



Change Your Culture? Change Your Stories

Culture is Complex

Culture is a complex system. It is comprised of a multitude of interrelated mechanisms, processes, and procedures that collectively inform employees about “the way things are done around here.”

Part of shaping organizational culture is conscious and intentional. Training programs reinforce best practices. Performance reviews set expectations. Bonuses hopefully reward the right stuff. Executive team actions vividly illustrate the company’s priorities.

However, most cultural elements develop unconsciously. There’s so much that goes unmanaged. Unintended and organic growth of the culture despite our best efforts to place boundaries around what a good job looks like occurs continually.

Changing Behavior Subconsciously

Culture is partially driven by deep-seated beliefs and assumptions. Much of why people behave as they do is below the surface; submerged like most of an iceberg and unable to be consciously articulated.

All is not lost. Leann Lipps Birch of the University of Illinois found a ray of hope. In the late 70’s, she conducted experiments with children to see what would get them to eat vegetables they disliked. What would convince them to eat specific vegetables they currently hated? Legislating compliance didn’t work. Neither did rewards like ice cream. Explaining the logic of being a good pea-eater failed miserably.

But one thing consistently did work. By putting two pea-lovers and the pea-hater at the same table, within several meals, the pea-hater became a pea-eater!

Birch’s experiments proved that we conform to the people around us. Since we can’t experience everyone’s behavior first hand – we tell stories. Stories are powerful and viral reinforcers for cultural behavior.

Change Your Culture With Stories

Most of the current stories told in your organization are preserving the existing culture. To change the culture, change the stories that are told.

Start changing your culture stories by:

- Modeling story-worthy things that you want in your ideal culture. Then let employees tell stories about them.
- Catching others doing story-worthy things that represent the ideal culture. Then personally telling compelling stories about them.

At first, there will be dissonance between the old and new stories. That’s okay. The resulting tension can be used as a springboard for building mechanisms to support your new stories. We can change our stories and be changed by them.

Need to Change Your Stories?

We’re experts in culture and story telling.
Call or email Bliss Training & Consulting at:
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Driving Successful Change

Seventy percent of all change efforts fail. Follow these 8 keys to increase your odds of driving successful change:

1. **Sponsorship** - Having a senior leader who is responsible for the success of change. Someone who can deploy the needed resources.
2. **Vision** - Presenting a clear and compelling picture of the future following successful change.
3. **Change Leadership Team** - Actively leading the desired change, speaking with one voice.
4. **Communication** - Creating opportunities for constructive dialogue with change leaders and those being asked to change.
5. **Lack of Urgency** - Explaining why the change is necessary and how fast it must happen.
6. **Incentives** - Rewarding people for behaviors that enable change and help celebrate change milestones.
7. **Accountability** - Making sure employee behavior is aligned with change goals and expectations. That leaders are “walking the talk.”
8. **Performance Management** - Measuring progress towards attaining the vision. Documenting employee contributions to the desired change.



“If you want something to grow
pour champagne on it.”
*Carol Bernick - Executive
Chairman, Alberto Culver Co.*