

THE STORY AND SYSTEM OF A
START-UP THAT BECAME
AUSTRALIA'S
BEST PLACE TO WORK



CULTURE

IS EVERYTHING

TRISTAN WHITE

PRAISE FOR *CULTURE IS EVERYTHING*

“Peter Drucker taught us that culture eats strategy for breakfast. But how do you build a strong, sustainable company culture? With a repeatable system and checklist. Tristan White’s Culture Is Everything System makes the complex task of building a strong culture much simpler by design. If you are an entrepreneur or leader and want to build a strong culture, then read this book for a practical case study in how it’s accomplished.

—VERNE HARNISH, author of *Scaling Up (Rockefeller Habits 2.0)*

“Tristan knows better than anyone the impact of culture on a company. We worked together years ago, and his results have proven that his insights are worth reading by any company that wants to grow. I’ve loved watching his year-over-year trajectory to becoming the number-one company to work for.”

—CAMERON HEROLD, author of *Double Double* and *Meetings Suck*

“Great entrepreneurs walk their walk and talk their talk. They wholeheartedly believe that business should be used as a force for good and feel a deep level of personal responsibility to make sure theirs is. Tristan White knows better than anyone that your people and your culture are the ones to drive this mission, and he’s devoted his life to ensuring his company means more than a pay cheque to everyone involved. I’ve long respected Tristan for his values and ethics and am excited to see what impact he makes by sharing his learnings with the world. Go Tristan!”

—EMMA ISAACS, founder / global CEO, Business Chicks

“It takes a relentless commitment to improving the lives of others to have achieved such accolades as a best employer. Tristan has a clear sense of vision, he knows why he does what he does, and he is happy to share with those who want to learn and see what is possible when you ‘give a damn’ for other human beings. This is a wonderful story that will inspire you to greatness. #smallbizsuccess”

—NAOMI SIMSON, entrepreneur, NaomiSimson.com

“Ninety percent of the 332 successful small business owners I’ve interviewed cite ‘happy staff’ as a critical success factor. Tristan’s unwavering passion for creating a workplace that ensures such happiness is palpable. Having worked in a corporate cubicle for twenty-two years, I wish my past employers had the opportunity to have read this book.”

—TIM REID, host of *The Small Business Big Marketing Show*

“Tristan’s journey has so many lessons across all walks of life—both personal and professional. His story and that of The Physio Co. is an inspiring one and a demonstration of how passion, tenacity, and laser-beam focus can help you achieve your goals. I see our members challenged every day with the rapidly changing health and well-being landscape. They all share a commitment to improve the life of Australians via physiotherapy. Tristan is living proof of this ethos. In a world of digital disruption, it is refreshing to see a relationship-/people-based approach creating a successful business. Tristan has paved the way for the ‘social-physiotherapist’ of the future. This book is a powerful read.”

—CRIS MASSIS, CEO, Australian Physiotherapy Association

“In Culture Is Everything Tristan White provides the proven formula: a repeatable system, directed towards a clear vision and a foundation of core values—all supported by recognition and repeatable with ongoing storytelling. Tristan now facilitates all entrepreneurs to do the same with his Culture is Everything Checklist used at The Physio Co. Now put this book and provided checklist into play in your organization!”

—JACK DALY, three-time Amazon bestselling author,
www.jackdaly.net

“From start-up to Australia’s best place to work, Tristan recognised his competitive advantage would come from attracting and retaining the best people. This book shows you how he did it.”

—GLEN CARLSON, cofounder and managing director,
Dent Global

“Businesses with strong, aligned cultures outperform other businesses every day of the week. My business, The Entourage, is committed to building a phenomenal culture, and we’ve won awards for it. Tristan’s Culture Is Everything System is a practical, easy-to-follow approach to help leaders, entrepreneurs, and business owners understand how to create a world-class culture for their team.”

—JACK DELOSA, founder and CEO, The Entourage.

“Building a great business takes time, takes strong leadership, and takes a commitment to creating a robust culture. Greencross grew from a small group of veterinary practices to a large, ASX-listed healthcare success story based upon a people-focused culture. If you want to learn the foundations of strong growth centred on a robust culture, read Tristan’s book and follow his lead.”

