



The **Connected** Leader

White Paper

The ability to influence and create transformation is powerful.
The connected leader knows and embraces this.

“The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.”
— Colin Powell

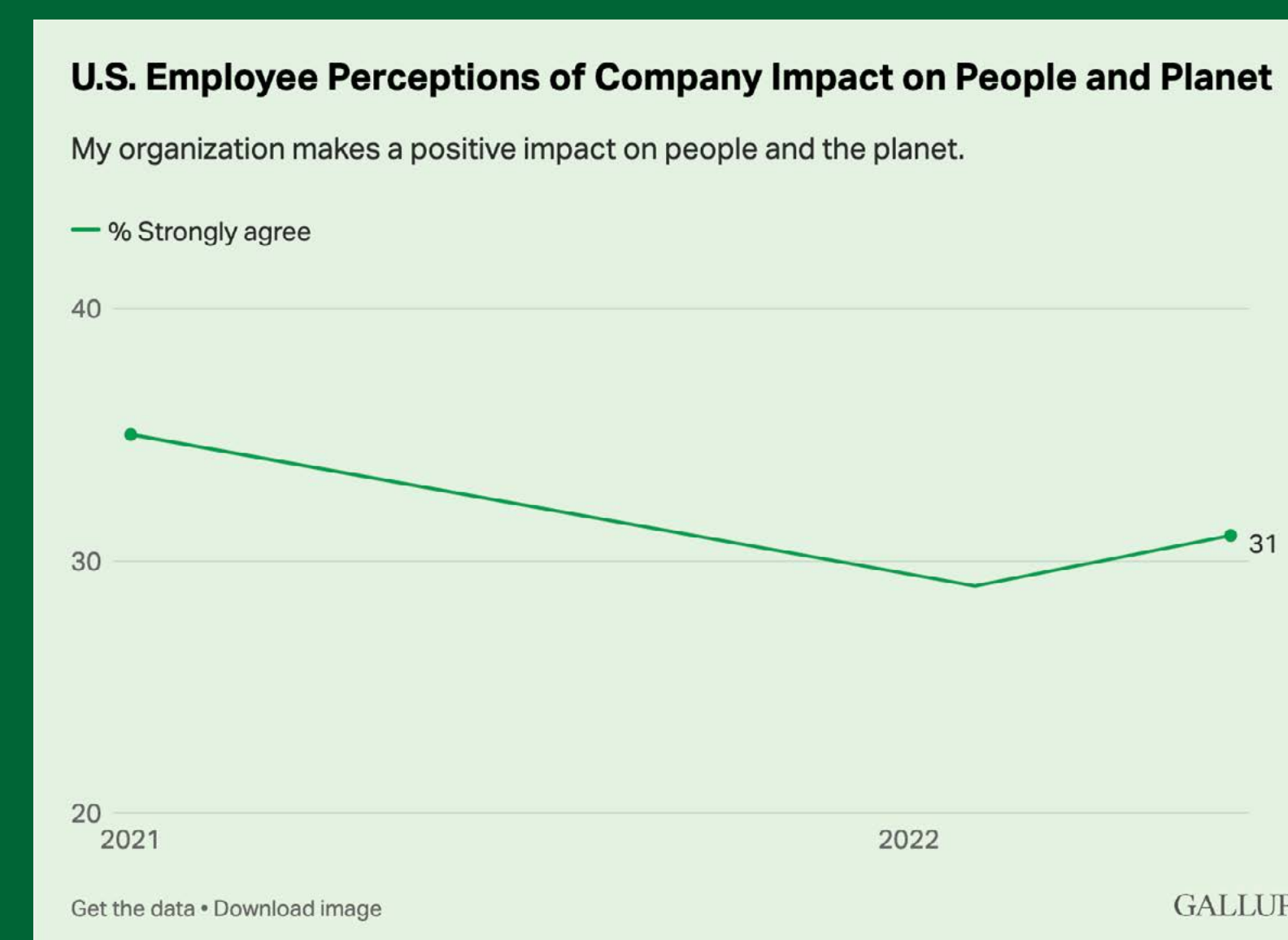
The World Today

Imagine leaders faced with a completely new work landscape and supervisors worried about daily staffing problems having to ensure that employees are safe while learning how to do a new job and to help staff navigate strained work-group relations. Meanwhile, managers must sort out how to meet production goals while battling supply chain issues, how to meet monthly and quarterly financial targets, and how to forecast changing customer expectations. Now add the reality of employee disengagement and burnout. Oh wait! We don't have to imagine. Welcome to the new world of work.

