

# Christian Leaders Don't Have to Worry About Organizational Culture, Right?!

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## **Phil Cooke: What's your new book about?**

**Denise:** FUSION: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies cracks the code on culture-building the way my first book, What Great Brands Do, explained how to build a valuable, sustainable brand. It shows leaders how to build a healthy, valuable, sustainable organizational culture by aligning their external identity and internal culture.

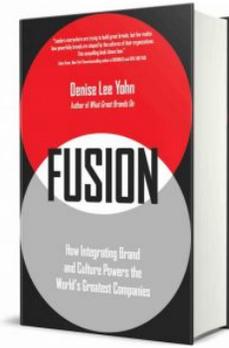
## **Phil: Why did you write it?**

**Denise:** I talk to business leaders around the world and most don't know how to cultivate their organizational culture or they go about the wrong way. For example, they often think that there is one "right" kind of culture—a kind of warm and fuzzy one—that works in all companies. But since every organization is different, every culture should be too. A nice 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.

**Phil: So what do leaders of churches or non-profits have to learn about this topic?**

**Denise:** Frankly, I think a lot. I find that organizational culture isn't even on many Christian leaders' radar screens. At churches, so much attention is put on church members and visitors, and non-profits are so focused on donors and program recipients — external stakeholders — little time and energy is spent on staff members and volunteers — internal ones.



And I get it. Leaders of Christian organizations are usually stretched beyond belief and pulled in a million directions, so it's easy to overlook the people who are supposed to be helping carry the yoke with you. But the experiences that staff members and volunteers have working inside your organization directly and deeply influences the experiences of the people outside it, so you need to deliberately and diligently cultivate your organizational culture.

**Phil: OK, so how do we do that?**

**Denise:** Having examined lots of case studies, interviewed many industry leaders, and reviewed respected academic research, as well as drawing on my experience working with world-class organizations across a broad range of sectors, I've discovered specific ways in which culture should be cultivated.

Leaders lay the foundation for their cultures by identifying and clearly articulating a single overarching purpose and one set of core values of their organizations. It might be obvious that every Christian organization's ultimate purpose is to glorify God, but I'm talking about a adopting a specific purpose that is unique to your organization. And core values are the essential and enduring principles and priorities that prescribe the desired mindset and behavior of everyone who works at your organization.

Although the primary application of your purpose and core values should be to guide your internal stakeholders, they should fully align with how you want your organization to be perceived and experienced by external stakeholders. Just as it makes no sense for a company to have a business mission statement that is disconnected from its brand promise, your organization should be guided by a single purpose that shapes your internal culture and your external identity.

Then leaders they take responsibility for cultivating a culture that embodies that purpose and core values. They implement specific strategies and drive certain initiatives to build their desired culture, including management practices (leadership responsibilities and style), communication (internal and external messages), employee/volunteer experience (daily interactions), organization (structure), and operations (systems and processes.)

**Phil: Can you give me some examples of leaders and organizations that are doing this well?**

**Denise:** I'll give you two. One is a megachurch; the other, a small non-profit — that way, you'll

see this applies to churches and organizations of all sizes and scopes.

Over 28,000 people attend one of Crossroads Church's 10+ locations throughout the greater Cincinnati, OH, metro area. Over 300 employees and 5,000 regular volunteers comprise the church's internal stakeholders. The church is guided by a distinctive culture that is documented in its 40-page "Culture Guide." The guide lays out Crossroads' mission (purpose) and values ("7 Hills We Die On," named after Cincinnati which is known as "the city of seven hills).

It also includes a section called "I Promise," which includes commitments such as "I promise to practice the spiritual disciplines" and "I promise to trust those in authority." Executive Pastor Darin Yates explained to me that these principles were developed to be clear about "what kind of people and what kind of behavior we want." Leaders use "I Promise" when screening and on-boarding new hires, and at the beginning of every ministry year, they review it as an organization, reading it line by line and teaching the story behind each principle and then everyone initials each promise and signs the document. The principles tell staff members, he says, "this is the way we're going to operate, settle conflict, disciplines, expectations, etc. The principles are all structured around scripture, but are very specific to our organization."

Yates credits "I Promise" and the many other deliberate cultural practices at his 20 year-old organization for enabling it to grow successfully into a multi-location church that has tremendous impact in its region. And they will continue to tap into the aligning, clarifying, and unifying power of culture as it grows into an international organization.

Another organization that couldn't seem more different from Crossroads but similarly prioritizes its culture is Plant With Purpose, a 20-person, \$3.5 million San Diego-based non-profit that seeks to reverse deforestation and poverty through its work with over 500 rural communities in places like Haiti and Burundi.

Because Plant With Purpose leaders believe that employees best understand and embrace the purpose of the organization when they experience it firsthand, they arrange for all employees, regardless of role, to spend time working at one of their field locations. Executive director Scott Sabin explains that, although providing this employee experience consumes time and money, it is critical because "we believe that this work flows from the heart." The experience of working alongside the local farmers helps employees, he says, "feel the connection between what we are doing here and the lives we are impacting elsewhere."

**Phil: Where can people get more information about you and your book?**

**Denise:** Please visit <http://deniseleeyohn.com/fusion> where you can learn more, access free downloadable content, and check out my work as a consultant and keynote speaker.