

A CONCEIVIAN BRIEFING · IV

# On *Moods*

The invisible weather a leader brings into every room, and why it decides what the whole company can see.

SAQIB RASOOL · AUGUST 27, 2025

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PREPARED FOR LEADERS, MISSION CAPTAINS, AND MOBILIZERS

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“A mood is not an inner condition. It comes neither from outside nor from inside, but arises from being-in-the-world itself.”

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

## ABOUT THIS BRIEFING

For the leader who walks into a room and notices everyone has gone quiet, and cannot say why. Read this if you have begun to suspect the temperature of your company is set by you, but cannot tell which moods you are spreading or how to change them. You will leave able to see the invisible weather you carry into every meeting, and the few moves that change what the whole company can see.

A leader's mood is never private. It is the weather the whole company lives in. And like weather, it decides what can grow.

**T**he skills for working with moods are the most foundational skills for leading a powerful life and a powerful enterprise, and they are almost never taught. We are taught strategy, finance, operations. We are not taught that beneath all of it runs something that quietly governs what we and our people can even see. A mood of ambition and possibility opens hidden doors. A recurring mood of resentment, resignation, or skepticism will waste a leader's time, drain a team, and corrode a company, no matter how good the strategy on paper.

So let us be precise, because precision is where the power is. A mood is not an emotion. Emotions and feelings are sense based, physical, short lived, the jolt of anger at an insult, the lift of good news. They come and go in minutes. A mood is something else entirely. A mood is long lived, mostly invisible to the person living inside it, and it is the background orientation that decides what seems possible at all. As the philosopher Matthew Ratcliffe puts it, echoing Heidegger, we are always in some mood, and what looks like the absence of mood is just the presence of a hidden one. Gloria Flores says it beautifully: moods are windows to our assessments and to the standards beneath them. Become sensitive to your mood, and you can open the curtains and see how you have been seeing.

Here is the shortest true definition I know. A mood is your opinion about the future. If you believe that an opportunity exists in this difficult situation regardless of the obstacles, you hold a powerful mood, and you will act into it. If you believe all hope is lost and nothing you do will matter, you are stuck in a powerless one, and you will quietly stop trying. You might object that it depends on the situation. It does not. Two leaders can face the identical breakdown. One meets it as new ground to learn and move on. The other concludes they are surely going to be harmed and there is nothing to be done, and so retreats into what worked in the past, and repeats it. Same situation. Opposite futures. The difference was the mood.

Change is simply an opportunity for the reconfiguration of power. Your mood decides whether you can see the opening or only the threat.

## I

# Moods are contagious, and the leader is the source

Moods come to us over long stretches of time, from our family, our history, our culture, and we infect each other with them constantly. They are largely invisible to us and yet plainly visible to others. This is the fact that makes mood the central instrument of leadership, and the one most leaders never pick up.

In a company, the dominant mood almost always originates at the top. A leader living in fear produces a company where every request feels like a trap and every promise arrives wrapped in insurance. A leader living in resignation produces teams who have quietly concluded that nothing here will change, and who are usually right, because the person setting the weather has already decided it. Entire countries carry shared moods this way. Chauncey Bell observed that resignation is widespread in the modern world, the mood that says, I am capable, but no one cares about what I care about, so there is nothing I can do. You can hear that exact mood inside a struggling company, in the passive voice, the unspoken complaint, the meetings where no one states a real position. It is not a personnel problem. It is a mood, and it spreads from wherever the power sits.

## II

# The leader who is too nice to lead

Now let me name a mood that hides as a virtue and quietly weakens more leaders than any other. Being nice. We tend to treat it as a fixed feature of personality, but there is no such fixed thing. What we call personality is a jumble of opinions about how life works and the habits built up around them, and all of it is far more changeable than we believe. Being nice is not character. It is a mood, an opinion that says if I am not liked, things will not go well for me.

For a leader, this mood is expensive. It is the executive who will not have the hard conversation, who tolerates what should not be tolerated, who lets a missed commitment slide rather than name it, all to remain liked. My teacher James McManis used to say that nice people stink up the world, and in an enterprise he was right, because the nice leader sends a standing invitation to be taken advantage of, and the whole company learns that accountability is optional here. There is a quieter cousin of this too, the leader who keeps a happy front while sitting on an unspoken grudge, what the French call *ressentiment*, a silent compromise of integrity that never gets confronted and so never gets resolved. It poisons relationships from underneath while everyone smiles.

The replacement for being nice is not being harsh. It is being straight. When you are straight, you stop violating your own conscience. You name what is not working, you hold yourself and others accountable, you own your own mistakes plainly, and you stop pretending. Being straight requires vulnerability, you

risk the thing you were getting by staying quiet, and that is exactly why it carries power. A leader who is willing to be straight changes the mood of an entire organization, because people can finally trust that what is said is real.

When you are being nice, you are protecting yourself. When you are being straight, you are leading.

### III

## The vicious cycle, and how companies get stuck in it

Bad moods do not stay single. They compound. Something breaks down, a partnership, a team, a relationship, and instead of confronting it, we build a quiet resignation about it. Then, on top of that, we build a second mood, a mood about ourselves for being in the situation at all. I was foolish to hire this person. I should have seen this coming. We refuse to forgive ourselves, which is itself a form of arrogance, an ungrounded faith that we should have been able to think our way to a perfect decision. Now there are two locks on the door. A bad mood about the situation, and a bad mood about ourselves. This is the vicious cycle, and it is a downward spiral that drains the life out of leaders and the companies they run. The longer it grips, the stronger it gets, until it begins to look like permanent bad luck.

