

Preventing (or Correcting) a Dysfunctional Culture

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Last week, I attended the annual Catalyst Conference held in Atlanta. John Maxwell and Andy Stanley started this two-day learning event for Christian leaders nine years ago.

Dave Ramsey is a national radio host and respected author of *The Total Money Makeover*. Dave spoke, not because of his perspectives on money management, but because his organization in Nashville has a uniquely healthy culture.

Dave described five enemies of unity. He said that synergy never occurs without unity, and unity never occurs automatically. To create a powerful, compassionate, effective culture requires constant conversation. Dave says the members of his organization talk about detecting and preventing these five enemies a lot! Further, he sometimes has to take drastic action to keep the challenges in check.

Poor communication is overcome by using every available method for sharing information. Dave conducts a weekly one-hour informational and planning meeting on Monday mornings. To keep people growing and sharp, he sponsors an hour of spiritual or leadership nourishment mid-week.

Negative thoughts and issues are expected to be handed “up” for support and resolution. Positive comments and celebrations are liberally handed “down” to be enjoyed by all.

Each employee prepares a bi-weekly one-page summary of achievements and activities, including at least one emotional “high” and one “low.” Those are read and acknowledged by each manager.

Gossip will destroy an organization if it is tolerated. Gossip is degrading to both the gossiper and the person being discussed. Dave’s expectation is that each person talks about a problem only to the individual who can take action to resolve that problem. “No gossip” means no complaining about the performance of someone to anybody but that particular individual.

To reinforce his point, Dave pointed out that gossip appears in the Bible in the same unacceptable list as adulterers and murderers (Romans 1:29). Dave does not tolerate gossip in his organization.

Unresolved disagreements happen either when a leader doesn’t know conflicts exist or when that leader avoids confrontation. Dave expects his managers to be “in the know” due to good communication (see above). Further, he doesn’t want any manager practicing “squirrel decision-making.” (He mimicked running in front of a car, darting back and forth to get out of the street!)

Dave expects managers to act swiftly when there are hurt feelings and disagreements. If a mistake is made, well....the manager will just gain additional experience by making a second decision.

Lack of shared purpose is caused when a leader fails to restate the goal, vision, and mission early enough or often enough. Because people live in “current reality” every day, they know it well. There is no automatic reminder, however, of what is possible or expected. It is the leader’s responsibility to ensure that every individual is engaged and aligned to the organization’s imagined future reality.

Sanctioned incompetence demoralizes capable contributors. Dave expects leaders to address when an employee can’t or won’t fulfill his or her responsibilities. Leaders are to find the strengths of individuals and have them work in those areas. Poor contributors are relocated or removed promptly.

Dave acknowledged that sometimes an individual has problems outside of work that significantly impact performance at work. In those situations, the organization is compassionate and helps the individual obtain whatever aid is needed to resolve the problem as quickly as possible.

These five enemies of a healthy culture are not tolerated in Dave’s organization. When leaders act swiftly, the rest of the team supports and appreciates keeping these enemies out of the workplace.

Dennis Hooper helps leaders protect and develop their future leaders. For an evaluation of your situation, call Dennis at (478)-988-0237, or e-mail him at dhooper2@juno.com. His website is www.buildingfutureleaders.com.