

Does Your Culture Need Help?

7 indications of a broken culture

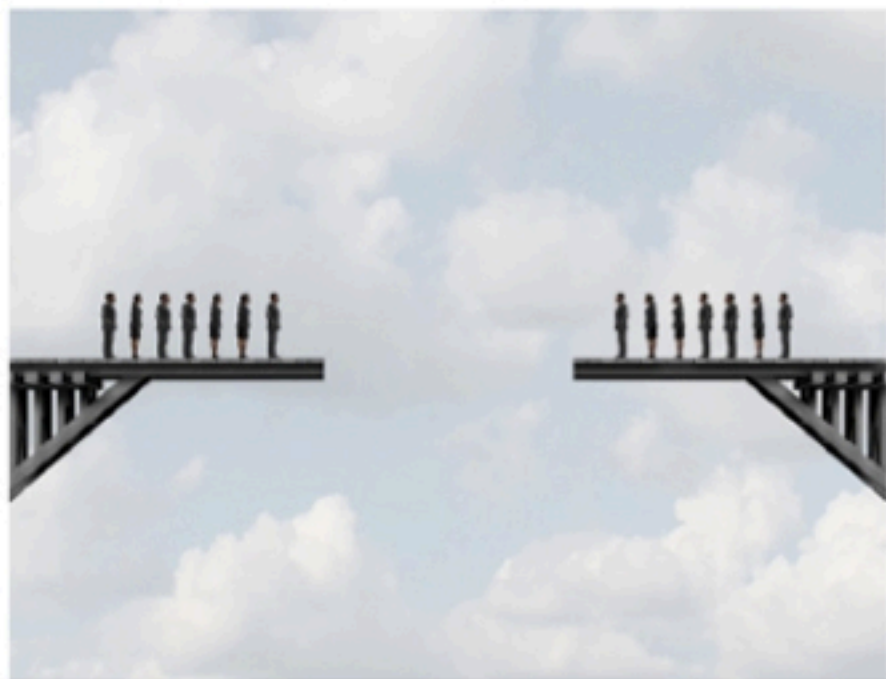
By **Lisa Aldisert**

Culture is a common buzzword these days. Many articles tout the importance of a good culture. There are even awards that celebrate companies where employees love to work. Experts talk about defining, transforming, and fixing your culture. But how do you even know if your company's culture needs help? Or what aspects to fix if it has some cracks?

It is possible for a culture to be mostly good and have only a few blemishes. In fact, that's the way that most cultures are. Even idealized cultures you see showcased in the media, with incentive perks and fun break rooms, still have issues.

Every culture has its challenges. There is no Oz, nor any magic bullet. Because companies and people evolve, keeping a healthy culture in check requires constant maintenance before a variety of factors can throw it off.

So how do you know if your culture needs attention? You need to be a sleuth to separate



employee complaints from true culture fissures, so this isn't about grapevine gripes. Instead, look for patterns in feedback by observing and keeping notes. The following are seven areas that usually indicate a broken culture, and will help lead you to the answers.

Management is Out of Touch

Simply put, a broken culture occurs when the leadership doesn't recognize that the culture is bad. Executives proceed, doing business as usual, sometimes

operating with their heads in the sand, ignoring the signs. Or, they may be aware of problems, but are too busy or apathetic to do anything about it. The bottom line is that if a damaged culture isn't recognized from the top, it's hard to fix it from the bottom.

Morale is Negative

Employees who purposely have limited interaction with each other are usually an indication of bad morale. If you notice employees keeping to themselves and keeping their heads down to avoid

office conflict, a troubled culture is to blame. There may even be low-grade complaints about a particular manager or general murmuring about how awful it is to work there. Another indication is when employees pack up and create gridlock at the front door when 5 o'clock arrives.

Managers Become Impatient

A broken culture takes a toll on management as well as employees. When problems seem endless and personal conflict relentless, managers can easily lose resiliency and patience. It takes a lot of skill, time and works to fix problems, and when issues seem never-ending, management begins to wear down. Another clue is when an otherwise positive manager turns negative and disengages from important work with the team.

Leaders Are Micromanagers

Excessive micromanagement from the top is an indicator of a broken culture. The message is that employees don't know what they are doing and can't be trusted to make good decisions for the company on their own. Relentless infringement on employee autonomy demoralizes employees, and they begin to check out in a variety of ways. Competent people don't need to be micromanaged.

Turnover Is High

If you can't keep employees, this is a prime indication that your culture needs help. This happens

when great employees are initially excited about working with you but are gone quickly. Or you just can't seem to attract quality talent because they've already heard through the grapevine about your toxic office environment. Currently, we're functioning in a full employment economy, so people have options. And, they will jump when unhappy.

Employees Aren't Fully Present

Do you know the term "presenteeism"? This happens when people come to work and just go through the motions. There is no excitement for projects; there is no enthusiasm for initiatives. You may also notice an uptick in the use of personal cell phones, even if it's against company policy. Employees are so desperate to escape the office environment that they are willing to risk breaking the rules and potential castigation just to virtually get away from the office for a while.

An Increase in Mistakes

It's a flashing red light when your team is making more mistakes than usual. A bad culture causes employees to disengage and this feeds into a lack of attention to detail. Employees get to the point where they just don't care anymore, either because their attempts to fix issues have fallen on deaf ears or because no one else appears to care.

When these challenges are first recognized, the issue may appear important but not urgent. If

leadership does nothing, though, it could get worse. Although the aggregate of these factors may seem grim, a broken culture doesn't mean the company is broken or that all hope is lost. In fact, in most cases, companies suffer from a few of these problems, rarely from all seven.

Look for the patterns in your organization and decide the best place to start. Don't try to fix everything at once but identify an area where you can have some relatively immediate results. A unified leadership team can go a long way to reverse a deteriorating culture. Work together and engage your employees in the process. The mere fact that you acknowledge the issues and want to make positive changes will make a big difference in overall morale.

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Lisa M. Aldisert is a NYC-based business advisor, trend expert, speaker and author. She is president of Pharos Alliance Inc., an executive advisory firm specializing in strategic planning, organizational and leadership development for entrepreneurial organizations.



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