The only way out is to stand authentically in the middle of the breakdown and own your own part in it. Not to blame, and not to grovel, but to tell the truth about what happened and where you participated in making it. For a leader this often means a real conversation that is long overdue, a standard finally named, a withhold finally spoken. And it means forgiving your past self, because whatever you decided back then, you decided with the skills and the seeing you had at the time. You are not the same person now. The decision you regret was the best your past self knew to make, and the decisions you make today may look like mistakes to your future self too. Extend that self the same forgiveness in advance. That forgiveness is what unlocks the second door and lets you move again.

### IV

## The moods that block a company from learning

Most failures, if you look closely, are failures of learning, and the refusal to learn is itself a mood. A company that cannot learn cannot adapt, and in this era that is fatal. The culprits are familiar once named, the hurry that says there is no time to learn, the overwhelm that says there is too much to ever

get serious about, the playing small that says I am not capable of this, and underneath them the quiet self blame that says I never get anything right. What replaces them is not forced positivity but curiosity, wonder, and a measured optimism, the genuine joy of encountering a new world rather than grimly extracting information from it. The modern leader has access to more knowledge than any human in history and often the least joy in learning. Yet the leader who can hold curiosity in a crisis, especially when they know nothing, can take the breath, drop the panic, and actually see the situation, while everyone around them runs scared and repeats the past.

## V

### A leader's map: blockers, destroyers, and builders

Moods can be characterized, and what can be characterized can be changed. Most people drown in their moods because they cannot name them, and the sharp knife of precise articulation is the beginning of mastery. Over a decade of work with leaders and their enterprises, I have found people living in three broad families of mood, and naming them gives a leader a usable map rather than a vague intuition.

The first family are the **blockers**, the moods that quietly impede progress and close off a new future. Anxiety, confusion, frustration, heroism, resignation, and what I call hysterical industriousness, the mood that says I have no time to think, just get this done, and which makes any honest diagnosis of a hard situation impossible. Inauthentic serenity belongs here too, the leader who reports being fine while privately suffering. The second family are the **destroyers**, the moods to avoid at almost any cost, arrogance, cynicism, overwhelm, playing small, and hubris, which is having every possibility open to you and no gratitude for it. Blockers and destroyers share one root, a deep resistance to the new. Living in them, a leader meets every disruption with fear or with the urge to extract something quickly, and forgets to bring curiosity and wonder, and so the disasters only grow.

The third family are the **energizers and builders**, the moods worth cultivating deliberately, because they increase a leader's power in every dimension. Ambition, which says I see opportunity here and I am committed to acting. Confidence, which says I have done hard things before and I am competent to act now. Awe, which says I do not know what is going on, but life is full of openings and I am glad to be here. By learning to tell builders from blockers from destroyers, a leader brings forward both the hidden possibility and the hidden mess, so that both can finally be worked with.

## VI

## Orchestrating the mood of a team

Here is where this becomes a daily leadership practice rather than a private insight. The single most practical move I know is to share moods openly with a team. In our own company, each person names their mood at the start of the morning. When someone names joy or ambition, we let ourselves be infected by it. When someone names confusion or resignation, we hear it not as a problem to fix on the spot but as a shared concern and an opening for exploration.

The discipline here is subtle and it matters. You do not rush to fix the mood. Moods do not shift on command, and trying to fix one in the moment teaches people to stop being honest about theirs. You simply let it be named, thank the person for their candor, and let the work continue. That alone, the naming, begins a quiet phenomenon of care and trust, because people learn they can be authentic here without repercussion. A leader who builds this practice is engineering the emotional substrate of the enterprise directly, and far more powerfully than any values poster ever could. And it works on the leader too. I often see my own mood most clearly only when I am listening to my team name theirs, and when I genuinely cannot tell what mood I am in, which is itself the sign of a hidden one, I ask the people around me to help me name it.

Good moods, when they appear,  
are cause for celebration. Bad  
moods, when they appear, are  
cause for concerned  
investigation. Dread none.  
Cultivate the builders with  
patience.

### VII

## The mood a leader must cultivate above all

If there is one mood worth a leader's deliberate cultivation above all others, it is the one Fernando Flores named as the foundation of leadership in turbulent times, the mood of emotional fortitude. It is the union of serenity and confidence, confidence in the world to keep opening possibilities, and confidence in yourself to see them and act. It is the capacity to remain resolute and unperturbed in the face of whatever arrives. The image is a mountain in a storm. The waves rise and crash against it, again and again, and the mountain does not move.

This is not the absence of mood, and it is certainly not the performance of being a cool, detached, unbothered executive. You are not a robot void of feeling. You are a human being full of potential, and the work is not to suppress what arrives but to meet it. Which returns us to where we began, with Rumi, who understood moods seven centuries before we built taxonomies for them. Every mood that arrives, even the dark and unwelcome ones, the meanness, the shame, the crowd of sorrows, is to be met at the door and treated honorably, because each may be clearing you out for some new delight. The leader who can welcome what arrives, name it precisely, and stand like the mountain while it passes, holds the one capacity that no strategy, no tool, and no machine will ever replace.

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“A mood is your opinion about the future. Learn to name it, and you can begin to choose it.”

SAQIB RASOOL

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This Briefing draws on the tradition of Fernando Flores and Gloria Flores, our teacher Chauncey Bell, and the phenomenology of mood in Heidegger and Matthew Ratcliffe. The poetry of Rumi reaches us through the translations of Coleman Barks. We offer it in their debt.

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