

Culture Is Everything and Everything Is Culture

It doesn't matter what you do, whether you are in the government or private business: Culture drives success.

When I use the word "culture," I'm referring to your workplace's personality. Your DNA. How you do the things you do. I'm talking about an ecosystem, holistic, long-term perspective of your workplace and recognizing that everything in work is interconnected to everything else.

Culture matters because you cannot win just by focusing on money, for two simple reasons:

- Someone down the block is always going to be able to pay your best employees at least a bit more than you are – so you can't attract and keep your best and brightest employees if you just focus on the money.
- Someone down the block is also going to be able to offer services or products cheaper than you can offer them – so you're not going to win your customer's lifelong loyalty if you just focus on money.

If you just focus on money, then in the eyes of both your customers and your employees you become nothing more than an interchangeable commodity.

Remember, loyalty isn't dead, as so many people claim these days. Loyalty is only dead if you choose to smother the life out of it!

I think the fact that people say loyalty is dead is a wakeup call – organizations can't get away with running their business the way they may have 50, 30, or even 5 years ago.

Creating a high-performing culture begins by valuing your workplace values

Actions speak louder than words.

Talk is cheap.

So your real values have nothing to do with the cutesy feel-good slogans plastered on your coffee mugs or hanging on a pretty poster in the lunchroom. Your workplace values are reflected in what everyone actually does, day in and day out. Your values are what your employees and customers see, feel, and experience every day in their interactions in your workplace.

If you are serious about your values (and *not* being serious about values tends to be positively correlated to an increase in the readership of Dilbert cartoons) then you need to have deeper workplace conversations as to what those values such as, "leadership," "teamwork," "trust," and "great service," *really mean* in terms of everyone's behaviors and attitudes.

And your leaders need to lead out loud with their values so that they become completely evident to the people they are leading. Your front-line employees need to deliver your values out loud so they become self-evident to your customers.

Your values ultimately shape, reflect, and define your culture.

Hmmm...could it be that culture is everything and everything is culture?



INSPIRING WORKPLACES

THE WAY WORK OUGHT TO BE

Service is everything and everything is service.

Being good isn't good enough anymore. Your organization needs to not just match expectations; you need to exceed customer service expectations. This is why offering "good customer service" could be costing you millions of dollars in unrealized revenue. Because "good" only keeps you out of the doghouse. Good keeps you out of jail. Being merely "good" does nothing to turn customers into lifelong enthusiastic fans of your organization!

And it's not even always good enough to even exceed expectations – you also *need to be different*.

You need to *stand out from the herd* in order to be heard! If you aren't different in a compelling way from your competitors, then why is anyone going to be loyal to your business?

It's difficult to imagine any organization that is NOT in the service business. Ultimately, everyone is in the service business and everyone's job is to provide service to someone. Maybe not service to your external clients or customers, and maybe it's only service to one or two other people internally, but the reality is, *everyone is a service provider*.

Creating a service-value mindset starts at the top, and it starts with your culture.

If you treat your employees well, and provide them with great service, guess what they will in turn do with your customers?

Happy customers begin with happy employees.

Engaged, loyal customers begin with engaged, loyal employees.

And, passionate, word-of-mouth marketing begins with great employees because marketing is everything, and everything is marketing.

So here we are again: culture is everything, and everything is culture.

Communication is everything, and everything is communication

If actions speak louder than words, then everything really is communication. Truly open and honest and effective communication in the workplace is the key to, well, pretty much everything.

I've never, ever heard a person say to me: "I'm just TOO informed about what goes on in my workplace!"

But, of course, it's not just what you say, it's how you say things that ultimately matters even more. How people communicate in your workplace is a reflection of your culture and it shapes your culture.

Okay, I'm going to say it again. Culture is everything, and everything is culture.

Ideas are the currency of success, so you really need to be in the business of ideas



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To be successful, you need ideas from everyone and everywhere: small ideas for continual improvement, and grand breakthrough ideas (because someone on your team might be working on a better eight-track tape, if you catch my drift).

Ideas don't just help you thrive, stand out from the herd, make you more money, and make you more competitive – there's a chicken-and-egg relationship here as well. Asking for and getting ideas from your employees is also one of the most powerful workplace motivators there is.

Ideas inspire and energize people. And, conversely, you need energized and inspired people to come up with those ideas.

How you communicate, the values you live by, and the amount of freedom and fun you instill in your workplace all impact your ability to inspire new ideas.

So (are you sensing a recurring theme here?) . . . culture is everything and everything is culture.

Change management is so 1990s, but it's still critically important!

If the change going on outside your organization is greater than the level of change going on inside your organization, you are going to be in serious trouble ... maybe not tomorrow, maybe not next year, but someday soon.

I've always disliked the term "change management" because it seems to me that, as cliché as this sounds, change is a constant, it's happening faster than ever before, and because to be successful you need to be

constantly growing and evolving and adapting, then change management is really all about an on-going mindset and approach for how you run your organization.

