

What Stops Your Organization From Having a Winning Culture?

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If the CEO is committed to creating possibilities from “nothing”, he or she cannot transform those possibilities into reality as a lone wolf. If he surrounds himself with the smartest people, it does not mean those people will be comfortable turning “nothing” into something extraordinary. Even the smartest people need to be

motivated to produce astonishing results. And, without a culture to support extraordinary, high performance becomes a pipe dream. Therefore, the CEO is also responsible for creating a winning culture.

While there is no silver bullet, the solution is much simpler than it sounds. Every organization has a culture. Every culture is made up of a network of conversations (social anthropologists say the culture of a country, company or family is made up of a network of conversations). If you listen to what stakeholders – employees, suppliers, community, management, government, media, etc. – say, that will provide insight into what the culture of the organization is. Regardless of what you wish the culture to be, what people say about a company determines what the culture is. Sometimes the water cooler conversations are most telling.

There are 3 main kinds of conversations that make up a culture in an enterprise:

- **Under performing** – Like all cultures, under performers use key words. The conversations sound something like: “Things are unfair.” “I don’t like.” “I don’t know how.” “I don’t care.” “That’s impossible.” “You’ll never be able to do it.” “Something is wrong with.” In general, the underperformers tend to be victims and feel powerless to change anything.

- **Average performing** – The average performers talk about the following: “If it was meant to be it will be.” “Let’s see how it goes.” “I’ll give it my best shot.” “If they do it first, I will do it.” “Under promise and over deliver.” It seems as though this group is committed to avoiding any type of pressure.

- **High performing** – In this paradigm, the people occur as though they are from another planet. To start, they are making unreasonable promises to accomplish the task at hand. They almost appear reckless. Yet, there is a high level of integrity and accountability. Furthermore, they are making unreasonable requests of one another, without complaints. The language would sound more like: “this is going to require real effort to accomplish. And, I am up for it.” “Let’s take care of this now.” “Nothing can stop us now.” “Let’s work on this together.”

As you can see, the language within an organization can predetermine outcomes. If you watch the 3 groups closely, you will see their actions are always correlated with the conversations they have. With that understanding, it becomes clear why some corporations, divisions or teams have difficulty executing easy initiatives.

On the other hand, when the CEO is committed to inventing breakthroughs or creating possibilities from “nothing”, she will need a corporate culture that is ready for action, even if the goal appears impossible.

Therefore, if you are a leader/manager, it is not necessary to control your people. It is, however, imperative to create a network of conversations that will support the possibilities you invent.

To support this effort, you should give real time feedback to your people, instead of waiting for annual reviews. Your people should know immediately when their conversations and actions reflect under performance. Conversely, they should be acknowledged when they display behavior of a high performer.

Furthermore, if high performing language does not exist in your company now, it will not happen overnight. You will need to repeat the message many times.

While I may have over simplified this method for creating a winning culture, it works. Except, the network of conversations has to start at the top. In some cases, leadership does not have the core competencies to transform culture. If that is the case, it is better to bring in outsiders with the expertise. That way you avoid trial and error and get it right the first time. Like creating possibility from nothing, the CEO gets to create the language of high performance from nothing as well. What are the conversations in your organization?

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