

Signs of an Unhealthy Culture

INSECURITY AND NERVOUSNESS

- Staff members are afraid they might lose their jobs if they entertain a potential offer from somewhere else. In a healthy culture, leaders come alongside their teams to help them think or pray through and consider the offers.
- Traveling to conferences or visiting other organizations is discouraged. Insecure leaders are threatened by the new perspectives that might reveal their own inadequacies.
- The only new ideas the leader likes are his or her own.
- In brainstorming sessions, people don't attend or are afraid to share. This could mean the leader is looking for affirmation about his or her own ideas rather than looking for new ones.
- Defensiveness is more of a norm than an exception. This points to people feeling as if they have to prove themselves.
- There is little freedom to try new things without fear of reprisal. In an unhealthy culture, you either
 - (a) never try anything new or
 - (b) say, "Let's try it and ask forgiveness later if it doesn't work."

In a healthy culture, you initiate new ideas and propose new directions without fear because the typical response by leadership is to ask clarifying questions and then bless the effort.

EMPTY DESKS, QUIET HALLWAYS

- You have a revolving door of staff. A high turnover is a symptom of deeper troubles and wastes precious resources on downtime and continual retraining.
- You publish a notice regarding a new staff position, and hardly anyone expresses interest. The word is out: your business or church isn't a fun place to work.
- People clock out right at five o'clock, and you don't see your staff hanging out after hours or during their discretionary time.
- Very few former staff members talk positively about their experiences.
- There are lots of hushed hallway conversations.

LACK OF COMMUNICATION AND TRUST

- Your leaders and core staff can't quickly, easily, and authentically tell you the mission of the organization and why it matters. Likewise, if the vision lacks clarity, your culture needs work.
- You never (or rarely) meet together with your entire team.
- Everything has to go to the top for approval. Other leaders on the team have not been empowered to make decisions.
- Everyone knows of people on staff who lack competence or character, yet the leaders are unwilling to make the tough decisions to let them go.

DIRTY TRICKS

- There is a lot of backbiting, bickering, or complaining between team members.
- You get reports of harassment, discrimination, or leaders abusing their power or positions.
- There is an acceptance of pranks on the team that embarrass people or highlight their weaknesses.

UNHAPPY FAMILIES

- People have to choose between job and family. You probably don't say that out loud, but your team regularly is making that choice.
- Spouses of your staff feel as if they are competing with a mistress called "ministry" or "job."
- It is common for staff to attempt to negotiate better salaries or benefits. This often points to a lack of feeling valued.

You don't get to spike the ball on culture. You can never proclaim your culture a success or stop working on it. If you have human beings working with and for you, then this will be something you work on ad infinitum. If you do only one thing, assign a culture champion on your team. Whether it is yourself or someone else at the senior leadership level, someone should be thinking about assessing and improving the culture every step of the way.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Take time with your team to honestly consider each of these characteristics. Evaluate your health.
2. Pick two things you can do as a team to improve your culture right away. It won't happen overnight, but with intentional steps, progress can happen.

Stevens, Tim (2015-01-13). *Fairness Is Overrated: And 51 Other Leadership Principles to Revolutionize Your Workplace* (pp. 169-172). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.