

give river

Championship Culture

Lightning Guide

The 5G Method for People Leaders

Guidance

Gamification

Gratitude

Growth

Generosity

Backed by research on winning teams: Google Project Aristotle · MIT · Navy SEALs · Gallup

This is the companion to the full Championship Culture Playbook — download it free at giveriver.com/resources/playbook

Building winning workplace teams is supremely difficult.

Most leaders have tried: team off-sites, perks, surveys, recognition tools, periodic "employee appreciation" gestures. And most of the time, it falls flat — because these approaches treat culture as an **event** rather than a **system**. Real culture operates continuously, not occasionally. And without a system to carry it, culture is whatever happens when you're not looking.



Culture left to chance

Without a system, culture is whatever happens when you're not looking — hallway conversations, who gets praised by the loudest manager, what gets tolerated. Rarely what you'd choose.



Too much time, too little traction

Leaders are stretched thin. Culture-building slips because there's no system to carry it — it relies entirely on individual energy, which is the first thing to run out.



Values on walls, not in behavior

Your values are printed, framed, maybe even recited. But without systems that reinforce them daily, they're decoration. Values become culture only when they're tied to specific behaviors that get recognized, rewarded, and repeated.



Good intentions, no follow-through

You meant to do something about morale after that last exit interview. You planned to start recognizing people more consistently. You talked about team-building at the leadership offsite. But there's no structure to carry the intention — so it stays a conversation instead of becoming a habit.

Teams Using This Approach See Results Fast

Results typically emerge within the first 60–90 days of consistent implementation.


40%

reduction in turnover


30%

productivity increase


90%+

platform adoption rate



"We had 100% participation in our first Give River season, and the impact was undeniable. The experience sparked lasting culture change and inspired us to launch a second season."

— Mary Tran, CEO, EXP Future



"What would have been a heavy lift launched in record time. We saw team members engaging and recognizing each other within the first week. That momentum was everything."

— Leah Sturm, HR Coordinator, CADDC



"Great for remote teams. When people are siloed, it's easy to feel disconnected from leadership and coworkers. This method bridges that gap. It gives people opportunities to build genuine rapport, feel recognized, and stay connected."

— Justin, Deputy Director, It Gets Better



Is this approach for you? Take a 3-minute assessment → giveriver.com/resources/assessment

The Strategies Driving Championship Teams 🏆

You don't need to guess what makes great teams work. Decades of research — from Google to the U.S. military to championship sports franchises — have already answered the question. The patterns are remarkably consistent, and they're more accessible than you'd expect.



Psychological Safety

Google studied 180 teams over two years and found psychological safety was the #1 predictor of effectiveness — more than talent, resources, or strategy.

Teams where people felt safe to speak up performed **2x better**.



Frequent Connection

MIT's Human Dynamics Lab found that communication patterns predict team success as powerfully as all other factors combined.

High-performing teams communicate **3x more frequently** — not in meetings, but in quick check-ins and informal exchanges.



Continuous Learning

Navy SEAL teams run After-Action Reviews after every mission — not to assign blame, but to extract learning.

Mistakes become data, not shame. Pixar, Microsoft, and healthcare organizations have adopted the same practice.



Purpose & Meaning

Adam Grant's research at Wharton found that connecting work to impact beyond the individual increased performance by **171%**.

Championship teams don't just know what they're doing — they know *why* it matters. Purpose isn't a perk. It's a performance driver.

We synthesized all of this into one proprietary framework: the 5G Method →

Introducing the 5G Method ⚡

Five ways to build the conditions championship teams share — each one reinforcing the others.



Guidance — Sustain Through Change

Before anything else works, people need to know what's expected, how they're doing, and that someone's paying attention. Guidance is the coaching, feedback, and accountability layer that holds everything together — especially when things get hard.



Gamification — Performance in Play

Friendly micro-competitions, team challenges, and rewards that make participation feel like play — not work. Mix up the teams, create low-stakes contests, and give people something to rally around together.



Gratitude — Make Value Visible

Recognition that's specific, public, and tied to your values. Not "thanks for your hard work" — but "@Sarah, the way you handled that client call showed exactly what we mean by ownership." That specificity is what turns recognition into culture.



Growth — Build a Learning Culture

People stay where they're growing. Short, consistent learning — delivered weekly, not dumped quarterly — builds a team that gets better together. When mistakes are treated as data instead of failure, people start taking the risks that drive real innovation.



