The EXTRAORDINARY TEAM NEWSLETTER

The summer is all about unwinding, kicking your feet up, and taking a vacation here and there. I'll be in PEI eating lobsters and mussels - and finishing my latest book, 201 Ways to Add More Pizzazz to Your Panels!

How can you motivate your team through the summer months to start or continue to make positive work culture changes? This month's featured article can help.

Kristin

IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE

HOW TO CREATE A CULTURE WHERE TEAM MEMBERS ARE COMFORTABLE BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

Every once in a while, I stumble upon a quote, a paragraph or small article that resonates with me – and today I want to share this clipping from PCMA's Convene Magazine. It came out in January and it is still sitting on my desk.

I ponder it from time to time, as I believe many of my clients are struggling with this same challenge: How to create a culture where team members are comfortable being uncomfortable.

The author of this "resolution," [Julie Krieger](), Vice President at Marketing Design Group says, "The marketing landscape is changing at such a rapid pace that we're all operating in unchartered territory [I call this the VUCA world!]. That's why we have to create a space in which our team feels safe to ask for help when they need it, to take risks, fail on occasion, learn new skills, and admit when they don't know how to do something."

So how do you create that type of culture? I believe you have five levers that you can move on a day-to-day basis to affect a cultural change:

- **Reinforce the Mission/Vision/Purpose.** I call these the "business fundamentals." It's more than printing a poster on the wall. It's more about connecting the dots to how the cultural behaviors you are looking for contribute to the desired state. Continually beat the drum about how the team needs to be comfortable being uncomfortable in order for them to fulfill the mission of the organization, achieve their vision and realize their purpose. (Hint: If you are tired of hearing yourself say the same messages, that's probably about the time that your team is realistically hearing and/or believing you.)
- **Communicate, Model and Reinforce Core Values.** Every company has core values, beliefs, or commitments. Some call it a creed, a philosophy, or principles. Whatever you want to call it, it's a handful (I hope no more than 5 – I like 3) of core qualities or characteristics that the company holds dear. My guess is that you can wind this behavior of being comfortable with the ambiguity as part of a core value. I like Krieger's list that actually spells out what that means (e.g. ask for help when they need it etc.). But it has to be more than simply talking about your core values and the desired behaviors. You, as the leader, need to model these behaviors. Kreiger mentions, "If I don't demonstrate an aversion to risk, others will likely stop trying to experiment with new ways of doing things." And, it is important to reinforce those core values and behaviors with a healthy dose of recognition – and the flip side of that reinforcement coin – consequences of non-performance.
- **Stories, Legends, and History.** People remember stories, so don't be shy of sharing stories that exemplify the desired shift in behavior. When someone DID go out of their way to help a teammate, when someone DID fail and we shared the lessons learned (and didn't chop off their head!). Dig into the history of the company and you'll find the "legendary" stories about how the company that created on gosh-only-knows-what (probably before the internet!).
- **Artifacts.** Look all around you. There are "artifacts" – objects that serve as to clues about the organization's culture. Something as simple as the company logo, website, marketing materials; the physical office environment and opportunities to share information, our activities within the office and in the community, our policies and procedures including the clothes we wear, the words we use and our work schedules. It ALL contributes to the culture. That's a pretty long list, if you think about it. If you were an archeologist and had no idea of the organizational culture other than what you saw, what would you think and feel about that company and the people who worked there?
- **Underlying Assumptions.** This is a bit harder too discern, but every person has some underlying assumptions about the place in which they work. Some are spelled out in the policies and procedures. Others are learned during on-boarding. And others are baked into the everyday work. They aren't explicitly stated, but everyone kinda knows them or follows them – for whatever reason. It might be from a previous workplace, the previous leader, or even industry practices. Here's my short list of examples I often see:
    o The boss is always right.

- o That's not my job.
- o I'll believe it when I see it.
- o People are expendable and interchangeable.
- o Empowerment only works for managers.

If you have an underlying assumption that runs counter to being comfortable with being uncomfortable, then you are going to need to work hard to change it. Challenge those assumptions if they don't support the culture you are trying to build.

Shifting a culture takes time, energy, and passion. More importantly, it requires intentionality. Your organization HAS a culture…whether it has been deliberately created and cultivated is a different matter altogether. Be deliberate in using these five levers to create the organizational culture you know is needed to be successful now and in the future.

THE TOP FIVE MOST ANNOYING WORPLACE HABITS…AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

A new survey of 800 UK-based workers by online print provider Instantprint reveals how much small workplace annoyances can damage business performance. When asked to rank office habits based on which is most annoying, the following five came out on top:

1. Poor personal hygiene
2. Eating smelly food in the office
3. Taking frequent smoking breaks
4. Constant whistling
5. Being late

Well over half of respondents (58%) said that they're regularly annoyed by colleagues during the workday, with only 4% saying they've never been annoyed by a co-worker's actions.

