

ONE PODCAST. SEVEN PIECES. ONE DISTINCT VOICE.

An editorial writing sample based on Game Changers with Molly Fletcher and her conversation with Danny Meyer.

SOURCE EPISODE

How to Build a Culture
People Want to Be Part Of
Danny Meyer

EDITORIAL ANGLE

When Your Best Employee
Becomes Your Biggest
Leadership Challenge

WHAT IS INSIDE

Editorial analysis / Article / Newsletter / Five LinkedIn posts

Editorial & Brand Voice Analysis

Source episode: Danny Meyer, How to Build a Culture People Want to Be Part Of

Companion article: When Your Best Employee Becomes Your Biggest Leadership Challenge

Why I Chose This Angle

Molly and Danny covered a lot in their conversation, including company culture, employee performance, and the difficult decisions leaders have to make.

The example that stuck out was Danny's story about the talented cook who made incredible pasta but was miserable to work with.

It's a familiar problem for leaders. Someone is exceptionally good at their job, but everyone around them is paying the price for their behavior. At what point does keeping that person do more harm than good?

I thought that question deserved its own article.

It also gave me a way to explore Danny's ideas about the behaviors leaders tolerate and his framework for evaluating employees based on ability and willingness.

Getting Familiar With Molly's Voice

Before writing, I reviewed several articles on Molly's website to understand how she communicates with her audience.

Her writing is conversational and direct. She draws on her background in professional sports, uses examples that make leadership challenges easier to recognize, and gives readers practical advice they can use.

I approached the article with those characteristics in mind. I opened with a situation her readers would recognize, used Danny's actual examples to explore the problem, and kept the writing focused on decisions leaders face in their own organizations.

Adapting the Work Across Platforms

I also paid attention to pacing. Molly's articles give ideas room to develop without getting overly technical, so I used a mix of shorter observations and fuller explanations.

Writing for Different Platforms

I wanted the article, newsletter, and social posts to give readers something different.

The article explores what happens when an employee's talent starts working against the team. Danny's story about the cook and his ability-and-willingness framework help readers think through how they'd respond.

For the newsletter, I chose a separate story from the conversation. Danny shared advice about imagining two front pockets, one for problems you don't know how to solve and another for problems you already know how to handle but keep avoiding. That became the basis for a more personal email about difficult conversations.

The five social posts each focus on a specific part of the interview. Some introduce practical leadership ideas, while others use Danny's stories to encourage discussion or give readers a reason to explore the article and episode.

The goal was to create written content that feels appropriate for Molly's audience across each format, while making good use of a conversation she'd already recorded.

When Your Best Employee Becomes Your Biggest Leadership Challenge

Proposed standalone editorial article | Written in Molly Fletcher's first-person brand voice

You've got someone on your team who's incredibly talented. They deliver great results, know their job inside and out, and bring skills that aren't easy to replace.

The problem is no one wants to work with them.

Maybe they have a bad attitude, dismiss their colleagues, or make everyone else's job harder. You know there's an issue, but every time you consider addressing it, you think about what they contribute to the business.

Can you really afford to lose them?

It's a tough position for any leader. But what is keeping that employee costing the rest of your team?

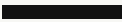
Your Culture Is Defined by What You Tolerate

I recently sat down with Danny Meyer, founder of Shake Shack and Union Square Hospitality Group, on Game Changers. Danny has spent decades in hospitality, and he's learned some valuable lessons about building and protecting a strong company culture.

During a visit to UCLA, Danny heard athletic director Dan Guerrero talk about the attention it takes to maintain a strong culture. That conversation helped him think differently about the behaviors leaders encourage and the ones they allow.

Danny eventually developed a simple equation: culture is the behaviors you celebrate, minus the behaviors you tolerate.

For years, he admitted, he was much better at celebrating the good than addressing the bad.



He compared it to a hockey team with great offensive players but terrible defense. Scoring plenty of goals doesn't help much when you're giving up even more.

The same thing happens in business.

You can celebrate wins and recognize your top performers all day long. But if you're allowing behavior that works against your values, you're making it harder for everyone else to succeed.

The Problem With Your Most Talented Employee

Danny shared a story that shows what this can look like in practice.

Imagine having a cook who makes the best homemade pasta you've ever tasted. The food is incredible, but the cook is difficult to work with and creates problems throughout the kitchen.

Danny admitted that he used to make excuses for employees like this. Their talent made it easy to justify overlooking their behavior. He worried that letting them go would upset the team.

Eventually, he realized he'd been looking at the situation all wrong.

By the time a leader recognizes that someone's behavior is hurting the culture, their colleagues have probably been dealing with it much longer.

They're the ones managing the tension, working around the problems, and wondering why nothing has changed.

