

# Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



## *The Culture Code* by Daniel Coyle

### Why Read *The Culture Code*?

*“Group culture is one of the most powerful forces on the planet.”*

*“We all want strong culture in our organizations, communities, and families. We all know it works. We just don’t know quite how it works.”*

*“Culture is a set of living relationships working toward a shared goal. It’s not something you are. It’s something you do.”*

*The Culture Code* is a fantastic book about little things that make a huge difference in a group or organizational culture. There’s a lot to unpack in this book, and fortunately it’s fun to read, with lots of great stories and examples from a variety of sources. This is a book that leaders and followers at all levels should read and think about, since a huge part of being an effective leader is fostering a culture that allows for the organization, the team, and individuals on the team to be successful. Culture isn’t something that’s created overnight, or by big actions... it’s made up of many smaller actions over time, and this book provides some insight into small actions and behaviors that any leader can take to help create a positive culture.

There are several videos about the book available online. Find some of them at the links below or by searching in any internet-based search engine.

- **Secrets of Highly Successful Teams: Daniel Coyle (5 minutes):**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXK5ZYNLGRY>
- **The Inside Scoop on Successful Teams with Daniel Coyle (7 minutes):**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgotPv2KNCo>

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

**Blog:** <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

**Professional Reading Program:** <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

**Main WFLDP page:** <https://www.fireleadership.gov>

## *The Culture Code Discussion Questions*

### **Chapter One: The Good Apples**

What do you think about the example that leads off the chapter? What are your thoughts on “creating conditions for others to perform?” After reading about “belonging cues,” have you found yourself paying more attention to them? What have you seen or not seen in your organization.

### **Chapter Two: The Billion-Dollar Day When Nothing Happened**

What’s your take on the relationship between belonging cues and performance? Have you ever experienced or seen a situation where this kind of cohesion or lack of it obviously impacted your (or your teams) ability to work together?

### **Chapter Three: The Christmas Truce, the One Hour Experiment, and the Missileers**

What can the WIPRO example tell us about belonging cues and our culture in wildland fire management? How about the “opposite of belonging” examples? What do you think about the Missileer culture compared to wildland fire culture? Have you seen anything similar? Different? What might you do if you found yourself in that kind of setting?

### **Chapter Four: How to Build Belonging**

What do you think of Popovich’s approach to coaching and teamwork? What are some ways you can use this methodology in a fire organization? How might you maintain high performance standards while still creating strong group cohesion/belonging?

### **Chapter Five: How to Design for Belonging**

After reading this chapter, do you have any ideas on you can set things up for connections in in your environment? Are there things that your organization is doing now that encourage connections? Discourage them? What do you think about “collisions?” Have you seen this effect in the fire culture? What’s your take on proximity and the Allen Curve in terms of how cohesive and successful a group is? Have you seen example of this in your workplace?

### **Chapter Six: Ideas for Action**

What’s your take on the idea of “muscular humility” as described in this chapter? Why might this concept be powerful in the wildland fire setting? How many of these ideas for action have you seen in your organization? What are some that you think you can put into action in your group?

### **Chapter Seven: “Tell Me What You Want, and I’ll Help You”**

How do your AARs compare the SEAL AARs described in this section? Are you going to do anything differently after reading and thinking about what makes an effective AAR? What do you think about approaching a situation – a line dig, firing operation, or a tough conversation – knowing that it won’t go perfectly or as planned? How does this tie to creating an environment where seeking help is positive rather than negative?

## **Chapter Eight: The Vulnerability Loop**

What do you think about vulnerability loops? How can these loops create trust in a group? Do you see any of these types of interactions on your crew? On your district/forest/park/unit?

## **Chapter Nine: The Super-Cooperators**

What's your take on cooperation in the SEAL team example? How does flattening rank help build teamwork skills? Could the concept apply in your team? Do you do similar things already? How many of the "Harold" rules could apply or be adapted for use in a fire setting?

## **Chapter Ten: How to Create Cooperation in Small Groups**

How can we apply Cooper's ideas about "leader among leaders" in a fire organization? What do you think about Cooper's take on the four most important words a leader can say? How effective are your AARs compared to the "ideal" AAR? Could yours be better? What would it take to make that happen? Is there anything we can learn, as firefighters/fire managers from the Bin Laden compound example?

## **Chapter Eleven: How to Create Cooperation with Individuals**

After reading this chapter, what are some things you can do to create cooperation? Are you the kind of listener you want to be? How good is your understanding of "what makes people tick?" What kinds of things can you do to improve that kind of skill/ability/understanding?

## **Chapter Twelve: Ideas for Action**

In this section the author highlights some action items... are there any that you'll use in your workplace? How about your life away from work? Did anything in this portion of the book take you by surprise? Make you think about something in a way you hadn't before?

## **Chapter Thirteen: Three Hundred and Eleven Words**

When it comes to purpose and value, what really drives your organization? Is it different than what the organization says it is? How does that purpose, or credo, show up in daily life? What do you think about the example with the "high performing" students? What kinds of small behaviors can add up in your group?

## **Chapter Fourteen: The Hooligans and the Surgeons**

What can we in the fire organization learn from the Hooligans example? Are there any unorthodox leadership/social skills that you've used? What kind of positive and negative social cues do you see in your group or organization? Do any of these cues resonate with you? What does this example tell us about the value and importance of cumulative small behaviors? Now think of the medical team example... what lessons from the successful teams can be applied in wildland fire?

## **Chapter Fifteen: How to Lead for Proficiency**

In the restaurant example, a core purpose of that organization was “taking care of people.” Using ideas and concepts you’ve read so far, what thoughts do you have on how to better “take care of people” in your group? Your life? How could this benefit you and your team? What rules of thumb could be adapted to your situation?

## **Chapter Sixteen: How to Lead for Creativity**

Is there room in wildland fire, and your organization, to not only make mistakes, but to embrace them and treat them as valuable lessons to use for improvement? Are you, and your group, willing to find and learn from mistakes, in even successful operations? Have you ever had difficulties sharing mistakes? Have you ever seen shared mistakes and failures actually build trust and improve performance afterward? How do these ideas tie in with commonly-heard concepts like “just culture,” “learning culture,” or “high reliability organization?”

## **Chapter Seventeen: Ideas for Action**

What’s your opinion of the idea of “productive dissatisfaction?” Does your organization use “artifacts” to emphasize what it’s about? Should it? If not, what might it use? Does your team have “bar-setting behaviors” like the 40 for 40? What small, effortful behaviors have you seen in your organization that lead to larger success?

## **Epilogue**

Creating positive culture takes work, probably involves changing something that you do. What did you think of the author’s example from his own experience to close out the book? Can you see yourself using anything from this book in your situation? How can you start working with others to make whatever it is you do, better?