

The Human Dimension

Three keys to creating a positive culture in your golf course or turf business:

- *Commit to shared organizational philosophy.*
- *Create a people-oriented culture.*
- *Align your organizational structure with your organizational philosophy and your culture.*



Does Your Business Have the Right Culture? Are You Positive?

A few weeks ago I was shopping for a new sports coat. The following are my observations from two of the stores I visited:

Store 1: I observed three sales clerks. Two appeared to be having an argument while the third leaned lazily against a wall. Without moving, the third asked in a disinterested tone "Can I help you?" After I indicated I was looking for a sport coat, he pointed me to the racks and hovered over me as I looked for and tried a couple sports coats. He provided little assistance although he was knowledgeable when I asked questions and urged me to purchase every coat.

Store 2: As I entered, a nicely dressed man approached and asked with a smile "How can I help you today?" When I indicated I was looking for a sports coat, he asked questions to better understand what I wanted, measured me for size and then escorted me to the racks where the coats were located. As I tried on jackets, he was completely focused on assisting me in finding the perfect jacket; he was truly enjoying what he was doing. As I looked around the store, every customer was receiving the same service.

You may be thinking that this is an interesting story but how does it apply to a golf course or turf business where we are may not be selling directly to the customer. Let me suggest that this story is more about the culture of the two stores than it is about customer service. Note that the man at the first store also knew about coats; the difference was attitude. The culture of a business dramatically influences attitudes and consequently performance.

The critical questions are what did the owner of Store 2 do that the owner of Store 1 did not do? How did the Store 2 owner create a positive culture? In this article, I will suggest three keys to creating a positive culture in your golf course or turf business:

- Commit to shared organizational philosophy.
- Create a people-oriented culture.
- Align your organizational structure with your organizational philosophy and your culture.

Commit to Shared Organizational Philosophy

In a positive business culture everyone feels they are a part of a winning team. What does it mean to be part of a winning team? We know that in sports the winning team is the one that better completes the desired outcomes of the sport: scores more points, scores more runs, scores more goals.

What does it mean to be part of a turf team that is "winning?" Let me suggest that again it means successfully completing the desired outcomes. In this case the comparison is not with the opposing team or teams but with the expected or desired performance level or with the goal.

What does it mean for a winning business team to complete the desired outcomes? Let me suggest the answer has three parts:

1. Selecting desired outcomes.
2. Insuring that these outcomes are meaningful to everyone on the team. This means superintendents, owners, managers and employees.
3. Gaining all team members' commitment to these outcomes.

Let's look at some examples of successful winning business teams:

- **Southwest Airlines:** Despite becoming a major airline, Southwest has maintained the intense desire to succeed derived from its beginnings as a small airline overcoming all attempts by the established airlines to put it out of business.
- **Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream:** In addition to the usual focus on quality and profitability, Ben and Jerry's has been committed to setting an example of social responsibility for a large company.
- **Federal Express:** Although most of us think of speed when we think of Federal Express, their success has come largely from their commitment to reliability.

You are probably asking, what does this mean for my golf course or turf business? A business—your business—must begin by establishing its organizational philosophy. You are

probably familiar with mission statements. An organizational philosophy includes mission but is much more. If you review the examples above, much of the commitment was to more than mission, also vision and core values. As you look at the material below, consider the following generalization: the mission is for the owners; the vision and core value are what motivate the employees.

The organizational philosophy provides both the focus for owners, managers and employees being passionate about the business and the framework necessary for all personnel to become empowered to make decisions. The organizational philosophy contains mission, vision and core values as described in the outline below:

Mission or Purpose:

- The answer to “Why the business exists?”
- A broad statement of business scope and operations that distinguishes one landscape or nursery business from others.
- What we get paid for.

Vision:

- The picture of the future to be strived for.
- A motivational tool. An example: Doing our part for a more beautiful community.
- One might be motivated in life to climb a ladder, but without vision, one might get to the wrong roof and thus have to start over.

Core Values:

- “How do we want to act, consistent with our mission and vision, along the path toward achieving our vision?”
- How individuals or the organization wants life to be day-to-day.
- Small number (3-5) and ranked. An example: Disney
 1. Safety
 2. Customers
 3. “The Show”
 4. Efficiency

Mission, vision and core values are pretty abstract concepts. To make them more real, let’s look back at our examples of winning business teams:

- Southwest Airlines: The intense desire to succeed derived from its beginnings as a small airline overcoming all attempts by the established airlines to put it out of business is an example of a part of Southwest’s vision of being the airline everyone can afford to fly and a core value of excellence and customer service.

- Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream: The commitment to setting an example of social responsibility for a large company reflects the vision of all companies being committed to social responsibility.

- Federal Express: Reliability is a core value.

Simply defining the organizational philosophy is not sufficient to developing a positive culture. The final two steps in establishing expectations for a winning business team are to focus on that those outcomes are most meaningful to everyone on the team and then to gain the commitment of all team members to the key components of mission, vision and core values.

Create a People-Oriented Culture

In this section we focus on business culture. The contention is that a positive culture is encouraged when business personnel are central to the culture.

