

FIRED UP *or* **BURNED OUT**

How to Reignite Your Team's Passion,
Creativity, and Productivity

MICHAEL LEE STALLARD
with Carolyn Dewing-Hommes and Jason Pankau



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO BEIJING

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INTRODUCTION



What fires up people and helps them and the organizations they work in thrive? I'm not talking about motivational speeches and incentives that produce a short-term burst of enthusiasm. I mean, what really makes people perform to the best of their abilities for long periods of time? What causes individuals to put their hearts in their work?

Although people generally enter their organizations fired up, over time most work environments reduce that inner fire from a flame to a flicker. As I will explain, solving this problem needs to be one of the highest priorities of today's organizations.

In this book you will learn how to increase the fire and passion inside people that is necessary for individuals and organizations to achieve their potential. The approach I will describe is based on the results of E Pluribus Partners' multiyear study of leaders who succeeded and those who failed to engage the people they led. Our work draws upon explanations and insights identified from diverse fields of knowledge, including psychology, sociology, neuroscience, political science, organizational behavior, systems theory, history, philosophy, and religion.

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One of the best ways to learn how to fire up people is to study the best practices of outstanding leaders. The leaders you'll learn from include these:

- a renowned basketball coach whose Hall of Fame biography credits him for producing teams that “scaled unprecedented heights that no future organization in any sport is likely to approach”
- a remarkable twenty-five-year-old queen in the 1500s with no leadership experience who inherited a bankrupt England and led her country to become one of the most powerful nations on earth
- an exceptional woman who began as a volunteer in her organization, then went on as CEO to transform it into one of the best-managed organizations worldwide, according to the late Peter Drucker
- a distinguished American career soldier who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, named *Time* magazine's Man of the Year twice, and was considered by Winston Churchill to be the primary architect of the Allies' victory during World War II

These are just a few of the remarkable people whose stories will help you understand how to fire up people in your organization.

DO YOU THRIVE OR JUST SURVIVE?

How many people truly thrive at work? Research by the Gallup Organization suggests that fewer than three in ten Americans are

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engaged in their jobs.¹ In other countries, the number is even lower. Just imagine the wasted human potential! Because so few individuals are thriving in organizations, it follows that organizations are wasting much of their potential too.

Over the course of my twenty-five-year business career, there have been times when I thrived and others when I merely survived. In a couple of the worst instances, the work culture slowly drained the life out of me. So there you have it: thrive, survive, or die. Which term describes what your work culture is doing to you? If you are a leader, how would the people who report to you answer that question?

I've been interested in work cultures throughout my career because I wanted to understand the culture that would bring out the best in me. My interest increased dramatically in the late 1990s when I became the chief marketing officer for the global private wealth management business of a major international brokerage firm on Wall Street. In that position, I recognized that a key success factor for our business was building strong relationships between our clients and our firm's frontline professionals, and I did whatever was possible to promote such relationship building. In addition, we developed and implemented business practices to keep our frontline professionals fired up. The result was that our revenues doubled over a two-and-a-half-year period, and our business achieved its first billion-dollar revenue year in the firm's history. During that time I realized that my colleagues and I had discovered something special.

In the spring of 2002, I left Wall Street to start a think tank to assist people and organizations in achieving their potential. In the search to comprehend every aspect of how to help people thrive in organizations, I learned from the advice and insights of experts in a broad range of fields, and from the approaches of great and

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failed leaders. My coauthor Carolyn Dewing-Hommes shared with me her insights gained from a Citibank study when she had access to some of the world's most prominent companies and their leaders. My other coauthor, Jason Pankau, shared insights that he developed as a leader and a coach of corporate leaders. One important insight emerged from two experiences that forever changed my life.

THE POWER OF CONNECTION

My wife was diagnosed with breast cancer in late 2002. Fortunately, it was detected early, removed by surgery, and treated with radiation. While Katie underwent treatments at our local hospital, the kindness and compassion of many health-care workers comforted us. Some of them were cancer survivors. They knew what we were going through, and they went beyond their regular duties to make a human connection with us. Those connections boosted our spirits.