So how do you instill this attitude into your employees?

It starts and ends with your culture.

Did I mention that culture is everything and everything is culture?

Motivating employees has nothing to do with team-building events and everything to do with your culture

You do not inspire and motivate employees through a 1, 5, or even 10 times-a-year events.

And you don't motivate employees effectively with money, at least not in the long haul, because someone can always pay your employees more and because in two months that raise becomes nothing more than their new, expected salary. And, it is because external motivators aren't nearly as powerful a motivational force as intrinsic motivators. Carrots and sticks may work in the short term; but for long term, real success, they simply do not work.

Now, I'm not suggesting money isn't important, and that you aren't going to lose good people because they can get more money elsewhere. Of course you will lose employees to a bigger paycheck. Of course no one would show up at work tomorrow if the checks stopped coming. Of course everyone would love to be paid more.

What I am suggesting is that the true key to long-term success is taking the focus off the money, and focusing on creating an inspiring, "want to," kind of workplace instead of a "have to" kind of workplace.



You really can't motivate another human being. But what you can do is create the kind of environment where people feel motivated.

You create a motivating environment by creating the kind of culture where people want to be at your workplace on a Monday morning, where they want to contribute their ideas, where they want to remain loyal, and where they enthusiastically rave about your workplace to anyone who will listen.

You create a motivating environment by connecting people to an exciting sense of purpose, by providing the tools and resources to do the job well, and then by getting out of the way so they can do it!

You create a motivating environment by modeling core values, creating the kind of workplace where there really is open and honest communication, where ideas really are valued, where employees feel respected, cared for, and cared about as human beings first and foremost.

Employees feel motivated when they feel valued. When they know their work matters and they can measure their progress. When employees truly believe there is a climate of trust and mutual respect in your workplace.

So, when it comes to motivation, yes, you guessed it.

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Five Ways to Jump Start a Culture Shift in Your Workplace

Natalie Wood once observed, “The only time you can change a man is when he is a baby.”

If there’s even a morsel of truth in her comment, then imagine how difficult it must be to change the culture in a workplace. Many people feel that changing a workplace culture is akin to corralling a herd of feral cats while trying to nail jelly to the wall of the Titanic (yup, it’s a cliché super storm).

Yes, it’s challenging to change an entire culture. And no, you can’t do it overnight – especially since the job of nurturing an inspiring culture is never finished. But yes, you can do it, and, as many organizations have shown, you can make a dramatic change to your culture faster than you might think.

It starts by acknowledging that great cultures don’t happen by accident – you need to be intentional. According to Human Capital Institute, 70% of a leader’s time should be focused on talent management and fostering an inspiring culture.

Being intentional about your culture requires that you consider your culture in every decision you make by always asking the question: Does this decision both create and reflect the kind of culture we want to build and be known for?

If you need to make a major shift in your culture, here are five ways to jump start the change in your organization:

1. Focus on the Important Stuff.

The Denmark supermarket chain Irma transformed their culture (and saved their business) when the CEO decided to try a revolutionary new approach: putting people first. To achieve that goal the company focused on three areas: Leadership training based on personal development, open communication (including a very personal and heartfelt weekly newsletter that helped build trust and openness), and celebrating positive results. Within less than a year Irma became profitable and today is recognized as the fifth best workplace in Denmark and the best retailer to work for in Europe.

2. Do a Values Blitz.

AFA JCDecaux (a Copenhagen-based outdoor advertising company) transformed their culture in less than a year by relentlessly focusing on one of their four core values (teamwork, create positivity, spread humor, show a fighting spirit) one week at a time, cycling through a different value each week for six months until the values became engrained into everyone’s behaviors. Within a year profits were up, turnover and absenteeism rates were down, and there was a waiting list for candidates wanting to get on with the company.



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3. Create a 3 in 3 Culture Challenge.

Challenge every employee and every team to do three things in the next three months to contribute to a more positive, inspiring culture.

4. Have More Conversations, Less Meetings.

Michael Abrashoff, the commander of the USS Benfold, changed the culture of his ship by having a conversation with every crew member about the kind of ship they wanted to serve aboard. That was it – in-depth conversations which led to a common understanding of the culture resulted in an increase in the crew retention rate from 29% to 100%. Remember, whether it's managing change or building a great culture, communication is everything and everything is communication.

5. Take a VCR Approach.

Use signs, posters, badges, buttons, bumper stickers, or mascots to create a **Visual** reminder of the desired goal or changes; **Communicate** success stories on a consistent basis (open meetings with a “culture moment” or create a story section on your intranet and share stories from within your organization and examples from other organizations); **Recognize** employees and teams who model the desired behavior. Starting with the easy-to-do “low hanging fruit” actions and recognizing and celebrating the small wins and milestones along the way is the key to building momentum.

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