

# FATHOM

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING THE PERSUASIVE ORGANIZATION



## COMMUNICATING TO BELONG

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# Communicating To Belong

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have rightfully become a ubiquitous organizational priority and, at their best, help build engagement, empower individual creativity and feedback, and create a healthier company or team. But at their worst, they can feel perfunctory and engender a feeling of dissatisfaction and disengagement. What differentiates these two outcomes? At the Latimer Group, we've found that successful DEI training relies on powerful leadership communication: skills that create community, foster trust, and allow employees to bring their whole selves into their workplace.

Like any other type of communication, these principles can be implemented and strengthened by building up specific skills that bring DEI to life. Importantly, company leadership should model the importance of these principles and provide concrete ways for their teams to implement DEI within the workplace. Why? Because, like any other communication, diversity, equity, and inclusion is more than a soft skill; it has a measurable effect on the performance of an organization.

At the Latimer Group, we've found it useful to focus on a fourth dimension of DEI: Belonging. A helpful perspective comes from Deloitte's 'Workforce Experience by Design' practice, which defines belonging as "comfort, connection, and contribution": knowledge that people will be treated fairly and respected in the workplace; that they have meaningful relationships and are connected to their organization's goals; and that their strengths help achieve those goals.

Understanding belonging through these ideas underscores its importance for employee productivity and retention. Consider these statistics:

- **Forty percent of people** say they feel isolated at work, resulting in lower organizational commitment and engagement.
- **Over fifty percent of employees** who left their jobs in the second half of 2021 reported feeling

undervalued by their organization or manager or lacked a sense of belonging.

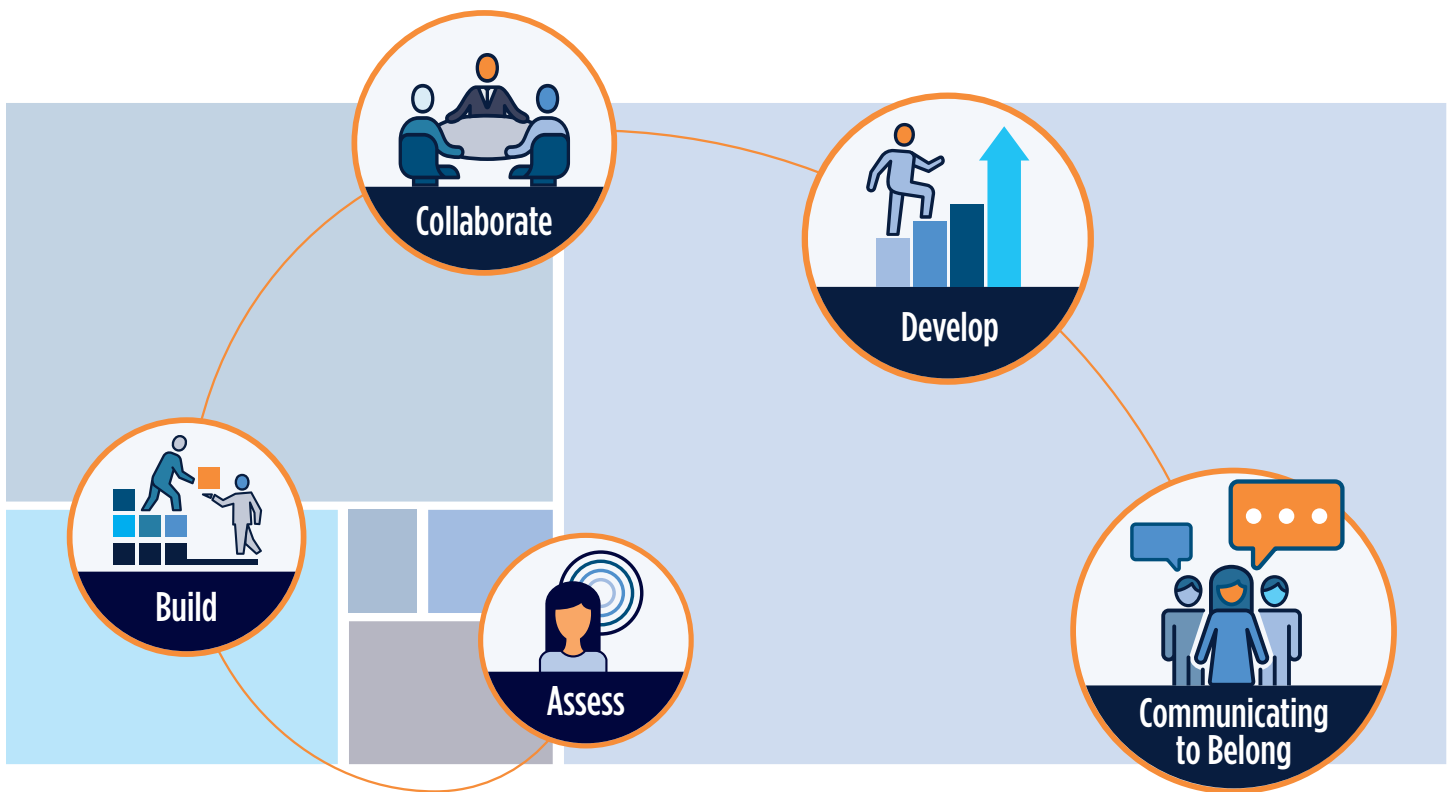
- **Nearly half of those employees** noted that one motivation for leaving their job was the desire to work with people who trust and care for each other.

