

THE
INFINITE
GAME

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**SIMON
SINEK**

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THE
BESTSELLING
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**START
WITH WHY**
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**LEADERS
EAT LAST**

How to Build Trust

An Excerpt from The Infinite Game by Simon Sinek

Winning

On the morning of January 30, 1968, North Vietnam launched a surprise attack against U.S. and allied forces. Over the next twenty-four hours, more than 85,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops attacked over 125 targets across the country. The American forces were caught completely off guard. So much so that many of the commanding officers weren't even at their posts when the attacks began—they were away celebrating Têt in nearby cities. The Têt Offensive had begun.

Têt is the Lunar New Year and it is as significant to the Vietnamese as Christmas is to many Westerners. And, like the Christmas truce of World War I, there was a decades-old tradition in Vietnam that there was never any fighting on Têt. However, seeing an opportunity to overwhelm American forces and hopefully bring a swift end to the war, North Vietnamese leadership decided to break with tradition when they launched their surprise offensive.

Here's the amazing thing: the United States repelled every single attack. Every single one. And American troops didn't just repel the onslaughts, they decimated the attacking forces. After most of the major fighting had come to an end, about a week after the initial attack, America had lost fewer than a thousand troops. North Vietnam, in stark contrast, lost over 35,000 troops! In the city of Huế, where fighting continued for almost a month, America lost 150 Marines compared to an estimated 5,000 troops the North Vietnamese lost!

A close examination of the Vietnam War as a whole reveals a remarkable picture. America actually won the vast majority of the battles it fought. Over the course of the ten years in which U.S. troops were active in the Vietnam War, America lost 58,000 troops. North Vietnam lost over 3 million people. As a percent of population, that's the equivalent of America losing 27 million people in 1968.

All this begs the question, how do you win almost every battle, decimate your enemy and still lose the war?

Finite and Infinite Games

If there are at least two players, a game exists. And there are two kinds of games: finite games and infinite games.

Finite games are played by known players. They have fixed rules. And there is an agreed-upon objective that, when reached, ends the game. Football, for example, is a finite game. The players all wear uniforms and are easily identifiable. There is a set of rules, and referees are there to enforce those rules. All the players have agreed to play by those rules and they accept penalties when they break the rules. Everyone agrees that whichever team has scored more points by the end of the set time period will be declared the winner, the game will end and everyone will go home. In finite games, there is always a beginning, a middle and an end.

Infinite games, in contrast, are played by known and unknown players. There are no exact or agreed-upon rules. Though there may be conventions or laws that govern how the players conduct themselves, within those broad boundaries, the players can operate however they want. And if they choose to break with convention, they can. The manner in which each player chooses to play is entirely up to them. And they can change how they play the game at any time, for any reason.

Infinite games have infinite time horizons. And because there is no finish line, no practical end to the game, there is no such thing as “winning” an infinite game. In an infinite game, the primary objective is to keep playing, to perpetuate the game.

My understanding of these two types of games comes from the master himself, Professor James P. Carse, who penned a little treatise called *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility* in 1986. It was Carse’s book that first got me thinking beyond winning and losing, beyond ties and stalemates. The more I looked at our world through Carse’s lens of finite and infinite games, the more I started to see infinite games all around us, games with no finish lines and no winners. There is no such thing as coming in first in marriage or friendship, for example. Though school may be finite, there is no such thing as winning education. We can beat out other candidates for a job or promotion, but no one is ever crowned the winner of careers. Though nations may compete on a global scale with other nations for land, influence or economic advantage, there is no such thing as winning global politics. No matter how successful we are in life, when we die,

none of us will be declared the winner of life. And there is certainly no such thing as winning business. All these things are journeys, not events.

However, if we listen to the language of so many of our leaders today, it's as if they don't know the game in which they are playing. They talk constantly about "winning." They obsess about "beating their competition." They announce to the world that they are "the best." They state that their vision is to "be number one." Except that in games without finish lines, all of these things are impossible.

When we lead with a finite mindset in an infinite game, it leads to all kinds of problems, the most common of which include the decline of trust, cooperation and innovation. Leading with an infinite mindset in an infinite game, in contrast, really does move us in a better direction. Groups that adopt an infinite mindset enjoy vastly higher levels of trust, cooperation and innovation and all the subsequent benefits. If we are all, at various times, players in infinite games, then it is in our interest to learn how to recognize the game we are in and what it takes to lead with an infinite mindset. It is equally important for us to learn to recognize the clues when finite thinking exists so that we can make adjustments before real damage is done.

Trusting Teams

What is this for?” asked George. “This has nothing to do with the oil field.” This was the general consensus from the rest of the people in the room too. They were to be the crew for the Shell URSA, the biggest offshore deepwater drilling platform the Shell Oil Company had ever built and they had no time for this “workshop.”

The Shell URSA would stand forty-eight stories tall and would be capable of drilling deeper than any other platform in the world, more than three thousand feet below the surface of the ocean. At the time, 1997, it cost \$1.45 billion to build (about \$5.35 billion in today’s dollars). Given how massive and expensive an operation it was, it presented all kinds of new challenges and dangers, so Shell wanted things done right. Which is why they handpicked Rick Fox as the man to lead the job.

