

Have you ever worked on a team where it felt like you didn't belong? Like you were completely disconnected from others, like you were speaking a completely different language? Or worse, maybe it felt like there was strong dissonance that led to interpersonal issues. At one point or another, it seems like most people have had an experience like this. It can feel difficult to pinpoint where exactly this originates from and, often, it can be traced back to a sense of belonging. When someone feels like they're not fitting in or that they're not accepted by the in-crowd, a lack of belonging is where the central issue lies. But what does belonging have to do with management? When there's a lack of belonging, it affects productivity and collaboration within your team.

A sense of belonging is something that we're all striving for: acceptance from colleagues and managers and self-assurance that how you show up as an individual is valued to the team. As managers, you have a lot of influence on how to cultivate this concept within your team. This builds off what was shared in October's newsletter on [Psychological Safety](#), so I'd recommend checking that out if you haven't done so already. By bringing some of these concepts to the table, you're going to be on your way at creating a more interconnected team and creating a strong sense of belonging.

Until next month!

Let us know what you think about the newsletter and what you'd like to see in the future!

[Jesse Heath](#)

Employee Relations Coordinator  
[Human Resource Services](#)

[Feedback Form](#)

## Belonging

**"True belonging is not passive. It's not fitting in or pretending or selling out because it's safer."**

**It's a practice that requires us to be vulnerable, get uncomfortable, and learn how to be present with people without sacrificing who we are."**

-René Brown

Belonging is more than just a buzzword when it comes to effective teams. It's at the cornerstone of productivity, engagement, collaboration, and innovation. Belonging goes beyond just feeling welcomed; it's the sense that each member of the team is respected, valued, and integral to the department's mission. It's a feeling that the way the employee shows up as their authentic self makes a difference to the team, that they're more than just another cog in the machine. But what does it mean to cultivate belonging at work, and how can your team actively create an environment like this?

### What is Belonging?

Belonging is the feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity in a group. In a workplace, this translates to employees feeling safe and valued for their unique contributions. When employees feel they belong, they are more likely to bring their whole selves to work, contributing their ideas and energy fully.

### Why Does It Matter?

Belonging impacts more than just morale. Studies consistently show that belonging leads to better engagement, lower absenteeism, and higher job satisfaction. A 2019 study by [BetterUp](#) found that employees who feel they belong are 50% less likely to quit and show a 56% increase in job performance. The benefits extend to organizational reputation too!



### Key Elements of Belonging in the Workplace

#### Psychological Safety

Psychological safety means that employees feel comfortable speaking up, making suggestions, or even admitting mistakes without fear of punishment or ridicule. Leaders can create this environment by modeling open-mindedness, encouraging vulnerability, and treating mistakes as learning opportunities.

#### Clear & Open Communication

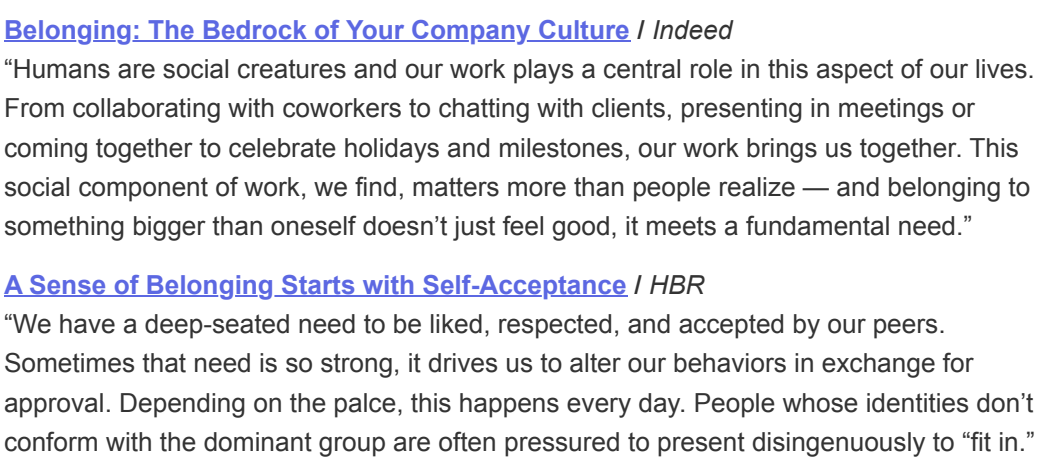
Transparent and open communication fosters trust within teams. When leadership communicates openly about changes, challenges, and goals, employees feel more connected to the team's mission. The sense of connection to a larger purpose enhances a feeling of belonging and shows employees that they're integral to success.

