

## **GREAT CULTURES ARE MORE THAN HAWAIIAN SHIRT DAY & BAGELS**

Culture. Every organization has one, whether you work on it or not. The real questions are, “Is it the one you desire and does it enable organizational success?” These are much more pointed questions and ones that need to be answered before you invest in culture development. In other words, it’s way more than bagels and Hawaiian shirt day!

A definition of culture I like is:

**“Shared beliefs or values of a group exhibited in day to day social interaction.”**

It permeates every facet of your operation. It’s extremely powerful yet invisible to the naked eye. If ignored, it can single handedly destroy any program, initiative or strategy. In fact, management expert Peter Drucker is famous for coining the phrase, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” I would argue it also does for lunch and dinner. It’s that important!

On a positive note, culture, if effectively designed and implemented, will enable success in all areas of your organization. So how do we build an intentional culture that enables success?

### **It All Starts with Values**

I know, I know.....not another discussion on organizational values! You are probably saying, “We have values, they are posted on the website and the office walls but very few people actually live them.”

Therein lies the problem. Values become meaningless plaques on the wall if they are not internalized by all employees, starting with leadership.

Committable Core Values (borrowing a Zappos term), however, can enable all facets of your business. The key word here is committable. This means you are willing to make hiring, promotion and firing decisions based on living these values.

For instance, if **Respect for Others** is a core value, are you willing to fire a high producing sales person who consistently disrespects staff creating a

hostile work environment? If you aren't, then the REAL value is, "produce numbers and nothing else matters."

They are woven into the day-to-day fabric of the entire organization (hiring, meetings, performance reviews, procedures etc.) They work very hard at Zappos at living the values in everything they do.

## The Four Question Value Test

There are no right or wrong values, just the ones that are right for your organization. This is why we recommend defining your desired culture only after deciding your core design elements. These four elements (Mission, Vision, Leadership and Competitive Edge) need to be clear before looking at what values you need to be successful. When determining your values, ask yourself these four simple questions about a potential value:

- Does it Support the Mission?
- Does it Enable the Vision?
- Will Leadership Commit to the Value and Lead By Example?
- Does it Help Leverage our Competitive Edge?

If they pass this four question test, you are well on your way to determining your committable core values. I personally prefer a short list (3-6) of core values to ensure simplicity and create focus on the few things that really matter. (Zappos has 10 but they are uniquely disciplined at managing this number. Most organizations are not.)

## The Proof is in the Pudding!

Warning! The easy part is determining your committable core values. The hard part is implementing them so they become a culture by design. There are two key components that drive a successful implementation of an intentional culture. They are illustrated in the culture model above:

1. Leadership by Example - Your leadership team must be the example! They must internalize and live them first. Then they must hold others accountable to them (this includes other executives). If leaders do not lead the way, the cultural implementation WILL fail. It's also the leader's

responsibility to protect and preserve the core values and their connection to mission, vision and competitive edge.

2. Day to Day Alignment & Execution - Culture doesn't develop overnight and it certainly doesn't change overnight. In order for this change to occur, the desired values and behaviors must be on display every day. This may mean changes in many day to day operational activities. Some examples include changes in:
  - policies and procedures so they are aligned to the values
  - how you run meetings (e.g. encouraging ideas and creating a safe environment to share)
  - consequences for misaligned or poor behavior (at all levels)
  - hiring practices (interview for value alignment)
  - promotion practices (promotions do NOT occur if person is not leading by example)

You will need to honestly assess some or all of these to ensure they are designed to enable success, not hinder it. Each one of these day-to-day components must align to the core in order to build a consistent culture that supports and drives intentional success.

Be patient! It is a slow process that takes day-to-day discipline. You will see only small victories at first but over time, they will end up being transformational.