

Cracking Your Church's Culture Code
Seven Keys To Unleashing Vision and Inspiration
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Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

Culture—not vision or strategy—is the most powerful factor in any organization.

Organizational culture includes tangibles and intangibles. The things we can see are the way people dress and behave, the look of the corporate offices, and the messages of posters on the walls. The intangibles may be harder to grasp, but they give a better read on the organization's true personality. The organization's values (stated and unstated), beliefs, and assumptions; what and how success is celebrated; how problems are addressed; the manifestations of trust and respect at all levels of the organization—these are the intangible elements of culture.

Vision and strategy usually focus on products, services, and outcomes, but culture is about the people—the most valuable asset in the organization. The way people are treated, the way they treat their peers, and their response to their leaders is the air people breathe. If that air is clean and healthy, people thrive and the organization succeeds, but to the extent that it is toxic, energy subsides, creativity lags, conflicts multiply, and production declines.

A strong, vibrant culture stimulates people to be and do their very best and reach the highest goals. A healthy culture inspires and stimulates all staff members—whether they're in the boardroom or the mailroom—to give their best because they are convinced their ideas will be valued. In a creative, supportive environment, people are less threatened by their own mistakes and by others' failures.

Culture Is the Most Powerful Factor in Any Organization

Vision statements, strategies, and goals are very good tools, but they can't compare in importance to the culture. Culture Is Usually Unnoticed, Unspoken, and Unexamined. Top leaders need to spend at least as much time analyzing their culture as they do crafting their new vision, strategy, and marketing plans. Toxic culture is like carbon monoxide: you don't see or smell it, but you wake up dead! Culture Determines How People Respond to Vision and Leadership. The intangibles of respect and trust transform a church culture into a beehive of thinking, creating, and working together to accomplish grand goals.

Culture Most Often Surfaces and Is Addressed in Negative Experiences. When there's a disconnect between a leader's vision and the receptivity of the staff, the problem isn't with the vision; it's the culture.

Vision and strategy simply can't succeed without a positive, healthy culture. A positive culture will act as an accelerant for your vision. One of the most helpful elements in this book (available on the Web site www.freeculturesurvey.com;

Strangely, some of the most toxic organizations have the most charming leaders. To people on the outside looking in, these senior leaders and nonprofit executives present themselves as gracious, gifted leaders, but those who see them every day are the victims of their fangs and venom! They have exceptionally high expectations of workers, but they offer them little or no autonomy to make decisions. Leaders of healthy organizations are steadfastly committed to resolving problems, not with a heavy hand to rigidly control people, but by treating everyone with respect. The most powerful features of an organizational culture are trust and respect.

Let's look at some of the potholes, mud pits, and collapsed bridges that threaten to slow, stall, or crash our Indy car:

Unrealistic Demands

One of the most trust-building statements any leader can make is, “I’m sorry. I was wrong.”

Power Struggles

Dishonesty

Investment banker Charles Schwab commented, “I have yet to find the man, however exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a spirit of approval than under a spirit of criticism.”

Using People Instead of Valuing Them

Unclear Vision, Strategy, Goals, and Values

A Lack of Authenticity

People have an almost limitless capacity for self-deception.

The seven keys of CULTURE are

1. Control
2. Understanding
3. Leadership
4. Trust
5. Unafraid
6. Responsive
7. Execution

If control is concentrated in one person who insists on making virtually all important decisions, the organization experiences a significant bottleneck.

Healthy teams are pipelines of leadership development.

We’ll never have truly healthy cultures, however, if we don’t identify and develop a host of strong, creative, passionate leaders.

Trust grows in an environment that is HOT: honest, open, and transparent.

Great leaders welcome dissenting opinions, as long as they are offered in good will and with an eye toward a solution. When the right people are placed properly and invited to make a difference for the kingdom, accountability is seldom a problem—and it should never be a primary means of motivating people, whether they are staff or volunteers.

As leaders we need to carefully plan the first couple of sentences for every meeting we lead.

Respecting people who have different opinions is essential if we want to create an inspiring culture.

First, then, we need to be honest with ourselves about how we view people on our teams. Do we respect them as adults and thus can be honest with them, or do we believe we need to treat them like children and filter the information we share with them?

When team members share their hearts, especially hurtful things, the leader needs to listen carefully without a shred of defensiveness.

The leader's role is then to be the CPO, the chief priority officer.

An important principle of creating a healthy culture is becoming comfortable with some unresolved issues.

If his attitudes and behaviors in private match his public words of faith and nobility, they know they can trust him. If not, they first lose respect for the leader, then for their coworkers who remain loyal, and, finally, even for themselves for staying in such a toxic culture.

Loyalty earned is a beautiful thing, but loyalty demanded is toxic.

For words of affirmation to be meaningful, they need to be specific, personal, and timely.

When we choose respect instead of manipulation, and honesty instead of avoidance of issues, most people will thrive,

It's amazing how someone's IQ seems to double as soon as you give them responsibility and indicate that you trust them. —Timothy Ferriss

Accepting responsibility for what we can control—and making a steadfast commitment not to complain about what's outside our control—are crucial ingredients in spiritual, emotional, and relational health.

“What is it about me that keeps me from becoming the best me that God intended me to be?”

God has made us so that we thrive emotionally at work only when we know we are contributing our knowledge and skills to accomplish something bigger than ourselves.

Our ability to connect with people, earn their trust, invite their opinions, and inspire them is the most important trait we bring—even more important than our experiences or skills. Emotional health is primarily a function of relationships, not competence in our roles.