#### Recognition and Appreciation

Recognizing and rewarding employees for their unique contributions, whether through formal rewards or simply acknowledging efforts, helps reinforce their role within the organization. Appreciation does not have to be extravagant; sincere, frequent expressions of thanks from managers and colleagues can go a long way in making employees feel valued.

#### Opportunities for Growth

A sense of belonging is often tied to a sense of investment. When employees see that their organization is invested in their development and provides opportunities for growth, they're more likely to feel committed and connected. This could involve training programs, mentorship opportunities, or simply creating a culture where growth is encouraged and supported.



### How to Cultivate Belonging in the Workplace

Building a workplace where everyone feels they belong requires intentional practices and a commitment from all levels of the organization. Here are some strategies to help build belonging within a workplace:

#### Foster an Inclusive Leadership Style

Leaders set the tone for workplace culture. By demonstrating an inclusive leadership style—valuing all opinions, welcoming feedback, and encouraging participation—leaders can model a culture of belonging. Holding regular check-ins, actively listening to team members, and creating opportunities for every employee to contribute builds a foundation of trust and respect.

#### Promote Cross-Functional Collaboration

Belonging is often fostered through shared experiences and relationships. When employees have opportunities to work with colleagues across departments, they build a stronger network within the company and a broader understanding of the organization. Collaboration creates opportunities for mutual respect and appreciation, strengthening a sense of belonging.

#### Implement Mentorship Programs

Pairing employees with mentors can be a powerful way to increase belonging. Mentorship provides guidance and support, making staff feel cared for and invested in. It can be especially impactful in promoting a sense of belonging by helping individuals achieve their professional goals within the team.

#### Solicit and Act on Feedback

A department that listens to its employees and acts on their input is more likely to foster loyalty and belonging. Feedback is only effective when the organization responds and adapts based on employees' needs and insights, so don't provide assessments if you do not intend to follow through on results.

A culture of belonging is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing commitment. It requires regular evaluation, open dialogue, and adaptability. By building a culture where every employee feels they belong, teams can set the stage for a more engaged, innovative, and resilient workforce.

## Additional Resources for Belonging

### Articles

[Belonging: The Bedrock of Your Company Culture](#) / *Indeed*

"Humans are social creatures and our work plays a central role in this aspect of our lives. From collaborating with coworkers to chatting with clients, presenting in meetings or coming together to celebrate holidays and milestones, our work brings us together. This social component of work, we find, matters more than people realize—and belonging to something bigger than oneself doesn't just feel good, it meets a fundamental need."

[A Sense of Belonging Starts with Self-Acceptance](#) / *HBR*

"We have a deep-seated need to be liked, respected, and accepted by our peers. Sometimes that need is so strong, it drives us to alter our behaviors in exchange for approval. Depending on the palce, this happens every day. People whose identities don't conform with the dominant group are often pressured to present disingenuously to "fit in." Under these circumstances, a sense of belonging is hard to come by."

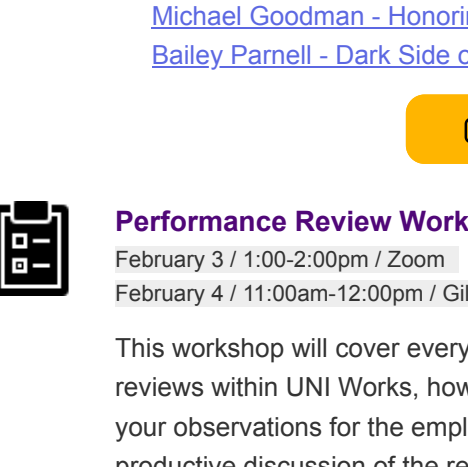
[How Workplace Belonging Influences Employee Success](#) / *SHRM*

"There are business implications to psychological safety—or its lack. Harvard Business Review noted such feelings have been "well established as a critical driver of relationships, greater innovation and more effective execution in organizations." It also appears psychological safety is tied to resiliency—the ability to adapt to stress, change and disruption, and to reduce risks such as employee burnout and turnover, according to MeQuilibrium. For example, among employees considered most resilient, 89 percent said team members valued and respected each other's contributions."

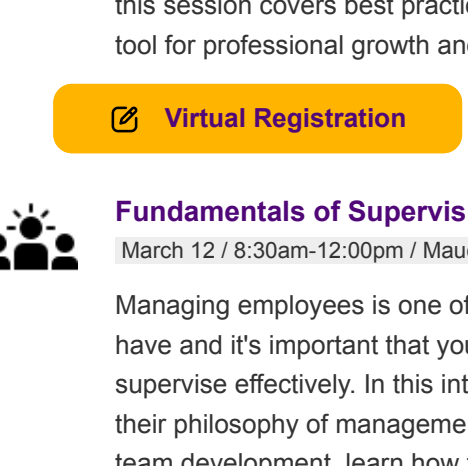
[A Culture of Belonging Creates a Team That Thrives](#) / *Forbes*

"As a leader, you play an essential role in shaping an organizational culture that fosters high performance and success—for individuals, the team, and the business as a whole. Creating an inclusive environment where each person feels valued for who they are enhances employee engagement and overall satisfaction. It means people have both the support and the motivation to show up and contribute their full talents every day. Who wouldn't want to lead and work in an environment like that?"