Fox was a tough guy’s tough guy. Hard and confident. He was intolerant of weakness. He felt he had every right to be. This was one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. One false step, a glance in the wrong direction and in an instant a man could be ripped in two and killed by one of the heavy moving parts. He knew so—he’d seen it happen. Safety was Fox’s number one concern . . . that, and making sure that the URSA operated at peak capacity, pulling as many barrels of oil out of the ocean floor as it could handle.

Off in Northern California, far from Shell’s New Orleans headquarters, lived a woman named Claire Nuer. A Holocaust survivor, Nuer operated a leadership consulting practice. She heard about the Shell URSA and, always looking for opportunities to share her philosophies, cold-called Rick Fox. When Nuer asked Fox about the challenges he faced, he spent most of the time telling her about the technical challenges. After letting him explain all the complexities of running a deep-sea rig, Nuer made a rather unusual proposal. If Fox *really* wanted his crew to be safe and succeed in the face of all the new challenges, his crew would need to learn to express their feelings.

Such an idea must have sounded ooey-goey and New Agey. It must have sounded like it had no place in any serious, performance-driven organization. If it were any other time, Fox, a man who believed expressing feelings was the same as expressing weakness, might have hung up the phone. But Nuer got lucky. For some reason, perhaps because he was struggling with a strained relationship with his son, Fox listened to what she had to say. He even accepted an invitation to

fly to California with his son to attend one of her workshops. There, father and his son were offered a safe space to open up about how they felt about each other. The workshop had such a profound and positive impact on their relationship that Fox wanted others to experience it too. He hired the Northern California, hippie type to fly across the country and test her theories with his roughneck, calloused, Louisiana crew. He knew they would be cynical and laugh at what he was asking them to do. But Fox cared about his crew, and he knew that any humiliation or mockery he would have to endure would be short lived compared to the benefit they would gain. And so the experiment began.

Day after day, for hours, members of the URSA crew would sit in circles and talk about their childhoods and their relationships. Their happy memories and their not-so-happy memories. On one occasion, a crew member broke down in tears as he told his teammates about his son's terminal illness. Crew members were not only asked to talk about themselves, there were also asked to listen. Another crew member recalled being prompted to ask the group, "If there was one thing you could change about me, what would it be?" "[You] don't listen," they told him, "you talk too much." To which he could only reply, "Tell me more."

The members of Fox's team got to know each other on a deeper level than ever before. Not just as coworkers but as humans. They opened up about who they were versus who they pretended to be. And as they did, it became clear that, for most of them, the tough-guy personas they projected were just that—personas. Under their hard exteriors, like all people, they had doubts, fears and insecurities. They had just been hiding them. Over the course of a year, Rick Fox, with Claire Nuer's guidance, built a team for the Shell URSA whose members felt psychologically safe with each other.

There is a difference between a group of people who work together and a group of people who trust each other. In a group of people who simply work together, relationships are mostly transactional, based on a mutual desire to get things done. This doesn't preclude us from liking the people we work with or even enjoying our jobs. But those things do not add up to a Trusting Team. Trust is a feeling. Just as it is impossible for a leader to demand that we be happy or inspired, a leader cannot order us to trust them or each other. For the feeling of trust to develop, we have to feel safe expressing ourselves first. We have to feel safe being vulnerable. That's right, vulnerable. Just reading the word makes some people squirm in their seats.

When we work on a Trusting Team we feel safe to express vulnerability. We feel safe to raise our hands and admit we made a mistake, be honest about shortfalls in performance, take responsibility for our behavior and ask for help. Asking for help is an example of an act that reveals vulnerability. However, when on a Trusting Team, we do so with the confidence that our boss or our colleagues will be there to support us. “Trust is the stacking and layering of small moments and reciprocal vulnerability over time,” says Brené Brown, research professor at the University of Houston in her book *Dare to Lead*. “Trust and vulnerability grow together, and to betray one is to destroy both.”

When we are not on a Trusting Team, when we do not feel like we can express any kind of vulnerability at work, we often feel forced to lie, hide and fake to compensate. We hide mistakes, we act as if we know what we’re doing (even when we don’t) and we would never admit we need help for fear of humiliation, reprisal or finding ourselves on a short list at the next round of layoffs. Without Trusting Teams, all the cracks in an organization are hidden or ignored. Which, if that continues for any length of time, will compound and spread until things start to break. Trusting Teams, therefore, are essential to the smooth running of any organization. And on an oil rig, it actually saves lives.

“Part of safety,” said Professor Robin Ely, coauthor of the *Harvard Business Review* article about the URSA, “is being able to admit mistakes and being open to learning—to say, ‘I need help, I can’t lift this thing by myself, I’m not sure how to read this meter.’” What the URSA crew discovered is that the more psychologically safe they felt around each other, the better information flowed. For the first time in many of their careers, Fox’s crew felt safe to raise concerns. And the results were remarkable. The Shell URSA had one of the best safety records in the industry. And as Nuer’s trust-building techniques spread across the company, it contributed to an 84 percent overall decline in accidents companywide.

