

Improve Your Church Culture

5 TRUTHS ABOUT CHURCH CULTURE

There is too much at stake to let church culture become an obstacle to executing the vision of your church and leading as God calls you.



Healthy culture is vital to success

Culture enhances or diminishes the effectiveness of everything you do. If not aligned with your goals, the best strategies, plans, and programs often fall short of your desired outcome. When your culture is healthy, everything falls in place creating momentum and excitement.

“Until I came to IBM, I probably would have told you that culture was just one among several important elements in any organization's makeup and success — along with vision, strategy, marketing, financials, and the like... I came to see, in my time at IBM, that culture isn't just one aspect of the game, it is the game.

In the end, an organization is nothing more than the collective capacity of its people to create value.”

— LOUIS V. GERSTNER, JR., FORMER CEO OF IBM

There is good news!

You are not doomed to suffer the culture that currently exists at your church. Leaders can create a healthy church culture. In fact, creating a healthy culture is one of the primary responsibilities of a leader.

Here are 5 truths to help you with this important task:

1. Your church has a culture, regardless of whether it is intentional or accidental. It is the leader's responsibility to create an intentional culture.

Your first step is to own the fact that you have a culture in your church and it is impacting your ministry.

"Maintaining an effective culture is so important that it, in fact, trumps even strategy."

-HOWARD STEVENSON,
PROFESSOR EMERITUS AT
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Ask yourself

*How would I best describe the culture of our church today?
What about our culture is intentional? What is accidental?*

Highlight:

Be intentional.

2. Your culture is influenced by the decisions you make with your limited resources.

Regardless of your intended culture, your actual culture is formed as a result of how you spend your time, money, and the evaluation questions you ask. Regardless of the size of your Sunday attendance, every church faces two of the same limitations: time and money.

Have you ever thought the following?

"If only we had more money, we could..."

"If only I had more time, I could..."

Ask yourself

If a person outside our church took a look at our programming calendar and spending priorities, what would they say we value most?

What do the questions we ask to evaluate our ministry suggest are our strongest values?

Highlight:

Allocate limited resources wisely.

3. What you say “no” to defines your church and culture more than what you say “yes” to.

In ministry, it can be difficult for most people to say no. The myth we are tempted to buy into is that more events equal more changed lives. Oftentimes, this is simply not true. By saying "no" to good things, it leaves room to do great things. Our schedules are often so full that when something really great comes along, we can't prioritize it as we should.

What if you could say no to the less essential things so that you can execute your ministry's vision and increase its effectiveness by saying yes to the right opportunities?

Ask yourself

What have we said yes to in the past 3 months that we should have said no to?

What was the last time we said no to something good so that we could do something great instead?

Highlight:

Say "no" more often.

4. Strong culture allows you to develop other leaders more effectively.

Teaching our leaders to ask the wrong questions hurts their development. We train our people to ask, “How would the Lead Pastor do this or what does the Lead Pastor want me to do? The more powerful question for them to ask is, “How should our church do this?” or “How does this reflect what is most important at our church?”

When others know your church culture well, it enables them to make effective decisions for you, on behalf of the church. By doing this, you build leaders who are decision makers.

“Culture guides discretionary behavior and it picks up where the employee handbook leaves off. Culture tells us how to respond to an unprecedented service request. It tells us whether to risk telling our bosses about our new ideas, and whether to surface or hide problems. Employees make hundreds of decisions on their own everyday, and culture is our guide. Culture tells us what to do when the CEO isn't in the room, which is of course most of the time.”

--FRANCES FREI AND ANNE MORRISS

Ask yourself

What would people in our church say about our leadership development effectiveness?

When someone, other than the Lead Pastor, is asked to make a decision, what are the questions they ask themselves?

Highlight:

Build a leadership development culture.

5. Culture can be changed, but it's not easy.

In order to change culture, we have to communicate the why behind the what and consistently prioritize the same 3-5 values.

When we decide to get intentional with our culture, we must answer 2 important questions. First, why are we valuing something new? Second, what specifically is it we are choosing to value? Simply talking about our values or creating an eloquently worded description of our values will not gain traction with our staff or congregation. We must consciously choose to say no to opportunities not in line with our values and choose to utilize our limited resources to support the values which will change our culture.

"We can change culture if we change behavior."

--DR. AUBREY DANIELS

Ask yourself

If you were to choose 2-3 values you would want to begin modeling consistently today, what would they be?

Why did you choose each of those values?

What could you start doing this week to intentionally introduce them to your church culture?

Highlight:

Do the hard work.

The leader cannot give away the responsibility of creating culture. It will be defined by them regardless of whether they want it to be or not. This is in the definition of a leader.

"Growing a culture requires a good storyteller. Changing a culture requires a persuasive editor."

--RYAN LILY



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