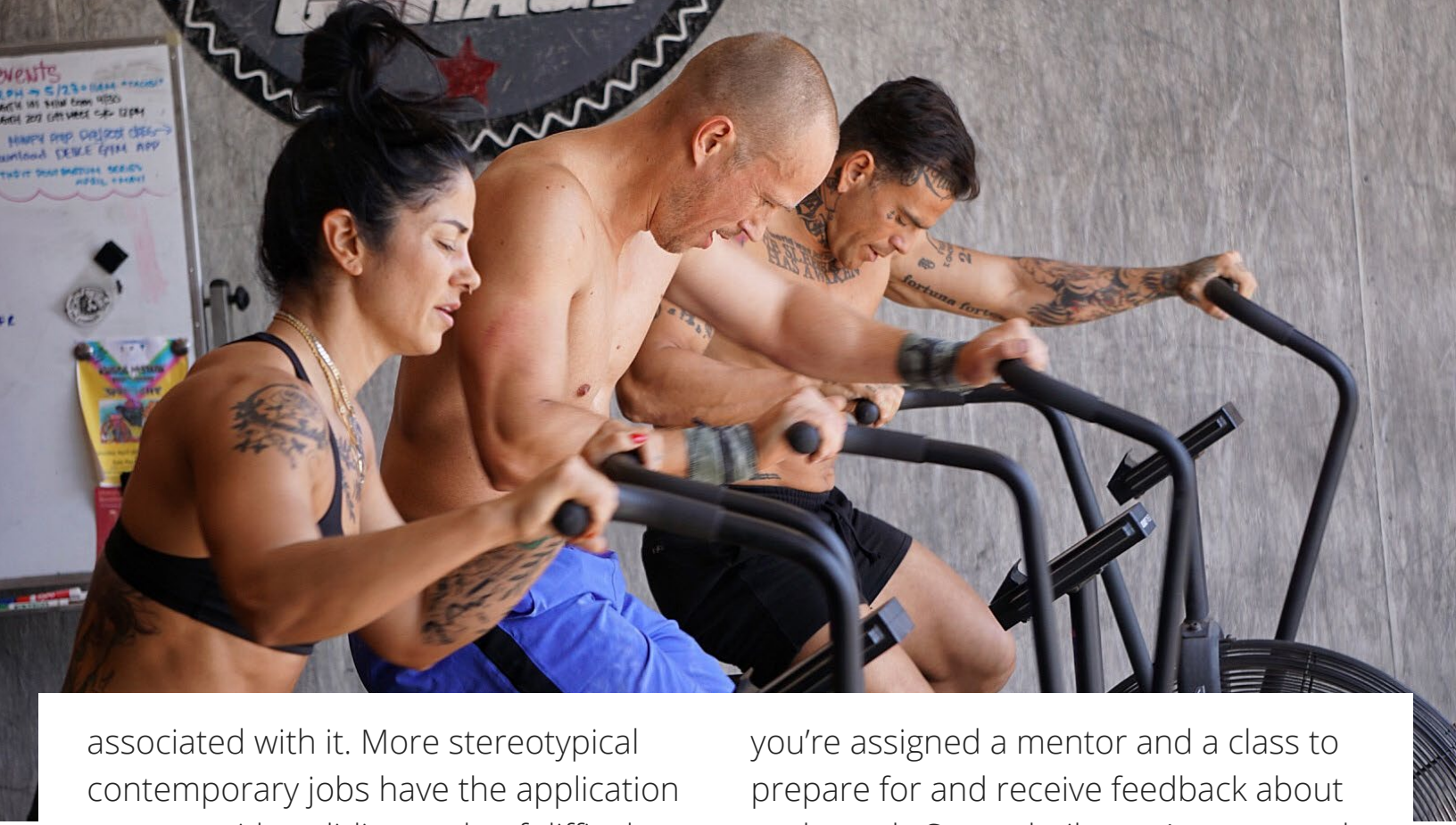
associated with it. More stereotypical contemporary jobs have the application process with a sliding scale of difficulty. Prospective Microsoft employees in the early dominant years of the company were put on the spot to answer questions like, "Why are manhole covers round?" in their screening process.

