

# It's Time To Identify And Reset Your Company's Culture

**F** [forbes.com/sites/alisacohn/2022/05/18/its-time-to-identify-and-reset-your-companys-culture](https://forbes.com/sites/alisacohn/2022/05/18/its-time-to-identify-and-reset-your-companys-culture)

May 18, 2022

## Leadership Strategy

Alisa Cohn

Contributor ⓘ

I write about leadership, start ups, and interesting related topics.

One of my clients, Shawn, is about to celebrate the tenth anniversary of his enterprise. He started his social impact investing company with a mission to transform the way investors think about sustainability and we were reflecting—marveling really—about what the team has accomplished.

As we discussed his plans for a 10-year celebration, he told me that he wanted to think about culture. He and his leadership team had never fully defined their culture, and it had resulted in some hiring mistakes and some misalignment within the company. He realized codifying the culture would be important to lead the company to its future.

When you're building your company, department, or even your small group inside of a larger organization, you may think you have plenty of time to define culture. However, as an executive coach who works with startup founders and C-suite executives, I've seen firsthand how putting off defining your culture until some time in the future causes issues. Your culture starts emerging and getting set around you, so by the time you address it you're not really creating your culture, you're excavating it. If you like what you see, that's great. But, more often, you'll see that there are some elements you need to adjust.

## PROMOTED

So wherever you are in the lifecycle of your company or your department, it's a good moment to reflect on what your culture is now and how you'd like to steer it going forward. Here are three steps to do that.

### **Who has the right stuff?**

First, think about your best employees. Who are the employees that perform the best, who you can always count on, and who you know you'd fight for if they left? Do they also make others better? Articulate the common traits they share.

### By

I asked Shawn to name his top five employees, which he easily did. When I asked him their common traits, he said "spark." I asked him what he meant, and he said "they bring creativity to their work and they energize other people." Beautiful. Spark could be a top cultural value.

We discussed the additional traits his top employees shared, and we created a list of what they were, how they were expressed, and why they were important. This is a great start when you want to define your culture.

[Read More Leaders Are Living In Well-Being LaLa Land](#)

### **Ask the experts**

Don't just rely on your own point of view. Your employees are keen observers of the life inside of your company and they have a lot of knowledge to add. In addition to getting their insights, you'll need to bring them along if you're going to formalize the culture, and when you seek their input you'll also get their buy-in.

So it's a good investment of time to investigate your culture to figure out how your people view it. Survey them. You might want to start with your leadership team, and then gather groups of employees. Prompt them with questions like these:

- Who are the people here that you think are the most successful?
- What qualities make them successful?
- What do you like most about this company?
- What have been your peak experiences here?
- What have you experienced in past companies that you're relieved you don't have to deal with here?
- What kind of people would not be a good fit here, and why?
- What three words would you use to describe our company?

Remember that the purpose of these discussions is to gather data. Once you sift through all the words and the insights from the discussions, you'll have an understanding of the air your company is breathing—what the culture is now.

### **Think about the future**

After you've discovered what the culture is today, it's a good moment to think about how your organization will win in the future. What got you here won't get you there, and just as people have to adapt, so do companies. And as your company grows, you have to expand your culture to allow new people to come in, take root and add value.

In Shawn's case, we agreed that he wanted to double down on the cultural value "spark." Bringing in more energizing people would add tremendous value. At the same time, one of the other values he identified was "high pain tolerance." The employees who built this business had the ability to stick with something long past the time others would quit. Since

they were blazing new trails, everything they did was bespoke to each customer they had. That was key to standing up the original products, but he'd need to bring in people who could create repeatable processes to operate at scale. He realized that he needed to find people who were much more systematic in their approach, so we added "methodical" to tilt the culture more towards scale.

Now, when Shawn discusses culture in his small group meetings and in the all-hands, he can start talking about the need to be more methodical and bring methodical leaders in. And then everyone can embrace this new profile of employees.

It may be a good moment for you to reflect on your culture. Use these ideas to help you identify the culture you have now and the culture you'll need to bring you into the future.

Alisa Cohn

I am an executive coach who works with startup CEOs, co-founders and executive teams. Download my 5 Scripts for Delicate

...