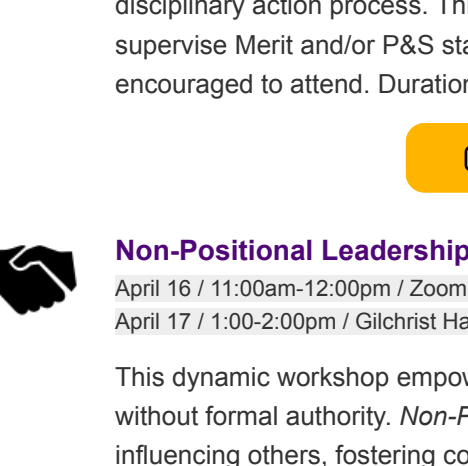
### Videos



How do you foster a culture of belonging in your workplace? One way is through a concept called "bridging," which acknowledges our individual needs, values, and worldviews while honoring our shared humanity. Incorporating bridging into your workplace may help people feel less isolated and more included.



Building a strong culture is what builds a strong organization. Simon highlights the importance of having difficult conversations, giving feedback the way others receive it best, the problems with "compliment sandwiches", and more.

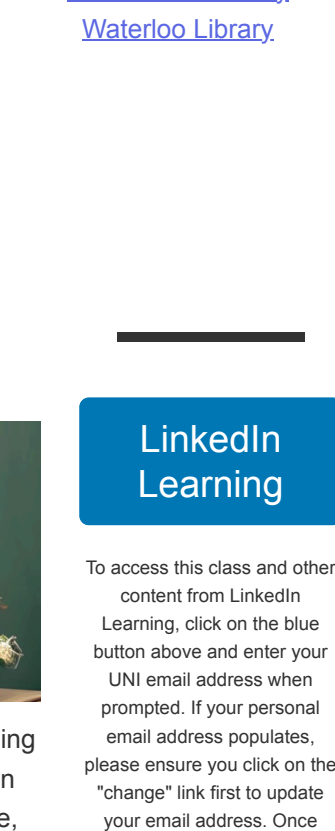


Ever see red? It's called being defensive, and turns out, it is the single greatest inhibitor to true collaboration. Jim Tamm shares years of experience in getting out of the red zone and cultivating a "green zone" attitude. Jim Tamm is a former law professor and senior administrative law judge for the state of California. He mediated nearly 2,000 employment disputes and handed down legal decisions that impacted national labor policy.

### Read Recommendation

*You Belong: A Call for Connection* by Sebene Selassie

You are not separate. You never were. You never will be. We are not separate from each other. But we don't always believe it, and we certainly don't always practice it. In fact, we often practice the opposite—disconnection and domination. From unconscious bias to "cancel culture," denial of our inherent interconnection limits our own freedom.

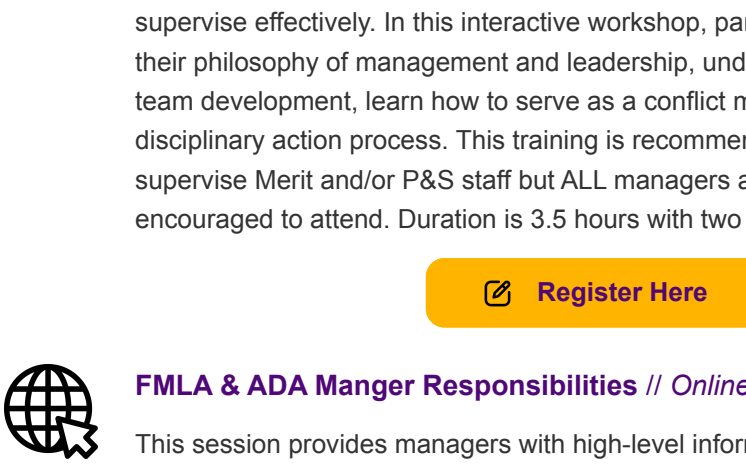


Available At:  
[Cedar Falls Library](#)  
[Waterloo Library](#)

**Notable Quotable:** "I was having a bumpy ride. I could sit there all day every day with my blabbering, deluded mind going on and on. But the only real possibility for creative response and for transformation was to invite kindness, get curious, cultivate ease, and smooth my own ride."

