THE LEADERSHIP PLAYBOOK FOR

THRIVING

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STEP INTO POWER

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This leadership playbook lays out the rules of the game and essential plays for using change as a springboard to a culture in which wellbeing and performance thrive. The rules? That leadership drives culture, culture determines both performance and wellbeing, and all of the above affect recruiting, retention, and profitability.

EMERGENCE FROM THE DARK AGES

Recent years seem to have accelerated change across the world. Some liken it to the Renaissance following the Dark Ages. We know it. We feel it. We want it. We might even be a little afraid of it. This leadership playbook lays out the essential plays to springboard into a better experience, replete with innovation, improvement, and excitement whether your company is already enlightened or is just now coming to the realization that there is a better way to operate.

In recent years, many have questioned the viability of current norms of with respect to work-life balance (or integration), how to accomplish the work with current staffing constraints and attitudes, and whether a "hustle culture" left us all in a working environment that was far from ideal. While some blame the pandemic for the "great resignation" and "quiet quitting," the truth is that many were already unhappy, and were starting to re-evaluate workplace norms.

Some employers didn't see it or weren't willing to grapple with it. With the myth of "this is how it has to be" exposed, for many, resentment replaced acceptance. Leaders, often caught flatfooted, crave the means of improving culture, performance and retention.

LEADERSHIP DRIVES CULTURE, CULTURE DETERMINES BOTH PERFORMANCE AND WELLBEING, AND ALL OF THE ABOVE AFFECT RECRUITING, RETENTION, AND PROFITABILITY.

Until recently, leaders told themselves that the work was getting done, frustrations were “normal,” and everyone thought they were rocking along just fine.

In professional fields such as law, accounting, engineering, medicine, and behavioral health, managers are often doers first and managers a distant second.

In fact, some managers’ “management skills” consist of doling out assignments to team members, often by email and without sufficient guidance. Human resources and professional development staff often beg managers to spend a modest 30 minutes a month to provide meaningful feedback to team members.

Complaints about both too many meetings and, paradoxically, insufficient guidance continue to abound.

Add the fact that managers are stressed as they juggle their considerable responsibilities and often are perceived as “scary,” which then begs the question: How can a scary “manager” be effective?

CULTURE IS THE COMPANY’S UNDERLYING PERSONALITY AND COLLECTIVE EMOTIONALITY AS DETERMINED BY HOW PEOPLE WORK TOGETHER, HOW THEY TREAT EACH OTHER, AND HOW COMFORTABLE PEOPLE ARE BEING THEMSELVES.

To be sure, there are manager who walk the walk of true collaboration, and mentoring and development of team members, but the reality of most company cultures is that even for the best intentioned, the demands of the work make the focus on people seem unsustainable, which means that mentoring, training and teamwork suffer. At the same time, managers struggle to care for employees’ wellbeing as they drive change and results. There is no shortage of pressure.

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

Some leaders have operated under the illusion that they needed to figure out how to maintain the office-based culture in in the new normal of hybrid working. This begs several questions before even getting to "how" to maintain culture. What is the culture? Is culture important? Is the existing culture worth maintaining? Will we ever go back to the old normal? At this point the answer to the last question is undoubtedly "no. "Leaders who are paying attention struggle to identify the levers that control culture before answering these basic questions.

Culture is not about SOPs for approval of expenditures, onboarding procedures or HR processes. Culture is the company's underlying personality and collective emotionality as determined by how people work together, how they treat each other, and how comfortable people are being themselves. Culture includes the extent to which leaders are able to set goals which they realistically believe employees will achieve and employees are learning, growing, and finding fulfillment in their work. Culture depends on leadership. More to the point, how leaders treat colleagues determines culture and then becomes part of the culture—informing others about how they can treat those with less power. Unless interrupted, culture is self-perpetuating.

It's on this backdrop that leaders considering culture can clarify for themselves the reasons culture is important. While some leaders don't believe culture affects the bottom line and is therefore irrelevant, others see the possibility of a culture that is driven by positive values and supports wellbeing as *better* in all regards.

Advice to the enlightened trying to convince the skeptical: Wellbeing does affect the bottom line, in addition to having people-centric “soft” benefits some so easily dismiss.

Consider that employees operating in a healthy culture can concentrate because they aren’t anxious or on edge. Employees are more creative, and more likely to deliver excellent and timely work product. Employees don’t overreact or take things personally.

