



Cadence Bank Podcast: In Good Companies

Season 3, Episode 5: All You Need Is Love: The Origins of “*Love as a Business Strategy*”

How much better would the world be if everyone loved going to work? How much more engaged would we be? How much more efficient? That’s the vision of Mohammad Anwar and Chris Pitre (Softway & Culture+), two co-authors of the WSJ-bestseller *Love as a Business Strategy*. They want to revolutionize the way companies do business, by putting people at the center of every decision. But this idea didn’t come out of nowhere. It was born from the real life transformation of their company, Softway. So on this episode, we’re telling that story: how a leader learned to love his team and, in doing so, transformed his company and himself.

Mohammad founded Softway when he was 20 years old, and he’d grown the business to over 300 employees since its inception. But by 2015, the company had developed a toxic culture, and Mohammad was known for his unprofessional outbursts. With the business struggling, morale was low. Two weeks after Chris was hired, Softway laid off a third of its workforce by gathering them in a conference room and telling them all at once. Mohammad didn’t know if the business would last another month.

But then he had a realization, and together he and Chris went on a journey to institute a “culture of love.” Through slow, quiet work, Mohammad changed his behaviors and made Softway a place that employees loved. Success soon followed. Now, they help other businesses change their own cultures. On this episode, we’ll explore the leader’s role in a culture of love: their responsibilities, behaviors and how they stand to benefit.

So, join us, as we answer the question: “What’s love got to do with it?”

Episode Transcript:

[00:00:00] **Mohammad Anwar:** We were broke. We couldn't do any of those things. We had to find ways to build a culture just by the way we treat one another. And guess what? It doesn't take time. You just have to show up to the meetings and treat your teammates with that love and compassion and kindness, which doesn't cost anything. So, it doesn't cost you time. It doesn't cost you money. So those excuses are down the drain.



[00:00:21] **Patrick Pacheco:** I'm Patrick Pacheco, and you're listening to season three of *In Good Companies* from Cadence Bank. The podcast where we share our wealth of knowledge to help you navigate the opportunities ahead. Because that's what Cadence is all about: the expertise and flexibility to do business on your terms. We're empowered to help, whether it's through our podcast or any of our more than 350 locations across the south and Texas.

[00:00:43] **Patrick VO:** Most of us spend 40 hours a week--at least! --at our job. That's half your waking life, Monday to Friday. Our most attentive hours, when the sun is shining and our coffee has kicked in, are spent with co-workers, colleagues and bosses.

How much better would the world be if everyone loved going to work? If it was a place that made us feel valued and excited? That's the vision of our guests today.

[00:01:12] **Chris Pitre:** My name is Chris Pitre and I'm the Vice President of Softway and the co-founder of Culture+, which is a subsidiary of Softway.

[00:01:19] **Mohammad Anwar:** My name is Mohammed Anwar. I'm the president and CEO of Softway and Culture+, I'm also the co-author of a Wall Street Journal bestselling book called *Love as a Business Strategy*.

[00:01:32] **Patrick VO:** Mohammad and Chris are just two of the minds behind the concept of "Love as a Business Strategy". And while that might sound crazy, it has the potential to be revolutionary. So, for our next two episodes, we'll be exploring their ideas. Next week, we'll get down into the nitty gritty of love as a business strategy: systems and strategies to empower employees, hire winners and create honest feedback, up and down your organization.

But today, I want to tell you a story. It's a love story, but not the kind you're used to. It's how a leader learned to love his team, and in doing so, transformed his company and himself. But before we start, we need to know: what is love as a business strategy?

[00:02:22] **Mohammad Anwar:** In the simplest of terms, love as a business strategy is where people are the center of any business decisions, and there's a misconception that exists inherently in the corporate world, that it's people are profit. Our decisions are at the cost of



people, right? Hey, if you want to make more profit, cut the comps and benefits first. Cut the 401k benefits, cut the food budget. Whereas over here, love as a business strategy is where you actually prioritize people. You put people at the center of all these decisions because they're ultimately responsible for driving profits for your business. So how do you empower them? How do you enable them to drive your business to success? Because people and profit can coexist. They are not opposites or polar opposites or exclusive.

[00:03:12] **Patrick VO:** Mohammad started his business, Softway, back in 1999. They offered custom technology solutions, like apps and ecommerce sites. And in the early days, it was all so simple.

