Culture Is Everything and Everything Is Culture

It doesn't matter what you do, whether you are in the government or private business: Culture drives success.

When I use the word "culture," I'm referring to your workplace's personality. Your DNA. How you do the things you do. I'm talking about an ecosystem, holistic, long-term perspective of your workplace and recognizing that everything in work is interconnected to everything else.

Culture matters because you cannot win just by focusing on money, for two simple reasons:

- Someone down the block is always going to be able to pay your best employees at least a bit more than you are – so you can't attract and keep your best and brightest employees if you just focus on the money.

- Someone down the block is also going to be able to offer services or products cheaper than you can offer them – so you're not going to win your customer's lifelong loyalty if you just focus on money.

If you just focus on money, then in the eyes of both your customers and your employees you become nothing more than an interchangeable commodity.

Remember, loyalty isn't dead, as so many people claim these days. Loyalty is only dead if you choose to smother the life out if!

I think the fact that people say loyalty is dead is a wakeup call – organizations can't get away with running their business the way they may have 50, 30, or even 5 years ago.

Creating a high-performing culture begins by valuing your workplace values

Actions speak louder than words.

Talk is cheap.

So your real values have nothing to do with the cutesy feel-good slogans plastered on your coffee mugs or hanging on a pretty poster in the lunchroom. Your workplace values are reflected in what everyone actually does, day in and day out. Your values are what your employees and customers see, feel, and experience every day in their interactions in your workplace.

If you are serious about your values (and *not* being serious about values tends to be positively correlated to an increase in the readership of Dilbert cartoons) then you need to have deeper workplace conversations as to what those values such as, "leadership," "teamwork," "trust," and "great service," *really mean* in terms of everyone's behaviors and attitudes.

And your leaders need to lead out loud with their values so that they become completely evident to the people they are leading. Your front-line employees need to deliver your values out loud so they become self-evident to your customers.

Your values ultimately shape, reflect, and define your culture.

Hmmm…could it be that culture is everything and everything is culture?

Service is everything and everything is service.

Being good isn't good enough anymore. Your organization needs to not just match expectations; you need to exceed customer service expectations. This is why offering "good customer service" could be costing you millions of dollars in unrealized revenue. Because "good" only keeps you out of the doghouse. Good keeps you out of jail. Being merely "good" does nothing to turn customers into lifelong enthusiastic fans of your organization!

And it's not even always good enough to even exceed expectations – you also *need to be different.*

You need to *stand out from the herd* in order to be heard! If you aren't different in a compelling way from your competitors, then why is anyone going to be loyal to your business?

It's difficult to imagine any organization that is NOT in the service business. Ultimately, everyone is in the service business and everyone's job is to provide service to someone. Maybe not service to your external clients or customers, and maybe it's only service to one or two other people internally, but the reality is, *everyone is a service provider.*

Creating a service-value mindset starts at the top, and it starts with your culture.

If you treat your employees well, and provide them with great service, guess what they will in turn do with your customers?

Happy customers begin with happy employees.

Engaged, loyal customers begin with engaged, loyal employees.

And, passionate, word-of-mouth marketing begins with great employees because marketing is everything, and everything is marketing.

So here we are again: culture is everything, and everything is culture.

Communication is everything, and everything is communication

If actions speak louder than words, then everything really is communication. Truly open and honest and effective communication in the workplace is the key to, well, pretty much everything.

I've never, ever heard a person say to me: "I'm just TOO informed about what goes on in my workplace!"

But, of course, it's not just what you say, it's how you say things that ultimately matters even more. How people communicate in your workplace is a reflection of your culture and it shapes your culture.

Okay, I'm going to say it again. Culture is everything, and everything is culture.

Ideas are the currency of success, so you really need to be in the business of ideas

To be successful, you need ideas from everyone and everywhere: small ideas for continual improvement, and grand breakthrough ideas (because someone on your team might be working on a better eight-track tape, if you catch my drift).

Ideas don't just help you thrive, stand out from the herd, make you more money, and make you more competitive – there's a chicken-and-egg relationship here as well. Asking for and getting ideas from your employees is also one of the most powerful workplace motivators there is.

Ideas inspire and energize people. And, conversely, you need energized and inspired people to come up with those ideas.

How you communicate, the values you live by, and the amount of freedom and fun you instill in your workplace all impact your ability to inspire new ideas.

So (are you sensing a recurring them here?) . . . culture is everything and everything is culture.

Change management is so 1990s, but it's still critically important!

If the change going on outside your organization is greater than the level of change going on inside your organization, you are going to be in serious trouble ... maybe not tomorrow, maybe not next year, but someday soon.

I've always disliked the term "change management" because it seems to me that, as cliché as this sounds, change is a constant, it's happening faster than ever before, and because to be successful you need to be

constantly growing and evolving and adapting, then change management is really all about an on-going mindset and approach for how you run your organization.

So how do you instill this attitude into your employees?

It starts and ends with your culture.

Did I mention that culture is everything and everything is culture?

Motivating employees has nothing to do with team-building events and everything to do with your culture

You do not inspire and motivate employees through a 1, 5, or even 10 times-a-year events.

And you don't motivate employees effectively with money, at least not in the long haul, because someone can always pay your employees more and because in two months that raise becomes nothing more than their new, expected salary. And, it is because external motivators aren't nearly as powerful a motivational force as intrinsic motivators. Carrots and sticks may work in the short term; but for long term, real success, they simply do not work.

Now, I'm not suggesting money isn't important, and that you aren't going to lose good people because they can get more money elsewhere. Of course you will lose employees to a bigger paycheck. Of course no one would show up at work tomorrow if the checks stopped coming. Of course everyone would love to be paid more.

What I am suggesting is that the true key to long-term success is taking the focus off the money, and focusing on creating an inspiring, "want to," kind of workplace instead of a "have to" kind of workplace.

You really can't motivate another human being. But what you can do is create the kind of environment where people feel motivated.

You create a motivating environment by creating the kind of culture where people want to be at your workplace on a Monday morning, where they want to contribute their ideas, where they want to remain loyal, and where they enthusiastically rave about your workplace to anyone who will listen.

You create a motivating environment by connecting people to an exciting sense of purpose, by providing the tools and resources to do the job well, and then by getting out of the way so they can do it!

You create a motivating environment by modeling core values, creating the kind of workplace where there really is open and honest communication, where ideas really are valued, where employees feel respected, cared for, and cared about as human beings first and foremost.

Employees feel motivated when they feel valued. When they know their work matters and they can measure their progress. When employees truly believe there is a climate of trust and mutual respect in your workplace.

So, when it comes to motivation, yes, you guessed it.

Culture is everything and everything is culture.

Effective, Inspiring Communication at Work

Communication in the workplace is everything. And everything is communication.

Here are few ideas on how to improve the communication in your workplace:

Speak Up About What's Bugging You? Brainstorm Everyone's Communication Pet Peeves

Start by taking time with your team to simply brainstorm everyone's pet peeves. Don't limit how you define communication, keep the question open-ended. When I do this simple exercise in my workshops what usually comes out loud and clear are two things:

- Everyone has a LOT of pet peeves that no one has ever bothered to mention before
- Most of the pet peeves (I'd say 80-90%) are trivial things, such as people leaving too long a message on their voice mail, or unclear subject lines in e-mail messages that could easily be resolved with a little awareness. (Hence the need for an exercise such as this!)

Remind Everyone to take their Talk for a Walk

When you consider the old phrase, "Actions speak louder than words," then you really are reminded that EVERYTHING you do (and don't do) is communicating a message.

Talk is cheap. Actions speak volumes.

So when thinking about how effective your communication is in the workplace, start by considering what your actions are saying to the people around you, especially if you are in a position of leadership.

And talk about your workplace values, but dig deeply. Have the conversation about what your values actually mean in terms of everyone's behaviors and attitudes.

People Aren't Mind Readers

Never assume people know what you're thinking or how you are feeling. And don't assume they already know "this."

Remember, effective communication is an investment. Yes, it takes up more time and energy to communicate to the other human beings on your team, but ultimately it's a time saver.

It's Not Just What You Say… but HOW You Say Things that Matters

According to a Harvard Business study, 71% of workplace conflicts are based on HOW things are said, which means you can't just be thinking about what needs to be communicated, but how you're are going to say things effectively.

Listen Up!

Effective leaders, effective team members, and effective sales people all listen more than they talk.

Tell Your Face You're Happy to Be Here

We are primarily a visual animal, so always be aware of what your body language is saying to others.

There is a reason that even some phone operators get training in body language – because it can affect our tone of voice, confidence level, and ultimately how we come across.

Now your arms folded around your stomach might just mean that you are cold, or you are self conscious about the extra pounds you recently packed on, but the people around you might think that you are being close minded or negative, so think about the hidden messages you may be inadvertently transmitting.

And especially be aware of what your face is saying. We have literally hundreds of different facial expressions (if not thousands) available to us, so use them!

Show that you are listening to others with your eyes! Smile to show people you are awake and alive and interested in what they have to say. Smiling not only boosts your mood from the outside in, it is also the facial expression most visible from farthest away.