Wellbeing is deceptively pervasive, operating under the waterline, affecting everyone and everything. Wellbeing is intricately intertwined with culture. Wellbeing determines retention of both management and employees, how well trained your team members become, whether and how well senior colleagues share information and support each other, and whether more senior colleagues are territorial about what is “theirs.”

Stated even more precisely for the skeptics, we know that people who are stressed take more sick leave and don't perform tasks as adeptly as those experiencing wellbeing. We also know that this must adversely affect the bottom line. Then, adding insult to injury, when the stressed finally do quit, the costs of poor culture exponentially multiply. There is the added burden on those who have to pick up the slack as they await a new hire.

There is the opportunity cost of managers and sometimes leaders devoting precious time to training and onboarding and away from other critical work. Add the cost of the external or internal recruiter, and the costs of an unhealthy culture escalate.

Further consider that systems and their consequent incentives and disincentives affect behavior, collaboration, and the pressures colleagues feel to act in a certain way. Thus, in addition to the personal aspects of how colleagues treat each other, the impersonal systems have either a positive or negative effect on culture. Every strategy has consequences, which may require additional solutions.

WELLBEING IS DECEPTIVELY PERVASIVE, OPERATING UNDER THE WATERLINE, AFFECTING EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING.

MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF DIVERSITY BY MINIMIZING PROBLEM B

Consider the value of culture through the lens of Dr. Michael J. Kirton's work. Kirton was a renowned behavioral expert who studied the impact of different problem-solving styles on collaboration.

Kirton aptly described the workplace as having two types of problems: Problem A and Problem B. Problem A is what the company's employees are tasked to provide or produce. Problem B is friction arising from colleagues with different work styles unwittingly annoying each other as they go about solving Problem A in their preferred style.

When we expand that to include generational, racial, socioeconomic, and other differences and needs, we have a lot of Problem B.

Kirton's point is that if you don't address Problem B, you spend more energy triaging Problem B than on solving Problem A. Companies that have figured out how to minimize Problem B—that is the challenge of being diverse in all its forms not the diversity itself—actually position themselves to use diversity to better solve a broader range of Problem As.

These companies have an advantage over other companies because they avoid myopic thinking; they are more successful. These companies also prove to be better places to work for a broader range of people, leading to greater recruiting success and better retention rates. And the bottom line is better too.

Dr. Kirton observed that respectful cognitively diverse teams tend to stay together for longer, as well as being more successful in general.

He further observed that culture is about creating a problem-solving culture, attracting cognitively diverse people to solve the problems you need to solve.

As Kirton said, minimize coping – working outside of your preferred style – when don't need it, maximize coping when there is a bombshell. With good cognitive diversity engagement, you can better anticipate the bombshells.

CULTURE IS LIKE A GARDEN; IT CAN BE BEAUTIFUL, LUSH AND THRIVING BUT ONLY THROUGH INTENTIONAL CREATION.

It can be difficult to define culture and determine how to carry forward the desirable aspects while eliminating the counterproductive ones. What is clear is that culture is like a garden; it can be beautiful, lush and thriving but only through intentional creation. Also like a garden, neglect leaves culture wild, barren and unfruitful. Creating a culture in which everyone thrives isn't by happenstance. Leaders, ask yourself, what kind of a gardener do you aspire to be?

The skeptical may worry that this gardening *fluff* eviscerates a leader's efficacy. But, being a good gardener doesn't mean you're a hopeless 'soft touch' or avoid doing what's difficult. In fact, being a good gardener means thinking and speaking with objectivity and candor, and grappling with uncomfortable topics. Consider that like plants, employees need to be trained, pruned, reorganized, or replanted.

With regard to the latter, I can assure you that an employee who isn't succeeding even after good training and internal replanting, will breathe a sigh of relief by finding employment elsewhere. In fact, kindly helping a colleague find other opportunities helps the garden thrive. No one likes to see a colleague fail. You wouldn't plant a cactus in the Amazon, would you?

UPGRADE YOUR PERSONAL OPERATING SYSTEM AS A LEADER

To the leaders who are committed to being thoughtful gardeners, let's upgrade your personal operating system. The "upgrade" presents an opportunity to lead at an extraordinary level. It's not about doing more. In fact, it may be about doing less, and it is most certainly about thinking more intentionally and acting based on a thoughtfully and objectively conceived plan.