[00:03:23] **Mohammad Anwar:** When I first started the company, I was 20 years old and I started it with my brother and some classmates from college. So, it was definitely the startup environment. The culture that was typical of startups were, you know, eating, sleeping, working day, night, hustling as much as possible and a lot of camaraderie. We take care of each other, we help each other and so forth. So that's how it started. But as we began to become successful and grow as an organization, our culture started to take a turn. And that had to do a lot with me as the CEO of the company. As we began to grow, we had over 300 employees within 10 years. I think success got to my head. And I started to model behaviors from other leaders of larger corporations that I had witnessed or interacted with. Our culture then took a turn to where it was more based on fear. I followed the command-and-control approach. It's my way or the highway approach. And led with behaviors that really created an environment of fear in the company. So, people were not showing up with their true self or putting their heart and passion into what they were doing. It was just, hey, do whatever gets us to get the paycheck and get the minimal work done. A lot of people would bring about feedback, but I wasn't willing to listen. Right? Because in my mind, this is what you need to do. This is how you become successful; this is how you make profits. This is what is necessary for the organization to be successful. I was also quite honestly trying to mimic quite a bit of the other organizations out there and say, but this is how it's done. So, I hear you, but this is business. So, I created that kind of an environment not knowing what I was doing.

[00:05:22] **Patrick VO:** By the time Chris joined in 2015, things had taken a turn.

[00:05:26] **Chris Pitre:** You had this organization of people who were skilled and talented, but you could hear a pin drop when you walked into the office. It was super quiet. The median age



in our organization is like 32 or 34, something like that. So it's really young, but it's like you could hear pin drops.

[00:05:44] **Patrick VO:** The culture at Softway had soured. Literally.

[00:05:47] **Patrick Pacheco:** So, there was a really distinct story in the book about a harsh email you sent regarding a dirty fridge in the break room. So, first off, how dirty was the fridge in the break room?

[00:05:57] **Mohammad Anwar:** It was really dirty. It was bad. I mean, not trying to rationalize why I wrote the email, but there were lunch boxes in there that had all kinds of, let's just say it was like a science experiment. It was really bad.

[00:06:09] **Patrick Pacheco:** So, you sent a message. What was that message like?

[00:06:13] **Mohammad Anwar:** Well, the message was downright aggressive. It called into question people's home training. I accused people of being lazy with a lot of passive aggressive tone in there. And I basically said, Hey, look, it's a privilege for you to have a refrigerator here, so if you're not going to keep it clean, I have the right to take it away, like all kinds of threats. And then also threaten them to get to clean the fridge no later than the end of day and acknowledge this email. You know, in a very threatening tone.

[00:06:46] **Chris Pitre:** I personally did not respond cause I was like, you ain't getting that from me. I'm still Alice Pitre's son, so there's no way that we're going to do that. My honest reaction, if I were to be completely candid, was, he lost his mind, but somebody needs to help him find it. And me being this new hire, I'm not using the fridge, I don't understand the fridge politics. I don't know whose stuff is in there. I've never opened it, but now I'm being accused of being lazy. You know, my home training is all in question. So, he's brought my mom into this, right? And I'm sitting here like, oh my gosh, what is going on?

[00:07:20] **Mohammad Anwar:** So that email unfortunately got circulated with ex-employees, made it to Glassdoor, and it became the laughing stock... Look what the CEO of Softway is up to. And even in that moment, I still justified it. I rationalized it, and I was not willing to have it any other way. That's how blinded I was.



[00:07:41] **Chris Pitre:** My peers, who were other directors at that time, they were talking and they were like, Chris, we really think you should be the one to go and talk to Mohammad. I'm sitting here, like me? I just got here. I'm two weeks in and you want me to go and have a crucial conversation with the CEO, who I don't even know?

[00:07:57] **Patrick Pacheco:** That's like the old, let's get Mikey.

[00:07:59] **Chris Pitre:** Yeah, exactly. And they're like, yeah, he'll probably listen because he doesn't know you very well. And I'm like, probably is not the confidence builder you think it is. I set up the meeting with Mohammad. It's a Friday at 4 p.m.; I'm like, if this does not go well, I get to leave and exit with dignity and without eyeballs. So, I got into that room and here I am, the new hire, having a conversation with the CEO about his behavior and how he's communicating, and I was just like, Hey, Mohammad. So, I want to talk about that email and I really want to understand, you know, what was your objective and what were you hoping to accomplish with that? And do you think there could have been another way to sort of get that outcome? And he looks at me and he's like, Chris, you don't understand. I know you're new here. You don't understand. I've been telling these people that they need to keep this fridge clean because this is a privilege. It's not a right. I don't have to give them a fridge. I was like, we're going in the wrong direction. I was like, I'm about to be known as the person who got the fridge taken away.

