

Chris Carey Corporate Culture

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Chris Carey is founder and president of Chris Carey Advisors LLC and a columnist for *Forbes* and *Forbes.com*. A consultant for numerous organizations, he recently met with the editor of *MWorld* to discuss the role of leaders in determining corporate culture.

Carey explained that defining and maintaining a productive corporate culture is one of the most important responsibilities of a company's CEO. "There are extremes in cultures—from the wild culture of Zappos that can stimulate performance to the dysfunctional culture that, like a dysfunctional family, can bring about anger, negativity, and little cooperation and collaboration." The nature of the culture is very much determined by a company CEO. "He or she has to define and manage a culture in a way that instills a work environment conducive to business growth and profitability. Without such effort by a leader, cultures happen by default and, likewise, the consequences."

THE ROLE OF STYLE

"The right culture," said Carey, "is one that comes naturally to a leader.

It is in sync with the leader's style, of course, but it also reflects the nature of the business. A sales firm, for instance, might have one kind of culture whereas a factory might have another, and each might be suitable to the business."

According to Carey, a leader has to realize this. He or she has to be conscious of the culture and its nature. If the leader wants to alter it, he or she has to make a true commitment to change. Ideally, the leader should make an effort to match the culture to his or her style and the organization's goals.

As far as changing a culture, Carey observed, it needs to be done in small steps. Leaders have to realize, that it isn't easy. "Most workers are familiar with a leader going away to some seminar and coming back charged up about instilling a new culture in the organization and then a month or two later putting the effort aside to pursue other goals." Carey said that he didn't want to discourage leaders. "It's not impossible. You can definitely change a culture to be much more positive, to a point where you can tap into the organization's strengths."



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Carey advised that the first thing that a leader needs is understanding of the current culture, something that can be determined by a survey. "With such information on hand, a company can slowly shift culture," he said, "obtaining feedback periodically to see how the change is being accepted. Simple questions can be asked, like, 'Does your manager live up to the company's three core values?' A yes suggests that the new culture is being adopted. A no answer is a red flag that more needs to be done, perhaps even a change in staff to those more attuned to the culture targeted for the organization."

COPING WITH RESISTANCE

According to Carey, more often there is a need to change managers to bring about a change in culture than a need to change a CEO. Once the head of the organization has communicated a specific style that needs to be adopted, that is the kind everyone should work toward. If there is resistance, it often comes from middle managers. They really need to understand the significance of the change and be given coaching or training. If those don't work, termination may be the only other option. MW