

Erica Keswin

**Bring Your Human to Work: 10
Surefire Ways to Design a
Workplace That Is Good for
People, Great for Business, and
Just Might Change the World**

Made by Blinkist



These key insights in blinks were written by a team of experts at Blinkist. We screen the world of nonfiction to choose the very best books. Then, we read them deeply and transform them into this concise format that brings you the most inspiring ideas from the text.

Maybe these blinks will inspire you to dig deeper, or maybe they're enough to start you thinking and then on to something new. However you read blinks, we hope they help you become an even brighter you.

What's in it for me? Mix business with pleasure.

Building relationships with one another is a huge part of what it means to be a human being. But when it comes to the modern world of work, the importance of connection is often overlooked. Where once there was face-to-face communication, now there is instant messaging.

Luckily, these blinks will help you put the human touch back into your business. From meetings to feedback to values, this is your go-to guide for fostering better interactions between the human beings in your organization.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- why office friendships are good for business;

- how you can have more meaningful meetings; and
- the best way to give back to your community.

Bringing your authentic self to work is good for both you and your company.

We're often taught to keep our professional and personal lives separate. But it might be time to rethink this rule. That's because when you try to keep a strict divide between your work and the rest of your life, you're missing out on a key opportunity – to bring your humanity to work with you and to be your authentic self all day, every day.

A study from Harvard Business School found that businesses which celebrate their employees' authentic personalities enjoy higher employee retention and more satisfied customers than businesses that try to force a uniform “corporate identity” on their staff.

The key message here is: Bringing your authentic self to work is good for both you and your company.

So what does business authenticity look like in action? A company based around the humble kitchen apron can show us the way.

When Ellen Bennett began her apron company, Hedley & Bennett, she branded herself as a millennial who was wise beyond her years. She began telling people that she wanted to make the world a better place – one apron at a time. Her communication style was authentic, too, even if that meant dropping the occasional F-bomb. This may not have been strictly corporate behavior, but it did make her stand out from the crowd. These days, Hedley & Bennett is a global leader in fashionable kitchen aprons. Ellen credits her success to simply being “real” with everyone around her – from her employees to her clients to her investors.

So how can you make your company or brand feel more *real*? Well, one of the

best ways is to embrace authenticity – and to start telling stories. After all, the stories that we tell about ourselves let others know who we are and who we want to become.

One company that uses storytelling to powerful effect is the airline JetBlue. At the onboarding ceremony for new hires, JetBlue employees take to the stage and tell stories that highlight the brand's values. But JetBlue doesn't just let employees tell the company's stories; it also uses audio recordings of satisfied customers who talk about their positive experiences with the company.

One story, for instance, comes from a mother who describes how a JetBlue crew member helped her disabled son access a bathroom in an emergency. Through storytelling, JetBlue teaches its new recruits about the company's values. But perhaps more importantly, the

stories also showcase the warm,
authentic face of the company.

It's important to maintain a human touch in the brave new world of technology.

When you're a customer, interacting with technology can either be a gift or a curse. Consider the experience of going to the airport and checking in for a flight. If you're a frequent flyer, then using your airline's speedy self-service check-in machines might be a dream come true. But if you're not used to flying, or aren't accustomed to self-service machines, then you might find the same experience a nightmare. With no airline employees around to talk to, you might start wishing you'd stayed home.

The key message here is: It's important to maintain a human touch in the brave new world of technology.

A major problem for companies nowadays is how to balance the needs of tech-savvy customers with those who crave old-school customer service. The

solution lies in finding the sweet spot between human connection and efficiency-boosting technology.

This isn't as difficult as it may sound. By using technology to free your employees from repetitive tasks, you can grant your staff more time to have meaningful human interactions.

Again, let's look at JetBlue as an example of this approach in action. The airline has made self check-in and bag-tagging the norm at airports. Instead of having to manually complete this laborious process for every customer, crew members are now free to mingle and interact with passengers.

This means they can spot customers who might need more tailored help. Perhaps they see a tired-looking mother who's struggling with her small children – she might really appreciate a free coffee. Or perhaps a wheelchair user could use

some extra attention to make his airport experience more comfortable.

JetBlue understands that the true value of modern technology lies in enabling us to do more meaningful, *human* things with our time – like interacting with customers. But sometimes the best place for technology in your organization is where the customer can't see it at all.

At the revamped Union Square Cafe in New York City, all the restaurant's employees wear Apple smart watches. These watches allow the waiters, coat check staff, and cooks to seamlessly coordinate with each other. This, in turn, helps diners move through their restaurant visit more smoothly.

The customers are usually not even aware that modern technology is invisibly improving the situation; they still get an entirely human experience with their waiter. The end result is that they

have a more pleasant visit and spend less time waiting around.

Design your meetings carefully to make them more productive.

The biggest opportunity for human connection might be your team meeting. This meeting is one of the most frequent opportunities, too. After all, some 36 million meetings occur every day in the United States alone. But just how productive are these meetings?

