

Chapter 8

Corporate Culture – Is this the right place for you?

New Recruits to Disney Theme Parks attend Disney University where they are introduced to a new language and become indoctrinated in the Disney way of doing things: Employees are “cast members.” Customers are “guests.” A work shift is “a performance.” Employees learn Disney slogans such as “Even if it’s a rough day, we appear happy.” “You’ve got to have an honest smile that comes from within.” Facial hair on men, heavy make-up on women and cursing of any kind are not allowed.

From Built To Last by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras

Up to this point, we’ve focused on the skill of unhooking from confining roles, toxic relationships, boundary busters, and emotionally charged situations at work. We’ve argued that if you can change your reaction to external conditions, you can change (and improve) the quality of your daily experience in the workplace. But what happens when you’ve unhooked in every way imaginable and you still feel unhappy at work? What options are available to you then?

In certain cases, you may master the art of unhooking and still suffer from recurring feelings of frustration, anger, helplessness, anxiety, or despair on the job. In those situations, the emotional discomfort you experience may have less to do with the individual people and circumstances, and more to do with the company itself. Sometimes your personality, your ethics, and your way of doing business may clash with your employer’s culture.

Every company has a culture. Some cultures are more clearly defined than others. *Corporate culture* is the term used to describe the predominant attitudes, behaviors, values and ethics practiced within an organization. Through our work with hundreds of companies and thousands of individuals, we’ve seen one very consistent theme: *long-term job satisfaction is directly influenced by how well your personal attitudes, behaviors, values, and ethics match those of*

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your employer's. In other words, if you don't like to smile, you won't like working at Disneyland.

The ability to uncover a company's culture is critical because, once exposed, you can understand how it is affecting you. For example, if you discover that you're working in a highly political environment where posturing and self-promotion are rewarded, and yet you thrive in settings where direct communication and mutual support are the rule, you'll finally comprehend why you feel so uneasy on the job. Or, if you realize that your employer expects you to be available 24/7 for company business, and you're determined to spend quality time with your kids, you'll know why you feel intensely conflicted every time a work obligation interferes with family time.

Unfortunately, most cultures aren't as easily discernible as Disney's. Frequently, employees interpret a bad cultural fit, as "there must be something wrong with *me*." Take Robert, a low-key guy in a high-stakes environment. He works for a brokerage firm where quick decision-making, competition between co-workers, and risk-taking is rewarded. Robert is extremely talented at analyzing long-range market trends, but he doesn't move fast enough on the trading floor to convert his analyses into profits. "Next to the other traders, I'm a snail," he confides. "I'm not aggressive enough to make a real killing."

Then there's Gwen, the director of marketing for an established national symphony. She spends most of her time responding to interoffice e-mail and attending lengthy meetings. A natural pioneer, Gwen gets tired of "decision-making by committee." Lately, she finds herself snapping at co-workers. "I love the symphony, but I hate the bureaucracy. Any marketing initiative I introduce takes months to become a watered-down version of the original idea." The symphony's interdepartmental politics zap Gwen's energy. "I've lost any of the excitement I once had for my job."

Alicia is a veteran TV news producer. Initially, she couldn't wait to produce stories for top network news shows. Her segments on social issues won

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numerous journalism and television awards. Now, 15 years later, Alicia is singing a different tune: “ I’m tired of running around. I’ve had it with working under extreme time deadlines and I’m sick of dealing with volatile television personalities.” While she complains about the conditions of her work environment, Alicia secretly fears that her dissatisfaction might really mean she’s lost her creative edge.

Each of these individuals feels unhappy and frustrated at work. Each person is experiencing prolonged discomfort on the job. While you might argue that Robert needs to learn how to trade faster, Gwen should buck up and deal with the bureaucracy, and Alicia ought to adjust her attitude, we propose that the real issue in each case is of a cultural nature. None of these people currently inhabits a work environment that is a “good fit.” In Alicia’s case, she’s outgrown the very setting she used to love.