Generosity — Connect to Greater Purpose

Work that connects to purpose beyond the paycheck changes how people show up. Charitable giving, volunteer challenges, and shared acts of generosity create the kind of belonging that no benefits package can replicate.



The Season Model



A defined start, a defined end, and a reason to keep showing up.

Most culture initiatives launch big and fade quietly. The Season model prevents that by design: every sprint has a defined end, which creates urgency. It has a theme, which creates focus. And it has a reset, which means you never ask people to "stay engaged forever" — just for the next 8–12 weeks.



8–12 Week Sprint

Long enough to build real habits. Short enough to stay urgent. Research shows behavior change takes ~66 days — a Season gives you exactly that runway, plus a defined finish line.



Survey-Driven Focus

Your team survey reveals where to start. Each Season has one primary focus — chosen based on what your team needs most right now.



Finish, Celebrate, Reset

Every Season ends with a celebration and a fresh start. This prevents culture initiatives from becoming background noise — there's always something to work toward.



The practical takeaway: you can build these conditions deliberately.

That's what the 5G Method is designed to do — five interlocking elements that create the same dynamics championship teams share.



Happy

Fulfilled, appreciated, connected to meaning beyond the paycheck



Healthy

Psychologically safe, low burnout, sustainably high energy



High-Performing

Focused, collaborative, and consistently raising the bar for each other

Pre-Season Prep

Three roles. Everything else follows.

Culture initiatives die when "everyone owns it" — which means no one does. Before you launch a single Season, name the person in each of these seats.



Head Coach

Executive Sponsor · 2–4 hrs/month

This is the single biggest predictor of adoption: when senior leaders visibly participate, the rest of the team follows. Their job isn't to run it — it's to show up, model the behavior, and remove obstacles.

- Visibly model participation on Day 1
- Give 2+ public recognitions per week
- Reference culture wins in all-hands meetings
- Remove obstacles the team flags

Key question: "Will you visibly champion and model this?"



Culture Captain

Project Owner · 3–5 hrs/week

This person owns the weekly cadence: scheduling activities, tracking who's participating, flagging who's gone quiet, and reporting results to leadership. Think of them as the project manager of your culture initiative.

- Own the activity calendar and themes
- Send weekly participation summaries
- Track who's engaging and who's gone quiet
- Run monthly retrospectives with leadership

Key question: "Can you commit the time to run this?"



Culture Champions

Dept. Ambassadors · 1–2 hrs/week

One per department or team. Their job: personally invite team members to participate, model the behaviors first, collect honest feedback weekly, and escalate problems to the Captain fast.

- Personally invite every team member
- Model participation before asking others
- Collect informal feedback weekly
- Surface blockers to the Captain within 72 hrs

Key question: "Will you model this and surface what's not working?"

What a Season Looks Like

Think of this as choose-your-own-adventure. You can start where your team scored lowest — that's where the biggest gains are. Or start where you're already strong and score a quick win that builds momentum for the harder stuff. Either way, pick one Season, run it for 8–12 weeks, and build from there.



Your assessment points the way.

Lowest score = biggest opportunity. Highest score = fastest win. Pick your play.



Guidance Season

RUN THIS WHEN: TEAM NEEDS CLARITY OR ACCOUNTABILITY

A focused sprint on goal-setting, feedback rhythms, and role clarity. By the end, everyone knows what's expected and how they're tracking.

Low score on: Coaching & Feedback



Gamification Season

RUN THIS WHEN: ENERGY IS LOW OR PEOPLE ARE SILOED

Cross-departmental challenges, micro-competitions, and collaborative events. By the end, people know colleagues they didn't before — and they're having fun.

Low score on: Team Energy & Play



Gratitude Season

RUN THIS WHEN: TEAM FEELS UNDERVALUED OR DISCONNECTED

Recognition flows in every direction. Points reward the generous, not just the recognized. By the end, your team has a shared language around what "great" looks like.

Low score on: Feeling Valued



Growth Season

RUN THIS WHEN: TEAM WANTS TO LEARN AND DEVELOP

Short, inspiring learning content on a consistent cadence. By the end, everyone has grown — and they've done it together, which compounds the trust.

Low score on: Continuous Learning



Generosity Season

RUN THIS WHEN: TEAM LACKS PURPOSE OR MISSION CONNECTION

Team engagement translates into real charitable giving. Teams that give together develop a shared identity that outlasts any single initiative.

Low score on: Purpose Connection

Where Does Your Team Stand Today?

Take 5 minutes to rate your team on each dimension — or **send this as a quick survey to your whole team** and compare results. Honest answers become your roadmap for where to focus first.