—GLEN RICHARDS, founder and former CEO, Greencross Limited (ASX: GXL)

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TRISTAN WHITE

Advantage®

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*To past, present and future members of The Physio Co family (TPCers):
thanks for inspiring me to learn, grow and improve every day.*

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WHAT IT TAKES



THE CRITERIA TO BECOME A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

GREAT PLACE TO WORK CRITERIA

Australia's 50 Best Places to Work is an annual study and ranking by the Great Place to Work[®] Institute. The award is based on Great Place to Work input gathered on two assessment tools: the Trust Index[®] Employee Survey and the Culture Audit[®] Management Questionnaire.

The results of these surveys are used to determine rankings. The employee survey—which counts as two-thirds of the score—measures behaviours identified by the institute as creating a trusting workplace, the defining principle of a great workplace according to the institution. The culture audit gives human-resources personnel a chance to describe the company's unique culture.

The Great Place to Work[®] Institute has established standards that define a great workplace based on research data collected from more than ten million employees worldwide in companies of varying sizes, ages, industries and structures.

The findings are published annually in media channels such as *BRW* and *Australian Financial Review*, Australia's premiere business publications.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



WHEN I FOUNDED THE PHYSIO CO (TPC) in 2004 I was a twenty-four-year-old recently graduated physiotherapist with a dream of landing a job that inspired me. I never did find that job, so I've ended up creating it. In those early years, it was my parents, Marj and Roy, who really guided and supported me. Since then, along with the continued support of my Mum, it has been my wife, Kimberley, who has become my biggest fan and supporter. Another very important mentor, advisor and friend throughout my entire TPC journey has been Ben Hosking. I'm so very grateful to these caring people for the belief they have in me and the patience they have shown as I learn to be the best person I can be.

INTRO



AND GETTING TO KNOW ME (TRISTAN)

G'DAY! THANKS SO MUCH for grabbing a copy of my book. I'm rapt that you're here with me and interested in building a great place to work. The world needs more great teams, organisations and workplaces.

My name's Tristan White, and over the last decade or so I have become the *Culture Is Everything* guy. That's the name of the blog that documents my journey as the founder and CEO of The Physio Co and the place where this *Culture Is Everything* journey first started. You can find that blog over at tristanwhite.com.au.

Culture Is Everything is the message that I now share with the audience at every speaking engagement I present, and that's the title of this book. *Culture Is Everything* is my approach to building a truly great business.

This book will help you understand that approach in more detail, but as an overview, *Culture Is Everything* is the method that I've created from

- thirteen years as a growth and culture-obsessed entrepreneur;

- attending conferences and learning events in Australia, USA, Canada, the Philippines, Greece and China;
- completing a master of business (MBA) degree at QUT;
- completing the Entrepreneurial Masters Program at MIT;
- reading mountains of books and articles (at least 250 business books!);
- learning from countless experiments and mistakes;
- working through challenges over months of accumulated sleepless nights;
- creating a high-performing hundred-plus-person team with an award-winning culture (from one person with an idea thirteen years earlier); and
- that team being ranked as one of Australia's 50 Best Places to Work for eight consecutive years and becoming Australia's Best Place to Work.

In short, my *Culture Is Everything* System is the outcome of years of learning, trying new things, making mistakes and refining an approach that has guided The Physio Co to more than thirteen years of continuous and profitable growth.

To me, creating a great place to work by building an aligned team that grows fast, celebrates often and genuinely cares for its people not only seems like the right thing to do, but over the long term—it works.

This book, however, is not a textbook. It's an experience-share based on the journey that I'm on. If you learn something that works for you, apply it. If what works at TPC doesn't resonate with you, don't use it. That's your choice. Please keep in mind, though, that the

Culture Is Everything System is not only for care-focussed organisations like the business that I lead. The same approach, using language tailored for your specific team/business/industry, is a repeatable system that has worked in fast-paced sales environments, in the construction industry, and even for a large team of garbage collectors. Whether your team has one, ten, a hundred, or a thousand team members, this method can work. The *Culture Is Everything* System has helped TPC scale from one person to a team of hundred-plus. The system is repeatable in small to medium-sized businesses and in one hundred to many thousand-person teams as well.

CULTURE WILL SAVE YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS

Lack of time is the biggest problem facing most business owners and senior leaders. Why? Because their team seems to need their constant attention, on both small and big challenges.

I was exactly the same, but I found a solution. Creating a strong culture changed my life in many ways.¹ *Culture Is Everything* means a culture by design (as opposed to a culture that occurs by default because no one is paying any attention to it).