The upgrade is the shift from operating out of fear to operating with the kind of objectivity that leads to superpower confidence in the face of uncertainty. It is operating from a place of strength. The challenge is discerning whether fear or objectivity drives you. The humble truth is that we cannot believe everything we think. And yet we do.

Thus, the upgrade to a personal operating system demands taking an objective view of one's own thinking. This is metacognition—the awareness of one's own thought processes. It requires considering whether one's understanding of the "facts" is true, and whether one's analysis of those facts is unbiased and grounded. Leaders, you wouldn't just accept another's assessment without critical probing and pressure testing.

Now it's time to apply those same instincts and skills to your own thinking. You know how to do this—you do it every day.

To hone your metacognitive skills, consider the work of the late David McClelland. McClelland, named one of the 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th century by the American Psychological Association, was an expert on human motivation. He identified three motive needs: achievement, affiliation and power. We all have these needs to varying degrees, regardless of race, gender, age or national origin.

Carl Jung, a renowned psychoanalyst, was the first to identify fear-driven thinking as part of a person's "shadow." The fears that are an ingrained part of the human experience are the exaggerated and negative flip side of the three motive needs that McClelland identified. We all have these fears and operate from a place of fear at times. There's no shame in this. Rather, operating out of fear is merely what keeps us alive by heightening our reactivity. Thankfully, we are not running from the saber-toothed tiger anymore, even though it can feel that way at times.

Our choice in this moment of opportunity is to eschew fears and embrace deep thinking about the challenges and how to achieve the desired outcome. Makes sense, right? The problem is that our vigilance has been conditioned over thousands of years, and it's hard and maybe even seems foolish to ignore a warning that has literally kept us and our ancestors alive. Paradoxically, to create the culture we want, we must do just that.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 lay out the motive needs, strengths when you are at your best, and the corresponding fears or shadow-side and typical behaviors when you are fear driven and at your worst.

Dr. William Sparks, who combined the forgoing concepts into a robust leadership framework more fully described in his book *Actualized Leadership: Meeting Your Shadow & Maximizing Your Potential*, provides a short-form version leadership assessment for determining primary leadership style and predominant motive need at www.alpfree.com/arudia/.

You can also take his short-form Actualized Team Profile at https://www.atpfree.com/arudia/ to find out more about how you affect your team culture when you are at your best versus driven by fear.

TABLE 1: ACHIEVER LEADERSHIP STYLE

At Your Best: Place of Strength	At Your Worst: Fear Based
Motive Need = Achievement	Shadow = Fear of Failure
Behavior	Behavior
Detailed	Nitpicking
Organized	Micromanaging
Structured	Critical
Thorough	Pessimistic
Serious	Rigid

TABLE 2: AFFIRMER LEADERSHIP STYLE

At Your Best: Place of Strength	At Your Worst: Fear Based
Motive Need = Affiliation	Shadow = Fear of Rejection
Behavior Friendly Generous Loyal Empathetic Helpful	Behavior Sensitive Insecure Anxious Conflict Avoidant Indecisive

TABLE 3: ASSERTER LEADERSHIP STYLE

At Your Best: Place of Strength	At Your Worst: Fear Based
Motive Need = Power	Shadow = Fear of Betrayal
Behavior Candid Courageous Decisive Confident Competitive	Behavior Impatient Condescending Intolerant Rude Manipulative

The optimal choice between leading from a place of strength or fear is obvious. However, the difficulty is not in making the choice; it's in effectuating the choice because our fears are so entrenched. When a person is fear driven, they believe the fear is justified and that they are acting appropriately. Unfortunately, actions informed by fear cause the very undesired result the person seeks to avoid. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, Dr. Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist, philosopher, and Holocaust survivor, referred to this as paradoxical intent.