Strong, positive work relationships have always been important and are at the heart of strong, positive cultures and key organizational outcomes. Even in the modern

organization robust with technology, successfully meeting goals is driven by the relationships among and between leaders and employees in person and on-screen.

How do leaders successfully navigate this new world of work?



If I raised a concern about ethics and integrity, I am confident that my employer would do what is right. Down 5 percentage points from 2021 to 2022.

At work, I am treated with respect. Down 7 percentage points from 2021 to 2022.

There is someone at work who encourages my development. Down 5 percentage points from 2021 to 2022.

My organization cares about my overall well-being. Down 14 percentage points from 2021 to 2022.

Understand the Landscape

Leaders must be mindful that employee expectations are different today. Employees want collaboration and development, and they want to know that their piece of the puzzle is valued. Employees also want to know that not only is their work valued but also that they are valued as an individual. They want their organization and leaders to prioritize their well-being. Unfortunately, over the last couple of years, work became transitory for many individuals. There were staff reductions and/or high employee turnover, resulting in the culture of the work-group changing. Additionally, the political and social environment led to high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout, further impacting the culture and the experience of the individual. In many industries, it is still difficult to find talented employees who will stay and bring much-needed stability to the work group. Many organizations still struggle with cultivating employee trust and generating loyalty to the organization or its leaders. People in leadership roles also face these challenges as individuals. These experiences have raised a lot of questions.

- How do I build (or rebuild) employee trust and loyalty to the organization and to me?
- How do I create a workspace — real and virtual — that mixes an appealing employee experience, excellent customer focus, and strong business performance?
- How do I know the pulse of the organization — both on the business side and the employee- experience side?
- How do I create or repair strong positive relationships across the business?

The Answer: Become a Connected Leader'

As a connected leader, you build a culture in which your employees have strong trust in you and have a more positive experience, including increased job satisfaction and

productivity, increased confidence, increased feelings of respect and recognition, more independence, easier open communication, and an increased commitment to the job.

This Is What It Means to Be a Connected Leader

Go Back to Basics

People have been experiencing high rates of change over the last several years, and one aspect that makes it so hard on everyone was that there was no preparation. COVID-19 arrived on the scene, and the world of work changed in an instant.

As a connected leader, you understand that one of the reasons that change is so difficult is that humans need stability. Change upsets what is expected, and that can be difficult. We like to know what the rules of engagement are because it gives us a sense of security. Leaders who are allied with their team members understand this.

So what can a connected leader do? You need to go back to the basics and confirm the following:

- *Is my vision for what I want the organization to look like known and compelling?* Generally, leaders get what they ask for, and connected leaders inspire their teams and achieve more. By painting a vivid picture of where you want the organization to go, you are defining for others what you want the future to look like, what you expect, and creating an opportunity for others to engage. This gets everyone focused on a common mission.
- *Am I credible to my followers? Do my words and action match? Do I tell the truth even when it's hard? Do my followers trust me?* A leader without credibility is in a world of hurt. Connected leaders are trusted and, thus, have more influence and generate more loyalty.
- *Do my employees know that I value them as individuals, including their well-being?*

Employees who know that their leaders value them are more likely to be engaged, demonstrate discretionary effort, and have higher trust and loyalty.

- *Do I find ways to bring people together and collaborate on solving problems?* Creating moments of collaboration builds team-member engagement and makes team members a part of the solution, which generates buy-in and commitment.
- *Do I communicate information in a way that my team understands and can relate to?* Whether it is sharing your vision, collaborating on solving problems, or sharing information, connected leaders tailor their messages and messaging style to individual needs and increase the probability that the message connects with the audience.
- *Do I take action and not get bogged down waiting for perfect information, and is this visible to others?* Connected leaders who are action-oriented enhance their credibility and demonstrate their commitment to whatever the target of that action is (e.g., safety, well-being).
- *Do I share feedback and let others know how they are doing and how their role adds value?* Employees want collaboration, development, and to know that their piece of the work puzzle is valued. Connected leaders who do this show respect to employees and give them information on which they can act.
- *Do I practice fair accountability?* Connected leaders make sure their team can meet expectations and deliver success.
- *Do I cultivate strong, positive relationships between my employees and me? Between members of my work group? Between leaders who report to me and their reports?* Relationships create the context for the ability to influence.

