

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

# Defining DNA

## Episode 131

*No church or organization ever wandered into a great culture.*

Just like each person has a unique DNA, so does your church. It doesn't define *what* you do so much as it defines *how* you do what you do. If you don't shape culture intentionally, you might not like where you end up. In this episode, Tony, Amy, and Lance Witt explore how your church can more clearly define your DNA so that your staff team can thrive in both health and performance.

### *Benefits of Giving Focus to Organizational DNA*

- Organizational DNA is the essence of your leadership environment. You can think of it as the style, personality or culture of an organization. There is a Ritz-Carlton way of doing customer service. There is a Starbucks way of doing business. Chick-Fil-A and KFC both sell chicken, but they have radically different organizational DNA.
- It boils down to a pattern of behaviors that are valued, modeled and tolerated by the people in highest levels of leadership—whether those behaviors are positive or negative.
- You can think of culture as gasoline and your ministry as an engine. It's not enough to have high-quality gasoline. Gasoline is purposeful; it is for powering the engine. A high-octane gas and a powerful engine will get traction quickly.
- Articulating your desired culture-shaping behaviors creates alignment, synergy and clear expectations. It helps attract the right kind of people, differentiates you from other organizations, and lessens turnover.

### *Best Practices for Getting Started*

- Start with the senior leader: The culture can't be disconnected from the values of the senior leader. Ask yourself, "*What makes me pound my fist on the table?*" A frustrated reaction to behavior often reveals the violation of a value leaders hold, even if they have never defined it for the team.
- Next, think about some of the top performers on your team, both staff and volunteers. Identify 4-5 things they do or represent that you wish everyone did.
- Cascade some of your early thinking down to the senior leadership team, staff, and board. Ask for input, but this is not a democratic process. This is not up for a majority vote. Senior leadership has to have "veto" power.

- After you have defined the key behaviors that define your organizational DNA, make sure to make them part of accountability. Churches tend to let culture slip as long as people get their job done and don't mess up morally. You need to hold people accountable for performance, character AND culture-shaping behaviors.
- Other best practices:
  - Don't name too many behaviors and make them as specific as possible. They need to be "sticky."
  - Train on these behaviors consistently: with new hires, in staff meetings, in 1-on-1 meetings, etc. Keep this word picture in mind: Drip it, don't power-wash it.
  - Reward and celebrate people who model the desired culture. In particular, tell stories that bring the values and behaviors to life for the team.

## Next Steps

- Take some time as a leader to assess what you are doing to intentionally shape the culture. Here are some questions to get you started—
  - *Have we been intentional about the behaviors we value? Have they ever been clarified in writing?*
  - *Do we teach them? Do we tell stories about them and celebrate them?*
  - *Do I personally, as the leader, model the behaviors that shape the culture we hope to create? Does my senior leadership team model the behaviors?*
  - *Do we hire people who reflect the behaviors we value?*
  - *Do we coach the behaviors we value? Do we hold people accountable when they don't live out the behaviors that shape the culture we hope to create? Do we tolerate behaviors that negatively shape our culture?*
- No church staff drifts into a healthy culture. The [Unstuck Teams](#) process guides pastors to build staff teams that love working together and get stuff done—spiritually, emotionally, and relationally healthy, as well as productive and high-performing.

Check out [theunstuckgroup.com/teams](https://theunstuckgroup.com/teams) to learn how it works and start a conversation with our team.

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