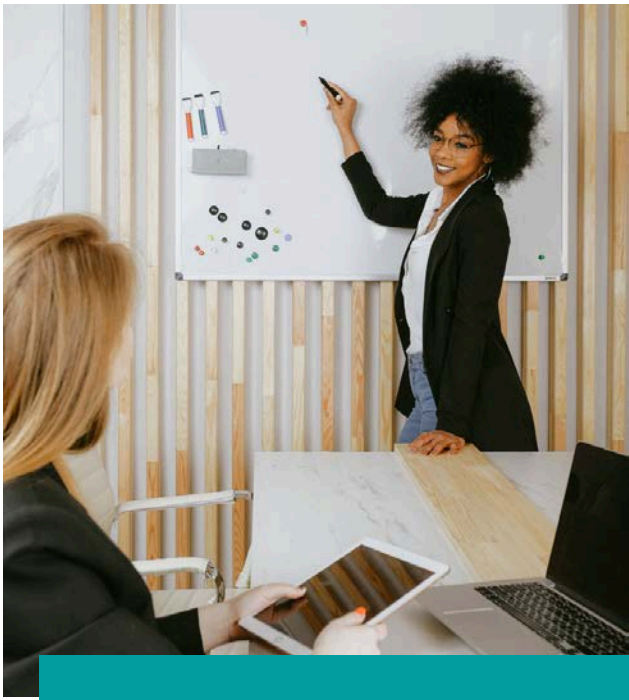
An example of paradoxical intent is a person who chafes against lack of control and becomes impatient, pushing harder for results. The paradox is that the person's actions actually undermine the team's ability to function, delaying or derailing results. To avoid this paradox, we need to be able to recognize and call out our fears to prevent them from surreptitiously hijacking the way we think, feel and act. We can nurture this capacity by evaluating ourselves against the descriptors in Table 3 describing the Asserter Leadership Style to determine whether we're working from a place of strength or fear.

Acting from strength requires vulnerability, humility, and a willingness to take responsibility for ourselves, including our thinking. Doing so empowers you as a leader and is the upgrade to your personal operating system. Guaranteed, with this upgrade you will be a more confident, capable, strategic, and thoughtful leader. You will be a true leader. You've got this.

21 PLAYS TO UPLEVEL YOUR LEADERSHIP GAME

These 21 leadership plays will help you use any moment as springboard to a better personal experience of being a leader as you cultivate a culture in which clients or customers are successfully served by thriving and innovative people who experience a sense of wellbeing and fulfilment on the job.

WHO ARE YOU BEING?



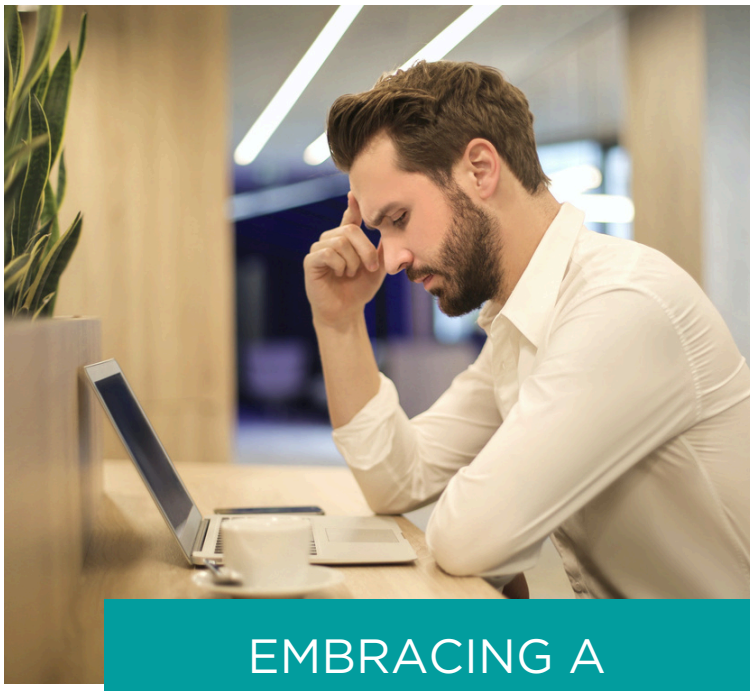
1. **Be objective about yourself.** Leaders must recognize that like other humans, they have strengths and weaknesses. If you are not honest with yourself about yourself, you risk overdoing your strengths and being defensive about your weaknesses. You risk not reaching out to colleagues when necessary. Two (or more) heads *really are* better than one.

2. **Embrace a problem-solving mindset.** Embracing a problem-solving mindset is essential to nurturing a desired culture. In fact, the best cultures adopt a problem-solving mindset. They eschew blame in favor of solutions, learning and growth.

