

## PROLOGUE

# “Since Feeling Is First ...”

I borrowed the title of my Prologue from an e. e. cummings love poem because it so nicely captures the reason I wrote this book. Why would I start a business book with a line from a love poem? Because love is one of our most powerful primal feelings. And primal feelings fuel the brain-power that drives the best team performances.

This book was born out of feelings, painful feelings. Not long ago, my life took a sharp turn when I lost something that I dearly cherished. I had been leading a large IT group for over a decade, one with a unique vitality that fostered great success and deep satisfaction, but the team’s energy was waning. Our CEO had just retired, our company was merging with another company, and we could feel our once exceptional and vibrant culture, with its focus on the sanctity of teams, giving way to a more conventional and moribund one.

Years before, we had hit on a winning formula for what we called high-performance teams. One tenet of that formula placed a huge priority on giving a strong voice about running the organization to the teams who played such a major role in getting results. Team members

loved that responsibility and responded with great enthusiasm. We paid a lot of attention to how people felt about their work, their emotional relationships to the organization, and their feelings for one another. In that environment, people performed masterfully. Even our customers and competitors could see something special in “the way we do things around here.” Now, as the merger took effect, a lot of the optimal emotions that had driven our success began to seep away. I left the company and founded the Nura Group, a consulting and training company that specializes in helping individuals and teams improve their ability to create game-changing innovations. Although the flame that inspired innovation at my former employer had faded away, my passion for what we had built had kept burning. Could I pass the torch to others?

That question led to many others. Could I define and describe the energy that drove us to achieve so much? Why did it make such a difference to our creativity and performance? Could I teach it to others? To answer those questions, I began a quest that included immersion in the latest developments in psychology, neuroscience, and even quantum physics. I poured through spiritual texts for inspiration and insight. I took a master’s degree in organizational development. I searched my heart and wracked my brain. In the end, my heart won.

Along my journey, I learned a lot about our primal human nature and how optimal emotions naturally evoke the most sought-after contemporary team competencies, from quickness, flexibility, and resilience to innovation and complexity management. Back at my old job, we never really talked about emotion, preferring, as most businesspeople do, to toss around terms like “empowerment” and “engagement” and “motivation” and “innovation.” But as I learned more and more about what separates good teams from great teams, I came to understand that superperformance depends on creating a work environment that respects and taps into the power of what Mother Nature has hardwired into our brains, the power of our emotions.

I’ve worked with a lot of clients since I began developing the idea of primal teams, and I’ve taken great satisfaction from seeing the prac-

tices I teach actually transform teams as they learn to *harness the power of emotions to fuel extraordinary performance*. The results speak for themselves.

Gradually, I have built a vocabulary to describe an experience that can feel like pure magic but often defies words. I have tried very hard to find the right words so that I can share what I’ve learned with my readers, that is, all the team leaders and team players who want to feel the thrill of doing their best work in the best possible environment. That brings me back to the word “love,” but not with its conventional connotation of wide-eyed, gushy sentiment but rather in the sense of a basic and powerful human emotion that can conquer fear and ignite vitality. Love uniquely facilitates optimal cognitive function, enhanced perception, heightened inspiration, and crystal-clear insight.

Rational thinking, logic, and mathematical models will always play a role in solving our most challenging business problems, but they’re never as sharp as when powered by the beating human heart. That’s where the energy starts, with our emotions. Only by working directly with our emotions can we release the energy we need to become world-class creative problem solvers.

Many other authors have written fine books about team performance and employee engagement and emotional intelligence. I’ve read most of them and have found their observations quite useful. However, I have chosen not to repeat their excellent advice in this book but instead to explore many of the latest, most eye-opening, and often quite unconventional ideas and techniques that put more heart into the performance equation. With these tools, anyone who leads or works on a team can harness the optimal emotions that fuel the highest levels of success and satisfaction—and help teammates do the same.

I’ll close by paraphrasing my favorite line from the e. e. cummings poem:

*“the best gesture of my brain is less without my heartbeat’s power”*

—Jackie Barretta

