

Changing Your Culture

Changing the culture in an organization takes time, dedication and commitment.

We often hear from leaders who are struggling to build positive cultures at work. Despite heroic efforts and seemingly endless attempts to turn the ship, negativity seems to persist around every corner. Team members complain about work the previous shift left behind, supervisors struggle to improve lines of communications, and leaders are blindsided by problems that seem to come out of nowhere.

Good team members grow weary of hearing constant complaints, and initiatives seem to stumble right out of the gate. Deeper problems, like quality issues, high staff turnover, and a struggling census are sometimes also present.

So, what can be done? Where does a leader even start?

Here are five practices to jumpstart your change efforts:

1. Stop posting signs and focus on underlying enablers to good action

Rather than trying to influence mindsets by posting signs or having mandatory in-services that urge employees to be polite to co-workers or kinder to residents, focus on conditions that lead to the unwanted behavior. What is the underlying cause of the unwanted behavior? Oftentimes, poor team dynamics leads to poor customer service, so focus on building team skills, celebrating staff successes, and growing emotional intelligence. Other times, team members are overworked and have no ability to provide feedback to leadership on needed support, equipment or supplies, resulting in hurried responses to residents or a lack of anticipatory thinking. Instead of telling staff to not rush, engage them in efforts to improve efficiency of work and access to needed support. Make needed supplies and equipment accessible and easy to locate so that team members spend less time trying to find things or replenish needed stock. When team members feel part of a happy team that works together, and sense a greater level of support from colleagues and leaders, they begin treating each other and residents better.

2. Look for quick wins

Like it or not, we live in a time of short attention spans and immediate feedback. Many organizations will announce large-scale 'initiatives' to improve quality or engagement, only to have efforts stall as leaders work through technical issues or deployment across various areas. Instead of grand improvement schemes, focus on small, impactful, visible changes. Run pilot projects to test improvements and publish results in open, conspicuous places. Provide on-the-spot praise for good work and promote peer recognition of desired behaviors. Celebrate early and often to build momentum.

“Engagement, retention, and employee productivity are complex and multi-faceted problems, and building an irresistible culture is not a “once and done” project. Rather, it requires an “always on” approach, where your organization constantly creates opportunities to listen more closely, develop opportunities and involve employees in decision-making.”

Denise Boudreau-Scott, Drive President

3. Align formal organization structures

Too often, organizations develop culture statements or engagement plans but fail to change their existing management, oversight, and human resources structures. This creates frustrating disconnects for employees who are told they are empowered, but then face mountains of burdensome paperwork, onerous approval mechanisms, and practices that treat employees as children or thieves rather than trusted team members and colleagues. To address this, review administrative controls and approvals that delay activities rather than promote accountability. Allow teams and supervisors discretion over reasonable budgets, scheduling practices and work routines. Structure human resources as an employee support and resource division, rather than an administrative process controller.

4. Hold formal leaders to the highest standards

Many efforts to improve morale and engagement fail because of direct sabotage or lack of modeling by formal leaders. To be successful, community leaders and department directors must model desired behaviors consistently. Non-supervisory team members are quick to observe when formal leaders are held to different standards or model behaviors unaligned with company rhetoric and will take this as a sign that the organization isn't truly committed to changing practices. One frequent example we hear is that team members are constantly told to smile and say hello, yet leaders walk by them in silence and without the slightest look of recognition on their face. If you are committed to changing the culture, don't allow good technical skills to take the place of displaying expected behaviors or required emotional intelligence; require leaders in all areas, from nursing to maintenance, to model wanted behaviors or find leaders that do.

5. Remember Culture Won't Change Overnight.

Expect an evolution, not a revolution in your community culture. One of the challenges of working with culture is that it changes slowly — often too slowly for leaders facing fast-moving competitors. That's the bad news. The good news? If you approach culture with respect and resilience, you can use it to accelerate other improvement efforts and help your organization thrive. There's no better time to start. Don't just use your biased “gut feeling” to determine where your culture stands! Measure it just like you would any other influential element of your business.

We are looking for just two organizations to pilot a remarkable program that actually gives you a numeric score for your current culture and helps to pinpoint needed changes. Used for decades in a variety of field, the tool has been proven to accurately measure culture and predict the outcomes of your organization based on the final score. This pilot will provide you with the surprising ability to benchmark where you currently stand, and can also help you to determine if changes are creating the impact you are looking for in your organization. Interested in learning more? Contact us at info@cultureoutcomes.com.

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