When I suggest that teams must learn to be vulnerable with one another, that they must care about each other and show it, I often face pushback. The chief of a state police department, for example, told me: “I understand what you’re saying, but I can’t go back to my organization and tell the officers I ‘care’ about them. It’s a machismo culture. I just can’t do it. It won’t work.” But if a roughneck like Rick Fox can do it on an oil rig, then any leader in any industry can do the same. Our ability to trust is not based on our industry. This is human being stuff. Sometimes all we need to do is translate the concepts to fit the cultures in which we work. I asked the chief, “Can

you go back to your officers and tell them, ‘I give a shit about you guys. I want you to come to work and feel like I give a shit about you and I want to build a culture in which every officer feels like someone gives a shit about them?’” The chief smiled. He could do that.

In business, the resistance tends to come from a different place. Leaders of companies tell me that business is supposed to be professional, not personal. That their job is to drive performance, not to make their people feel good. But the fact is, there is no avoiding the existence of feelings. If you’ve ever felt frustrated, excited, angry, inspired, confused, a sense of camaraderie, envious, confident or insecure while at work, then congratulations, you’re human. There is no way we can turn off our feelings simply because we are at work.

Feeling safe to express our feelings is not to be confused with a lack of emotional professionalism. Of course, we can’t rage or disengage because we’re feeling upset with someone on our team. We are still adults and we must still act with respect, courtesy and thoughtfulness. However, this does not mean we can or should even try to turn off our emotions. To deny the connection between feelings and performance is a finite-minded way of looking at leadership. In contrast, leaders like Rick Fox understand that feelings are at the heart of Trusting Teams . . . and Trusting Teams, it turns out, are the healthiest and highest-performing kind of teams.

On oil rigs, the historical average for industry uptime (the amount of time a platform is up running and operational) is 95 percent. The Shell URSA ran at 99 percent uptime. Their production was 43 percent better than industry benchmarks; they even outperformed their own production goals by 14 million barrels. And as if that weren’t enough, the URSA was way ahead of their targets for environmental goals as well. In other words, to build high-performing teams, trust comes before the performance.

Performance vs. Trust

The Navy SEALs became well known to the public from movies like *Acts of Valor* and *Captain Phillips* and from the operation that resulted in the death of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Indeed, the Naval Special Operations Forces are among the highest-performing organizations on the planet. However, it may surprise you to learn that the people on their teams are not necessarily the highest-performing individuals. To determine the kind of person who belongs in the SEALs, one of the things they do is evaluate candidates on two axes: performance versus trust.

Performance is about technical competence. How good someone is at their job. Do they have grit? Can they remain cool under pressure? Trust is about character. Their humility and sense of personal accountability. How much they have the backs of their teammates when not in combat. And whether they are a positive influence on other team members. The way one SEAL team member put it, “I may trust you with my life but do I trust you with my money or my wife?” In other words, just because I trust your technical skills doesn’t mean I think you are trustworthy as a person. You might be able to keep me safe in battle, but I don’t trust you enough to be vulnerable with you personally. It’s the difference between physical safety and psychological safety.

Looking at the Performance vs. Trust graph, it is clear that no one wants the person in the lower-left corner on their team, the low performer of low trust. Clearly, everyone wants the person in the top-right corner on their team, the high performer of high trust. What the SEALs discovered is that the person in the top left of the graph—the high performer of low trust—is a toxic team member. These team members exhibit traits of narcissism, are quick to blame others, put themselves first, “talk shit about others” and can have a negative influence on their teammates, especially new or junior members of the team. The SEALs would rather have a medium performer of high trust, sometimes even a low performer of high trust (it’s a relative scale), on their team than the high performer of low trust. If the SEALs, who are some of the highest-performing teams in the world, prioritize trust before performance, then why do we still think performance matters first in business?

In a culture dominated by intense pressure to meet quarterly or annual targets, too many of our leaders value high performers with little consideration of whether others on the team can trust them. And those values are reflected in whom they hire, promote and fire. Jack Welch, CEO of GE during much of the high-flying 1980s and ’90s, offers an extreme example of what this looks like. Welch was so concerned with winning and being number one (he even titled one of his books *Winning*) that he focused almost exclusively on performance to the detriment of trust. Like the SEALs, Welch also ranked his executives on two axes. Unlike the SEALs, however, his axes were performance and potential; basically, performance and future performance. Based on these metrics, those who “won” biggest in a given year were earmarked for promotion. The underperformers were fired. In his drive to produce a high-performing culture, Welch focused on someone’s output above all else. (Though Welch did have metrics on culture, if you ask anyone who worked at GE at the time, it was largely ignored.)

Environments like the one Welch cultivated tend to benefit and celebrate the high performers, including the ones of low trust. The problem is, the toxic team members are often more interested in their own performance and career trajectories than they are with helping the whole team rise. And though they may crush it in the near term, the manner in which they achieve their results will often contribute to a toxic environment in which others will struggle to thrive. Indeed, in performance-obsessed cultures, these tendencies are often exacerbated by leaders who encourage internal competition as a way to further drive performance.

