



talking about...

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... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

Do You Want A Passive or Constructive Culture?

"Life is bigger than our explanations of it. To be in touch with life, go beyond your explanations."

... Julio Olalla, The Oracle of Coaching

One of the biggest challenges facing leaders who seek to shift an organisation's culture lies in developing a clear understanding of the culture they want to create. At first this may appear quite complex, but in many ways it is relatively simple. Ultimately an effective culture lies in "creating balance". "Creating" refers to a way of doing things in the organisation that focuses on what is a better way of doing things rather than protecting what we already do – being constructive rather than defensive. "Balance" refers to an equilibrium between an organisation's financial and commercially desired outcomes and how people feel about being in the organisation – a balance between task and people. The key to understanding "balance" is recognise that it is not an end state rather it is the constant dynamic interplay between task and people that allows for things to get done whilst creating engagement for the people who are doing the tasks.

The danger here is that leaders confuse "balance" with harmony. In his recent newsletter, Jon Gordon pointed out that:

"John Gottman's pioneering research found that marriages are much more likely to succeed when the couple experiences a 5 to 1 ratio of positive to negative interactions whereas when the ratio approaches 1 to 1, marriages are more likely to end in divorce. Additional research also shows that workgroups with positive to negative interaction ratios greater than 3 to 1 are significantly more productive than teams that do not reach this ratio.

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The key is to intentionally cultivate more positive interactions to fuel success.

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However, please know that this doesn't mean we should never have negative interactions. There is research by Barbara Fredrickson from the University of Michigan that shows if a work group in a company experiences a positive to negative interaction ratio of 13 to 1 the work group will be less effective."

Leaders, who confuse "balance" with harmony, often hold that they want people to work in an environment where everyone "gets on". This then gets translated into everyone is nice to everyone else. These leaders don't want people to feel uncomfortable because they see this discomfort as people not being engaged. Yet, it is clear that discomfort is part of every organisation. How can it not be when there will always be decisions or ways of doing things that people will not like? Ultimately being an effective organisation involves accountability and accountability will create discomfort and involve difficult conversations. If the underlying cultural premise is harmony, it is almost certain that the culture will become

passive rather than constructive as people are not prepared to create the balance needed between task and people by holding others accountable. Unfortunately this is a scenario that is seen all too often.

So the key to culture is simple. Focus on what you want to create and do so in a way that constantly and effectively balances people and task. Therein lies the great challenge.

"The hidden harmony is better than the obvious."

... Alexander Pope (1688 - 1744) English poet

Police Emergency

This is the true story of George Phillips of Meridian, Mississippi, who was going to bed when his wife told him that he'd left the light on in the shed. George opened the door to go turn off the light but saw there were people in the shed in the process of stealing things.

He immediately phoned the police, who asked "Is someone in your house?" and George said no and explained the situation. Then they explained that all patrols were busy, and that he should simply lock his door and an officer would be there when available.

George said, "Okay," hung up, counted to 30, and phoned the police again.

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"Hello, I just called you a few seconds ago because there were people in my shed. Well, you don't have to worry about them now because I've just shot them all."

Then he hung up. Within five minutes three squad cars, an Armed Response unit, and an ambulance showed up. Of course, the police caught the burglars red-handed.

One of the policemen said to George: "I thought you said that you'd shot them!"

George said, "I thought you said there was nobody available!"

"It is the ability to take a joke, not make one, that proves you have a sense of humour."

... Max Eastman (American Author, Journalist and Writer, 1883-1969)

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