As the *Harvard Business Review* puts it, "When employees do not feel like they belong, they will disengage or look for the exits, as many employers are discovering." One expert told the analysts, "People spend so much time at work. When they are in a space that doesn't acknowledge that what is happening in the world impacts them, it becomes harder for them to contribute."

*Most organizations aspire to create positive, supportive workplaces that allow for connection. Organizations that do this well get better employee performance, less turnover, and fewer people calling out sick.*

Of course, most organizations, leaders, and managers aspire to create positive, supportive workplaces that allow for connection — but doing so has more than moral benefits. Organizations that do this well get better employee performance, less turnover, and fewer people calling out sick. As Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic and Katarina Berg write:

*The degree of meaning and purpose you derive from work may be the biggest difference between a job and a career, and psychological research has consistently shown that when employees feel that they belong to a team or organization — in the sense that it aligns with their values, and enables them to express important aspects of their identity*



**— they will not only tend to perform better but also experience higher levels of engagement and well-being. In contrast, a lack of belonging will increase the risk of alienation, burnout, and underperformance.**

Beyond the sense of well-being it cultivates, belonging has a measurable impact on business; Deloitte: “Belonging can lead to a 56% increase in job performance, a 50% reduction in turnover risk, a 167% increase in employer net promoter score, 2X more employee raises, 18X more employee promotions, and a 75% decrease in sick days.” All these metrics point to a positive workplace culture, a healthy reputation, and a better bottom line.

### Communication for belonging

Belonging as a concept can feel both vast and vague. But, like other kinds of intentional communication, cultivating belonging relies on a set of teachable, practicable skills. These skills include four main building blocks: Assess, Build, Collaborate, and Develop, each of which can be practiced individually but which work together to communicate and cultivate belonging among a team.

#### Assess

Similar to The Latimer Model for persuasive communication, an essential step in creating

belonging in the workplace begins by understanding the context through assessing yourself, your audience, and your message. This type of awareness forms the basis of every step you take as a leader to build belonging within your organization.

Self-assessment requires reflection on your own strengths and weaknesses as a communicator. What do you do well, and where are opportunities for improvement? This assessment allows you to focus energy on areas where you might need to sharpen your skills and customize how you reach out to others to take full advantage of your strengths.

Audience assessment addresses the needs of those you want to reach out to—what kinds of messages and deliveries do they prefer? What means of communication make them feel respected and understood?

Message assessment recognizes the effect that your words might have on others and strives to construct a message that resonates with your audience. This doesn’t mean that you can only say what other people want to hear—but it recognizes that how you say something makes a difference in how receptive people might be to your message.

*continued*



## Build

Another essential step in creating an organization prioritizing belonging is building relationships based on trust and respect. This process emphasizes understanding and engaging with others—by listening intentionally, demonstrating respect, and forming authentic connections.

Listening is an often overlooked skill. What we think of as “listening” is often just biding time until our turn to speak. Instead, listening that builds belonging is purposeful and actionable and requires a specific kind of engagement that both enriches our own understanding and communicates respect to the speaker. It requires you to eliminate distractions (no phones!) and prepare to focus. Pay attention to what is being said (taking notes can be helpful), keep your body posture active and engaged, ask questions, and follow up on the conversation as needed.

However, building relationships isn’t just about being receptive to other people’s communications—it’s about actively looking to foster connections through telling stories about yourself and your experiences and creating space for others to be vulnerable by being vulnerable yourself. It is important to note that no one should be pressured to share stories they don’t feel comfortable sharing; rather, the goal is to create an environment that is respectful, safe, and authentic.

## Collaborate

One of the pillars of DEI communication is creating a culture in which a team can work together productively. True collaboration requires that each team member feels safe and supported in offering ideas and feedback. For leaders, that means developing communication skills to:

- Solicit ideas, comments, and questions from each team member; this may require understanding differences in communication styles and offering multiple avenues by which input can be offered.
- Support and acknowledge each contribution, even if the team moves in a different direction.
- Be aware of how delivery can include—or exclude—others, and continuously assess whether

communication is inviting or discouraging conversation.

## Develop

With a foundation set in awareness and strong mutual relationships, the fourth aspect of organizational belonging is fostering growth, empowering others, and reinforcing trust through empathetic, authentic, and respectful communication. An office committed to development includes:

- Genuine compromise so that each individual has a chance to contribute and be heard,
- Clear, Two-Way feedback which fosters respect, empowerment, and the opportunity to grow,
- Confidentiality so that sensitive issues can be addressed honestly and with constructive follow-up.

Importantly, leadership should acknowledge that events outside the office may affect workers within the office. As Harvard Business Review analysts note, “The traumas and challenges that happen outside of work can impact relationships and productivity in the workplace—particularly when those traumas are not acknowledged.” This need not cross boundaries or be a protracted discussion—a simple recognition that something upsetting has occurred and the invitation to take time to process it is enough.

Considering the benefits of belonging—in reputation, employee satisfaction, and effectiveness—investing in the skills required to build it should be a priority for any organization. The Latimer Group’s new Communicating to Belong workshop has grown out of the belief that building belonging is essential to good business and can be cultivated through systematic training, practice, and modeling.

As with all critical communication skills, developing belonging in your team requires paying attention to the skills and techniques we often take for granted and recognizing that a small investment can provide great rewards.

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*To learn more about The Latimer Group’s new Communicate to Belong Workshop, please contact us at [info@thelatimergroup.com](mailto:info@thelatimergroup.com).*

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