Pitting their people against each other might seem like a good idea to finite-minded leaders like Welch. But it's only good for now. Eventually, it can lead to behaviors that actually undermine trust, things like hoarding information instead of sharing it, stealing credit instead of giving it, manipulating younger team members and throwing others under the bus to avoid personal accountability. In some cases, people will go so far as to intentionally sabotage their colleagues to advance themselves. As expected, in time, the organization as a whole will suffer . . . maybe to the point that it is forced out of the game altogether. The GE that Jack built was almost destined to fail before too long. Indeed, if it weren't for a \$300 billion government bailout they received after the 2008 stock market crash, GE probably wouldn't exist anymore. Time is always the great revealer of truth.

It's not surprising that even well-intentioned leaders who value trust often fall into the trap of hiring and promoting high performers without regard to whether they can be trusted and trusting. Performance can easily be quantified in terms of output. Indeed, in business, we have all sorts of metrics to measure someone's performance, but we have few if any effective metrics to measure someone's trustworthiness. The funny thing is, it is actually incredibly easy to identify the high performers of low trust on any team. Simply go to the people on the team and ask them who the asshole is. They will likely all point to the same person.

Conversely, if we ask team members whom they trust more than anyone else on the team, who is always there for them when the chips are down, they will likely also all point to the same person. That person may or may not be the highest individual performer, but they are a great teammate and may be a good natural leader, able to help raise the group's performance. These team members tend to have a high EQ and take personal accountability for how their actions affect the team's dynamics. They want to grow and help those around them grow too. Because we tend to measure

only someone's performance and not trust, we are more likely to miss the value of a trusted team member when deciding whom to promote.

When confronted with the information about how others feel about them, high performers of low trust rarely agree or even want to listen. They think of themselves as trustworthy, it's everyone else who can't be trusted. They offer excuses instead of taking responsibility for how they show up. And though they can feel that the rest of the team may not include them in things (probably convincing themselves that everyone is jealous of them), they fail to recognize that the only common factor in all these tense relationships is them. Even when told how the rest of the team feels about them, many higher performers of low trust will double down on performance instead of trying to repair lost trust. After all, thanks to lopsided corporate metrics, it is their performance that helped them advance their careers and provide job security in the past. Why change strategy now?

Good leaders don't automatically favor low performers of high trust nor do they immediately dump high performers of low trust. If someone's performance is struggling or if they are acting in a way that is negatively impacting team dynamics, the primary question a leader needs to ask is, "Are they coachable?" Our goal, as leaders, is to ensure that our people have the skills—technical skills, human skills or leadership skills—so that they are equipped to work to their natural best and be a valuable asset to the team. This means we have to work with the low-trust players to help them learn the human skills to become more trusted and trusting, and work with the low performers to help them learn the technical skills to improve their performance. Only when a team member proves uncoachable—is resistant to feedback and takes no responsibility for how they show up at work—should we seriously consider removing them from the team. And at that point, should a leader still decide to keep them, the leader is now responsible for the consequences.

Teams naturally ostracize or keep at arm's length the member they don't trust. The one who "is not one of us." This should make it easier for a leader to know whom to coach or remove so that the whole team's performance can rise. Or does it? Is it the team member who is low trust or is it the rest of the team?

If You Build It, They Will Come

There had been several allegations made against him. Investigators were looking into some of them, including whether he was sleeping in the gym instead of being out on patrol, whether he had illegally tinted windows on his personal vehicle and whether he tried to use his badge to get out of a ticket in another jurisdiction. He was even being investigated for having sex with his ex-wife in a patrol car while on duty. Officer Jake Coyle felt like they were constantly going after him for something. Like the microscope was always on him. He didn't trust his leaders, he didn't trust his colleagues and they didn't trust him.

Other police officers regularly picked on Officer Coyle. He wasn't a member of their clique and they made sure he knew it. They made fun of him and played pranks on him. They would put garbage in his car, for example, or block his car in with a snowplow. To the other officers, it was just playful hijinks, frat-boy humor. But to Officer Coyle it was much more serious. Their behavior toward him left him feeling no sense of trust or psychological safety within the department. It got to the point that he hated coming to work. He just wanted to get through his shift and go home. More and more, he was thinking about picking up and starting over somewhere else; he was already looking into a transfer to a different police department. And then something happened.

When Jack Cauley arrived at the Castle Rock Police Department to be the new chief, what he found was a police force that resembled the one he had just left and countless others around the country (as well as too many corporate cultures today). A place where many people felt undervalued and ignored. Where they felt pressured to make the numbers above all else. "We were basically told that we were replaceable and that there [were] hundreds of people waiting to have our jobs," said one officer, describing what it was like at CRPD before Chief Cauley. "Rookies [did] not feel comfortable advancing ideas they may have [had]," another said. It was a place where officers would be punished for not writing enough tickets.

