Notes from The Culture Code by Daniel Coyle

Note: These notes are a collection of excerpts from Daniel's book.   The snippets in different colors represent some of the more profound concepts.   The numbers next to each snippet represent locations within a Kindle e-reader.

117 - The 3 Essential Skills for an Effective Culture

1. Build Safety - explores how signals of connection generate bonds of belonging and identity.
2. Share Vulnerability - explains how habits of mutual risk drive trusting cooperation.
3. Establish Purpose - tells how narratives create shared goals and values.

The three skills work together from the bottom up, first building group connection and then channeling it into action.

179 - a group succeeds because the signals represented are "We are solidly connected" Jonathan's group succeeds not because its members are smarter but because they are safer.   Safety is not mere emotional weather but rather the foundation on which strong culture is built.

208 - Characteristics of highly effective, cohesive, safe groups

- Close physical proximity, often in circles
- Profuse amounts of eye contact
- Physical touch (handshakes, fist bumps, hugs)
- Lots of short, energetic exchanges (no long speeches)
- High levels of mixing; everyone talks to everyone
- Few interruptions
- Lots of questions
- Intensive, active listening
- Humor, laughter
- Small, attentive courtesies (thank-your, opening doors, etc)

236 - Belonging Cues - cues humans use to form safe connections. Include among others proximity, eye contact, energy, mimicry, turn taking, attention, body language, vocal pitch, consistency of emphasis. We use signals long before language and our unconscious brains are incredibly attuned to certain types of behaviors.

244 - Belonging Cues Possess 3 basic qualities

1. Energy: they invest in the exchange that is occurring
2. Individualization: They treat the person as unique and valued
3. Future orientation: They signal the relationship will continue

These add up to the message that you are safe here. They seek to notify our ever-vigilant brains that they can stop worrying about dangers and shift into connection mode, a condition called psychological safety.

280 - Team Performance is driven by 5 measurable factors:

1. Everyone in the group talks and listens in roughly equal measure, keeping contributions short.
2. Members maintain high levels of eye contact, and their conversations and gestures are energetic.
3. Members communicate directly with one another, not just with the team leader.
4. Members carry on back-channel or side conversations within the team.
5. Members periodically break, go exploring outside the team, and bring information back to share with others.

295 - Words are noise. Group performance depends on behavior that communicates one powerful overarching idea: We are safe and connected.

410 - When you receive a belonging cue, the amygdala switches roles and starts to use its immense unconscious neural horsepower to build and sustain your social bonds.

744 - Story of Greg Popovich wrestling and joking around with one of the players.   "He wanted to make sure the player was ok. That's the way Pop approaches every relationship. He fills their cups.

802 - "Magical Feedback" I"m giving you these comments because I have very high expectations of you and I know that you can reach them.   This sentence contains 3 separate cues:

1. You are part of this group.
2. This group is special; we have high standards here.
3. I believe you can reach those standards.

807 - Greg Popovich's methods are successful because of these types of belonging cues:

- Personal, up-close connection (Body language, attention, and behavior that translates "I Care about you")
- Performance Feedback (relentless coaching and criticism that translates as We Have High standards here)
- Big Picture perspective (larger conversations about politics, history, and food that translate as Life is bigger than basketball)

847 - On Greg Poppovich after a heartbreaking loss in the NBA finals. He insisted the team keep their reservation meant for celebrating, hurried to the restaurant and arranged the tables so they sat as a family, and a multitude of other details that signified to the team that they would be together and stay as a team/family regardless of their circumstances.

"I remember watching him do that, and I couldn't believe it." RC Buford says. "By the end of the night, things felt almost normal. We were a team again.   It's the single greatest thing I've ever seen in sports, bar none."

930 - Collisions - defined as serendipitous personal encounters - are he believes the lifeblood of any organization., the key driver of creativity, community and cohesion.   A practiced belief on the part of Tony Hsieh who tries to foster and create as many as possible.

976 - The most successful projects in a study of engineering firms were those driven by sets of individuals who formed what Allen called "clusters of high communicators."

990 - Proximity is a very critical thing. If you're on a different floor in some organizations, you might as well be in a different country.

994 - The Allen Curve - the anomaly when plotting the frequency of communication relative to distance.   A sudden steepness occurs at the 8 meter mark. At distances less than 8 meters, communication is off the charts. Decrease the distance to 6 meters and frequency skyrockets. Get close and our tendency to connect lights up.

Similar to the Dunbar number, our social brains are built to focus and respond to a relatively small number of people located within a finite distance of us.

1036 - **Over-communicate your listening -** Posture and expression are extremely important. It's the way we prove we're in sync with someone.

1058 - **To create safety, leaders need to actively invite input.** It's really hard for people to raise their hand and say 'I have something tentative to say' and it's equally hard for people not to answer a genuine question from a leader who asks for their opinion or their help.

1063 - **Embrace the messenger** - when a group shares tough news or gives tough feedback. Don't just tolerate it. Embrace it.

1072 - **Preview Future Connection -** Sneak preview future relationships, making small but telling connections between now and a vision of the future. Cardinals example of telling current minor league players that a big leaguer was sitting right where they are at 3 years ago.

1080 - **Overdo thank yous** - In highly successful cultures, the number of thank yous seem slightly over the top. A Small thank you causes people to behave far more generously to a completely different person. They are not only expressions of gratitude but their crucial belonging cues that generate a contagious sense of safety, connection, and motivation.

1110 - **Be painstaking in the hiring process** - this signals to the group that you are protecting the culture. similarly to eliminating bad apples as early as necessary.

1116 - **Create Safe, Collision Rich spaces -** be obsessed with creating cohesion and interaction. Create spaces that maximize collisions.

1134 - **Make sure everyone has a voice** - nuff said, easier said than done. Ensure everyone has a voice in different conversations.

1153 - **Pick up trash** - never be too "big" for a role. Show you're willing to get dirty in any way necessary, including picking up trash, answering the phone, etc. Muscular humility - a mindset of seeking simple ways to serve the group.

1169 - **Capitalize on threshold moments** - Pixar showing people early on that they are "empowered to make the films better" or the OKC Thunder taking their team to the Oklahoma City Memorial to show that they are a part of the city and something bigger.

1186 - **Avoid giving sandwich feedback.** - avoid giving good, bad, good feedback. Clearly separate the two.

1195 - **Embrace Fun -** its the most fundamental sign of safety and connection.

1305 - The key to combining skills of a team into greater intelligence involves the willingness to perform a certain behavior that goes against our every instinct: sharing vulnerability.

1349 - After action reviews are the military's way of getting to the hear to things quickly after an event occurs. These awkward, painful interactions, generate the highly cohesive, trusting behavior necessary for sooth cooperation.

1367 - Asking tough questions and answering them among others, makes people uncomfortable.   These tough questions however, make you and those around you feel closer to each other. Asking/answering superfluous questions doesn't generate this type sub-surface level connection. It helps to break down barriers, and says "hey, none of us are perfect, so lets figure this out together"

1410 - Moments of vulnerability have shown in studies to increase cooperation while inversely in situations where people's sense of power (situations where they feel more invulnerable) dramatically diminished their willingness to cooperate.

1455 - Characterizes this experiment as an example of breaking down walls of competition (invulnerability) and creating a network of vulnerability.   Both MIT and the participants shared a common goal.   http://news.mit.edu/2011/red-balloons-study-102811

The experiment symbolizes "What are groups really for?"   The idea is that we can combine our strengths and use our skills in a complementary way. Being vulnerable gets the static out of the way and lets us do the job together without worrying or hesitating.   It lets us work as one unit.

1606 - Seal Team training is centered around creating hundreds of micro events that expose who is truly their for the team, and who is there for themselves.   These events help build closeness and cooperation. As an individual it forces you to leave it all out on the table which builds a level of trust that's exponentially higher than anything you can get anywhere else.