At DEUCE Gym, the rite of passage for prospective coaches and leaders is a multi-layered development process called Coach's Prep. Whether you're an aspiring coach or a renowned ten-year veteran, you must overcome this rite of passage. It begins with a commitment of both time and money. You'll need to be a member of the community for three months before enrolling. From there you can write a Letter of Intent to the group professing your commitment to the program. Once you're accepted you're assigned a mentor and a class to prepare for and receive feedback about each week. Secondarily, you're expected to attend a weekly developmental class to take on lectures, drills, and workshops to develop your craft. The third and final element of Coach's Prep is a series of tests. There are three of them, to be exact, beginning with a written test that must be attempted within six months of being in the program. The second level test is a verbal test. The third and final test is an evaluation of several real-time coaching efforts.

What do these rites of passage have in common? While they range from murderous to tedious, they all provide a transition. The people that begin them *evolve* through them and come out on the other side another person. This is the kind of adaptation that gives adaptive

change its name.

By definition, effective rites of passage are challenging. This is because the systemic stress required to leave homeostasis and achieve some adaptive change cannot occur inside of comfort. The challenges these rites of passage present are most literally what selects for willingness and builds trust.

➡ IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE RITES OF PASSAGE THAT ARE EFFECTIVE FOR ONE GROUP CULTURE MAY NOT BE APPROPRIATE, BY DEGREE, FOR ANOTHER GROUP CULTURE.

The reason the rite of passage to be a US Navy SEAL is so arduous and has prideful attrition rates is that these men die when anyone other than the **most** willing, **most** trustworthy warfighters make it through. DEUCE Gym is seeking excellence, but

we aren't going to war. Furthermore, the rites of passage to become a coach are necessarily more severe than they are to be a student. You can imagine we can afford and enjoy some attrition in our processes to become a leader, but when signing up members we'd like just enough of a barrier to entry to filter for commitment and build rapport with our students. There isn't much business upside in filtering for gym memberships through a process like the Navy SEALs.

Effective rites of passage get the right amount of willingness and trust in the system.

In order for a rite of passage to successfully select for willingness and build trust it must take on one or more of the following traits:

- Sacrifice
- Delay gratification or take time
- Express mental and/or physical hardship
- Transformation

EXERCISE 2 →

The first step to implementing an effective rite of passage into your culture is awareness. Take on the following exercise to understand your culture's filter:

1. From the moment of inquiry, what is the process to enrollment into the culture? Draw it below.

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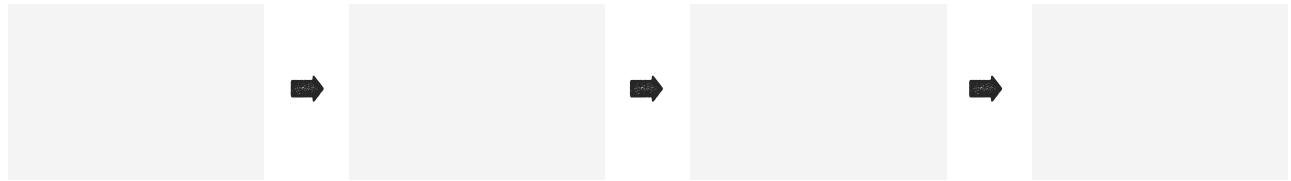
2. What must one sacrifice to join? Is the only sacrifice money?

3. Can you join on the spot or is there a delay?

4. Is the process of joining uncomfortable physically and/or mentally?

5. Does the process of joining inspire growth in the subject joining the organization?

6. Describe how each of the above compares relatively to organizations in your space. Are there degrees of difference? How does it compare to an organization you want to emulate or aspire to out perform?

INGREDIENTS FOR AN UNBEATABLE CULTURE

For an unbeatable culture, we'll need it to, in some ways, mimic effective leadership. As we now know, leadership is about adaptive change and accountability to results that are outside of our control. In order to understand the ingredients needed to build this unbeatable culture, we need to understand what's required for transformative work. At the end of the day, an unbeatable culture would move towards positive adaptation. If not, it couldn't perform or keep up with the "competition".