### Linked Learning: Class Highlight

How Managers Create a Culture of Belonging  
Kimberly Manns



To access this class and other content from LinkedIn Learning, click on the blue button above and enter your UNI email address when prompted. If your personal email address populates, please ensure you click on the "change" link first to update your email address. Once entered, click on "Continue to the University of Northern Iowa LinkedIn Learning account" to access content.

## Upcoming Learning & Development



### PechaKucha Showcase

December 4 / 12:00-1:00pm / University Room, Maucker Union

PechaKucha (a Japanese term for *chit-chat*) is a storytelling format in which a presenter shows 20 slides for 20 seconds of commentary. This fast-paced presentation is a great way to share your story and provide the audience with new insights. Bring your lunch and learn from leaders and peers from around the university as they share their story. Here are two examples:  
[Michael Goodman - Honoring Parentless Students](#)  
[Bailey Parnell - Dark Side of Social Media](#)

[Register Here](#)



### Performance Review Workshop

February 3 / 1:00-2:00pm / Zoom  
February 4 / 11:00am-12:00pm / Gilchrist Hall 009

This workshop will cover everything you need to know about performance reviews within UNI Works, how to write an evaluation that is a fair summary of your observations for the employee, and some tips on how to have a productive discussion of the review. This process doesn't have to be mundane; this session covers best practices that transform reviews into a tool for professional growth and engagement.

[Virtual Registration](#)

[In Person Registration](#)



### Fundamentals of Supervision

March 12 / 8:30am-12:00pm / Maucker Union's Oak Room

Managing employees is one of the most impactful responsibilities that you can have and it's important that you are equipped with the skills needed to supervise effectively. In this interactive workshop, participants will reflect on their philosophy of management and leadership, understand the stages of team development, learn how to serve as a conflict mediator, and review the disciplinary action process. This training is recommended for those who supervise Merit and/or P&S staff but ALL managers are welcomed and encouraged to attend. Duration is 3.5 hours with two 5-minute breaks.

[Register Here](#)



### Non-Positional Leadership: Leading from the Middle

April 16 / 11:00am-12:00pm / Zoom  
April 17 / 1:00-2:00pm / Gilchrist Hall 009

This dynamic workshop empowers professionals to lead effectively, even without formal authority. *Non-Positional Leadership* teaches essential skills for influencing others, fostering collaboration, and driving change across an organization. Participants will explore strategies to build trust, communicate with impact, and inspire their peers and supervisors alike. Through hands-on activities, you'll learn how to harness your unique position to become a catalyst for positive change and a key contributor to organizational success.

[Virtual Registration](#)

[In Person Registration](#)



### UNI Professional Development Conference

May 29 / 8:30am-4:00pm / Location TBD

Join us for the Six Degrees of T.C., UNI's Professional Development Conference for staff and faculty who are committed to personal growth, skill-building, and career advancement. This inspiring event brings together the best and brightest within the institution for a day of engaging workshops, network opportunities, and an insightful keynote session. Whether you're looking to enhance your leadership abilities, expand your network at UNI, or ignite your professional potential, the Professional Development Conference is the place to learn, connect, and thrive. This conference is organized by the P&S Council.

[Registration Coming Soon](#)



### Navigating Difficult Conversations

June 23 / 1:00-2:00pm / Zoom  
June 24 / 11:00am-12:00pm / Gilchrist Hall 009

In this practical workshop, participants will develop the skills needed to handle challenging conversations with ease and effectiveness. Whether it's addressing performance issues, resolving conflicts, or delivering tough feedback, this session provides tools and techniques to communicate openly and productively. This workshop is ideal for anyone looking to turn difficult conversations into opportunities for understanding and growth.

[Virtual Registration](#)

[In Person Registration](#)



### Fundamentals of Supervision

July 23 / 8:30am-12:00pm / Maucker Union's Oak Room

Managing employees is one of the most impactful responsibilities that you can have and it's important that you are equipped with the skills needed to supervise effectively. In this interactive workshop, participants will reflect on their philosophy of management and leadership, understand the stages of team development, learn how to serve as a conflict mediator, and review the disciplinary action process. This training is recommended for those who supervise Merit and/or P&S staff but ALL managers are welcomed and encouraged to attend. Duration is 3.5 hours with two 5-minute breaks.

[Register Here](#)



### FMLA & ADA Manger Responsibilities // Online Learning

This session provides managers with high-level information about how to identify a potential leave or accommodation request from an employee and clarifies a manager's role in complying with the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This training takes approximately 45-minutes and will save your progress if you are unable to finish in one sitting.

[Access Here](#)

### Our Vision

All employees will be positively engaged in achieving their greatest potential while contributing to the success of the university.

### Our Mission

Human Resource Services fosters and environment of integrity and collaboration through innovative solutions and communications contributing to the successful recruitment, development, and retention of university employees.



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