

## Culture Is King

At a leadership training program I recently gave for a group of high-tech managers, a distinguished-looking man came up to me at the break and shared: “I love what you said about the need for each one of us to develop a leadership culture within our organizations. We talk about it all the time. Last year, our company grew 600%. Our focus on culture-building worked splendidly.” Impressive.

As I’ve suggested earlier, one of your most sustainable competitive advantages will be developing a Culture of Leadership. When clients engage Sharma Leadership International for organizational development and employee training, one of the first areas we focus on is developing the company’s culture – because all performance is driven by the culture. Your competitors will copy your products if they are good. They will copy your services. They will copy your branding. But they will never be able to copy your culture. And your culture is the very thing that makes your organization special. Your organization’s culture is what sets – and then drives – the standards of behavior. Your culture tells your people what’s acceptable and important. Your culture lets people know what your organization values (e.g., honesty, innovation, unending improvement, wowing customers, collaboration, candor and so on). Your organization’s culture states its philosophy, its mythology, its religion. To me, culture is king.

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**The five best ways to build culture are as follows:**

**RITUALS.** *I like the “cult” in culture. The best companies, like Dell and Google and Southwest Airlines and Apple and Wal-Mart, have something in common with cults. They have unique rituals like 7 a.m. team huddles or Friday afternoon pizza parties to promote team bond-ing. Rituals shape culture and keep it special.*

**CELEBRATION.** *John Abele, founder of the multi-billion-dollar Boston Scientific, once told me over dinner that “you get what you celebrate.” Powerful idea. When you see someone living the values your culture stands for, make them a public hero. Behavior that gets rewarded is behavior that gets repeated. Catch people doing good.*

**CONVERSATION.** *Your people become what the leaders talk about; to get your vision and values into your people's hearts, you need to be talking about that stuff constantly – at employee gatherings, at your weekly meetings, during your daily huddles and at the water cooler. You need to evangelize what you stand for constantly. In his excellent book *Winning*, Jack Welch said that he spent so much time evangelizing GE's mission that he could call his people at three in the morning and – half asleep – they could re-state it. (He never did)*

**TRAINING.** *A mission-critical focus to build culture is employee is your people. If you agree that your organization's number-one resource is your people, then it only makes sense to invest significantly in developing your number-one resource. Hold seminars and have leadership workshops to instill the values you seek to nurture and build a leadership culture into their hearts and minds. When your people improve, your company will improve.*

**STORYTELLING.** *Great companies have cultures where great stories are told from generation to generation. The story about to the company was founded in a basement or the story about how a teammate went the extra mile and delivered a customer's baby or the story about how the organization fought back to victory from the brink of disaster. Storytelling cements a company's most closely cherished ideals into the hearts of its people.*

People want to go to work each day and feel they are a part of community. One of the deepest psychological needs of a human being is the need for belonging. We also want to work for an organization that values us, that promotes our personal growth and that makes us feel that we contributing to a dream. Get these things right by creating a Culture of Leadership and you'll keep your stars and attract other ones. And wouldn't that be perfect?

**“ The Greatness Guide ” by ROBIN SHARMA,**  
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