Chief Cauley knew all about police departments using tickets and arrests as the only metrics of performance. As an ambitious young officer starting his career in Overland Park, Kansas, in 1986, he himself had climbed the ranks by beating the metrics his superiors set for him. If they wanted him to write X many tickets, he would write double. Over the years, he came to realize that such a focus on performance came at a cost to the officers and the culture of policing. So, when he was offered the job to be the chief at Castle Rock PD, he leapt at it. This was his chance to prove what

can happen to a police force with a culture built on trust, not tickets written, blind obedience or job insecurity.

One of Cauley's first acts as police chief was to hold listening sessions with every single member of the organization—every sworn officer and every staff member. During the sessions, multiple people told him that they had been asking for years for a fence to be built around the parking lot. The parking lot was an open and exposed area of asphalt that wrapped around the CRPD headquarters. Officers and staff complained that when they left work at night, when it was quiet and dark outside, they felt afraid walking to their cars. They had no idea if someone was hiding, waiting to pounce on them. For years, management told them to deal with it. They were told that there were more pressing things to spend money on than a fence, things more related to the job of policing—like new firearms or new cars.

It became clear to Cauley that the people who worked at the department did not feel like their leaders had their back. The new chief had to build a “Circle of Safety” first. Without it, nothing else he needed to do would work. So, in short order, Cauley had a fence erected around the parking lot. This simple act put everyone on notice: things were going to change. It was one of a series of seemingly small things that sent a profound message to his people—I hear you and I care about you. A Circle of Safety is a necessary condition for trust to exist. It describes an environment in which people feel psychologically safe to be vulnerable around their colleagues. Safe to admit mistakes, point out gaps in their training, share their fears and anxieties and, of course, ask for help with the confidence that others will support them instead of using that information against them.

It was during one of his early listening sessions that Cauley sat down with “Problem Officer” Jake Coyle. The chief knew that internal investigations had exonerated Coyle from the more significant allegations against him. A few infractions, however, proved true, like having illegally tinted windows on his personal vehicle. None of the violations were major, but together they were enough to fire the young officer. Chief Cauley could have looked at Officer Coyle, said, “Low performer, low trust,” and shown him the door. But Chief Cauley suspected that it was the culture that was toxic, not the officer. And if he was working to change the culture, then it only seemed fitting that he give the officer a second chance. To many a finite-minded leader, the chief's decision would be considered too risky; why keep an employee who has proved themselves to be a lower performer and untrustworthy? Instead of terminating Jake Coyle, however, Chief Cauley gave him a three-day unpaid suspension and, as Coyle remembers the chief telling him, “the opportunity to

turn this around.” Officer Coyle smiles as he tells the rest of the story. “He basically said ‘I believe in you. . . .’ [My job] was basically the one thing I had left. I already lost everything else . . . and so I was like, ‘Okay. Let’s do this!’”

With those words Officer Coyle showed that he knew he had work to do. If his chief wanted to build a culture of trust, then he had to act in a way that would be worthy of that trust. True trusting relationships require both parties to take a risk. Like dating or making friends, though one person has to take a first risk to trust, the other person has to reciprocate at some point if the relationship has any chance of succeeding. In an organization, it is the leader’s responsibility to take the first risk, to build a Circle of Safety. But then it is up to the employee to take a chance and step into the Circle of Safety. A leader cannot force anyone into the circle. Even on strong, Trusting Teams there are still some who refuse to step in, especially on teams with an entrenched history of prioritizing performance before trust. This does not mean they are toxic, it just means they need more time. True trust takes time to develop and it can take some people longer than others.

The process of building trust takes risk. We start by taking small risks, and if we feel safe, we take bigger risks. Sometimes there are missteps. Then we try again. Until, eventually, we feel we can be completely ourselves. Trust must be continuously and actively cultivated. For Chief Cauley, giving Officer Coyle a second chance to make something of himself in a healthier culture was just the start. He stayed personally involved in Coyle’s growth. He coached him now and then, checked in on him every so often and kept tabs on how he felt about his job, and made sure that Officer Coyle’s direct supervisors were doing the same thing. Chief Cauley also held Coyle accountable for his own actions and offered him a safe space to express how he felt without any fear of humiliation, taunting or retribution. Coyle, in turn, had to take advantage of the safe space Cauley was building to share his feelings and ask for help when he needed it. He was also expected to behave in a way that was consistent with the values of the organization. And it worked. Today, the culture of the Castle Rock Police Department has been completely transformed. It is a place in which trust flows freely. Jake Coyle is now one of the most respected and most trusted officers at CRPD and is responsible for training new recruits who join their ranks. And Chief Cauley, always in search of the truth, still does his listening sessions.

The Truth Shouldn't Hurt

Human beings are hardwired to protect ourselves. We avoid danger and seek out places in which we feel safe. The best place to be is among others around whom we feel safe and who we know will help protect us. The most anxiety-inducing place to be is alone—where we feel we have to protect ourselves from the people on our own team. Real or perceived, when there is danger, we act from a place of fear rather than confidence. So just imagine how people act when they work in constant fear of missing out on a promotion, fear of getting in trouble, fear of being mocked, fear of not fitting in, fear of their boss thinking they're an idiot, fear of finding themselves on a short list for the next round of layoffs.