Every exception you make because someone is talented tells the rest of your team something about what you're willing to accept.

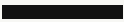
Ability and Willingness Are Two Different Things

Danny uses two factors to evaluate employees: ability and willingness.

That creates four possible situations.

Can do, wants to. These are the people you want to recognize, support, and keep growing. They have both the skills and the willingness to contribute.

Can't do yet, wants to. These employees deserve an investment in coaching and training. They may lack experience, but their willingness to learn gives them room to grow.



Can do, doesn't want to. This is where the talented cook fits. Someone may have exceptional technical skills but lack the willingness to meet the organization's behavioral expectations.

Can't do, doesn't want to. When someone lacks both the skills and the willingness to improve, it's difficult to see a productive path forward in that role.

It's important to understand what's causing the problem before deciding how to address it.

Someone who's eager to improve but needs training deserves a different conversation from someone who knows what's expected and repeatedly chooses not to meet those expectations.

Good leadership requires figuring out which situation you're dealing with before deciding what to do next.

The Conversations You Avoid Don't Go Away

One of the most revealing parts of my conversation with Danny was hearing him talk about his own leadership mistakes.

He admitted that some of his biggest missteps came from knowing something needed to be addressed but putting it off because the conversation would be unpleasant.

A board member once gave him a useful way to think about those decisions.

Imagine having two front pockets. One holds problems you genuinely don't know how to solve. The other holds problems you already know how to handle but haven't addressed.

The goal is to keep that second pocket as empty as possible.

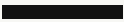
It's a useful way to look at the decisions we keep postponing.

Danny also talked about learning to approach difficult conversations with kindness. Giving someone constructive feedback means caring enough about their growth to tell them what they need to hear.

Avoiding the conversation may feel easier in the moment, but it doesn't give that person the opportunity to improve. And it leaves everyone else dealing with the consequences.

What Is Your Team Learning From You?

Think about the employee you've been making excuses for.



They could be your top performer, someone whose skills would take months to replace. The thought of losing them is enough to make you hesitate, even when you know something needs to change.

Those concerns are real. But so are the consequences of allowing the problem to continue.

Your team learns what matters by watching your decisions. They see who gets recognized, who receives coaching, and which behaviors you're willing to overlook.

If there's a conversation you've been avoiding, start there. Be specific about the behavior, explain what's expected, and give the person an opportunity to respond.

And remember that sometimes the most important leadership decision isn't about your highest performer. It's about everyone else who shows up, does great work, and deserves to be part of a team where the standards apply to everyone.

For more on building a culture people want to be part of, listen to my conversation with Danny Meyer on Game Changers. We discuss leadership, difficult feedback, and what it takes to protect your culture as your business grows.

The Conversation You Keep Putting Off

Proposed companion newsletter | Subject, preview text, and full email

SUBJECT: The conversation you keep putting off

PREVIEW: A leadership lesson from Danny Meyer that's worth remembering.

Hi [First Name],

There's a big difference between having a problem you don't know how to solve and having one you know exactly what to do about but keep putting off.

I recently had Danny Meyer, founder of Shake Shack and Union Square Hospitality Group, on Game Changers. We talked about building strong teams, protecting company culture, and some of the leadership lessons he's learned over the years.

One story really stuck with me.

Danny shared advice he received from a board member who told him to imagine having two front pockets.

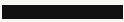
In one pocket are the problems you genuinely don't know how to solve. Those deserve your time, attention, and creativity.

In the other are the problems you already know how to handle but haven't dealt with yet.

The goal is to keep that second pocket as empty as possible.

Think about what's sitting in your second pocket right now.

Maybe it's an employee who's incredibly talented but makes life difficult for everyone around them. You know their behavior needs to change, but you keep making excuses because they're so good at what they do.



Or maybe there's a conversation you've been avoiding because you're worried about how the other person will react.

Danny admitted he's made that mistake himself. He's waited too long to address problems because he didn't want to deal with an uncomfortable conversation.

And when you're leading a team, other people can end up paying the price for that hesitation.

So here's something I'd encourage you to try this week.

Make a list of the problems you've been carrying around. Separate the ones you're still figuring out from the ones you already know you need to address.

Then choose one from that second group and take the first step.

You don't have to resolve everything today. But you can stop putting off what you already know needs your attention.

I explored another part of my conversation with Danny in a new article, *When Your Best Employee Becomes Your Biggest Leadership Challenge*. It looks at why talented employees aren't always good teammates and how to recognize when someone needs coaching versus a different kind of conversation.

[Read the article]

And if you haven't listened to my conversation with Danny yet, I think you'll enjoy it. We cover much more about culture, feedback, and the decisions that shape great teams.