As the founder of a small business, I survived the early years by relying on my curiosity and drive to even stay in business. I had belief in myself and my work.

But I wasn't always paying attention to culture.

In those early days, when we had a small team of fewer than fifteen people, my ambition and naivety caused problems that left me having next to no time in my life to do anything but work. At the

1 Tristan White, "How a Strong Culture Creates Time in Your Day," Dynamic Business, February 13, 2012, <http://www.dynamicbusiness.com.au/small-business-resources/managing/how-a-strong-culture-creates-time-in-your-day-13022012.html>.

same time, TPC was barely making enough money to pay me a wage. That wasn't the way it's supposed to be.

Fast-forward to today and we find TPC with an amazingly talented group of over a hundred team members located in more than 140 locations who together deliver more than two hundred thousand unique and memorable physiotherapy consultations to Australian seniors every year. There are also some huge differences in my working life: The Physio Co is five times the size, it is more profitable, I have my life back—and it no longer revolves around me working six to seven days a week!

What made the difference? If you said 'culture', then you already know.

Building a team based on the *Culture Is Everything* System has helped create hours in my day and has literally changed my life. It's not a quick fix, but it is one of the most sustainable and rewarding ways to simplify and grow a business.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT MAKES ME TICK

Before we dive into The Physio Co story and the systems you can use to build a strong culture, I'd like you to get to know me and my thoughts about work. Even before I became the *Culture Is Everything* guy, I wanted to find a job surrounded by people who inspired me to do great work. What eventually became the *Culture Is Everything* System has changed in small ways over the years, but the foundational ideas that influenced it remain the same.

The ideas that influence my approach are what I call the **Five Beliefs of Meaningful Work**.

1. I believe we spend so much time working that we have to find a way to enjoy it.
2. I believe we enjoy work when we're doing something useful for others.
3. I believe we enjoy work when we feel proud of doing the right thing in challenging situations.
4. I believe we enjoy work when there are defined boundaries around what we should be doing and we have some freedom around how to do it.
5. I believe every team, business and organisation can create this 'freedom within boundaries' environment that is the foundation of a strong culture.

There's plenty of research that has found that on their deathbed, people often regret having spent so much of their lives at work. I understand that, but I'm willing to challenge the concept to find a way for us to better blend our work with other parts of our life, so that we see our work among the best things we do—to blend work and life instead of trying to balance the two. I believe it is possible to do great work that we can be proud of even when we come to the very end of our lives and look back.

MY EARLY DREAM OF BEING A SPORTS PHYSIOTHERAPIST

I didn't develop the *Culture Is Everything* approach overnight. While I've always been driven by short- and longer-term dreams to create a positive future, in my early years my goals seemed to come unstuck and my career couldn't get off the ground as I expected. Let me explain.

While I was working my way through a bachelor of physiotherapy degree at the University of Melbourne, my plan was to start my career in a large teaching hospital as a junior physiotherapist, then to become a sports physiotherapist after a few years. My long-term goal was to be treating and working with elite athletes in a busy sports clinic before eventually owning a sports practice of my own, and ultimately to become the physiotherapist for the mighty Richmond Tigers, my favourite Australian rules football team. (Go, Tigers!)

But after five years of university—two spent training in large teaching hospitals—I didn't think I could stomach the idea of another few years in the public hospital system. I now realise that the reason I couldn't handle that public-hospital career direction was because it was in conflict with my Five Beliefs of Meaningful Work. Hospitals have very strict practices with little room for freedom, which I've discovered is an important factor in enjoying my work.

So with a fair bit of apprehension about the whole thing, I skipped forward on the career plan by a few years and took on the challenge of working in a busy private practice in Gippsland, Victoria, as my first physiotherapy job—mostly working with clients who were 80 to 90 percent functioning in their overall lives and needed help to get back to 100 percent.

But after about eleven months, I had to admit that there was a problem—a big one.

I didn't find the work as rewarding as I'd hoped. I was spending all day, every day, in a small physiotherapy treatment room, and every twenty to thirty minutes a new patient would come in to see me. Because of their injuries, many patients were frustrated or angry; as an eternally optimistic person, it was becoming a real challenge to be continuously surrounded by people in a negative frame of mind. Most nights and every weekend I was drained and exhausted and desperately trying to keep up with paperwork. Plus, other than minor injuries barely affecting their everyday lives, the clients were in good health and able to do most of the things they needed or wanted to do. I was starting to question if that type of work really did inspire me. Effectively, I was helping healthy people be even more healthy.