Give yourself this basic goal: try and see how many people you can get to smile back at you, just by putting your best face forward.

Are You Tone Deaf or Tone Aware?

If you own a dog, then you know how important your tone of voice is already. Just try saying the words "good dog" in different tones (angry vs. happy, soft vs. loud, fast vs. slow) and watch the different reactions you get!

Think about what your tone of voice might be communicating. The pacing, pausing, volume, and pitch all affect how you are perceived. A rising pitch – the way children often speak, as though every statement is a question – can make you come across as insecure about what you are saying, whereas a falling pitch denotes confidence.

And, what about the overall level of energy in your voice? Whether you are speaking on the phone or faced-to-face, adding some energy into how you speak makes a huge difference in how others perceive you.

And, finally, remember that variety is not only the spice of life, it's also the spice that makes your tone of voice come across as more interesting and engaging.

Do You Need to Go to an ESL Course?

It seems to me a lot of English-speaking leaders and managers these days need to take an English as a second language course, because although they're speaking English, most of the people around them don't have the foggiest clue what they are saying!

Remember the importance of simply using plain language in your workplace communication. I'm not talking about "dumbing down" your language, but we need to use the same language we use at home with our spouses and kids. And dogs! Jargon speak is a surefire way of getting everyone's eyes to glaze over, and study after study has shown that a high use of jargon corresponds to low morale and higher distrust in the workplace!

So be ruthless. Do away with all those annoying acronyms and meaningless phrases! Brainstorm everyone's most annoying buzzword phrases, play jargon bingo in your meetings to raise awareness of the need for simple-speak, and use a jargon jar to penalize people for using tired clichés – every buzzword means a quarter into the jargon jar that goes to your social committee or favorite charity.

Talk About the Elephant

An ideal way to create more conflict and stress at work is by ignoring the proverbial elephant in the room.

Avoiding conflict creates more conflict.

Avoiding stressful conversations creates more stress.

Avoiding conflict might make for superficially effective meetings and a "nice" place to work, but it also creates havoc in the long run, allows complacency to take a firm hold, and creates an environment where potentially god-awful – even dangerous ideas – are allowed to thrive unchecked.

This is why truly inspiring workplaces embrace conflict, rather than shy away from it. And it's why they invest in open and honest and real communication to help make sure that everyone is comfortable disagreeing with each other – without being disagreeable!

Context is King

Do you need to have a difficult conversation? Then consider the context: the location, the time of day, what just happened before, and what's going to happen afterward all potentially will impact how well the conversation goes.

Ask and Ye Shall Receive

Asking questions is one of the most important things we can do at work. Questions generate deeper discussion, spark creative thinking, clarify misunderstandings, and, when you ask people for their opinion in genuine ways, let people know that you respect their wisdom and experience.

Tell Your Stories

Storytelling is the oldest and most powerful form of communication there is. After all, when you go home on a Friday night, do you ever fire up the PowerPoint and start sharing pie charts and jargon speak with your friends and family? No! You tell stories!

Any message you need to communicate effectively at work can be turned into a story with a little creative thought. And by turning your message or idea into a story, you help connect emotion with logic, you make the ideas more memorable and you keep people interested and awake!

There are two levels of storytelling to consider. The smaller stories – like how Bob was a customer service hero last week because of what he did – and the larger epic stories that employees need to be part of as well.

By epic stories, I mean that story of how your company came to be and why, the mythology that surrounds some of your founders, the historical context of your organization, and the epic tale that you are still writing today – where do you see your organization twenty years from now?

Death by a Thousand Meetings

Tired of boring, ineffective meetings being held in a place called the BORED-room?

Here's a shocker: meetings really can be fun AND effective! So make sure your meetings aren't sucking the souls out of everyone. Do the basics religiously – send out agendas in a timely manner, take proper minutes, only invite folks who need to be there, start and end on time… you know the drill.

And, then go one step further. Make your meetings fun and creative! Make them a place where people actually want to show up and participate! Make them a place where ideas thrive instead of a place where ideas go to die!

Stand Out from the Herd to Be Heard

Consider the need to stand out from the herd to be heard over the din. Whether you are communicating with your customers or your fellow employees, being boring, and being "corporate" will get you nowhere fast.

So don't shy away from using humor to make a point. Get creative to stand out from the heard. Be more human. Inject personality into everything you communicate. Make it fun. Make it edgy sometimes.

Above all else, whether you're communicating by phone, e-mail, or in person at a meeting, keep it real!

Make your meetings fun and creative! Make them a place where people actually want to show up and participate!

Inspiring Workplaces

Culture Drives Success

- Business/workplace success (or failure) is driven by culture: your workplace's DNA, your organization's soul, your unwritten rules of conduct, how people behave when the leader isn't around!

- Inspiring workplaces recognize that culture is everything; everything at work is interrelated, so it's necessary to take an ecosystem approach to creating success and an intentional approach to building your culture: you can't leave it to chance or accident!

- You don't create a great place to work through a 1, 10, or even 20 times a year event – it's the small things done consistently that creates greatness

- Someone always can afford to pay you and your employees more, someone can always offer your services or products at a lower price, if you JUST focus on the money and the bottom line, you will never be as successful (or as happy) as you could be

- Success will be increasingly driven in the future by values and by culture: it won't be about outdoing each other but about "out-howing" your competition: HOW you treat your employees, HOW you treat your customers, HOW you treat the environment, and HOW you treat the community you work in will drive success more and more

- Creating inspiring workplaces also matters because life is too short and work has a huge impact on the quality of your life: work affects your attitude, your mental and physical health, your family life, where you live, with whom you socialize, your identity and it's the biggest single use of your time during the waking hours of your life. You owe it to your clients, your family members, your team mates, and yourself to create as inspiring, as passionate, as creative and as fun a workplace as possible!

Recommended Reading

- ✓ *Inspiring Workplaces – Creating the Kind of Workplace Where Everyone Wants to Work*, Michael Kerr

- ✓ *Firms of Endearment*, Raj Sisodia, Jag Seth, David Wolfe

- ✓ *The Seven Day Weekend*, Ricardo Semler

- ✓ *Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion and Purpose*, Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos.com

- ✓ *Why is Everyone Smiling?,* Paul Spiegelman, CEO of Beryl Call Centers

- ✓ *Tribal Leadership*, Dave Logan, John King & Halee Fischer-Wright

An Inspiring Culture Starts with an Inspiring Vision

- One mindset that prevents 90% of organizations from being in the "top 10% club" is complacency and simply believing that because "most workplaces have always functioned this way, this must be the way things are done!"

- An inspiring vision is about creating an on-going dialogue with your team; an on-going conversation around everyone's idea of what work can be at its ultimate best, of not just what you do, but HOW you do it!

- Creating an inspiring vision isn't about some words in a statement, it's about the emotional connection to a grand ideal; it's about everyone understanding how everyone's jobs, behaviours, and attitudes align with the vision and fuels a sense of purpose beyond just collecting a paycheck

- It's about imagining what's possible, about passion, about excitement, about deciding not to settle for anything less than being the greatest workplace you possibly can be

- Even at the level of projects, at meetings, or in teams, people need to understand the "why" to be truly inspired and to stay motivated

- You need to keep the inspiring vision alive in creative and fun ways and constantly link it to everything you do

- Dry jargon, vague "corporate speak" language that seems to speak more to shareholders, will never serve as inspiration for anyone! Jazzy, zippy, REAL language that connects at an emotional level and defines an exciting possibility will inspire people if you truly believe in it and keep it alive!

Live and Breathe Inspiring Values

- Actions speak louder than words; talk is cheap

- You must have the next level of conversation as to what your key values actually mean in terms of everyone's behaviors and attitudes day in and day out

- You need to live your actions out loud so that your teammates, your new employees, and your clients understand what your values are because they see them in action

- There are times when living by your values should make you feel uncomfortable because your values will guide you toward making some very difficult decisions

- If your values actually mean anything then they will be your guide as to how you hire, train, coach, mentor, communicate, lead, and make strategic decisions

Recommended Reading

✓ *Nuts! Southwest Airlines Crazy Recipe for Business Success*, Kevin Freiberg

✓ *Start with the Why*, Simon Sinek

✓ *Confessions of a Radical Industrialist*, Ray Anderson

✓ *Nine Minutes on a Monday Morning*, Jamie Robbins

Inspiring Communication

- Communication is everything and everything is communication

- It's not just what you say, but how you say it: 70% of workplace conflicts are based not on what people said, but how they said it

- The typical workplace is thought to have ten negative "sea gull" comments for every one positive comment!

- Negative comments hold more power than positive comments; it takes five positive comments to negate one negative comment!

- Personal, face to face communication needs to be viewed as an investment

- There's nothing small about small talk: small talk is where relationships and trust are built, small talk has been shown to be a key morale booster in workplaces

- 50% of e-mails have a "tonal issue"

- Inspiring workplaces create opportunities for real conversations to happen

- Inspiring workplaces value simple, plain, direct language and avoid jargon

- Inspiring workplaces tell the story of their organization, and use stories to convey key messages – stories are the oldest and most powerful form of communication

- Create more inspiring meetings that encourage fun, foster dialogue, and spark creativity; set a minimum goal that no one leaves your meetings until everyone feels better about things than when they came in.