Here, we offer you the opportunity to investigate your employer’s culture and determine how well it suits you. By taking our Corporate Culture Assessment, you can clarify your own attitudes, behaviors, values, and ethics and compare them to those of your workplace.

The Corporate Culture Assessment

The C.C. assessment begins with a Personal Inventory. You’ll be reading and responding to sixteen questions that cover a broad range of workplace issues. Carefully consider your answer to each question. The personal inventory will give you a clearer picture of the best work environment for you.

Personal Inventory

1) At this time in your career, what kind of general work environment do you want?

(Circle one)

- A) Friendly, collegial – team approach, success is shared
- B) Competitive, win/lose – concrete rewards for high performance
- C) Conformist – steady rewards if you play by the rules

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- D) Political – Ally self with those in power and navigate up
- E) Creative, individualistic – make your mark with original ideas
- F) Other _____

2) What kind of dress code do you most prefer?

(Circle one)

- A) Classic corporate
- B) Relaxed professional
- C) Fashion forward
- D) Alternative – originality counts
- E) Casual
- F) Uniform required

Other _____

3) Which of the following approaches to work fits you best?

(Circle one)

- A) Hard drive – Overachieving is the norm; work hard to move ahead. Long hours are part of the game. Building your career is the highest priority.
- B) Low gear – Things move slowly but predictably. It's a day job.
- C) Change the world – Commit time and energy to a noble cause. Make a difference in other people's lives.
- D) Middle of the Road – Work is engaging but not consuming. There is a ladder to climb but you also have time for your personal life.
- E) Mom & Pop – Perform a variety of tasks in a small, cozy environment. Be part of the company family.
- F) Status – Image counts. Work for established name in an attractive environment. Being associated with a reputable company is key.

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4) Rate all of the following qualities in their order of importance to you at work:

(1 = extremely important, 5 = not important at all)

Creativity	_____
Efficiency	_____
Fairness	_____
Status	_____
Honesty	_____
Innovation	_____
Kindness	_____
Power	_____
Prestige	_____
Profitability	_____
Respect	_____
Responsibility	_____
Tradition	_____

5) Rate all of the following rewards in order of importance to you:

(1 = Extremely important, 5 = not important at all)

_____ Financial rewards

_____ Public recognition – acknowledgement for achievement

_____ Promotion – new title, more responsibility

_____ Benefits – education, travel, vacation time, pension plans, health coverage

_____ Flexible hours – time for self and family

_____ Social value – making a contribution to society

_____ Creative license – freedom to express ideas

6) Which management style are you most comfortable with?

(Circle One)

- A) Structured – management sets the goals and monitors performance
- B) Loose – you can do what you want but you have to show results
- C) Hands on – everything you do is watched and carefully monitored daily

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- D) Team approach – work as a team and get rewarded as a team
- E) Free for all – no guidelines or accountability, management distracted
- F) Other _____

7) You believe an individual should be promoted for?

(Circle the ones you agree with)

- A) Achievement - exceeding expectations
- B) Innovation – generating fresh ideas
- C) Masterful political maneuvering
- D) Having the right connections
- E) Sacrifice and hard work
- F) Good looks
- G) Other _____

8) What communication style do you prefer in a company?

- A) Direct communication – I like to be kept informed about everything through meetings, e-mails and voicemail
- B) Chain of command – communication is filtered and delivered to those who need to know
- C) Informal – news travels through word-of-mouth
- D) I'm only interested in the information that pertains to me
- E) Don't ask, don't tell – communication is overrated.
- F) Other _____

9) Which decision making style works best for you?

(Circle one)

- A) Company encourages employees to make decisions at all levels
- B) Decisions are made by a committee made up of representatives from every department
- C) Decisions are made by consensus everyone affected must agree
- D) Authorities make decisions and pass their decisions down to others
- E) Other _____

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10) When a crisis occurs which approach are you most comfortable with?