3 **Derive power from your self-awareness.** Being self-aware and accepting yourself means you can give up trying to impress or be someone you aren't. By embracing your leadership style, you avoid the stress, inauthenticity, defensiveness and a host of other counterproductive behaviors. While every leader can learn techniques from others, Gallup makes a pretty strong case for leading from your strengths. See Rath, Tom (2009). *Strengths Based Leadership: Great Leaders, Teams and Why People Follow.*

4 **Don't succumb to Fear of Failure.** The motive need "achievement" is about winning through technical expertise, something with which many professionals are quite familiar. The corresponding Fear of Failure is the fear that one card, removed from the house of cards, will cause disastrous results. Guided by fear, a person can be rendered ineffective, exhibiting such behaviors as micromanagement, unending criticism, and excessive pessimism. You know yourself: Which behaviors resonate with you when you are not at your best? Note them, and use their presence to warn you when your thoughts are fear based and not objective. Then, choose to lead with objectivity and from a place of strength.

5 **Don't succumb to Fear of Rejection.** The motive need "affiliation" and its corresponding Fear of Rejection manifest in subtle ways. Serving clients, acquiring and building relationships with new clients and colleagues, mentoring and being appreciated all satisfy the need for affiliation. When triggered by perceived threats to the relationship, Fear of Rejection can result in overdone relationship-protective behaviors that annoy the very people to whom you want to be connected. To avoid this folly, identify the behaviors that serve as a warning that you are acting out of fear. Then, use this insight to choose objectivity.



EMBRACING A PROBLEM-SOLVING MINDSET IS ESSENTIAL TO NURTURING A DESIRED CULTURE.

6 **Don't succumb to Fear of Betrayal.** The motive need "power" and "control" is about driving results, also something with which leaders are quite familiar. The corresponding Fear of Betrayal is the fear of being betrayed or undermined or simply not having the power or control to drive results. The triggering of this fear can result in impatience and pushing hard to drive results, which can result in bullying and manipulative behaviors. A less severe manifestation of Fear of Betrayal is making decisions without other's input so as not to impede results. To stay at your best, to prompt you to choose clear thinking and objectivity, identify the behaviors you notice about yourself at your worst, and heed their warning.

DO NOT LET CULTURE DEVELOP AS AN UNINTENTIONAL CONSEQUENCE OF YOUR ACTIONS; TAKE ACTIONS TO INTENTIONALLY SHAPE AND DEVELOP YOUR CULTURE.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO CREATE?

7 **Be intentional; culture matters.** Great cultures don't just happen. Many leaders focus on business strategies, relegating culture to a distant second or third in importance. Legendary management consultant Peter Drucker is said to have remarked that "culture eats strategy for breakfast." He didn't mean that strategy is unimportant, but rather that a powerful and empowering culture is a more certain route to organizational success. Do not let culture develop as an unintentional consequence of your actions; take actions to intentionally shape and develop your culture. Consider how your choices as a leader affect culture.

LEADERS HAVE THE GREATEST ABILITY TO INFLUENCE CULTURE, AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO DO SO.

8 **Own the mantle of power.** Leaders have the greatest ability to influence culture, and the responsibility to do so. Recognize that how you treat colleagues, especially those with less power, either nurtures or poisons your culture.

9 **Create a system that works.** Colleagues are like actors in a play, meaning that the systems in place incentivize certain behaviors as scripted. Thus, if leadership wants people to act differently, it must create different systems, which lead to different incentives and behaviors.

10 **Assess your culture.** It's time to take a good, hard look in the mirror. What is your company's culture? To answer this question, ask yourself questions such as: How do people treat each other? Are those lower in the pecking order afraid of more the senior? Do the transgressions of the people with the biggest books of business or highly sought-after skills get a free pass? Are there "politics"? Are issues addressed or avoided? Have hope; if you didn't like any of the answers, this playbook will give you tools to change it.

11 **Co-create your vision.** Work with your colleagues to create a vision of the values you desire. Depending on the size of the company, you many need to employ survey and focus groups to secure input and buy-in. Be patient with the process because it will take time to do it right.

