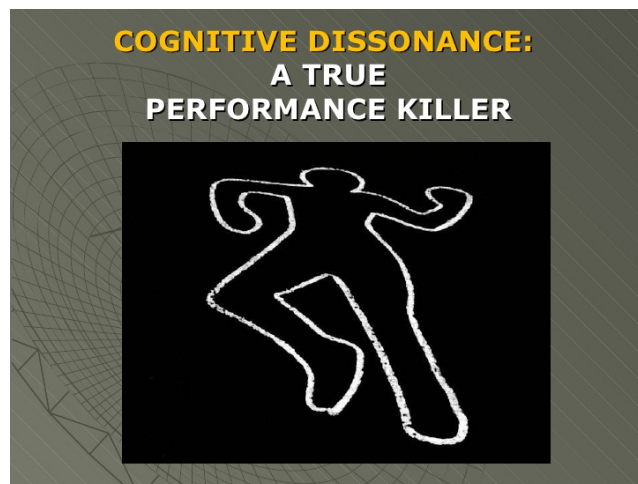


Leadership Culture and Cognitive Dissonance

Posted by Orrin Woodward on July 13, 2016

There is nothing more important, its proper implementation determining the destiny of nations, companies, charities, and families, than the creation of culture. Culture, a system of beliefs, values, and customs a community follows, cannot be seen, but it influences every behavior within the community. Interestingly, despite nearly every leader expressing the need for right culture to produce right results, few seem to build culture with specific intent. This, I believe, is one of the biggest leadership mistakes.

In other words, every community must get intentional about culture or suffer the grave consequences. Just over a year ago, in a conversation with [Chris Brady](#), he boiled down influence within a company to the three R's – require, recognize, or reward it. Although we weren't specifically talking culture at the time, it didn't take me long for me to realize Brady had just summed up the different methods one can create culture within a community. Ever since, I have thought deeply on how to create a culture that requires, recognizes, and rewards the right behaviors.



Cognitive Dissonance

Needless to say, this is much more difficult to do than it sounds, for most companies suffer from cognitive dissonance – a malady where the organization promotes one thing while rewarding another. Cognitive dissonance is perhaps the biggest failure-mode for most communities because it involves a misalignment between the culture and the longterm vision. This misalignment creates cultural inertia that, left to itself, will divide the community and blur the vision. Dissonance, in a word, destroys unity.

Accordingly, great leaders must identify the purpose and vision of the community; then develop the culture of requiring, recognizing, and rewarding to ensure the proper behaviors are performed to accomplish the vision. Moreover, if the leader realizes the 3 R's currently instituted will not achieve the stated purpose and vision, he must have the courage to make the needed adjustments. In fact, this is what makes the leader the

leader, namely, the courage to create the culture in order to achieve the community's purpose. Any leader not willing to do this, is not truly a leader, for he merely follows the current culture rather than building the proper culture.

In essence, leaders are responsible for eliminating cognitive dissonance out of the culture to ensure the actions of the organization move it towards its purpose and vision. After all, nothing validates the leader's value so much as his/her ability to move the cultural current in the proper direction. It doesn't matter if it's easy; it doesn't matter if it's convenient; it doesn't even matter if it's popular, but what does matter is whether the community can accomplish its reason for existing with the current culture. Thus, if there is cognitive dissonance, the culture must change.

When an organization is suffering in the throes of cognitive dissonance, the leader's responsibility is to charge to the front lines and resist the improper cultural current, converting the dissonance into resonance by aligning the 3 Rs to the purpose and vision. Indeed, when the cultural current is flowing smoothly, the requirements, recognition, and rewards align the people win personally and professionally when the company wins purposefully. Proper leadership, therefore, creates the culture and the culture creates the results.

What is the purpose for your company? What is the culture of your company? Do the culture's results aligned with the purpose of the company? If so, then the community will win. If not, then the leader must get to the front and lead, for as Harry Truman once said about leadership, "the buck stops here".

Sincerely,

[Orrin Woodward](#)