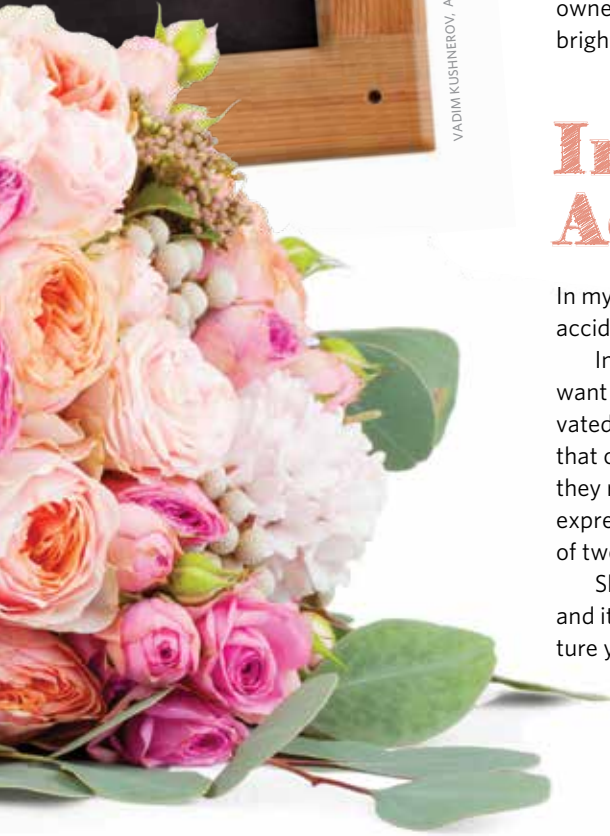


A company culture that encourages innovation and learning can help propel your business to new heights. Creating that culture takes time — and self-reflection.

BY GLENNA HECHT, SPHR





VADIM KUSHNEROV, ALEX TARASSOV & SEDMI/SHUTTERSTOCK



Here's a series of questions I field pretty regularly: "My workplace culture needs to be fixed. What can you do?" "My boss asked me to introduce a culture initiative. What does that mean?" "How do I know if I have a good or a bad culture at my business?" And maybe my favorite question of all: "Why does company culture matter?"

These are great questions with no easy answers. First, it would be presumptuous for anyone to offer insights on your company culture from the outside looking in. Unless someone has spent time in your organization, working with your team and assessing your "ways of doing things," we don't know your culture. You do! You already have a culture. It may not be the one you want, but it exists and acknowledging reality is the starting point.

Culture evolves over time. It involves how staff members treat each other, how they treat customers, and how work gets accomplished. Culture is often based on intangibles, such as how a group addresses mistakes, encourages (or discourages) open communication, and responds when the "going gets tough." Many think a company culture is informed by grand, strategic efforts — mission statements, mottos, formalized procedures — but it is primarily shaped by small everyday interactions and gestures: how you greet each other (or avoid eye contact) in the morning, who takes ownership for goofs, who feels encouraged to speak up — and who hangs their head and thinks no one cares about their input. In short, company culture is not "what you do." It's "who you are."

Creating a positive company culture has real-world, immediate implications. When people feel good about their workplace — and when they see that the values expressed by the owners actually match up with the team's actions — they are more likely to stay in their jobs. (Hello, reduced turnover!) A productive, healthy culture also inspires people: A designer who feels valued, heard and respected is going to bring a different energy to the design room than a person who feels like just another cog in the wheel — and that's true for managers, delivery drivers, salespeople, flower processors and seasonal workers, too.

Changing a culture won't happen overnight. Here are some concrete practices owners and managers can start to work on right away to set your team on a new and brighter path.

Intentional vs. Accidental Cultures



In my experience, a company's culture falls into two categories: intentional or accidental.

Intentional cultures occur when owners have methodically executed what they want to experience. It is transformative. In these workplaces, employees are motivated to be and do their best. The management team knows and lives by the idea that culture is not what an organization builds or delivers, but how they act and what they represent. Is it a birthday design, sympathy arrangement or a wedding? Or an expression of love from a relative, a remembrance of a beloved friend, or a celebration of two families becoming one?