- Take time every few months to discuss everyone's communication pet peeves and to do a communication "checkup." 90% of the issues uncovered will be small issues that simply require raising awareness of them!

- Inspiring workplaces "get" that it is through open and honest and real inspiring communication that people feel valued, trusted and respected!

- Use humor to help break the ice, tear down walls, build trust, and to help your messages stand out from the herd to be heard!

Recommended Reading

- ✓ *Why Business People Speak Like Idiots*, Brian Fugere, Chelsea Hardaway, and Jon Warshawsky

- ✓ *You've GOT to Start Meeting Like This*, DVD, Michael Kerr

- ✓ *Death by Meeting*, Patrick Lencioni

- ✓ *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs*, Carmine Gallo

INSPIRINGWORKPLACES
THE WAY WORK OUGHT TO BE

Inspiring Creativity and Innovation

- Everyone needs to think of themselves as being in the idea business; ideas are the currency of success; ideas keep people motivated and inspired

- Creativity is both a tool needed to create a more inspiring workplace and the end result of working in an inspiring workplace

- Creative people and organizations spend more time on the problem-defining stage of the creative process. Everything starts with a question or issue, so encourage curiosity at work, use questions to plant the seeds that get people thinking and one day will blossom into ideas

- It's a process: 1. Asking questions; 2. Generating ideas, 3. Choosing and doing it!

- Create a culture that values questions: questions drive conversations, drive curiosity about your business, and start the creative process

- Create a question-of-the-month board, a question board, start meeting with a question, constantly ask each other questions to plant the seeds that might later become great ideas

- Ask big questions for big ideas, change the question to get different ideas

- Ask everyone questions, especially your clients, especially the new people!

- Make sure you are solving the REAL source of the problem or issue and not a symptom: organizations spend millions of dollars solving the wrong problems!!

- Take time not just to solve problems, but to brainstorm opportunities

- Create opportunities for real brainstorming meetings focused only on ideas

- Create opportunities to debate ideas in healthy, respectful ways and be wary of the two ends of the spectrum: "groupthink" that discourages dissent and opts for the safest idea because no one wants to hurt anyone's feelings vs. everyone is ultra critical and nothing gets proposed or accomplished.

- Set the stage for creativity: the setting, time of day, and especially psychological headspace of everyone on your team can impact the level of creativity

- Do whatever you can to banish idea-squashing language ("We tried it before in 1954!" and idea-killing behaviours (too many rules, too much red tape, too many committees, too much micro-management etc.)

- Use humor in meetings to lower inhibitions, open up dialogue, shift perspectives, reduce stress and spark lateral thinking

- Reward smart failures done in the spirit of trying something truly new!

- Most motivating thing you can do: ask employees for input and do it! Innovative organizations "do, in order to find out what they need to do"

- Remember: the greatest risk of all is often to do/change nothing!

Recommended Reading

✓ *Harvard Business Review on Breakthrough Thinking*

✓ *Weird Ideas that Work*, Robert I. Sutton

✓ *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers*, David Brandt

✓ *Imagine, How Creativity Works*, Jonah Lehrer

Inspiring Motivation, Inspiring People to Be Their Best

- Don't aim to simply motivate employees: hire already motivated people, then inspire them to greatness

- The top "motivators": purpose (people need to know why they are doing something); progress (people need to know what success looks like, and that they are making progress towards something); pride (in the team, in their skills, in their success, in your products…)

- Pride matters more than money to most people, which means you need to think of all the people that need to be praised on a more regular basis

- Practice positive praise: keep it 100% positive, be specific, be timely, and be sincere!

- Praising effort is more effective than praising raw talent

- External motivators tend to be short-lived, fostering a culture that promotes intrinsic motivators (such as pride) is the only truly long-lasting motivator

- Forget about the golden rule and instead remember there are different strokes for different folks: everyone has a different "on switch" and "off switch," things that help motivate them, things that de-motivate them

- We don't just recognize employees through formal recognition programs: it's about the day-to-day things we do – asking them for their input or inviting someone to work on a project recognizes people's accomplishments in a far more meaningful way!

- Truly inspiring leaders understand that the number one reason people cite for leaving their jobs is feeling unappreciated

- Truly inspiring leaders not only appreciate and recognize and thank their employees in meaningful and fun ways, they thank the employees' families, who are often part of the support team

- If you are in doubt, ask how people like to be thanked, start a file that identifies people's personal interests; ask their spouse for suggestions for rewards and perks

- You get the attitudes and behaviours you reward and recognize!

- Ultimately, the number one thing people want to know is that their work matters and that as a leader you care about them at a personal level!

Recommended Reading

✓ *Recognizing and Rewarding Employees*, R. Brayton Bowen

✓ *The Progress Principle*, Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer

✓ *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*, Bob Nelson

✓ *First, Break all The Rules*, Marcus Buckingham

✓ *All In*, Adrian Gostick and Chester Elton

Inspiring Fun and Humor at Work

- A sense of humor isn't about telling jokes or being funny, it's about having a sense of balance and perspective and humanity

- Studies show that a positive, healthy sense of humor (even in the military) is positively correlated to other key leadership traits such as trust

- According to a Harris and Associates poll, 72% of employees (the top answer) said that the kind of workplace they would find most difficult to leave, is a fun workplace with high levels of trust; numerous other studies show that employee happiness and engagement levels are the leading indicators of future success

- Using humor at work is about learning to take yourself lightly and the things you have no control over lightly in order to be more professional

- Humor is both a tool/resource and the end result of working in a great workplace

  Practice "safe" humor: humor that laughs with people, not at people

- Humor helps create a more relaxed work atmosphere and helps us relax mentally and physically in the face of stress

- Humor can help your customer service stand out from the herd

- Humor, play are the top catalysts for creating thinking: HA + HA = AHA!

- Use your sense of humor to reward the positives at work and to pull people out of the dungeon during challenging times

- Use humor to reframe your stressors, reframe how you communicate key message, and how you look at you challenges to be more creative

- Rituals and traditions create a want-to kind of work atmosphere, they give people something to look forward to and something to reminisce about, they create a sense of shared experience and history and can give workplace a sense of personality and soul

Recommended Reading

- ✓ *You Can't Be Serious! Putting Humor to Work*, Michael Kerr

- ✓ *Get Weird! 101 Innovative Ideas to Make Your Company a Great Place to Work*, John Putzier

- ✓ *Why is Everyone Smiling?*, Paul Spiegelman

- ✓ *340 Ways to Put Humor to Work*, e-book, Michael Kerr

Five Ways to Jump Start a Culture Shift in Your Workplace

Natalie Wood once observed, "The only time you can change a man is when he is a baby."

If there's even a morsel of truth in her comment, then imagine how difficult it must be to change the culture in a workplace. Many people feel that changing a workplace culture is akin to corralling a herd of feral cats while trying to nail jelly to the wall of the Titanic (yup, it's a cliché super storm).

Yes, it's challenging to change an entire culture. And no, you can't do it overnight – especially since the job of nurturing an inspiring culture is never finished. But yes, you can do it, and, as many organizations have shown, you can make a dramatic change to your culture faster than you might think.

It starts by acknowledging that great cultures don't happen by accident – you need to be intentional. According to Human Capital Institute, 70% of a leader's time should be focused on talent management and fostering an inspiring culture.

Being intentional about your culture requires that you consider your culture in every decision you make by always asking the question: Does this decision both create and reflect the kind of culture we want to build and be known for?

If you need to make a major shift in your culture, here are five ways to jump start the change in your organization:

1. Focus on the Important Stuff.

The Denmark supermarket chain Irma transformed their culture (and saved their business) when the CEO decided to try a revolutionary new approach: putting people first. To achieve that goal the company focused on three areas: Leadership training based on personal development, open communication (including a very personal and heartfelt weekly newsletter that helped build trust and openness), and celebrating positive results. Within less than a year Irma became profitable and today is recognized as the fifth best workplace in Denmark and the best retailer to work for in Europe.

2. Do a Values Blitz.

AFA JCDecaux (a Copenhagen-based outdoor advertising company) transformed their culture in less than a year by relentlessly focusing on one of their four core values (teamwork, create positivity, spread humor, show a fighting spirit) one week at a time, cycling through a different value each week for six months until the values became engrained into everyone's behaviors. Within a year profits were up, turnover and absenteeism rates were down, and there was a waiting list for candidates wanting to get on with the company.

3. Create a 3 in 3 Culture Challenge.

Challenge every employee and every team to do three things in the next three months to contribute to a more positive, inspiring culture.

4. Have More Conversations, Less Meetings.

Michael Abrashoff, the commander of the USS Benfold, changed the culture of his ship by having a conversation with every crew member about the kind of ship they wanted to serve aboard. That was it – in-depth conversations which led to a common understanding of the culture resulted in an increase in the crew retention rate from 29% to 100%. Remember, whether it's managing change or building a great culture, communication is everything and everything is communication.