As I reflect on that time, I most certainly did not feel I was helping others in a useful way or feeling proud of the work I was doing, again conflicting with my Five Beliefs of Meaningful Work. And as much as I desperately wanted my career to be in sports physiotherapy, I really didn't enjoy working nights and weekends in order to be where the athletes were—at evening training sessions and weekend footy matches for a local football club. Plus, I didn't find much satisfaction in the outcomes for patients who were already high functioning; I didn't feel as useful as I could be.

I didn't want to admit to myself, let alone anyone else, that I was rethinking my dream. Up until this point, I really thought that I would position myself as an expert in the part of the profession that was the most recognised by people outside the industry: the person that elite athletes would consult after they'd injured themselves playing sport.

Oddly enough, in that first year I found a lot of satisfaction working with the few elderly clients that I had at the practice. Sometimes I found I could help these clients experience as much as 50

percent improvement in their quality of life. For example, if a patient couldn't walk independently to their dining room or the bathroom without lots of pain and discomfort, I was sometimes able to help them regain their mobility to where they could walk those distances with ease. That was rewarding! I found that the elderly people were much more appreciative of the work that I was doing with them. I had been sheepish about working with the elderly—they're not the sexy clientele one thinks of when they think 'physical therapy'. But I remember thinking how the elderly people I was working with were once a much younger, fitter generation of people, and they deserved to be respected and helped to have the most independence.

In short, what I thought I wanted to do wasn't what I really enjoyed doing, and so my head and my heart were telling me to go in two different directions.

After one year, I gave back the keys to the company car, left that dream private-practice / sports-medicine job and moved back home to my parents' house. I'd spent five years at university and one year starting my dream career. Now I didn't have a job, I didn't know where I was headed, and I thought it was going to take me a few years to recover and sort myself out.

RETHINKING MY CAREER PLAN

At home at my parents' place in Foster, Victoria, I reflected on what I had enjoyed as a physio student, which parts of my year in private practice I'd liked the most and what were the coming trends for healthcare in Australia. From this, I realised that I really liked working with elderly folk *and* that there was a phenomenal amount of future demand for physiotherapists in aged care. So I started exploring elderly care as my first step in rebuilding my career.

I got a job working twelve hours per week as a subcontractor physiotherapist at an aged-care home in Preston, an Inner Northern suburb of Melbourne. On first glance, it didn't look like a very nice place—it was old and smelly—but I ended up loving it. That turned out to be one of the most rewarding jobs I've ever had. I felt more empowered to actually make a difference in people's lives. The job also gave me a chance to get to *know* people; instead of a small number of twenty- or thirty-minute consultations with private-practice clients over a few weeks, I could spend time with each of the aged-care home's residents over longer periods. I learnt to understand their needs and their wants, and then tailor my physiotherapy approach to them.

I also enjoyed getting to know the clients' families and the other members of the staff at the aged-care home. I felt like I was part of a caring group of people who worked together to help a group of elderly residents. It felt great and I was inspired! Every day I came to work with a smile on my face because I felt a sense of belonging and like I was doing something useful in the world.

During the first few months working at the Preston nursing home, I was able to build a strong relationship with their director of nursing, and this resulted in me being introduced to management at some nearby aged-care facilities. In a learn-by-the-seat-of-your-pants approach to relationship building and business development, I began meeting with and winning contracts as a physiotherapy supplier to a number of other aged-care homes. By the end of that first year, I was working forty to fifty hours per week at four different aged-care homes. In less than twelve months, I had created a rewarding job that I loved and had more aged-care homes to service than I was able to deliver by myself. With elderly residents to be helped, I saw no other option but to recruit some other people to help me out and join

in the fun. So I started employing physiotherapists! That's when, in 2004, my new job became a business and The Physio Co was born.

WHY THIS BOOK?

I've written this book because I want you to understand how we've created a great place to work at The Physio Co. I also want to help you do the same. Creating a great place to work that inspires you and those around you is not only possible but can be much simpler than you might think. This book is to help you learn the steps of a repeatable system to build a strong culture and to give you the confidence to make it happen. I even have a checklist for you to use as you go!

