

Why Culture, at Home and Work, Cannot Be Left to Chance

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What's more important? Getting the order out today, or creating a culture that will enable you to do 5,000 orders next year?

The answer, of course, is both. One task is urgent, the order today, it's easy to understand what to do. The other issue is important, creating an empowering culture for growth. Culture building is more nuanced, it's never urgent, and it's the thousands of little intentional things. It's harder to codify, but we all know a good one when we see it.

When well-intentioned people are mired in the day-to-day rush of business, it's challenging to be intentional about culture.

It happens in the macro and the micro. For example, look at a family scenario. The leaders (parents) can run around taking care of the urgent tasks, dinner, laundry, drop offs, not to mention the formidable task of making a living. These tasks alone are enough to fill each and every day, and then some. But what makes a family really work is the culture, the emotional climate, the tone, the shared belief system.

We can try to mandate those. I can create a list of "family" values and recite them to my kids every night at dinner. I can even make them memorize our values. But I won't be creating a values-based culture. I'll

be creating a memorizing and reciting culture. It might be a little better than simply running around trying to get the laundry done, but not by much.

The leader's job is more than simply shipping the orders (or making the dinners). The job of the leader is to create the cultural climate of the organization. It doesn't matter if you are leading a family of two, or a corporation of 2 million, if you don't create your culture by design, it will be created by default.

Culture is a fuzzy messy thing that involves feeling, emotions, beliefs, and behaviors. Being intentional about creating an emotional climate requires more than inspirational posters and a cool workspace. Have you ever been in a well-appointed home that felt emotionally stifling? Just because you buy a "Love Lives Here" wooden wall plaque from Hobby Lobby doesn't mean that the people in your home will actually feel loved.

I used to speak about families and organizations differently. I've stopped doing that because I've realized parenting and leadership are the same thing.

Naming your culture is the first step in creating it. For example, in our family, one of our core tenets is, we have each other's back. This doesn't mean the parents bail out the children at every turn. This means we *all* help each other out. We have another shared belief, "McLeod's finish strong." We remind ourselves, and each other, of this if we're ready to give up on something. These shared beliefs are cornerstones of our culture.

Naming your culture is step one. You also have to be intentional about living it. You have to show people what it looks like in action. You have to train them to get good at it. You have to reward it. You have to create a system for the team to be intentional when the leaders aren't around. That's the harder part. It will never be urgent, but it is important, incredibly so.