5. Take a VCR Approach.

Use signs, posters, badges, buttons, bumper stickers, or mascots to create a **Visual** reminder of the desired goal or changes; **Communicate** success stories on a consistent basis (open meetings with a "culture moment" or create a story section on your intranet and share stories from within your organization and examples from other organizations); **Recognize** employees and teams who model the desired behavior. Starting with the easy-to-do "low hanging fruit" actions and recognizing and celebrating the small wins and milestones along the way is the key to building momentum.

Celebrating the small wins and milestones along the way is the key to building momentum.

Meetings that Rock! Injecting Fun and Energy into Your Meetings

In my days as a senior government manager, I recall feeling as though meetings were a place where you went to get a bit of your soul sucked out of you.

So I'd suggest that perhaps we should all be setting a rather loftier goal for our meetings and events. And while we're reaching those loftier goals, why not turn the entire meeting experience into more of an inspiring experience adding more fun into the mix?

Injecting more fun into your meetings won't unto itself guarantee your meeting is a success, but it just might help draw more bums into the seats, keep folks awake and away from the swimming pools, and leave attendees feeling so good that they're already planning to attend next year's event before they've even hauled their bums from the seats.

Here are a few random ideas on how to up the fun factor in your next meeting.

Set the Tone before the Meeting

- Make the agenda interesting, fun, and grabbing. I don't mean corny or goofy, but for goodness sakes inject some life into the actual meeting agenda copy! This is as much a marketing piece as anything else, so use captivating copy to attract attention and encourage all your presenters to use fun titles, regardless of how serious their presentation is (in fact, I'd suggest the more serious the topic, the more in need of a catchy, even self-deprecating title there is).

- Create a fun top-ten list of the reasons people shouldn't miss the meeting in addition to a fun top-ten list for why they should attend.

- Create a short, fun video (or series of videos) to post on your website that will serve as a teaser for your event. Ask you presenters for short promo videos to post. (As a keynoter, I've often provided teaser videos for clients and the feedback suggests that the videos have in fact influenced some attendees' decisions to attend the meeting.)

- Put together a fun video or at least a list of suggested things to see, do, eat and experience in the host city. Create a family-friendly version as well to encourage people to bring along their spouses and kids.

- Send people a fun "How to Survive the Meeting" tip sheet. Keep it fun, but include some actual nuggets that will help put attendees' minds at ease.

- If you're going to have a theme, then use it or lose it. And don't go back to the same old cliché theme that sounds like it's been hacked off someone's corporate vision statement or that sounds like every other theme from the last ten years. Create a theme that's truly memorable, inspiring and fun. Something creative enough to actually serve as a useful catchphrase or that truly can be used as a guiding light when you make decisions about the event. Try using a thought-provoking or unusual question for your theme, then encourage all the presenters and attendees to arrive at the meeting with their best answer to the question. Having a question theme also creates an instant ice breaker for meeting attendees.

- Take advantage of all the social media outlets to plug your meeting in fun, creative ways and to highlight testimonials from past attendees.

Kick Off

- Nothing say, "Hey this is going to be a fun meeting" quite like fun directional signs. (Conversely, nothing says, "I'm already hating this meeting because I can't even find the bloody registration table.")

- Nothing says, "Hey this is going to be a fun meeting" quite like fun name tags! Okay, so maybe fun name tags won't make or break your meeting, but it's something. Several companies offer wacky name tag add-ons with labels such as, "Plays Well with Others" or "Runs with Scissors." Or leave space for people to add a creative alter ego name based on a superhero OR leave space for people to add their alter ego fun job title that captures the real essence of what they do for a living and award a prize for the most creative title.

- Have all your meeting volunteers wearing fun t-shirts with your theme emblazoned on them. Consider different colored t-shirts, hats or scarves to identify different categories of volunteers.

- Hire a "town crier" to direct people to the registration table. The town crier can also be used to help herd folks back into the sessions after breaks throughout your event.

- Have a door prize draw right at the convention table to help set the tone.

During the Meeting

- Look for opportunities to create rituals and traditions at your meetings. Traditions become part of your history, they help bond people together and give attendees something to look forward to year after year and something to reminisce about. It might be a ritual to kick off the entire meeting, to end the meeting, to start or end each day, a ritual to introduce the new incoming president, or a ritual that welcomes the new attendees in a fun way. (One of my clients had all their newest members serve coffee to the rest of the attendees on the first breakfast while wearing bright red vests.)

- Invite any meeting attendees or volunteers who have a talent of some sort to busk during the coffee and meals breaks. You can also use it as a fundraising mechanism to raise money for your charity of choice.

- Include a fun trivia list or fun questionnaire on each table. Use a different one each half day.

- There's a reason Billy Crystal is back at the Oscars. A great emcee can keep the energy, theme and fun flowing throughout the meeting.

- Award prizes for the furthest away attendee and the closest attendee; the best dressed; the person whose appearance most closely ties into your theme; the attendee with the best idea on how to improve next year's meeting…

- Award a "Best Audience" prize to the table that demonstrates the best audience behaviour.

- Shoot short, fun "attendee in the hall" videos to capture their impromptu thoughts on the meeting and then intersperse the clips throughout the meeting.

- Award a prize for whoever can provide the group with the fastest and most accurate summary of the meeting on the closing day.

- Let attendees know what wacky holiday ("Talk Like a Pirate Day" – September 19; " Answer Your Cat's Question Day," January 22) it is each day of your meeting.

- Have a different fun theme day for each day of the event (day 1 could be "High Five" day, day 2, "Talk in the Third Person, day" day 3 "Ask a Strange Question" day.)

- Take a cue from the folks at "Dance Your PhD", wherein PhD candidates actually dance their PhD, and encourage presenters to do a 30-second dance summarizing their presentation.

- Hold a "This Meeting's Got Talent" evening or morning where people can showcase unusual talents.

- Match different fun theme songs to different presenters.

- Hold a meeting scavenger hunt over the course of the meeting that links to your theme.

- Hold a "get to know you" attendee scavenger hunt where people must find different attendees who match unusual characteristics/traits/hobbies as listed on the sheet.

- Have some greeters at each entrance. Hey, if it works for Wal-Mart…

- Do a "word of the day" drinking game – wherein whenever the emcee (or presenters if they are game) says a certain word everyone in the audience takes an exaggerated sip from their water/coffee/tea.

- Put an "idea bulletin board," "humor board," or "photo board" up in a prominent location.

- Have each presenter answer a series of quirky questions before each presentation (a la James Lipton from "Insider the Actors Studio").

- Hire caricaturists to draw cartoon sketches of the presenters, attendees and even to capture a summary of the presentations in a fun way.

- Put a headlamp on each table, so that if anyone wants to ask a question of a presenter, they must don the headlamp and turn on the light to indicate they wish to ask a question.

After the Meeting

- A fun post-event video on the web site can help remind attendees of the value they received from the event and prime the interest for next year's event.

- Create an opportunity for attendees to easily upload video testimonials to your website, encouraging people to keep them short, benefit-focused and fun.

- Send out a humorous "top-10 things we hoped you learned from the meeting list" that intersperse funny highlights with some serious gems from the event.

As you can appreciate there truly is an endless number of ways to inject a bit, or a lot, of fun into your meetings. Depending on the size and nature of your meeting some of these ideas may be too "out there" for your next event, but with a little imagination and input from meeting attendees there are countless simple things any meeting organizers can do to up the fun factor.

. . . . .

INSPIRINGWORKPLACES
THE WAY WORK OUGHT TO BE

Twenty-four Awesome Meeting Ideas to Add Some Fun, Creativity, and Energy into Your Meetings

1. Officially start your meetings 10 minutes early to include a 10-minute buffer period and socializing time that gives participants a chance to grab a coffee, say a few hellos, share a laugh, and still start the official part of the meeting on time.

2. Play the increasingly popular dinner game of "Phone Stacking," wherein everyone puts their electronic gadgets in a basket and whoever is the first to check theirs, or who owns the first one that goes off, has to put $10.00 into your social committee fund, or pay for the donuts, or dance an Irish jig, or sing a Celine Dion song…

3. Kickoff your meeting with a fun ritual or icebreaker, even something as simple as a funny "thought of the day" or announcing whatever wacky theme day it happens to be, or opening with a strange question ("What celebrity would be of most beneficial to our organization and why?") can help set the right tone.

4. Assign a Meeting Ref on a rotating basis, who plays the role of tracking any meeting violations and who keeps thing moving smoothly along!

5. Leave two blank chairs, or better still, get some inflatable dummies or mannequins, to represent your ideal customer and your ideal employee, as a constant reminder to ask what they might be thinking and to view issues from their perspective. Use them as your voices of conscience.

6. Clarify at the onset what is the goal or purpose of the meeting to remind people about why their presence matters and what is expected of everyone.

7. Introduce everyone in a fun way. Have a standing ovation for everyone who comes into the meeting room or have everyone share their alter ego name derived from the formula: "Your first pet's name + the name of the street you first lived on."