[00:08:56] **Mohammad Anwar:** Oh, immediately I was justifying why I did what I did. I wasn't having it; I wasn't willing to listen to him. I was rationalizing everything and justifying my actions, justifying my email.

[00:09:09] **Chris Pitre:** Then I finally just ripped the Band-aid off and I was like, well, Mohammed, I'm just going to be honest. If we were at my last job, you would've gotten fired for sending that out, because that's not how we talk to each other. That is just not the way that you unite a team. That's not the way that you communicate. That's not the way you get people sort of committed to changing their behavior.

[00:09:25] **Mohammad Anwar:** I really had that realization moment, wait a minute, that doesn't sound right. Maybe I did do something wrong.



[00:09:31] **Patrick VO:** The fridge email opened Mohammad's eyes to his behavior. But it was nothing compared to what happened next.

[00:09:39] **Patrick Pacheco:** Late 2015, you had, what you've referred to as Softway's Darkest Day. Can you kind of talk about that situation and what gave rise to that?

[00:09:47] **SFX:** Music in underneath

[00:09:48] **Mohammad Anwar:** You know, our company was on the verge of bankruptcy in 2015, 2016. Although we had had huge successes up until that point in time, and we had been in business almost 12 years, because of the culture, because of my behaviors, our company was on the verge of bankruptcy. And in order to keep the company from shutting down, we had to do layoffs. We had to layoff one third of our organization, almost a hundred employees, all in one day. The unfortunate thing is that we did so in a very dehumanizing manner. It was not something that I was proud of. I was having all kinds of doubts in my heart, at the moment, but I also was being told and reminded, this is how the corporate workplace is, this is how it should be done. So, I was just taking the guidance. I mean, still full ownership. I allowed it to happen and I did it. But at the moment, apparently this is the norm in the corporate workplace and that's how it should be done. So, we followed suit; we followed whatever was out there known to be done in terms of layoffs and mitigate any lawsuits, mitigate any legal consequences, speak as little as possible, just let them go. Right? Don't give any information. Don't divulge the why, don't say anything beyond X, Y, Z. Be stoic. Do it, get it done.

[00:11:12] **SFX:** Music crescendos, then ducks underneath

[00:11:14] **Mohammad Anwar:** All the people who were being laid off were asked to assemble in one conference room, one area. And then the people who were not getting laid off were asked to assemble in a different part of the office. And we announced all at once, gave them folders and said, you're being let go, there's boxes out there to go pack your stuff. The security guard will escort you to the parking garage. That was it. After that moment in time, I would say I hit the lowest point in my life. I did not know if I was the right person to continue to be the CEO of the company. I lost all my confidence. I questioned the existence of Softway. I didn't know if our company's doors would even remain open for a month longer. I hit the lowest point in my life at that point in time. For sure.

[00:12:00] **SFX:** Music finishes, and a little pause



[00:12:02] **Patrick VO:** It might be hard to have sympathy for Mohammad at this point. He was a bad boss: callous and prone to angry outbursts. But in his position, Mohammad also felt isolated and stressed. And that's a way that many leaders feel.

[00:12:19] **Patrick Pacheco:** So, let's talk about leaders. People might roll their eyes and say, you know, cry me a river and gimme a little violin to play. But being a leader is difficult. I mean it is hard to be sitting in the corner office or whatever office you sit in and lead a team. What challenges do you feel leaders face that employees are not aware of?

[00:12:37] **Mohammad Anwar:** There's a saying, I might butcher this saying, but you know, it gets lonely on the top. So, when you're a leader, one of the challenges that I think leaders face out there is the stress, the pressure of performance of the company, performance of their business objectives. They're not allowed to be vulnerable and open. They have to keep up this facade of being successful and being poised and know what they're doing. And that pressure of being artificial, of being someone that's not human and that's not really internally at your core, I think puts a lot of pressure on leaders. And that's where a lot of the stress, the anxiety, the pressures come from. Yes, there's realities of business pressure, the realities of making payroll, meeting the business needs and so forth. Those are not something I don't want to undervalue. But a lot of it is also just manufactured and that, I think, is a big part of the burden that leaders carry. They're not able to be vulnerable and be themselves because they think that's a sign of weakness.