Adaptive, transformational work requires both willingness and trust. Here's why both willingness and trust that are critical ingredients to developing an unbeatable culture:

★ WILLINGNESS

While it seems obvious, individuals' willingness to engage in a culture is required to realize the peak expression of a group. There is a nearly one-to-one correlation between the level of willingness to participate and the top-end cultural implications of the group. Essentially, the more willing the participants are in the group the more utilitarian upside the collective group has.

We don't need to go far to realize that the groups that demand the most willingness have tangible advantages over those who don't. After all, consider the willingness required to join the local park

rec league baseball team. The willingness for these participants is a small fee in the tens of dollars, a time commitment of several hours on a dozen Sunday mornings, and maybe access to some baseball equipment. Enrolling yourself on the New York Yankees roster requires unrecognizable willingness when compared to the Sunday league team. To join the Yankees culture you'd need to devote more than a decade of training in intensities and volumes that exceed that of a fulltime job to have a chance. To add insult to willingness flavored injury, even inside of the ranks of Major League Baseball, the Yankees *require* more willingness culturally in the form of ancient dress code rules, the removal of facial hair, and the maintenance of the league's strictest code of conduct.

KNOWING YOU NEED WILLINGNESS IS ONE THING. KNOWING HOW TO CULTIVATE IT IS ANOTHER THING ALTOGETHER.

If you want to create collective willingness, you'll need to filter for it and develop it. The most common way to do this in a group is with rites of passage. We know that adversity fortifies individuals and groups, especially in the area of willingness. To continue

in the face of hardship is a display of willingness. If you turn up the dial on hardship, you select for increasingly more willing people. Rites of passage provide a controllable, scalable, formalized way to create willingness in a group.

For example, the tips of the spear military units that express the highest value performances in the highest risk environments have the most notoriously grueling rites of passage. This sliding scale of controlled adversity moves from basic bootcamp-level rites of passage for regular enlisted soldiers to the well-documented, exponentially grueling "selection" processes that forge our Special Forces operators.

The rites of passage required to earn a job on our Top 5 NCAA baseball program were remarkably grueling. Plenty of talented athletes were filtered out of this process; All-Americans included.

In an effort to cultivate and filter for more willingness, the formal rites of passage in place to earn a place of leadership at DEUCE Gym are also asymmetrically difficult when compared to industry norms. Even the most qualified coaches must enroll in a multi-layered developmental program that costs not just time and money, but developmental stress that serves as a rite of passage to join the team.

The first step to developing an unbeatable culture will be to create an environment of universally strong willingness. Willingness offers the chance for excellent performances. The best way to accomplish this is with an effective rite of passage into the culture.

⭐ TRUST

Do we need trust in an unbeatable culture simply because it feels warm and fuzzy? No. We need trust because without it individuals and subsequently the group as a whole will not operate at vulnerable edges. After all, high performance teams explore their edges better than any.

We know that leadership holds the space between reality, as dissatisfying as it may be, and the standard. Even the greatest individuals and teams of all time chronically operate under their peak potential. Chances are, however, they just tend to operate closer to the standard, more often. As we saw in the leadership

section, the irony of being a high performance team and earning those results includes a considerable amount of failure. In an uncertain landscape, even the best of the best will fail.

➡ TRUST ALLOWS INDIVIDUALS IN A GROUP TO VULNERABLY SEEK THEIR EDGES AND EXPRESS THEIR BEST EFFORTS IN THE FACE OF SOME GUARANTEED FAILURE.

If there is no trust, there is no vulnerability. If we understand the mechanism for growth as a willingness to explore our edges and uncover our blind spots, you soon realize that without trust the collective will refrain from operating at edges where uncertainty is highest and the chances for failure are greatest. The protection mechanism in the absence of trust is a performance inhibitor.

Like we said about willingness, to know that trust is important is one thing. Building a culture of trust is another.

THE FIRST STEP TO BUILDING TRUST IN A CULTURE IS A RADICAL COMMITMENT TO TRUTH.

The trouble with this obvious positive attribute isn't in speaking truths in the form of positive feedback. Most cultures are willing to speak the truth when it is easy. Giving negative feedback, however, is much more difficult and more rare, but not less a part of the truth.

The result of this imbalance is that people aren't transparent about the whole truth; the good and the bad. When negative feedback is withheld or not received the environment becomes ripe for resentment and politics. This is not an environment of trust.