The short answer is: not very. It's estimated that American businesses waste a grand total of \$37 billion a year on useless meetings. So what's going on? Well, the main issue is that our meetings usually lack purpose.

Picture a scenario in which your team has a problem it doesn't know how to solve. After a few weeks of stalled progress, you call a meeting to deal with the issue. The alleged purpose of the meeting is to solve the problem. But be honest: How will sitting around a table

actually contribute to problem-solving? What does bringing everyone together really achieve? Without a clear strategy, your meeting is probably just a waste of everyone's time.

The key message here is: Design your meetings carefully to make them more productive.

So, how can you make your meetings better? Well, the first step is to ensure that they're aligned with your organization's values.

One company that's always looking to align its meetings with values is Mogul – a digital platform that engages with millennial women. Mogul emphasizes its core value of transparency during company meetings by giving updates on its financial health and key performance metrics. This way, attendees understand how the company is faring.

You can also make your meetings more meaningful by rethinking the physical space in which you meet. When you conjure up a mental image of a meeting, you might see a long, rectangular boardroom table. But if you want to encourage more open and dynamic communication between your meeting attendees, then it's better to install a round table instead. This simple change will help everyone feel as if they are equally involved in the interaction.

Another tip for better meetings is to ensure that every attendee gets her fair share of the conversation. Research shows that when six people hold a meeting, two of the people will tend to do 60 percent of the talking. If you're leading a meeting, you can combat this problem by calling on the more reticent people in the group to give their opinion. Psychologists have found that introverted people prefer being asked for their opinions during group

discussions rather than spontaneously jumping in.

Supporting your employees' wellness offers a huge range of benefits.

In the year 1700, the world of work changed forever. It all started with an eye infection. When physician Bernadino Ramazzini met a cesspool operator who was suffering from an eye infection, he realized there is an important connection between our health and our work. This led Ramazzini to write a book called *The Diseases of Tradesmen* – and the field of occupational medicine was born.

Ramazzini's discovery of the work-health connection eventually led to the modern corporate wellness system. Today, around 70 percent of American employers offer their staff a wellness program. Good health, it turns out, again benefits both employees *and* employers.

The key message here is: Supporting your employees' wellness offers a huge

range of benefits.

Of course, one of these benefits is financial. A 2014 study published in the *Harvard Business Review* looked at the relation between employee well-being and employers' financial expenditure in the US. It found that every dollar spent on employee wellness interventions yielded employers six dollars of savings in health-care costs.

But financial savings aren't the only benefit of investing in your staff's well-being. In 2015, researchers found that wellness initiatives also led to greater employee productivity, better performance, and higher levels of morale and engagement.

But what exactly do we mean when we talk about wellness programs? While this term has become synonymous with subsidized gym memberships and cholesterol check-ups, the best wellness programs offer much more than that.

One company who has taken its wellness offering to the next level is Vynamic, a health-care consulting firm. On top of the usual benefits, Vynamic has also introduced nutritious snacks, ergonomic chairs, and treadmill desks to the workplace. When its consultants are working with clients off-site, Vynamic arranges for these wellness perks to go with them.

But Vynamic doesn't stop there. The company recognizes that true well-being also includes the mental and social dimensions. With this in mind, it has decided to do something unique in the world of consulting – let its employees choose their projects. Other firms tell their consultants where they're needed and expect them to just get on a plane and go. Meanwhile, Vynamic talks through different options with each employee so that they're never posted somewhere they don't want to be.

Unsurprisingly, Vynamic's unique wellness initiatives have led to unique outcomes. Whereas most consulting firms see an employee turnover rate of 20 percent, Vynamic's attrition rate is half that. This goes to show that if you create a caring, human-centered workplace, your talented employees will want to stick around.

When your company helps the wider community, everyone wins.

Part of being human is making connections with your fellow human beings. A powerful way to achieve these connections is to give part of yourself to others – in other words, *to give something back*.

The world's most successful companies have long understood the power of giving back. In fact, over three quarters of the small companies listed by *Inc.* magazine as the best places to work give their staff time off to volunteer for charitable causes. Additionally, a 2015 study by consulting firm Bain & Company revealed that employees who feel inspired by volunteer projects are three times more productive than employees who don't feel inspired.

Here's the key message: When your company helps the wider community,

everyone wins.

So, how can your company start giving back?

Well, perhaps the most important thing to know is that authenticity is king. It's not enough to simply *say* that you're going to do good; both your customers and your employees want to see evidence that you're taking sincere, meaningful action. In fact, one recent study found that 76 percent of millennial consumers will do their own check on whether a company is telling the truth about its environmental or social positions. So don't just talk – *act*.

That being said, the best strategy for deciding how to give back might be to wait until the right opportunity presents itself.

When Brian Berger founded the men's underwear brand Mack Weldon, he didn't want to rush into a cookie-cutter

philanthropy initiative. Authenticity was one of his company's core values, so Berger opted to wait until an initiative came along that aligned with what he – and his company – were all about. And five years later, Berger finally found what he was looking for: a textile recycling project called Community Recycle.