So, my reasons for writing this book are threefold: (1) I want to share my story with you. That story is one that demonstrates that if you're true to your beliefs, it's possible to find purpose and passion no matter where you work (even in aged care!). (2) I'd like to share an insider's view of the TPC family with the outside world. I want the world to recognise the great work that our team does with our clients. (3) I would like to teach and inspire you to have the confidence in this tried-and-tested system of building a great culture and put it to work for yourself.

The *Culture Is Everything* approach isn't just for the touchy-feely physios of TPC. This is a process for successful, numbers-driven entrepreneurial businesses. Read the story here, adopt the system at your workplace and enjoy creating a world-class culture that becomes one of the best places to work!

THE CULTURE IS EVERYTHING SYSTEM



AS THE FOUNDER AND CEO (chief enthusiasm officer) of a business that has been ranked eight times as one of Australia's Best Places to Work, the questions I most often get from other leaders, managers, business owners and future team members is 'How do you guys do it? How do you create a great culture?'

I used to answer this question by launching into a long explanation that made sense to me but that others found hard to follow.

Since then, I've summarised the approach we use to building a great culture at The Physio Co into 'The *Culture Is Everything* System: The Four Secrets to Creating a World-Class Culture'.²

Those four *Culture Is Everything* secrets are:

1. Discover the Core
2. Document the Future
3. Execute Relentlessly
4. Show More Love

² 'The Four Secrets to Creating a World Class Culture' is the speech that I most often present to audiences at industry conferences, in-house workshops and company retreats. As a gift to you for reading this book, I've put together a very special readers-only presentation of this speech. Please head over to tristanwhite.com.au/foursecrets if you'd like to see it.

These four secrets are interrelated:

- First, we need to know who we are (**discover the core**) and where are we going (**document the future**);
- Second, to create a great business we need to both **execute relentlessly** and **show more love**. Growing a profitable business fast and simultaneously showing love to your team is not easy. It takes discipline and a robust system to follow.

To be even more practical, I've also created the *Culture Is Everything* Checklist. This one-page checklist defines all nineteen steps that The Physio Co has used to build a world-class culture that is the basis for becoming Australia's Best Place to Work.

Ideally, the checklist would be implemented in sequential order, from one to nineteen. However, the important bit is getting each step embedded, so it can actually be done in any order you choose. In my experience of building one of Australia's Best Places to Work, you need them all.

WHY A CHECKLIST?

Checklists are one of the most valuable tools in business (and in life). Sticking to a checklist with great discipline helps you avoid mistakes. The chance of error is much lower if you follow a tried-and-tested checklist that's purpose-built for the task you are trying to achieve. Checklists work when we set our egos aside, accept human fallibility and follow a system that works. A world-class culture is the foundation of any team that aspires to build a great

place to work—‘build’ being the operative word. Use my *Culture Is Everything* Checklist to build culture in your workplace. You can grab a copy of the checklist right now from tristanwhite.com.au/checklist.

Where to Start

The simplest way to use the *Culture Is Everything* Checklist is to start at the top and move through the list in sequence. But you can start anywhere. You could start near the bottom to find some quick wins that move you towards your very own great place to work.

But Don’t Rush It!

To get the best results, take the time to plan, review, communicate, educate and gradually integrate the nineteen steps into your business. I recommend working through the four sections, starting at the top of the checklist and integrating one section per quarter year. That way, it will take a full twelve months to have the systems in place that are the foundations of a great place to work.

The checklist is made up of ideas and best practices that I’ve learned from the first thirteen years leading The Physio Co. Some of the steps are of our own creation, while others are from people much smarter than I (whom I’ve done my best to credit throughout the book).

The part that I've played in creating the *Culture Is Everything* Checklist is years of learning, plenty of mistakes and now a summary of the bits that have worked at TPC.

The next ten chapters work through the four secrets and nineteen steps in the checklist to guide you from what's most important to start first, to getting it right and working in the details over time. To first *Discover the Core*, we set our core purpose (chapter 1) and core values (chapters 2 and 3). Then we *Document the Future*, setting a ten-year long-term target (chapter 4) and focusing in with a three-year vision (chapter 5). To *Execute Relentlessly*, we get things done in twelve minutes of power (chapter 6) and hire the right people for the job (chapter 7). And as we execute, we also *Show More Love*, both in how we treat employees from their first day on (chapter 8) and how we celebrate our journey together (chapter 9). Finally, we see how all these elements are the CEO's responsibility and can lead to tremendous growth (chapter 10).