On the other hand, if a culture has a commitment to truth and is therefore embracing negative feedback then the culture can reap the benefits of negative feedback. As a growth minded culture, negative feedback is the most valuable kind because it has the best chance to be disconfirming information. By definition, disconfirming information would challenge our edges and our blind spots. Confirming information would only further solidify what we perceive to be true already. When you are open to disconfirming information, you're open to growth and development at the edges. Cultures that are willing to facilitate trust plant the seeds for a developmental advantage over cultures that do not.

THE BLACK BOX OF CULTURE

What goes into the box, as we've noted, is both willingness and truth.

➡ HOW DO WE FILTER SO THAT THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS IN THE BOX? YOU GUESSED IT. IT'S RITES OF PASSAGE.

Now, we get to the magical processes common in the world's best team cultures. What the box looks like or the details of what happens inside of it don't matter much for the sake of our inquiry. The black box is the specific culture.

As long as the unbeatable culture of the New York Yankees is clean-shaven and the unbeatable culture of SEAL Team 6 is an embrace of commando beards, it seems silly to mimic the nuanced details of this black box of culture. After all, my experience in the University of San Diego baseball locker room differs greatly when it comes to the finer details of our

unbeatable culture when compared to the unbeatable culture that defines the team at DEUCE.

In San Diego, our interactions were defined by an aggressive sense of humor that burned bright on the strong, borderline offensive, shots we'd take at each other. The tension around accountability could turn words into violence. We were on edge to the extent that it served our performance. At DEUCE, we don't pride ourselves on trash talk and (so far) there haven't been any fistfights, but I'm here to report the similarities.

What we're interested in are the principles. What here is the same?

As we've discussed, the ingredients for each respective culture are present in both organizations in their own way. What results do unbeatable cultures manifest when you put trust and willingness into the black box, you ask?

A CULTURE OF TRUTH

When in any high performance arena, all games become a game of inches. Imagine the highest performing environments. Gold medals are won (and lost) by hundredths of a second and the difference between a pop out and a home run are just millimeters of margin for error.

▶ IN HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS, INFORMATION IS A PREMIUM.

Remember that an unbeatable culture will mimic the mechanics of leadership. Effective leadership does two things. Firstly, it's accountable to positive outcomes. Second, it drives adaptation in self and others.

If getting results, or positive outcomes is all about managing the space between reality and the standard and closing that gap is only possible with a commitment to process, we know that leaders are continually exposed to a failure to meet the idealistic standard. Not only is willingness and trust required to face this dissatisfaction and objective failure, it means the best leaders will need to seek the most accurate feedback about this space between where the team is and where the team would like to be.

If driving adaptation in self and others

is facilitated by growing exposure to our edges and blind spots, we have yet another mechanism at play that puts information at a premium. You could imagine how useful our ingredients are yet again of willingness and trust. These both are required to support an individual (or culture) in their vulnerable inquiry into the information, including negative feedback that would guide this type of adaption. To explore your blind spots is to explore the truth. Unbeatable cultures mimic this leadership mechanism by valuing norms and traditions that seek truth regardless the fact that it will almost always be easier not to.

The best performances possible need the best, most truthful information as fuel to make calculated choices and critical adjustments. Most cultures fail in performance because it is much more difficult for emotional humans to send and receive parts of the truth that are uncomfortable. Negative feedback, for example, is a part of truth as much as positive feedback. Most center-of-the-bell-curve organizations have an asymmetrical willingness to share positive feedback over negative feedback. As a result, they are less truthful.

EXERCISE 3 ➡

Consider the following scenarios of two radically different cultures communicating important information that affects the performance of the group.

EXAMPLE 1 ➡

After an alleged missed sign, a Major League third baseman misses his coverage after a successful sacrifice bunt attempt by their opponent.

> **MLB Short Stop:** "That's twice, Derek! Are you not clear on the signs? We're in 'Bunt Defense 3'. Get your head out!"

> **MLB Third Baseman:** "I saw Skip give the sign. We're early in the game, I figured we'd live in 'Bunt D 1'. I blew it."

> **MLB Short Stop:** "This is the show, kid. Don't think. Plug in!"

EXAMPLE 2 ➡

After a miscommunication about an incomplete project proposal, an executive confronts a manager in the hallway of a major corporation.