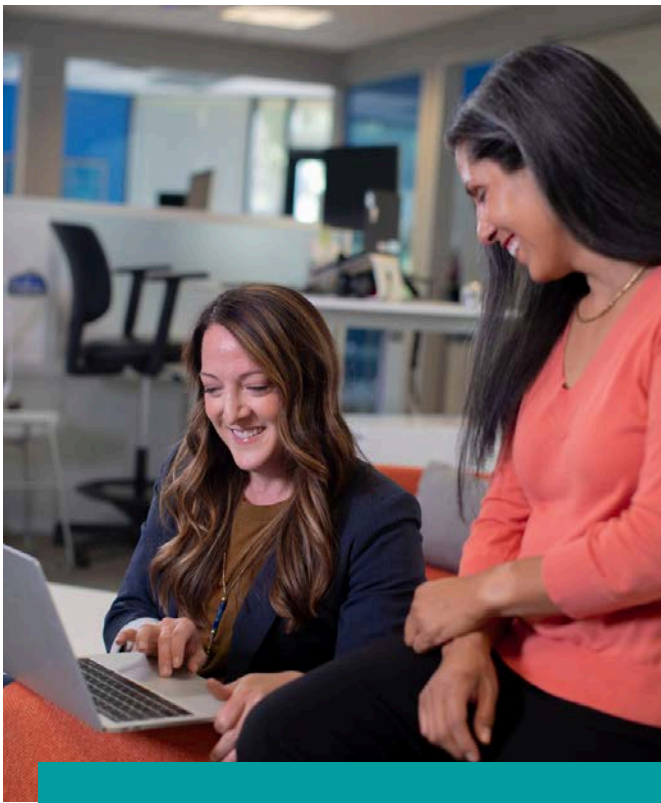
HOW WILL YOU DO IT?

12 **Share information and educate.** Remember to share information and educate your colleagues. Telling yourself that you don't have the time is warning you that Fear of Betrayal is affecting your thinking and choices. Choosing patience empowers better results.

13 **Listen resonantly.** Listening with resonance means listening deeply for understanding. Listen through the fear for the message, and register the fear as a message. Your colleagues possess valuable information. Listen.

14 **Proactively embrace diversity.** This message cannot be overstated; embrace differences as the advantage that they are. Differences make a company strong, but only if you proactively address Problem B, the friction and misunderstandings that can result from differences. The answer to Problem B is not to require everyone to mold themselves into a particular archetype embodying success. Rather, increasing understanding, getting to know colleagues, and honoring the differences dissipates Fear of Rejection and discomfort arising from disconnection.

15 **Choose and live by trust-enhancing core values.** Many companies don't deliberately create their core values. Their values happen as a consequence of compensation and other structures that often lead to internal competition for work, clients, power, and money. If instead you create a culture in which trust and the values that foster trust are lived, you create a culture in which colleagues are loyal, fulfilled, and loath to disappoint the company, each other and clients. They perform and deliver results. They don't waste energy on self-protective strategies. Consider what the values of kindness, mentoring, collaboration, accountability, and wellbeing would do for your company's culture.



ONCE A COMPANY ESTABLISHES A CULTURE, IT MUST SUSTAIN AND NURTURE IT WITH CONSISTENCY.

16 **Don't take anything personally, really.** To be at your best, to be the leader you need to be to accomplish your goals, to stay empowered in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges, you will need to amplify your objectivity in order to depersonalize complaints and criticism. The objective truth is that the complaints and criticism are not about you, even if they are directed at you. Instead, they embody important information and most likely fear. Listen, learn, and lead.

17 **Use coaching skills.** Coaching is not refining a person's swing by telling the person what to do. Coaching, in the business context, is asking colleagues open-ended questions designed to support colleagues in doing their best thinking, developing alignment and engaging them in the process *as you learn and gather more information*. It is a great way to mitigate the effects of Problem Bs as you harness diversity.

18 **Enforce cultural norms even-handedly.** Once a company establishes a culture, it must sustain and nurture it with consistency. In a healthy culture, people understand the norms for working together and are called out when their behavior falls short. Importantly, they are supported in making the necessary improvements.

19 **Embrace accountability as an enviable value.** People often wince when they hear the word "accountability". But accountability is about trusting that colleagues will do what they said they would do. Once you have accountability, if the work isn't getting done, it's time to figure out what isn't working and why. This is relatively easy in a culture that also embraces a problem-solving mindset.

20 **Give credit to colleagues.** As Harry Truman said, “It’s amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

21 **Recruit for culture fit and diversity.** As the company grows, a company committed to maintaining its culture will recruit for both cultural fit and diversity. This may require walking away from qualified candidates who don’t embody the company’s values.

If you, like many leaders, dare to hope for a better culture, know that you have what it takes. You’ve got this.

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