By the end of this book, you'll be able to use the checklist's four secrets and nineteen steps to build a great culture for your workplace. You'll have the answer to every entrepreneur's number-one question: 'How do I create a great culture?'

MONEY ISN'T EVERYTHING

When you have a business with more than one person, you need glue to keep people together, to keep managers, employees, suppliers and customers happy, to keep the business successful and growing. If your motto is 'Money is Everything', and money is the glue that holds everyone together, then I wish you the best of luck. In my experience, *Culture Is Everything*.

A strong workplace culture is created by a group of people who choose to work with a business they trust—a business that inspires and challenges them, that treats them fairly and with respect but doesn't take itself too seriously, that celebrates their successes and supports them in tough times, that exists to make a difference in the world and have some fun along the way. A strong workplace culture is created when people share a common purpose and support each other to bring that purpose to life.

The strongest workplace cultures can survive the tough times. Because tough times happen. Global financial crises arrive. Economies slow down. Floods and earthquakes hit. Clients are lost. And, although hopefully not in my business or yours, people die at work. When bad stuff happens, do you want a group of people on your team who only know the good times? A culture that's only been created since you started giving away more perks than the competition? I certainly don't. It's in the tough times that the people who choose to be part of a strong culture individually ask, 'What can I do to help?' and show that together 'we can do it'.

According to some, the way to a great workplace is to offer as many perks as possible. Now, don't get me wrong—offering benefits to team members is important, but I don't agree it's

what builds the trust required to be a great place to work. You see, perks create a culture of entitlement, a 'what's in it for me' culture where employees are always expecting more. And unless you have an unlimited amount of money, you can always be 'out-perked'. Any victory is short-lived because a competitor can always offer more. For example, it's popular to give employees a free day off for their birthday. That sounds nice, but what happens when someone offers two days or a whole week off? This approach to building a great workplace via a 'perk-off' with the competition is a never-ending and very slippery slope.

Honestly, do you really want people on your team who only joined because of the perks? When the going gets tough, I reckon the motto of people attracted to a business with a culture of entitlement built on perks is 'I'm outta here'. Like it or not, a black-swan event will hit. Not if, but when. Will perks matter then?

What do you think: Is it perks or purpose that create a great place to work?



*CULTURE IS EVERYTHING
SECRET #1*

DISCOVER THE CORE

CHAPTER 1

A SHORT AND EASY-TO- UNDERSTAND CORE PURPOSE

(Instead of a Wishy-Washy Mission Statement)

AS A YOUNG PHYSIO, just one year after graduating from the University of Melbourne and planning to build my career as a sports physiotherapist, I found my true inspiration in the most unlikely of places: an old and smelly home for elderly people in Melbourne's Inner Northern suburb of Preston. That's where I met a resident who inspired me and eventually became my friend—a bloke called George (who, thirteen years on from the first time we met, has a room named after him at The Physio Co's South Melbourne support office).

George lived in that smelly old aged-care home because he had reached a point in his eighties where his legs would no longer work the way he wanted them to and he needed more care than could be managed at home. Before moving into the aged-care home, George had lived at home with his wife, Mavis, just a few blocks away. In spite of his condition, George's dream was to get his legs working again so he could move back and return to Mavis.

As a physiotherapist, I worked with George three times every week, and he would work very hard. We'd practice his walking within

a set of parallel bars, we'd do squats, calf raises and lots of other strengthening and balance exercises. Mavis visited the home almost every day, and sometimes while we had our therapy sessions. Over time, I got to know them both.

After our therapy sessions, I'd wheel George back to his room in his wheelchair, and he'd get in bed and rest a little. Often he'd get back in his wheelchair late in the afternoon and wheel himself down the corridor of the care home to the front reception. There he would use the pay phone to call Mavis and chat about their family, his favourite football team (the Essendon Bombers) and the horses that he liked at the races (he loved to have a fifty-cent bet!). Connection to Mavis and the world outside the care home was critical to George and really drove him in his dream of moving home.

George never made it home to live permanently, but one year he was well enough to go home on Christmas Eve and spend a couple of nights at home with this wife, children and grandchildren. I've never seen a more excited eighty-something year-old person than George in the weeks leading up to that Christmas, when he knew he would be spending it at home. And for at least two months afterwards, he recalled stories of his visit home—he would tell me all about it while we did our physio sessions together.