(Circle one)

- A) Work together as a team to solve the crisis
- B) Find out who is responsible and have his or her team clean it up
- C) Find out who is responsible and make the individual clean it up
- D) Cover up the crisis and deal with it behind closed doors
- E) Ignore the problem. Things tend to work themselves out
- F) Other _____

11) When an employee is caught breaking a company rule what should be done?

(Circle one)

- A) Immediate dismissal
- B) Warning, followed by close monitoring
- C) Informal reprimand by direct supervisor
- D) Isolate and humiliate the person
- E) No consequences
- F) Other _____

12) How do you expect to feel at work?

(Circle one)

- A) Happy and content
- B) Frustrated but gratified because I'm making a difference
- C) Grateful to have a job – never mind if it's a little boring
- D) Skeptical – work is not about feeling good; it's about getting paid
- E) Angry and resentful – Work is a pain in my _____
- F) Successful and encouraged
- G) Other _____

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13) In your opinion what kind of person should get ahead?

(Check as many of the qualities that it takes to get ahead in your opinion)

- A) Hard worker
- B) Innovator
- C) Politician
- D) Plays by the rules
- E) Gets along with everyone
- F) Income producer
- G) Other _____

14) How would you rate your ability to effectively deal with company politics?

- A) Extremely high
- B) High
- C) Average
- D) Low
- E) No ability at all

15) How much stress are you willing to have in your work life?

- A) Espresso
- B) Strong coffee
- C) Regular cup of coffee
- D) Decaffeinated
- E) None at all

16) Which phrase best describes your overall moral code at work?

- A) Be honest and honorable
- B) Do well when you can. When you can't, make money
- C) Don't ask, don't tell
- D) The truth is relative
- E) Survival of the fittest
- F) Other _____

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Now that you've completed the personal inventory, you can move on to the Workplace Appraisal. To accurately evaluate the culture of the company, we ask you to read and provide answers to the following questions. To render an accurate appraisal of your workplace culture, do your best to look beyond the *stated* company values, and identify the behaviors and attitudes that are *actually* rewarded

Workplace Appraisal

1) How would you describe your company's general work environment?

(Circle one)

- A) Friendly, collegial – team approach, success is shared
- B) Competitive, win/lose – concrete rewards for high performance
- C) Conformist – steady rewards if you play by the rules
- D) Political – Ally self with those in power and navigate up
- E) Creative, individualistic – make your mark with original ideas
- F) Other _____

2) What is the dress code?

(Circle one)

- A) Classic corporate
- B) Relaxed professional
- C) Fashion forward
- D) Alternative – originality counts
- E) Casual
- F) Uniform required

Other _____

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3) Which of the following best describes your employer's approach to work?

(Circle one)

- A) Hard drive – Overachieving is the norm; we all work hard to move ahead and create results. We put in overtime regularly.
- B) Low gear – Things here move slowly but predictably. We complete our work shifts and go home.
- C) Change the world – We all commit time and energy to making a difference. We sacrifice for a noble cause.
- D) Middle of the Road – We aim for reasonable productivity. Work should be engaging but not consuming. We allow time for your personal life.
- E) Mom & Pop – Everyone is expected to perform a variety of tasks in a small, cozy environment. We treat you like family.
- F) Status – Image counts. We work for established name in attractive environment. We all look good and reflect the status of our company.

4) Rate all of the following qualities in order of their value within the company. *Hint: valued qualities are often rewarded through promotions, pay raises, public recognition, etc.* (1 = valued very highly, 5 = not valued at all)

Creativity	_____
Efficiency	_____
Fairness	_____
Status	_____
Honesty	_____
Innovation	_____
Kindness	_____
Power	_____
Prestige	_____
Profitability	_____
Respect	_____
Responsibility	_____
Tradition	_____

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5) Based on your experience, what kinds of rewards are available in your company?
(Rate all of the following rewards in order of importance in your company 1 = Extremely important, 5 = not important at all)

_____ Financial rewards

_____ Public recognition – acknowledgement for achievement

_____ Promotion – new title, more responsibility

_____ Benefits – education, travel, vacation time, pension plans, health coverage

_____ Flexible hours – time for self and family

_____ Social value – making a contribution to society

_____ Creative license – freedom to express ideas

6) What would you say is the management style of your company?

