

Building a Successful (Sales) Culture

By John Chapin

You just hired the perfect person: great work ethic, positive and upbeat, they show up early, leave late, take ten minutes of a fifteen-minute break, and do more than expected and more than you ask for. Now let's take that person and put them into an environment where people are negative, aren't held accountable, take three days off for a hang-nail, show up at 8:05 then spend 45 minutes "getting ready" for their day, start preparing to leave at 3:30 and leave at 5:00 like there's a fire drill. What happens to that perfect hire? One of two things: they either become just like everyone else after about a month, or they leave.

Whatever your culture is, it has a substantial impact on performance. There is significant peer pressure to conform to the culture, be it good or bad. This peer pressure is one of the four main motivators for people who belong to any group. Positive peer pressure is what took my grades from Cs in the public high school to As and Bs in the private high school. It's also what ensured that I made over 200 phone calls per day in my first job as a stock broker. If you're a great team or organization with a great culture, fantastic. Unfortunately, most organizations have negative cultures, or at least elements of them.

Features of great cultures

Feature #1: Great leadership

Culture is top down; it begins at the top and flows down through the entire organization. Whatever the leadership team eats, breathes, walks and talks related to culture, *will* become the culture. As a leader, you don't get what you want, you get what you tolerate and allow. And what you tolerate and allow you tacitly condone and get more of. If you allow people to miss their numbers year after year, when it's evident they aren't making the calls and doing the necessary work, you'll get more of that. If you allow negativity in the workplace and don't hold people accountable, you'll get more negativity and more people not doing their job. On the flip side, if you lead by example, walk your talk, believe in people more than they believe in themselves, empower them, listen to them, give them all necessary tools and resources, and hold them to a higher standard, you'll get more of that.

Feature #2: Rules and decrees

The culture in an organization is how people treat other people, how they treat work, and how they treat the work environment. Great cultures have rules and decrees regarding these three items. Written rules and decrees. Here are a few examples:

- Everyone is expected to show up on time, work until the end of the day, finish what they start, be honest, have integrity, and put in a full day's work for a full day's pay.

- Everyone will be held to the highest professional and ethical standards. There is no place in the workplace for negativity or unprofessionalism. You will be respectful to all employees and clients. Gossip, talking, and otherwise communicating, behind someone's back won't be tolerated.
- We are a great organization with a great product. We take better care of our clients than the competition because we care more.

Your rules and decrees, totaling about eight to fifteen in number, should be framed and prominently posted in several highly-visible areas in the workplace on a document titled: Rules and Decrees of the Workplace. Prospective employees should also receive a copy of these during the interview process and you should have a conversation with them about how they feel about these. By the way, full acceptance of the rules and decrees is a non-negotiable prerequisite to being hired.

Feature #3: Everyone-on board, all-in commitment.

When Malcolm Butler was limited to a few special teams plays in Super Bowl 52, many people said that move cost the Patriots the Super Bowl. Maybe, and my contention is that, had they let him play and won Super Bowl 52, the Patriots would not have been back to play in Super Bowl 53. No one who breaks the rules gets a pass. If this is allowed even once, people *inside* the organization start to question the integrity of the culture, and the culture starts to crumble. When you're more interested in winning, or making a sale, than living by your values, it's the beginning of the end. Again, *no one* gets a pass on the rules, **not even your top sales rep**. This doesn't mean people don't get a mulligan. You can allow a mistake or two, but address it immediately, *and keep the leash short*. No chronic offenders who are making blatant and/or repetitive mistakes. While an occasional mistake may be inevitable, carelessness, ignorance, and apathy aren't.

Feature #4: Culture is a living, breathing organism.

A great culture can't simply be written out, placed on the wall, and left to die. It needs to be kept alive and well by visiting it often, talking about it, and reviewing it. Repetition is important, because like any new habit, it will take time to imbed the culture into the consciousness and subconsciousness of everyone in the organization. Once it's locked in and habitually followed, discussing the culture keeps it on everyone's radar screens and ensures it is remembered and adhered to. Also, it may be necessary to tweak some rules or decrees from time to time. Though many rules and decrees, like the examples I gave, aren't likely to change, there may be times when changes in people, technology, and other unforeseen future events, make an edit necessary.

Finally, you build a great sales culture by building a great overall company culture. As part of the organization, the sales department is included in all rules and decrees. Everyone, from leadership to the mailroom, must be on the same page when it comes to culture. So, while the

sales department may have some additional rules and decrees related to activity, quotas, and other items, building an all-in, solid organizational culture is what will ensure the success of the sales culture