

Five Myths About Corporate Culture, And Five Strategies For Cultivating A Great One

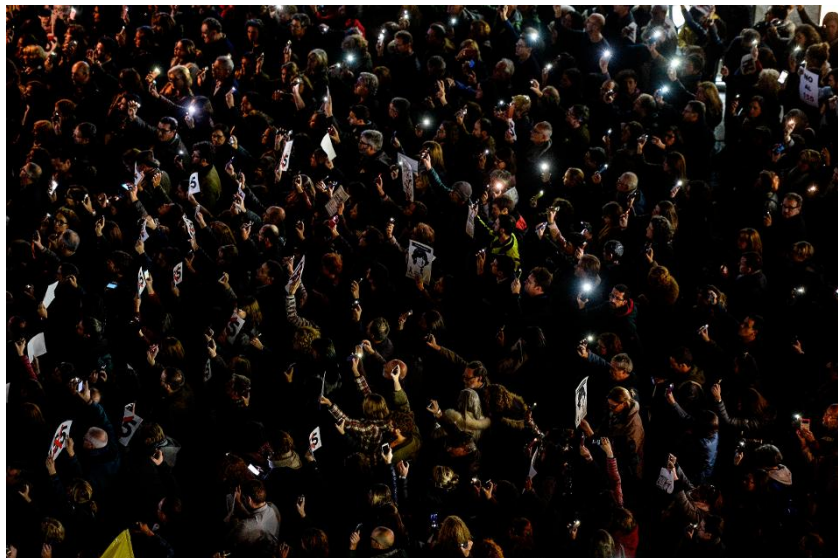
F forbes.com/sites/deniselejohn/2018/01/16/five-myths-about-corporate-culture-and-five-strategies-for-cultivating-a-great-one/

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Denise Lee Yohn, Contributor I write about brand leadership. Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.



While the importance of workplace culture is well-understood, *how* to build a great culture is less established. In the research and work I did leading to my upcoming book, *FUSION: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies* (published by Nicholas Brealey, an imprint of Hachette Book Group on March 13, 2018), I identified five common myths about culture-building -- as well as five strategies for cultivating a unique, healthy, sustainable organizational culture.



While the importance of workplace culture is well-understood, how to build a great culture is less established. (Photo: JOSEP LAGO/AFP/Getty Images)

Five Myths About Corporate Culture

As I've spoken to and worked with executives around the world over the past decade, I've heard several common misperceptions about how to build and sustain a great culture.

Myth #1: There is one "right" kind of culture—a benevolent and supportive one—that works in all companies.

The fact is every organization is different and so should its culture. A warm and family-like culture might fuel one company's growth but might backfire completely at another's which must be more competitive and driven by standards.

Myth #2: You can improve your culture by giving employees perks and throwing parties.

Free lunches and wellness programs are mere table stakes for most employees these days. And these tactics might help you produce happy employees but do little to prepare them to deliver great customer experiences.

Myth #3: Culture is good for improving employee retention and recruitment and bolstering corporate reputation, but doesn't have anything to do with core business objectives and strategies.

Culture is a strategy- and performance-enabler. If you don't align your culture with your business goals, how can you expect your people to help you achieve them?!

Myth #4: You can't really affect culture -- it grows organically.

It is true that culture can't be imposed. As a leader, you can't force your people to think or behave a certain way. But you absolutely can and should set the conditions to cultivate culture that deeply influences the way your employees perform daily.

Myth #5: Culture- building is exclusively the purview of the human resources department to work on through recruiting, training and development, compensation, and benefits.

Your desired culture must be *operationalized* throughout everything it does.

And this, brings me to the five strategies that enable business leaders to cultivate a unique, healthy, and sustainable organizational culture.

Five Strategies For Cultivating A Great Culture

By examining case studies, interviewing industry leaders, reviewing respected academic research, and drawing on my experience working with world-class organizations across a broad range of sectors, I've discovered specific ways in which corporate culture should be cultivated.

Leaders of great companies lay the foundation for culture-building by identifying and clearly articulating a single overarching purpose and one set of core values of their organizations. And they assess their organization and determine where the biggest gaps are between their existing culture and their desired one. Ultimately they take responsibility for leading culture-building. Even if implementing specific changes falls to the leaders of functional areas, the top leaders of an organization must initiate and champion them across the board. And they ensure all other leaders and managers are actively engaged in and accountable for cultivating the desired culture.

Then savvy business leaders implement specific strategies that cultivate a distinct culture that is fully aligned with their brand identity. They know that when they create an interdependent and mutually reinforcing relationship between how their organization thinks and acts on the inside and how it is perceived and experienced on the outside, they increase the

competitiveness of their business, create measurable value for their employees and customers, and future-proof their business by developing an authentic brand and healthy organization.

Here are the five strategies for cultivating a great culture:

1. Organize and Operate On- Brand: Implement an organizational design and run your operations to give your organization the structure and processes necessary to operationalize your culture.

2. Create Culture- Changing Employee Experiences: Deliberately design and manage your company's employee experience—just as you would customer experiences—so that every facet of an employee's journey throughout his or her connection to your organization encourages and enables your desired culture.

3. Sweat the Small Stuff: Ensure even the most mundane or minute aspect of your organization—from its “rituals” and “artifacts” (things your organization regularly does and creates to commemorate or symbolize important achievements or events) to its policies and procedures—advances and supports your desired culture.

4. Ignite Your Transformation: Use employee brand engagement tactics—stage employee brand engagement experiences, launch creative communications campaigns, and develop and deploy employee brand engagement toolkits—to kick- start the fusion process and then to regain focus and momentum when necessary.

5. Build Your Brand from the Inside Out: Leverage your internal culture to shape your external brand identity, using your overarching purpose and core values to inspire external brand actions, such as new products or services or corporate programs with a positive social impact, that differentiate your brand.

Culture-building is a powerful antidote to the unprecedented threats most organizations face today. And culture is only going to become more important as the war for talent increases, companies continue to diversify, and the pace of business continues to accelerate. Rejecting common culture myths and deliberately cultivating a culture through these strategies is the key to preparing your organization for what lies ahead.