LOWER LIGHT LEADERSHIP

What People Are Really Looking For

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I have been thinking about TED Talks and what people seem to be drawn toward when they watch them. At first glance, the most popular talks over the years may look like a mix of unrelated topics. Creativity. Leadership. Body language. Vulnerability. Procrastination. Happiness. AI. Deepfakes. Education. Climate. Technology. Relationships. The future of work. The future of humanity. But the more I look at it, the more I think there is a common thread running through all of it.

People are looking for humanity.

That may sound broad, but I do not mean it in a vague, sentimental way. I mean people are looking for reminders that people still matter, and maybe even more personally, that they still matter. They are looking for ideas, leaders, organizations, and conversations that treat human beings as more than output machines. More than job titles. More than performance metrics. More than consumers. More than workers to be trained, used, measured, replaced, or discarded when they no longer produce the desired return.

When I look at the talks that have captured people's attention over the years, I do not just see curiosity. I see hunger. I see people trying to make sense of what is happening to us. Why are we so connected and still so lonely? Why do so many workplaces talk about culture while treating people like costs to be controlled? Why are young people anxious about the future before they have even had a fair chance to build one? Why does technology keep advancing while trust keeps eroding? Why do so many people feel like they are constantly one mistake, one restructuring, one algorithm, or one AI tool away from being cut loose?

The trend says something.

People do not keep gravitating toward talks on creativity, trust, leadership, vulnerability, relationships, purpose, confidence, learning, and the future because those things are cute ideas. They gravitate toward them because they know something is missing. They can feel where humanity has leaked out of the systems they live and work inside. They may not always know how to name it, but they feel it.

They feel it when school becomes more about compliance than curiosity.

They feel it when work becomes more about extracting performance than developing people.

They feel it when leaders talk about values, then abandon those values the moment money, ego, or pressure enters the room.

They feel it when mistakes become identity statements instead of learning opportunities.

They feel it when people are praised for being resilient while the environment around them keeps becoming less humane.

They feel it when organizations call people their greatest asset, then treat them like an expense line waiting to be reduced.

That is what bothers me.

I understand that organizations need money. I understand that businesses have to survive. I understand that results matter. I am not trying to pretend the practical realities of business do not exist. But somewhere along the way, too many leaders started treating the finite game as if it was the whole game. Quick wins. Short-term numbers. Immediate performance. Faster output. Lower cost. Less patience. Less development. Less humanity.

And then we act surprised when people disengage.

We act surprised when employees stop trusting leadership.

We act surprised when people protect themselves instead of bringing their best ideas forward.

We act surprised when people are anxious, guarded, burned out, cynical, or quietly looking for somewhere else to go.

Maybe they are not lazy. Maybe they are not entitled. Maybe they are not unwilling to work. Maybe they are responding to environments that have asked them to perform like machines while still needing them to care like humans.

That is not sustainable.

A person is not a machine to optimize. A person is more like a plant to be cultivated. You can artificially boost production for a season, but if you strip the soil, ignore the roots, and only care about the harvest, eventually the life drains out of the thing you were depending on. People need more than pressure, targets, feedback, and consequences. They are looking for purpose. They are looking for connection. They need room to grow. They need to know their contribution matters. They need to know a mistake does not erase their worth. They need leaders who see more than the immediate return they can extract from them.

That is humanity.

Humanity is remembering that every person has a life outside the role they fill. They have a family. Dreams. Fear. Potential. Grief. Strengths they may not fully know how to access yet. Greatness that may need patience before it shows up clearly. They are not just performers. They are people becoming something.

I think that is part of why people are drawn to voices like Simon Sinek, Brené Brown, Liz Wiseman, Adam Grant, Ken Robinson, and others who have spoken in different ways about purpose, trust, vulnerability, contribution, leadership, learning, and human potential. They are not all saying the same thing, and they do not all work in the same lane, but the best of this work keeps pointing back to a similar concern: people are not meant to be managed like disposable parts in a machine.

We need places where that message becomes more than inspiration.

A TED Talk can wake something up. A book can give language to something we have felt for years. A keynote can create a spark. But most of us need more than a spark. We need spaces where these ideas can be practiced, challenged, personalized, and lived. That is where good coaching, leadership development, and culture work can matter. Not because any one company or coach has the magic answer, but because these spaces can help people slow down long enough to reconnect with what pressure has buried.

This is the kind of work I see organizations like The Optimism Company, The Wiseman Group, and others trying to address from different angles. Purpose. Trust. Leadership. Multiplying intelligence. Building cultures where people can contribute at a higher level. Helping people and organizations see that performance and humanity should not be enemies.

That is also the kind of work I care about through Lower Light Leadership.

I do not believe people are merely looking for another framework. I think they are looking for a way back to themselves and back to each other. They want to know how to stay grounded in a world that keeps changing. They want to know how to lead without becoming hardened. They want to know how to speak honestly without becoming cruel. They want to know how to pursue meaningful results without being defined by every outcome. They want to know how to make decisions from values instead of panic. They want to know how to keep their humanity intact when the systems around them keep rewarding speed, image, control, and short-term wins.

This matters especially right now because work feels brutal for a lot of people. Many feel like they are constantly on the chopping block. One mistake could cost them credibility. One restructuring could cost them stability. One technological shift could make them wonder if their skills, experience, and years of contribution still matter. AI has added another layer of pressure to a workforce that was already carrying a lot. People are asking, sometimes quietly and sometimes out loud, “Where do I belong in all of this?”

That question deserves more than a productivity hack.

It deserves leadership.

It deserves coaching.

It deserves development.

It deserves communities and organizations willing to tell the truth about what people need in order to do meaningful work without losing themselves.

I think people are drawn to these talks because they are searching for evidence that someone still sees the person inside the performance. Someone still believes creativity matters. Trust matters. Purpose matters. Connection matters. A person's voice matters. Their growth matters. Their family matters. Their becoming matters.

And if that is what people are searching for, then those of us who care about leadership, coaching, education, culture, and development should pay attention.

The opportunity is not simply to give people more content to consume. The opportunity is to help restore humanity where it has been neglected. To help leaders remember that the people they lead are not tools for their ambition. To help individuals remember that they are not defined by one result, one job, one mistake, one season, or one person's opinion of them. To help teams rebuild trust. To help people reconnect with purpose. To help organizations play a longer game than immediate extraction.

Because if we keep letting the humanity leak out of the workforce in exchange for quick wins, we may get more output for a while. We may get cleaner dashboards, faster processes, better margins, and more efficient systems.

But what will it cost us?

What happens when people stop bringing their full selves because it no longer feels safe to do so?

What happens when creativity dries up because compliance was rewarded more than curiosity?

What happens when trust disappears because leaders only remembered values when values were convenient?

What happens when people stop believing their work is connected to anything meaningful?

What happens when we win the finite game and lose the people who made the game worth playing?

I do not think people are watching these talks because they want to be entertained by good speakers. I think they are watching because something in them is still reaching for what is human.

And I think that reaching is worth listening to.