Our Universities: Creating a Powerful Corporate Culture

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Our Universities: Creating a Powerful Corporate Culture

Sixth and final reflection on corporate culture…

Nurturing a strong organizational culture is the only job that matters. Without the power of a positive shared experience, selfishness and happenstance rule not vision or purpose.

“A company’s culture is often buried so deeply inside rituals, assumptions, attitudes, and values that it becomes transparent to an organization’s members only when, for some reason, it changes.”

Rob Goffee

Healthy organizations promote effectiveness through proactive leadership. Unhealthy organizations sap initiative and good intentions from all. The following six precepts have application in any setting where two or more people aspire to common goals.

First, be willing and able to present your point of view to make the enterprise more successful in attaining its goals. Never compromise your perspective. Thoughtful and informed discussion, even disagreement, is not antagonistic but stokes the heart of an organization. Krystal Barron in a May 23, 2013 post on The American Genius suggests five ways to argue fairly in the workplace. These are nearly self-evident. Focus on the positives, don’t take criticism personally, set up a framework for discussion, don’t be a gossip, and don’t participate in workplace gossip. The difference between a productive discussion and denigrating the culture of the workplace is a fine line that gets crossed, by design or default, daily.

Second, do everything you can to build confidence in organizational purpose by supporting forward-looking ideas. Purposeful confidence is not decoration but the integrated result of the work of many. Consistent determination to improve creates confidence. Carmine Gallo, communications coach and author of “The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs: How to be Insanely Great In Front of Any Audience”, identifies key differences between confidence, and arrogance. Arrogant people have little regard for anyone or anything outside of self. He suggests arrogant people are the last ones to “fess up” to their own mistakes. Arrogance focuses inward on the individual while confidence focuses outward on the organization.

Third, contribute to the positive perspective in the workplace even when it’s difficult. It is easy to be a cheerleader when the team is winning. The real test of good citizenship is what happens when the culture is challenged by defeat, scarcity, misstep,
poor leadership or occurrences caustic to a healthy culture. According to a 2010 post on the website Incentive, What Motivates, Michael Ryan says the value of uplifting people’s efforts, even when they are not successful, is irrefutable. I don’t believe Ryan is suggesting dispensing “faint praise” at the water-cooler, but sincere appreciation for hard work.

Fourth, encourage and support the people you work with. On any day all of us may be difficult to be with. Develop a perspective that allows you to look past individual frailty for everyone you work with: Encourage up, encourage out, and encourage down. This may sound like Pollyanna to members of work organizations where there is incessant strife, favoritism, envy and other trappings of human nature. Larry Downes, CEO of New Jersey Resources, speaking to Harvard Business Publishing, said that leadership is alive, vibrant and personal and every member of an organization must be engaged as a leader. This implies that we are all edifying, encouraging and challenging each other forward.

Fifth, make yourself proud of the place you work. Some days that’s not easy. That is why it’s called work. International Business Times reported last week in a study conducted by People Management that claims two fifths of employees are not proud to work for the organization that signs their checks. That’s down from almost one half from last year. It’s sad: Workplace pride is a self fulfilling prophecy.

Sixth, “boy-scout” the workplace. The Boy Scout rule, “Always leave the campground cleaner than you found it,” could be applied every day in every workplace. It’s a simple admonition that would go a long way to create positive corporate culture. If leadership doesn’t give you a reason to do it, find it inside yourself as a personal mission. It will make you feel better about the place you work, and those you work with.

These simple observations will help make any workplace culture stronger and distribute leadership: not by leading from behind, or leading from below or above, but by everyone leading from within.