

Finding the Handles: Six Ways Culture is Created, Reinforced and Changed

The process of culture shaping is challenging. Let's explore what starts to put "handles" on culture so that you can steer it:

1. **Strong Leadership Support:** If a leader has been in position for a while, workplace culture is nearly always a reflection of their own personal beliefs, values and practices. As a result, if senior leadership is on-board and engaged in a culture shaping process – almost nothing can stop it. However, if leadership isn't – almost nothing short of a major crisis can change it.
2. **Consistent Communication:** Culture change can be exciting and scary. Opening lines of communication and inviting input, regular engagement and feedback helps bring information and minimize fears and concerns.
3. **Close Alignment Between Values, Goals and Practices:** The clearer an organization's values are as well as their goals and expectations for practices – the easier it is to train and manage to those. The more aligned they are to each other (if goals are expressions of the values, if practices support the goals and reflect the values, etc.) the more naturally a common culture emerges.
4. **There is Loss Before Gain:** If a culture change process is clear and thorough, some people will start to see they don't fit. They will either choose to leave or be let go. Some tools, practices or sacred cows will no longer be congruent with the values.
5. **Culture Is Magnetic:** Like likes like. Birds of a feather flock together, etc. As your culture clarifies itself, your organization and team will naturally attract more of the kind of people who identify with your new culture. Those people will be more open to and aware of the tools and resources that better fit with this newly shaped culture.
6. **Culture is Self-Forcing but Maintenance Helps:** Celebrating is one of the most powerful ways to reinforce culture. Honoring the individuals and teams who best reflect the values. Celebrating the accomplishments of others who are aligned with or are a result of your culture helps reinforce that value of what has been created.