



## Community Transcends Geography

I feel blessed to have practiced yoga with Jen for about 5 years now. Her students span several generations, come from different backgrounds, and have varying perspectives on the world. Yet, we have two things in common: our love of yoga and our love of Jen's teaching.

When the pandemic hit, Jen began conducting classes via Zoom. We often stayed on the video after class to talk about what we were each experiencing and to support each other through the worst of it. When we finally were able to get together to practice in person — outside, socially distanced — it was amazing. Our connection had somehow strengthened during our physical separation; our sense of community continued to bind us together.

As I write this piece, the Delta variant is surging and business news is full of stories about the “great resignation.” Companies are delaying return-to-office dates, hybrid work programs are on the rise, and leaders are increasingly anxious about maintaining employee engagement. I’d offer the simple thought that *one of the keys to engagement is an underlying sense of community.*

A corporate community is more than a group of people all working for the same company. It’s people who care about what they do and the people they do it with. It unifies and makes us feel that we belong.

What does that mean for leaders, especially in a virtual or hybrid world? We can’t force community to happen, but we can create an environment where it will form, grow, and flourish. Some of the experiences with my yoga community apply to cultivating connections in a corporate setting:

- *Practice authenticity* — Allow employees to show up as their true selves, with how they feel in the moment, performing to their abilities on that day. None of us is perfect and we all face different challenges.

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- *Create a space for sharing* — Whatever form your company takes in this hybrid environment, make it a safe place for employees to share what is happening and how they feel.
- *Stay in contact* — If someone misses a meeting or is unusually quiet, check in via text, phone, or email.
- *Above all, care* — Your actions and reactions speak to your commitment to employees as well as to the overall corporate community.

My yoga practice has taught me about strength, flexibility, and balance in ways that I can apply to many aspects of my personal and professional life. Over the last 18 months, it has also enhanced my thinking about leadership. We can all aspire to be that leader who operates authentically from the place of truly caring about our employees, creates meaningful connections, and encourages those connections across our organizations.

As we think about shaping the future of our corporate culture in a world of change, a strong sense of community will help differentiate our firms when it comes to talent attraction, engagement, and retention. It’s not something we can leave to chance; it’s something we as leaders must nurture even — and especially — while we are apart. *Community will transcend geography.* 🌐