In short, he was the most excitable bloke because he was working towards a dream, and as a physiotherapist, I was able to share that dream with him.

Enthusiasm like I found in George is the reason that I loved working at that aged-care home and the reason that I continue to work in aged care today. Years later, looking back, I realise that working with George was how I discovered what eventually became TPC's core purpose.

DISCOVERING TPC'S CORE PURPOSE

The reason I tell you about George is because that's what TPC does. We help seniors stay mobile, safe and happy. That's our cause. That's our belief. That's what we stand for. That's The Physio Co's core purpose.

A core purpose is the reason an organisation exists. It's a brief statement that anyone can read and think, *Yep, got it. I know exactly what they're up to.* The fewer words the better. For example, Facebook's core purpose is 'to build a global community'. With over 1.86 billion active users every month, Facebook uses their core purpose to continuously pursue their dream to make the world more open and connected.

I first learned of the idea of a core purpose from my favourite business book of all time: *Good to Great*, by Jim Collins. In *Good to Great*, Collins describes how greatness is not a result of chance or circumstance but is largely a matter of conscious choice and discipline. That point was super important to me because it helped me realise that I too had the potential to build a truly great company if I was willing to do the work.

Collins's research has found that a core purpose, or what you stand for, is a critical part of building a team that achieves long-term success. According to him, there are five important characteristics of a good core purpose:

- It absolutely has to be inspiring to those *inside* the organisation.
 - It has to be something that could be as valid a hundred years from now as it is today.
 - It should help you think expansively about what you *could* do but aren't doing.
 - It should help you decide what *not* to do.
 - It has to be truly authentic to your company. (Teams that fail on this important point are often the ones that really don't stand for anything and never will.)
-

Before I read *Good to Great* and discovered the idea of a core purpose, TPC was foundationless. It was impossible for anyone to succinctly know exactly what was important to us, and even I, the founder, was confused and couldn't clearly communicate the reason we existed.

In those pre-core purpose years, I had been drafting various versions of what TPC's vision and mission statements could be. I wasn't creating them to inspire others or to help us decide what to do, as Collins suggested. Instead, I was creating them because I thought that a business wasn't a real business until it had both mission and vision statements! To be completely honest, at that stage I didn't understand the difference between mission and vision, I didn't know why they were important, and I certainly didn't connect with the idea of making them useful for TPC.

A core purpose is more succinct, clear and powerful than either a vision or mission statement (possibly because a lot of vision and mission statements are wishy-washy and effectively meaningless).

Even though a core purpose is short—the length of a single sentence—and the concept is straightforward, it wasn't easy for me to define for TPC. It took me close to a year to draft, redraft, get feedback, think some more, start again, get more feedback and finally cut our core purpose down from about fifteen words to the eight words it is today:

The Physio Co exists *'to help seniors stay mobile, safe and happy'*.

From George to now, that's what TPC has always done and what we'll do for the next hundred years.

HOW A CORE PURPOSE HAS HELPED

In the years since finalising and sharing TPC's core purpose, those eight words have become amazingly powerful in aligning our team and growing our business. In my experience, a core purpose has helped provide a filter to what we should and shouldn't choose to do.

For example, every year, TPC's physiotherapists provide hundreds of thousands of consultations to people just like George (and Mavis) across Australia. Physiotherapy for senior residents of aged-care facilities, retirement villages and private homes is our thing. The Physio Co's core purpose of helping seniors stay mobile, safe and happy makes decision making simple. No, we don't work with young people or athletes—that's not within the scope of our core purpose.

TPC's core purpose is *sticky*. I roll off our core purpose many times every day. I use the core purpose in one-to-one conversations, in all-company updates, in presentations, meetings, interviews, e-mails, training sessions and all sorts of other places. I also ask questions

of others about whether what we are doing fits our core purpose. If something aligns with our core purpose, we usually do it. If it doesn't fit, we don't do it. It becomes a very simple filter.

The power of a compelling core purpose is in the simplicity and direction it can provide when used in decision making every day. When referring to TPC's core purpose, potential team members immediately know that physiotherapy for seniors is our thing. Just as importantly, our clients love that we are completely focused on seniors and not trying to be everything to everyone.³

Once you have your core purpose, you'll need core values to fully discover your core.