(Circle one)

A) Structured – management sets the goals and monitors your performance

B) Loose – you can do what you want but you have to show results

C) Micromanagement – everything you do is critiqued and revised

D) Team approach – work as a team, get rewarded as a team.

E) Absentee – no guidelines, no accountability

F) Other _____

7) In your opinion, what are promotions based on?

(Circle the ones that pertain)

A) Achievement

B) Innovation

C) Political maneuvering

D) Having the right connections

E) Sacrifice and hard work

F) Good looks

G) Other _____

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8) Which phrase best describes your company's communication style?

- a) Direct communication – through meetings, e-mails and voicemail.
- b) Chain of command – Information filters down through the ranks
- c) Hearsay – sometimes you hear it, sometimes you don't
- d) Smoke signals – random vague messages that you are left to interpret
- e) What communication?
- f) Other _____

9) In your experience, how are decisions made in the company?

(Circle one)

- A) By individuals at all levels within the company
- B) By committee – someone from every department participates
- C) By consensus – everyone affected must agree
- D) By authorities who pass their decisions down to others
- E) Other _____

10) What is the company approach when a crisis arises?

(Circle one)

- A) Work together as a team to solve the crisis
- B) Find out who is responsible, and have that person's team clean it up
- C) Find someone to blame and make that person the scapegoat
- D) Cover up the crisis; deal with it behind closed doors
- E) Deny the crisis until it becomes unmanageable
- F) Other _____

11) What are the consequences for misconduct in the company?

(Circle one)

- A) Immediate dismissal
- B) Warning, followed by close monitoring
- C) Informal reprimand by direct supervisor
- D) Isolate and humiliate
- E) No consequences

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F) Other_____

12) How would you best describe the way employees feel at work?

(Circle one)

- A) Happy and content
- B) They are frustrated at times, but feel good about their contribution
- C) Grateful to have a job – never mind if it's a little boring
- D) Skeptical – work is not about feeling good; it's about getting paid
- E) Angry and resentful
- F) Successful and encouraged
- G) Other_____

13) What kind of person does best in this company?

(Circle one)

- A) Hard worker
- B) Innovator
- C) Politician
- D) Rule Keeper – Learns and plays by the rules
- E) Collegial – able to get along with everyone
- F) Rainmaker – makes money for the company
- G) Other_____

14) How would you rate the level of politics in your company?

(Circle one)

- A) Extremely high
- B) High
- C) Average
- D) Low
- E) Other_____

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15) How would you rate the level of stress in your company?

(Circle one)

- A) Espresso
- B) Strong cup of coffee
- C) Regular
- D) Decaffeinated
- E) Other_____

16) Which phrase best describes the overall value system of your company?

- A) Be honest and honorable
- B) Do well when you can. When you can't, make money
- C) Don't ask, don't tell
- D) The truth is relative
- E) Survival of the fittest
- F) Other_____

The third and final part of the Corporate Culture Assessment is a comparison grid. By taking answers to the personal inventory and juxtaposing them to responses to the workplace appraisal, you can literally see where you stand in relation to your company.

Remember Gwen? She's trying to understand why she feels so confined and frustrated as the Director of Marketing for a prominent national symphony. Her comparison grid sheds valuable light on the ways in which her personal values and work style clash with the symphony.

Corporate Culture Grid

Name: GWEN

Position: DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, ABC

SYMPHONY.