> **Executive**: "Susan, how are you? I wanted to connect if you had time. Maybe coffee?"

> **Manager:** "Sure, is everything OK?"

> **Executive:** "Yeah, it's fine. Just wanted to take your temperature on the Fall Proposal we talked about. I received it, but it's missing some things I'll need before I pass it along to the board."

> **Manager**: "I know. I'm so sorry it was late, but I figured after the long weekend you wouldn't get to it yet anyway. Look, I've been on these guys about it and it's just hard to get them to execute. You know how Jeremy and them can be. Psh – Attention to detail isn't their forte, am I right?"

> **Executive:** "I understand. I hope you know how valuable you are around here, I just need to pass this along ASAP. The board is breathing down my neck. I was just hoping that you'd referee their efforts on this, but I know they are a tough bunch. Do you need me to step in?"

Answer the following questions in reflection of the cultural wiliness to seek truth.

1. Who takes responsibility in Example 1? Who takes responsibility in Example 2?

2. Does Example 1 uncover the truth about the failure? Does Example 2 uncover the truth about the failure?

3. Does the Example 1 pair courageously offer clear feedback? Is the pair in Example 2 clear about their feedback?

4. Which example is the most economical with their language?

5. Which example will yield a smaller, more efficient feedback loop?

6. Can the pair in Example 1 move on yet? Does Example 2 feel resolved?

THE PROCESSES OF UNBEATABLE CULTURES

RITES OF PASSAGE

⬇

WILLINGNESS & TRUST

⬇

DELIBERATE PRACTICE

⬇

MASTERY

⬇

ACCOUNTABILITY TO RESULTS

What's possible when you put high-level *willingness* into the black box of an unbeatable culture? The rites of passage that establish the willingness of the world's best group cultures create an opportunity for mastery. After all, the pursuit of mastery is one that takes commitment that transcends extrinsic motivation. Mastery is a signature trait of unbeatable cultures.

➡ THE MORE THOROUGH YOUR RITES OF PASSAGE THE HIGHER THE QUALITY OF INDIVIDUALS THAT REMAIN.

This creates not just a more capable talent pool, but a more gritty talent pool who are more fit for the developmental trajectory of the highest performing groups. After all, unbeatable cultures don't just perform well *now* they systematically improve overtime.

Rites of passage don't just get the right people on the bus, they provide checks and balances for people who demonstrate the characteristics required for high level development. Based on the fundamental behavior of the

developmental process, we know that we must spend time at the fringes of our ability to progress. This, by definition, is an uncomfortable process. Men and women who are fit for difficult rites of passage demonstrate the ability to overcome the very kind of scenarios that high performance teams live in: uncomfortable ones.

Specifically speaking, using rites of passage to check for high-level willingness increases the demand for intrinsic motivation. Motivation that comes from needs being met within is the best kind of willingness. This type of driving force burns longer and brighter

than extrinsic motivation, which comes from outside sources.

→ OUR MOTIVATION ULTIMATELY ANSWERS THE ULTIMATE QUESTION, "WHY AM I DOING THIS?"

Groups with individuals who can continually provide a strong answer to that question will produce better work, longer that is more resistant to adversity. Externally motivated individuals have a more fragile purpose than intrinsically motivated individuals. After all, when extrinsic motivations like money or status cannot outweigh the difficulty or length of the journey, performance will suffer. Groups with more members who are intrinsically motivated have a greater utilitarian advantage over individuals who are extrinsically motivated. Said differently, if your reason for doing a thing is isn't stronger than its difficulty you likely won't succeed.

The reality of the rites of passage that is optimal for any given culture operates on a sliding scale. Consider this conundrum. At DEUCE Gym, we've always had rites of passage for our members and our leaders alike. The evolution of the rites of passage to be in leadership at DEUCE has evolved with the success of the business. For example, in the beginning we

couldn't offer the money or the lucrative opportunity to entice the best coaches in the world. Coincidentally, we weren't the best gym in the world, so this was rather fitting. The advantage of our rites of passage was that we would enroll highly motivated, highly committed individuals of a relative level of expertise. These individuals have since become world-class in their expertise and the same rites of passage that demanded their level of commitment are still in place, but the culture now attracts an increasingly talented pool of men and women.