8. Play a drinking game. Choose 1-3 words or phrases that you are trying to reduce the use of in your workplace and every time anyone uses one of those words or phrases everyone must take a loud exaggerated sip from their coffee, tea, or water.

9. Break up into small groups. As soon as your meeting size gets bigger than just five people, some attendees will have a tendency to withdraw from conversations and brainstorms, especially around contentious issues. So even in smaller meetings, breaking up the group into even smaller discussion groups of three people and then reconvening increases the likelihood that all voices will be heard.

10. Add a "What if…" component to your agenda to dedicate time to just thinking about possibilities rather than always focusing on problems or issues.

11. Have a "Rumour mill" portion for people to bring up issues that might not be on everyone's radar.

12. Include a "What haven't we talked about" section in your agenda.

13. Include a "Show and Tell" portion in which anyone can share something new or innovative on which they are working.

14. For longer meetings, include a " humor break" half way through, wherein participants go around the table and tell a funny quick work-related story, joke, or quote.

15. Have a "Whine and cheese" section in your meeting where you serve cheese and allow people to whine about something that's not working at work in an exaggerated way, with the promise being that this is the only time they get to whine about it, otherwise the whine has to stay corked!

16. Include a "Meet _____" section to introduce a new employee or a new client to the group.

17. Bring food, especially fun food that will generate conversation. Try popcorn to go with a video screening, ethnic food to celebrate your team's diversity, or desserts to talk about how to put the icing on the cake for your customers. Beryl Health Centers has a Dessert Ambassador in its organization who brings a different tasty dessert treat to each meeting once a month.

18. Try a little stand up. No, not comedy. Have everyone stand for the meeting. You'd be amazed at how much quicker things move along and how the dynamics will change.

19. Use fun door prizes to encourage positive meeting behaviors, fun penalties to discourage negative meeting behaviours.

20. Have everyone wear a removable name tag that includes something other than their name. Perhaps how they are feeling on a scale of 1-10, a word that best describes their mood, the name of their first pet, or a strange question.

21. Use the sports stadium "wave" to inject some energy half way through a meeting.

22. Introduce a surprise part way through, such as arrange for a masseuse team to offer shoulder massages halfway through a meeting.

23. Recap the meeting, summarizing the salient points and reminding everyone of the decisions that were made and who's doing what by when. Be specific and build momentum!

24. End on a high note with a fun ritual or tradition that encourages everyone to leave with a smile on their face, celebrating the positive things that have happened, and focused on the need to build momentum toward the next meeting.

Fun Meeting Icebreakers to Set the Mood

It's important that you set the right tone at the start of your meetings, and often the tone that is most effective is a lighthearted one.

Opening meetings in a fun way puts attendees at ease, helps focus participants in the moment, encourages more open communication, sparks creative thinking, and even builds trust. Moreover, starting meetings on a fun note can become a tradition to which meeting participants look forward, so that over time people actually show up to your meetings on time because they don't want to miss the opening!

Here are 52+ icebreakers – enough for one meeting a week – some fun, some silly, some a bit more serious, that might help your team start your meetings on the right note:

1. Assign everyone an alter ego name for the meeting based on this simple formula:
    Your alter ego name is: "Your First Pet's Name as a Child" (or a neighbor's/relative's pet) + "Your Mother's Maiden Name = Your New Name. Go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves using their alter ego name, and/or have everyone write their newfound names on their "Hello, My Name is…." nametags.

2. Same as above, only using everyone's "Rock Star" name as generated at the website: www.rockstarname.com

3. Same as above, only using everyone's "Country Western" name as generated at the website: www.countrystarname.com

4. Same as above, but using everyone's "Pro Wrestling" pseudonym as generated at the website: www.wrestlingname.com

5. Same as above, but using everyone's anagram-generated name, as created at the website: www.wordplays.com/anagrams

6. Same as above, but use everyone's "poet's name" as generated at the website: www.wordchowder.com/Poetnamem.html

7. Pull out a coin and read the date, then have everyone talk briefly about their top memory of that year and where they were and what they were doing that year.

8. Open with a short fun video, such as the Fun dancers video on the home page of www.HumoratWork.com

9. Ask everyone an unusual, fun, or thought-provoking work-related question. Starting the meeting with this tradition not only can be fun, it encourages everyone to participate and you can learn some interesting

things not only about your colleagues, but about your organization that might help you succeed. For a list of potential questions, you can purchase the e-book "Inspiring Questions for Inspiring Workplaces" at http://store.mikekerr.com/e-books/inspiring-questions-for-inspiring-workplaces/

Here's a few possible questions to try out:

- What celebrity would help our organization the most and why?
- What was the worst job you had, and what specifically made it so bad?
- What TV show or movie title best describes your workplace culture?
- If you could change one policy or rule in your workplace, what would you change and why?
- If you could change your job title to better reflect your role and responsibilities, what would you call yourself?
- What's your most annoying workplace buzzword or jargon phrase?
- What's one thing we could do to make the workplace more fun?
- What's one thing we ought to be doing for our customers that we're currently not doing?
- What's something we need to do more to foster more ideas in the workplace?
- Who's the most creative person you know and what makes them so creative?

10. Go around the room and ask everyone to answer an unusual or fun personal question… something that allows participants the chance to get to know each other at a personal level. This needn't take long; some of the questions may only require very succinct, top-of-mind answers.

- What's the best movie you've seen recently?
- What's your favorite TV sitcom of all time?
- What's the worst job you ever had?
- What's the number one place you want to visit in the world?
- If you won the lottery tomorrow, what would you do?
- If you could play a musical instrument you currently don't play, what would it be?
- What other language would you most like to speak fluently?
- What was your very first job?
- What is your favorite season?
- What would your "last meal" request be?
- What's the funniest thing that has happened to you recently?
- What's the funniest thing someone has said to you recently?

11. Recognize whatever fun, offbeat theme day or holidays it happens to be, such as "Talk like a Pirate Day" or "Blame Someone Else Day." You can simply announce the day's theme at the start of the meeting and/or post it on a whiteboard or flip chart for everyone to see. For a listing of offbeat theme days, visit www.humoratwork.com and type "wacky theme days" into the search box to find a list, sorted by month.

12. Recognize someone on the team by publicly sharing and praising a positive piece of news about them.

13. Share a good news story that has happened in your organization or industry.

14. Many organizations with a strong safety culture open their meetings with a "safety moment," so try a spin on this by opening with a "values moment," where you talk about one of your organization's core values, relate a story that demonstrates how someone lived the value out loud or go around the room and have everyone talk about something they've done recently that reflected that core value.

15. Share a fun fact related to your business – some weird statistic, strange historical fact, or offbeat piece of trivia.

16. Share a fun quote of the day with the team – something funny or thought-provoking, or better still, both! There are hundreds of great sites on the web for quotes, and you also can find great quotes in the archived issues of the Humor at Work e-newsletter at: http://archive.aweber.com/humor_at_work

17. Open the meeting with a "Meet _____" segment, where you introduce someone new to your organization complete with some fun, personal facts about the individual.

18. Loosen people up and get the laughter flowing with three minutes of the "energy ball": a theater improv warm up exercise wherein everyone stands up and you pass one imaginary, invisible ball of energy back and forth to each other. Works best if you clap it out to the person you want to throw it, and they then catch it with a clapping motion. Sounds insanely flakey, but it never fails to get people laughing and to wake everyone up!

19. Stupid human tricks: yes, open with a segment of stupid human tricks wherein you encourage anyone to step forward with any weird skill or talent they possess, be it ventriloquism, touching their tongue to their nose, wiggling their ears or simply arching one eyebrow in dramatic, "Spock-like" fashion. Award a small prize for the best stupid human trick as voted on by the meeting participants.

20. Read out a rave review customer letter or raving comment by a customer.

21. Order customized fortune cookies with work-related quotes, ideas, thoughts or trivia inside them, and have each participant read out his/her particular quote. (Google "customer fortune cookies" to find a supplier near you.)

22. Brainstorm something fun or silly to fire up the creative juices, focus people in the present, and to remind participants of the basic rules of a good brainstorming exercise (no blocking, listen to each other, leap frog off each other's ideas, go for quantity not quality). Potential topics include: come up with the most number of uses for a paper clip, create a new superhero that reflects your best business practices, come up with 10 alternative uses for a stapler, 20 ways creatively to add value to your customer service experience, or alternative names for your meeting room…

23. Go around the room and have everyone say how they are doing on a scale of 1-10. Option b, have them not only say their number, but why they chose the number they did.

24. Have participants draw a picture on the whiteboard or a flip chart that best represents what is on the top of their mind right now.

25. Have a five-minute trivia challenge game with questions related to your industry or organization. This could easily become a tradition at every meeting.

26. Have a five-minute trivia game NOT related to your business.

27. Leave out a pile of random photos torn out of magazines and have people pick up a photo that best describes where they are emotionally/mentally at work right now and explain why.

28. Open with a book review of a work-related book that someone read. This could become a rotating tradition where someone new each meeting is called upon to provide a synopsis and review of a book.

29. "In the News": Share some interesting news articles or opinion pieces from the news that relate to your industry.

