



Leadership Barometer 192 Culture Starts at the Top Robert T. Whipple, MBA CPTD



I have been working with organizations for decades and have observed that culture always starts at the top. There can be numerous factors that go into building a great culture. The one with the greatest impact is sitting in the corner office.

Here is a real story about culture

I was sitting in the office of a CEO. He was telling me about the problems in his organization. The manufacturing people could not get along with the sales group. The maintenance people were always at war with the designers. The engineers thought the quality people were nuts. The entire organization was in constant conflict due to these problems. He wanted to know if I could come in and “fix” the culture to be one of higher trust.

I looked at him and said, “have you considered your part in creating these problems?” He said, “Oh no, there is nothing wrong with the culture of the senior team. It is the groups below that need to be fixed.” After a few seconds of consideration, I simply stated, “then I don’t think I can help you.” I got up and left his office and the building.

Poor culture is a common disease

I noticed that many leaders have a tendency to think this way. They see all the problems below them in the organization. They do not realize that it is their policies and actions that are creating most of the friction. Here is a link to a brief video I made. The title, [The Role of Leaders in Creating Trust](#) illustrates my point.

The culture cure is simple but elusive

Work to convince the senior leader that he or she is at least part of the problem. If the culture is not what the senior person wants, the cure is staring you in the face. You just need to convince him or her to try a different style and see if things improve.

To soften the blow, do not have the mindset that you must totally fix the senior person to be successful. Instead, focus on helping the entire organization function better.

Lower the fear

The usual cause of organizational problems has a root in lack of psychological safety. Educate the leader on what the words mean and how by changing his or her behavior the culture can be changed rather quickly.

Conclusion

My work will never end. There are so many leaders who cannot see the link between their behaviors and their problems. By teaching the leader how to change his or her behaviors, you can have a direct impact on the culture.

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.