



BUILDING COMMUNITY IN A HYBRID WORLD

An ebook by Dr. Vince Molinaro

© 2022 Dr. Vince Molinaro (Leadership Contract Inc). All Rights Reserved.



If you are like me, you have been paying close attention to the ongoing discussions and debates about the future of work.

IS HYBRID WORK HERE TO STAY?

When the pandemic forced lockdowns and ushered in remote work worldwide, it launched a global, never-before-seen experiment. Since then, companies and their leaders have been grappling with the way forward. **Is hybrid work here to stay?** Some executives have issued ultimatums, demanding their employees return to the office, but employees have been reluctant. Many of them are rethinking their relationship with work and their organizations, triggering widespread resignations.



DO YOU HAVE PRE-PANDEMIC AMNESIA?

As the pandemic has stretched on, I've noticed something very subtle taking place: many leaders are looking back on our pre-pandemic world of work with a sense of fondness and even loss. It's as if we remember a much better world of work than the one we find ourselves in at present. With everything that we've collectively experienced over the last couple of years, we have forgotten that things weren't that great. It's like we have what I call pre-pandemic amnesia.

Let me remind you of how things were before the world was upended. **Only 35% of employees were fully engaged back in 2019.** In addition, according to [research conducted by Cigna](#), 61% of Americans reported feeling lonely at work in 2019. Leaders themselves also struggle with loneliness. A research study reported in the [MIT Sloan Management Review](#) found that 76% of senior leaders said they had difficulty making connections with their work teammates, and 58% felt their social relationships at work were superficial at best. My global

research revealed that companies believed that only **49% of their leaders were truly accountable and living up to their expectations**, and **80% of teams were seen as mediocre**.

No wonder employees have taken the time to reassess their life priorities. They haven't forgotten what the world of work was like and want no part of it moving forward — unless, of course, we can change things for the better in our hybrid world.

And this is where we find ourselves right now. Leaders face new challenges and opportunities and must accept that hybrid forms of working are here to stay. So now the questions are:

How can leaders step up and embrace the new realities?

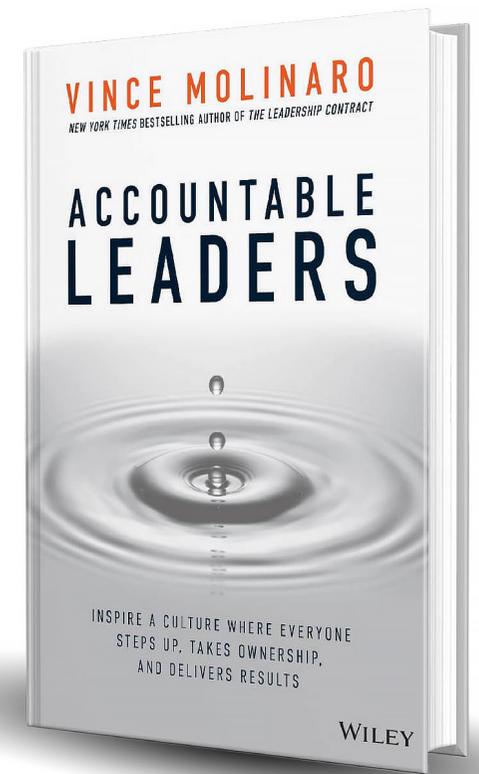
How can we inspire employees, create compelling cultures and build a sense of belonging in a hybrid world of work?

The shift to remote and hybrid work is an opportunity to reset.

As I found when researching for my book, [Accountable Leaders](#), CEOs have been increasingly focused on organizational culture over the past decade. CEOs and top HR leaders overwhelmingly believe that culture can be a critical competitive advantage. However, before the pandemic, my research found that **only 33% of senior executives were confident that they had a strong leadership culture in place.**

It is critical to get leadership culture right. The research clearly shows that companies with solid cultures deliver three times the returns to shareholders.

Unfortunately, very few companies had thriving cultures before the pandemic. So this is a great time to reset and rebuild a new, stronger culture for the future.