Connected leaders are open to taking a hard look at themselves in relation to these questions. They are willing to ask for feedback from others regarding what they do

well and what they can improve upon. This willingness to be honest with themselves is followed by a sincere effort to remediate any deficits. Connected leaders embrace the opportunity to craft a successful future.



Watch Out for Derailers

What moves leaders in the opposite direction of connectedness?

Anything that cuts the connection can create a state of disconnection. This can include behaviors ranging from bullying to negative public feedback to office gossip to acting like an angry parent to dismissing ideas and contributions. This list can continue with talking over to excluding individuals from key conversations to talking and not listening. All of these can break trust.

Aside from the many negative implications these behaviors can have on a thriving culture, once trust is broken, a leader's ability to influence is severely damaged. This impact cannot be understated. A leader without the ability to influence — to move others from one position to another — will end up a leader without followers. Because it is the leaders who create the culture, it is particularly toxic if leaders-of-leaders behave this way. When a leader behaves in this manner, it invites others to model these undesirable behaviors. There is also harm to the culture — all of which pushes the organization in the opposite direction of excellence.

In an environment in which leaders behave in this way, there is a direct impact to controlling exposure and protecting people. In environments with disconnected leaders, employees are less willing to:

- Raise concerns
- Approach others who are at risk
- Volunteer for initiatives, such as process-improvement efforts or employee- engagement opportunities, like safety committees
- Share ideas on how to better control exposure

A culture led by disconnected leaders can become toxic, and an environment that flirts on the edge of toxic draws attention away from exposure.

Cultivate Connected Leader Across the Organization

Given how critical connected leaders are, how can organizations cultivate connected leaders?

1. Know where you want to go.

As a connected leader, you must first determine what you want your culture to look and sound like and why improving it is worthy of energy. Leaders usually get what they ask for. The challenge is for leaders to define exactly what they want and how to make their desire transparent. Common cultural attributes of a desired culture may include people willing to surface problems and concerns and willing to admit mistakes. Most organizations want people to feel respected, know they have opportunities to grow and develop, be engaged in problem-solving, find the work interesting and challenging, and like working at the organization. (The list is endless but unique to each organization and each leader.)

2. Know where you are.

You must then evaluate how connected people are in the organization and the gap between where things are today and what is needed for future success. An effective strategy always begins with knowing the current state. Who are your most connected leaders? It is well studied that the relationship between the employees and their immediate supervisor is critical. It is the lens through which the employees largely experience the organization. In a positive relationship, employees are more engaged and see the organization more favorably. In a less-positive, or even negative, relationship, employees see the organization less favorably.

3. Build abilities.

As a connected leader, you must develop the ability of other leaders to increase connection and to create moments of transformation that build the desired culture. Transformational leadership is about acting in a way that other people want to tap into so that they can translate what they see and hear in way in which they can act on and model it for their leaders. For example: I see my leader behaving in a way that builds trust and alliance, taking time to talk with me and understand what my day-to-day experience is, then providing support to help me be successful. I can see this impact on the organization and, most importantly, experience this personally.

4. Recognize desired performance.

You must stay on the lookout for other leaders acting in a way that builds connection, and when you see it, recognize it and connect it to your vision for the organization. A lot of time and effort are focused on creating a positive experience for employees, and you need to be intentional in building positive experiences for leaders as well. This is important because it is all the leaders — front-line through the senior leader — who will build the culture. And we want to encourage them to build connections.

In Closing

Here are three questions that will help you and your leaders connect:

1. What do I want others to think about me?
2. What do I want others to think about themselves?
3. What do I want people to tell others about me?

At the beginning of your day, prime yourself by asking these questions and reflecting on how you will leverage each interaction — big and small — to build connection. Ask your leaders to build this practice also.

There is gravity to being a leader. There is also satisfaction. The ability to influence and create transformation is powerful. The connected leader knows and embraces this.

Interested in how you can transform your leadership style and inspire trust in your teams?



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