These annoyances can have a tangible effect on businesses, with one in three workers saying they have a directly negative impact on their productivity. So what can you do about these poor office habits other than hold your nose and be patient?

First of all, I go with the assumption that the offender doesn't know that they are offending you and everyone else in the office. So treat the situation with care and compassion for your fellow human.

Second, think about the conversation you want to have:

- **What have you specifically observed?** What would be an acceptable solution? When and where do you want to have this conversation? Make sure it is in a neutral, private place (NOT your office)!
Third, have the difficult conversation:
- **Start with honesty.** I like to start with, "This is uncomfortable for me to share with you," simply because it IS uncomfortable! But it needs to be addressed in order to improve the team's performance.
- **Then be clear, direct, and concrete about your expectation(s).** "I rely on people to be here on time during the workday."
- **Provide descriptive, specific feedback** using "I" statements. For example, "I noticed that you have been at least 15 to 20 minutes late to work for the last three days." Try to avoid blatant generalities such as "You're always late!" They will always argue with you!
- **Share the impact of this behavior.** "When we wait 15 minutes for you to arrive before we start the morning meeting, that causes the rest of us to run late for the rest of the day," Try to separate their "intention" for being late such as "Apparently, you don't think it's important to be on time." You don't know that, so don't say it!

- **Own your part in it**...however small. "I should have brought this up 3 months ago, but I just kept thinking it would resolve itself. But it hasn't."
- **Look for the Win-Win.** This is a bit of a brainstorming, give and take discussion. Usually, the two of you can come to some agreement that will work for both parties. If not, I like to use this challenging question: "What will it take for you to get to work on time each and every day?"
- **Agree on a path forward.** Agree on what the offender will do and what you will do to help and support that person. Discuss what will happen if the offensive behavior happens again (which it will – remember, you are probably talking about a habit that will take some time to break!).
- **Finish with next steps.** Summarize the discussion and end on a happy note what you will do next and what they will do next.

You are not done yet! Check in periodically and don't forget to hold your part of the bargain!

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: IN THE LINE OF FIRE – HOW TO HANDLE TOUGH QUESTIONS WHEN IT COUNTS

Q&A is often the biggest fear for many panelists. What if I get asked a hardball question? What if I can't answer it? What if I don't get any questions at all?

And you have every right to be concerned if you are in front of *any* audience. (I was going to admit that there may be audiences where everyone loves puppies – the topic, the moderator, panelists, and the audience – are all holding handing hands and singing kumbaya. But then, that would make for a very boring panel discussion. A great love fest, but not a lively and informative panel discussion!)

Did you know there is an art to answering tough questions? I didn't. In fact, I didn't even think about it until recently – and I'm in the business of helping moderators and panelists be freakin' brilliant!

My colleague, Michael Chaleff, recommended Jerry Weissman's book *In the Line of Fire: How to Handle Tough Questions...When It Counts*. Not only was I mesmerized by the thought process and methodology to answering tough questions, but Weissman uses presidential debates to illustrate his points! How cool is that! (For those of you who don't know, I'll be commenting on the 2019-20 Presidential debates – so the timing of reading this book is impeccable!)

I'll summarize the key techniques outlined in the book – but if you are even mildly interested, you'll want to pick up a copy.
- **Exercise time and traffic control** during the key steps to the Q&A cycle: Open the floor, recognize the questioner, yield the floor, retake the floor, provide the answer.
- **Listen intently** to the questioner. Many panelists have failed when the question asked is not answered. Weissman says, "Concentrate on the questioner's pivotal words as if in slow motion....Resist thinking of the answer and instead listen for the key issue."
- **Identify the "Roman Column"** (this is THE most valuable skill!). Unfortunately, the key issue (the Roman Column) isn't as obvious as it might seem. "It comes all wrapped up in a large knotty ball....[full of] misinformation, nonlinear right brain thinking, unprepared extemporaneity, and anxiety about standing up exposed in front of an audience."
- **Buffer the key word**. The buffer is the first line of self-defense by reframing or paraphrasing the inbound energy of challenging questions. Make it personal by

adding the word "you."
- **Answer succinctly**. This has as much to do with your preparation to ask the expected questions, without "launching into oratory or to wax eloquent" with new or tangential information.
- **Finish with topspin** (the most sophisticated of them all). After the panelist has answered the question, conclude with a statement (or two, but no more) that directly counters the challenge embedded in the question.

If you are even remotely worried about your upcoming panel discussion, not only READ the book, but do your homework. You'll look brilliant!