

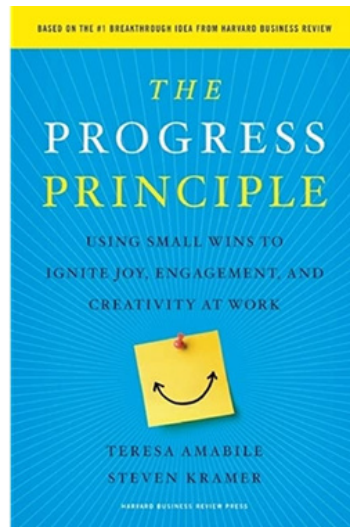
# THE SECRET TO JOY AT WORK

FOR YOURSELF & FOR YOUR TEAM



# THE PROGRESS PRINCIPLE: CONSISTENT FEEDBACK ON MEANINGFUL WORK

Amabile & Kramer asked folks working across industries, on teams of different sizes doing different kinds of work, to answer a single prompt at the end of each work day, every day, for three months:



People need to make progress by getting consistent feedback on meaningful work.

**Consistent feedback:** People want information that tells them their contributions (and their humanity) are seen and valued.

**Meaningful work:** People are happier when they're engaged in work that matters to someone or something they care about.

“Briefly describe one event from today that stands out in your mind.”

They received roughly 12,000 responses per day.

Analyzing people's answers and looking for themes and patterns, Amabile & Kramer gained key insights into the secrets to joyful inner work lives:

**Catalysts:** People thrive with feedback that sparks joy and momentum. These catalysts are most effective when they're local: they come from immediate supervisors or colleagues.

**Nourishers:** People benefit from emotional connections that build bonds and affiliation.

“Because they spend so much of their lives working, people deserve the dignity of having positive lives at work.”

~Theresa Amabile



# PROGRESS PRINCIPLE

According to Amabile & Kramer, "making progress (being productive and creative) leads to positive inner work life. This creates *the progress loop*, the self-reinforcing process in which progress and inner work life fuel each other." (68-69)

Here is the progress principle in a nutshell: "of all the positive events that influence inner work life, the single and most powerful is progress in meaningful work; of all the negative events, the single most powerful is the opposite of progress -- setbacks in the work. We consider this to be a fundamental management principle: facilitating progress is the most effective way for managers to influence inner work life." (76-77)

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**MAKING PROGRESS IN  
MEANINGFUL WORK IS  
THE MOST POWERFUL  
STIMULANT TO GREAT  
INNER WORK LIFE.**

– AMABILE & KRAMER

Other findings include:

- progress enhances intrinsic motivation
- progress increases expressions of joy, warmth, and pride
- progress encourages team members to view each other more positively
- progress is often followed by feelings of accomplishment, satisfaction, happiness, and even elation
- positive inner work life improves performance across industries



# FEEDBACK

Feedback is a critical component of creating psychological safety at work.

Colleagues can only progress through the four levels of psychological safety -- inclusion, learning, contributing, and challenging -- if they get feedback along the way.

This means feedback is not something to be given once a year at annual reviews, or at the end of the semester (like teaching evals). Just as an instructor who learns what wasn't working only after class is over, employees have no chance to improve and get better if they don't get feedback as they go.

Feedback is also essential to building trust. Trust is nurtured when feedback is regular, fair, and relevant.

And keep in mind: it will be nearly impossible to deliver critical feedback effectively to someone who isn't accustomed to hearing from you.

Just as importantly, design your team's work so that the projects themselves provide feedback as the work progresses.

## TWO ROUTES TO FEEDBACK

The route most managers think of: getting feedback from a manager or knowledgeable peer.

The preferable route: getting feedback from the work itself.

The key is to design each job so that, in the act of carrying out the work, people gain knowledge about the results of their effort. Ideally, this should be a feature of every job in every contemporary organization.

is it in yours?

-Amabile & Kramer



# 7 CATALYSTS

Catalysts emerged from the stories people told about the events of their day. Catalysts play a key role in facilitating progress and providing feedback. Here are the seven catalysts Amabile & Kramer uncovered:

- 01 Setting clear goals
- 02 Allowing autonomy
- 03 Providing resources
- 04 Giving enough time - but not too much
- 05 Providing help with the work
- 06 Learning from problems...AND successes
- 07 Allowing ideas to flow



# CATALYSTS @WORK

How do catalysts show up for your team? You can learn a lot by reflecting on what your colleagues are showing you through their behaviors. In the list below, put a check next to the description most generally fitting your team. This check provides an excellent start to determining how you can enhance the inner work lives of the folks you're responsible for.