30. Open with the "stress-busting tip" of the day. This could become a tradition along the lines of the "safety moment" but instead focusing in on stress management and overall wellness topics. The tips could run the gamut from how to get a better night's sleep to nutrition tips; from how to prioritize your workload effectively to how to tap into your sense of humor.

31. Open with the joke of the day. Keep it clean, and of course stay away from any sexual, ethnic, religious, or political humor.

32. Have participants pair off and give them five minutes to come up with six things they have in common with each other, other than the totally obvious (so, no "we're both mammals" allowed).

33. Ask everyone or anyone to share the funniest work-related anecdote that has happened to them since the last time you met.

34. Give everyone funny name tags, courtesy of the folks at Pc/Nametag (www.pcnametag.com/product-FUN_TITLES_RIBBON_PACK-110.aspx)

They've got a collection of fun name tag add-ons that include, to name just a few,: Runs With Scissors, Queen Bee, Big Cheese, BORED Member, Plays Well With Others, and My Ribbon is Better Than Your Ribbon.

35. Introduce the special guests attending your meeting in spirit only: To add some fun to your meetings and to help your team brainstorm from some different perspectives, try creating a few stock, exaggerated imaginary characters who attend all your meetings. Make one an imaginary superhero - someone who represents your company values in an outrageously exaggerated way. When you brainstorm or debate a new decision, you then get to ask, "What would Super Dave do?" (Of course, I'm confident you'll come up with a wittier, more descriptive name than Super Dave.)

Then create a character who represents your most ideal customer, and a character who represents your most powerful nemesis (perhaps your main competitor), after all, every great superhero requires a super villain! Flesh out their attributes, then use the characters as points of reference in all your planning, brainstorming, and communication efforts. Remember, the entire planet is depending on you!

36. Open each meeting with a Top 10 list. It could be funny or merely interesting facts or tidbits about your industry. A simple one to try is a "Top-10 Reasons We're Having This Meeting," then create a list that intertwines the humorous with some serious reminders as to why the meeting is important.

37. Announce the "meeting rules of the road," but since the idea is to set a positive tone make sure they are fun! You might consider announcing, for example, some fun penalties for meeting infractions, such as: Whoever is caught texting or answering a cell phone will have to dance an Irish jig or pay a dollar into the social fund committee.

38. Give out a door prize to whoever arrived the earliest at the meeting, whoever had to travel the farthest, and whoever has the best joke, thought, or quote of the day.

39. Announce a "word of the day" for your meeting. Define what the word means, use it in a sentence, and then encourage people to weave it into as many conversations as they can.

40. Announce the "weasel word" of the day for the meeting: a word or phrase that you are trying NOT to use in your workplace. Fine people a dollar every time they use it in the meeting.

41. Open the meeting with a wacky sound that becomes your official "start of the meeting kickoff" signal: a gong, kazoo, or bagpipes would all work fabulously. Except for the bagpipes.

42. Thank everyone for attending the meeting in a fun way.

43. Have each participant pull a different question, quote, thought of the day or interesting fact from a bowl and read it to the group.

44. Rather than have everyone wear name tags, have everyone write down a word on their name tag that reflects their energy level.

45. Give everyone a standing ovation as they enter the meeting room. Yes, you'll begin with only one person giving a standing ovation to one or two people perhaps, but that makes it even more fun!

46. Introduce any guests at your meeting, but be sure to include some fun, personal facts about them (okay, not too personal, the object isn't to embarrass them, but to simply make them feel welcome and for the rest of the participants to get to know them a little better).

47. Have each person around the table take a moment to thank someone, as a way of reminding people how important it is to regularly praise employees in your organization. The person doesn't necessarily have to be present at the meeting, it could be a simple public recognition of someone that serves also as a reminder than after the meeting everyone present at the meeting should take the time to acknowledge the individual in person.

48. Spend a minute or two at the start of your meeting, as an accounting firm in the U.S. does, blowing bubbles at each other. An effective, albeit a tad silly, way to help people relax and have a few laughs.

49. Spend a few minutes practicing the fine art of scarf juggling, another great way to generate a few laughs and to focus participants in the moment. Plus, it's much safer than starting out juggling chainsaws.

50. Have everyone stand, place their hands on their hearts, and recite a pledge for how they will behave during the meeting.

51. Have everyone stand and do the "fun dance" for one minute. For instructions, watch the video posted here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=vX9lF8WyCKM

52. Acknowledge any birthdays, anniversary dates, or special occasions happening in any of the meeting participants' lives.

53. Open with an interesting "This Day in History" fact (Google "this day in history" to find examples). Bonus points if you find a few that are not only interesting but also relevant to your industry.

54. Another alternative name generator to try: The Honey Boo Boo Name Generator. To generate everyone's Honey Boo Boo southern nickname, Google Honey Boo Boo Name Generator.

55. Yet another alternative name generator: Your Hobbit Alter Ego Name. Google Hobbit Alter Ego Name Generator.

56. Have each participant come up with as many anagrams for their name as possible in five minutes. Could be a team or individual competition. OR, Google anagram name generator to find a site that does it for you, and choose everyone's funniest alter ego name.

57. Have each person stand and spell their name using only the movement of their hips.

58. Another alter ego name generator, this one for your Super Villain alter ego name: www.chimpage.com/supervillain.html

59. Rather than have everyone wear name tags with their names of them, have everyone wear a tag with a word on it that best describes their work situation since you last met.

60. Open with the question: What's one thing you have done since the last meeting of which you are most proud?

61. Open with the question: What's one thing each member around the table does that makes the team better?

62. Have a different name tag theme each meeting. One meeting everyone wears a name tag listing their birth city; another meeting they list their favorite animal; another their favorite song. It's a simple way to build connections and generate conversations.

Putting Humor to Work for More Success and Less Stress

… is one of the easiest, most effective, and certainly the most fun way to manage workplace stress, provide inspiring customer service, attract and keep great employees, reduce conflict, create an atmosphere of trust and openness, spark creative solutions to day-to-day challenges, improve communication, boost morale, and foster productive and healthy workplaces.

Putting humor to work…

- Isn't about telling jokes or being funny – *It's about a sense of perspective*
- Isn't about being *un*professional – *It's about being even more professional*
- Isn't about being *un*productive – *It's a tool to help workplaces improve productivity*
- Isn't just a workplace tool – *It's an indicator as to how healthy your workplace is*

Putting humor to work is about practicing safe humor…

- Safe humor laughs with people, *not at people*; laughs at situations, not people
- Safe humor avoids *sexist, racist, or ethnic topics*
- Safe humor is considerate of the *timing, situation, and audience*
- The safest form of humor, especially as a leader, is *laughing at yourself*

Managing stress with humor

REWARD:
Reward yourself, your employees and your customers when things go wrong. Reward your stressors. Celebrate at your busiest times. Create a "Worst Work Day" weekly or monthly award, or a "I Had to Deal With the Most Obnoxious Customer on the Planet" weekly award.

REFRAME:
Mentally change your perspective on a stressful situation to find the funny in it. Exaggerate wildly, put yourself in someone else's shoes, try the old, "the bad news is _____", but the good news is _____", or ask yourself, in a humorous way, "How could this situation have been much, much worse?"

RELAX:
Take a five-minute "humor break" to regain some clarity and perspective. Remind yourself of how easy it really is to choose your own attitude and reaction. Reflect on a funny story. Create a humor first aid kit for "serious" emergencies. Or use a "laugh-line" and implore someone to make you laugh!

It's a tool to help workplaces improve productivity.

Say what? Communicating with humor

- "HOW" you say things often matters more than "WHAT" you say!

- People are 5x more likely to comply with a request when it's served with humor

- Use humorous quotes, funny cartoons, top-10 lists, fun photos and stories to connect with people and deliver any message more effectively

- Create more inspiring meetings by adding humor: create fun agendas, give out door prizes, have a "humor break," hold "theme" meetings

- HA + HA = AHA! Creating a fun workplace atmosphere stimulates greater creativity and innovation, promotes lateral thinking, and creates a psychologically safe place for people to suggest truly creative ideas

HOW you say things often matters more than WHAT you say!

Inspiring service with humor

- Inspiring service happens once we inspire our employees

- "Good customer service" just meets customers' expectations, so it only keeps you "out of the doghouse." Inspiring service happens by exceeding expectations.

- Inspiring service happens through *small, simple gestures.* A genuine smile, referring to the person by his/her name, and/or making a personal connection.

- 68% of customers leave because of "perceived indifference" – you need to be not just in the *service* business, but in the customer *empathy* business

- Use humor to stand out from the herd, and to be heard; to differentiate yourself from your competitors, to brand yourself in a unique and fun way

- Use humor to inspire customer loyalty (consider the LIFETIME costs of losing a customer and the LIFETIME VALUE of retaining a loyal customer)

- Great teamwork = providing great service to your teammates; some of our most important customers are our internal teammates and employees

Motivating principles to live and laugh by

- Creating a positive workplace environment isn't a 2 or 6-times-a-year "event" – *it's the small ways you interact, communicate, and work together on a daily basis.*

- Intrinsic motivators outweigh external motivators: *Pride matters more than money!*

- "Carrots" outperform "sticks": *rewarding positive behaviour beats beatings!*

- Different strokes for different folks, so ask! *Everyone has different "on" and "off" switches, so ask people what their specific motivational "ons" and "offs" are!*

- The top motivators are: Recognition. Praise. Thanking people. Tapping into pride. Celebrating successes and milestones. Respect. Creating a fun environment. Asking people for their input *and using it! Connecting people to the "bigger picture." Relating people's jobs to measurable achievements. Letting people know that it matters whether or no they show up! Involving* people. Involvement = engagement!

