Building a Culture that Supports Your Values

By Francisco Gomez

THINK about the last time you went to a restaurant, shopped for clothing, or communicated with a service provider's support line. What was your experience like? How did you feel and what have you done since as their customer? Have you purchased from them or used their services again? Did you recommend them to your friends? Or did you swear them off and blast them on social media? Similarly, how do you and your employees feel when at work? On the drive to the office each morning, do you feel excited or do you

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dread the day? When you get to work, do you perform at your peak, feeling inspired and energized, or are you anxious or bored counting the minutes until your next break? In each case, whether you're a customer or an employee, what you are likely responding to is the organizational culture. If your employees go above and beyond and show the highest levels of performance and innovation, it's because of culture. If you have loyal customers who purchase from you reliably and recommend you to family and friends, it's because of a great customer experience fostered by your culture. An organization's culture is responsible for the level of customer and employee satisfaction, as well as for the failure or achievement on all business goals. It goes without saying, it's critical that organizations and their leaders understand what culture is and how to influence it.
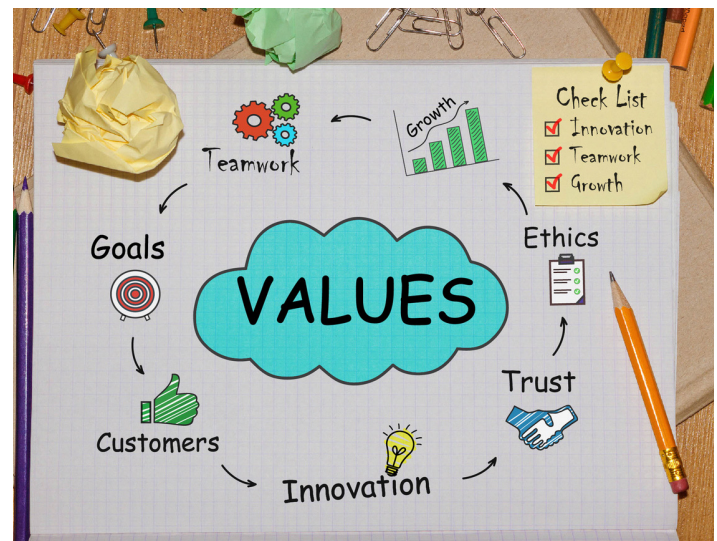
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>
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CULTURE DEFINED

Culture is defined by the patterns of behavior that are encouraged or discouraged by people, processes, or systems over time. These three things—what people do, the processes they follow, and the systems they operate within—are also the primary areas of activity for leaders. Every decision and action leaders take is a building block in the culture, whether it's how they behave in individual employee interactions, how they encourage organizational performance, or how they select and implement incentives and discipline. This is a fact and opportunity that can be used to support all organizational objectives or it can be ignored and squandered away, letting culture drift in indeterminate and likely undesired directions. The key to leveraging this fact lies in understanding and deliberately influencing the components that make up a culture. The most effective leaders are cultural architects with a clear vision of the organization's core purpose (the mission), their principles and standards (their values), the look and feel (the culture), and an actionable design for the behavioral infrastructure that will support these elements.

GETTING STARTED

The essential first step in building your desired culture is defining the critical few behaviors that everyone (frontline employees up through leadership) must do to support your mission. In essence, you work backwards from the mission statement and values by defining the behaviors that each organizational layer needs to do to bring them to life. For instance, your mission statement might be *To Be the Choice Provider of X by Delighting the Customer With Superior Service.* That statement itself is good for little more than a pretty poster on

the wall until it gets embodied with the behaviors that will turn the declaration into a reality. Together with your leadership team and a select group of frontline employees (high performers), you should precisely define what it is that frontline employees will do and say to *delight the customer with superior service*. How will they behave in front of the customer? How will they behave on the shop floor? How will they behave with their peers? When done correctly, a list of the critical few behaviors (the most important, tactical, and objectively defined) that support your mission will be identified.

aged and can become habits. They will also ensure that the behaviors that are contrary to your mission are discouraged. One of my favorite quotes from Aubrey Daniels is, "Behavior goes where reinforcement flows." The leadership behaviors you define should focus primarily on flowing reinforcement towards the behaviors that support your mission, values, and business objectives.

IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

Make eye contact, smile, and greet every customer

Approach the customer and offer help before they ask

Take every customer inquiry and request to its conclusion (even if it's not in your department)

Ask customer open-ended questions to ensure understanding and match product precisely to that need

Provide feedback to peers on their customer service behaviors

FRONTLINE BEHAVIORS

THESE MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

Conduct daily walks on the shop floor to observe and provide feedback on customer service behaviors

Ask employees open-ended questions about their most recent (most interesting, favorite, difficult) customer service experience

Remove obstacles preventing employees from engaging in desired customer service behaviors

Ensure processes and systems support customer service behaviors (evaluate work processes, pay systems, disciplinary systems)

Inform cross-functional peers of any obstacles to meeting customer requests the moment you discover them and define short and long-term solutions with them

LEADER BEHAVIORS

Once frontline behaviors have been identified, pinpoint the leadership behaviors that support them. These leadership behaviors will serve as the accountability system that will ensure that the most critical behaviors defining your desired culture are encour-

*Notice that these are all observable and measurable behaviors. Objectively defined behaviors are essential for accountability, feedback, and coaching

While this may seem like a simple example, I'm using it to illustrate a more complex general principle. To have the culture you want and to truly live your values as an organization, you need to understand behavior and all of the factors that influence it. Culture will give you precisely what you put into it as a leadership team. If you don't like what you see, turn the lens around and focus it on your leadership decisions. What are you doing to shape that culture?

[About the Author]

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As a bilingual senior consultant, Francisco supports clients with large-scale behavior change and has a proven record of generating measurable performance improvements across a diverse set of industries and business needs. In his free time, Francisco enjoys cooking with his wife and daughters, practicing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and playing jazz drums..

[About ADI]

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