

Leadership Barometer 152 Leaders Create Culture **Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD**



In any organization, leaders create the culture. Apathetic people exist in every organization. One can fault workers who trap themselves in a state of despair. Managers typically describe these people as having "bad attitudes." The culture created by leaders is often the root cause of the problem.

Place these individuals in a culture of trust, respect, and challenge. You will see many of them quickly rise up to become happy and productive workers. It is essential that each individual in the workforce find real meaning in the organizational culture. Culture is determined by numerous actions and concepts, but it starts with the values and vision of the leader.

The culture of an organization is not easy to define. Most of the leadership textbooks I have read describe the culture in terms of physical attributes that characterize an organization. For example, here is a typical list of the things purported to make up a company culture.

- **Physical structure**
- **Language and symbols**
- **Rituals, ceremonies, gossip, and jokes**
- **Stories, legends, and heroes**
- **Beliefs**
- **Values and norms**
- **Assumptions**

The above list is a montage of the lists in many textbooks. When you think about it, these items do go a long way toward defining the culture of an organization. Unfortunately, I believe these items fall short because they fail to include the emotions of the people. After all, organizations are made up of people, at all levels, interacting in a social structure for a purpose. Let us extend the list of things that make up the culture of an organization.

- **Is there a high level of trust within the organization?**
- **To what extent do people have the opportunity to grow in this organization?**
- **Do people feel safe and secure, or are they basically fearful?**
- **Is the company financially stable?**

- How do people treat each other on their own level and on higher or lower levels?
- Is there mutual respect between management and workers?
- Is the culture inclusive or exclusive?
- Do people generally feel like winners or losers at work?
- Is the culture one of reinforcement or punishment?
- Are managers viewed as enablers or barriers?
- Are people trying to get into the organization or trying to get out?
- What is the level of satisfaction for people in this organization?
- Can people “speak their truth” without fear of reprisal?
- Do people follow the rules or find ways to avoid following them?
- Do people receive a living wage?

How can leaders build the right culture where people have a sense of purpose and meaning in their work? Here are eight approaches that are used by successful leaders.

1. **Have high ethical and moral standards. Operate from a set of values, and make sure people know why those values are important.**
2. **Operate with high Emotional Intelligence. The ability to work well with people is critical.**
3. **Build trust. Trust is the glue that holds people together in a framework of positive purpose. Without trust, we are just playing games with each other, hoping to get through the day unscathed.**
4. **Create a positive vision of the future. Vision is critical because without it people see no sense of direction for their work. Create a common goal that is exciting.**
5. **Lead change well. Change processes are in play in every organization daily, yet most leaders struggle with change processes.**
6. **Build High Performing Teams. Enhance a sense of purpose where there is a kind of peer cohesion brought on by good teamwork.**
7. **Build morale the right way. Motivation is derived by treating people with respect and giving them a clear vision and autonomy. Avoid trying to motivate people by adding hygiene factors, like picnics, bonuses, or hat days.**
8. **Reinforce good behaviors.**

Most of the above concepts sound like common sense; unfortunately, they are not common practice in many groups. This void contributes to much of the apathy in organizations. To have people rise to their level of potential, you need a strong culture. To accomplish that, focus on the above concepts, and see a remarkable transformation in your organization. Become a student of these skills, and teach them to other leaders. Learn how to personify the concepts listed above to rise to the level of great leadership.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations