

Your Organization's Culture--Compliance or Commitment?

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I recently read an article entitled, "Relationship is the Essence of Leadership." Do you agree with that contention? As I help individuals build personalized leadership development plans, a primary objective that I keep in mind is, "How will this action enhance relationships and improve results?"

John Agno's article is worth reading. Access his website at www.coachingtip.com. Type into the search engine "Relationship is the Essence of Leadership."

The article led me to some powerful conversations with the leadership team members of an organizational client. I'd like to share those thoughts with you.

Imagine that there is a tool that measures the health of your organization's culture. The scale ranges from "compliance" on one end to "commitment" on the other. Where would your organization stack up?

The stereotypical "command and control" style of leadership tends to deliver a "compliance" culture. A more collaborative leadership style, where people know their responsibilities, where they are competent in their roles, and where they are honorably motivated to serve both their paying and internal customers tends to deliver a "commitment" culture.

Innovation, breakthroughs, and excellence are rarely associated with compliance cultures. In those environments, people operate not because they want to do what's right, but because they know that if they don't follow the rules, there could be serious repercussions. Threats and bribes are used to cause people to abide by established procedures. Feedback is used not to help people stretch and enhance their skills and contributions, but to keep people in line with the established regulations.

How would you move in the direction of a commitment culture if you so desired? Commitment develops because of contributions from both the leader and the other members of the organization.

First, the recruiting and hiring process must bring into the organization individuals who want to function consistent with the values and vision of the organization. Some people, based on their previous experiences, just can't seem to operate without rules and someone watching their performance closely. They believe the function of leadership is to oversee their behaviors and correct them. They literally look for the minimum requirements so that they can carefully make sure they comply.

Committed individuals, however, once they master the basic requirements of the job, look at the intent behind their responsibilities. They look for ways to improve what's been done in the past. They push to enhance their skills. They seek new and better ways to serve their internal and external customers. They welcome feedback, and they volunteer feedback to their colleagues because they understand that everyone in the organization wants to improve.

The other part in creating a commitment culture is the leader's contribution. His or her behaviors tend to avoid the "command and control" approach, preferring to release accountability to those who are performing the work. The "release" approach ensures that a given individual understands the expectations of his or her customers and has all the resources necessary to meet them.

Time and energy is spent on building skills. The leader stretches each individual by looking for growth opportunities, offering challenging assignments, and providing supportive recognition. The presumption is that each person wants to contribute, using his or her talents in support of the organization's vision of "what could be." The leader confronts poor performers quickly, because the good performers in the organization do not want to be held back by the negative influences.

Collaboration is rampant, as each individual on the team is looking for ways to improve quality, reduce costs, and increase reliability. One idea inspires additional thoughts. It's hard to determine who THE leader is because each individual lives with initiative, creativity, and follow-through.

Are you in the business of building leaders? If you're not, it's likely that your organization is closer to a "compliant" culture than it need be!

For past articles, take a look at Dennis Hooper's website, www.buildingfutureleaders.com. Or contact Dennis by e-mail at dhooper2@juno.com. Or call 478-988-0237.