



# “WHOLE SELF” CULTURE KEY TO THRIVING ORGANIZATIONS

By Mike Robbins

How does a culture of healthy, high expectations, balanced by nurturance, enable individuals and organizations to achieve greater fulfillment, competitive advantage, and success? How can companies create an environment where their employees feel safe and encouraged to take risks, give more of themselves while maintaining balance, and deliver results? And what does it mean to individuals to bring their “whole selves” to their work?

My new book, *Bring Your Whole Self to Work*, is scheduled for release in May 2018. In it, I examine what I’ve learned over 17 years as a researcher, writer, and speaker regarding workplace dynamics and how an environment of authenticity, healthy risk-taking, and support helps both individuals and companies thrive.

When we enthusiastically challenge our employees to bring their best—their whole—selves to work, we and they reach new, higher levels of creativity and performance. Individuals’ passions and talents are engaged. They connect—with their own aspirations, and with others. As they do, teams and organizations push farther. Reach higher. Grow and succeed.



But individuals need to feel safe to bring all of who they are—and that takes courage. My experience and research has shown that when we nurture and support employees, their fulfillment influences those around them to aim higher for the organization's collective success.

Consider implementing these steps to help attract and retain employees committed to personal and organizational growth and success.

**FIRST:** Encourage your employees to embrace their vulnerability. We erroneously think being vulnerable is a sign of weakness. It's not. Vulnerability can be scary, but it's essential to encourage healthy risk, change, creativity, collaboration, growth, and results.

Dr. Brené Brown of the University of Houston says, "You can't get to courage without walking through vulnerability."

**NEXT:** Encourage your employees to have "sweaty-palmed" conversations. A mentor once said to me, "Mike, what stands between you and the kind of relationships you really want is probably a ten-minute, sweaty-palmed conversation you're too afraid to have."

Too often we avoid conflicts with others because we're afraid of the consequences that come with speaking up. Yet when we muster the courage to start those sweaty-palmed conversations, we strengthen our ability to resolve differences while deepening our connections, building confidence, and contributing to collective success.

**REMINDE YOUR EMPLOYEES TO:** Stop trying to survive. When we do things that truly matter to us, it's tempting to hold back and play it safe. Don't!

I learned this playing baseball for over 18 years at the college and professional levels. Some of the most disappointing moments I had weren't when I failed, but when I held back—due to my fear of failing. Encourage your employees to let go of their obsession with survival and instead take risks. Go for what they—and the company—want and need to succeed. As one of my coaches pointed out, "You're living your life as though you're trying to survive it. You have to remember: no one ever has!"

Whether you run a business, manage a team, or simply want people around you to feel safe and empowered to bring all of who they are to their work, there are two components to creating an atmosphere of authenticity that leads to greater levels of engagement, performance, and success:

**Healthy, high expectations.** High expectations are essential for people to thrive. We almost always get what we expect from others, but if we demand perfection many may fall short. Employees will feel they're not set up to succeed. Healthy, high expectations challenge people to do their best without pushing them for insatiable, unhealthy perfection.

**High level of nurturance.** People want to feel they're seen, heard, and valued—not just for what they do but for who they are. A high level of nurturance creates a safe space for employees to make mistakes, ask for help, speak up, and disagree. Nurturing environments are filled with compassion and empathy. People feel supported.

We often think that in order to have a high bar we can't be nurturing. Or we think that if we nurture people, we can't expect a lot from them. The goal is to do both, and to do so passionately.

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Asking our employees to bring their whole selves to work, and creating an environment that allows them to do so, is no small feat. It takes courage on everyone's part and can, at times, go against conventional wisdom. However, technology companies must do all they can to attract, develop, and engage the best people in today's competitive global economy.

Creating an environment where employees feel safe and encouraged to flourish will help your company attract individuals committed to your organization's success.

**About the Author** Mike Robbins is the author of the forthcoming book *Bring Your Whole Self to Work* (May 2018). He also wrote three previous titles: *Focus on the Good Stuff*, *Nothing Changes Until You Do* and *Be Yourself, Everyone Else Is Already Taken*. He's an advisor to Nutanix and an expert in teamwork, leadership, and culture. He delivers keynotes and seminars, and consults with top technology companies across the globe. [www.Mike-Robbins.com](http://www.Mike-Robbins.com)