Leaders need to rethink everything they've taken for granted for so long:

Why do we have the meeting cadence that we do?

How do we want to recognize hard work and celebrate success?

What is the best way to collaborate in a hybrid world?

If we're only in the office twice a week, how do we make that time count so we can build connections and commitments to each other?

Some organizations are already doing this. For example, some are rethinking team-building activities to move them online. IBM developed a Work from Home Pledge that laid out new rules for remote work, including how team members would support one another in finding a work-life balance, make time for family responsibilities, how colleagues can stay connected, and more. This pledge shows an example of an organization taking the time to re-evaluate and re-articulate their norms and expectations due to the current context. Take a few minutes to ask yourself the following questions and see if any action needs to be taken:

How have your expectations changed?

How clearly have you articulated them?

How are your leaders setting the tone?

IT COMES DOWN TO ONE WORD: **COMMUNITY**

The world has never been more connected. Yet, at the same time, many feel more disconnected and isolated. So how can leaders move forward? The answer comes down to one word: community. And that's what this eBook is all about.

The word community can feel like a big, amorphous, and abstract concept. But it starts with something simple: the ability of leaders to establish strong relationships and create a sense of purpose, meaning, and belonging with their colleagues. So they can collectively set the tone of accountability and inspire employees to step up, take ownership and deliver results.

I've written extensively about this idea of building a community of leaders because, in my global work as a leadership advisor, I have consistently seen this as the most significant opportunity within a company. And when my teams and I have helped companies establish strong communities of leaders, the results and impact on employees, customers and the business have been simply amazing.

WE **NEED COMMUNITY** NOW MORE THAN EVER

Though I've written about this idea a lot in the past, I believe that, now, we need to build community in organizations more than ever.

So how do we do it? It starts with every leader prioritizing and being deliberate about building relationships with peers and employees. You see, when everyone was in the office, we did not have to be as deliberate. We knew we would run into almost everyone on our team during a typical workday. However, at the same time, many of us may have thought that those casual moments of chit-chat and chance encounters were enough to drive engagement and keep relationships strong. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Real community building takes commitment. Relationship building has always been a critical part of the work of leaders. However, transitioning to a world where more people work remotely, more often takes away the crutch of feeling like you're connected to your team just because you see them every day and occasionally ask how their weekend was.

Build a sense of purpose on your team.

Let's look at your role in creating a strong sense of community within your organization. The first area of focus is with your direct team, and a powerful strategy is to connect your team to your company's purpose. **Research** has shown that people who feel like they work for a purpose-driven company are much more engaged than people who don't see a purpose in their work. A purpose doesn't necessarily have to be entirely altruistic; people can find meaning in all kinds of work. A purpose is simply an answer to the question, "Why are we here?" The answer could be anything from "We're keeping our community safe and healthy" to "We're creating a world-class product that our customers need."

Additional **research** reveals that two-thirds of employees are re-evaluating their purpose in life right now. As a leader, you can make a real difference in how much purpose and meaning they can derive from their work.

Leaders have a clear role in articulating the organization's purpose and connecting it to daily work. Articulating a sense of purpose should start at the top of any organization and flow right down to the front line. This should be a front-of-mind concern for every leader right now.

Making work feel meaningful is a deeply personal process for individual employees, but leaders can play a significant role. On the one hand, ineffective or mediocre leaders can undermine an employee's sense of purpose in their work by doing things like forcing people to cut corners, failing to recognize hard work, being unfair, cutting people off from relationships with colleagues, or putting people at risk. But, on the other hand, leaders can help employees find meaning in their work.

DOES EVERYONE ON YOUR TEAM **UNDERSTAND THE TEAM'S PURPOSE?**



Here are a five ways you can incorporate purpose and meaning into your daily work as a leader:

1. Communicate the Purpose

First, leaders should directly articulate the organization's broader purpose and connect it to the work that their teams do.