- Effective praise is: timely, sincere, specific, and 100% positive.

Include humor as one of your core values!

Creating a Culture That Embraces Humor

1. Create a vision with your team of where you want your workplace to go: what you want your workplace to look and feel like at its most inspiring! Connect all team members to a more inspiring sense of purpose at work.

2. Include humor as one of your core values. And while you're at it, review your core values to make sure they are actually meaningful to everyone on your team.

3. Hire for attitude, hire for a sense of humor, hire people who align with your values.

4. Train, coach, and mentor employees based on your workplace vision and values.

5. Create a culture committee or fun-at-work squad to initiate some simple ideas that will build momentum in the workplace.

6. Look for opportunities to create rituals and traditions at work. Traditions are an easy way to instill a sense of fun and a sense of shared team experience and history.

7. Create a library of workplace culture reading materials, DVDs, and audio CDs.

8. Hold regular "culture chat" meetings to assess the progress and allow employees the chance to offer feedback and ideas on how to build a more open, fun, and innovative culture.

9. Measure it! If you don't continually assess your culture, chances are nothing will change!

10. Give your team explicit permission to have fun. Remember, it's not about choosing between fun OR work, it's a choice for fun AND work!

Six Powerful Ps of Motivation and Engagement

1. PASSION:
If you're not excited about work, why should anyone else be?

- As the novelist E.M. Forester once said, "One person with passion is better than 40 people who are merely interested."

- Are you adding positive energy to the project/idea/workplace, or are you sucking the energy out of the room through apathy, or worse, energy-draining behaviors and language?

- How would you rate the overall energy level in your workplace?

- Are you communicating with passion? Not fake passion, but genuine interest and enthusiasm

- Do you say "Yes" more often that you say "No"?

- Are you the first to step up to the old plate?

- Do you know what your team's top three passions are?

- Do you know what your employees are truly passionate about, both inside and outside of work?

- Can you tap into your fellow employees' personal passions and make use of them in your workplace?

- Do your employees have the chance to work on something at least once a week that they are truly passionate about?

- What are you doing to actively demonstrate your passion about your workplace vision and goals?

2. PURPOSE:
A powerful sense of purpose leveraged with intense passion is one of the most powerfully motivating forces

- Does every employee understand exactly why your organization exists?

- When dealing with lots of change at work, do you explain and continually sell why the change is necessary?

- Are you connecting everyone's work with the bigger picture, and helping them see why their work matters and how it contributes to the overall vision and mission?

- Are you aligning your purpose with your hiring, training, and coaching?

- Open your meetings with a brief: "Why we are here today?" moment to remind people of the purpose of the meeting

- Does everyone clearly understand why their team exists?

- Does everyone understand why the project they are working on matters?

- What stories can you tell that will help make an emotional connection to a greater sense of purpose?

- Hold an annual family open house to remind employees why they work

- Create a wall of family photos to remind employees why they work

- Create a "Dream Wall" with photos that reflect people's personal passions to remind them why they work

- Share and celebrate everyone's "big dreams" both inside and outside work to help connect people to a great sense of purpose and create awareness that might help them achieve their big dreams

- What are you actively doing to shift employees from a "job" mindset, where they view their work only as a way to make money, to a "calling mindset," where employees feel rewarded and challenged by the work itself, not just the external rewards?

- When you tackle a new problem or challenge, ask "Why" five times to make sure you are getting to the real root cause, the real source of the issue

- What can you do to communicate your organization's vision and purpose in outrageous ways?

3. **PROGRESS:**
When visible progress is made towards a powerful sense of purpose, it's easy to get passionate about the journey you're undertaking

- Continually ask and answer the question: "How will we know we've made progress?"

- Create a giant scorecard that highlights your major milestones and progress

- Map out a plan as to how you will communicate and celebrate each milestone

- Send out a brief monthly progress report on key initiatives

- Hold a team huddle at the end of the week to review the progress made in key areas

- Hold a monthly team huddle to show the progress

- Help everyone understand and see their potential career paths for advancement

- Create fun rituals linked to milestones or sales: for example, every time someone makes a sale over $_____, you hit a giant gong

- Offer training that will give employees a sense of moving forward with their key skills and talents

- Continually adjust workloads/goals so that employees feel challenged, not overwhelmed

- Take the time to figure out how different aspects of an employee's job can be measured—this isn't always easily done, but is has a huge payoff in terms of motivation

- Create a "Where we began" scrapbook, video, or booklet to give employees a sense of the progress and changes over the years

- Create a "Where are we going?" scrapbook, video, or booklet to show the path

- Share all the financial numbers so that everyone sees the progress in financial terms as well

- Create a progress plan at the end of each meeting: answer the basic questions when a new idea is decided upon: Who will do it and When will it be done?

- When brainstorming or asking for employees' input, start with the small stuff, the "low hanging fruit," so people get a sense of immediate progress

- Constantly communicate and celebrate the "small wins" no matter how small they may feel

- Start a daily journal and record three, no matter how small, three things you are grateful for; three small wins: This is proven to be one of the biggest single boosters of happiness levels

4. **PRIDE:**
   An intense sense of pride both comes from and fuels progress toward a compelling purpose

- Intrinsic, internal motivators, such as a feeling of pride, are longer lasting and far more powerful than any external motivator

- Create a list of all the things about which you and your employees can be proud...

  - Your culture?
  - The values for which your organization stands?
  - Your sense of vision or mission?
  - Your team?
  - Your product or services? What specifically?
  - Your talents?
  - Your relationships?
  - Your customer service?
  - Your public image?
  - Your social or environmental contributions?
  - Your character? What specifically?
  - Your ability to overcome obstacles and impossible odds?

- Studies show that praising effort, not just raw talent, creates a bigger, more sustained pay off by setting up a "learning mindset" where employees feel they can learn, grow, and continually improve vs. a "fixed mindset" where they feel they cannot learn new things, adapt, or grow

- Are you creating a culture that recognizes the value of praise?

- The most effective praise is: 100% positive, timely, specific, and sincere

- Stockpile thank-you notes to make it easy to write hand-written notes of praise and encouragement
- Look for creative ways to say thanks: Add a special thanks note onto their pay check, leave thank-you notes on Post-It notes, put up a sign of thanks in the washroom
- Send thank-you cards and gifts to the families of employees to really wow your employees and tap into their pride
- Hold a family open house for employees to boost the pride factor
- Hold internal team "show and tell" days
- Do your business cards convey a message of pride? (And does everyone in your organization have a business card? If not, what message are you sending?)
- Start a file of your employees' spouses and children's names, their birthdays and interests
- Start a file to keep track of your employees' interests and passions so you can tailor small gifts of appreciation to them effectively
- Hold an end-of-week team huddle to celebrate the top 3 highlights of the week
- Leave a Monday morning voice mail message of thanks and encouragement on everyone's voice mail as a way to start the week on the right foot
- Create an annual scrapbook of accomplishments for the year
- Encourage employees to get involved in charities
- Create team events that contribute to a local charity
- Create a "Why we like it here" video using different employees

- Make use of people's personal talents at work
- Celebrate the anniversary dates of when employees started with your organization
- Celebrate employees' personal accomplishments: Have they climbed their first mountain, ran a marathon, or contributed significantly to a charity?
- Hold a "show and tell day" for departments to show off their work
- Create referral cards for employees to give out to perspective new hires
- Hold a fun awards ceremony, mimic the Oscars, and in addition to the more serious awards, mix in some plain fun ones: Best Sense Of Humor, Most Likely to O.D. on Caffeine, Wackiest Tie Collection, Least Likely to be Voted Off the Island . . .
- Celebrate your "Workplace Heroes" with a "Going the Extra Mile" award
- Create a "Going the Extra Inch" award for small ideas that can be implemented on a regular basis
- Make a list of your "unsung heroes" that tend to get left out of things and create special programs that recognize and reward them for their efforts
- Capture your corporate history from your veterans: record their stories, triumphs, and funny anecdotes
- Have a "Pass the Bouquet" day where everyone passes a bouquet of flowers from desk to desk over the course of a week to thank people for different things
- Create a large symbol, such as a giant stuffed animal, that gets passed on to people as a public show of thanks
- Create a "kudos" page in your newsletter

- Create a "kudos" board in a prominent hallway

- Create a file/board/binder/booklet showcasing customers' letters of thanks and praise

- Celebrate the anniversary date of your organization's founding

- Look for unusual ways to recognize employees: Name a hallway, stairwell, meeting room, or cafeteria dish after them!