Twelve months later, Katie was diagnosed with cancer again, this time ovarian. During the first half of 2004, Katie had six chemotherapy treatments. She took a break from chemo over the summer, then started high dosage chemotherapy at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. Our experience there really surprised me. Every time we approached the front doors of the Fifty-third Street entrance in midtown Manhattan, the exuberant doormen locked their eyes on us and greeted us with big, warm smiles as if we were friends coming to visit. The receptionist and security people were equally friendly. At our first office visit, Dr. Martee Hensley, Katie's oncologist, spent an hour educating us and answering a long list of questions. Although the

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statistics were sobering, Dr. Hensley's warm disposition and optimistic attitude lifted our spirits and gave us hope. Simply put, the connection with the people at Sloan-Kettering encouraged us.

One day while Katie was having a treatment, I went to the gift shop to get something to drink and stumbled on a meeting in the adjacent lounge where Sloan-Kettering employees were discussing an employee survey. I overheard them share that they loved working there because they loved their colleagues, their patients, and their cause, which is to provide what is stated on the center's printed materials . . . *the best cancer care, anywhere*. It was apparent that those health-care professionals had formed a connection with one another and with their patients. During our time at Memorial Sloan-Kettering, I witnessed more joy, trust, cooperation, and connection there than in 95 percent of the offices I had been in over my career. Who would have guessed that a cancer treatment center could be such a vibrant and positive work environment?

Today, I'm overjoyed to say, Katie is in remission for both cancers, and she feels great. Reflecting on those days, I'm convinced that the connection we felt from the tremendous outpouring of care provided by health-care workers, friends, and family helped Katie overcome cancer, and it protected our family's spirits. An American Cancer Society publication stated that feeling alone is one of the worst things for cancer patients. We rarely felt alone because we were constantly reminded that many, many people were pulling for us. We figured people were praying for us from probably every religion known to man, and even our atheist friends said they were sending positive thoughts our way. Perhaps for the first time in my life, I experienced the joy that comes from a real sense of community and connection to people beyond my family and close circle of friends.

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For years I did not fully appreciate or understand the importance of relationships and connection. There is increasing evidence that this is a national problem. The well-documented decline in joy following World War II in the midst of growing economic prosperity is widely believed to be attributable to diminishing connection in our lives: families have spread out geographically, more families have become headed by two-career couples, and more time has been spent in the workplace. Two books by respected authorities in their fields, psychologist David Myers's *American Paradox*² and political scientist Robert Lane's *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*,³ describe this phenomenon. In the pages ahead, I will shed light on this problem and how we can correct it.

CONNECTION AFTER 9/11

Another insight about our environment's impact on us came to me as I considered what I felt on the mornings following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Walking from Grand Central Station to my office near Times Square, I vividly remember looking down the canyon-like avenues and seeing American flags flying everywhere against the backdrop of a giant smoldering cloud that hovered over the southern end of Manhattan. I also recall New Yorkers nodding and making eye contact with me as if to say, "We'll make it through this." (If you've been to New York City, you know that making eye contact with strangers is rare.)

A sense of connection in our shared belief in freedom and democracy moved the hearts of people across America to fly their flags and send money for the families who lost loved ones. And

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connection moved rescue workers and volunteers to come to New York City and Washington, D.C., to do what they could to help. Although New Yorkers pride themselves on individualism, I can tell you they were profoundly moved by the outpouring of affection from their fellow Americans. During that time of shock, of mourning, and of sadness, the empathy and compassion extended by people throughout the United States and the rest of the world provided the healing embrace New Yorkers needed to continue on.

Social commentator David Brooks, writing about American unity following September 11, likened us to one big family because even though we may have our differences, when one of our own is in trouble, we are there for one another.⁴ The same strength of connection got us through the Depression and World War II.

The sense of connection I felt following the 9/11 terrorist attacks had a profound effect on me. It led Carolyn, Jason, and me to name our think tank E Pluribus Partners, inspired by America's motto *E Pluribus Unum*, which in Latin means "out of many, one." John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson chose that phrase. If they had seen Americans coming together in the aftermath of 9/11, I believe they would have stood up and cheered.

WE MUST CONNECT WITH OTHERS TO THRIVE

The more we reflected on our own experiences and the more research we conducted about what makes people and organizations thrive, the more Carolyn, Jason, and I became convinced that it came down to this: connection. Our connection with others

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in our organization keeps us fired up for long periods of time. Connection meets basic human psychological needs for respect, recognition, belonging, autonomy, personal growth, and meaning. When these needs are met, we thrive. Research shows that when connection is present, organizations are more productive, more innovative, and more profitable. Our lives, including the time we spend working, are enriched with greater connection. My hope is that you will recognize the vital role of connection in reaching your personal potential and experiencing life at its best.

