Tips for a strong culture

Don't (let them see you) worry. Be happy!

Gratitude creates happiness. It is a wonderful habit to wake up and first thing, as a matter of habit, appreciate life, friends, colleagues, family and other loved ones. I personally love to start the day by doing something good for somebody: A charitable donation, some time with a mentee, a positive comment to somebody, a personal card. It has become a habit. More than anything, it makes me feel privileged to be able to do things for others.

Happiness is contagious. The employee getting a positive comment who then becomes happy and passes it on to her kid who then is nice to the school janitor. As a CEO with a wide reach across a community, my happiness can impact thousands of lives.

It has made me wonder how happiness among senior leaders may influence company culture and whether organizations with happy leadership have better results and a more positive culture.

Living in fear

In supply chain, where risk management has become important, we see serious risk avoidance. Let's face it: Many companies have a punitive culture where transgressions and missteps are dealt with harshly. Employees avoid what may be a career-ending step.

While risk avoidance can be good, it can be – and often is – detrimental to organizations when it is pervasive. When decisions drag out infinitely because nobody dares make a decision, the organization is working on inertia. In the meantime, more nimble competitors are gaining market share. Risk avoidance can cause employees to refrain from voicing alternative points of view, bringing up new ideas or bringing problems to management's attention. It creates a fake illusion of consensus, it kills innovation and it kills employee motivation.

Companies with high degrees of risk avoidance make more strategic and tactical errors. Their focus tends to be on the day-to-day and often miniscule problems.

A positive culture supports collaboration, not just internally but also with external partners. It is more likely to foster innovation and creativity. It is related to employee satisfaction and longevity. All of these are areas that correlate to success and profitability.

Think before you speak

Ask business leaders, and they all want to create a positive culture. However, it takes focus to stay the course. Leaders can undo years of positive culture, when they overreact on isolated incidents, side-track dissenters, or publicly discuss failures. Leading often means shouldering fear. Everyone has the fear of failure. It is built into our DNA, and it worked well for our ancestors' survival. For leaders, failure can be very public. Yet, being a leader is also a privilege, and with that privilege comes the obligation of shouldering the fear without letting fear overwhelm. Only weak leaders don't recognize the fear. Great leaders figure out how to translate the fear into a positive team culture, placing the focus on results and what it takes to get there. Nobody wants to go through the business jungle with a skittish leader. ●

For more tips on how to build a more positive corporate culture, go to **www.sbnonline.com**

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