1717 - The story of the Pink Panthers - https://www.vice.com/sv/article/nnq39w/pink-panthers-greece
A highly effective, close knit group of robbers that pulled off some of the most daring heists ever.   We would tend to presume that such faultless coordination requires special training, powerful leadership, and centralized organization. When in fact this was just a group of "refugees" from the Serbia conflict that happened to develop a close bond out of the survival from the Serbian conflicts.

1800 - A major problem here is that as humans, we have an authority bias that's incredibly strong and unconscious - if a leader tells you to do something, by God we tend to follow it, even if its wrong. How do you break away from this?   In trying to create leaders among leaders, you can't just tell people to "never defer to authority." You have to create the conditions where they start to do it.

1820 - One of the best things I've found to improve a team's cohesion is to send them to do some hard, hard training. There's something about hanging off a cliff together, and being wet and cold and miserable together, that makes a team come together.

1830 - On having a good after action report meeting. You have to talk about every decision, and you talk about the process. you have to resist the temptation to wrap it all up in a bow, and try to dig for the truth of what happened, so people can really learn from it.   You have to ask why, and then when they respond you have to ask another why.

2005 - Concordances happen when one person can react in an authentic way to the emotion being projected in the room. It's about understanding in an empathic way, then doing something in terms of gesture, comment, or expression that creates a connection.   The most important moments occur in conversation when one person is actively, intently listening.

2056 - Building habits of group vulnerability is like building a muscle. It takes time, repetition, and the willingness to feel pain in order to achieve gains.   Below are some action steps to take to increase vulnerability:

Make sure the leader is vulnerable first and often: nothing carries more power when a leader signals vulnerability. Three questions a leader should ask:

1. What is one thing I currently do that you'd like me to continue to do?
2. What is one thing that I don't currently do frequently enough that you think I should do more often?
3. What can I do to make you more effective?

The key is not to ask for 5 or 10 things but just one, it's easier for people to answer and when asked this way it makes safe for people to do the same.

Over-communicate expectations - be explicit and persistent about sending big, clear signals that establish expectations, modeled cooperation, and aligned language.

Deliver negative stuff in person - Big or no matter how small, all negative news should be delivered in person.   Deals with things in an honest up front manner that avoids misunderstandings and creates shared clarity and connection.

When forming New Groups, focus on two critical moments :

1. The First vulnerability
2. The first disagreement

Listen like a trampoline - the most effective listeners do 4 things:

1. They interact in ways that make the other person feel safe and supported
2. They take a helping, cooperative stance
3. They occasionally ask questions that gently and constructively challenge old assumptions.
4. They make occasional suggestions to open up alternative paths.

In conversations, resist the temptation to reflexively add value - Forgo easy opportunities to offers solutions and make suggestions. "say more about that" good leaders get others to talk the most. Suggestions can be made but only once after establishing "a scaffold of thoughtfulness."

Aim for candor, avoid brutal honesty - nuff said

2150 - Hotwashes, AARs, and Brain Trusts build the habit of opening up vulnerabilities so that the group can better understand what works, what doesn't work, and how to get better. This type of work may seem inefficient but like working out, going through the pain and uncomfortability of these sessions are the path to building a stronger group.

2304 - Purpose isn't about tapping into some mystical internal drive but rather about creating simple beacons that focus attention and engagement on the shared goal. Successful cultures do this by relentlessly seeking ways to tell and retell their story. They start this by building high purpose environments.

Here is where we are, and here is where we want to go.

2315 - Mental contrasting - envisioning a reachable goal and then envisioning the obstacles. This has proven in many cases to achieve significant results. Also helps to increase motivation. It channels your attention.

Here is where you're at, and here is where you want to go.

2330 - When we hear a fact, a few isolated areas of our brain light up, translating words and meanings. When we hear a story, however our brain lights up like Las Vegas, tracing the chains of cause, effect, and meaning.