Gratitude · Feeling Valued

People regularly recognize each other in specific, public ways tied to your team's values — not just generic "good job" or once-a-year awards.

1 2 3 4 5

Generosity · Purpose Connection

People can describe how their work matters beyond their job title — to clients, community, or a mission they care about.

1 2 3 4 5

Gamification · Team Energy & Play

There's a spirit of playful competition on your team. People do fun things together that challenge them, cross-departmental groups form around shared goals, and participation feels energizing — not obligatory.

1 2 3 4 5

Guidance · Coaching & Feedback

People know what's expected, get regular feedback on how they're doing, and feel coached toward growth — not just evaluated at review time.


1 2 3 4 5


Growth · Continuous Learning


The team has a regular rhythm of learning together — not just annual training or one-off workshops. Mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, not failures.

1 2 3 4 5

WHAT YOUR SCORE MEANS:

 **20–25:** Strong foundation — keep running focused sprints and add new themes each cycle

 **13–19:** You've got 1–2 clear priorities — start your first Season focused there

 **Below 13:** Start with Guidance first, then Gratitude — build the foundation before everything else



Gratitude

Make Value Visible

Start here. Recognition is the fastest culture lever — and the most universally neglected.

WHAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE



45%

reduction in turnover with high-quality recognition
(Gallup/Workhuman 2024)



32%

jump in performance when recognized 6x per year
(Workhuman)

MEASURE THIS

📅 **Recognition frequency:** # per person per week — target 2+

📅 **Distribution:** % of team giving AND receiving

How To Do It — Step by Step

You can start today with zero tools — here's the manual approach. (Give River's free platform automates all of this, but the system works either way.)

1

Create a Dedicated Recognition Channel

Create a dedicated space — in your team chat, email thread, or shared board. Somewhere visible to everyone. Pin this template: "@Name, thank you for [specific behavior tied to value] — this created [specific impact]."

2

Leaders Model First — Every Week

Head Coaches and Culture Captains give a minimum of 2 recognitions per week before asking others. Your behavior unlocks theirs.

3

Run Weekly Recognition Roundups

Every Friday: your Culture Captain shares the top 3–5 recognitions from the week with names, behaviors, and impact. Social visibility compounds momentum.

4

Track Distribution, Not Just Volume

Keep a simple spreadsheet: who gave recognition, who received it, when. If 10% of people generate 90% of activity, you have a distribution problem. Flag anyone who hasn't been recognized in 30+ days and personally invite them in.

5

Tie Every Recognition to a Value Explicitly

"This shows our value of [X]." Without this link, recognition stays social — it doesn't build culture. Values become living behavior, not wall decor.



Give River automates tracking, analytics, and value-tagging — so your Culture Captain spends time on culture, not administration.



Guidance

Sustain Through Change

This is the foundation everything else is built on. Without clear expectations, regular feedback, and coaching, every other element eventually stalls.

WHAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE



14.9% ↓

turnover when employees receive consistent feedback (Gallup)



2x

more likely to be engaged when managers set clear expectations (Gallup)

MEASURE THIS

1:1 completion rate: % of managers holding weekly check-ins — target 90%+

Goal progress: % of individual/team goals on track at mid-Season

How To Run a Guidance Season

Structure creates freedom. When expectations are clear and feedback is consistent, people stop guessing and start growing.

1

Set Individual Development Goals

Ask each team member to define 1–2 personal growth targets for the Season. Not performance metrics — development goals. "I want to get better at presenting" or "I want to learn to delegate." Write them down and share with their manager.

2

Align Team-Level Objectives

As a team, pick 2–3 shared objectives for the Season. These should be specific enough to track and ambitious enough to matter. Post them somewhere visible — a shared doc, a wall, a Slack channel.

3

Launch Weekly 1:1 Check-ins

Every manager holds a 15–20 minute weekly check-in with each direct report. Not a status update — a development conversation. Two questions: "What's going well?" and "Where are you stuck?" Consistency matters more than length.

4

Run a Mid-Season Progress Review

Halfway through: revisit individual and team goals. What's on track? What needs to shift? This prevents the common failure mode of setting goals in week 1 and never looking at them again.

5

Close the Season With a Reflection

End with a team retrospective: what did we learn about how we work together? What will we carry into the next Season? Celebrate progress, not just completion.



Give River provides goal-tracking, milestone notifications, and coaching frameworks — so your Guidance Season runs on structure, not memory.



Gamification

Performance in Play

When work feels like play, people show up differently. This Season is about energy, connection, and breaking down silos through shared challenges.

WHAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE



90%

of employees report increased productivity with gamification (Zippia)



48%

improvement in collaboration when teams are cross-functional (Deloitte)

MEASURE THIS

Participation rate: % of team engaging in challenges — target 80%+

Cross-dept connections: # of new team pairings formed this Season

How To Run a Gamification Season

The fastest way to break silos and build energy. Friendly competition makes participation feel like play — not work.

1

Form Cross-Departmental Teams

Mix up the usual groups. Put engineering with marketing, operations with sales. Give each team a name and a shared Slack channel. The goal: people build relationships outside their daily orbit.

2

Launch Weekly Micro-Competitions

Short, fun challenges that anyone can participate in. Trivia, wellness challenges, creative prompts, problem-solving races. Keep them low-stakes and high-energy. Rotate the format weekly so it stays fresh.

3

Make the Leaderboard Visible

Post standings where everyone can see them. Points for participation, not just winning — this keeps it inclusive. Update weekly. A little friendly competition goes a long way when it's transparent.

4

Run a Team-Wide Event at the Midpoint

Halfway through the Season, do something bigger: a team game day, a collaborative challenge, a volunteer event as mixed teams. Shared experiences create bonds that Zoom calls can't.

5

Celebrate and Award at the Season Finale

End with a celebration. Recognize top teams, MVP participants, and most improved. Hand out rewards — gift cards, extra PTO, charity donations in the team's name. The finish line is what makes people want to run the next one.



Give River automates team formation, challenge delivery, leaderboards, and rewards — so your Culture Captain designs the fun, not the logistics.



Growth

Build a Learning Culture

Teams that grow together stay together. This Season builds a shared vocabulary, normalizes mistakes as learning, and makes development a team sport — not a solo grind.

WHAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE



14.9% ↓

turnover reduction with continuous learning and feedback



40% ↑

improvement in skills retention when learning is gamified

MEASURE THIS

Learning completion: % of team engaging with weekly content — target 75%+

AARs held: # conducted this Season — target 1 per major project

How To Run a Growth Season

People stay where they're growing. Short, consistent learning builds a team that gets better together — and trusts each other more.

1

Ask Your Team What They Want to Learn

Run a quick poll or open question: skill-building, leadership, wellness, industry trends? Let them shape the curriculum. Ownership drives completion.

2

Deliver Short, Weekly Learning Content

5–15 minutes. YouTube, podcasts, articles, or your own content. Consistency beats comprehensiveness — one thing weekly beats a course dump monthly.

3

Make Completion Visible and Celebrated

Track who engages and give points for completion. A weekly shoutout to top learners costs nothing and drives remarkable behavior change.

4

Run After-Action Reviews

After any big project: gather the team for 30 minutes. Three questions: (1) What did we set out to do? (2) What actually happened? (3) What will we do differently? Document the answers. The act of asking normalizes learning over blame.

5

End the Season With a Learning Showcase

Have 2–3 team members share something they learned or applied. Five minutes in an all-hands. The social proof compounds motivation for the next Season.



Give River delivers learning content automatically, tracks completion, and awards Season points with zero admin overhead.



Generosity

Connect to Greater Purpose

Purpose-connected work is the single highest-ROI culture investment. This Season bridges individual effort to collective impact — and creates the kind of belonging that no benefits package can replicate.

WHAT YOU CAN ACHIEVE



171% ↑

performance when work connects to purpose (Adam Grant, Wharton)



87%

of purpose-driven employees report higher engagement (Deloitte)

MEASURE THIS

📅 **Participation rate:** % of team contributing — target 70%+

📅 **Total impact:** \$ donated + volunteer hours logged this Season

How To Run a Generosity Season

Purpose-connected work is the highest-ROI culture investment. When effort becomes impact, people show up differently.

1

Let Your Team Choose the Causes

Run a quick vote on 3–4 causes or charities. Ownership of the mission dramatically increases participation — people give more when they chose the cause.

2

Connect Team Achievements to Giving

Tie participation milestones to charitable donations. When the team hits a recognition goal, a dollar amount goes to their chosen cause. Effort becomes impact.

3

Run Volunteer Challenges

Organize one team volunteer activity — together or skills-based. Even 2 hours as a group builds bonds that months of meetings can't. Shared experience is the shortcut to trust.

4

Share the Impact — Close the Loop

Once a month: share where the dollars went and who was helped. A photo, a letter, a 2-minute story. Visibility closes the purpose loop and recharges motivation for the next Sprint.