→ WHAT'S MORE VALUABLE TO DEUCE GYM: THE BEST COACH IN THE WORLD WHO ISN'T COMMITTED, OR A COMMITTED COACH WHO CAN IMPROVE?

Thankfully to our rites of passage we were built on the later and not the

former, which is the same way US Navy SEAL Teams are built and the tech giant, Google, was built.

The first engineers that worked at Google, for example, were the founders. Larry Page and Sergey Brin now attract (and choose not to hire) computer engineers that they couldn't have begged to join them in 1998 when the company was founded. This is the relative, sliding scale expertise of any high performance culture. The rites of passage for Google were commitment to early dog days and uncertainty. Now, they have more competitive rites of passage to match the offerings of being the world's most dominant web brand.

⮞ MASTERY COMES FROM PRACTICE.

After observing countless craft masters across a number of disciplines, we know that not all practice is created equal. As it turns out, when you start with the ingredients of high level willingness and trust, you're primed to participate in the most potent style of practice known to man: deliberate practice.

Deliberate practice, which is a concept coined by researcher Anders Ericsson, has repeatable, observable characteristics that make it advantageous over other practice styles. Deliberate practice is particularly important not just because it is the most efficient method for developing mastery, but it's nature is

to remove the stagnation effects of the auto-pilot mode we can become trapped in once we develop our craft to a certain competency. This means cultures that embrace deliberate practice principles can get better ***forever***.

Since there are plenty of rising stars in life, business, and sport that were once great but are no longer relevant, we can lean on deliberate practice as an insurance policy against the erosion of performance that happens over time. It's quite common for a fifth year surgeon to have superior technical ability than the twenty-fifth year surgeon. If you're reading this, you can evaluate how good your handwriting has become. After all, you've put in decades of practice, haven't you? I'd imagine it's immaculate! It's likely not, however, because you stopped improving long ago. Chances are you got good ***enough*** and you plateaued. Unless you're signing up for some calligraphy competitions, you're benefiting from this energy saving auto-pilot mode you enter when hand writing. The trouble is when we go into auto-pilot and stop improving in skills that we actually want to improve.

IN ORDER FOR DELIBERATE PRACTICE TO WORK, WE NEED A CLEAR VISION OF THE OPTIMAL RESULT.

We call this the ***standard***. Ericsson calls it a ***mental representation***. Ralph Lauren might call it ***taste***. The clearer this target is the more feedback we can extract from our attempts to achieve it.

The nuts and bolts of deliberate practice can be followed to improve any craft towards mastery. Unbeatable cultures take these habits for all they are worth.

TO BE IN DELIBERATE PRACTICE, ONE MUST HAVE A CLEAR STRETCH GOAL.

This by definition is a clear image of the standard and it must characteristically "stretch" the practitioner. Inside this stretch characteristic is the mechanism that supports development indefinitely and resists stagnation. The second criterion for one to be in deliberate practice is that there must be a mechanism for ***immediate informative feedback***. Inside of this feedback is the

information that truth-seeking cultures thrive on. After all, this feedback loop being effectively short being that it is immediate expedites improvement much better than a longer feedback loop alternative. It also informs exactly what needs to be done to adjust course in a way that will illicit outcomes that are closer to the standard. The third and final element of deliberate practice is the *repetition* required for mastery.

PURSING MASTERY WITH DELIBERATE PRACTICE IS THE UNBEATABLE CULTURE'S SOLUTION THE BURDEN OF BEING ACCOUNTABLE TO RESULTS.

Thankfully these cultures are primed to do the edgy, hard work because they have filters and reinforce the willingness and trust required for the truth seeking nature of deliberate practice.

EXERCISE 4 ➡️

It would be a shame to understand deliberate practice in theory, but not be able to put it into practice. Take on the following exercise to test your ability to create a deliberate practice environment for any craft imaginable. Remember drills are precise. Football drills aren't football games. They are high focused, shrunken down learning environments. Be specific!

1. What skill are you trying to improve? Can you envision an objective mental representation of it?

2. What is the clear, stretch goal of the drill?

3. Is there a mechanism for immediate informative feedback? How will the practitioner know immediately if she has deviated from the standard?