2478 - Real Time Signals that signify (or not) team members connections to their work:

- **Framing** - successful teams are able to articulate a higher purpose to the work beyond just work.
- **Roles -** Successful teams were explicitly told by the team leader why their skills were important for the team's success, and why it was important for them to perform as a team.
- **Rehearsal -** Successful teams elaborate dry runs of the procedure, preparing in detail, explaining new protocols, and talking about communication.
- **Explicit encouragement to Speak Up -** Successful teams were told by team leaders to speak up if they saw a problem; they were actively coached through the feedback process.   The leaders of unsuccessful teams did little coaching, and as a result team members were hesitant to speak up.
- **Active Reflection -** Between surgeries, successful teams went over performance, discussed future cases, and suggested improvements.

2608 - It's important to find a way to build a language, to teach behavior. You can't just model the behavior and trust that people would understand and do it. It's important to name things.

Examples from a restaurant:

- Read the guest
- Athletic hospitality
- Writing a great final chapter
- Turning up the home dial
- Finding the yes
- Collecting the dots and connecting the dots
- One size fits one

2770 - The creative process is a series of cognitive puzzles involving thousands of choices and thousands of potential ideas, and you almost never get the right answer right away. Building purpose in a creative group is not about generating a brilliant moment of breakthrough but rather about building systems that can churn through lots of ideas in order to help unearth the right choices.

2796 - Minimize involvement amongst leaders when making creative decisions (advice from Pixar leader) because:

1. Teams are in a better position to solve problems.
2. A suggestion from a powerful person tends to be followed.

2815 - Worry when people avoid each other, celebrate when a group takes the initiative without asking for permission.   Defend the team when they make mistakes.

2858 - Building creative purpose isn't really about creativity. it's about building ownership, providing support, and aligning group energy toward the arduous, error-filled, ultimately fulfilling journey of making something new.

2886 - Ways to Help Build Purpose

Name and rank your priorities - In order to move toward a target, you must first have a target.   Most successful groups realize that one of the main priorities relative to success is building and sustaining the group itself.

Be 10X as Clear about Your priorities as you think you should be - Leaders are inherently biased to presume that everyone in the group sees things as they do, when in fact they don't.   This is why it's necessary to drastically over communicate priorities.

Figure out where your group aims for proficiency and where it aims for creativity - Skills of proficiency are about doing a task the same way, every time.   Machine like reliability.

- Fill the group's windshield with clear, accessible models of excellence.
- Provide high repetition, high-feedback training.
- Build vivid, memorable rules of thumb (if X, then Y).
- Spotlight and honor the fundamentals of the skill.

Creative skills are about empowering a group to do the hard work of building something that has never existed before.   Empowers the team to do the work with the right level of support.

- Keenly attend to team composition and dynamics.
- Define, reinforce, and relentlessly protect the team's creative autonomy.
- Make it safe to fail and to give feedback.
- Celebrate hugely when the group takes initiative.

Embrace the use of catchphrases - Often mistaken as cultish jargon, this is one of the most important things. They should be simple, action oriented and forthright. Examples from other companies:

- Create fun and a little wierdness - Zappos
- Talk less, do more (IDEO)
- Word hard, be nice (Kipp)
- Pound the rock (San Antonio Spurs)
- Leave the jersey in a better place (New Zealand All-Blacks)

Measure what really matters - the world is cluttered with noise, distractions, and endless alternative purposes.

Use artifacts - these signal - "This is what matters"

Focus on Bar Setting Behaviors - translating abstract ideas into concrete terms.   One way is to spotlight a single task and use it to define their identity and set the bar for expectations. Example Hotel chain - "Always pull the curtain", Hockey team - 40 for 40 - symbolizes an actin that may not work 39 out of 40 times but its worth it to do it on the one time it does.

2979 - Talk less, and focus more on ways of creating belonging.