[00:13:41] **Patrick VO:** When it comes to love as a business strategy, some leaders worry about what they lose: power, respect, time. But leaders have so much to gain from a culture of love.

[00:13:54] **Mohammad Anwar:** Love as a business strategy allows leaders to be human, allows them to be vulnerable and be valuable like everyone else. It automatically takes away this pressure of being someone you're not. I'd rather be Mohammed, you know, and I'd rather be who I am as a person inside of work and outside of work. I want to be true to myself and not try to put on this other jacket when I'm entering the workplace. So, Love as a Business Strategy allows us to create a culture where your team members become your support system and you see each other as humans first before titles. You're able to now go into a workplace knowing that you're not alone on this journey. You have a lot of people around you who can support



you, help you, and it makes your job a lot easier. So, there are a lot of benefits to leaders in following the culture of love.

[00:14:52] **Patrick VO:** Mohammad was lost. His company was crumbling, his staff avoided him and he felt like a failure. He didn't know where to turn. But he was about to have an experience that would change his life forever.

[00:15:07] **Mohammad Anwar:** A couple of weeks after the layoff, I received tickets to go to my alma mater's football game. I was looking forward to a distraction. I wanted to just forget about everything that was going on with the work and life, and I just wanted to go have a good time, and we were having a Cinderella season up until that point in time. So, I went to the game. We were ranked, playing another ranked opponent, but unfortunately going to the fourth quarter, we were losing by 20 points, playing with our third-string quarterback, and the stadium was emptying out. ESPN Game tracker predicted we had a 0.1% chance to win that night. I was disappointed as well. I debated if I should also leave the stadium and go home. But something inside of me told me to stay back, be there to watch the game. And I'm glad I did because I ended up witnessing one of the best comebacks in Cougar football history. We won that night with less than 30 seconds left on the clock, by 35 to 34. Watching the press conference of then rookie head coach Tom Hermann, who had taken us on a 10 and 0, record till that point in time. You know, one of the reporters asked him, Hey, what had led to the success that night or the resiliency in the comeback victory that night? And it's what he said that changed the course of my life. He said it was the love and support the football players had for one another. Genuine, you have my heart in your hand, kind of love. And that's the kind of love that is required to go win championship games. As he was saying all of this, you know, I was thinking and asking myself, do I love my team? Do I care for my team the way coach Tom Herman is describing? And the resounding answer that kept coming back was, no, I didn't; I did not care for my team the way he was describing. And that's when I had the realization that something has to change. And if I build a culture of love inside the walls of my business to emulate the success that the University of Houston Cougar football team was having, then I needed to change my behaviors and how I treated people and how I behaved with people. And that was the start of the journey.



[00:17:21] **Patrick VO:** When Mohammad brings up a culture of love with leaders, they often misunderstand.

[00:17:25] **Mohammad Anwar:** It is not the romantic type of love. It is the love where we can hold people accountable through trust and empathy. Love is not soft. But, it actually enables you to have tough conversations, tough love.

[00:17:39] **Chris Pitre:** For us, love is not always just about being nice and cordial and warm and happy go-lucky, holding hands and skipping through the daisies. For us, it's about really ensuring that people can say what needs to be said to get the thing done right. It means having the tough conversations. It means turning controversy and confrontation into effective and powerful conversations that actually might change the solution. It might open up an idea, it might open up a revenue stream. Right? And we have plenty of stories in our organization where one conversation that started out to be sort of uncomfortable, I don't think this is the way it should be, or I don't like this. Or this is rubbing me wrong. Turn into an opportunity, turn into a new partnership, turn into a better or deeper relationship with a client.

[00:18:30] **Patrick VO:** After feeling so lost, Mohammad held onto Coach Herman's words for dear life. He was excited to turn the page and share the culture of love with his team.

[00:18:42] **SFX:** Inspirational, orchestral music builds underneath

[00:18:44] **Mohammad Anwar:** The day after hearing that press conference, we had a company town hall meeting with our entire organization, and I decided to tell them, I love you all.

[00:18:53] **SFX:** Inspirational music falls apart.

[00:18:55] **Chris Pitre:** It was like somebody passed gas in church. It was not good. Everybody was just, like what? And nobody trusted it. Nobody believed it.

[00:19:04] **Mohammad Anwar:** I got the strangest and the weirdest looks. People were rolling their eyes, like, is this the same CEO that just laid off one third of the company is now telling us he loves us? What is going on? So I realized that, wait, I needed to really stop with the declaration and I needed to first learn to walk the talk.



[00:19:24] **Patrick VO:** Mohammad realized that if he wanted to create change, as a leader, it was up to him to lead the way.

[00:19:32] **Mohammad Anwar:** So, I went on a journey of just working on myself, trying to build a self-awareness of how I was being experienced by others and had to go on a commitment journey to try and strive to change my behaviors. The reality is the leaders have a magnified influence on the culture of any organization. Their behaviors set the tone. So, from the topmost leadership, if you want to see an effective culture transformation, it has to begin with leaders. Everyone has to get on board, but the starting process has to be with leadership. It has to begin with the topmost leaders embracing the culture of love and behaving and acting in ways that represent it. Because that sets the tone, it gives the permission, it gives other people the inspiration to follow their footsteps.

[00:20:21] **Patrick VO:** But leaders aren't always sure where to start when it comes to culture.

[00:20:26] **Patrick Pacheco:** So, what do you think are some of the misconceptions leaders have about culture when they think they're driving culture? They're creating culture?

[00:20:37] **Mohammad Anwar:** Leaders look at culture as, you know, the ice cream shops, the free food, the table tennis, all of those things as the definition of culture, a great culture. The reality is those are just perks and benefits. They're not culture. And that is the biggest misconception I have found. It's like, well, we have Taco Tuesdays and we have goat yoga on Thursdays. I'm like, that is not culture. That is just benefits. So, culture is ultimately the culmination of how we behave with one another, how we treat one another. That emotional environment that we create is what culture is and it is an intangible.

[00:21:20] **Patrick VO:** With his misguided "I love you" speech, Mohammad had stumbled upon an important lesson: culture isn't what you *say*, it's what you *do*.

[00:21:29] **Mohammad Anwar:** Think of it this way, I know we've heard of the saying "Culture eats strategy for breakfast" by Peter Drucker, and we are very fond of that saying, and we truly believe in it. But at Softway and Culture+ we have a saying, "If culture eats strategy for breakfast, then behaviors eat culture for lunch." Because at the end of the day whatever culture you aspire to build, it starts with the culmination of how you behave with one another. So, behaviors are the foundation, they're the bottom line that makes a difference to your



financial statements. The key to changing culture or strengthening culture is changing behaviors of people.

[00:22:05] **Patrick VO:** Chris points out that emotions aren't behaviors. Behaviors are what you do in response to emotions.

[00:22:11] **Chris Pitre:** I truly believe that when you're angry, everybody behaves differently. But unfortunately, especially in the workplace, everyone sees anger in one form of behavior, which is usually yelling and aggression. But when you're not angry and you're not aggressive, you can be passive, you could be quiet, you can ice people out, you can play mind games. I will be sarcastic with you. I will say the sharp biting comment that just shuts you down. That's where I go when I'm angry. And so, once I understood that personally, I just saw someone else. Maybe he wasn't as self-aware with his anger, but also, I wasn't there to judge. For a while there, whenever he was triggered, we just had this agreement that he would exit the room and I would follow and we would just talk about it. And after a while, he didn't need that because he found ways to emotionally regulate.

[00:23:03] **Patrick VO:** As part of this journey, Mohammad had to redefine what it meant to be a leader.

[00:23:11] **Mohammad Anwar:** I think we have to understand our role as a leader. What does it mean to be a leader? Our job is to make other people's jobs easier. Our job is to make them more successful, set them up in their career, make sure that they're doing the best work of their lives. Our job is to remove those obstacles, empower them and give them the necessary tools, resources to be successful. But as long as we're in this mindset of, well, I'm a leader, I'm more powerful, I am the one who owns this. You know, as long as we come with that mindset, we're going to expect other people to come serve us. And to become a leader, we have to first fundamentally reset our mindset, reset our operating system, as I would call it, what it means to be a leader. Then when you can start creating your behaviors, your policies, your processes that represent the roles of a leader are there to really serve the people, then everything else starts to fall in place.



[00:24:11] **Patrick VO:** Mohammad's favorite example of this? Open door policies.

