Is Your Culture A Competitive Advantage Or Reoccurring Challenge?

Every organization has a culture. It might be a competitive advantage or something that needs to change. Whatever your situation, nurturing the right culture will make a difference.

> **If you want to retain more customers - improve your culture.**
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> **If you want to reduce staff turnover - improve your culture.**
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> **If you want to sell more products - improve your culture.**
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> **If you want to increase efficiency - improve your culture.**
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> **If you want to be the employer of choice in your community - improve your culture.**
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> **There is very little that can't be improved with the right culture.**

Begin With Focus

Start with your corporate focus. Is it compliance or culture, technology or culture, staff development or culture? Hopefully it is all of those things and more. Culture, procedures and development activities are not mutually exclusive. They require purpose and unity to produce the best results.

Have you ever watched someone that just doesn't seem to care about their job? Their personal performance has a direct impact on employees around them and the customers they serve. It might be someone you work with or someone who served you at a business. Workplace engagement is a continuous challenge for high performance companies. If you want to enhance your corporate culture in the months ahead, here's a simple game plan to get started.

Clarify Your Purpose

Vision, mission, and values are guiding principles. In the absence of documented direction, employees will interpret business philosophies based on what is visible through daily practices, decisions, and policy applications. Document a clear, concise purpose for your organization so employees don't have to distill the philosophy through their own filter. Why leave the outcome to chance? Write it down and share it often.

Set Direction For Your Organization

The simplest form of direction can be clarified with tangible goals and objectives. If your bank wants to be the premier provider of small business loans in your trade area, make sure your staff understands that objective. Provide a context for your objectives by setting measurable goals associated with outcomes that represent preferred achievements. The goals should be easy to understand and reinforced frequently with employees.

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Start Asking More Questions

Community banks are loaded with talented, dedicated employees that would enjoy seeing their organization succeed. Leverage that talent and desire by asking them how the organization can achieve the bank's goals and objectives. If you conduct employee surveys, corporate culture assessments or one-on-one interviews to capture the pulse of your organization, keep investing in the process. Two-way communication can produce powerful results.

Get your employees to talk constructively about ways to improve. You will find it difficult to provide outstanding service to customers if the internal service doesn't meet the same standard. This is critically important in organizations with centralized support areas and multiple locations in their service network. Geographic distance can be overcome with consistent dialogues. Who is better equipped to identify ways to improve processes than the employees that rely on them for effective execution of their job responsibilities?

Help Employees Understand Their Contributions

Fully engaging employees is dependent on their understanding of how they fit into the big picture. Banks with high corporate culture scores are typically organizations that connect job descriptions with staff responsibilities, their daily duties, and decision-making authority. Employee empowerment is most effective when it is practiced. Managers and employees need to establish a consistent understanding of the parameters affecting how things should be done and how they have a favorable impact on customers. If the customer remains the center of the work environment, employees find it easier to embrace the associated responsibilities. That condition remains constant whether the customer is internal or external.

Measure Performance

Great cultures are rich with accountabilities. Try to find a highly effective team that has no goals and ignores their performance. It doesn't happen. Great cultures measure results. They encourage ownership of outcomes and celebrate success together. Measurement is embraced as an integral part of determining the level of success achieved.

Share Results

One common result in employee satisfaction or corporate culture surveys is the presence of low to moderate ratings for communication. It is common to many organizations. Department managers get busy with projects and fail to share performance results. Relationship managers get busy with customers and fail to tell the support staff about system problems.

Ask managers to overcompensate with frequent, open communication. Encourage feedback. Ask questions. Openly accept ideas. If you want your culture to be a competitive advantage, employees and customers need to feel the difference the culture produces. Emotional connections, the engagement so many organizations hope to generate, is the key to improving culture.