2. Conduct Purpose Pulse Checks During Team Meetings

You can check for clarity by asking your team to identify how a specific project ties back to the organization's larger strategic goals. You can also communicate purpose to individual employees and the team explicitly: *We all need to work together to ensure this software update rolls out smoothly because it includes several features our customers need.*

3. Review Strategic Priorities Together Regularly

My research reveals that one of the critical behaviors of accountable leaders is that they effectively communicate their strategy to their teams. Do you do this consistently? Help your team draw connections between those big-picture priorities and their day-to-day work. For example: *The company has set a goal of becoming carbon-neutral by 2040. This quarter we're going to dive into a supply chain audit to identify where most of our emissions come from.*

4. Reinforce Your Company's Purpose When Assigning Tasks

You can also tie deadlines back to larger strategic goals: *Let's get this data review done by the end of the month so the Board can make the call on whether to proceed at their Q4 meeting.*

5. Tie Praise Back To Purpose

When you celebrate an accomplishment or compliment someone, tie your praise back to the purpose: *Thanks again for your hard work on that design. It looks great, and it will help us achieve our goal of reducing waste in the manufacturing process.*



Build a **Sense of Community** Across Your Organization

The second area to focus on is your role in building a sense of community between peers and colleagues across your organization.

Professor Henry Mintzberg from McGill University **has long espoused that a small group of managers** committed to building a sense of community within an organization can drive a lasting cultural change. However, the most straightforward steps may be the most powerful: reaching out and connecting with your fellow leaders. Be deliberate about this. Make a point to ask for advice on the leadership challenges you face and encourage an open dialogue.

These actions are critical because **research shows that a lack of social connection** at work can have serious consequences, including health problems, diminished performance and creativity, and impaired decision-making.

Deliberate relationship-building can also give you a huge career boost. For example, during the height of the pandemic, a senior executive in my network reached out to me for advice after he joined a new organization. He told me the entire recruitment process was virtual. In his new role, he was taking over a team of 40 employees. He also told me he always created a 90-day plan for his integration in a new company. He had already

mapped out several interviews with peers and key team members he was planning to do. The reason he reached out to me was that, while this approach worked well in the past, he'd always done it in person. He wanted to talk to me about what he should do to adapt his plan to an all-remote world.

I advised him to dial up his focus on relationships even more. I encouraged him to talk to more people than he typically did in the past. He took my advice to heart. A while later, he sent me an email to share his progress. He told me he scheduled about sixty virtual calls with colleagues from across the company. The response was overwhelmingly positive. His colleagues on the executive team heard great things about his conversations with their teams. **A resounding theme emerged: everyone he had talked to said they felt like he had been with the company forever.**

Here is an excellent example of the power of having a deliberate focus on relationship-building, even in a virtual world. It will pay off if you put in the work to build trust, credibility, and engagement. Here are some other strategies to consider:

1. Start With Trust

Trust is the foundation of every relationship you'll build. So, it's essential to understand how you come across to others. A great way to strengthen relationships is to get feedback from peers about your leadership. Ask for honest comments on your authenticity. Are you perceived as honest and trustworthy? Another essential strategy is to ensure you and your team demonstrate responsiveness and competence.

2. Build An Accountable Team

Build a team that consistently delivers on its promises. If people see you as someone who makes excuses or ducks responsibility, they'll never trust you. Doing the hard work of leadership and holding your team accountable is key to establishing trust. Just as people want to be able to trust you to follow through on what you've promised to deliver, they want to rely on you to see that the whole team can be relied on. And that's your responsibility as a leader. If you need more guidance on this, you can download our eBook: [How to Build an Accountable Team](#).

