



Dear Friend,

The Election

It's over...finally!

Is it just me, or did this last election cycle seem never-ending? Commercials, news leads, news feeds, debates, canvassers, bumper stickers. For almost 2 years, we've been bombarded by electioneering at the federal, state, and local levels.

And, I must say, not all that went on in order to win our votes was tasteful. All too often in this go-round, the effort to *win* undermined an effort to draw respectful differences between visions, positions, and approaches so that people could make informed decisions.

I raise the election, and how it was run, because I believe that the experience demonstrates a fact that many of our leaders, or want-to-be leaders, miss about *leadership*. The *leader* has a central responsibility in setting the tone -- for the country, the state, the county, the city, or the school board.

And, we too, as *leaders*, have a central responsibility in setting the tone -- for our companies, our branch offices, our departments, and our teams. The job of creating, cultivating, and sometimes even correcting culture falls squarely in our laps. And, although I'm a big proponent of delegating (see e.g., [The Delicate Dance of Delegating](#)), the job of shaping culture can be shared but never surrendered.

So, join me for this month's edition of **EA Insights** as we examine organizational culture. What's the role of the leader in affecting the environment? I'm glad *you* asked. But, I wish many of the candidates had asked as well. Had they, we would have had a far different election experience, and we would be light years ahead in moving forward...together...to the *real* business at hand.

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
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A True Test of Leadership: Cultivating Culture

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Think about the place where you work.

First picture the top brass -- the folks in the C-Suite, owners, senior staff, whomever. If this group was asked to describe your business "culture", what would be the response?

Now, picture the rest of the staff -- that is, everyone minus the people in Group 1. Ask them to describe your "culture", and what

do you get?

I will tell you that I'm someone who gets to do just this kind of poking around within organizations. And, I'll also tell you that often the responses of the two groups don't match much, if at all. Honestly,

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"Quotes"

*"My internship showed me a glimpse into the corporate culture[.] *** Needless to say, I liked what I saw."*

~Sara Anderson

"[H]e has created a beautiful corporate culture, which rewards risk taking, which supports rather than punishes those who have a bad year or two, which allows ideas to percolate upward."

~Michael Barach

"Be in tune with the corporate culture."

~Richard Bayer

"As a founding member of our organization, [his] focus on our corporate culture has assisted [us] in becoming a leader in our industry.... His new role in this important aspect of our organization will set the stage for continued success."

~Clive Beddoe

"You got the interview because the company believes you have the necessary skills to handle the job. The interviewers are looking for 'fit.' Before making a job offer, they need to know that you mesh with the corporate culture."

~Brenda Greene

"Our growth is solid in number of new franchisees and new offices. We are establishing a visible brand name that's quickly becoming known for excellent

sometimes it's downright Twilight Zone-ish. It leaves you wondering whether these folks really do work in the same place.

Okay, snarky commentary aside, what I see is quite common. Many people, and particularly leaders, tend to focus on the bottom line -- the outcomes. Now, you get no push-back from me here; attention to outcomes is a primary leadership function. What many fail to recognize, though, is that the organization's culture affects the bottom line; culture impacts outcomes. Thus, if you want to achieve results consistently, then consideration of culture is a must. And, the people most responsible for shaping culture are an organization's leaders -- the individuals who are accountable ultimately for goal attainment.

Executive Advantage leadership clients probably can recite with me much of what is outlined below (*which is good!*). But, for everyone else, let me share that there are three primary parts to a leader's job as it relates to establishing an environment that's conducive to getting work done...well...and in the regular course of business (not just occasionally).

Understanding Culture

There actually are two aspects to the understanding culture part of the leader's role.

First, it is important to grasp what the notion of *culture* is generally. An organization's *culture* is that set of values, attitudes, practices, and goals that its people share. It represents the way those in your organization think, how they dress, what they believe, how they do things that, when taken together, affects how they function within the setting. Understand also that much of an organization's culture is influenced by its leaders -- the people, who intentionally or unintentionally, set the tone for themselves and for those around them.

The second part of understanding *culture* is deciphering the current culture of an organization, and sometimes even of its subunits. To help Executive Advantage clients get a handle on internal culture, we developed an assessment tool covering 10 topic areas to provide an unbiased examination. Whether using the EA tool or some other, though, the goal is for leaders to be able to step back and get a dispassionate reading on the organization's present cultural state.

Defining Desired Culture and Developing Execution Strategy

Once you know what you have, you've got to figure out if that's what you want. Is the current culture, in whole or in part, effective? Is it conducive to accomplishing the organization's strategic goals? Will it affect your ability to attract and retain the workforce that's needed to meet the demands of today and the future? Does it make you want to come to work each day? It is the leaders' duty to take time in order to give reasoned thought to the type of environment that will best position the organization to advance its direction.

However, don't stop there. If there's a gap between the current and the desired states, the development of strategies to bridge that gap is needed. Note that bridging the gap doesn't implicate everyone in the organization, *except* its leaders; strategies for bridging the gap must start with each leader and flow outward from there. Also, just as there's been specificity in diagnosing and defining, be precise also in determining the steps involved in creating the desired culture change. Leaving strategy development or an execution approach to chance, or merely outlining vague goals, will result in a wasted effort.

Monitoring and Adjusting for Culture

Culture is not created overnight, and culture change requires time as well. While there may be low-hanging fruit that will yield some quick wins, there are no short cuts.

Leaders must be prepared to prioritize culture nurturing routinely as well as culture change, when necessary. That involves the identification of key organizational indicators and pulse-taking approaches that can be utilized at designated intervals to permit the ongoing observation of the culture. It involves holding people within the organization accountable - leaders and staff alike -- for adhering to the principles outlined in the desired culture picture. It also involves making adjustments in attitudes, operations, or personnel when gaps remain, reappear, or present themselves in new areas.

Only by moving the commitment regarding culture from paper and into daily practice will people within the organization grasp its importance and join the effort to safeguard it.

Is your current organizational culture helping or hurting what you're trying to accomplish? Have your efforts at a turnaround been successful? If assistance with diagnosing the current, defining the future, and/or dealing with strategy and implementation sounds good to you, reach out to us at **Executive Advantage**. It would be our pleasure to help you create or cultivate a culture that supports your success. [Contact us today](#).



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About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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customer service and a vibrant corporate culture."

~John Hewitt

"They need to change their corporate culture to fit into the local market."

~Wataru Kasatani

"We've had this program since the mid-1970s and it's really become a part of the corporate culture[.]"

~Tracy Koon

*"His leadership models important traits that have brought [the company] to its present position of strength, the courage to make the right decisions, even when they are difficult, unwavering focus on innovation, and emphasis on a healthy corporate culture. *** [His] leadership provides an example for other executives -- whatever the industry -- to emulate for their great benefit."*

~Lisa Walker

"[My] belief is what kept me from falling into a corporate culture that outwardly encouraged individuals to display respect and integrity, while encouraging them to compromise whenever it was expedient, rationalizing the compromise because 'everyone else does it.'"

~Sherron Watkins

"We have this theory. It's part of the corporate culture. You try, you tweak it, tweak it again. Whatever you try, you check it out, take new action, go through the cycle. You keep tweaking. That's one of the hallmarks of our success."

~Jim Wiseman