



Chief Executive's Approach to Improving Culture

By Nancy Capistran, PCC, CPC

It is easy for heads of companies to overlook culture. Often, they consider “feelings” to be too “fluffy.” One of my long-standing clients and I often talked about his skeptical views of what he perceives to be a “touchy-feely” skill. He struggles to see the business worth. His direct, competitive, decisive, risk-taking personality has difficulty relating to “feelings” in the workplace. I asked him if he’d entertain the idea of doing an interesting interpersonal test before our next session. As I described the exercise, his body language told me that this was going to be very difficult for him. He felt strongly that it was not going to make any difference, and that it was a waste of his time in a schedule that was already overflowing with demands. He hesitantly agreed to the trial after saying that I had always provided sound guidance and that he trusted me. I explained that his employees wanted to feel connected to him, and for that to happen he needed to soften his approach to meet them where they were. I went on to explain that he needed to think positively about this exercise, and to also be extra observant with his employees for two weeks. The goal was “to catch” as many people as possible doing a good job and then to express genuine appreciation for their work efforts. He said that he felt uncomfortable doing that because “that is what I pay them to do.” I asked him to remain curious and open-minded to see what happened if he showed up differently around the office.

At our next session, he was holding back a grin on his face and finally confessed by saying, “WOW – the results were very different than I expected. After I got over how silly I felt giving someone a compliment for the work they were hired to do, I focused on the task at hand. As soon as I witnessed something being done well, I immediately responded with a compliment or an acknowledgment. People lit up! Some had a shocked look on their faces because they had no idea that I was watching. It sparked additional dialog with people that I’ve never really talked to before. There ended up being a ripple effect as many of the people I complimented told their co-workers and it became part of the ‘water-cooler conversation’ in a positive way.”

He went on to share that everyone seemed to have more pep in their step just by his taking notice of them. Convincing him to remain curious about making small changes in his organization’s culture produced rewards on two levels: he gained valuable insights that he hadn’t had before, and this tiny change that he finally had been willing to implement increased productivity, which then expanded his business.

Culture change is gradual. It takes time and it takes practice. Setbacks are natural and to be expected. Some days we move the lever forward and some days we don’t. Every day is a new opportunity to go after what we truly want. Sometimes we may feel extremely overwhelmed to the point of feeling powerless for what to do next. Insecurity of this sort drives distorted thinking. To adjust your mindset from powerless

to powerful, you must first acknowledge that just because you feel dead-ended does not mean you really are.

We often underestimate how powerful we actually are. Approach challenges with an understanding that every problem has a solution. Even if you can't figure out the answer right away, have faith that every problem can be dealt with, solved, or overcome. Center your energy on taking control of what is within your control.



About the Author: Nancy Capistran is a best-selling author, an award-winning, internationally certified executive coach, motivational speaker, and trusted advisor. She is Principal of [Capistran Leadership, LLC](#), and [Crisis Interception, LLC](#). Nancy's best-selling international leadership book: [Open Your Eyes and LEAD](#) shows readers how to become a positive force in the world and how to balance and manage omnipresent tensions while striving for leadership excellence. Capistran shares inspirational stories and advice from her 30+ year career to help both seasoned and emerging leaders develop intentionality while maintaining their core values and beliefs even when life's pressures dictate otherwise.