4. What is the opportunity to accumulate repetition in this environment?

When studying cultures, it's extremely common to focus on their language. For our high performance needs, we'd like to see a culture manifest an advantage with how they communicate. As it turns out, that's exactly what we see in unbeatable cultures.

This works because the critical ingredient of trust affords cultures the opportunity to communicate the truth. It's important to note that the truth is important beyond it's virtue. Inside of the truth are extremely valuable bits of information for development. After all, in the world of high performance teams, if you aren't improving it doesn't matter if you're having success now because those that are committed to developing will soon be passing you up.

How, then, do unbeatable cultures communicate?

Since they have high levels of trust, they can communicate the truth even when it's uncomfortable. This opens the door for negative feedback or disconfirming information. Groups that can share this type of information have a distinct advantage over those who cannot.
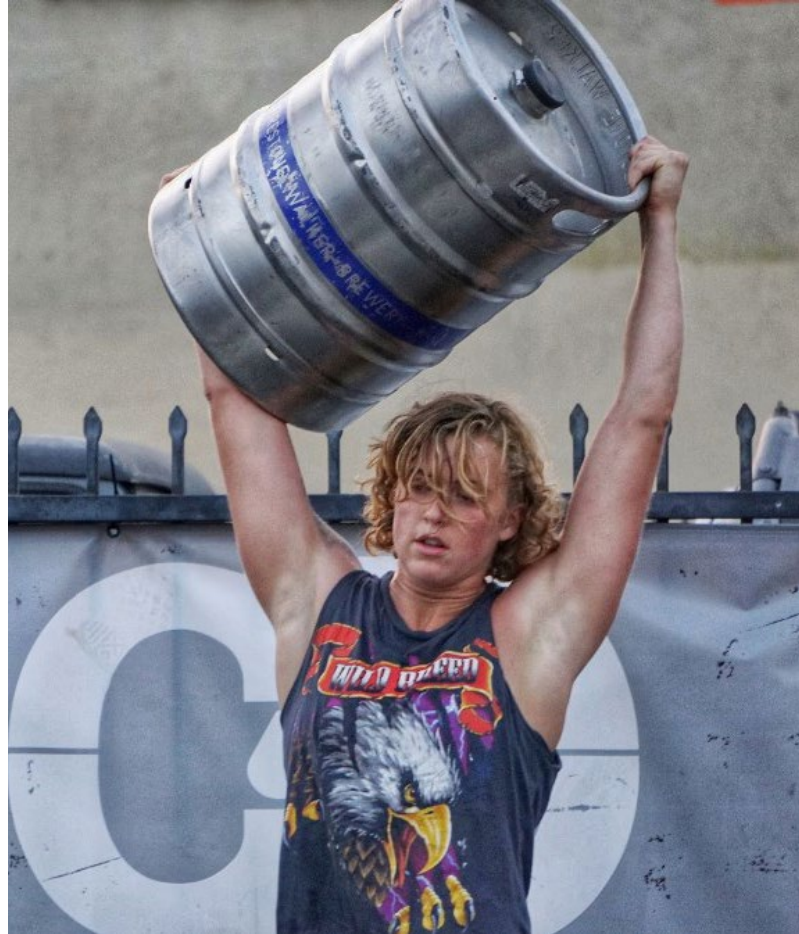
WHEN IT COMES TO DEVELOPMENT, WE KNOW THAT TRANSFORMATION HAPPENS WHEN WE ARE SHOWN OUR BLIND SPOTS.

Anything that challenges our assumptions can break our developmental frame. If you're in the business of gaining perspective, you're also in the business of breaking your frame. For example, it's not from learning what you already know that will lead you to growth. We know that it's the exposure to that which we can't see and that which we don't know that are critical exposures to drive our growth. Disconfirming information, or negative feedback, is most literally our path to improvement.

This is where groups that lack trust shoot themselves in the foot. When individuals have helpful feedback to give, they are fearful to share it because of a lack of trust that it will be received. This creates network of relationships that aren't interested in seeking truth above avoiding discomfort. As a result, these cultures keep the keys to their improvement a secret ultimately blunting their development.

Groups with high levels of trust are afforded the opportunity to send and receive radical truth, which ultimately includes negative feedback that will light the path to endless developmental heights.