5

Celebrate the Season's Collective Impact

End the Season with the total: hours volunteered, dollars donated, causes supported. Make it real and visible. The finish line celebration is what makes people want to run the next Season.



Give River has built-in charitable giving integration that lets team achievements convert directly to real donations with zero admin work.

DIY vs. Give River

You can implement everything in this guide without Give River's free platform. Here's what changes when you use it.

DIMENSION	DIY	FREE GIVE RIVER PLATFORM
Admin time per month	5-15 hours	~30 minutes
Platform adoption rate	~20-30% avg	90%+ avg
Recognition tracking	Manual channel / spreadsheet	Automated + value tagging
Gamified Seasons	Custom-build each sprint	Pre-built templates, 1-click
Learning library	Weekly curation 3-5 hrs	100+ modules, auto-delivered
Analytics	Manual, delayed	Real-time + red flag alerts
Charitable giving	Separate tool or manual	Built-in giving integration
Coaching support	Self-directed	Expert network available

When DIY makes sense

Very small team (under 15) · Dedicated Culture Captain with 5+ hrs/week · Leadership willing to track everything manually · Okay with slower time-to-impact

When the Free Give River Platform makes sense

Team 25+ people · Limited admin time · Want to skip the DIY build and get straight to culture-building · Charitable giving is a priority

The Give River Platform is free to start — and preventing just 2-3 departures through better culture more than justifies growing into a paid plan.

Your Team's Championship Culture Starts Today.

THE GIVE RIVER PHILOSOPHY

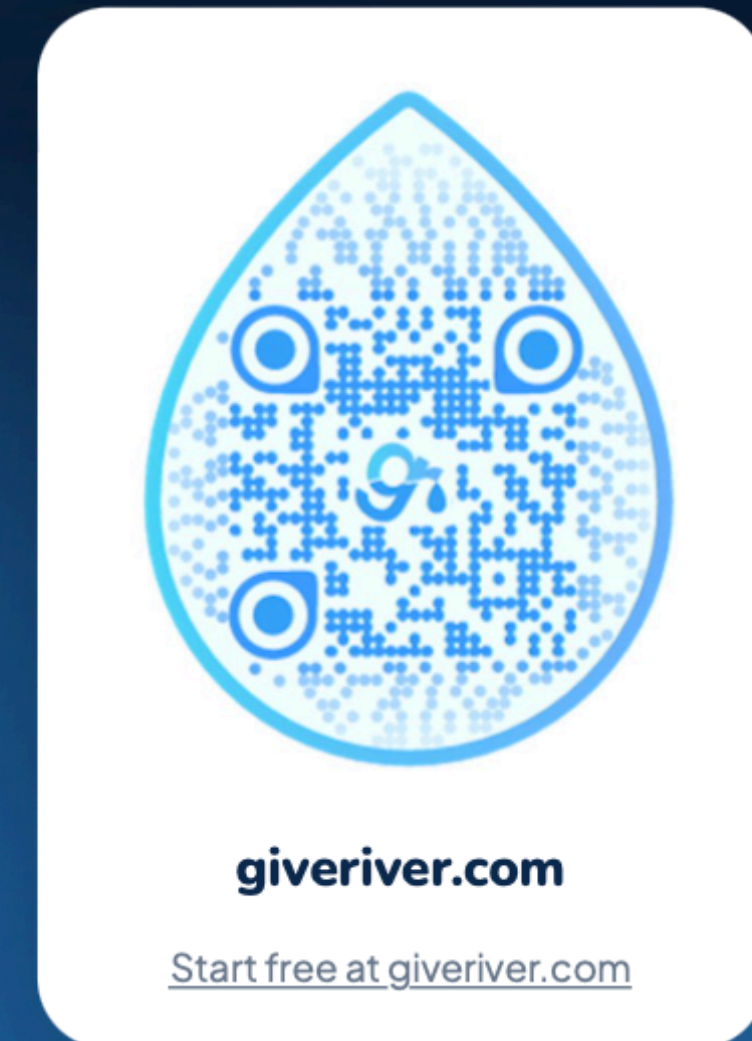
Just as individual drops come together to form a powerful river — your team's acts of recognition, growth, and collaboration combine to create a powerful, unstoppable force.

That's the Give River effect. And it starts with a single drop.

"Give River was the catalyst for a real culture shift. We had 100% participation in our first season, and the impact was undeniable."

— Mary Tran, CEO, EXP Future

SCAN TO GET STARTED



Book a Quick Call →

20 minutes. No pressure. Just conversation.