[Listen to the episode]

Molly

Five Ways From One Conversation

LinkedIn Content | Five posts exploring different ideas from one conversation

01 / ARTICLE TRAFFIC

The talented employee nobody wants to work with

Imagine having a cook who makes the best homemade pasta you've ever tasted.

The food is incredible. The talent is undeniable.

But nobody in the kitchen wants to work with them.

Danny Meyer shared this example during our conversation on Game Changers.

He admitted that for years, he made excuses for talented employees whose behavior hurt the team. He worried about losing their skills and what it might mean for the business.

Eventually, he realized that by the time a leader recognizes the problem, everyone else has probably been dealing with it for much longer.

That's something every leader needs to consider.

When you overlook someone's behavior because they're exceptionally good at their job, you're asking the rest of your team to live with the consequences.

And you may end up losing the very people you're trying to keep.

I explored this further in my new article, [When Your Best Employee Becomes Your Biggest Leadership Challenge](#).

[\[Read the article\]](#)

02 / PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

Ability versus willingness

When an employee isn't meeting expectations, the first question shouldn't be whether to keep them.

It's why they're struggling.

Danny Meyer shared a framework on Game Changers that looks at two things: ability and willingness.

That gives you four possibilities.

1. Can do, wants to. They have the skills and the willingness. Recognize them and help them keep growing.
2. Can't do yet, wants to. They need coaching or training. Their attitude gives you something to build on.
3. Can do, doesn't want to. They're capable of meeting expectations but unwilling to do so. This calls for a conversation about accountability.
4. Can't do, doesn't want to. They lack the skills and the willingness to improve. It's time to evaluate whether they belong in the role.

Not everyone needs more training. And not every performance issue is a reason to let someone go.

Your job as a leader is to understand the difference.

[Listen to my conversation with Danny Meyer]

03 / DISCUSSION

The two-pocket lesson

A board member once gave Danny Meyer a piece of advice about leadership that involved two front pockets.

In one pocket, you carry the problems you genuinely don't know how to solve.

In the other, you carry the problems you already know how to handle but keep putting off.

The goal is to keep that second pocket as empty as possible.

I love this because we can spend so much time thinking about decisions we've already made in our heads but haven't acted on.

The employee who needs feedback.

The difficult conversation you keep rescheduling.

The problem everyone knows about but nobody wants to address.

Danny admitted he's made the mistake of putting those things off himself.

So here's something to consider today.

What's sitting in your second pocket?

And what's stopping you from dealing with it?

04 / PODCAST TRAFFIC

A hockey team with no defense

Imagine a hockey team that scores five goals but gives up six.

Great offense. Terrible defense.

You still lose.

Danny Meyer used this analogy when we talked about company culture on Game Changers.

For years, he was great at celebrating the behaviors he wanted to see in his businesses. But he wasn't nearly as good at addressing the behaviors that were working against his culture.

He eventually came to think about culture as the behaviors you celebrate, minus the behaviors you tolerate.

It's a lesson that applies far beyond restaurants.

You can recognize great performance, reward talented people, and celebrate every win.

But if you're letting poor behavior go unchecked, those wins won't tell the whole story.

Building a strong culture means paying attention to both sides of the equation.

[Listen to my conversation with Danny Meyer on Game Changers]

05 / LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

Being nice isn't always being kind

You can genuinely care about someone and still need to tell them something they don't want to hear.

Danny Meyer and I talked about this during our conversation on Game Changers.

He admitted that some of his biggest leadership mistakes came from avoiding difficult conversations because he didn't want to upset people.

He eventually learned to think differently about kindness.

Giving someone constructive feedback is part of helping them succeed.

Think about the best coaches in sports.

They don't stop giving feedback when an athlete becomes successful. They know there's always something to improve, and they expect their best players to keep doing the work.

The same goes for leadership.

If someone isn't meeting expectations, tell them. Give them a chance to understand the problem and make a change.

Avoiding the conversation might spare both of you some discomfort today.

But it rarely helps anyone get better.

Editorial Writing That Fits Your Clients

ONE CONVERSATION. MORE WORTH PUBLISHING.

I work from recorded conversations, existing articles, and brand materials to find the ideas worth publishing. From there, I write for the places a client already speaks to their audience, including their website, newsletter, and social channels.

For agencies, this can be handled as freelance or white-label editorial support. I can follow an established brief, learn the client's voice, and deliver writing for your team to review.

Typical written package: one original editorial article, one companion newsletter, and five written social posts. Video editing, graphics, publishing, and scheduling are outside this writing package.

LET'S TALK

Elle Mills

Editorial Writer | Out of Edits

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DISCLOSURE

I created this portfolio sample using publicly available content from Molly Fletcher's conversation with Danny Meyer. The writing and content ideas are my own and were developed without their involvement. All first-person writing is an example of how the content could be published.