



Not From Here, Not From There, AND Highly Successful

Solid theoretical and empirical research confirms that people globally have a fundamental need to belong—belonging is a primary motivator of human behavior, almost as much as the need for food. However, career growth often involves changes to different jobs, locations, and with different accepted behavior patterns. These changes can result in a disconnected feeling of “I’m not from here—the new place—and yet I’m not from there—my old place.”

Average tenure of all C-suite titles is lower now than historical numbers and CEO turnover, especially in public traded companies, is accelerating at record high rates since the Pandemic ended. The value of being accepted as a leader of the company—i.e., “belonging to this workplace,” creates energy that then can be channeled into driving growth work goals.

Here are ways to move past that “Not From Here, Not From There” disconnected phase quickly. First and foremost, focus on what others have done in this situation who have become highly successful in their fields:

USE HUMOR: Trevor Noah was actually an “illegal being” in his home country because he was the child of an African mom and a European father. He used his childhood stories humorously to write a #1 *New York Times* Bestseller book, won two Primetime Emmy Awards in his entertainment career, and was named by *Time* magazine “one of the hundred most influential people in the world.” Research shows that humor and laughter are valuable tools to diffuse stress. If humor isn’t your natural bailiwick, Stanford Professors Jennifer Aaker and Naomi Bagdonas effectively demonstrate its techniques in their book, *Humor, Seriously: Why Humor Is a Secret Weapon in Business and Life*.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS: Nelson Diaz grew up in New York City’s Harlem public housing with his Puerto Rican mom. He was the first Puerto Rican at Temple University to earn a JD, which he did by founding the first organization for black and Hispanic law students at Temple. This organization provided him relationships where together they—marginalized, poor, and/or first-generation college students—could: (a) discover the missing essential information that those from traditional academic backgrounds already knew; (b) recover mental bandwidth from their mutual support, which leads to the comfortable and energizing feeling of belonging. His book, *Not from Here, Not from There*, details his story from Harlem through Temple to becoming the first Puerto Rican to be admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar Association, on to becoming the General Counsel for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and then a Board Director for Exelon, a publicly traded corporation that is the largest regulated U.S. electric utility.

BE DETERMINED: Tara Westover was the youngest of seven “loosely homeschooled” children raised in totally remote Idaho mountains by Mormon survivalist parents. Her quest for education led her to studying independently—without a high school diploma—and scoring well on the ACT exam, gaining college admission, overcoming difficulties in adjusting to society, and graduating from undergraduate college with honors, then a Masters and a PhD from Trinity College, Cambridge University, England. She wrote a book, *Educated*, that won numerous awards and received the National Humanities Medal.

Whether it’s called Patrick Lencioni’s Tenacity in his *The 6 Types of Working Genius* book, or Angela Duckworth’s *Grit*, or Daniel Goleman’s Self-Awareness Emotional Intelligence Quadrant in his new book, *Optimal*, it’s determination to keep reaching for desired goals that moves a person from a past “there” to belonging in a new “here.”

EMPHASIZE UNIQUE SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES: Just as Noah, Diaz, and Westover went from their initial situations to be highly successful elsewhere in their new situations, note that each of them used their experiences to make themselves more resilient and achievement-oriented than others who were continuously a member of the same group.

Noah, Diaz, and Westover empowered their own “thriving” and belonging in their new organizations by engaging in self-care through crafting meaningful work that was built upon each of their unique interests/skills—i.e., their sustainable competitive advantages. Research confirms that the need to belong is indeed enhanced by also satisfying one’s own sense of worth.

Other research shows that those who are thriving are: (a) buffering themselves from goal-achievement distractions; stress, and negativity; (b) more physically well, more resilient, and more able to focus on their work—i.e., better health, engagement, performance, and retention. They sustain their own thriving through (a) engaging in self-care—i.e., their uniqueness and its advantages; (b) creating and building high quality relationships; (c) building community within and outside the organization.

Those who succeed as today’s leaders also have a growth mindset—instead of:

- Being discouraged, they use humor to strengthen bonds/relationships, diffuse stress/tension, and boost resilience and performance even when stakes are high.
- “I/we can’t” thinking, they demonstrate “not done it yet/what if we do/try X” brainstorming around obstacles.
- Staying stuck, they are determined to reach their goals, one way or another.

In other words, they’re now from here, no longer from there, AND highly successful from what they’ve learned there and here.

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