

Hartz & Minds 33: Executives Must Cultivate Company Culture – Proactively

“The frog dumped into a pot of boiling water, jumps out and lives. The frog put into water before it heats up, will meet his demise in that pot.”

Defining a corporate culture that enables business success is both *critical* and *easy*. Get the executives together and develop a mission, vision, and values framework that engenders pride and inspires both employees and customers. Hire a graphic designer to place them on a tree, in a Venn diagram, on an inverted pyramid, or in puzzle pieces. The *difficult* part is maintaining through words, actions, systems, and structures, the ongoing modus operandi of the intentions on paper (or in pixels).

“The best laid plans of mice and men oft’ go awry.”

However, humans are human and with the speed and complexity of today’s life and work, we can all default to the path of least resistance. We can kowtow to authority, respond to the squeakiest wheel, go-along to get-along, or focus on achieving our own financial reward. This often leads, unintentionally, to “us versus them” silos within the organization.

It’s nearly impossible to make enemies of proximal co-workers; it’s much simpler to blame other departments, customers, donors, headquarters, or the board of directors. It’s nearly impossible to withhold official and unofficial information from colleagues, but advantageous to define “colleagues” as those who work in our functional area or those who operate at our level (title, pay grade, or expertise).

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

In an era that demands innovation, cross-functional cooperation, excellent customer service, and continual growth, true leaders must embody and evangelize the original mission, vision, and values, to preserve the culture of the organization. This means leading by example with authenticity, communicating expectations and information regularly, holding everyone accountable for their actions (and inaction), encouraging (or mandating) teamwork, and enabling people to do their jobs efficiently and effectively. Envisioning a future that lives beyond the next quarter and shaping a cooperative environment, will ensure the mission can be met.

“Servant leaders enable others to grow & serve, as they themselves grow & serve.”

Leaders determine culture in business, nonprofits, government, families, sports teams, and symphonies alike. Executives must *proactively* plant, fertilize, cultivate, and recognize their employees, partners, and customers every day, or they too, will meet their demise.