1) General work environment I want:

CREATIVE, INDIVIDUALISTIC

1) General work environment I'm in:

POLITICAL

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2) Dress code I prefer

RELAXED PROFESSIONAL

2) Company dress code

CLASSIC CORPORATE

3) Best approach to work for me

MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

3) Company approach to work

MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

4) Qualities I value on the job

Creativity ___ 1 ___

Efficiency ___ 3 ___

Fairness ___ 3 ___

Status ___ 3 ___

Honesty ___ 1 ___

Innovation ___ 1 ___

Kindness ___ 2 ___

Power ___ 5 ___

Prestige ___ 5 ___

Profitability ___ 5 ___

Respect ___ 5 ___

Responsibility ___ 3 ___

Tradition ___ 3 ___

4) Qualities the company values

___ 5 ___

___ 1 ___

___ 5 ___

___ 2 ___

___ 4 ___

___ 4 ___

___ 5 ___

___ 2 ___

___ 1 ___

___ 1 ___

___ 2 ___

___ 1 ___

___ 1 ___

5) Rewards I want

Financial ___ 1 ___

Public recognition ___ 5 ___

Promotion ___ 5 ___

Benefits ___ 3 ___

Flex hours ___ 5 ___

Social value ___ 1 ___

Creative license ___ 1 ___

5) Rewards the company gives

___ 5 ___

___ 1 ___

___ 1 ___

___ 1 ___

___ 3 ___

___ 1 ___

___ 5 ___

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6) Management style I prefer

**LOOSE, YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU WANT
YOU DO
BUT YOU HAVE TO SHOW RESULTS**

6) Company's management style

**MICROMANAGEMENT – EVERYTHING
IS CRITIQUED AND REVISED**

7) My reasons for promotion

ACHIEVEMENT, INNOVATION

7) Company's reasons for promotion

POLITICAL MANEUVERING, SACRIFICE

8) My communication style

DIRECT

8) Company communication style

SMOKE SIGNALS

9) Decision making I prefer

**COMPANY ENCOURAGES EMPLOYEES TO
MAKE DECISIONS AT ALL LEVELS**

9) Company decision making

**BY AUTHORITIES WHO PASS THEIR
DECISIONS DOWN TO OTHERS**

10) My approach to crisis

**WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM TO SOLVE
IT
THE CRISIS**

10) Company approach to crisis

**COVER UP THE CRISIS: DEAL WITH
BEHIND CLOSED DOORS**

11) Consequences for misconduct

INFORMAL REPRIMAND BY DIRECT SUPERVISOR

11) Consequences for misconduct

ISOLATE AND HUMILIATE

12) How you expect to feel

SUCCESSFUL AND ENCOURAGED

12) How employees feel

ANGRY AND RESENTFUL

13) Who should get ahead (top 3)

**HARD WORKER
GETS ALONG
INNOVATOR**

13) Who gets ahead (top 3)

**HARD WORKER
POLITICIAN
INCOME PRODUCER**

14) Level of Politics I prefer

AVERAGE

14) Level of politics at work

HIGH

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15) Preferred stress level
REGULAR CUP OF COFFEE

15) Level of politics at work
ESPRESSO

16) Your value system
HONEST AND HONORABLE

16) Company moral code
SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

As Gwen's chart indicates, she's in a work environment that runs contrary to her nature. Her Corporate Culture Inventory illuminates why the endless meetings and bureaucratic red tape at ABC Symphony bring her down. At the same time, Gwen can appreciate the fact that her job doesn't consume all of her time. As questions #3 indicates, she prefers a job that affords time for her personal life.

Your Corporate Culture Grid

Now it's your turn. Combine your responses on the Personal Inventory with your answers to the Workplace Appraisal to see how well your company's culture fits your attitudes, behavior, values and ethics.

