A FIELD GUIDE FROM UNIFIED PURPOSE

The HEAL Method

A human-centered operating lens for how your team works. Belonging and performance follow.

Humanity **Equity** **Acceptance** **Love**

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

A working tool, not a manifesto.

This guide introduces HEAL, a human-centered approach built on four pillars: Humanity, Equity, Acceptance, and Love. It reads as culture work and delivers there, but it is really an operating lens for how a team works: how it meets, plans, executes, gives feedback, and decides. Read it once, then keep it nearby, marked up, and return to it when a real situation calls for it.

What you will find inside

- A clear case for why compliance-based culture work keeps stalling, and what to do instead.
- The four pillars, each broken down into the personal work of the leader and the applied work of the team.
- One composite organization carried through all four pillars, with measurable outcomes.
- A starter toolbox and a short self-assessment you can run this week.

How to work with it

- Read the framework first, then choose one pillar that matches a live tension on your team.
- Do the personal reflection before you touch the applied practice. The order matters.
- Treat the closing prompts as journaling or team-meeting questions, not rhetorical flourishes.
- Use the snapshot on your own, then again with your team, and compare the gap.

A note on the illustrations. The organization, leaders, and experts named throughout this guide are composites. They are drawn from patterns that recur across many teams and sectors, and the names are fictional. The dynamics are real; the people are representative.

PART ONE · THE CASE FOR A DIFFERENT APPROACH

We have been treating culture as a compliance problem. It is a human one.

Most organizations have more policy than they have belonging. They have run the trainings and published the values, and still people feel unseen, cautious, and quietly on their way out.

The reason is not effort. It is design. When culture work is built to satisfy a requirement, it optimizes for defensibility rather than for connection. People learn to click through it. Leaders learn to document it. And the fragmentation and polarization the work was meant to heal keep widening underneath the paperwork.

HEAL starts from a different premise. Dignity, belonging, and genuine care are not the reward for a healthy organization. They are the conditions that produce one, which is both profoundly human and practically powerful. Decades of work on the Service-Profit Chain point the same way: how people are treated inside an organization shapes how they treat the people it serves, and that shapes the results. Care is not the opposite of performance. It is the earliest input to it.

The shift, stated plainly

THE COMPLIANCE-BASED APPROACH	THE HEAL APPROACH
Starts from risk. Asks what we are required to do.	Starts from people. Asks what would let each person contribute fully.
Measures completion. Modules finished, boxes checked.	Measures conditions. Psychological safety, belonging, and follow-through.
Treats inclusion as a program the organization runs.	Treats inclusion as an outcome the culture produces.
Locates the problem in individuals who need correcting.	Locates leverage in systems, and in leaders willing to examine their own positionality.
Generates caution. People manage exposure.	Generates care. People take the risks that good work requires.

HEAL is not an attack on the intent behind compliance work. It is a better path to the outcome that work was always reaching for: people who belong, and results that follow from it.

PART TWO · THE FRAMEWORK

Four pillars, woven into one rope.

Humanity, Equity, Acceptance, and Love are not four separate levers you pull one at a time. They are four strands of a single rope. Pull on any one alone and it frays. Woven together, they hold weight.

Humanity

Seeing and treating people as whole human beings before roles. The ground the other three stand on.

Equity

Designing conditions so that contribution is possible for everyone, not only for those the system already fits.

Acceptance

Meeting people and reality as they are, which is what makes psychological safety and honest growth possible.

Love

Generative care: a professional commitment to another person's growth and flourishing, expressed through action.

THE SYSTEMS POINT

A team can be warm and still inequitable. It can be fair on paper and still unsafe to speak up in. Each pillar covers a blind spot the others cannot see. That is why HEAL resists any single idea sold as the whole answer.

A WIDER LENS

HEAL reads as culture work, and it delivers there. But the four pillars are really a lens for how a team does anything together: how it runs a meeting, assigns a project, reviews a failure, and makes the decisions it cannot take back. Belonging is the outcome. How the team operates is the point. This guide stays close to the leadership case; applying the lens to your team's own decisions and workflows is the work of a tailored engagement.

PILLAR ONE

Humanity

See the whole person before the role they play.

