

Creating an Intentional Culture

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Was it in geography, world history, or civics that you first became aware of the word “culture”? Or maybe you first heard the term “culture” in preparing Petri dishes for studying bacteria.

However you first learned of that word, you are now building one in your organization! What? Nobody ever told you that? I’m telling you that being intentional about building your culture is one of your biggest jobs as a leader!

Open your mind to how an outside observer might describe your organization’s culture. What if your leadership team became more intentional about what you and your colleagues want to create?

Let me share two examples of intentional cultures that you can study as models to stimulate your imagination!

Think back to that class in U.S. history. Remember those guys named Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin? Remember the Continental Congress and debates about how the big states and small states would be represented? Some of you memorized, “We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union...” (Um, it gets a little fuzzy after that!)

All that debate in the 1770’s was a large-scale effort to establish an intentional culture. Nothing like democracy had ever existed before in the history of the world! A bunch of renegade ideas were offered by people who felt there had to be a better way: “What if we worked it like this?”

We take all that for granted today, but those activities were radical! They sure took King George III by surprise! Over two centuries later, the concepts are still being copied!

How about a current culture that’s being intentionally built? Visit a Chick Fil-A restaurant and listen to the employees. When you hear “My pleasure!” in response to your “Thank you,” take a moment and ask that person “Do you say ‘My pleasure!’ when you’re not at work?” Listen closely. Then ask how working at Chick Fil-A has influenced this person’s life in other ways.

In his 1989 book entitled It’s Easier to Succeed Than to Fail, Truett Cathy reveals that in 1946, at the end of his first week operating his new restaurant, he and his brother Ben decided to close on Sunday. “Never have I intended to make a big issue out of being closed on Sunday,” Cathy writes. But he also notes, “People who take a day of rest to worship the Lord and to refresh themselves spiritually and physically are the kind of associates we seek.”

The company is very open about how it conducts its business. Researching this article on the internet (web address is www.chick-fil-a.com), I found many “frequently asked questions” with surprisingly frank answers!

The stated purpose of Chick Fil-A is, “To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us. To have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick Fil-A.” Their systems and structures are all intentionally set up to serve. Your culture could be intentional, too.

Ah, the cynics out there are thinking, “Sure, but what about results?” In 2001, fifty-five years into its history, Chick Fil-A reached the \$1 billion mark in annual sales. Five years later, they doubled to \$2 billion. In 2009 they reached \$3 billion, \$4 billion in 2012, and \$5 billion in 2013. Now that’s growth!

David Grossnickle, owner/operator of the store on Sam Nunn Boulevard in Perry, GA, was generous with his time as I sought perspective for this column. Are you interested in learning more about building intentional culture? David says he’s willing to talk with you about how Chick Fil-A is doing it!

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