Carol Dweck's research supports these claims and she's coined the term the growth mindset to encapsulate a particularly advantageous framework for development. Unbeatable cultures take on this perspective for everything it's worth.

Dweck observes that there are two dominate perspectives through which we can view the world. The first of which perceives our traits as generally fixed. This fixed mindset assumes that some folks are good writers and others are meant to be athletes. One might imagine

that if you believed that your traits were generally unchangeable that it would affect how you receive feedback in the world. Groups with collective fixed mindsets would be less inclined to send and receive disconfirming information because it's not helpful and potentially alarming information about your unchangeable poor abilities.

Those who take on the growth mindset, however, believe that our traits are generally malleable. We can improve (and degrade) our public speaking skills and our Microsoft Excel savvy. As a result, this perspective places a premium on the full truth, negative feedback included. Scratch that. The growth mindset views negative feedback as developmental gold. This disconfirming information becomes the road map to positive adaptation.

Luckily, for unbeatable cultures they have the willingness and trust required to communicate the truth.

⬇ WHEN TAKING ON THE GROWTH MINDSET ENDLESS POSITIVE ADAPTION IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE MOTIVATED PURSUIT OF DISCONFIRMING INFORMATION.

Harvard psychologist Robert Kegan reiterates that most employees do two jobs at work in ordinary community cultures. One is their job and the other is hiding their weaknesses. Unbeatable cultures on the other hand recognize the truth, which is that we all have strengths and weaknesses and if we can agree on the fact that inquiry into our areas of improvement has a utilitarian advantage, it's worth exploring rather than hiding this part of truth.

EXERCISE 5 ➡️

Does your group culture send and receive feedback well? Invite your team to complete the following reflection to better understand you and your culture's ability to send and receive the truth, including negative feedback:

RELIABILITY
We say what we mean and do what we say, because our words and actions reveal our inner character. This brings a great awareness to constantly reviewing our limitations and capabilities.

- Was I reliable? Did I say what I intended? Did I do what I said I was going to do?
    - **My strengths:**
    - **Opportunities for growth:**

    - **Team strengths:**
    - **Opportunities for growth:**

LEADERSHIP
This begins and ends with accountability. Leaders own their failures and grow from them.

- Did I hold myself accountable throughout the last year? Or did I blame others? Do I hold myself and others to the same set of standards?
    - **My strengths:**
    - **Opportunities for growth:**

- Did the team hold itself accountable? Did the team hold others accountable (i.e. other team members)?
    - **Team strengths:**
    - **Opportunities for growth:**

COMMITMENT TO PROCESS
We want results. How we get them is a constant commit-

ment to the things we can control; our process.

• How well did I commit to controlling the controllables of the process? (i.e. systems, procedures, checklists, etc).
- **My strengths:**
- **Opportunities for growth:**

• Was the team committed to process?
- **Team strengths:**
- **Opportunities for growth:**

GROWTH MINDSET
If we see criticism as a reflection of our true self, we're less likely to hear it and less likely to evolve. The growth mindset creates an environment for radical transparency and radical truth. This allows for unlimited growth potential and authentic relationships.

• Was I open to negative feedback? Am I interested in disconfirming information as much as I am confirming information?
- **My strengths:**
- **Opportunities for growth:**

• Was the team committed to a growth mindset?
- **Team strengths:**
- **Opportunities for growth:**

EVOLVING BUSINESS
While it's not everything, the bottom line is important. Business development is both a personal and collective responsibility.

• Was I able to contribute to the improvement of the bottom line?
- **My strengths:**
- **Opportunities for growth:**

• Was the team able to contribute to the bottom line?
- **Team strengths:**
- **Opportunities for growth:**

While there are a number of world-class group dynamics to learn from, this text was an effort to get down to the nitty gritty of what makes high performance team cultures work.

🔸 **WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT, ORGANIZATIONS THAT SEEK TRUTH WITH ABANDON HAVE A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE OVER CULTURES THAT DON'T.**

The details of the norms and traditions matter much less than a culture's ability to mimic effective leadership.

Rites of passage do a great job of filtering for helpful ingredients like willingness and trust required to pursue the truth that fuels the habits of a culture that will not just perform well today but can evolve for the better – forever.