Conversely, the lack of connection will gradually burn us out. Organizational environments where connection is low or absent diminish our physical and mental health. They create a low level of toxicity that drains our energy, poisons our attitudes, and impacts our ability to be productive. Like the frog in the proverbial kettle of water that is oblivious to the fact that the water is slowly coming to a boil, a person in a low-connection environment had better wise up to his situation before it's too late.

In addition to bringing out the best in individual performance, connection improves group performance. Research has proven that connection makes us better problem solvers, more creative, more trusting, and more cooperative. Trust and cooperation are the lubrication, if you will, that make the tasks of organizations run better. In a work environment that fails to increase individual engagement and connection among people, results will eventually suffer. Too often that's exactly what happens when leaders experience success for a time, only to see their organization's performance decline.

Creating the right work environment requires paying attention to the so-called soft aspects of organizations. These are

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emotional issues such as the meaning of work and the way people treat one another. A 2004 study of fifty thousand employees at fifty-nine global companies conducted by the Corporate Leadership Council, a unit of the prestigious Corporate Executive Board, found that emotional factors were four times more effective in increasing employee engagement than rational factors.⁵

It would be rational, then, to take a hard line on the soft issues that have been overlooked in the past. While our human natures may lead us to assume that other people think the way we do (or at least they should), those who have studied personality and neuroscience tell us that people are wired very differently. The overwhelming majority of leaders with whom I have dealt excelled in left brain-directed linear and analytic thinking yet were less sensitive to the issues that had an emotional effect on people, a cognitive strength primarily directed by the right brain hemisphere.⁶ (According to the research of one psychologist—based on his study of more than 2,245 executives—95 percent of them who completed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a test that identifies temperament, were classified as left brain-directed “thinkers” rather than right brain-directed “feelers.”⁷) Herein lies the challenge. Because of the left brain’s dominance in most leaders, they tend to view actions that improve engagement and connection as inefficient and therefore unimportant, and they discount the feelings of people with other temperaments. Such leaders will be persuaded that investing in the soft issues is beneficial only when they see proof of its positive, tangible effect on the performance of people and organizations. My hope is that the following pages will persuade leaders with facts and testimonies that economic and organizational benefits come from the soft issues.

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THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF CONNECTION

Building organizational connection is already happening in many revered companies. From Main Street to Wall Street, I am encouraged to see leaders beginning to recognize the value of connection and fostering a sense of community. The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Starbucks, and jetBlue are very intentional about increasing their connection among employees and with customers. Harley-Davidson has created a community around its motorcycle riders, employees, and management, and the company sponsors cross-country trips and road rallies. On Wall Street, Goldman Sachs has enhanced and expanded its leadership training in order to advance the connection among its leaders. Goldman has even made leadership training available to the up-and-coming leaders of its client companies to strengthen its connection with them before the promising leaders reach the top jobs. In San Francisco, the biotech company Genentech, which *Fortune* magazine named in 2005 as the number-one-rated company to work for, brings in cancer patients to connect with its employees, throws weekly parties for employees to connect with one another, and celebrates big product breakthroughs with company-wide parties that have featured entertainers Elton John, Mary J. Blige, and Matchbox 20.⁸ Southwest Airlines learned that its performance at the gate improved when it maintained a 10 to 1 frontline employee-to-supervisor ratio because supervisors could connect with, coach, and encourage those people.⁹ (Some airlines have frontline employee-to-supervisor ratios of 40 to 1 that make connection difficult to maintain.)

Ed Catmull, the head of Pixar Animation Studios, formed Pixar as an antidote to the disconnection that is the norm in the film industry where independent contractors come together for a

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specific project and then disband upon the project's conclusion.¹⁰ Pixar keeps the team together so that they build connection. Catmull also created the in-house Pixar University to increase connection across Pixar. At Pixar University connection occurs when every employee, from the janitors to Catmull himself, spends four hours each week in classes with colleagues learning about the arts and animation and about each other. It's no coincidence that Pixar University's crest bears the Latin phrase *Alienus Non Dieutius*, which means "alone no longer."¹¹

The bottom line is that connection is a necessity to any organization that aspires to achieve sustainable superior performance. Organizations with people who report they are more connected and engaged are also better performers across the board in a variety of measures from customer satisfaction to profitability.

An overwhelming amount of evidence points to the need to increase connection in our organizations. It is possible to thrive at work and be a catalyst for positive change. If you are ready to experience work and life at its best and are tired of settling for less, it's time to get fired up!