

Let's Significantly Improve Our Culture

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2015, published in the *Savannah Business Journal* on Monday, April 6, 2015

Often, organizations unintentionally lapse into tolerating undesirable situations or conditions. I don't know what yours might be. If you look and listen, however, you will observe (and maybe experience) what you would never want an outsider to encounter. Talk with your highest achievers, and they will offer several objectionable conditions with very little hesitation!

Would you like to look back on the next couple of months as a beneficial turning point in enhancing the quality of your organization's culture? Here's a novel approach you might consider. At your next leadership team meeting, suggest the following commitment.

"Over the next six months, we resolve to eliminate (or at least significantly reduce the impact of) three long-standing cultural irritants that have been of concern to our best team members."

Here's how you start. Ask each leadership team member to generate a short list of annoyances. Assemble the combined list and select a few stimulating examples that any member of your organization will immediately recognize.

To effect long-lasting cultural change, improvements will have to be initiated and sustained by all the people in your organization. Announce this initiative to your organization and invite volunteers to volunteer for a short-term task team aimed at cultural improvement.

From the volunteers, identify three to five conscientious, reliable members of your organization for whom such issues are major irritants. Along with one or two members of the leadership team, assemble these individuals for an introductory meeting for chartering the task team.

Describe your desired outcome and your few examples. Ask the convened individuals to add to the list their unique concerns, prioritize the comprehensive list, and come back in two weeks to finalize the joint expectations. Ask them to include a plan for how the anticipated successes will be monitored, measured, and reported to the organization.

Provide to each team member a copy of Robert Mager and Peter Pipe's 1970 book *Analyzing Performance Problems (or You Really Oughta Wanna)*. This is a superb resource for dealing with behavior problems, especially those where "more training" doesn't seem to be a workable solution.

Once the task team has agreed on how it will function and its top priorities, announce this effort again to the organization. Have the task team members describe the opportunities they intend to address. Encourage team members across the organization to do some local introspection within their teams and to offer their suggestions to members of the task team.

Set aside time in your leadership team meeting every two weeks to obtain a progress report from the task team. Listen to and further enhance one proposed plan at each of these meetings. Identify clearly who will do what to implement the solution.

Broadcast and celebrate each specific improvement, including how the ongoing success will be monitored and measured. Periodically assess what has been done well and what could be done better in subsequent improvement steps.

After the task team has addressed the highest priority concerns, evaluate the entire effort with the task team. Consider how effective both the process and the results of the intervention have been. Spend the next six months observing what the longer-term effects are on the culture. I suggest a joint evaluation with your leadership team and task team at the three months and six months points.

You can duplicate this effort at any time. After the initial endeavor, you'll find ways to make subsequent interventions less harsh yet hopefully even more effective.