Name _____

Position _____

Personal Inventory

Workplace Appraisal

1) General work environment I want

1) General work environment I'm in

2) Dress code I prefer

2) Company dress code

3) Best approach to work for me

3) Company approach to work

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4) Qualities I value on the job

(rate 1-5)

Creativity _____

Efficiency _____

Fairness _____

Status _____

Honesty _____

Innovation _____

Kindness _____

Power _____

Prestige _____

Profitability _____

Respect _____

Responsibility _____

Tradition _____

4) Qualities the company values

(rate 1-5)

5) Rewards I want (rate 1-5)

Financial _____

Public recognition _____

Promotion _____

Benefits _____

Flex hours _____

Social value _____

Creative license _____

5) Rewards company gives (rate1-5)

6) Management style I prefer

6) company's Management style

7) My reasons for promotion

(Top 2)

7) Company's reasons for promotion

(Top 2)

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- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 8) My communication style | 8) Company communication style |
| 9) Decision making I prefer | 9) Company decision making |
| 10) My approach to crisis | 10) Company approach to crisis |
| 11) Consequences for misconduct | 11) Consequences for misconduct |
| 12) How you expect to feel | 12) How employees feel |
| 13) Who should get ahead (Top 3) | 13) Who gets ahead (Top 3) |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| 14) Level of politics I prefer | 14) Level of politics at work |
| 15) Preferred stress level | 15) Actual stress level |
| 16) Your moral code at work | 16) General value system at work |

After the assessment

Now that you've completed your assessment, here's how you can use the information to empower yourself at work:

If your company's culture generally matches your personal inventory, you can trust that you're in a work environment that suits you. Equipped with this information, you can focus your energy on operating most effectively within the culture. In this case, unhooking techniques will help you navigate any interpersonal snags that you encounter within the organization.

If it's a mismatch, if the culture runs contrary to your ethics, values and business practices, you can search for a better fit. This could mean:

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- A) Finding a new job at a new company with ethics, morals, and business practices closer to yours.
- B) Finding a new job in the same company working for a boss whose value system is closer to yours.
- C) Staying put, but keeping an eye out for opportunities (A) and (B).

How Companies Change Cultures

The company you presently work for may be very different from the one that first hired you. This is because **cultures change as leadership changes**.

There are two events that usually lead to a corporate culture overhaul:

- 1) When a company merges with or is sold to another company with a different culture.
- 2) When a company changes management – current leadership leaves or retires.

If you work at a company that's undergone a change in leadership or ownership, and you long for the way things used to be, it's probably due to the fact that you're working in an environment where the ethics, values and business practices have changed. This new set of rules may go against your personal value system. What follows are two case studies where structural changes led to cultural changes.

The Merger

Ralph is a lifetime employee of Homestead Bank, an institution that takes pride in practicing family values. He and most of his colleagues have worked there for more than 15 years. They feel a sense of loyalty and commitment to their customers and to the community. The bank has a reputation for looking after its' employees. It offers flextime so that employees can attend their children's school conferences or accompany their elderly parents to medical appointments.

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One year ago, Homestead Bank merged with a much larger commercial bank. This larger bank is more competitive and more profit-oriented. Employees are expected to work longer hours. There is no flextime. All medical and school appointments must be scheduled after work. If a family emergency arises, you have to take the time off as a sick day, personal day or vacation day.

Ralph has an elderly father who's taken ill. They live in the same town. As long as he worked for Homestead Bank, Ralph could take a couple of hours off to accompany his father to the hospital or to a doctor's appointment, return to work within two hours, and make the time up later in the week. Now, Ralph must either take the whole day off, or pay a nurse's aid to escort his father.

Ralph's father has a degenerative illness. By the end of the first year, he's used up all of his sick days and vacation days. Whereas in the old culture, he'd want to give the bank double time for every hour he took off, now Ralph feels resentful for the lack of generosity on the part of this employer. He longs for the old company.

After Ralph takes the C.C. Assessment, he realizes that the bank's culture has changed dramatically over the past year. Faced with the fact that he strongly dislikes the new culture, Ralph must make a decision. Either he adjusts to the new culture or he looks for a new job. Because he needs the secure paycheck, Ralph isn't ready to move at this time. Still, he can begin to investigate other job opportunities with company's that come closer to his value system.

