Transforming Culture

Culture transformation is about everyone acknowledging what is, defining what should be, and figuring out a path forward. True culture change is a marathon not a sprint and takes time (a lot of it) and sustained effort (a lot of that too). It is about creating a safe environment, defining clear expectations, and holding people accountable. Action must replace rhetoric.

Before changing culture, it is important to embrace the three pillars that strong, intentional cultures prioritize – purpose, safety and vulnerability. People must understand and buy into the collective vision, feel a sense of belonging within the organization, and be able to be their authentic selves.

People often ask how long culture change takes within an organization. While you may start seeing change in a few months, enduring culture change takes a long time (some say two years while others say three to five). It takes so long because change is based in the habits of people who are very used to one way of doing things. Remember people change because they see benefit in the changes.

Culture starts at the top. Leadership matters and must model the behavior they expect of others. Leaders must also accept responsibility for their part in developing, perpetuating, and accepting a destructive culture. Moving forward in the transformation process, they must be clear about their expectations, address hard issues quickly, and reward people for positive change.

Transforming culture is a three-step process:

Step 1 – Unfreeze

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1. Create a brave culture committee.

2. Assess your current culture and its challenges.

3. Define your values and desired culture.

Step 2 – Change

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4. Create a vision for change and communicate it.

5. Clarify roles and responsibilities and communicate them.

6. Remove obstacles.

7. Create and celebrate short-term wins.

8. Hold people accountable.

9. Measure progress.

Step 3 – Evolve

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10. Continuously reenforce expected behaviors.

11. Continuously monitor how things are going.

12. Make changes as needed.

Before starting the marathon, below are a few tips for transforming culture:

1. **Be intentional.** Define both the culture you have and the culture you want. Align your preferred culture with behavior and make those behavioral expectations crystal clear to everyone. Live your values every day. Deliver what you promise. Hold everyone accountable. Ensure clear consequences are defined and maintained. Handle the hard stuff. Maintain standards of fairness.

2. **Communicate.** Listen carefully valuing the voices around you. Check in regularly. Create safe space for brave and real conversations. Allow healthy conflict and take the time to address it effectively. Provide and accept honest feedback.

3. **Celebrate Small Wins.** Say thank you. Reward people. Measure how you are doing.

If The Strategy Group can be of help in your culture journey, don't hesitate to reach out to us, dwhertz@thestrateygroupllc.org.

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