



Create a Thriving Organizational Culture

If you want happy, productive employees, build a people-focused culture.

By Kerry Alison Wekelo

Some employees just aren't into their jobs. In fact, that may be true for most employees. The Gallup organization reports that just 32% of employees say they're enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace.

It doesn't have to be that way. With the right approach, nonprofit leaders can improve their organizational culture and motivate employees to perform at their highest capacity.

Successful leaders are the ones who intentionally use their behavior as a positive example. If you expect employees to work overtime for important deadlines, for example, they're more inclined to do their best if you also stay and work the overtime.

To engage those employees, a leader must commit to supporting people's growth. Here are four ways to do that:

1. Insist on a healthy work-life balance

Work and home used to have clearer boundaries, but these days work is always a mouse click or text message away.

That can make it tough for both employees and leaders to balance their lives, but it's important that they do.

When your life is well balanced, you'll be more satisfied, more motivated, happier, and healthier. To achieve that balance, you need to learn to say "no," set boundaries (such as declining to take work calls after 9 p.m.), and handle issues as they come up so you aren't thinking about them after you go home. Leaders should practice this themselves and then facilitate it for employees.

2. Practice effective communication

Communication isn't just about what you say, it's how well you listen. You need to be an active listener. That means you not only hear the words the other person is saying, but you try to understand the complete message that's being sent. To achieve that, do the following:

- **Practice** empathy.
- **Focus** your attention.
- **Show** you're listening through both verbal and non-verbal responses.

- **Suspend** judgment.
- **Ask** questions.
- **Verify** that you correctly understand the other person's message.

3. Focus on your people

There are three keys to having happy workers:

- **Hire** the right people.
- **Provide** generous benefits.
- **Prioritize** wellness efforts that encourage employees to exercise and eat right.

4. Regularly conduct employee surveys

It's important to ask employees about what's working and what's not working. But remember that surveys that only gather information aren't useful. To make surveys effective, you must provide detailed results back to your team and create an implementation plan that includes some of your employees' ideas.

Although every person is different, we universally do well with leaders who focus on appreciation, respect, and trust, and who empower teams to add value to the organization. Exceptional leaders know how to motivate employees, retain quality talent, and cultivate job satisfaction. 

Energize Your Workforce

Use the following articles (Nonprofit World.org) for more insights into creating a thriving organizational culture. Give all employees access to these articles to enhance their learning and leadership skills:

- How to Change the World by Changing Your Culture** (Vol. 31, No. 2)
- Yes, you CAN Balance Work & Family Roles** (Vol. 31, No. 6)
- Be a Better Leader by Being a Careful Listener** (Vol. 37, No. 1)
- Bring Your Training Home** (Vol. 37, No. 4)
- Seven Steps to Hiring & Keeping the Right Person** (Vol. 32, No. 4)
- To Make an Impact, Improve Your Non-Verbal Skills** (Vol. 38, No. 3)
- How to Tap into Purpose to Motivate People** (Vol. 38, No. 2)
- Going Beyond Why: Three Powerful Ways to Cultivate a Culture of Purpose** (Vol. 39, No. 1)
- Productive Employees: Two Crucial Ingredients** (Vol. 37, No. 2)
- Are You Offering the Right Perks?** (Vol. 35, No. 1)
- Reimagining Your Hiring Practices: A Self-Assessment** (Vol. 36, No. 3)

Kerry Alison Wekelo (kerryalison.com) is managing director of human resources and operations for Actualize Consulting. She also is author of *Culture Infusion: 9 Principles to Create and Maintain a Thriving Organizational Culture*, and founder of Zendoway, a company that encourages holistic wellness.

Creative Bonding Ideas

Here are more ways to ramp up relationships with employees, courtesy of Kerry Alison Wekelo's inspiring book *Culture Infusion* (kerryalison.com):

SCHEDULE A PLAY DATE WITH YOUR COWORKERS

Play games at lunch, go to a sporting event together, take a painting class, or get out and move together on a walk-and-talk. Survey employees to find out what they want to do. Then use that feedback to choose the event.

HOST AT LEAST ONE WELLNESS FAIR EACH YEAR

Bring in vendors to offer samples of healthy food and products. Have movement classes as part of the fair, and give free chair massages. Provide raffles to give away wellness prizes such as massages, gym memberships, glass water bottles, and the like. Another option for a wellness fair is to offer health screenings. The more often you have such fairs, the better. Doing so will incorporate employee wellness into your culture and show in a tangible way that you care about people's well-being.

MAINTAIN A "GET-TO-KNOW-YOU" BUDGET

Use this budget to get to know each of your employees better through lunch meetings, coffee breaks, and so on. If you have a large enough number of employees, give each department or team a budget of their own so they can do the same.

SPREAD GRATITUDE

Suggest a week of random acts of kindness with employees and external customers (nothing monetary allowed). The act of giving improves people's moods and makes them more appreciative themselves.

UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRAINING & EDUCATION

You need to offer *both*. A comprehensive learning benefit includes training (which is about doing something) and education (which is about knowing something). Solicit ideas from employees on learning opportunities they'd like you to offer. Encourage them to gain personal-interest as well as job-related skills. This will keep them satisfied and energized and show you are interested in their holistic well-being.