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Culture Cards

11 steps to build and sustain a culture of teamwork, communication, respect & gratitude

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It is my belief that almost every book can be narrowed down to about 10 pages of useful, actionable data once you remove all of the fluff. This book is dedicated every person, family, business, team & organization that has a desire to build a better culture.

Contents:

1. What is your mission / vision?

The first step in any endeavor is to know what you want to achieve. What is the vision for what you are about to undertake? One of the tools you need to keep with you at all times is a telescope so you can always see where you want to go. At times the course may change but the mission or vision usually stays fairly constant. Once it is defined everyone must know what the vision is. When Kennedy was trying to put a man on the moon even the janitor when asked what his job was would say, "to put a man on the moon." People can lose their way if they lose their why. Remind people often what you are trying to achieve and how important the end result is. The number one complaint in almost every organization is lack of communication. Even if you say something 20 times everyone else may have only heard it 3 times. Ask everyone around you what the mission is and see what answers you get.

2. What are the rules on your bus?

The second step to building a great culture is to have a clearly defined set of rules. These are not just policies, they are a set of beliefs and actions that everyone must live up to. At the same time, you also need to be clear on what actions you will not tolerate. What are your non-negotiable items? Remind new team members that they must adapt to your culture, you do not plan to adapt to theirs. Post the list of "rules" in a common area for all to see. Print out a handout with the rules and a ticket on the bottom for all to sign. Make it clear (over communicate) that failure to abide by these rules may force people off your bus. When the culture gets strong, people that don't fit in will realize it immediately and others may even ask them to leave. Everyone needs to live and breathe these rules, especially the leaders. Our actions are so loud that people cannot often times hear our words.

3. How positive is your organization?

When people look to follow someone, they tend to want to be around people that are positive. Leaders need to be "the thermostat" in your organization and set a positive temperature, instead of being "a thermometer" and reacting to a negative setting. Does your organization have a director of happiness? Ask people in your organization to rate their current level of happiness. Being positive and being happy leads to the feeling of gratitude which is a key component to building a great culture. Have each of your leaders write down one thing for which they are grateful every day. Another item to measure is how often you give positive feedback. One mistake most people make is having too high of a standard set for giving out positive feedback. If you see an action you want repeated, give positive feedback. Even when used for required daily actions, positive feedback can be a very powerful tool.

4. Do you put others first?

The whole premise of building and sustaining a great culture can be summed up by one single word, "serve". To serve is to put others first. To serve is to help others achieve their goals and dreams. By helping others succeed you will also succeed along the way. Imagine how many times Sherpas have reached the top of Mt. Everest by helping others. One question to ask yourself is, what do others want? This goes for both customers and team members alike. When it comes to creating the vision of the company make sure that you look at it from a "how can I help them" point of view vs. a "how can they help me" point of view. In a service based business our motto is that Job #1 is to serve the guest and job #2 is to help someone else serve the guest. Show both your team and your customers that you care. Once people know that you care about their success, they are usually more invested.

5. Are you intentional?

Are you intentional when it comes to what you are working on every day? Do you work up or do you spend too much time working down? Being focused and intentional with your goals and your communication is key. You need to set the priorities because if you don't, others will set them for you. When you set goals they need to be SMART goals; specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound. You can use pre-shift meetings to make sure everyone is focused on the right thing. We can all be busy but at the same time get nothing done if we are not intentional. Try to find a way to limit interruptions. An open door policy is great but there are times when you need to shut the door and get things done. Plan your meetings for certain days and times. Have all of the leaders keep a time journal for 1 week in 15 minute blocks. When we say yes to one thing, it means we say no to something else.

6. Is everyone held accountable?

The first half of the battle is setting the goals and being intentional but the victory comes when people are held accountable for what they said they would do. There is nothing that will kill a culture quicker than if people do not feel compelled to perform. We need to be even more consistent with our feedback than we do with our goals. We can set one goal and if we give feedback on that item every day it will usually become a habit. If we only give feedback once or twice people will think that it isn't important to us anymore. We need to give feedback during the shift as much as possible. Any behavior that we talk about in public will get repeated, good or bad. If you want to keep great habits occurring, you need to give constant feedback. We also need to make sure that the company coat of arms doesn't point at each other. We need to build a culture of "responsibility" vs. a culture of "blame".

7. Do you empower others?

Empowerment is one of the hardest traits to both quantify and put into action. If our team feels that they are treated like robots, they will not perform to their best ability. It is our job to give the vision and guidelines but then let the team help chart the course. There are times when we will need to step in to make sure that we stay on course. When people come to you with problems, you should ask if they have any suggestions with how to handle the situation. If you like it, you have instant empowerment. If you don't, you can still say that you need to think about that idea for a bit, then later you can suggest a similar solution. As the work force changes generationally, it will become even more important for the team to feel empowered. The reality is that everyone drives the organization. Every person on the team shapes the future of the organization with every action they take.

8. Do you have a 360 degree view?

Vision becomes the most clear when you can work both "on" and "in" your business. People that spend all of their time working "on" the business forget what it takes to work "in" it. People that spend all of their time working "in" the business forget that it is their job to keep the organization moving forward. We need to avoid tunnel vision and really pay attention to what is going on around us. Not only within our organization but with other organizations as well. We need to have a culture where it is ok to make mistakes, but the rule is that we all learn as much as possible from mistakes to prevent them in the future. We need to be present and engaged to fully comprehend what the pulse of the organization is. We also need to be able to see and predict what kind of impact every action that we take would have on our organization. This way we can decide if it is an action worth taking or not.

9. Focus on the details - "Discipline"

Paying attention to the details is what sets the "good" apart from the "great." One key truth that great organizations realize is success comes from doing the little things perfect day after day. This is where "good" organizations say "good enough." They do not realize what a difference that extra 5% can make. It is true that the extra 5% is not easy to achieve, but once it is achieved the first 95% is automatic. Small daily habits can build momentum over time and before you know it, you have massive accomplishments. The key to focusing on the details is discipline. Discipline is best defined as doing what you are supposed to do, when you are supposed to do it and to do it how it is supposed to be done. Write out a list of every daily, weekly and monthly item that needs to be done in each area of your organization. Make sure everyone knows which items they will be responsible for completing.

10. Do you show appreciation?

After reading multiple books that contain 1000's of ways to reward and energize team members, it all boils down to appreciation and feedback. The biggest issue that most of us as leaders face is that we set the bar too high when it comes to giving positive feedback or showing appreciation. On the flip side we are often very quick to point out when something isn't up to standards. As mentioned earlier, the best way to get a behavior repeated is to recognize it in public. This is the basis upon which the Culture Cards program is built. It takes praise and feedback and puts it into a very personal hand written note. The best part about the program is that it encourages team members to give praise and feedback to fellow team members and even to the leaders. Image the culture of your organization when it would be "normal" for everyone to give praise and positive feedback on a daily basis.

11. Do you ask for feedback?

As is true in any relationship, people want to be in a situation where they feel that their voice is heard. The team is talking every day, are we as leaders really listening? The level of culture is best felt on the front lines, do you spend enough time with the front line to know what they face and how they feel? Do you have a process for when a team member wants to make suggestion? If you want to say no to the suggestion make sure you explain the "why." I make it a goal to implement at least one new suggestion per year. Another great way to make sure that we are listening to our team is to have them complete a brief survey or review on each leader of the team once per year. It is best that all surveys go to one person to compile the data and share with each individual leader. This way ratings can be averaged out and feedback comments can be given anonymously in bulk to ensure honesty.