3. Reorganize your time to prioritize relationship building.

Several years ago, I took on a global executive role. My job required me to work with colleagues around the world. Consequently, I would find that on some days I'd be on virtual calls from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. to accommodate various time zones. On these days, I would do what I always did — I'd go into the office and then spend the whole day locked in a meeting room, just going from call to call. I'd be in the office, but I wouldn't see any of my colleagues. I realized that this wasn't smart. So, I decided to reorganize my time. I would work from my home office on those heavy days of back-to-back virtual meetings. Then I would go to the office on lighter days, where I could book lunches and coffees with colleagues or take time to walk around the office and check in with people. As we transition to a new world of hybrid work, we'll all need to do this kind of learning. *What's the best way for you to organize your time now? Do you have time in your schedule to connect with colleagues and direct reports? What do you want those check-ins to look like in this new world of work?* Be deliberate about learning how to organize your time so that you can prioritize building relationships.



The benefits of building community in a hybrid world.

A few years back, I was part of a line-up of speakers at a conference that included Sir Ken Robinson, one of the world's greatest minds on creativity, innovation, and education. I have followed his work through his books and TED talks, so I was thrilled to get a chance to hear him speak. Robinson said that in today's world, we need to think about organizations as organisms instead of machines. He said **an organization is not the buildings, offices or factories — it's the people inside.** And that culture is the relationships, patterns of behavior and common beliefs held among those people. These are essential words for us to think about.

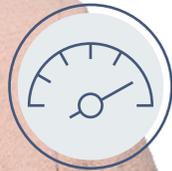
AN ORGANIZATION'S
CULTURE DOESN'T
EXIST IN ITS OFFICES OR
FACTORIES. IT EXISTS
IN THE **RELATIONSHIPS**
AMONG COLLEAGUES.



Promotes a stronger sense of belonging



Allows for greater knowledge sharing



Encourages higher levels of performance



Creates a culture of accountability



Improves employee engagement

So, as you look to the near future, ask yourself: do you see reaching out, connecting, and building solid relationships with your colleagues as a core part of your job? Or do you see it as a luxury? In our new hybrid world of work, building community will have many benefits:

Wouldn't you want to see these benefits take hold in your organization? We see these benefits realized all the time in our leadership development programs. The leaders we work with are craving community. CEOs and senior executives want to create it in their companies, but many don't know how. Fortunately, this is a deliverable we have consistently achieved. In some cases, leaders have reported up to a 60% increase in the sense of community established in our programs. And they have seen this translate into better leadership and strategy execution.

Are you ready to commit to being a community builder?

You have an excellent opportunity to do your part because, whether you realize it or not, your organization needs you to be a community builder. In my book, [Accountable Leaders](#), I share strategies to be a community builder.

- **Commit to Being a Community Builder**

Think about how you show up now. Are you constantly thinking about your self-interest? Do you spend a lot of time and energy on office politics? Do you protect your turf? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, you have some internal work to do before you can expect your peers to trust you.

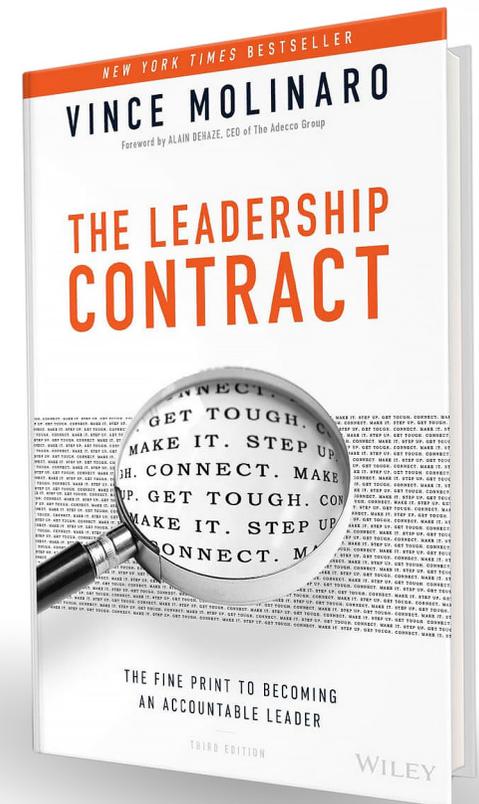
- **Develop a One-Company Mindset**

Do you spend all your time thinking about your team or department? Push yourself to think bigger. Sometimes all it takes is one leader sacrificing time or resources to help a colleague to shift a whole company's thinking.