Change In Management

Kate works as a sound engineer for a music production company. Her company records and distributes the latest in country western music. Kate joined this growing corporation five years ago. At that time, it was a fledgling enterprise. The founder, Earl is a charismatic entrepreneur who encouraged forward thinking and breakthrough ideas. His conference room looked more like a living room. It

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had armchairs, couches, musical instruments, and a large bowl of M&M's in the middle of a guitar-shaped coffee table. You could put your feet up, pitch new talent or discuss current projects, and enjoy the comraderie of your co-workers.

Last summer, Earl retired. His replacement is a businessman from Chicago. This new leader is more corporate. One of the first things he does is convert the living room into a conference room. Now, Kate finds herself sitting in a straight back chair around a large conference table with notepads at each person's station. Instead of bowls of M& M with a free-for-all approach to contributing new ideas, it's Danish and filtered opinions.

The new leader likes to give PowerPoint presentations displaying profit earnings for each quarter. His favorite words all start with P – productivity, profitability, procedures, policies, permission, and protocol. His new hires all have MBA's or degrees in accounting.

Kate doesn't recognize her former company. She misses the days when everyone pitched in to complete recording projects, and you never knew what the next day would bring. While she understands that the company may benefit from this more structured approach to growing a business, she's not sure if the culture fits her anymore. Does she want to work for this more mature company or is it time to go?

Kate takes the C.C. assessment. As she reviews the comparison grid, it becomes very clear that the new management does not fit her entrepreneurial style. She must accept that with Earl's departure, the company that used to be her second home is now a foreign land. Over time, she decides to join forces with her co-workers and start another recording studio.

Uncover a company's culture *before* you take the job.

The next time you're searching for a new job, make it your mission to uncover the company's culture before accepting any position. Why? Because, if the culture is a good fit, the likelihood that you'll enjoy your new job will increase

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ten-fold. At the same time, if it's a bad fit, you'll have the option of dodging a career bullet.

1. Learn to identify the culture the minute you walk in.

As you walk into the company environment, notice how it looks and feels. Whatever reactions you have, heed them. Early impressions are frequently accurate.

- **Notice the physical environment** – Is it clean or dirty, organized or chaotic? Are the offices furnished or unfurnished, designed or thrown together? Is the building or physical space dark and dingy or bright and fresh? Does the overall facility communicate prosperity or deprivation?
- **Tune into the attitude emanating from employees** – Do the company's employees seem energetic or sluggish? Does the pace feel hectic or relaxed? As you walk in, are you greeted in a friendly manner? Does the general atmosphere feel warm or cold, hip or stodgy? Do you pick up an attitude of fun, creativity, tradition, and conservatism? Does it feel collegial or competitive?

2. Uncover the culture during the Interview process.

As you converse with your potential employer, look for subtle signs about the company. Be ready to ask questions that will reveal different aspects of the culture. Here are some examples:

- What are the company's hours?
- What hours do you (the interviewer) keep?
- What are the hours of the department I'll be working for?
- How long have you (the interviewer) been with the company?
- How long has the person I will be working for been here?
- How are decisions made – and how are those decisions communicated to staff?
- What role does the person who gets this position play in decision-making?

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As you speak to the interviewer, look for that person's stress level. Does her or she seem harried or at ease? Does the person seem generally satisfied or frustrated with his or her own job? What kind of attire is the interviewer wearing? How does he or she interact with other members of the staff?

3. After the interview, do your homework.

The best way to decipher a culture is to speak directly with the people who've worked in it. For this reason, it always benefits you to make contact with both current and past employees. Though it may be difficult to track down these individuals, it's worth the effort.

- Meet or speak with potential co-workers to get a better idea of the culture
- Meet or speak with the person you are replacing if possible
- Meet or speak with past employees of the company

Questions to ask past or present employees

- 1 – Can you give me three brief phrases that describe your company?
- 2 – What do you now know about your company that you wish you had known coming in?
- 3 – How do employees get promoted?
- 4 – How is appreciation shown to employees?
- 5 – What behaviors are rewarded?
- 6 – What behaviors are frowned upon?
- 7 – Do you always know what is expected of you?

