

Top 5: Things A Leader Can Do to Build a Constructive Culture



*Based on Culture Bites episode: 5 Things Leaders can do to build a Constructive Culture
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As we know culture and leadership are tied at the hip; leaders have a lot on their plate already so we have put together some simple guidance that taps into the essence of leadership – role modelling specific behaviors to those around them.

BE CLEAR

For a leader, one of the most important styles to constantly improve is their Achievement style (style 11 on our Human Synergistics Circumplex). The key to this is clarity. As a leader you need to be crystal clear about WHY you are here: What the reason your role exists is and what is expected of you. A crucial instrument in this process is a written goal and the matching plan that will help you move towards this goal. Only when you are clear about what is expected of you and WHY, you can create clarity for your people around their goals and milestones. Another crucial instrument is providing examples of what good looks like, instead of telling others what you don't want. This will provide a benchmark to the team and allow individual members to assess their own progress. Operationally, this can be done by creating a checklist of what needs to be done. When setting meaningful goals, a leader must bear in mind that time is their most valuable asset. Leaders cannot be everywhere or do everything – prioritizing goals by asking the question “where is my effort really making a difference?” will help leaders understand where to spend their time and energy and, ultimately, to help the team achieve what the organization needs.

BE CONFIDENT

True confidence that flows from an inner conviction is one of the most important assets of a leader. This is not about building bravado – which is actually a sign of deeply rooted insecurities. To be more confident as a leader and to also grow the confidence of others, the Self-Actualizing Style is an area to look at. For leaders building confidence means cultivating the art of self-reflection which is essential for developing a vision for how they want to show up as a leader. It also means staying focused on what went well instead of what didn't and to constantly review how their actions have contributed to the progress made. This can be a tough one for leaders as one of their main tasks is to solve problems, which can lead to problem-focused thinking and to see rather what is wrong. But still, they need to be role-models to their people and helping others build their confidence – by focusing on the good and reframing negative situations into learnings and to help them be explicit about what they are proud of. This can also mean speaking openly about their mistakes and failures and to show some vulnerability: being vulnerable is not the flipside of being confident, but can actually lead to people around you giving themselves less negative self-talk. Role-modeling is the essence of leadership: to give an example to show how the leader deals with their own limitations openly without any self-bashing to show how mistakes can be seen as learning opportunities. One last point to be made here – especially for leaders with a stronger Oppositional style - is focusing on learning to confirm before you correct to ensure the confidence of the team members raised rather than threatened. Leaders really need to listen to what others are saying and to be present with them so they can really feel that what they have to say is meaningful and important.

BE A COACH

Coaching others is in line with the Humanistic-Encouraging Style. This is all about making others their best selves, to develop and grow them. Leaders can ask themselves – or better yet, ask their people! -, how they can help their people instead of direct and supervise. So instead of telling others what to do you might ask them questions about what they think they might need to do. This will build team members' confidence and have them think for themselves – the essence of coaching! It is important to give people ownership if you want them to take responsibility instead of having others only carry out the leader's plan. When asked by a team member for support a leader may say something like “I am not sure, what do you think?” So as a leader have your people elaborate on their ideas and let them think out loud. A great coaching question would be “what is your dilemma? What is the real challenge to you? Where are you stuck?” Leaders can achieve what they want to achieve by helping their people do their best – each day. This does not only include removing any road blocks, but believing in a version of their team members that they don't yet believe they could be.

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CONNECT

It is of high importance that leaders stay in touch with their people and ask how they can best connect with them, which is part of Affiliative behavior. This style sometimes does not rank as highly among the Constructive styles, but there is a lot of value in building an affiliative connection. It is a way to increase trust when you are interested in people and paying attention to them. This trust serves leaders very well in times of change when trust becomes really important. So having a virtual coffee with a team member or walking the shop floor is not at all a waste of time. A lot of “frictional losses” are no longer occurring because when you know your people better, you work better together as you have a real relationship. This means to really lean into your relationship with each person on the team as the way to connect with people may be highly individual. However, a leader needs to ensure at all times that their interest in others is genuine!

BE CALM

Only when a leader is calm they can create a calm atmosphere which in turn creates a sense of safety. We talked about self-reflection in a previous section and here it comes up again: A leader needs to know themselves well enough to understand what triggers them to get into a Defensive state. This will help develop a strategy to manage this reaction. One simple thing we can do when we start feeling anxious or defensive is to change our breathing. On the whole it is crucial for a leader to not fill your schedule 100% but to leave some room (space to breathe!) and have some additional fuel in the tank for unexpected things that might pop up. This can either take the shape of having a “sacred hour” in the morning or at the end of the day to review the day, the goal, to prepare for the next day but also give myself a pat on the back for the things that have gone well during the day. Oftentimes also writing things down may help to gain insights on issues that may have taken lots of energy away. When a stressful situation arises it can help to walk away from it for a few minutes. Leaders need headspace to be able to deal with problems and can then be in a calm state in which they can operate from a Constructive level. A leader needs to take some of the pressure off of their people’s shoulders to create a calm work environment in which team members can thrive.

Are you interested in becoming more effective as a leader? Or would you like to know how Human Synergistics can help to help your clients become more effective as a leader or as an organization? We are very much looking forward to hearing from you info@humansynergistics.de