

Seven Ways to Enhance Organizational Culture

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My boss, the Marketing Manager, asked me to help him with some unusual projects. First, I organized an ugly tie contest. Next, we created a puzzle where everyone told me their fantasy identity (who they would be if they could be anyone) and I created a quiz. People had several days to try to figure out who was who. This culminated in a party and the revealing of all the secret identities (and prizes for those who had done the best guessing).

Along with many other events, we eventually instituted the first casual Friday in this company (hey, this was 1987).

At the time I knew what was happening and why it was important to the development of the culture in this organization. But I didn't understand it the way I do now. . .

For a whole variety of reasons, organizational culture is important to the health or viability of any organization.

It is one thing to know something is important. It is another thing entirely to know what to do about it. This article will give you some specific things you can do to act on the importance of your organizational culture.

Get help. Wherever you sit in the organizational structure or hierarchy you can impact organizational culture in a positive (or negative - but why would you want to do that?) way. Admittedly, if you are in a position of leadership, it might be easier, but we can all have an impact. But we can't do it alone. Form a team of like minded, interested and enthusiastic people, and get them on board with developing and enhancing your culture.

Get a vision. Get your team to discuss the current culture. Define the parts of the culture that are already great and need to be supported. And honestly determine where the culture could use some polishing. Then create a vision of the culture you want to create, taking into account the entire current picture - the warts and the beauty marks.

Get strategic. Your team will recognize that this is important - you've picked people who already understand that and you have developed a deeper understanding as you created a vision of a desired future culture. Help everyone understand - the team and organizational leadership - that this isn't a band-aid, quick fix; but an ongoing, strategic intention to build a more attractive culture that fits the needs of the organization.

Get people excited. Chances are your culture team will be excited. If not, get them excited! Help the team recognize that not everyone else in the organization is going to think that these efforts are worthwhile immediately. Remember that enthusiasm is contagious. Do what you can to keep the enthusiasm of your team high. If their excitement falters, remind them of the vision they created to re-invigorate them.

Get a champion. That person may be you, or it may be someone else on the team. In my case, I took on an alter ego of the "phun phantom." While a moniker might not be necessary, a point person, whether anonymous or not, is important. Culture change is like any other change - it requires champions. The champion needs to be someone who is passionate about creating the new culture. As in my case, this might be a perfect role for a young energetic person, but don't assign the role. The best champions will rise up and "select" themselves.

Get started. Yes, I have listed the first five suggestions in a chronological order. But that doesn't mean you can't do something today, as soon as you finish reading this article or right now. You already know some things that need to change in your culture, so role model one of them starting immediately. Maybe your first step is to invite a couple people to lunch that you think might want to be on your team. Whatever your first step is - do it.

Get momentum on your side. Any change will have a greater chance of success with momentum. Don't form your team today if you don't think you'll be able to get them going quickly. Don't think of this something that can be done in a couple of weeks. A single event that you hope will permanently change the culture - won't. In fact, it might have the opposite effect entirely. Get started but be committed to building momentum and staying with it. It will be one of the

most rewarding efforts you and your team will ever engage in.

I haven't given you specific cultural events to try. Why? Because I don't know what kind of changes you want to create. In my case we were trying to create higher levels of camaraderie and more fun in the workplace. You may have that and may want to enhance your culture in completely different ways. You and your team will figure out what to do. This list is meant to help you figure those things out for yourselves.

These seven things are by no means a complete list – but they are a great place to start. And getting started is the most important next step of all.

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