Business culture consists of an organization’s widely shared values, symbols, behaviors and assumptions. It can be thought of as “The way things get done around here.” It is not easy to develop a positive culture. A positive culture, therefore, creates a great competitive advantage for any business. This competitive advantage is the nature of relationships within the organization—the way people act toward each other; the “social capital” of the organization. It can be thought of as the organization’s underlying social architecture.

Think about the attributes of the culture in Store 2 in the introduction to this article: please the customer, enjoy your work, empathize with and relate to the customer. Think about how hard this culture must have been to establish! Think about how difficult it would be to compete with this store!

Now think about your own community. What business would you like to shop at or work for? What is the culture in that business? What are its attributes?

Culture is the intersection of the two conceptual categories of how people relate: sociability and solidarity. Sociability is a measure of friendliness among members of a community. In a highly sociable culture people do things for each other because they want to; there are no strings attached. It means people relate to

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Culture is the intersection of the two conceptual categories of how people relate: sociability and solidarity. Sociability is a measure of friendliness among members of a community. Solidarity is based in the mind rather than the heart. These relationships are strong whether or not the individuals personally like each other.

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each other in a friendly caring way. Solidarity is based in the mind rather than the heart. In high solidarity cultures relationships are based on common tasks, mutual interests, and clearly understood shared goals that benefit all of the involved parties. These relationships are strong whether or not the individuals personally like each other.

The diagram at the end of this article illustrates four types of cultures based on the levels of sociability and solidarity. Even though all four types of culture are feasible, I think you'll agree that few of us seek a business that is low on sociability. Most of us will seek to have a high solidarity business. Our success in defining a unique and clear organizational philosophy and our success in gaining commitment will determine whether we seek to establish a communal or a networked culture. The US Women's National Soccer team that won both the last World Cup and the last Olympic gold medal is an example of a communal culture. The team members are incredibly focused on their goal and really like each other and their personal relationships.

Align Organizational Structure with Philosophy and Culture

Now that your business is committed to its organizational philosophy and has defined its culture, *everything* must be focused to accomplish the mission, vision and core values, and maintaining the culture. All organizational structures, business systems and policies must be aligned with the organizational philosophy and the culture. All supervisory relationships must focus on the mission, vision, core values, and culture. Anytime this is not true, damage to the positive culture will occur.

Perhaps this is best understood by looking at the following examples of businesses not in alignment:

- A business has a core value of innovation but the culture is such that new ideas are unwelcome and immediately challenged.
- A business has a core value of honesty but there are no policies for dealing with dishonesty.
- A business has a desire to be the best in its community but supervisors are expected

to be very conservative in compensating employees.

- A business has being environmentally friendly in its mission statement but implements environmentally questionable practices whenever the alternative would cost more.
- The business leaders state that they encourage everyone to increase their responsibility but require a supervisor's approval for every decision.

Think about how you would react to each of these situations. Every time a business is not in alignment, someone will experience frustration and the culture will be damaged. Are there ways you can increase the alignment of your business?

Create a Positive Culture

The following are the three keys to creating a positive culture in your business:

- Commit to shared organizational philosophy.
- Create a people-oriented culture.
- Align your organizational structure with your organizational philosophy and your culture.

I conclude with the following suggestions for implementing these three keys:

- Organizational philosophy: Develop the mission, vision and core values for your business.
- Commitment: Gain the commitment of everyone associated with the business to the mission, vision and core values. Continually reinforce the mission, vision and core values especially focusing on those that you know have the most meaning to business team members.
- Motivation: Understand that each individual must be self-motivated. Your role as the owner or manager is to provide the culture where each individual chooses to be motivated.
- Herzberg: There are many theories of motivation but Herzberg's maintenance and motivational factors are perhaps the most useful. This theory holds that maintenance factors like wages, fringe benefits, security, fair work rules, parties, work breaks, working conditions, and status are important to maintain motivation. If one does not feel these are fair, he or she will lose motiva-

tion. These factors, however, do not create motivation. The motivational factors are challenging work, feelings of personal accomplishment, recognition for achievement, achievement of increasing responsibility, a sense of importance to the business, and access to information.

- Feedback: A positive culture is always characterized by frequent feedback, especially kudos.

- Trust: Good interpersonal relationships, including supervisor-employee relationships, are characterized by high levels of trust. Trust is increased when owners and managers are unquestionably trustworthy.

- Positive Attitude: The owners and managers set the tone for the business' culture. A positive culture is unlikely if each owner or manager does not have a positive view of the business and his or her role in it.

Robert A. Milligan

Implementing the three keys to creating a positive business culture involves emphasizing:

- Feedback: A positive culture is always characterized by frequent feedback, especially kudos.

- Trust: Good interpersonal relationships, including supervisor-employee relationships, are characterized by high levels of trust.

- Positive Attitude: The owners and managers set the tone for the business' culture.

Motivational factors include: challenging work, feelings of personal accomplishment, recognition for achievement, achievement of increasing responsibility, a sense of importance to the business, and access to information.