[00:24:14] **Mohammad Anwar:** So, first of all, I think open door policies suck. Sorry for my language, but I think it's just another way to say, Hey, look, I have an office. I'm your boss. You want to talk to me? My door's open. Come walk the hall of shame to come talk to me. I think that in itself is not serving others. I think that's a policy that needs to be long gone. Leaders need to walk up to their team members. Leaders need to go to their team members where they are and say, Hey, how can I help you? Not sit in your cozy office and say, I have an open door. Come walk in anytime you like. It's still intimidating as hell for people to even do that. I personally did that, so I'm guilty. I had to then realize that I'm here to serve them. They're not here to serve me, so I need to go out to them. I should never ask them to come to my office.

[00:25:00] **Patrick Pacheco:** I think if leaders get anything from this podcast, that one statement is probably as important as they can just take that one thing away. I think it hugely, improves their relationship with their employees.

[00:25:14] **Patrick VO:** By reimagining his role, Mohammad knew what behaviors he wanted to emulate. And he started doing them.

[00:25:20] **Chris Pitre:** He started to really change how he showed up. So, one of the things that you should know about Mohammad is his awesome wife, Julia. She's a five-time Olympic medalist in diving. And she's also a great chef. So she usually makes his lunch and it's delicious, amazing, a totally different meal every single day. And he would bring extras and let people eat along with him. So, he started to offer up things that she would make to people and everyone strategically tried to eat with Mohammad during that time because it's like, who doesn't want to pass up on this really grade A quality food, because she was only organic. And so that was one of the ways that he really tried to start serving people in a way that didn't require anybody to do anything differently or the processes and sort of workflow to change.



[00:26:14] **Patrick VO:** Mohammad didn't make grand gestures, he took small, consistent steps. If employees stayed late, he stayed with them. When they went home, he left thank you notes on their desks. Once a team had to come in over the weekend and...

[00:26:30] **Chris Pitre:** He knew that took away from family time. So, Mohammad went out and bought gift cards to take the families out so that, you know, the employees could actually make up that time on Mohammad's dime for the overage. So, he started doing those really small things to not just say that he loved people, but to show it and let people see that it was real.

[00:26:49] **Patrick VO:** As Mohammad behaved more compassionately, something interesting happened. He found it was easier to control his outbursts.

[00:26:56] **Chris Pitre:** It started to change the way that he communicated. It started to change the way that when he was triggered, how he could get over that and actually get to a resolution and a joint solution with said person. You started to see that over time.

[00:27:00] **Patrick VO:** And something else happened too: Mohammad's behavior began to bring about change in others.

[00:27:10] **Patrick Pacheco:** Did this change of behavior change your behavior at all? Did you see yourself changing anything?

[00:27:20] **Chris Pitre:** In watching Mohammad change, I had to be real about how I showed up in certain situations. Right? I have this thing that I struggle with constantly, which is, I'm going to tell you once and if you choose to go forward, I'm like, I'm done. You're in that ditch by yourself, but I'm not helping. Right? So really helping others realize, hey, sometimes people need to hear it more than once. Sometimes people need someone to sit alongside them and work with them as they make calls or decisions, right? And so really changing my mindset to be of service and to not necessarily do the work for people, but to sit alongside them as they do it so that way they could be more self-sustaining afterward, they could learn a new skill. They could sort of apply it forward. So, for me it really was about shifting mindset and service mindedness to be even more conscious of how I'm coming across, but also how my voice or talent or knowledge is being transferred into the team that's doing the work.



[00:28:21] **Patrick VO:** This is how a culture of love gets implemented. It starts quietly, at the top.

[00:28:27] **Mohammad Anwar:** I think the key is that we have to act before we expect, so the leaders have to start behaving and acting in ways that are different, that is representative of the culture of love, so people can truly believe it and see that weight. This is real. The leaders are behaving differently. The leaders aren't poking my presentation like they used to. They're not focused on the font size. They're actually focused on what is the substance of the presentation. Something's different about my leader all of a sudden, right? They got to experience those differences first, those changes in behaviors first before they become believers of the cultural love themselves.

