

## **Achieving Greatness – Leveraging Your Culturebrand**

Culture is often pushed aside by business leaders as being the soft stuff. Nice to have, but not value-adding. Here's what I have to say about culture – it is more important than everything else you are concentrating on!

In the past two decades whole industries have grown up around the desire for better performance, lower turnover, growth, profitability, sustainability and innovation, brand loyalty to name a few. We have seen employee engagement, creative thinking, process design and re-design, strategic planning, CRM and brand management. The list is long. It is no wonder that business owners and leaders feel confused or overwhelmed. Yet these are all good disciplines

Take a moment to consider this: organizations do not spontaneously occur. Usually one or two people have an idea. They visualize a product or offering to meet a need. They think about how it will be to bring that offering to the marketplace. They are clear about what they stand for. Whether tacit or explicit, there are founding values – perhaps even before there is a bank account!

In visionary organizations the core values need no justification. They are consistent and timeless – not changed by market conditions or the latest management trends. The values of respect, integrity, ethical conduct, safety, to name a few, make each person feel valued. There are also values that are important for the achievement of our goals – these include mastery and excellence; growth and creativity; relationships.

The values are a source of strength and they define the principles that determine *how* we work together. Furthermore, these values are articulated in our brand promise, to both our external and internal audiences. They also shape the experience that people have with our organization. And, they leave us with the feeling we walk away with – a memory. Culture equals brand. CultureBrand is leveraged to deliver strategic objectives – both financial and non-financial. Herein lies the secret to greatness.

As soon as we embark on this exploration of culture, we find ourselves immersed in complexity. This soft stuff is the hard stuff – hard to do. Also *hard* in terms of value creation. It adds to the bottom line.

So what do the great leaders endorse?

- Complex moral awareness – a deep understanding of and accountability for the culture in their organizations
- Practicing immersion – getting in and 'being' the values in action, doing it in terms of values based practices – and the same way that a person learns a language, the people learn the culture.
- Stories – making the tacit explicit and spreading ideas and aspirations. In this way, more than by facts raising people's game.
- Sustainable development – investing in how the organization is 'being' balanced with training, what the organization is doing.

- Principles of conduct – less emphasis on rules and command and control management and a far greater focus on values and accountability.

Get ready for your richly imagined future. Organizations have a soul: there is something more than market capitalization, bottom line and profitability. We have to ask 'what is the purpose'. Where people can bring their values to work, make a difference and grow to their full potential, we can begin to experience greatness. And greater results!

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