

Build a Winning Workplace Culture

Be the M.O.R.T.A.R. that holds it all together.

By Magi Graziano

The number-one driver of people's engagement and performance is culture. When your workplace culture is working, you can leverage it as a competitive advantage. However, when your culture isn't functioning properly — or not working at all — it's a deterrent to productivity, innovation, and employee morale.

If the culture you construct at work is one of the most pivotal cogs driving success, why do so many organizations fail at building one that wins? It's because, frankly, many nonprofit leaders are unaware of how big an impact culture really makes.

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What Are the Keys?

So how do you build a successful culture? It begins with you, as a leader: You must become the M.O.R.T.A.R. that holds it all together. M.O.R.T.A.R. stands for:

MOTIVATE

There are three keys to motivating workers to operate in service of the organization:

Clearly envision the overall mission.

Communicate the mission, vision, and purpose in a way that moves, touches, and inspires followers.

Link people to the purpose of their roles and to the larger role of the organization.

When you do these three things, people accomplish great feats, and enjoy themselves while they're doing it. Their energy won't flag even when things get tough, because they realize that what's at stake is much more than the task at hand.



ONBOARD

When new people come on board, it's crucial to connect them to the organization's vision. They must understand:

- **why** the organization exists
- **the core operating values** that employees are expected to demonstrate in the day to day implementation of their roles.

When new hires begin with the end in the mind, connecting their roles to the mission, they're set up for success. That's why onboarding deserves your keen attention.

REIN IN NEGATIVITY

Every organization deals with setbacks, challenges, breakdowns, and disappointments. The difference between success and failure is the leader who checks in with how people are feeling and works to reverse the negativity.

All negativity stems from an unfulfilled expectation, a thwarted intention, or an undelivered communication. When managers are aware of their employees' feelings, they know when someone is off kilter or upset. The astute leader provides support for people to overcome these motivation killers.

Inspiring people is a core competency of leaders. Great leaders foster alignment and engagement by inspiring people to bring their best selves to work. Leading others requires you to bring this energy. People become inspired when they start believing they have more ability than they thought they did.

TRAIN

Every person, at every level in an organization, needs some level of training and development. The rate of innovation is accelerating at a mind-numbing pace, and no matter what role a person holds, the skills of today will become insufficient for the work of tomorrow. Whether it's in the area of people readiness, a deeper technical expertise, management training, or an ability to take feedback as constructive guidance – the development of the workforce is a core tenet to any winning workforce strategy. The greatest gift you can give your people is the gift of developing them professionally.

ALIGN

Great leaders align people's values to those of the organization. To create such alignment, you must introduce the bigger picture into every employee's heart and head. When you understand how your mission satisfies people's needs, you have direct access to igniting engagement within them.

Without followers, you can't be a leader: Followers will voluntarily engage in something only if it satisfies their needs first and your goals second. When people can connect their personal mission and purpose with the greater good of

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the organization, they naturally feel compelled to do better and give more of themselves at work.

REWARD

The best leaders celebrate the success of every person and team. They understand the importance of incentives in keeping people engaged. And they realize that an effective reward can be as simple as a heartfelt “Great job!”

At the same time, they hold people accountable. Great leaders inform people what they're expected to accomplish and how their roles connect to the bigger plan. Seeing the full impact of their work is a reward in itself.

Look at Yourself First

To create a culture that drives your initiatives forward and fulfills your mission, you'll need to invest time and energy towards developing yourself as a leader of that culture. How well you communicate your intentions, and how often, is critical to the success of your cultural alignment. To be the M.O.R.T.A.R. that holds your workforce together, you must make developing yourself a top priority. 

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Become a Leader of Culture

For more on shaping the culture around you, check out these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

How to Use Your Organizational Culture as a Competitive Tool (Vol. 20, No. 2)

Creating a Values-Based Road Map (Vol. 23, No. 2)

Grounded Visioning: A Quick Way to Create Shared Visions (Vol. 26, No. 4)

Organizational Culture: It's in the Walk, Not Just the Talk (Vol. 29, No. 6)

Are You Offering the Right Perks? (Vol. 35, No. 1)

Why Your Employees Are Losing Motivation – and What to Do about It (Vol. 29, No. 4)

How to Change the World by Changing Your Culture (Vol. 31, No. 2)

Motivate Workers with Training Opportunities (Vol. 33, No. 3)