[00:29:04] **Chris Pitre:** Actually, the way that we went about it is we didn't require sort of stand-up new values and vision and tell everybody to get on board. Mohammad first started it with him. And then what he wanted to do is after he started to change, he started inviting feedback from the contributor level. And as he was talking to them, the feedback came less about him and more about us as leaders. And that's when he realized, okay, now I need to get my leaders on board. So, we actually did a two-day offsite and we brought all of the leaders, and we had our team write anonymous letters about how we as leaders made them feel. And I'll remember that some of them actually said, when I'm with you guys, I just feel so small. I feel like I'm unheard. You hear some of those things and that was sort of the big awakening for the leadership team. We encourage everybody, like if you're a leader who's never gotten honest feedback, you should try and solicit some anonymous letters because you might get some honesty that you haven't really gotten in your career. And as a result of that, that's when the work really transformed.

[00:30:15] **Patrick VO:** Mohammad was growing as a leader, and management had begun to change, too. But there was still hesitation from employees. Because there was still something important Mohammad hadn't done.

[00:30:27] **Mohammad Anwar:** So, I think the biggest journey for me was reaching a journey of forgiveness and the biggest obstacle for me was short of apologizing. Just couldn't get to the point of apologizing until about a year and a half into my journey. When I then openly apologized to the whole organization and sought forgiveness is when I think it started to flip where people were then able to really see that I was genuinely trying, I was genuinely human. And I think when that grace was extended to me, things started to move a lot faster.



[00:31:04] **Patrick VO:** Grace and forgiveness are key parts of the culture of love.

[00:31:09] **Chris Pitre:** You should still be able to empathize with people who might have messed up or made a mistake and so as a team, we also do like to make sure that we provide each other grace.

[00:31:19] **Patrick Pacheco:** Yeah, I think that probably some of the most powerful words that any man can ever speak was, I was wrong, and I'm sorry. And those are very difficult for anybody to say. I mean, in relationships at work, anything. So, you know, I commend you on getting to that point.

[00:31:34] **SFX:** exciting music in

[00:31:35] **Mohammad Anwar:** After that moment in time, that was a very pivotal moment in our journey that led us to then operate at a more unified front. We were able to do things that we were not able to do before, and that propelled our business outcomes. It helped us become a profitable business again. We tripled our revenues, improved our margins by 42 percentage points, and reduced our attrition from 30% to 12%. You know, we started to grow our accounts with customers. Everything just started to become more and more positive as a result of that.

[00:32:09] **Patrick VO:** Chris could see that the whole company had changed.

[00:32:12] **Chris Pitre:** The reason why I can say I saw it is because clients saw it. When our clients came back and said, you guys are a different organization, a different team. We had this one client group where our meetings started out to be 30-minute check-ins weekly. And then the 30 minutes grew into an hour. The hour grew into two hours. The two hours grew into four hours on site. And then we would just spend the whole day with this client. We would all be working on different things, but they just enjoyed the environment and the atmosphere. So much so that they didn't want to go back to their desks.

[00:32:46] **Patrick VO:** In fact, the shift led to a whole new business: Culture+.

[00:32:51] **Mohammad Anwar:** When we finally encountered this culture of love and tried to bring it into the workplace and experimented with our own environment, one of our largest customers noticed our transformation and asked us, Hey, can you help us with our leaders and our culture? And we're like, wait a minute. We're a technology firm. We don't do that kind of



stuff. But they pushed us and empowered us to do a pilot. And that pilot led us to travel the whole world. We've trained 1,400 leaders from 46 different nationalities and backgrounds. We traveled to 10 different countries all over the world and we imparted training on how to lead with love. And every session we went, we met humans from every corner of the globe with different backgrounds, differences in language, religion, ethnicity, gender, you name it. And every one of them resonated with the concept of love. And they were like, this needs to be shared with the world. This deserves the world to know that this is the way to move forward and anything and everything we do, we want to bring back humanity to the workplace.

[00:33:53] **Patrick VO:** Mohammad is by no means perfect, but now he's better equipped to deal with his mistakes.

[00:33:59] **Mohammad Anwar:** Oh, absolutely. And it happens even today, at the company, they've coined the phrase, oh, Mo's having a "moh-ment", which means I'm reverting back to maybe some of my past behaviors, but at the same time, I think that is self-awareness, right? You don't flip the switch and all of a sudden, you're this great human, it's a journey. And the more you can catch yourself doing those things, it's a victory. It's a win in my mind because now I'm at least having the awareness, and think, wait a minute, versus before, I wouldn't even care. I wouldn't even know I had done something wrong cause I had no awareness. So, it's a journey. This journey is a never-ending journey. It's a permanent state of transformation; you're never done. And also, we're human and we all make mistakes. We all have moments, we all have stressors that sometimes can push us to the limits, but what's beautiful about the culture of love is that people accept that. People appreciate that people can have bad days, can have moments, but it's how we show up for each other in those moments is what is different than if you were not practicing a culture of love where people are forgiving, where people are now empathetic and appreciate and want to help and say, Hey Mo, I see you're having a moment. Can I do anything? Is there something that's bothering you? Can I help you? Versus before, if I had a moment, first of all I wouldn't even be aware of it. And then secondly, everybody else would be just scared and not even care and run away as far as possible in a culture of love. There would be other ways around where they will actually reach out to you, want to help you, want to support you.

