

Creating a Performance-Based Culture

Culture is the learned expectations which drive how individuals act. A performance-based culture places focus on an individual's behavior directly affecting the business' results. It is a systematic approach that guides employees to deliver client value and achieve business objectives by recognizing success and creating accountability.

Achieving stronger performance goals may require an accompanying change in culture. The degree of cultural change required will vary depending on your existing culture, leadership philosophy, circumstances and team.

Strategy Management

Adopting an intentional culture is a component of strategic management. Culture needs to be designed, managed, and cultivated according to the organization's desired goals and business principles.

Goals will not be met simply by laying out targets. The business must be designed to meet these objectives. Individual performance will be an essential element of this design.

Conducting an analysis of your organization helps identify issues and potential reasons to implement a cultural shift.

"If strategy was seed, then culture would be soil"

- Franklin Covey

Here are some questions to ask:

1 As the business leader, are you mired in the minutia of day-to-day operations?

2 Is the organization struggling to meet sales objectives despite additional investments?

3 Is the cost of client acquisition overly expensive?

4 Are my team members invested in the success of the business?

5 Are my team members motivated to stretch and achieve new levels of success?

6 Do my call handlers know their role in the sales cycle is to set appointments?

7 Can my team members correctly answer what their goals are?

The answers to these questions may be an indication that the existing culture needs to be intentionally redesigned. These questions are not an exhaustive list of items to review. They are, however, a good start in seeing the organization from a fresh perspective.

What a Performance-Based Culture is Not

Rigid, cold, or unforgiving may be what some fear are accurate descriptors of performance cultures.

Cultural shifts do not need to be frightening or painful for your team. Nor does it require you to shed what makes your business a fun and rewarding place to work. Understanding the nature of the change, setting clear goals and expectations, and communicating effectively with your team will create a smooth process.

A culture of accountability is not designed to punish struggling performers blindly. Instead, it clarifies how each player helps the business achieve its growth targets.

Principles of a Performance-Based Culture

A strong culture guides team members toward a common purpose. It gels and unites the organization. It excites and motivates. It demonstrates appreciation. It creates positive energy.

Strong performers benefit as their efforts will shine through and be recognized. Each team member will understand his or her role and how that role impacts the success of the organization. Standards and goals will be defined and each person will work to achieve those goals.

- Performance matters
- Success has value
- Failure sparks a response

Role Clarification

Performance goals clarify individual roles and articulate the importance of the role. The call handler's role is to (1) successfully provide a positive brand experience and (2) set appointments for qualified prospects.

Clearly communicate role expectations to employees by setting performance targets in specific tasks. The call handler is not there to simply answer the phone. They are there to advance the client acquisition cycle. This requires success in two distinct and measurable areas.

Steps in Creating Performance-Based Culture

- 1 Consistency is Key
- 2 Identify Clear Objective Goals
- 3 Communicate, Communicate, Communicate
- 4 Reinforce the Culture
- 5 Success Must Matter

1 Consistency is Key

More than anything else, creating a culture requires consistency. Changes must be permanent. Otherwise, any effort that is implemented and not reinforced will be forgotten and discarded.

Be prepared for an investment of time, especially initially. Unfortunately, as a business leader your time is in strong demand and finite. Yet, success in designing a culture will net improved use of time in the long run. This is an investment of time, not a loss of time.

2 Identify Clear Objective Goals

Change must be designed with targeted goals in mind, crafted for your team and implemented with care.

Setting specific expectations provides clarity. Team members will know exactly what constitutes success. Ambiguity creates a conflict of understanding. As a leader, it is your responsibility to ensure each team member understands expectations.

Measurable performance goals should be provided to the team and should reflect overall business goals.

3 Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Team participation and agreement is an essential component. If all your efforts are interpreted as merely a new directive, then team members will perform only good enough to satisfy their roles. You want your team to excel and make an impact. Listen to their feedback and opinions. You may learn new things that will prove valuable.

As a leader you have not communicated until your team receives your communication. This means they have heard you and understand the communication. This requires multiple efforts over time. Appreciate the numerous amount of information flowing to them. You will need to break through that clutter by reinforcing this message.

Ensure they are part of the discussion of new goals. Explain how you arrived at your revenue goals and the need to set a minimum appointment conversion rate. These discussions will help illustrate the employee's role in achieving these important goals. The greater your team understands the greater their commitment in stretching to achieve success.

4 Reinforce the Culture

Progress must be measured by an objective standard on a regular basis. Infrequent measurement feedback allows the team member to believe goals are unimportant.

Consider frequent meetings in the beginning, perhaps weekly, to review scores. As the culture becomes more cemented, this may potentially be reduced to monthly. As the leader, you will decide what works best for your team.

Feedback is more nuanced than just measuring progress. This is your opportunity to instruct team members how they can alter their performance to progress beyond their current state. What is holding them back? What adjustments can be made? Supportive feedback is welcomed by the individual. It creates mutual trust. Without feedback, employees may feel they are on their own.

5 Success Must Matter

Consequences are a natural part of accountability. What will happen if goals are achieved? Exceeded? Unmet? Answers must be well considered at the start and then followed through. Consequences answer the important question your team member is asking; “what’s in it for me?”

Successful performers must be rewarded through an incentive program and during annual employee evaluations. Answer the question, “what’s in it for me?”

Team members who share in the business’ success will be rewarded for their efforts. Including organizational goals in addition to individual performance goals in an incentive program may be something to consider when designing a reward program.

For individuals failing to achieve success, this must also spark a response. The initial response may be increased coaching and feedback. Perhaps a coach from outside the organization will prove beneficial. The degree to which goals are missed and over what period of time will need also to be evaluated when making decisions.

Be Prepared

Evaluating any effort allows you to identify areas where adjustments are needed. Even programs that are initially effective may need changes over time to reflect different circumstances.

Be prepared for some anxiety. No matter how well you have crafted your business plan and explained it, some team members may still experience anxiety. Do not allow yourself to be alarmed or frustrated. Work through any reluctance or ambivalence by clear communication and an honest effort to gain trust.

If some employees do not wish to work in the culture that you, as the business leader, have designed, that is their choice. You want a team that is committed to the culture business objectives that yield success.