



Ensuring a High Performance Culture in Your Organization

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Many leaders spend a lot of time talking about organizational culture: What does it take to create the right kind of culture? How can you maintain that culture?

There's an old joke about an organizational leader who attended a presentation on managing change and organizational culture. He heard about a successful culture in another organization, and then told his Human Resources Director to **"Get me one of those things!"**

Of course it sounds ludicrous – but like most jokes, this story is based in truth. Most people struggle with culture because it's so difficult to define. Even less tangible than a "soft" concept, culture is more like a cloud: You know it's there, but it's nearly impossible to grasp. Leaders influence the development of a culture in several ways – and by doing so shape how others perceive the culture of their organization. Whether you are a board member, a leader or manager, or an individual contributor, here are three steps that you can take to influence the culture of your organization:

- 1. Convey your vision of a winning culture** - If you want to be more than just the caretaker of an existing culture, then you need to define your aspirations. Form a small coalition of stakeholders to create the specific cultural behaviors and expectations for your organization. Create a strategy to communicate, train, message and cascade the new expectations throughout your organization.
- 2. Demonstrate how new cultural behaviors can advance the organization** – Nothing reinforces new behavior like success. So once you define behaviors and expectations, work with your team to apply them to achieve the small but significant gains needed to gain momentum. Send these stories of success throughout your organization to reinforce the

new cultural behaviors.

3. **Stories** – Organizational stories exemplify organizational success and capture dramatically the exploits of employees who personify these values in action. Stories allow employees to learn about what is expected of them and better understand what the business stands for.
4. **Put teeth into the new culture by integrating it into your Human Resources processes** – People tend to do what is measured and rewarded. So a fourth step for building a new culture is to use the desired behaviors as criteria for hiring, promoting, rewarding, and developing people. The real turning point for GE's transformation came when Jack Welch publicly announced to his senior managers that he had fired two business leaders for not demonstrating the new behaviors of the company – despite having achieved exceptional financial results. This made it very clear that the culture was not just a soft concept – instead, it had tangible outcomes and consequences. Get the right people on the bus!

Question to consider:

- Remember the famous words of Peter Drucker: “***Culture eats strategy for breakfast.***” How can your organization start to build a culture aligned to meet your future needs?

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