A toxic environment is like carbon monoxide; you can't see it, but it'll kill you. And an inspiring culture is like perfume, filling the air with the sweet aroma of love, encouragement, passion, and a commitment to excellence.

The way a leader navigates change may do more to define the organization's culture than any purpose statement.

I encourage pastors to create a culture of experimentation in which creativity is celebrated and failure isn't a tragedy.

Leaders who take too much credit for themselves erode trust, discourage followers, and drip toxins into the culture.

Think the unimaginable, dream the impossible, and attempt incredible things for God.

In his insightful book *The Incestuous Workplace*, William White observes that the sickest cultures are those that close their doors to new ideas.

To identify mediocre staff members, Paul Idzik, COO of Barclay's Bank, suggests that leaders look for signs of someone who Is stubborn and resistant to change Is reactive rather than proactive Is lazy and unprepared Makes promises but seldom delivers Shirks responsibility and blames others

Identifies problems without offering solutions

When I consult with church leaders about hiring or promoting staff, I suggest they ask four questions

1. Competence: Can you do the job?
2. Character: Can I trust you?
3. Chemistry: Can you fit in our culture?
4. Capacity: Can you grow with us?

The more important factors that shape team members' responses are the way the change is presented, the level of respect for the person who presents it, the rate of change, and the clarity of the team member's role in the process of change.

Excited embracers make up 2 percent

Early embracers are 18 percent of a group.

Middlers are the largest part of the population, about 60 percent of people in the group.

Late embracers make up 18 percent

Never embracers are 2 percent

Author and humorist Robert Orben quipped, "Sometimes I get the feeling that the whole world is against me, but deep down I know that's not true. Some of the smaller countries are neutral."

Vision and Vehicle

If I wanted to travel to London from my home in Atlanta, it wouldn't matter if I had a Lamborghini or a Rolls Royce—a car wouldn't get me to Piccadilly.

I want to find out if their vision is clear and strong, and I want to help them see if their organizational structure and people can take them to reach that vision.

Dr. Gerald Brooks (www.growingothers.com) has helped me think through this issue by using a series of test questions.

1. The heart test: Is the vision burning brightly in the heart of the leader, both in public descriptions of where God is leading him and passionately in his heart?
2. The leadership test: Do the top leaders in the church share this vision, or are they apathetic or resistant? Are these the people who can take the church to the vision's destination?
3. The organization test: How well does the current organizational structure work to achieve the vision? What are the bottlenecks? Which aspects are cars that can't take you there? Which ones are planes or ships?
4. The recruiting test: Are new hires and volunteers on board with the vision, or are they still a work in progress?
5. The message test: Is the vocabulary of the vision consistent and strong in every part of the church?

Is the message of the vision reflected in sermons, written materials, the budget, signs, and conversations about the priorities of the church?
6. The planning test: Is the church's vision your staff's benchmark for strategic planning in every area?
7. The facility test: Do facilities, including their layout, design, and decor, reflect the vision?
8. The money test: Does the budget demonstrate the vision's priorities?

9. The pragmatism test: Does the vision make sense? Is it both God-sized and workable? Can you see it happening? Is it so global that it doesn't capture anyone's heart, or is it appropriately targeted?

10. The capacity test: How well does the capacity of the current organizational structure and personnel match the vision?

11. The clarity test: Can people throughout the organization articulate the vision clearly and with passion? If you ask people who come out the door after the service on Sunday morning to articulate the vision of the church, could they share it clearly and with enthusiasm?

12. The counsel test: Who are the outside voices that are helping to shape the vision and the vehicle to fulfill it?

13. The growth test: How do the ministries of the church need to be organized to capitalize on the next two stages of growth?

Olan Hendrix, author of *Three Dimensions of Leadership*, observed, "Generally, religious organizations start out with a goal orientation . . . deteriorate to a task orientation . . . and finally degenerate to a bottom-line control organization." Don't let that happen to you!

When presented with a complicated decision that could change the direction of the organization and shape the culture, we need to ask four questions; and it is important that we ask them in this order.

1. Is the program in line with our vision, mission, and core values? No matter how great an idea or opportunity, if the program isn't in line with the vision, we must say no to it. Most church leaders use their vision statements to say yes, but they rarely use it to say no and eliminate options. If everything imaginable fits under the umbrella of the vision, perhaps the vision statement is too broad and needs to be refined and clarified.
2. Do we have the organizational and human capacity—and the heart—to do this? The program may be so large that it creates enormous stress for the entire team, or perhaps we don't have the right people on the team to
3. How will God be glorified? Most leaders will ask, "Will God be glorified?" and the answer is almost always yes. When the answer is always yes, we are probably asking the wrong question. Instead, ask, "How?" This question will help us understand the true impact the decision will have on God's kingdom.
4. How much will it cost? This must be the last question asked. Understand the true nature of this question, and then consider it carefully. It's not "Can we afford it?"

Jim Baker is executive pastor of Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee. He notes, "In the midst of rapid growth, we have learned that organizational clarity, alignment, and collaboration are everything. In fact, we have learned that our effectiveness is ultimately the result of how well we execute these three critical processes.

William Bridges, a noted expert on change and transition, explains in his most recent book, *Managing Transitions*: "Making the Most of Change, too many leaders put up with less than healthy cultures because they aren't willing to pay the price to destroy the old and create the new."

Some leaders put on a good face in public, but they aren't very good at capturing the hearts and winning the loyalty of those closest to them.

As the months went by, the team implemented new ways of relating to each other, valuing those who ask hard questions, and creating new feedback loops to be sure everyone was on board. Gifted teachers know that asking a great question is often more valuable than an hour of brilliant lecture.