The concept

Humanity is the practice of treating people as ends, not only as means to output. It sounds obvious and is quietly rare. Under deadline pressure, the whole person shrinks to the function they perform, and the function is all the organization sees. Humanity is the deliberate refusal to let that happen. It is both the most human of the pillars and the one with the clearest business case, because people who feel seen bring judgment, discretion, and care that no role description can require.

What it looks like in practice

- **Presence.** Full attention in the moments that matter, not attention split with a screen.
- **Whole-person awareness.** Knowing that the person in the meeting carries a life outside it.
- **Dignity by default.** Protecting a person's standing even while addressing their work.

THE PERSONAL WORK

Before your next week begins, name three people you lead and one specific thing that is true about each of them beyond their output. If you cannot, that gap is the work. Presence starts with noticing.

THE APPLIED WORK

Open one recurring meeting with a genuine two-minute human check-in, not a status round. Protect it from being optimized away. The team will tell you quickly whether it is real or performed.

WATCH FOR

Participation in team discussion, quality of one-to-one conversations, and unplanned absence. When people feel seen, they show up, and they speak.

CLOSING PROMPT

Where in my week has efficiency quietly become permission to stop seeing people?

PILLAR TWO

Equity

Design the conditions so everyone can actually contribute.

The concept

Equity is often heard as a slogan. In HEAL it is an engineering discipline. Two people can be offered the same opportunity without the same access to it, because their conditions differ. Equity-focused interventions adjust those conditions so contribution becomes possible for everyone, not only for the people a system was built to fit. Here a leader's positionality matters: your vantage point shapes which barriers you see and which ones stay invisible.

What it looks like in practice

- **Access over sameness.** Adjusting for different starting points, not treating everyone alike.
- **Airtime and authorship.** Noticing who speaks, who gets interrupted, and who gets the credit.
- **Pathways, not just doors.** Making sure advancement routes exist for roles usually left out.

THE PERSONAL WORK

Map your own positionality honestly. What has been structurally easier for you than for others on your team, and how might that shape the barriers you do not naturally notice? This is not about guilt. It is about vision.

THE APPLIED WORK

Audit one system this month: hiring, promotion, project assignment, or meeting airtime. Pick the one where you suspect the gap is widest. Look at where people actually enter and where they actually stall.

WATCH FOR

Distribution of stretch assignments, internal promotion rates across roles, and application rates from groups currently underrepresented in your pipeline.

CLOSING PROMPT

Which barrier on my team is invisible to me precisely because I have never had to cross it?

PILLAR THREE

Acceptance

Meet people and reality as they are, so growth has ground to stand on.

The concept

Acceptance is the most misunderstood pillar, because it is mistaken for lowering the bar. It is the opposite. Acceptance means starting from what is actually true: this person's real strengths, this team's real state, this situation's real constraints. Only from there can anything honest be built. Acceptance is what makes psychological safety possible, and psychological safety is what allows compassionate accountability, the practice of holding a high standard and a person's dignity at the same time.

What it looks like in practice

- **Non-defensive listening.** Hearing what is true before deciding how to respond to it.
- **Compassionate accountability.** Direct about the standard, generous about the person.
- **Safety to surface problems.** Making it safe to report the error, the near-miss, the doubt.

THE PERSONAL WORK

Recall a recent moment you rushed past reality: a piece of feedback you deflected, a problem you minimized. What would it have cost you to simply accept it as true first, before responding? Practice that pause.

THE APPLIED WORK

Replace one blame-oriented review with a blameless one. Ask what we learned and what the conditions were, not who is at fault. Watch how much more the team is willing to tell you.

WATCH FOR

Psychological safety scores, the rate at which problems and near-misses get reported early, and how often people disagree with you out loud.

CLOSING PROMPT

What truth about my team am I managing around instead of accepting and working with?

PILLAR FOUR

Love

Care that actively wants the other person's growth, expressed in action.

The concept

Love is the pillar leaders hesitate to name at work, and the one that binds the rest. Here it does not mean sentiment or softness. It means generative care: a durable, professional commitment to another person's flourishing, shown through what you actually do. Love is what turns Humanity from noticing into investing, Equity from auditing into building, and Acceptance from tolerance into belonging. Named or not, people can feel whether their leader is genuinely for them. That felt reality is one of the strongest predictors of whether they stay and whether they give their best.

