

Creating a Culture: an Awesome Responsibility

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Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year because of the caring, sharing, and giving nature of the season. It's the culture of the season that makes it so special.

Culture cannot be touched or measured and it's not easily defined or described, but it is an incredibly powerful influencing force. A community's culture is what makes the people in that community do what they do, talk the way they talk, and act the way they act. Culture is what people use to define themselves and others: it's what determines social norms.

Every organization made up of people has a culture- states, towns, neighborhoods, churches, schools, classrooms, homes, and businesses. Each individual in the group is significantly influenced by its culture.

A business's culture may have more to do with its success, or failure, than any other factor. A major part of Enron's culture was profits, fast paced growth, and expansion. That dynamic culture is what made the company into such a huge, successful, company... and it also led to its demise.

A company's culture begins while the company is being formed- based on the founder's personality, values, and beliefs. The founder of a company can impact the culture of a business for its entire existence. Walt Disney, although long gone, is still impacting the culture at Disney. The mission statement developed around his vision, "The Happiest Place On Earth," still controls how the company acts, who works there, how decisions are made, and how things are done.

While owners, managers, and influencers have the most significant influence on culture, everyone has some impact. Most of us have known and worked with a constant complainer, or someone with a perpetually bad attitude, or someone who thrives on misery. Their toxic energy has a harshly negative effect on the entire culture.

The reverse is true of people with a happy or upbeat demeanor. Their goodwill has a positive effect on everyone, just like the Christmas season has a positive effect on just about everyone too.

Changing a culture can be a formidable task due to all the unseen and ever-changing ingredients like people's moods and personalities. Also, resistance to change, any change, is common. Generally, the longer people do something, the more resistant they are to changing, even if the change is positive.

One way culture is changed or developed is by modeling behavior- acting the way you wish people to act. People emulate the behavior of people they respect, admire, or see as someone they want to be like. Role models are so powerful to young people because they are developing their own identity so they are actively searching for examples on which to build. Adults do the same thing, just more covertly.

Integrity; ethical behavior; social responsibility; a customer, employee, and stakeholder focus; and a balance between work and home life are all ingredients of successful, durable, cultures. Integrity and trustworthiness are the two most valuable assets an organization, or an individual, can have and should be permanently woven into the culture.

As individuals or as business people, our most awesome responsibility is the culture we are creating... is it special... like the culture of Christmas?