



What Habits Are Defining Your Company?

Habits are regularly repeated behavioral patterns. They become our routines, our comfort zones. *It's estimated that 40-45% of our daily lives are habitual.* These patterns of behavior are repeated so frequently and embedded so deeply that they define us. This is equally true of organizations. Your company culture is a collection of attitudes and behaviors – shared habits – that define how you function together. Organizationally speaking, habits are a manifestation of a company's brand.

Our habits form our identity. If you think of your brand as your reputation, your organization's habits are the building blocks. Your habits are what people have come to expect from how you will behave. How you go about your business, how you treat your colleagues and customers, whether or not you keep your agreements, starting meetings on time, following through on initiatives, how you address issues, etc. Tackling a habit change is an opportunity to re-invent your company identity. This is not a simple re-branding exercise, but an in-depth look at how you do business and where you want to make shifts.

Healthy vs. Unhealthy. Healthy habits generate the kind of experience of life that is in alignment with who you want to be. They produce results that make you feel good and help propel forward momentum. Unhealthy habits are unproductive, unsatisfying (ultimately), and stagnating. It stands to reason then, that a healthy company is based on people employing healthy workplace habits that are aligned with the organization's vision and core values.

Keystone Habits. So, if you want to lead change in your organization, what habit should you tackle first? Identify a few priorities and leverage them. New York Times business reporter, Charles Duhigg, in his bestselling book, "*The Power of Habit*" emphasizes what he calls "keystone habits". He explains, "*The habits that matter most are the ones that, when they start to shift, dislodge and remake other patterns.*" Your focused attention on one habit can have ripple effects throughout the organization.

In our society, we often want quick wins. This is counterproductive as it perpetuates our frustrations for things not changing. Quick fixes and hopes of complete transformations actually keep us stuck in our patterns. Cultivating healthy habits requires us to reject immediate gratification in favor of long term growth, health or integrity. And ultimately, deeper satisfaction.

How long is this going to take? While pop culture contends a magical "21 days" to cultivate a habit, research indicates it can be more like two to eight months. The truth is it depends on the behavior, the person/organization and the circumstances. It doesn't really matter how long it



takes – that time will still pass and you can either be on your way to a new pattern or stuck in your company's same old way of doing business.

Examine Your Company's Habits.

- Do you address issues directly and respectfully with each other?
- Do you provide clear and real time feedback?
- Do you start and end meetings on time? Do you hold each other accountable for the action items?
- How do you identify and manage priorities? Are you tackling what matters most, or what's just urgent? Are you habitually in firefighting or reactionary mode?
- In your attempt to be in service to others, do you tend to over promise? Do you have a habit of making agreements that you can't keep – or can't even remember you've made?

Start by understanding how habits emerge and what it takes to change them. (In [The Power of Habit](#) Duhigg defines the "Habit Loop" - cue, routine and reward. Working with the dynamic of this loop is key to transformation). Manage your expectations and commit to small, incremental improvements. We may not gain "quick wins" but we can create "small wins" – and those small wins can build momentum. Be sure to reward yourself and your team for new, positive behaviors.

Habit building is a journey not a destination. You will make mistakes. Give yourself permission to do so. More importantly, encourage your team do so – no worthy endeavor is ever pursued without missteps. Develop strategies for getting back on track. Think of it as an experiment with the desired outcome of creating workable, productive and lasting ways of being a consummate professional and a vibrant, high performing organization.

Take the K Challenge: What unhealthy habit in your organization will you stop tolerating and start addressing in a new way?



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