What it looks like in practice

- **Investment in growth.** Spending real time and capital on people's development, not only their delivery.
- **Care under pressure.** Holding people's dignity precisely when it would be easier not to.
- **Belonging as the goal.** Working so that people feel they are genuinely part of something, not merely employed by it.

THE PERSONAL WORK

Ask yourself, honestly, whether you actually want each of your people to flourish, or mainly want them to perform. The answer is felt long before it is spoken. If it is not yet true, that is the most important work you have.

THE APPLIED WORK

Take one concrete action this week that serves a person's growth with no direct return to you: an introduction, an advocacy, a door opened. Make generative care visible through action, not language.

WATCH FOR

Employee net promoter score, voluntary turnover, referral hiring, and self-reported belonging. Love is abstract; its effects are measurable.

CLOSING PROMPT

If my people described how I treat them, would the word care survive the description?

PART THREE · ONE ORGANIZATION, FOUR PILLARS

Cascade Infrastructure Group

A composite of the mid-size firms this work meets most often: roughly 850 people, a regional engineering and field-services business, eighteen months past a merger that never fully knitted together.

When Dana Whitfield stepped into the role of Vice President of People and Culture, the signals were familiar. Two legacy cultures were still fragmenting along old lines. A compliance-driven inclusion program, rolled out to satisfy a client requirement, had bred more resentment than belonging. Voluntary turnover in the field crews was climbing, and the employee net promoter score sat at a negative eight.

> *Another training to click through. Nobody up there has ever spent a winter on a job site.*
>
> **Ray, a field supervisor, in an early listening session**

Working with Dr. Sofia Restrepo, an organizational psychologist who studies belonging in distributed teams, Dana chose not to launch a new program. She ran a HEAL pilot in two regions for three quarters, one pillar of emphasis at a time, and measured as she went.

WHAT DANA ACTUALLY DID

Humanity. Field huddles began opening with a genuine two-minute human check-in rather than a straight safety-and-status round.

Equity. A pathway audit revealed field technicians had far fewer routes into lead roles than office staff. Dana built an apprenticeship lane to open them.

Acceptance. Incident reviews were rebuilt as blameless learning reviews, focused on conditions rather than culprits.

Love. Managers were coached in generative care, and a simple peer-recognition practice gave it a visible, repeatable form.

She measured every strand as she wove it. What the numbers did over the next three quarters follows.

What moved, over three quarters.

Dana did not run a campaign. She wove one strand at a time and measured each one. Over three quarters, in two pilot regions, the numbers followed the care.

+34%	participation in team discussion, with unplanned absence down 11 percent (Humanity)
2 → 9	field-role internal promotions in two quarters, up from two in the prior year (Equity)
+52%	near-miss safety reports as people grew willing to speak up, with the safety index up 18 points (Acceptance)
-8 → +21	employee net promoter score, with pilot-region voluntary turnover falling from 19 to 12 percent (Love)

> *I stopped waiting to get blamed, so I started saying what I actually saw. That changed everything about how we ran a site.*
>
> **Ray, nine months later**

THE PATTERN, NOT THE NUMBERS

The exact figures belong to the composite. What travels from Cascade to your team is the order of things: woven together and measured honestly, the four pillars move the outcomes that compliance programs promise and rarely reach.

Figures are illustrative of the composite. Cascade Infrastructure Group, Dana Whitfield, and the people named here are fictional.

PART FOUR · THE STARTER TOOLBOX

Where to begin, organized by lever.

An introductory set of moves, grouped the way HEAL work tends to get built. Start with one item, not the whole grid. Depth comes from doing a few of these well and measuring what changes.

Structural elements

- A standing human check-in built into recurring meetings.
- A pathway audit of how people enter and advance in each role.
- Blameless learning reviews in place of blame-first post-mortems.

Leadership practices

- A positionality reflection each leader completes and revisits.
- Compassionate accountability: name the standard and hold the dignity.
- One growth-serving action per person, per cycle, tracked lightly.

Team dynamics

- Airtime awareness: notice who speaks, who is cut off, who gets credit.
- Norms that make it safe to surface an error or a doubt early.
- Peer recognition that gives care a visible, repeatable form.

Measurement

- A psychological safety pulse, read as a trend, not a verdict.
- Belonging and employee net promoter score, tracked over time.
- One equity metric per pillar, chosen for your actual context.

