

3 Driving Factors in Creating Culture in Your Church

Chick-fil-A is a favorite fast food restaurant chain in the Southeast. When you get something to eat there you are likely to hear a cheerful "My Pleasure" from any employee. It's part of their culture.

I recently visited [Christ Fellowship Church](#) in West Palm Beach. Todd Mullins is the senior pastor and Tom Mullins is the founding pastor. I love that church. The spirit there is amazing. It's a huge mega-church and yet they make you feel special. Each person is treated like a million bucks! The spirit of hospitality and serving is palpable.

In contrast, I've also traveled and consulted with churches that had no need for parking lot attendants because there was plenty of room. The ushers were grumpy and the people glared. (really) The staff members were unhappy and gossiped. The senior pastor was discouraged and the morale was dismal. The culture was toxic and the church was in serious decline. This is extreme, but more common than you might imagine.

You can't tell people the culture of your church. They experience it. For good or bad, your culture is in full play. It is possible to change it, but requires a long road of deliberate and intentional leadership. You can't print the six points of your culture in the bulletin and think that will change anything.

Some church staffs have gone on retreat to figure out what they want their culture to be. That's good, but again, you can't come back and announce it. The leaders need to live it out.

Candidly, it's very difficult to repair a negative culture. Rather, you **replace it with a positive culture**. In other words, you are on defense if you attempt to repair what is broken. It's like putting your fingers in the dyke to stop the flooding. The problem is that there are one hundred holes and you have only ten fingers! You can't keep up. Instead, you want to get out in front.

Make the changes you need to make. If you need to make a change in staff, be courageous and make the change. If you need to make a shift in your ministries, then do it. If you need to seek forgiveness or return to teaching the gospel, serving the poor; whatever it may be, just do it.

Don't jump into this process with fear or in panic. Think clearly and pray much. This is a long, slow and deliberate road. If a healthy culture represents a healthy personality, then what is your healthy personality? Live that out authentically. You won't need to hype anything up, or try to sell it; it will come naturally if you live it out intentionally.

It takes continual effort. **Your culture is never set.** As your church grows and new people become part of your church, the culture will drift. In very large churches, the same thing happens in the staff. When the culture drifts it's not the people's fault and it's not the staff's fault. It's the responsibility of the senior pastor, key staff and board.

At [12Stone® Church](#) where I serve as executive pastor, we have grown rapidly and

experienced a slight culture drift amongst the staff. This is not the staff's fault. It's my responsibility. If I've not communicated something or modeled something, or corrected something, how can the staff be responsible? The good news is that our team is so positive, hard-working and passionate for the vision that slight culture corrections are not a big deal. If you wait, or miss it altogether, that's quite another story.

[Dr. Sam Chand](#) has written an excellent book titled [CRACKING YOUR CHURCH'S CULTURE CODE: Seven Keys to Unleashing Vision & Inspiration](#). It's a great book, and I highly recommend it. Sam doesn't tell you what your culture should be, but helps guide you to experiencing the culture you want. He offers these helpful questions:

- Who actually controls what gets done and what doesn't?
- Does everyone understand the why behind the what?
- How is leadership discovered, developed and deployed?
- How are changes made?
- Is failure allowed?
- Are risks taken?
- Are the leaders courageous?
- Does the team think systematically?
- Who are your heroes?
- How much does the average staff member feel he or she has input into the direction and strategy of the church?
- Is there a spirit of hospitality and servant leadership?
- Who is rewarded, and for what accomplishments?
- What are the sacred cows?

The senior pastor is a major driving force in setting the culture. It's not an autocratic thing; it's a normal part of life and leadership. In fact, I believe this is one reason why churches that experience frequent senior pastor turnover struggle more with culture issues than churches that have a more tenured pastor. A tenured senior pastor is certainly not a guarantee to a healthy and thriving culture, but it's one significant factor.

In essence, there are **three driving factors that create culture**.

1. What you do.

No one church can do everything. Therefore **what you do is an important expression of who you are**. The prayerful selection of what ministries you do and don't do is a major factor in setting the culture of your church. What you do (and don't do) from global missions to local compassion and justice endeavors, to how you embrace first time guests to developing leaders all plays a significant role in shaping your culture. It's true that culture is greatly impacted by things of style and preference like if your church is more casual or formal, and your style of worship, but what you actually do has a far greater impact.

2. How you do it.

Churches do ministry differently. That's a given. We learn from each other, and some things are replicated, but there is an element of interpretation and factors such as leadership style, theology, priorities, finances, church history, size of church etc. that naturally cause the leaders to practice ministry a little differently from church to church. This has a huge impact on your culture.

3. What you care about.

Let me be candid, as a leader you can't care about everything! None of us like to admit that but it's true. We don't like the way that sounds because it suggests that there are some things we actually don't care about. That's not the heart of what I'm saying. The point is to be honest about the practical realities of leadership – and that connects back to point number one.

Here are a few questions that will help you land this point.

- What has God put on your heart?
- What are the burdens for people you carry?
- What keeps you awake at night because you feel something must be done?
- What ministries are thriving and you are passionate about their future success?
- What ministries are struggling that for you are non-negotiable and must improve?

If you follow this "5 Step" process, your culture is likely to flourish.

1. Know your culture.
2. Model your culture.
3. Communicate your culture.
4. Correct drift in your culture.
5. Celebrate your culture.

At [12Stone](#) our culture is felt, seen and quickly experienced. It is made up of three DNA strands and they are Spiritual Intensity, Creative Ideation, and Leadership Development. That's not our purpose or mission, it's our culture. That truly is who we are, and we invest much to keep that culture healthy and flourishing so that we can lift up the name of Jesus and see lives changed!

"This article is used by permission from Dr. Dan Reiland's free monthly e-newsletter, "The Pastor's Coach," available at www.INJOY.com."