Culture is Everything
How leaders make a culture that works

A company's culture is critical to the growth and longevity of the organization. A good culture impacts everything: customers, costs, profitability, attrition, and employee satisfaction. The responsibility for having a good or bad company culture resides with the executive leadership team.

Reinforce the whole:
The expression, "You get precisely what you reinforce," is true. For example, suppose a company is myopically focused on budgets. In that case, budget adherence will be met. However, opportunities may be missed, people could choose to leave, service can drop, and customer satisfaction could be impacted. If, by contrast, the leadership team maintained accountability and considered a holistic view of people, financials, customer satisfaction, innovation, and performance, then decisions would be made with a broader perspective, opportunities would have a better chance to be noticed, and the company has a greater ability to thrive.

Be Human:
People/employees are, first and foremost, fellow human beings. All human beings want to have a purpose, be a part of something they believe in, and be valued and respected.

- Purpose – Align the organization around a purpose. Create goals that are built with input from the organization. When people are part of the goal-setting process, they know that they, individually or as a team, are adding value to customers and the company. They can see how their work becomes essential to meeting those goals.

- Belonging – Design a team culture. People spend one-third of their lives at the office or working for a company, and if done right, this time can result in feeling like a close social group with like-minded priorities and values. Allow for giving back to society, engaging in sustainability, and creating an inclusive environment.

- Value – Everyone is valued. Everyone wants to feel like the company cares about them as an individual. Give people the ability to question the status quo, be innovative and learn. Educating managers and executives on listening, being empathetic, finding collaborative solutions to problems, and rewarding hard work and good ideas will go a long way.

Create an environment that understands and fosters those three elements. Not everyone will appreciate what the company does, and some may leave. People leaving can be both good and bad; however, attrition is expensive no matter how it happens. Creating a positive company culture will significantly reduce attrition. People with good job satisfaction are more likely to work harder, better serve the customer, aid in recruitment, contribute ideas, and help others in the organization.

Eliminate Negativity, Not Honesty:
Complaining about another team or person has never solved a problem and only serves to tear down an organization. The Leadership team should focus on making the company a positive, safe place to exchange ideas with the least amount of internal politics possible. Building an organization around holding people accountable while rewarding good work and ideas, creative problem solving, helping others, and building a foundation of trust will weed out the people not aligned with the culture.

Remember that we are a team. When speaking to or about your co-workers, think of their intentions, not just their words. Talking negatively about each other creates mistrust. This mistrust will sow the seeds of resentment across the company. Instead, encourage healthy disagreement and discourse in the organization, open and honest communication is always the best way.

People make mistakes, and not everything goes to plan. Talking about what went wrong in a way that asks, "What can I do to help the situation?" is an approach that focuses on the positive outcome rather than the negative one. The goal is to learn from mistakes, take responsibility and avoid blame.

Put into practice with the organization "If you have a problem with someone or hear they have a problem with something you are doing, take it up with them respectfully. If that person is not receptive and the matter is essential, take it up with your manager." Help train the team with the skills for positive conflict resolution. There are ways to handle confrontation with professionalism and respect.

If you interact with someone once and struggle, give the person the benefit of the doubt. We all can have a bad day and react poorly to a situation. Put yourself in their shoes and consider the following:

- Is this a normal response for this person?
- Is something going on in their personal life that could be troubling them today?
- Why are they reacting this way?
- Would I react this way if I were in their position?

Alternatively, if you know you didn't handle a situation well, take a moment to apologize, ask for guidance on how you could have done better, or acknowledge that you wish you would have handled things differently. Not only do you clear the air, but you permit others to do the same.

People do not always agree, and that is ok. We all have different backgrounds, experiences, knowledge, and personalities. So long as people interact with one another cordially and civilly with respect, those who disagree can work together without the situation becoming untenable. Having different perspectives can often bring about better solutions. Getting along with everyone is always optional for a good workplace and culture; however, respect and civility are not.