With the help of this project, Mack Weldon began encouraging its customers to send in their old, unwanted clothing whenever they purchased new items from the brand. The cotton in these used garments would then be recycled and turned into new items of clothing for communities in need.

Since starting this initiative, Mack Weldon has created real environmental and social impact – the brand has stopped eleven thousand tons of old clothing from going into landfills while creating quality garments for underserved communities.

*“The best give-back strategies
are discovered, not designed.”*

To be really productive, you may have to take a break from, well, being productive.

In today's hectic world, it's sometimes easy to forget that you're a human being. Instead, you start feeling like a human *doing*. Because you're constantly working, you're never enjoying the pleasure of simply doing *nothing*. But not only is this workaholic attitude bad for your well-being, it could also be bad for your business.

Research shows that we get our best and most innovative ideas when we step back from our everyday routine. The mother of innovation, it seems, is boredom. And pressing pause won't just improve your creativity. It could give your career a boost, too. Studies have shown that employees who take vacations are 6 percent more likely to get a promotion than those who don't.

The key message here is: To be really productive, you may have to take a break from, well, being productive.

If you think that being chained to your desk will help advance your career, then you may need to rethink your strategy. It might even be time for you to take a break. Not only will taking a breather from work give you some respite, it will also allow you to see the big picture. It might even help address the areas in both your work life and your personal life that could do with some improvement.

For instance, one study looked at what happened when a group of entrepreneurs and executives took a week off from all of their electronic devices and online activity. Incredibly, just three days into the experiment, many of the participants decided to make significant changes in their relationships and careers. By the end of

the study, these recovering tech addicts were making more eye contact with one another, had better posture, and reported having more energy, too.

When it comes to taking time off, certain business leaders are showing us the way forward. Tristan Walker is the CEO of the health and beauty brand Walker & Company. Walker grew up with an absent father so, as a father, he decided he wanted to always be there for his own children. That's why he opted to take three months of paternity leave when his son was born.

These days, Walker & Company is a highly lucrative company. This just goes to show that, when it comes to success, you don't have to choose between your bottom line and your life outside of work.

Make a connection by saying “thank you.

When was the last time you felt truly appreciated by a company?

The author and her young daughter used to stop by their local Starbucks each morning. The author’s daughter, who loved the pumpkin scones, was disappointed when the shop ran out one day. But as they left the Starbucks and started walking down the street, their barista, Ashley, ran after them.

She held a bag of gingerbread, which she offered to the little girl in place of her beloved pumpkin scones. In that moment, the author felt seen and appreciated – not just by Ashley herself, but by Starbucks as a company.

The key message here is: Make a connection by saying “thank you.”

Of course, you might not have either the opportunity or the inclination to chase after people with a bag of gingerbread. Luckily, there are more subtle ways of showing the people you work with that you appreciate them.

The fitness company SoulCycle has found a unique and memorable way for people across the company to show appreciation to one another. New recruits joining the company are given ten small pins; each pin represents one of SoulCycle's core values. When an employee sees someone in the company embodying the values, she can choose to express her gratitude by giving her coworker one of her pins. One facilities manager, for instance, has accrued 17 pins from his coworkers.

Making time for gratitude also allows you to get to know the people you work with better. When travel start-up Indagare started holding a daily gratitude meeting,

it invited attendees from across the organization to tell one other what they were thankful for – both in their working and personal lives. These daily sessions weren't just a chance for staff members to express gratitude, though; they also gave employees a greater insight into one another's lives.

Fostering this kind of intimacy and connection between coworkers is highly valuable to your organization. A recent Gallup study demonstrates this. It found that when employees feel they have a good friend in the workplace, their level of engagement goes up and their likelihood of leaving the company goes down.

So don't be afraid to show some gratitude to the human being at the desk next to you. It costs you nothing, and the rewards could be huge.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks:

When you arrive at work, you don't need to turn off your humanity. Enjoying meaningful relationships with your coworkers and customers won't just enhance your well-being; it will boost your productivity, too. So don't be a slave to your Wi-Fi connection; make today's technology work for you so that you can spend more time connecting with your fellow human beings.

Actionable advice:

Sit next to the people you want to work with.

To foster deeper connections between your employees, why not mix up your office seating plan? It's traditional for people to be seated near those they report to, but it doesn't have to be this

way. Instead, you could try placing your team next to another team. After all, when we sit close to others, an opportunity is created for more and better interactions. So the next time you want two people to work together, try bringing them physically together, too.

Got feedback?

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What to read next: *The Culture Code*, by Daniel Coyle

Now that you know the importance of building a humane workplace, why not discover more insights from the field of business psychology? In our blinks to *The Culture Code*, you'll explore the latest thinking from psychologists on everything from what makes a team tick

to why some teams consistently outperform others. Packed with fascinating research and actionable tips, this is your go-to guide for getting the best out of your people!

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