8 STEPS TO TRANSFORM YOUR CORPORATE CULTURE

Creating a great place to work

BY MAGI GRAZIANO

The engagement level of your workforce expands beyond the limits of offering tangibles such as a great benefits package, competitive market rates, flexible work schedules and challenging projects. Your company culture is truly your competitive advantage. Most leaders are intent on shaping a constructive, collaborative and innovative workplace; however, accomplishing this eludes most. The following eight steps are tried-and-true advances to creating a great place to work.

1 Understanding That the Organization is a Human System

The human system is made of people and it poses a higher degree of competency from all those who operate inside it. In a constructive corporate culture, the functionality of the system as a whole empowers individuals to fully participate with one another outside the limits of personal agendas and ego. It inspires people to collectively collaborate and contribute to the group cause. Understanding the human system allows you to consciously shape a culture and intentionally create an experience for people operating in the human system to thrive. This intentional experience is a constructive corporate culture.

2 Getting Curious About What Is So

When you take the time to peel back the onion and analyze the current condition of the human system in your organization at a macro level, it gives you insights into the root causes of labor disputes, stifled workforce productivity, unwanted employee turnover and lack of employee engagement.

It is imperative that you inform your people what you are up to and why. When you do reach out and let them know that you want to have a conversation or send a survey about culture, share the purpose behind your curiosity. If you are unclear about your reason and purpose for learning more, wait until you are filled with purpose or compelled by a real business need to move forward.

Before you begin your inquiry process, ask yourself what you really want to learn and what will you do with the information once you learn it. As you are speaking to people and reviewing the results of the survey, embrace your most curious, non-judgmental, non-reactionary, authentic self. Staying in the neutral zone during your conversations allows you to sense patterns and discern systemic organizational themes.

3 Acknowledging the Unworkability

Every executive has an image of how the ideal organization operates. The first step in any positive organizational change effort is getting real—the acceptance of what needs to change and what needs to happen to have the change last.

Make a list of the areas uncovered in the data collection process (interviews, focus groups, surveys) and prioritize the highest impact areas. These are highest because if improved, they would glean the highest return on time, money and effort invested. Next connect the underlying behaviors and processes that constrain the overall engagement, performance, collaboration and innovation in your workforce. Once you believe you have a handle on what is not working, it is important to allow the impact of this unworkability to move you into action.

4 Owning the Impact

Like it or not, the most senior executive is the ultimate guru with regards to how the organization operates. They decide what behavior is tolerated and how people treat each other. Introspection and self-awareness allows you to get real with yourself about what is really going on in the organization. If you are able to let go of self-judgment and defensiveness, you are much more able to see yourself as at the source of the unworkability. It is not about accepting blame or feeling guilty and taking responsibility for the problem. Instead, it is about seeing how you as the leader set the tone and create the space for constructive or destructive behavior to exist in the workplace.

5 Creating an Inspiring Vision

A mission statement is meant to guide the way for people to know and understand how to behave, act, react and work in sync with one other to accomplish the collective goal. In the absence of a grounded, motivating mission, human beings naturally focus on their individual experience and personal goals. The difficulty of this type of focus in a human system is that it produces silo mentality, unnecessary competition and friction throughout the organization.

6 Enrolling Others

Enrollment creates the possibility for others to feel connected and inspired in the workplace. Once you gain clarity on your mission and vision, communicating the message to the workforce is essential. Communication is often where messages break down. Realize that every person in your workforce has a unique perspective and way of listening, and target your message to the greater population and the varying degrees of listening. When crafting the message, discern the impact it will have on the people hearing or seeing it.

7 Designing and Following a Road Map

Once you have inspired the troops and promised a bright future for all who lead and follow in the organization, it is time to formulate a specific action plan. A cultural alignment road map includes desired outcomes, initiatives, programs, training, projects, people and timelines.

Each person involved and engaged in shaping a constructive corporate culture needs to understand their specific role, the amount of effort required outside of normal responsibilities, the goals and the desired organizational outcomes. Laying out a plan for what comes first, second and third, as well as who is ultimately responsible for keeping things on track is necessary to move forward. As with any major organizational improvement, meeting regularly, tracking progress and publishing results is what empowers forward movement.

8 Measuring What Matters

Now that all the groundwork has been established (you know the why, what, how and who), it is critical for success that you measure the benefits of the systemic changes you are making. Many organizations utilize the balanced score card approach as a framework for setting the right metrics. Additionally articulating and tracking the key result areas impacted by shaping a constructive culture gives insight and information that tells people in the organization what is working and what is not, what needs to pivot or realign, and what needs to stop. Without system-wide accountability from the top to the bottom and every one in between, the organization won't flourish. A core component of a constructive culture is achievement. When you measure what matters, people pay attention. Through accountability and transparency, people get to see their impact, how the team is doing and how an improvement in culture elevates the organization's operating effectiveness.

In Conclusion

The eight steps to transforming your corporate culture from the inside-out are not difficult to walk through. They are not revolutionary. These steps are simply a common sense approach to bringing out the best in people in the places they work. ✪

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