You may feel uncomfortable asking some of these questions. That's okay. We encourage you to pose as many questions as you can to unearth cultural information about your potential employer. The important point is to actively investigate the values, ethics and business practices of a company before you sign on as a member of the staff.

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Corporate Culture – Is this the right place for you?

Case Study

Elizabeth is an estate lawyer who left her last job when she had her first baby. After a year of full-time mothering, she's ready to return to the workplace. Her needs, however, have changed now that she has a child at home. She's looking for a job where she can have a more balanced life.

The first job listing that Elizabeth answers, she gets a call. It's a reputable estate law firm, and they want Elizabeth to come in for an interview. While she knows that her potential employer will be looking at her, she's determined to scrutinize them as well. She wants to uncover the culture before taking the job.

1. Learn to identify the culture the minute you walk in

Physical environment: Elizabeth notices that the office is really beautiful. Architecturally, it feels open and clean. The rooms are thoughtfully decorated with classic furniture and fine art. She's impressed.

Attitude emanating from the employees: Elizabeth observes that while the space is very attractive, the employees seem harried and stressed out. Their demeanor is friendly, but they appear to be moving at a very rapid pace.

2. Uncover the culture during the interview process

Elizabeth is interviewed by a panel of three: a senior partner, a junior partner and the head of human resources. She answers their questions easily, and enjoys the notion of going back into estate law. As the interview winds down, Elizabeth asks a few questions of her own.

"I'd like to know what the company hours are." The HR person replies, "General office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m." Elizabeth looks over at the junior partner and asks him, "What hours do you keep?" He replies, "I'm never out of here before 8 p.m." Because she'll be working for the senior partner, Elizabeth poses this question: "What are the hours of your department?" He

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smiles and says, “As long as you get your work done, you can leave whenever you want.” At that, the junior partner lets out an uneasy laugh.

Elizabeth wraps up her interview by asking each of the firm members how long they’ve been with the company. She learns that the human resources person has been there one year. The junior partner signed on three years ago, and the senior partner founded the firm fifteen years ago,

Do your homework after the interview.

Elizabeth leaves the interview interested in the job yet not really knowing what the hours of her new position would be. She decides to review the firm’s web site to see if there’s anyone on staff that she knows. To her delight, Elizabeth spots a lawyer with whom she went to law school. She calls him the next day and asks if he’d be willing to meet for coffee.

Over cappuccinos, Elizabeth and her former classmate catch up socially for a few minutes. Then, Elizabeth begins her research regarding the firm. “What three phrases best describe your company?” she asks. “Stress” “Long hours” and “More stress” he responds. “What do you now know about this law firm that you wish you’d known coming in? “Our senior partners are all maniacs.” He confides. “They live, breathes and eats work. They expect you to do the same.”

At that point, Elizabeth has obtained the crucial piece of information she needs to decide about the job. Clearly, this company’s culture will not allow her to live a balanced life. It does not fit her needs as a young mother. She thanks her colleague for his time, and he runs back to the office.

The world of work is one of constant flux. Companies open, close, change management, merge and re-invent themselves. The responsibility lies with you to determine the kind of environment you want to work in and the type of culture where you can best perform. Use the corporate culture assessment to gain a clearer understanding of what you require to have a fulfilling work experience. Then decide how much you are willing to compromise.

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Corporate Culture At-A-Glance

Assess your company's culture to see if it fits you in terms of...

- General work environment
- Dress code
- Attitude towards work
- Reward system
- Management style
- Reasons for Promotion
- Communication style
- Decision making
- Crisis management
- Consequences for misconduct
- Employee morale
- Level of politics
- Stress level
- Moral code

Culture's change when...

1. One company merges with or is sold to another company.
2. There's a change in management – current leadership leaves or retires.

Uncover a company's culture before you take the job

1. Begin to identify the culture the minute you walk in
 - Notice the physical environment
 - Tune into the attitude emanating from employees
2. Uncover the culture during the interview process
3. After the interview, do your homework
 - Interview current and/or past employees