Support the success of your peers and colleagues. With a one-company mindset, your colleague's success is your success. So, take time to invest in relationships and support your peers. Make sure you are a good follower and a good leader.

Make your own
pledge to being
a community
builder.

In my book, [The Leadership Contract](#), I created the Community of Leaders Manifesto as a rallying cry for leaders to commit to creating strong leadership communities in their organizations. I've taken the time to rewrite it for the hybrid world we face right now. You can find it on the next page. I'd encourage you to read it, share it with your colleagues, and commit to it. Good luck!



THE COMMUNITY OF LEADERS MANIFESTO FOR A HYBRID WORLD

I COMMIT TO PUT AN
END TO THE
ISOLATION &
LONLINESS
THAT WE FEEL EVERY DAY

I WILL REMAIN
CONNECTED
TO MY TEAM &
MY COLLEAGUES

I WILL BRING A
ONE COMPANY
MINDSET TO MY ROLE
AND WORK TO LEAVE THINGS
BETTER
THAN I FOUND THEM

**I WILL
BE THERE**
FOR MY TEAM AND
COLLEAGUES WHEN THEY
NEED ME MOST

ONCE WE HAVE ESTABLISHED A STRONG
**COMMUNITY
& LEADERS**

I RESOLVE TO BE A
COMMUNITY BUILDER
I WILL **COMMIT**
TO CREATING A STRONG SENSE OF
**COMMUNITY
& BELONGING**
ON MY TEAM
AND ACROSS MY ORGANIZATION

I WILL FOSTER
COLLABORATION
& INNOVATION
ACROSS OUR ORGANIZATION
AND TEAR DOWN SILOS

I WILL WORK TO STRENGTHEN
MY PERSONAL
**RESILIENCE
& RESOLVE**
AND SUPPORT OTHERS TO DO THE SAME

I KNOW THAT IT WILL BECOME OUR
**ULTIMATE
DIFFERENTIATOR**
IT WILL BE OUR TRUE
AND EVERLASTING SOURCE OF
**COMPETITIVE
ADVANTAGE**

I WILL SET THE TONE AS AN
ACCOUNTABLE
LEADER

I WILL COMMIT TO BUILDING STRONG
RELATIONSHIPS BASED ON
**TRUST
& SUPPORT**

ALL OF THIS STARTS WITH ME
AND THE PERSONAL DECISION TO
LEAD

IN A MORE DELIBERATE WAY
I WILL HELP MY ORGANIZATION
SUCCEED
IN A HYBRID WORLD OF WORK

About Dr. Vince Molinaro



Vince Molinaro, PhD, is a strategic leadership adviser, speaker, and researcher on leadership accountability.

As the founder and CEO of [Leadership Contract Inc.](#), Vince travels the world helping organizations build vibrant leadership cultures with truly accountable leaders.

Vince calls out the global leadership crisis today and thoughtfully lays out the strategy to address it head-on. His unique combination of provocative storytelling, evidence-based principles and grounded practicality has leaders at all levels stepping up to fulfill their obligations to drive the success of their organizations.

He is a New York Times best-selling author and has published several books including [Accountable Leaders](#) (Wiley, 2020), [The Leadership Contract](#) (3rd ed., Wiley, 2018) and [The Leadership Contract Field Guide](#) (Wiley, 2018). He has also co-authored two other books: Leadership Solutions (Jossey-Bass, 2007) and The Leadership Gap (Wiley, 2005).

His ideas serve as the foundation of leadership development programs in leading companies around the world. Vince lives leadership accountability every day as an entrepreneur and global executive. His research and writing on leadership accountability are featured in some of the world's leading business publications.

He also shares his insights in his [Gut Check for Leaders](#) blog, [Lead the Future](#) podcast and through the [Accountable Leaders App](#) available from the [Apple](#) and [Google](#) App Stores.

He and his family live near Toronto, Canada.

Hello@DrVinceMolinaro.com