Fear is such a powerful motivator that it can force us to act in ways that are completely counter to our own or our organization's best interests. Fear can push us to choose the best finite option at the risk of doing infinite damage. And in the face of fear, we hide the truth. Which is pretty bad in any circumstance, but when an organization is doing badly, it's even worse. This is exactly what Alan Mulally walked into when he took over as the new CEO at Ford in 2006.

Ford was in serious trouble, and Mulally was brought in with the hope that he could save the company. Much as Chief Cauley had done at the CRPD, Mulally made it his first order of business at Ford to find out as much as he could about the current state of things from the people who worked there. The task, however, proved more difficult than he expected.

To keep a pulse on the health of the organization, Mulally introduced weekly business plan reviews (BPRs). All his senior executives were to attend these meetings and present the status of their work against the company's strategic plan, using simple color coding—green, yellow and red. Mulally knew that the company was having serious problems, so he was surprised to see that week after week every executive presented their projects as all green. Finally, he threw up his hands in frustration. “We are going to lose billions of dollars this year,” he said. “Is there anything that's *not* going well here?” Nobody answered.

There was a good reason for the silence. The executives were scared. Prior to Mulally, the former CEO would regularly berate, humiliate or fire people who told him things he didn't want to hear. And, because we get the behavior we reward, executives were now conditioned to hide problem areas or missed financial targets to protect themselves from the CEO. It didn't matter that Mulally said he wanted honesty and accountability; until the executives felt safe, he wasn't going to get it. (For all the cynics who say there is no place for feelings at work, here was a roomful of the most

senior people of a major corporation who didn't want to tell the truth to the CEO because of how they felt.) But Mulally persisted.

In every subsequent meeting he repeated the same question until, eventually, one person, Mark Fields, head of operations in the Americas, changed one slide in his presentation to red. A decision he believed would cost him his job. But he didn't lose his job. Nor was he publicly shamed. Instead, Mulally clapped at the sight and said, "Mark, that is great visibility! Who can help Mark with this?" At the next meeting, Mark was still the only executive with a red slide in his presentation. In fact, the other executives were surprised to see that Fields still had his job. Week after week, Mulally would repeat his question, We are still losing tons of money, is anything *not* going well? Slowly executives started to show yellow and red in their presentations too. Eventually, it got to the point where they would openly discuss all the issues they were facing. In the process, Mulally had learned some tricks to help build trust on the team. To help them feel safe from humiliation, for example, he depersonalized the problems his executives faced. "You *have* a problem," he would tell them. "*You* are not the problem."

As the slides presented at the BPR meetings became more colorful, Mulally could finally see what was actually going on inside the company, which meant he could actively work to give his people the support they needed. Once the Circle of Safety had been established, a Trusting Team formed and the executives could now, in Mulally's words, "work together as a team to turn the reds to yellow and the yellows to green." And if they could do that, he knew they could save the company.

Nothing and no one can perform at 100 percent forever. If we cannot be honest with one another and rely on one another for help during the challenging parts of the journey, we won't get very far. But it's not enough for leaders to simply create an environment that is safe for telling the truth. We must model the behavior we want to see, actively incentivize the kinds of behaviors that build trust and give people responsible freedom and the support they need to flourish in their jobs. It is the combination of what we value and how we act that sets the culture of the company.

Culture = Values + Behavior

To build a culture based on trust takes a lot of work. It starts by creating a space in which people feel safe and comfortable to be themselves. We have to change our mindset to recognize that we need metrics for trust and performance before we can assess someone's value on a team. This is

perhaps one of the most powerful components of Chief Cauley's transformation of the Castle Rock Police Department. A culture in which pressure to meet numbers was replaced with a drive to take care of one another and serve the community better. To do this, however, he knew that he would need to change the way that he recognized and rewarded his people.

These days, CRPD officers' evaluations focus on the problems they are solving and the impact they are making in the lives of people at the department and in the community. The traditional metrics are included, but they aren't the focus any more. In addition to written evaluations, Cauley also occasionally presents certificates of recognition during roll call. These go to the officer or officers whose work best embodies the values of the department.

Unsurprisingly, because Chief Cauley promotes and recognizes care for team members and community, initiative and problem solving over traditional metrics, what he gets is more care, more initiative and more problem solving. Again, we get the behavior we reward. And the more problems the people of the Castle Rock Police Department solve, the more initiative they show, the more trust has flourished in the force and with the community. Chief Cauley calls it "one-by-one policing," because the benefits build up one step, one problem solved at a time. It's a system that promotes consistency over intensity.

People will trust their leaders when their leaders do the things that make them feel psychologically safe. This means giving them discretion in how they do the jobs they've been trained to do. To allow people to exercise responsible freedom. Whereas in the old system they were told, "Go do A, B, C, D and repeat," explains Chief Cauley, in the new system, when officers saw a problem or opportunity and said, "Wouldn't it be cool if . . .," Chief Cauley let them run with it.