This is a starting kit, not the full method. Each of these moves has a depth of practice behind it. The aim here is to get one strand of the rope in your hands.

PART FIVE · THE HEAL SNAPSHOT

A ten-minute read on where your rope is fraying.

Rate each statement from 1 (rarely true) to 5 (consistently true) for your team as it is now, not as you hope it is. Answer quickly and honestly. Then add your scores.

	STATEMENT	1 2 3 4 5
H	People on my team are known as whole people, not only by the work they produce.	1 2 3 4 5
H	My recurring meetings make room for genuine human presence, not only status.	1 2 3 4 5
H	When someone is struggling personally, we notice before it becomes a performance issue.	1 2 3 4 5
E	Advancement pathways exist for every role on my team, not only the ones near the top.	1 2 3 4 5
E	I can name the barriers my team members face that I have never had to face myself.	1 2 3 4 5
E	Airtime, credit, and stretch work are distributed intentionally, not by default.	1 2 3 4 5
A	People tell me problems early, including the ones that reflect badly on them.	1 2 3 4 5
A	I can hold a high standard and a person's dignity in the same conversation.	1 2 3 4 5
A	People disagree with me out loud, and it is safe for them to do so.	1 2 3 4 5
L	I genuinely want each person to flourish, and my actions would show it.	1 2 3 4 5
L	I invest real time in people's growth, not only in their delivery.	1 2 3 4 5
L	People on my team would say they belong here, not just that they work here.	1 2 3 4 5

Reading your score

48 to 60	**Woven.** The rope is holding. Your work is to protect these conditions under pressure and deepen the pillar that scored lowest.
33 to 47	**Fraying.** Real strengths and real gaps sit side by side. Choose the

	single lowest pillar and give it one quarter of deliberate attention.
12 to 32	**Unraveling.** The rope needs rebuilding from Humanity up. Start there, and do not try to move all four strands at once.

Turn the number into one move

A score is only useful if it changes what you do on Monday. Three steps turn this snapshot into action without waiting for a bigger initiative.

- **Name the fray.** Circle your three lowest statements. Those are your weakest strands, made specific.
- **Choose one strand.** Take the single lowest-scoring pillar and pick one applied practice from its page to run for the next month. One, not four.
- **Close the gap.** Have your team answer the same twelve statements. The distance between your scores and theirs is the most honest finding here, and the best place to begin.

FROM SNAPSHOT TO PLAN

When the snapshot has shown you enough to want the whole picture, the full HEAL diagnostic reads all four pillars across your team and returns a sequenced plan for the strand to pull first.

This snapshot is a first read, not a diagnosis. Treat the scores as a starting line, not a verdict.

PART SIX · WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

One strand at a time.

You do not need permission or a budget to begin. You need one pillar, one practice, and the honesty to measure what changes. When you are ready to go deeper, there are three natural next steps.

1 **Keep thinking alongside the work**

Two free newsletters carry these ideas forward between the big moves: *Theory Meets Tuesday* and *Practice of Thinking*. They are where the framework stays in conversation with real situations.

2 **Run the full HEAL diagnostic with your team**

The snapshot in this guide is the surface. The full diagnostic reads all four pillars across your team, surfaces the gap between your view and theirs, and returns a specific, sequenced plan. It is the fastest way to know which strand to pull first.

3 **Bring HEAL into the room**

For teams and leadership groups ready to do the work together, a facilitated session or keynote turns these pillars into shared language and committed practice. This is where the framework becomes your team's, not just yours.

Dignity, belonging, and genuine care are not the reward for a healthy organization. They are how you build one. Start with one person, one pillar, this week.

To go further: unifiedpurpose.com · hello@unifiedpurpose.com

About Unified Purpose

Unified Purpose is the consulting practice of Marc, founder and facilitator, built around a simple conviction: human-centered leadership is not the soft alternative to results. It is the most reliable source of them. HEAL is its core framework, a human-centered operating lens for how teams work that delivers the belonging and inclusion outcomes organizations are reaching for, without the compliance stigma that so often gets in the way.

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Illustrations, including Cascade Infrastructure Group and the people named within it, are composites drawn from patterns across many organizations. Names are fictional.

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