## 1. SETTING CLEAR GOALS

A. My team can easily name their goals and they know whether they're making progress.

B. Some folks, or some projects, have goals -- but not all.

C. Most of us usually don't know what our goals are.

## 2. ALLOWING AUTONOMY

A. My team knows they can make their own decisions.

B. We can make recommendations but don't typically make final decisions.

C. We do what we're told.

## 3. PROVIDING RESOURCES

A. Everyone on my team gets the resources they need to do their work.

B. Resources are limited but we know we can get them if they're available.

C. My team is generally stressed with overwork and lack of support, materials, etc.

## 4. GIVING ENOUGH TIME - BUT NOT TOO MUCH

A. Everyone on my team consistently meets deadlines.

B. We have flexibility with deadlines when they are difficult to meet.

C. Sometimes we're bored and sometimes everything is on fire.

# YOUR CATALYSTS

Read each catalyst, think back to the last few months of work, and then answer honestly about your team's current state

## 5. PROVIDING HELP WITH THE WORK

A. My team can easily get assistance and support when needed.

B. People are willing to help and provide resources, but we're mostly too stretched to help each other.

C. We know we have to complete our assignments with whatever resources are on hand.

## 6. LEARNING FROM PROBLEMS...AND SUCCESSES

A. We regularly debrief and apply the lessons we've learned to future projects.

B. My team can identify what did/n't work, but we don't consistently apply those lessons.

C. We rarely gather as a team to debrief, learn, and get better.

## 7. ALLOWING IDEAS TO FLOW

A. Everyone on the team comfortably brainstorms and problem-solves together.

B. Only some of us brainstorm OR most of us do but rarely.

C. We don't bother brainstorming because it doesn't usually go anywhere.

Your answers will illuminate some of your team's habits and experiences at work. Consider which catalysts would most help your team in your current context, and identify a few ways to use that catalyst with one or more of your team members. You may also want to think about the support you could get from *your boss* to use more of any of these catalysts. You can keep track of your ideas on the page called "Mix and Match," below.

# THE FOUR NOURISHERS

The four nourishers Amabile & Kramer uncovered are as essential as the seven catalysts. Reflect on each nourisher and respond to the prompts as specifically as you can.

## Respect

What are some of the ways you nourish your team by actively showing them respect?

## Encouragement

What are some of the ways you nourish your team by actively encouraging them?

## Emotional Support

What are some of the tangible ways you offer your team emotional support?

## Affiliation

What activities do you and your team engage in that strengthen bonds and deepen affiliation?



# MIX & MATCH

Choose one colleague and identify their behaviors -- words and actions -- that give you insight into their inner work life. Then consider which catalysts or nourishers might increase their joy at work.

COLLEAGUE'S INNER WORK LIFE

POTENTIAL CATALYSTS/NOURISHERS


# JOY AT WORK: MAD LIB

This exercise gives you a chance to reflect on what your team needs, what you already do, and what you'd like to get better at. Treat each mad lib as a mini action plan.

MAD LIB:

"I'm going to give [name of person] consistent feedback on their meaningful work in [name of project task, or initiative] by helping them [insert specific behavior based on catalyst or nourisher]."

YOUR TURN: (REPEAT AS OFTEN AS YOU LIKE)

"I'm going to give \_\_\_\_\_ consistent feedback on their meaningful work in \_\_\_\_\_ by helping them \_\_\_\_\_."

"I'm going to give \_\_\_\_\_ consistent feedback on their meaningful work in \_\_\_\_\_ by helping them \_\_\_\_\_."

"I'm going to give \_\_\_\_\_ consistent feedback on their meaningful work in \_\_\_\_\_ by helping them \_\_\_\_\_."



*The secret to amazing performance is empowering talented people to succeed at meaningful work.*

~Theresa Amabile

# THE PROGRESS PRINCIPLE INSPIRATIONS

*No matter what your work life is, the final goal is the same: to be able to work with joy.*

--Marie Kondo

**Earn your leadership  
every day.**

-- Michael Jordan

**Do Small Things  
With Great Love**

*Leadership is a series of small but meaningful actions that inspire others to follow.*