This is the core of one-by-one policing. Good leadership and Trusting Teams allow the people on those teams to do the best job they can do. The result is a culture of solving problems rather than putting Band-Aids on them. It's the difference between issuing lots of tickets at an intersection that has a lot of accidents and figuring out how to reduce the number of accidents in the first place. It also deters overzealous policing that can come as a result of a lopsided, metrics-heavy system of evaluation and recognition.

The bicycle unit, for example, knew about an unused bike track in town and saw an opportunity. They took the initiative to put the word out that any kids with bicycles were invited to come learn to jump their bikes, ride on the track and have free doughnuts with the officers—Dirt, Jumps and Doughnuts, they called it. The officers showed up with doughnuts donated by a local shop, a table,

their bicycles and waited. The first time they did it, they expected few kids to show up. In fact, over forty kids showed up, a number that has remained consistent every single month. Dirt, Jumps and Doughnuts became a huge opportunity for community engagement. For most people, the only time we talk to a police officer is if something has gone wrong or if we are trying to get ourselves out of trouble. These officers wanted to get to know the kids and they wanted the kids to get to know them beyond a one-time show-and-tell at the local school, for instance. At Dirt, Jumps and Doughnuts, there are no presentations or formal requests made by the police, they just ride their bikes with the kids.

On one occasion, the department received a call that a resident believed the house next to theirs was being used to sell drugs. Traditionally in such cases, the police would initiate an investigation. This would often be done covertly and include undercover officers both surveilling the house or making a buy. All the while, the neighbor who made the call wouldn't see a police response and would feel ignored. After weeks or months of building a case, the police would obtain a warrant, gather a larger group of heavily armed officers and forcibly break down the door to raid the house. The practice is dangerous for everyone involved, and though some arrests may be made, as officers explained to me, before long "[the dealers] would often be back on the streets and maybe back in that same house back at it." And even if the officers are successful in shutting down the house, the crime scene is often left wrapped in police tape with the doors broken in—not exactly something other neighbors want to be left with.

The new culture at CRPD opened up the opportunity to try something different. Instead of a stakeout, one of the officers walked up to the alleged drug house and knocked on the front door. When a person answered, the officer didn't ask to enter; instead, they shared that there had been reports about possible drug deals at the house and informed the person inside that the police would be watching. Over the next few weeks, the police presence in the area was stepped up. Officers on their rounds would make a point to drive by the house, maybe park across the street to eat their lunch. As it turns out, it's very hard to sell drugs from a house in which there is a regular police presence outside. And so the tenants simply left. No doors bashed down. No lives put at risk.

Now I fully appreciate the cynical view of this. That the police didn't solve the problem, they simply moved it to another location. And now another jurisdiction would have to deal with the problem and risk their lives. I grant you that this is indeed the case. But this is an infinite game. Using this one-by-one system of policing, the aim would be for other departments to adopt similar

tactics and further develop their own. In time, a crime like selling drugs out of neighborhood homes becomes a more difficult business proposition altogether, city by city, state by state, one by one. Notice that I said “more difficult” and not impossible. Despite what we’ve been led to believe by those who talk about the “war on drugs,” this is not a game that can be won. Drug dealers aren’t trying to beat the police and win; they are just trying to do more drug deals. The police need to play with the right mindset for the game they are in.

Infinite games, remember, require infinite strategies. Because crime is an infinite game, the approach Chief Cauley’s officers are taking is much better suited to that game than an attack-and-conquer mindset. The goal is not to win in the overall scheme of things; the objective is to keep your will and resources strong while working to frustrate the will and exhaust the resources of the other players. Police can never “beat” crime. Instead, the police can make it more difficult for the criminals to be criminals. At CRPD Chief Cauley’s officers are developing strategies that can be easily, cheaply and safely repeated over and over . . . forever if necessary.

“Most of what cops do is address quality of life issues, not fighting crime,” explains Chief Cauley, “and what about the quality of life for the officers?” If someone has to muster the energy to go to a job they hate every day, it will take a toll on their confidence and negatively affect their judgment. “If a cop’s grumpy, you’re probably screwed,” one officer explained. “If he’s having a bad day and you’re making it even worse for him or making more work for him, you’re probably going to get the worst of it.” Just like the Shell URSA, when a job can be deadly, creating a space in which employees can feel safe to open up is more than a nice-to-have, it’s essential.

If an officer feels inspired to go to work every day, feels trusted and trusting when they are there and has a safe and healthy place to express their feelings, the odds are pretty high that members of the public who interact with that officer will benefit too. Just as customers will never love a company until the employees love the company first, the community will never trust the police until the police trust each other and their leaders first.

Adding new focus on the culture inside the organization as a way to address outside challenges, the Castle Rock Police Department has seen a remarkable shift among its 75 sworn officers. Considering that over 95 percent of the nearly 12,500 police departments in the United States have fewer than 100 officers, one-by-one policing could serve as a model for other police departments that may be struggling with trust issues inside the department or with the community.