END-OF-CHAPTER CHECKLIST

When putting together the *Culture Is Everything* checklist, I agonised over whether vision should come before purpose. Because surely an entrepreneurial journey starts with vision, right? Well as much as I wanted to believe that, it's just not true. Purpose comes first. Meaning comes first. My early career discovery that I was more passionate about working with elderly people was the key. I couldn't have figured out a vision if I didn't have that meaning first. That's why Secret #1 is Discover the Core and Secret #2 is Document the Future.

- ✓ An easy-to-understand core purpose (instead of a wishy-washy mission statement) is step one on the *Culture Is Everything* Checklist.
- ✓ Step two on the checklist: 'Can *every* team member recite your core purpose?'

3 After most speaking engagements where I refer to TPC's core purpose multiple times, many of the audience can remember that TPC exists to help seniors stay mobile, safe and happy just as well as the TPC team. It works!

CORE PURPOSE: TEAM MEMBER STORY

One of the longest-serving TPC team members, who joined TPC in 2005, is a wonderful person called Shilpa. Like me, Shilpa had the pleasure of knowing and working with George at that Preston nursing home. She first joined TPC as a part-time physiotherapist. Since then, she has grown into a very capable team leader, managing a team of TPCers in Melbourne's East. Shilpa leads with her heart. She embraces TPC's core purpose of helping seniors stay mobile, safe and happy and applies it to everything she can—especially the way she cares for her team and her clients.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tristan White is married to Kimberley and is dad to Alexandra, Harriet and Roman. He's a qualified physiotherapist and is best known as the founder and CEO of The Physio Co (TPC).

TPC is a healthcare business that exists to help seniors stay mobile, safe and happy. Allied health services for Australian seniors at aged-care facilities, retirement villages and wherever senior clients call home is what TPC does.

In 2014, The Physio Co was named No. 1 on the annual *BRW* list of Australia's 50 Best Places to Work. TPC has been ranked one of Australia's Top 50 Places to Work for eight consecutive years in its thirteen-year history. In 2015 and 2016, along with being one of Australia's best, TPC was also ranked as one of Asia's Best Workplaces.

Tristan's passion is building TPC to be a thriving business with a strong and caring culture. The simple approach of creating and sticking to a simple set of rituals along with being honest, treating people with the respect they deserve and doing it all with a smile is working for Tristan and the TPC team.

TPC's team delivers hundreds of thousands of consultations to Australian seniors each year and is on track to achieve their audacious ten-year goal of two million unique and memorable consultations by the end of 2018.

Tristan loves to share what he's learnt on his entrepreneurial journey. His *Culture Is Everything* blog, over at tristanwhite.com.au, was listed by SmartCompany as one of Australia's 20 Best Business Blogs in 2011, 2013 and 2014. Tristan is regularly a keynote speaker at conferences where he shares his engaging presentations including 'The Four Secrets to Building a World Class Culture'.

To invite Tristan to speak at your next company event or conference, contact Tristan at www.tristanwhite.com.au



HOW ONE COMPANY IS REDEFINING THE MEANING OF GOING TO WORK

Tristan White's story started like many others. He had a dream to work in a job that inspired him. He didn't find that job, so he created it.

In 2004, The Physio Co (TPC) was born with one team member: Tristan White. In the thirteen years since, TPC has become a remarkable healthcare success story based upon fast growth and a thriving, systemized company culture.

Tristan's obsession with creating an inspiring place to work for himself and others has resulted in more than a decade of learning, testing and refining. If you've ever wondered how to build and sustain a thriving company culture, the Culture Is Everything system developed by Tristan White and The Physio Co team is your answer.

The Physio Co story and Culture Is Everything system explained in this book will give you the confidence and knowledge to create a strong culture in your very own business or team.



TRISTAN WHITE

- Founder and CEO (Chief Enthusiasm Officer) at The Physio Co
- Qualified Physiotherapist
- Ironman Triathlon Finisher
- Speaker
- Husband to Kimberley
- Father to Alexandra, Harriet & Roman

Tristan White is a lot of things, but what he's passionate about is inspiring others to do things they never imagined possible. The memorable, repeatable and time-saving Culture Is Everything system that Tristan has built with his team at The Physio Co is the basis for empowered team members and long-term business success. The Physio Co's success speaks for itself: TPC has eight times been ranked as one of Australia's 50 Best Places to Work. In 2014, they were number one on that list: Australia's Best Place to Work.


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