

3 Steps to Create the Workplace Culture You Want

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Culture is a word that gets used a lot when we are talking about leadership. My sense is that some leaders still feel like it's one of those "soft skills" or fluffy, kinder, gentler things that doesn't really move the needle when it comes to driving business results.

They might be right, but the overwhelming research on the topic says that a business's culture has a lot to do with the results it gets, the people it attracts, and the sustainability of its growth. Saying that it doesn't matter is like saying that an individual's personality has no bearing on their success. While it's tough to quantify, everyone knows it's true.

What I find to be more common among leaders is the belief that culture matters, but no real process in place for how to build the one they want. They shy away from big time investments throughout the organization, like mission or vision exercises that never seem to drive any real change. And for small business owners they often feel like they don't need a "cultural initiative" until they get to be much bigger.

We have to make a strong culture simpler and tangible to shape and achieve if we expect leaders to become competent at developing or changing culture on a team or in an organization.

And the team concept is important because while culture can be companywide, it's felt locally and the direct manager of any group of people is the largest influence on the culture of that team. Take a big company with a strong culture and, depending on how well they hire and develop their managers, you will find teams that don't represent that overarching culture at all.

This is just one of the reasons that developing leaders and managers within a business is critical if you want a strong culture throughout. They are the keepers of the culture, no matter what the poster on the wall says. So let's make this culture thing a little easier for leaders by breaking it down into a few key steps that any manager or leader can execute.

Step 1 - Define it

If I walk into your business and I ask a random person to tell me what kind of culture the business wants to have or is working toward, there should be some answers and they should probably be similar. Sometimes people can't answer that question and that means the business has not defined any kind of desired culture. Y

You can do this in a few short meetings or in a few hours over a couple of meetings, by asking these questions:

- What kind of environment do we want to work in?
- What kind of team will help us be most successful?
- What do we want our customers to say about us?
- What do we want to feel like at the end of a workday?
- What difference do we want to make?
- Why is a culture like this worth building?
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Of course, you can ask about 50 more to get even more clarity, but starting with these will get you moving in the right direction.

Step 2 - Align behaviors with it

Even in businesses with the culture they want defined, the question becomes, “now what?” A definition of culture is simply a set of intentions, and by themselves, those intentions mean nothing until we connect them to some set of actions and behaviors. The next set of questions to work through with your team are:

- What behaviors, by us as individuals, would make this kind of culture consistently happen?
- How would we show up for our day?
- How would we communicate with each other?
- How would we solve problems?
- What would we do when things weren’t going well?
- How would we support each other to make these behaviors consistent?
- What behaviors would destroy the kind of culture we want to build?
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Step 3 - Install it

Now we as leaders shift our own behaviors to support our team as they build a strong culture. Every performance conversation we have now has at least a component of it that contains this discussion.

- What are some of the things you are doing that help us achieve our desired culture?
- What are some of the things that you might change to contribute even more to us moving in that direction?
- How can I support you as you continue to help us achieve the culture we decided was important to us?

It also means that we take portions of our meetings or discussions to simply review and discuss our progress to the definition of success we created as we talked about culture.