

7 Imperatives for Changing and Sustaining Your Culture

Thought Starter Ideas

Creating and sustain a culture that can nimble, focused, and relevant must be a focused effort if you want to succeed in the future. The following seven imperatives were discussed in Chapter 14 of Randy Pennington’s book, *Make Change Work: Staying Nimble, Relevant, and Engaged in a World of Constant Change*.

These ideas are provided as a beginning place for your ideas. The most important action you can take with this list is to use it as a tool to generate ideas that will work in your organization or team.

Imperatives	Thought Starter Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Define the purpose, vision, values, and current reality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall purpose and vision will likely be established by the senior leaders. Consider asking each department and team to define how it contributes to advancing the purpose and vision. • One new CEO with which we worked asked his senior leadership team to define the values they believed should be present to achieve his vision. Then he asked the 3,000 employees in the organization to submit their ideas. Several hundred did so. The CEO and senior leaders found that the employees’ ideas were not significantly different so they used more of the words utilized by employees and fewer words used by the leadership team. • Open Book management (See the book, <i>The Great Game of Business</i> by Jack Stack) is an excellent tool for keeping everyone aware of the current business reality. This doesn’t have to be elaborate. One small business simply posted a bar graph on the break room that showed how much revenue the company needed each week. The company drew each week’s performance in with a marker. • One client established “Student of the Business” training for each department. The purpose was to educate everyone on the vision, strategic goals, and the key metrics that showed progress toward it. • The CIO of a public university allows staff to attend the Board of Regents meetings so that they can hear and report on the discussion that takes place. If no employees attend, the CIO delivers the report.

<p>❖ Create continual awareness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a “culture committee” that is charged with keeping the organization’s values and principles front and center with employees • Invest time in one staff meeting per month to discuss one of the organization’s core values • Share success stories of individuals and teams who are living the organization’s values in newsletters, in staff meetings, and on bulletin boards • Create a “Shout Out” Wall so that peers can recognize their colleagues who live the values and support the culture • Create a “Culture Book” so that individuals can share what the culture means to them (Zappos does a great job at this. Check out their videos on You Tube) • Make a big deal out of your employee survey and its results. Encourage everyone to participate. Conduct team discussions and focus groups to understand the data. Establish, communicate, track, and report performance on objectives to improve survey responses. Many organizations do an employee culture/satisfaction survey. Few actually make a big deal about it.
<p>❖ Cultivate the language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define what language supports and detracts from the culture. This is an excellent exercise for an intact or cross functional team. Make sure to include how to raise questions and disagree with ideas in an appropriate manner • Develop culture specific education sessions for staff – this could be formal training or more informal “Lunch and Learn” sessions • Create and share a glossary of terms and language to share with new employees so that they can easily adopt the language of their new workplace • Provide training to supervisors, managers, and teams on how to give feedback and redirect language that is inconsistent with the culture • Include questions about cultivating and supporting the language for staff surveys and performance reviews • Develop multiple scripts from which everyone can choose to use for their voice mail and out-of-office email responses – developing multiple versions allows people to choose the one that works best for them • Create a fine jar for use in meetings when the language of the meeting veers off course – make the amount minimal so that no one is financially harmed and use the money for doing something for the entire group

<p>❖ Leverage the legends and symbols</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include living the values and promoting the culture on performance reviews • Make supporting and promoting the culture a part of every promotion decision • Establish rewards – peer initiated or manager initiated – for individuals and teams who set the standard for living the culture • Talk about culture often in team meetings, newsletters, etc. • Tell stories about individuals and teams in meetings and publications • Create a “Culture Legends” book or web page to honor those who excel at living your values • Formalize the ending of every new employee’s trial/introductory period – at the end of the period tell the employee that you have decided that they are a great fit for the organization and that you want them to continue and ask them to make a conscious decision to do the same • Create a visible symbol for people who have been accepted into the organization at the end of the trial/introductory period
<p>❖ Build and maintain the competencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the specific competencies that are needed to thrive and flourish as a representative of the culture – don’t assume that people know what the words in your value statement mean • Build discussions and activities about what it takes to succeed in the culture into new employee training • Offer education sessions – face-to-face or on-line – that show examples of people living the culture • Create short culture case studies for use in staff meetings as a tool to spur discussion and develop competencies • Conduct culture education sessions led by senior leaders to encourage dialogue and show commitment
<p>❖ Align structure, process, procedure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematically evaluate and align every process and procedure to ensure that it aligns with and promotes the organization’s values • Evaluate every new process or procedure based on its alignment with and promotion of one of the organization’s values • Examine the organization’s structure and reporting relationships on a regular basis to ensure that it is consistent with your aspirations for the culture – empower a team of employees to evaluate and recommend changes to the organizational structure that would make it more consistent with your values • Pay special attention to processes that demonstrate how you value your staff such as performance review, career ladders, payroll processes, corrective action/disciplinary processes, and employee recognition

<p>❖ Actively strengthen the group and assimilate members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign a “buddy” to new hires in order to provide each new team member with a resource for answering questions and ensuring that new people have a positive role model to help them assimilate • Manage every step of the new hire process to send a message that new people are important – provide hiring managers a checklist to ensure that all details are addressed prior to the arrival of a new team member; make sure team members are on hand to welcome the new person; provide resource information to the new person about things they might want to know such as where to park, nearby places to eat, etc. • Include sessions that are designed to teach people the culture as part of the new employee on-boarding experience – when possible, have those sessions led by the organization’s employees • Create a list of core questions about the organization’s values that every candidate is asked to ensure that you are hiring for cultural fit • Conduct 360-feedback assessments about the organization’s values – these should be used for developmental purposes rather than as part of the performance review; you may want to begin with leaders, managers, and supervisors and then eventually move to everyone. <p>Note: We strongly recommend that you be cautious in using this type of feedback as part of the formal performance review until the culture is ready for that level of candor.</p>
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