



How CEOs create a culture that accelerates success

Your company's culture can be molded and shaped, once you develop a clear vision of the environment you want to build.

By Jackie Sloane

Two great reads on this topic:

Leadership Is an Art, by Max DePree, the former chairman of Herman Miller. One of the best books on leadership and how your actions and practices impact how others act and think in organizations.

The Springboard: How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations, by Stephen Denning. Tells the story of how the author launched a major change at the World Bank through the technique of using a "springboard" story, which stimulates listeners to engage in co-creating vision and change.

When Rebeca Mojica launched her business seven years ago, she focused on the enterprise she hoped

to lead, including the culture she wanted to create based on her prior work experiences. She sought staff who would accelerate the company's success, work with her to innovate and take excellent care of customers, building loyalty. Before hiring anyone, Mojica mapped out processes and drafted a manual. Today, Blue Buddha Boutique (*bluebuddhaboutique.com*) is the Midwest's largest supplier in its niche, with customers in 30 countries, steady growth (sales up 90 percent over last year) and legendary customer service that has won the company a committed following, including unsolicited kudos via email, phone and Facebook.

As a leader, you don't have to launch a new firm to create a culture that accelerates your success. Your actions, what you say, what you pay attention to, the questions you ask (and don't ask) and what you reward all impact the nature of your business. Departments and divisions of organizations can have their own distinct cultures. Teams and even families have cultures. One way to think of culture: It defines what is and is not possible in an organization.

How do you create a culture that drives what really matters to you? Here are some practices that work.

Define a clear vision.

What do you want to build? The best customer service in the industry? A finance team recognized as valuable business partners? Be as specific as possible—this first question impacts everything else.

Determine which practices will drive achievement of what you want to create.

Which practices currently support what you are working to achieve? What gets in the way? Involve your staff in this review. Share your vision, then ask them what they would need in order to become part of realizing it. Listen and learn. Engaging people in the power and excitement of the goal and in helping to achieve it is critical in cultivating a generative environment. Notice what gets the most emotion, and focus there. Make changes. One firm's top brass found that filing multiple lengthy reports was unnecessary for the results they sought. The reports were eliminated.

Create an ongoing feedback and learning loop to make adjustments and continually improve.

Mojica's practices include quarterly one-on-one employee-management reviews to share feedback and ideas, as well as discuss potential pay increases.

Reward what you want to see more of.

Thank your employees for their work and their good ideas. Acknowledge excellence at meetings. If you want more innovation and initiative, create time for fun and a safe space for learning.

Depending on the change you want to implement, you will probably benefit from the support of an executive coach or organizational development consultant. **ET**

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