

Leading Positive Workplace Cultures

How to create a no whinge, solution focused workplace

by Richard Dore

“Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.”

Theodore Roosevelt

In 1999, Proteus launched our first ‘Creating A Positive Culture In The Workplace’ workshop with great success and the popularity of this workshop has increased over the years amongst leaders.

Having a great workplace is still about the people, culture, and leaders building positive relationships where they engage and reignite their people’s purpose and passion. What has changed since the 1990’s is that people will not tolerate a dysfunctional workplace or toxic managers or colleagues for too long anymore - they vote with their feet – especially talented staff.

All workplaces need to continually work on their culture to ensure people are engaged, are focused and have clarity on what success is and a clear picture of what their ideal culture looks like. It is like creating great relationships; you need to know what that looks like and start working on making them magic.

We know some workplaces and departments are so toxic, that the only sane option is to leave! But the vast majority of leaders that participate in our programs and workshops are very keen for success and are more than happy to work hard and commit themselves to leading a great workplace.

However, this can appear to be rare and creating one is elusive and near impossible for some managers. People are often frustrated by their culture, with some describing their workplace as being dominated by cynical and negative personalities, with underhanded and manipulative infighting stifling growth, innovation and bottom line results.

The following practical ideas and principles will assist you in leading and creating great workplace cultures and unlocking roadblocks.

Visualisation & Clarity

Firstly you must visualise the culture you want and be clear on what your ideal culture looks like, then model the desired behaviours accordingly. Workplace cultures are often described as ‘the way we do things around here’, therefore, leading and creating an ideal workplace culture involves people being both conscious of their behaviours and being prepared to change to ensure that their current actions are aligned with the values of the organisation. So an ideal workplace can be achieved by ensuring that ‘behaviours match rhetoric’, whereby leaders and staff are consistently modelling the right behaviours.

Reflect The Culture That You Want

Mahatma Gandhi said: *“we must become the change we want to see”*, and that’s how it is with leadership. At Proteus we have used Gandhi’s quote and created our own mantra, *“reflect the culture that you want”*. If you want a great culture it starts with you ... ‘culture is caught not taught’! Modelling exceptional behaviour sets a standard and expectation for people to live up to. Not modelling positive behaviour will at best frustrate people, or at worst be seen as hypocrisy and only increase cynicism.

Dealing With Miserable People

The best way to deal with miserable people is to focus your energy on the right people i.e. positive people. Professional and optimistic people will not only inspire you, but also celebrate your successes and encourage you to do more. Don’t surround yourself with negative and miserable people, as they will only bring you down to their level.

Sure, always support and empathise with a person who is having a bad day, but be wary of persistently pessimistic people who are energy vampires. The best way to flip the attention that negative people often demand of you, is call them on their behaviour and don’t indulge them. Alternatively, get them off the bus and say farewell to them ...so set your miserable people free!

Praise And Recognition

Recognition is vital for a great culture, so make sure you spend the majority of your time giving people praise, recognition and rewarding them accordingly. Praise their results and recognise their progress. People love simply being acknowledged and praised for their contribution, so catch people doing the right thing. We have a **GST formula** at Proteus for praise, which is that recognition needs to be:

Genuine - praise needs to be authentic, sincere and genuine, otherwise people will think you are disingenuous or at worst patronising them!

Specific - be clear and specific with your praise, rather than vague and generic.

Timely - don’t wait for staff reviews to praise people - do it now - look for people doing a great job (it’s all around you) and thank them accordingly.

Funny thing is, when you give people genuine, specific and timely praise, it also gives you a lift and it becomes contagious.

Stop Whinging And Be Solution Focused

Make a decision today that you are no longer going to whinge and you will no longer allow other people to do it to you! We have another saying at Proteus, which is *“if you are not prepared to be*

a part of the solution, then you forfeit your right to complain”.

This is one of the best strategies for a great culture, because you and your people start offering ideas, plans and solutions each time a problem comes up. As opposed to the toxic dump delivered by negative individuals or an environment where people want you as the leader to fix everything, which will only create a culture of dependency - something you must avoid!

Fight Clean

As leaders we need to accept that conflict is all around us, however conflict doesn't need to be toxic, ugly or avoided at all costs. In fact we should embrace the fact that people working together will have strong personalities, different opinions and competing interests, then harness this into a passionate and professional workplace.

The key to fighting clean is to create workplace team rules or norms whereby if you have a problem you go direct to the person, without getting everyone else involved. This works best when you create a culture of 'robust debate' and 'healthy dissent'.

I believe there is nothing more exciting

and invigorating than having an environment where robust discussions occur, which allows for innovation and creativity to rise to the top. However ensure that there are no 'bloody revolutions' and that no one becomes precious if they don't get their own way. Remember, as Stephen Covey, of 7 Habits fame, recommends on ways to manifest integrity - "be loyal to those who are not present".

Celebrate

Celebrate your successes and your people. Rather than being frustrated by the diversity of your staff, celebrate and utilise their differences and support and encourage their uniqueness. I read somewhere that successful teams have a party and unsuccessful teams have more meetings! So always remember to celebrate.

Performance, Professionalism and Passion

Finally, use the three 'Ps' (Performance, Professionalism and Passion) for creating a great culture.

- 1. Performance:** when you come to work, work! Focus on the important things, with results being your constant goal - remember it is called work for a reason!

- 2. Professionalism:** whilst at work, be professional which includes appropriate behaviour to your organisation and industry. Ensure your team is crystal clear on professional behaviour expectations.

- 3. Passion:** be passionate about your work and make the workplace a fun place to be. Even when you don't feel like it - 'fake it till you make it'. Not in a superficial or disingenuous way, but trying on a new 'costume' for that situation (it feels fake at first) and then once you see positive results and success - you have made it.

The above principles are quite simple, however not always easy to implement, because these ideas may require you to change your behaviour. So take a moment to stop, reflect and respond more strategically to achieve your desired results.

Truly great leaders and companies have always worked hard for success, however they know what to focus on for their achievements. So work hard on the right areas and enjoy the benefits of having a great culture. It's a much better world to live in.

“It was actually quite easy. David was always there, all I had to do was remove everything that wasn't the David.”

Michelangelo after 4 years to create the Statue of David