Indeed, Chief Cauley recognizes that there is still a lot to do in his own department and that the old way of thinking hasn't completely gone away. But CRPD is on a journey and their culture today is significantly healthier than it used to be. Anecdotally, the officers report a significant increase in the number of people in the community who will wave them down just to say thank you. They report significantly more people buying them cups of coffee at coffee shops. Crime is under control and the community is more willing to help out too. "The community sees us as problem solvers," says Chief Cauley, "not the enforcers."

If leaders, in any profession, place an excess of stress on people to make the numbers, and offer lopsided incentive structures, we risk creating an environment in which near-term performance and resources are prioritized while long-term performance, trust, psychological safety and the will of the people decline. It's true in policing and it's true in business. If someone who works in customer service is highly stressed at work, it increases the likelihood that they will provide a poor customer service experience. How they feel affects how they do their job. No news there. Any work environment in which people feel like they need to lie, hide and fake about their anxieties, mistakes or gaps in training for fear of getting in trouble, humiliated or losing their job undermines the very things that allow people to build trust. In the policing profession the impact can be much more serious than poor customer service.

In weak cultures, people find safety in the rules. This is why we get bureaucrats. They believe a strict adherence to the rules provides them with job security. And in the process, they do damage to the trust inside and outside the organization. In strong cultures, people find safety in relationships. Strong relationships are the foundation of high-performing teams. And all high-performing teams start with trust.

In the Infinite Game, however, we need more than strong, trusting, high-performing teams today. We need a system that will ensure that that trust and that performance can endure over time. If leaders are responsible for creating the environment that fosters trust, then are we building a bench of leaders who know how do to that?

How to Train a Leader

Would-be leaders in the U.S. Marine Corps attend a ten-week training and selection process at Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia. Among the many tests administered at OCS is the

Leadership Reaction Course. The LRC is a series of twenty mini obstacle courses—problem-solving courses, to be more accurate. Working in groups of four, the Marines are given challenges such as figuring out how to get all their people and matériel across a water hazard (military-speak for a pond) within a set time period using just three planks of different sizes. The Marine Corps uses the LRC to evaluate the leadership qualities of their future officers. They look at things like how well the candidates follow a leader or deal with adversity and how quickly they can understand a situation and prioritize and delegate tasks. The amazing thing is, of all the qualities those future leaders are assessed on, the ability to successfully complete the obstacle is not one of them. There isn't even a box to check at the bottom of the evaluation form. In other words, the Marine Corps focuses on assessing the inputs, the behaviors, rather than the outcomes. And for good reason. They know that good leaders sometimes suffer mission failure and bad leaders sometimes enjoy mission success. The ability to succeed is not what makes someone a leader. Exhibiting the qualities of leadership is what makes someone an effective leader. Qualities like honesty, integrity, courage, resiliency, perseverance, judgment and decisiveness, as the Marines have learned after years of trial and error, are more likely to engender the kind of trust and cooperation that, over the course of time, increase the likelihood that a team will succeed more often than it fails. A bias for will before resources, trust before performance, increases the probability a team will perform at higher levels over time.

The ability for any organization to build new leaders is very important. Think of an organization like a plant. No matter how strong it is, no matter how tall it grows, if it cannot make new seeds, if it is unable to produce new leaders, then its ability to thrive for generations beyond is nil. One of the primary jobs of any leader is to make new leaders. To help grow the kind of leaders who know how to build organizations equipped for the Infinite Game. However, if the current leaders are more focused on making their plant as big as possible, then, like a weed, it will do whatever it needs to do to grow. Regardless of the impact it has on the garden (or even the long-term prospects of the plant itself).

I know many people who sit at the highest levels of organizations who are not leaders. They may hold rank, and we may do as they tell us because they have authority over us, but that does not mean we trust them or that we would follow them. There are others who may hold no formal rank or authority, but they have taken the risk to care for their people. They are able to create a space in which we can be ourselves and feel safe sharing what's on our mind. We trust those people,

we would follow them anywhere and we willingly go the extra mile for them, not because we have to, but because we want to.

The Marine Corps isn't interested in whether or not leaders can cross a water hazard or any other arbitrary obstacle. They are interested in training leaders who can create an environment in which everyone feels trusted and trusting so that they can work together to overcome any obstacle. Marines know that a leadership climate based on trust is what helps ensure they will enjoy success more often than not.

It's a phrase I will repeat again in this book: leaders are not responsible for the results, leaders are responsible for the people who are responsible for the results. And the best way to drive performance in an organization is to create an environment in which information can flow freely, mistakes can be highlighted and help can be offered and received. In short, an environment in which people feel safe among their own. This is the responsibility of a leader.

This is what Rick Fox did. He built a high-performing team by creating an environment in which his crew felt safe to be vulnerable around each other. The SEALs do this. They build high-performing teams by prioritizing an individual's trustworthiness over their ability to perform. Alan Mulally did this. He helped Ford become a high-performing company again only after he created a safe space for his people to tell the truth about what was going on. And this is what Jack Cauley is doing . . . and the results have been transformative. When leaders are willing to prioritize trust over performance, performance almost always follows. However, when leaders have laser-focus on performance above all else, the culture inevitably suffers.