
Three Places to Uncover Values in Your Culture

While serving alongside the Auxano team, I learned the important distinction between vision, mission, strategy, and values. Well-intentioned leaders can confuse those and mix and match them in a way that actually harms clarity.

- Mission is the *what*. Your mission is what your organization or ministry is on the planet to do.
- Strategy is the *how*. Your strategy is *how* you accomplish the mission.
- Vision is what you are pursuing *now* – the major goals in front of your team that are in alignment with your mission.
- And your values *impact everything* you do because your values form the culture of your ministry organization.

Because it is the shared values and beliefs that form the culture, it is critically important for leaders to understand the values beneath the surface. Wise leaders don't declare values; they uncover the values that are already there. In your organization, you can learn the values that are beneath the surface by looking in a few places. Doing so will help you understand the culture, and understanding the culture is more important than understanding the strategy because strategy is much more flexible than culture. So where do you look? To uncover the values in your culture, look in these three places:

1. The Heroes and Stories

The leaders in the culture that are spoken of as the epitome of the ministry or organization are good examples of the values on display. Listen to the stories that describe the heroes in the culture and you can learn what is valued. As I interviewed and onboarded into my new role at Mariners Church, I heard numerous stories of God's people at Mariners serving the poor and marginalized in our community and around the world. The stories are beautiful and amazing. By listening, you can learn a lot about what is valued.

2. The Celebrations

Plato famously declared, "What is celebrated in a country is cultivated." The same is true in any ministry or organization. Whatever has been celebrated has formed the culture. If a ministry celebrates tangible impact in a local community, you know local engagement is in the culture. If a ministry celebrates volunteers who are equipped for ministry, you know that leadership development is in the culture. If you pay attention to what is celebrated you will learn what is valued. If you want to add a value to a culture, you will need to find ways to celebrate and cultivate that value. You won't be able to merely speak a value into existence. You may be the leader, but you are not God.

3. The Language

As the new senior pastor of Mariners, I knew one of my first tasks was to understand the culture

beneath the surface at Mariners. Thankfully there was language and history for me to study.

I have been fortunate and blessed to follow an exceptional leader in Kenton Beshore. He has, infused the church with values that have created the culture. When he became the senior pastor 35 years ago, he brought the church a list of five values to the church:

- We teach God's Word.
- Be God's loving family.
- Every believer is a minister with a ministry.
- Be innovative in our ministry and relevant in our community.
- Be contagious in sharing Jesus Christ

Those values have been crystalized over time. I am leading our team through those values again. We are spending one staff meeting a month, with our whole team, walking through the importance and the implications of each value. It is helping me learn the culture, and I hope and pray it is helping us all renew our commitment to and unify around values that have formed the church we are honored to serve.

I love strategy. I have a tendency to go there first. Strategy is important, but culture is more so. Peter Drucker wisely quipped that "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." My friend Will Mancini has provided helpful tools, [such as this one](#), to help leaders articulate values through demonstration of those values.

If you are a ministry leader who would like some strategic outside eyes to help you and your team uncover your unique identity, not only your values but also your mission and your strategy, I highly recommend Auxano. I have learned a great deal from the team and believe wholeheartedly they would serve you and your team well. [To reach out to the team, click here.](#)

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