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Gaining and Maintaining A Healthy Company Culture

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Establishing and changing a company's culture calls for serious and diligent planning and work. Not unlike individuals, companies have personalities. Most of us have observed companies we would call casual, energetic, and even crazy as well as companies that are formal, slow-moving and serious in nature. What creates these differences social scientists call organizational culture.

When people elect to work within a company's culture, they have elected to choose a way of life during their work day. Unfortunately, this choice is often unconscious or uninformed. If the norms and values of the company's culture battle or conflict among themselves or with people's personal life and family culture, conflicts and reduced productivity automatically occur. Because every company culture has its own way of doing business and treating people, it is always best to hire and be hired into an company culture that is mostly congruent and not conflictive with your personal and family culture... that is, unless you have the desire to "shift" and accommodate to the company's culture without resisting and resenting it.

A vital personal and organizational issue today is integrity and ethics. There is a growing divide between organizational cultures that support high integrity and ethical conduct and those that don't. Do you focus on the "high moral road" and value a life and family of high integrity and ethical conduct? If so, you will wilt and become dysfunctional in an organizational culture where people "talk a good talk" but do not "walk the talk".

Everyone involved within a company needs to recognize that a company's culture trends to take on a life of its own. Customs and rituals develop that perpetuate a company's governing operating values and push people to align with them. Not all cultural traditions are positive. In some companies, negative customs perpetuate and produce unhappy, conflictive and dysfunctional states of affairs. Simple behavioral examples of such norms are "complaining" and "blaming".

You can use the assessment below to think through the values and norms that exist, or you wish existed, in your present company or in a company you are thinking about joining. It focuses on key elements of an organizational culture along with some "talking or thinking points". You will find my Assessment of Existing and Desired Norms and Values for an Organizational Culture helpful for planning to re shape the cultural norms of your company. Also for determining if a company you are looking to join has the right cultural norms to support you motivationally and contribute to the enhancement of your career.

Assessment of Existing and Desired Norms and Values for an Organizational Culture © 1999

Which formal and informal norms and values below are perceived to be present or desired? Think to yourself, to what degree, 1 being low and 5 being high, do you experience the norms below? Also, value the norms below? Think through and plan how can you gain and maintain those that are desired and help all stakeholders in your company be mutually accountable for honoring them.

ACHIEVEMENT REWARDS - People's accomplishments are acknowledged, regarded, praised and reinforced based on their true ability and contribution as against other, political or less fair reasons.

DEGREE OF STRUCTURE - Positions are defined, including performance standards, and people are operating within their own area of responsibility through policies and procedures as against people having a high degree of autonomy to informally handle issues and opportunities and also engage relevantly in other areas of the organization's work.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT - Managers show a genuine interest in the well-being of staff members by seeking out and responding to their concerns as against people feeling they are not receiving the emotional support they want and deserve.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION - People maintain 360 degree open, direct and congruent communication of suggestions, concerns and questions as against withholding, colluding, and hiding agendas.

MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY - Managers and staff members regularly participate in organization-wide mutual accountability and integrity check sessions focused on their contribution to, and achievement of, the organization's core governing operating values, performance goals, and vision and mission as against people doing their own thing and following their own interests without serious regard for relevant work and contributions.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH - People are encouraged to develop their skills through education and training opportunities and to take on new responsibilities as against a focus exclusively on staff members handling their present positions competently.

SOCIABILITY - people's involvement with one another on a personal level is desired and encouraged as against the desire for limiting interaction to tasks related to their position and the productivity and output goals to be achieved for the organization and its customers.

POWER DISTRIBUTION AND POSITION/WORK AUTONOMY - People have freedom, authority and responsibility to make appropriate decisions themselves as against a decision power distance between people and positions at different levels within the organization with demands to report, justify actions and gain permission from higher management.

TOLERANCE FOR CHANGE - Relevant, productivity enhancing change is expected and welcomed as against holding to tradition, predictability, and focusing on stability.

TOLERANCE FOR CONFLICT

- people demonstrate that disagreement is not necessarily a sign of disloyalty and the management of conflict is compatible with people's styles as against organizational harmony it self being stressed at the cost of open, honest and congruent interpersonal communication and problem solving.

TOLERANCE FOR RISK - People are encouraged to take well-reasoned chances as against avoiding risks.

I've found that to effectively plan and guide the development of a company's culture most often requires that owners and their top leaders partner with a professional business coach who understands how to surface and change cultural norms within organizations. With an experienced coach helping you and your team with the process, you'll save time and money and more easily and quickly achieve the company culture you desire.

If you need help in mastering and implementing any of the skills and tactics mentioned, I'm here for you! Please visit the Call-A-Coach section of my web site for more information.

About the author:

Dr. Mac shares with business owners the practical knowledge and insights he gained as a small company CEO. He founded Sycamore Ranch, Inc. when 27 and as CEO led his partners and a staff of 100 for 16 years in developing and operating the 50 acre recreational facility. Years later, he integrated what he learned from his Doctoral program at USC with his practical business experiences and began consulting. For four decades Mac's coached business owners in mastering and applying "how to" leadership and managerial skills for: Hiring and retaining only the top ten percent producers; Optimally deploying and supervising staff to maximize their personal motivation; Developing high integrity leadership teams; Facilitating mutual performance accountability and peer coaching processes; and, Integrating his Intentional Business Integrity Process into their company operations. Mac has served leaders in manufacturing and high tech companies; accounting, banking and insurance enterprises; medical and health care organizations; service and retail oriented businesses; as well as educational, governmental and non profit organizations. Q&A ProActive Leadership 888-648-5552 or MacAdam@PALConsulting

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