Shifting any culture involves an honest assessment of who you are as a company, and it also requires patience and understanding. It can take time to evolve to the culture you desire.

The first step toward an intentional culture is defining where you want to go. From there, develop clear and simple statements to communicate the road-map and guide employees in the behaviors to get there. Examples might be:

- We treat each other with respect.
- We are service focused.
- We are accountable.
- We embrace diversity.
- We have open communication.
- We have integrity and do what we say we will do.

When developing these statements, look at whether this is true for the organization and for your own behavior. Do you exemplify these qualities? Some of the statements might make you feel uncomfortable. Great! An intentional culture requires looking in the organizational mirror to determine the gap between cultural reality and cultural desire. The gap points to accidental culture.

Accidental culture evolves over time based on misalignment, emotion and lack of leadership.

When everything is going well, open communication may work perfectly. What is your reality when challenges occur? Do you become directive, short tempered and so on? A “negative” culture may be indicative of an accidental culture and may be a response to:

- Casual or inappropriate comments in the workplace
- Lack of teamwork
- Communication regarding negative customer interactions
- Responses to errors
- Saying no to ideas to avoid risk
- Shutting people down
- Unclear expectations

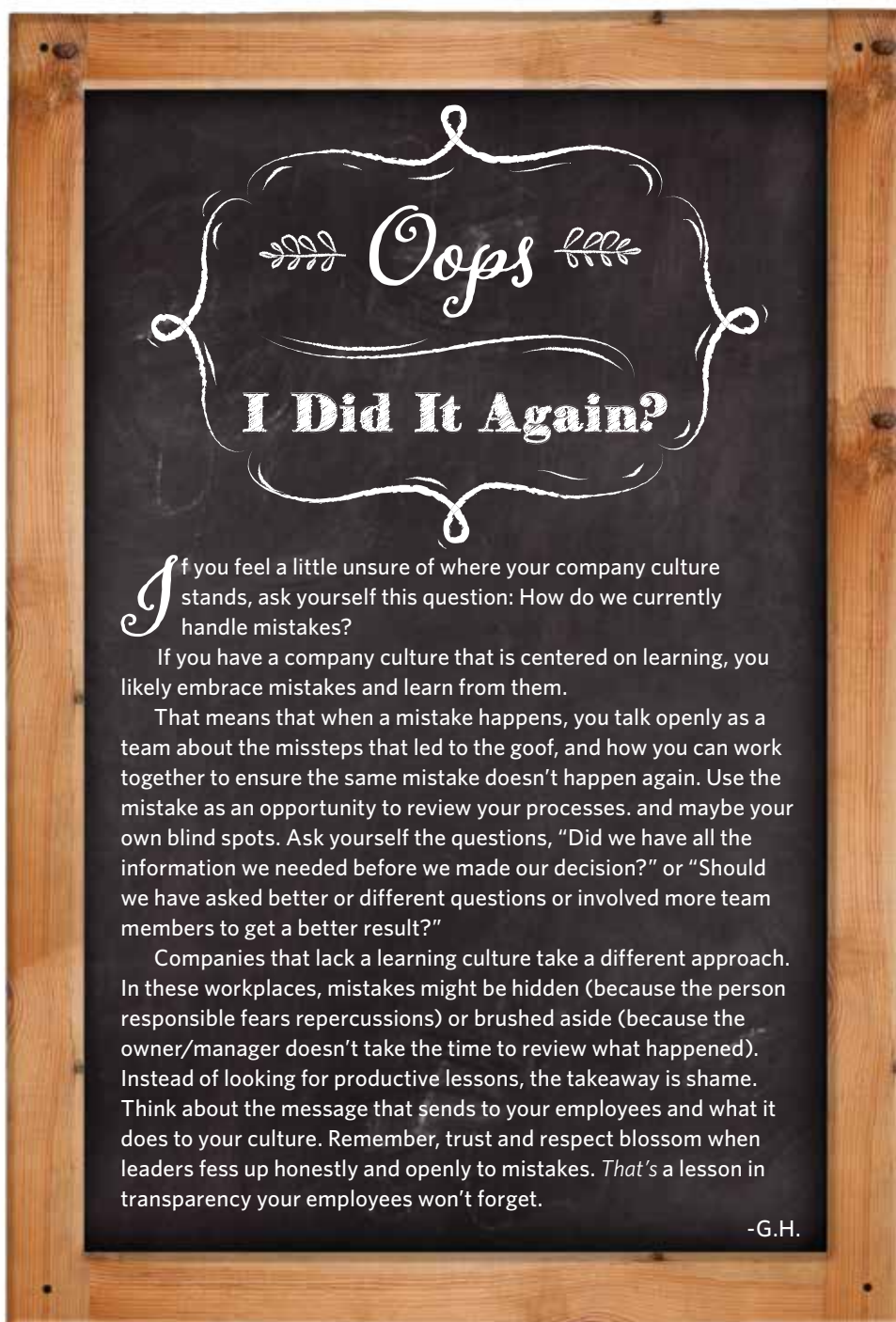
An organization may outwardly say people are treated with respect and dignity, yet in reality bad behavior is tolerated, and no change occurs. This indicates a cultural mismatch.

