

Great CEOs Pay Attention to Culture

Eagle's Flight CEO Phil Geldart, an expert in culture transformation, talks with journalist Romina Maurino about the non-negotiables.

Everybody talks about culture transformation, but how do you actually bring about sustainable change?

The biggest hurdle is getting people to be willing to change their behaviour. Culture is not an abstract thing that exists within a company. When you add up the way people behave in every circumstance that makes up a company's culture. To change it, you have to change individual behaviours.

How soon should you start?

Senior managers may be tempted to get started the moment they realize the transformation is needed, but some serious legwork is required before beginning. The senior leaders may not know how to behave in accordance with the new culture themselves, so that's first; and then they're going to have to design and plan a company-wide training and communication plan.

How involved do the CEO or senior leadership really have to be?

Senior people have several significant responsibilities, and those extend to demonstrating the new cultural behaviours. They have to model what they want to see in others. They have to support the other people within the organization as they learn the new behaviours, and then ensure efforts are made to sustain the change over time.

What can you do to get employees at all levels not only onboard but also excited about the changes, throughout what's often a long process?

Human nature is such that some people will take longer than others to adapt to the change and you have to accept that. You also have to sustain the momentum or it will get lost.



Keep the reason for the transformation top of mind, so there's a line of sight between where you were, where you're going, and why; then celebrate success along the way.

We talk a lot about senior management, but how involved do other levels of management and HR need to be in the transformation?

Each line manager has to encourage the new behaviours in their people. HR has a critical function driving the tactics of the change, but more as a "backroom" function. The people in HR should be designing the training, the communications and making sure all the pieces are in place. Line Management has responsibility for the outcome, HR has responsibility for the implementation.

How do you know if the transformation is being successful?

I always look at what the organization is trying to transform into, and what is the resulting benefit to the shareholders. There are different measures depending on what you are trying to achieve, but this process has to lead to a benefit, so the real measure of the transformation is the degree to which you're getting that benefit.

What can you do to maintain focus on the transformation in the face of new and competing priorities?

Look at all of the things that could derail the transformation up front before starting, then identify ways for dealing with each, should they arise. You should have those discussions right at the outset, so you have a plan for how to continue the process instead of abandoning it partway, or allowing it to be derailed, if competing priorities surface.

What are some common mistakes companies make while trying to change or improve their culture?

They try to impose it rather than training people to live it, and requiring leaders to be examples of it. They sometimes focus on small pockets, or fail to involve the unions or regions. Culture transformation is also often presented as a program; but it isn't; it's a long term way of behaving.

What are the most essential components for implementing long-term culture change?

Employees need to see examples of leaders behaving in the new way, and they need to be coached on how to successfully demonstrate the new behaviours themselves. They also need to understand that this is a non-negotiable issue, it's not a choice for an employee to decide whether or not they want to be a part of the new culture. Anybody who chooses not to buy in should exit and find a culture they're comfortable working in.

Do you ever get to a point where the transformation is complete, or should companies always be checking in on the state of their culture?

Culture transformation does come to an end – when you get everyone consistently behaving in the way you want. But once the transformation has occurred, you then need focus on sustaining it, showing how to live the new culture as the world around continues to change.



See the full interview at
www.eaglesflight.com/culture

**“A true culture transformation
should outlast the management that
initiated it.”**

Phil Geldart

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