

HOW LEADERS SHAPE CULTURE THROUGH THEIR VALUES AND BELIEFS

Employees want leaders to represent the values implied by their organisation's vision, but few are living up to expectations. Here's what it will take to turn that around.

Employees want to be led. They want to know the organisation they are working for has a vision and strategy for the future that will provide opportunity, stability and success.

Marie-Claire Ross is the chief corporate catalyst at Trustologie, a trust leadership consultancy. In her experience, the majority of leaders are not currently delivering on this front. One of the most common complaints she sees listed in employee engagement surveys is that leaders don't demonstrate company values. Sure, they pay lip service to them and chastise those who don't follow along to the letter, but few walk the talk. That gives employees an excuse to ignore these values – if their leaders aren't following them, why should they?

As a result, Ross warns, leaders are contributing to a toxic culture that promotes gossip, confusion and other malignant side effects that threaten to undo their otherwise great work.

The only way for leaders to avoid this is to find a way to communicate their values and beliefs in a meaningful way that encourages employees to model them. The process is not always easy, but the benefits are undeniable.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-AWARENESS

Of course, leaders are not intentionally sabotaging the future of their organisations

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by inadequately defining their values and beliefs. The reason the problem exists is because most don't realise they are doing so until it's too late. Why? Because they lack one key attribute found in all successful leaders: self-awareness.

According to research from organisational psychologist Dr Tasha Eurich, only 10 to 15 percent of leaders are actually self-aware. The rest act purely on instinct, making decisions and interacting with others without considering how their actions affect the organisation and their reputation as a leader.

Ross says it's only when leaders learn to become self-aware that they can hope to foster a positive culture effectively.

“It's when we are self-aware that we know the beliefs and values that define us. Leaders who are aware of their strengths,

own up to their weaknesses and adjust for the sake of their employees and organisation are more authentic and approachable. This increases leadership effectiveness; after all, employees are more likely to trust leaders who are authentic and human.”

INSPIRING THE INDIVIDUAL

In a study by Professor Yafang Tsai of Taiwan's Chung Shan Medical University entitled 'Relationship between organisational culture, leadership behaviour and job satisfaction', employees were asked to rank the importance of leadership behaviours on a scale from one to five. The two highest items were 'the leader will act accordingly with a certain vision that specifies a better future state' and 'the leader will behaviourally role model the values implied by the vision by personal example'. The lowest item was 'the leader will try to persuade those who disagree with [their] vision to agree with it'.

Put simply, employees want to see their leaders' values and beliefs in action, but don't want to feel pressured into aligning with them. Instead, says Ross, they want leaders to demonstrate the benefits that come with aligning with the organisation's vision.

“What employees are saying is 'hey, leader, what's in it for me?' This is where self-awareness is important, where emotional intelligence is important and why it's important for leaders to build relationships