- Open meetings by publicly praising someone who has done something noteworthy

- Create a special fund that employees can dole out to co-workers over the course of a year as a special bonus thanks for going above and beyond

- Use your employees in training, on videos, in marketing campaigns

- Ask employees for input on a regular basis: this shows you value their judgment and their experience; it's one of the most powerful ways to tap into a person's pride

- Send employees on different training opportunities

- Have a dedicated section in every meeting where everyone goes around the table and offers recognition of someone's accomplishment

- Listen for employees' ideas and then turn them into action as quickly and as often as possible! Nothing is more motivating than seeing your ideas turned into action!

5. **PLAY:**
   When you feel passionate about something, and take pride in your progress towards a compelling purpose, then work begins to feel like play

- "The supreme accomplishment is to blur the line between work and play." Arthur Toynbee

- As the "Fun Theory" (www.Thefuntheory.com) from Sweden demonstrated through its musical piano escalator, and photo radar lottery system, you can change behaviors by making it FUN for people to do so

- Create a more fun, relaxed atmosphere to encourage creative thinking, help people relax, and put everyone in a more positive frame of mind

- Create friendly competition among teams

- Get creative and figure out ways of turning mundane, repetitive task into a competition or mental game

- Remove barriers to work, processes or behaviors that drain the sense of fun at work

6. **PERSONAL:**
   The final piece of the puzzle happens when you connect employees' personal life and work passions to a greater sense of purpose. When you make them feel proud in a way that is meaningful to them, when you demonstrate and celebrate their individual progress, and when you encourage them to play in a way that works best for them; tremendous, inspiring accomplishments will be achieved!

- Work affects our personal lives, our marriages, our stress levels, our identity, our use of time, our attitudes, our health, our happiness, and our sense of accomplishment and purpose, so never lose sight of the fact that work is intensely personal

- Different strokes for different folks, so forget the "golden rule" that says you should treat other people the way you'd like to be treated because maybe someone else doesn't have the same motivational triggers as you!

- Although everyone is motivated to different degrees by the 5 Ps above, you still need to treat everyone as individuals and find their unique "on switches" and "off switches"

- The "on switches," things that motivate people, aren't necessarily just the opposite of "the off switches" (things that de-motivate employees); they are often completely different sets of lists, so you need to work on identifying both!

- Dogster.com survey found that 49% of dog owners said they would switch jobs if they could bring their dog to work with them: Find the hidden triggers in your workplace!

- Conduct "What will make you stay?" interviews instead of "Exit interviews"

- Get to know the person behind the job title: spouse's name, kids' names, kids' hobbies and birthdays, personal interests, and passions

- Offer rewards that contribute/encourage an employee's charity of his/her own choosing, not just your corporate charity

- Find out the root source of employees' motivation. Sometimes it's not about the pay or the corner office, but what the pay raise and corner office represent

Zapped By Zappos: Lessons in How to Build a Workplace Culture that WOWS!

I recently got ZAPPED!
But in a good way.

I was one of about 30 enthusiastic folks who attended the Zappos Insights workshop in Las Vegas, Nevada.

And, let me tell you, if you must brave the summer heat in Nevada, attending the Zappos Insights program is a fantastic reason to do so.

You can't help but end the day feeling inspired after being thoroughly and completely zapped by the Zappos culture.

Two of the taglines for my own business mesh perfectly with the Zappos Insights program: "The way work ought to be" and "Changing how the world works." I simply cannot imagine a workplace that better illustrates "the way work ought to be" than Zappos. And through its Insights program, which seeks to share its phenomenal success story with the world, Zappos is definitely on a mission to "change how the world works."

So here are ten (and I had to limit myself to ten, lest this turned into a book) of the insights I gleaned from my day at Zappos:

1. **Culture drives success.**

    I've been preaching this for years. Of course every business says it agrees with this notion, few, if anyone, deliver on the promise the way Zappos does. Its overriding core philosophy is built on the notion that if you get the culture right and if you make creating a great culture your top priority, everything else (including great customer service) will flow out of this as a by-product.

2. **Getting your culture right means getting your core values right.**

    Zappos got its values right by making sure the creation of its values was an inclusive process, with input on the values from all of the employees. Each year, Zappos creates a culture book that includes thoughts and stories from all the employees about what the values mean to them, which helps cement the values and helps strengthen the sense of ownership of the values by the employees.

3. Getting your culture right means living your values out loud.

Zappos actively uses its values to guide its hiring processes, its training process, and how it makes decisions. I did not talk to a single Zappos employee that day in any department who did not, at some point in the conversation, refer to one of the core values.

4. Getting the culture right means getting the right people on board.

The right people, in the case of Zappos means first and foremost people who will fit seamlessly into its culture and embrace its core values. It's about recruiting and hiring for attitude and for a good "culture fit," which is why the first interview for candidates is considered a "culture screening."

Questions such as, "How comfortable are you hanging out with employees after hours?" and, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how weird are you?" lead to conversations that help assess whether or not a candidate will fit into the Zappos family culture.

5. Getting the right people on board takes time and commitment.

There are no shotgun weddings at Zappos. Because its priority is to make sure it recruits and hires people who are a good fit with its culture, and because Zappos understands the enormous expense involved in NOT bringing the right people on board.

6. Getting the right people on board means getting serious about your training.

Everyone at Zappos takes an intensive four-week training program that serves several purposes. It immerses people into the culture, gives them a sneak preview of their jobs and the actual work environment, and helps forge relationships among employees who may go on to work in separate departments. The training process also serves as an extension of the selection screening process, offering both candidates and Zappos employees a honeymoon period to ensure there's still a good love match.

One of the more innovative approaches Zappos takes to filtering out potential mismatches is to offer candidates $3,000 to walk away after the first week of training. The incentive helps ensure that people are joining the Zappos family (and make no mistake, it is a family) for the right reasons.

7. When you get the culture right, you don't need so many rules. Or policies. Or bureaucracy.

This, for me, was a very cool by-product of getting the culture right. For years I've been telling my audiences: "When policy fails, try thinking."

Clearly, Zappos has done some hard thinking and has come to the very simple realization that if you hire the right people, train them properly, and get the culture right based on your core values, then you don't need to treat adults like children and you don't need to impose a bunch of ill-thought-out employee rules and policies.

One simple example: at Zappos there is no dress code. None. If and when someone's appearance ever becomes an issue, then they'd deal with it through a conversation with the individual, rather than punish everyone with some ill-thought-out, reactionary policy. This idea leads to another Zapp-ism: "Instead of rules, we have conversations." Beautiful.

8. Creating a fun physical environment creates energy, facilitates communication, and generates creative thinking.

I couldn't help but think that anyone who enters the front door of Zappos (where, incidentally, all employees must enter, by design, to help encourage relationships and chance encounters) must have two immediate thoughts:

"Wow. This is different."

"Hmm. I wonder if there are any job openings here?"

Sitting in the front lobby I was struck by the energy level in the room. It was only 7:45 in the morning, yet there was an endless stream of high fives, hearty "Good mornings!," laughter, and enthusiasm that you just can't fake.

And part of that energy is reflected in the physical environment of Zappos, which can only be described as Mardi Gras on steroids. In other words, this isn't your grandpa's accounting office.

From insanely fun meeting rooms featuring thrones to stairwells adorned with employee graffiti to open desk areas (or as they call them, "anti-cubicle zones") decorated and personalized to the hilt, the physical environment reflects people's personalities and mirrors Zappos insanely fun, creative culture.

As one of the Zappos Insight team members stress, though, and it's an excellent point, "The streamers around the office don't create happiness. They reflect happiness."

9. **Communication is everything, and everything is communication.**

That's one of my workplace mantras regarding communication at work, but boy does Zappos put this philosophy into practice. The way Zappos facilitates and fosters open and honest and timely communication is worthy of an article on its own. From their "Team Zuddles" to their quarterly all-hands meetings, to their internal Wiki site to their fun employee handbook ("written by employees for employees"), Zappos takes the notion of effective, inspiring, creative, and timely communication to a whole other stratosphere.

10. **Get the culture right and you really do deliver on that promise of service that WOWS!**

Again, this topic is worthy of an entire book on its own. So all I want to say here is that Zappos truly does deliver on its service value and its promise to wow its customers day in and day out by exceeding customers' expectations and by surprising them at every opportunity.

Zappos lives and breathes customer service. Employees are truly empowered to do whatever it takes to wow the customer and build relationships with its customers.

And this service-centric focus both flows out of the phenomenal culture, AND it also helps sustain the culture because that service-first mantra flows back inward as employees seek out ways to also wow their colleagues.

Ten inspiring lessons that serve as universal principles that truly can be applied to any workplace.

And, yes, it's easy to think of reasons why some of these ideas will never work in your particular workplace.

But if you want to zap some energy into your business, then start somewhere. Look for what you can do and what you can influence. Start with baby steps and build momentum. Involve your team members.

Become a cheerleader for cultural change.

As I constantly remind my clients, work is a critically important part of your life.

You owe it to your customers, your employees, your colleagues, your families, and your soul to create the kind of energetic, inspiring, creative, and fun workplace culture.