CULTURE GUIDE

CultureWise®

What is **culture**?

You have pizza every Friday, free snacks in the lunchroom, you can bring your dogs to work, and everyone seems pretty happy. We'll bet that your people probably say you have a good culture, but if you ask five team members what that means, you'll probably hear five different answers. And is a "good" culture the same as a "high-performing" one?

When we ask leaders to define culture, we often hear statements like these:

> *"It's the way things get done around here."*
> *"It's our system of beliefs and principles."*
> *"It's the personality of our company."*
> *"It's our environment."*

While these are all parts of what we mean by culture, they can sound awfully "squishy." It's hard to build a system around the "personality of your company."

Culture = Behavior

Instead, we like to think of culture as the set of behaviors that define how your people operate every day – with your customers, with each other, and even with vendors and suppliers. Viewing culture through a behavioral lens brings more clarity to your expectations and allows you to teach, coach, and guide people more effectively.

Values vs. Behaviors

Now you may be thinking, "*We already have a set of core values. Isn't that enough?*" Maybe. But values are usually abstract and can be interpreted many ways. Behaviors, however, are more concrete because they're action-oriented. Consider the following example. Which do you think would be easier to teach?

VALUE:	SERVICE
BEHAVIOR:	**BE A FANATIC ABOUT RESPONSE TIME.** Respond to questions and concerns quickly, whether it's in person, on the phone, or by e-mail. This includes simply acknowledging that we got the question and we're "on it," as well as keeping those involved continuously updated on the status of outstanding issues.

As you'll see, defining culture in terms of a set of behaviors like this allows you to "operationalize" your culture far more easily.

Why Should You Prioritize Culture?

Sure, culture is important, but you're working on so many projects and initiatives that you just don't have the bandwidth to address it right now. Sound familiar? While it may seem logical to focus on the tangible parts of your company first, culture significantly affects all aspects of team member performance. So strengthening your culture will accelerate your ability to execute every initiative on your plate!

Here are 6 other reasons great companies choose to prioritize working on their culture. See how many of these apply to you:

1 | To win more business in a "look-alike" world

Creating a sustainable competitive advantage is an ongoing challenge. It's relatively easy for competitors to copy your products and services. But copying the way your people operate is very hard to do. A high-performing culture can make you stand out in a crowded market.

2 | To attract and retain the best talent

You'll only go as far as your people will take you. Surveys confirm that a company's culture is one of the biggest reasons job candidates choose to take one opportunity over another and current employees choose to stay rather than leave.

3 | To increase collaboration and productivity

Team members work together more effectively and perform at higher levels when their company's culture is guided by a clearly defined set of behaviors. Communication improves because everyone's on the same page, and the potential for conflict is minimized, too!

4 | To preserve your culture in times of rapid growth

Culture was easy to maintain when your company was smaller—your staff just followed your example. But when you add people and locations, culture becomes more complex. A systematic method to continuously reinforce culture is crucial for a growing business.

5 | To maintain your cultural legacy through a leadership transition

Going from the "Old Guard" to the "New Guard?" As new leadership steps to the front, you'll need a plan and a system to preserve the cultural tenets that were the foundation of your company's success.

6 | To sustain your culture when most workers are remote

Spurred on by the pandemic, remote work is here to stay. Many businesses are permanently shifting to a remote or hybrid work model. A strong company culture will ensure that your team thrives even when people are rarely together.

What is our core philosophy?

We've been teaching culture for years, and our founder and CEO, David Friedman, has written two books on the topic (*Fundamentally Different* and *Culture by Design*). In those books, he introduced a set of steps, known as the 8-step framework, that are necessary to create and embed a high-performing culture.

And while all of the steps are important and have their place, the central organizing philosophy of everything we teach can be reduced to the following statement:

> *If you can define, in crystal clear terms, the behaviors that drive success in your organization, and you create a structured, systematic way to teach those behaviors over and over again, your people will eventually internalize those behaviors.*

Let's examine this a little more closely. It's a simple idea, but it's very powerful.

Behaviors

The first part of this philosophy stresses the importance of defining culture with more clarity, and specifically by describing behaviors. Earlier in this guide we noted the difference between values and behaviors, with values being more abstract and behaviors being more action-oriented. You don't necessarily have to get rid of the core values you may have previously created, but you'll find that defining behaviors will add the clarity necessary to drive your culture even more effectively. At CultureWise we call these behaviors "**Fundamentals**" because they're so fundamental to success.

The second part of the philosophy introduces the notion of a structured, systematic way to teach the behaviors with enough consistency to create real impact. We do this by practicing what we call "rituals."

Rituals

A ritual is a behavior that we do over and over again so that it becomes almost automatic, like a habit or a routine. Brushing our teeth in the morning, saying a prayer before a meal, singing the national anthem before a ballgame, and conducting a daily huddle at the start of each shift, are all examples of rituals.

Why is this important? Well, have you ever started a diet or exercise program that didn't last more than a few weeks? Or have you ever rolled out an initiative in your company that fell by the wayside when you got busy and soon it became yet another "flavor of the month"? We've all faced those struggles.

When something becomes a ritual, however, it's no longer difficult to do. We don't struggle to remember to brush our teeth in the morning. It's just a habit. So here's how we use this concept:

Once you determine your Fundamentals (behaviors), and introduce them to your team, you begin to focus on one Fundamental each week through a series of rituals. For example, you might make the first agenda item of every meeting be a brief discussion of the Fundamental of the Week. This gives you lots of chances to explore the Fundamental all week long. The following week, you apply that same ritual to the next Fundamental, and you continue to cycle through them week after week. It's not hard to remember to do because it's become a ritual.

Practice. Practice. Practice.

Here's an easy way to think of this concept. Have you ever wanted to learn to be really good at something – playing the piano, speaking a new language, learning to play golf, or anything else? What does it take? Loads of practice and repetition! But who likes to practice? Almost no one. See the problem?

However, when your practice becomes a ritual, or a habit, it's no longer difficult to do. Rituals are the foundation that allows the repetition to keep going, and the repetition is what's necessary to internalize the learning.

Now think of this concept in the context of your company's culture. If you want your team members to practice and internalize the behaviors that most drive success, you'll need to teach those behaviors over and over again. The only way you'll be able to do that with enough repetition, without getting bored, distracted, and moving on to some other initiative, is when you have rituals in place!

What about your current **Vision**, **Mission** and **Values**?

Let's address one important question: What do you do with your existing vision, mission, and values? Those core values may be on your walls, in your performance reviews, and even in your hiring process. If this describes your situation, you may be wondering how a behavior-based system like CultureWise® integrates with that legacy work. After all, the last thing you want to do is abandon all your previous messaging around culture.

The good news is that you don't have to abandon any of that work (unless you want to)! The easiest solution is to simply introduce the behaviors as the way in which your team lives out your core values every day. This allows you to position your behaviors as a deepening or an extension of that previous work. By defining specific behaviors, you're bringing more clarity to the values.

While some companies choose to align or "map" each behavior to a specific core value, it's not necessary. In fact, doing so can sometimes be messy and frustrating because certain practical behaviors, as valuable as they are, may not tie into any of the values. In our experience, it's usually more effective to think of and describe the entire set of behaviors as the way you demonstrate the entire set of core values.