Accidental cultures can be changed once you recognize and acknowledge these gaps. Leaders must then become intentional about the shadow they themselves cast and determine what behaviors are needed to shape the culture. Organizations that fail to intentionally create their cultures end up with the consequences of an accidental culture and the accompanying dips in morale, productivity and trust.

Make the Changes

So, how do you implement an intentional culture? Here are a few steps to consider:

1. **Identify your desired culture and values.** Weave these ideas and verbiage into everything you do. Include culture statements in recruiting postings, job descriptions, handbooks, training manuals and more.
2. **Communicate.** Tell your employees what your culture is. Don't assume people will act accordingly. They will do what they think is best or learned in another organization — rush an order out the door to stay on schedule, argue with a disgruntled customer, or cover up



a mistake rather than risk a public shaming. Unless you've been clear about your expectations, their actions may not be aligned with the culture you desire.

3. **Train and coach.** Once you identify a gap as a result of accidental culture, you may need to clarify, model and train those new expectations and provide more guidance on how employees are expected to behave. For example, a service-first culture may require alternative problem-solving guidelines, especially if your team has been operating under a different assumption like putting efficiency first, before customer service.
4. **Motivate and reinforce.** Make sure employees understand how the culture is exemplified in behaviors, and reward people when those behaviors are exhibited.
5. **Walk the walk.** Employees follow in the footsteps of their leader. Be open to feedback about managerial behavior and correct quickly.

Seek Out and Reward Innovation

One of my favorite stories from the early days of Starbucks involves a barista in California who kept getting requests for cold coffee beverages. At the time, the company only sold hot coffee and packaged beans. But the barista was convinced, and he set about experimenting with iced coffee and a blender. Voilà, the first Frappuccino was created. The rest is coffee history.

You may have an innovative staff member right now in your shop. Maybe they don't have a multimillion-dollar idea, but they probably have thoughts on how to streamline delivery, create a Mother's Day special, or make your containers easier to access. Part of your job as a leader is to figure out how to draw out the best in people. Make it part of your process to ask people for their ideas. Some em-

ployees will volunteer them naturally (and loudly and often); others may be more reluctant. That doesn't mean they don't have something important to contribute. So, create opportunities for feedback at all levels.

And when people come up with a great idea, acknowledge it! Reward it — with money, special perks, awards and praise. The bottom line: If you want fresh ideas and self-starters in your company, you need to make sure your team members feel heard, valued and empowered. ☘

Glenna Hecht, a speaker, author, consultant and HR guru, is the founder of **Humanistic Consulting**, an organization that provides outsourced HR and training solutions to companies in all industries. glenna@glennahecht.com

Designing and Creating Custom Ornaments, Gifts and Coins

Since 1974

Great Selection • Great Quality • Great Service







"Let Us Tell Your Story"





Phone: (800)745-MINT or (828) 883-8988
 Email: eanne@thecharlestonmint.com
gcneman@thecharlestonmint.com
caleb@thecharlestonmint.com



www.TheCharlestonMint.com