EVERYONE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WORKPLACE CULTURE

A development coach once shared their perspective on workplace culture with me. The coach asserted that anything you say, do, or allow to be said or done defines your team’s culture. Let us say you are in a lunchroom with team members. You know everyone at the table well, and not long ago you were a colleague rather than the boss. Someone at the table makes an inappropriate comment. It does not seem like a big infraction, and you let it pass rather than speaking up. In this instance you have just added to your team’s culture. You have confirmed that your culture allows inappropriate comments. You have silently told everyone at the table, “it’s no big deal.” The development coach then asked me, is this the culture you want?

This teaching moment gave me pause and has helped me carefully consider what I want the culture of my team to be, and what I am doing to establish and maintain that culture. I continually strive to ensure everything I say, do, and allow to be said or done on my team aligns with our chosen culture. This ongoing effort demands constant vigilance. When something on my team dissatisfies me, I use it as an opportunity to evaluate our culture and my role in reinforcing it. Often, this allows me to improve communication and address issues while strengthening our team culture.

Indeed.com defines work culture as: “Work culture is a collection of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that make up the regular atmosphere in a work environment. Healthy workplace cultures align employee behaviors and company policies with the overall goals of the company, while also considering the well-being of individuals.”

Every leader can establish the culture they want to support, and each leader should carefully consider the message they are sending and review their actions to align with their words. For example, if a leader claims their team cares about one another, they should foster discussions about well-being, establish healthy boundaries, and conduct meaningful check-ins that emphasize empathy and understanding. Without this type of follow-up action, it will be difficult to genuinely assert a caring culture.

I do not believe that culture is left in the hands of leaders. Each team member influences team culture. Individually we all chose to either enhance and build up the team’s culture, or negatively affect that same culture. Each team member should be supportive, inclusive, and collaborative, modeling positive behavior. Too frequently individuals feel trapped in a tough situation with no opportunity to influence positive change. Supporting a positive culture is not a panacea, and workplace difficulties should not be dismissed. However, I strongly believe that one person can help persuade others toward different behavior, which is something we should all strive for.

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