[00:35:44] **Patrick VO:** And Mohammad thinks that if he can do it, anyone can.

[00:35:49] **Patrick Pacheco:** So, what about leaders who tell you, we'd love to do this, but we just don't have time.



[00:35:54] **Mohammad Anwar:** Just making an excuse. I have a whole chapter in the book called No Excuses. It's the last chapter, every single excuse that I have heard in my whole career for leaders, including my own. I have a rebuttal for every single one of them. I will tell you, it doesn't cost you money. It doesn't cost you time because all we're asking of you is to treat one another better, treat one another with love. And trust me, you don't need ping pong tables. You don't need ice cream parties. In fact, when we were bankrupt, we were broke. We couldn't do any of those things. We had to find ways to build a culture just by the way we treat one another. And guess what? It doesn't take time. You just have to show up to the meetings and treat your teammates with that love and compassion and kindness, which doesn't cost anything. So, it doesn't cost you time. It doesn't cost you money. So those excuses are down the drain. They don't work.

[00:36:46] **Patrick VO:** And though the change is hard, it's worth it.

[00:36:50] **Mohammad Anwar:** Because we believe that if you want to see a change in the world, a place that we have ignored far too long is the workplace. And if we can help institute change in the workplace, then we might be able to change the world.

[00:37:03] **Patrick VO:** I hope you've learned as much as I did from Mohammad's journey. A culture of love can be transformative, both to your bottom line and your business life.

1. I suggest you think about your team. Do you have a culture of love? Do your employees feel the same?
2. It's up to you as the leader to be the catalyst.
3. Behaviors are the bricks with which you build your culture. Think about the kind of leader you want to be and act accordingly. Even if it's hard, remember: leading with love is free and the benefits could be enormous. There are no excuses.

But there's so much more to learn about the culture of love. Tangible frameworks, hiring strategies and ways to build it into the fabric of your business. And that's why Chris and Mohammad will be back next week--to discuss how to revolutionize your communication, empower your employees and harness the power of tough love.



Thank you to Mohammad Anwar and Chris Pitre. We've only scratched the surface of love as a business strategy. If you want to learn more, check out their best-selling book, or better yet, their podcast! We'll link to both in the show notes. And if you've been inspired to become a better leader, consider this:

[00:38:28] **Mohammad Anwar:** We have programs that we offer called Seneca Leaders, where we basically take leaders through an introspective journey to build that self-awareness and get them to realize that, wait a minute, I'm not the leader who I think I am. It's inspired by, obviously, love as a business strategy, but if you've read the book, trust me, it's nothing like the book. It is a very transformational experience that leaders go through to build that self-awareness. And it's done in a very psychologically safe manner, but you will come out of that session committed to transform. And if you personally are a CEO and a leader, I would highly encourage you to go to our website, senecaleaders.com, to find upcoming Seneca Leaders Sessions. We are actually hosting Seneca Leader events at the University of Houston Football Stadium, where it all began. But we also travel occasionally for destination training so you can get up to date details on events that you and your leaders and your managers can attend and build that self-awareness muscle.

[00:39:51] **Patrick Pacheco:** If you enjoyed the show, we'd appreciate it if you'd write a review on your podcast app. Or if you're short on time, you can just rate it as five stars. It only takes a second. And while you're there: subscribe! We'd love to have you. Because when you're with us, we're in good companies.

In Good Companies is a podcast from Cadence Bank member FDIC, Equal Opportunity Lender. Sheena Cochran is our production coordinator. Our executive producer is Danielle Kernell with writing and production from Andrew Ganem and sound design and mixing by Ben Cranell at Lower Street Media. I'm your host, Patrick Pacheco.

[00:40:25] **Outline:** Disclaimer (General Disclosure #1)