LIFESTYLE TIPS

Timely Information for Personal Success

Don't Let Workplace Culture Fly under the Radar

By Mike Jacquart

While workplace culture is important, it tends to fly under the radar in many instances. This is a shame, because I have often found that workplace culture often has more to do than any single reason why an individual succeeds – or fails – on the job. It's never ceased to amaze me that I have been doing the same type of work in many ways for a lot of years… that being writing, editing, and so on. And yet, it hasn't been unusual to be fired from one job, while told I was doing great work somewhere else! That's not all. I once had two editors who were my immediate supervisors: one thought I was doing a good job while the other one did not!

Different Bosses, Different Expectations

What gives? This is where workplace culture comes to play, and along with it expectations, microcultures, and other factors. Let's go back to the previous editors I mentioned, and their two, very different expectations. I was very happy at the time being an associate editor, and the one editor who liked my work was quite pleased with that, too. He could count on me to do what I was told, do my job well, make all of the necessary deadlines, and in so doing, reduce his workload and stress.

In the case of the other editor, these sorts of tasks and responsibilities were a *given*. You did them, maybe even well, but so what? This editor didn't like it if you didn't aspire to "move up the ladder." Different editors, different expectations.

Considering the Big Picture

"Culture, the foundation of any workplace, is made up of individual behaviors," explains Empathia, Inc. in this month's cover story in *Employee Assistance Report*.

Empathia notes that many workplace programs and benefits, including EAPs, are sometimes too focused on the individual and fail to consider the broader cultural context. After all, it's often said that people don't quit their companies, they quit their bosses!

CLIP-N-SAVE!

Healthy Recipe: Barbecue Turkey Burgers

INGREDIENTS:
- 4 tablespoons fat-free mayonnaise
- 4 tablespoons barbecue sauce
- 1 pound lean ground turkey
- ½ cup fresh, diced tomatoes
- 4 large leaves of fresh lettuce
- 4 whole-grain sandwich buns

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:
- Calories per serving: 262
- Carbohydrates: 25 g
- Protein: 32 g
- Sodium: 495 mg
- Fat: 4 g
- Saturated fat: 1 g

DIRECTIONS:
❶ In a small bowl, stir mayonnaise and barbecue sauce together. Preheat grill. Shape turkey into 4 patties, about 1-1/2 inch thick. Season with salt and pepper. Refrigerate until ready to cook.

❷ Grill burgers on both sides until cooked through, about 6 minutes per side. Toast rolls on grill.

❸ Top burgers with the mayo and barbecue sauce, lettuce, and tomatoes. Serve on the buns.

Serving size: 1 burger

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Empathia says that the bigger issue is that of MICRO-cultures that form across organizations based on norms established by individuals and leaders *within* a given department or team. As a result, there are often pockets of discontent OR pockets of high engagement and productivity.

Micro-cultures at Their Worst

I completely agree and can cite examples. At a particular daily newspaper where I worked as a reporter, there were several newsroom "teams" that took turns getting out the Saturday paper on Friday evenings. One group, the one that worked alternate Fridays from mine, got along quite well, but only did just enough work to get by.

The group I worked with wasn't chummy in the least, but we cared a lot more about putting out a good product. This, of course created animosity between the two groups – I hesitate using the word "team" because neither of us were. Calling people a "team" does not mean they work like a team!

These were micro-cultures at their worst, but it's not the only example of a micro-culture I could name. Newsrooms in general, regardless of the specific paper, tended to be "their own little world," set apart from the rest of the newspaper departments.

In fact, I recall being told from a publisher that we (the newsroom) "*were the one department that loses money.*" Talk about fostering discontent!

Unfortunately, regardless of the type of business, this sort of toxic environment within a company is not unusual. What does this all mean? "In addition to addressing individual concerns, EA professionals are uniquely positioned to help organizations explore systemic issues," Empathia concludes.

Summary

It's been my experience at least, that there are WAY too many work cultures with conniving, backstabbing, and petty situations in which star employees leave – and far too FEW that are thriving, positive places with engaged and satisfied employees.

When addressing a particular workplace problem, it's vital that EAPs go beyond an individual's behavior and performance and not overlook the broader issue of the workplace *culture*. It's a potentially toxic issue that I have known all too well. ■

Mike Jacquart is the editor and publisher of "Employee Assistance Report" who enjoys using his 30 years' experience at various sized companies (mainly in publishing) to share insights into various work cultures; some good, some bad, some in between. He may be reached at mjacquart@writeitrightllc.com.