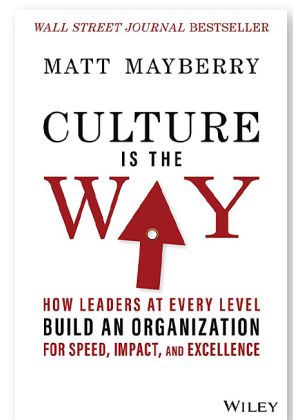


Culture Is the Way

How Leaders at Every Level Build an Organization for Speed, Impact, and Excellence

by **Matt Mayberry**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Many of you may not have given much thought to improving the world through better leadership and creating better workplace cultures. For the past few years, author, consultant, keynote speaker, and former NFL player Matt Mayberry has become convinced that this stance is beginning to shift. Organizations can and do have a positive effect on the world around them. Leadership and managers at every level can make a significant contribution to making the world a better place.

In *Culture Is the Way: How Leaders at Every Level Build an Organization for Speed, Impact, and Excellence*, leaders will learn how to build organizational cultures that will boldly lead them into the future. With each step forward, we can transform not only business performance but also the world around us and the communities we serve.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Five elements of a positive culture
- The five roadblocks to cultural excellence
- The five steps to building a world-class culture
- How to implement a culture implementation playbook

Is Culture Powerful? Ask a Football Coach

Author Matt Mayberry learned so many valuable lessons from playing the game of football, beginning as a little kid all the way through to the NFL, which benefited his life in so many ways. Over time, he realized that the same characteristics that distinguish the best football teams are also required to succeed in business. Adopting some of the key learnings from the game of football and implementing certain aspects of them in a business can be transformative to the company culture.

Great coaches understand the power of culture better than anyone. Business leaders who learn to take the same perspective on culture as some of the greatest sports coaches will drive their companies to attract top talent, play a significant role in making the world a better place, and positively shape every aspect of their employees' lives.

Three key lessons from great sport coaches that business leaders can apply as we move forward on a culture-building journey include:

1. Develop a burning desire to improve culture.
2. Generate and bring positive energy daily.
3. Don't just *manage* your people, *coach* your people.

Culture is the one thing that all leaders and their organizations have at their disposal to build and strengthen their organizational foundation to counteract crises, protect themselves from future threats, and win big.

Like the great coaches, an actionable playbook will help leaders implement their day-to-day operations to not only build healthier and better-performing organizations but also drive business impact to heights they never imagined.

Five Elements of a Positive Culture

Culture is the lifeblood of organizational excellence. The core. The energy. The genetic code. It is front-and-center for leaders who want to improve performance and strategic alignment. It is an organization's heart and soul.

Even low-performing companies that never prioritize culture and have toxic workplaces have culture. You either have a *culture by default* or a *culture by design* that has been intentionally built with as much rigor as the sales and operational strategy.

There are many aspects of culture that can significantly improve performance and outcomes. These five elements are integral to why culture is so important and cannot be ignored if you want to lead your team and organization to the next level.

1. Employee energy, excitement, and value: This is one of the more powerful forces of culture that is rarely discussed and frankly, difficult to quantify. Employees can and will be enthusiastic about leaders and managers who invest the time and effort to build a healthier and better culture by involving them in meetings, planning, and strategy sessions.

The employees want to know they are valued. When this is communicated and consistently implemented by leaders, the amount of energy and enthusiasm generated can be extraordinary.

2. Alignment and togetherness: If each division within an organization operates differently from one another, before long internal silos can easily develop. Naturally, different department leaders have different responsibilities and goals, but at the end of the day, you are all on the same team, working toward a common objective as a unified organization.

Great leaders and teams recognize this, and culture is the only factor that drives the execution of organizational alignment.

3. Clear expectations: If your culture is never defined, there are no clear expectations of what is required and expected of every team member to help the organization win. This leads to performance and morale issues.

A defined and positive workplace culture aids in mitigating and preventing these costly issues. In healthy cultures, there is clarity on the company's core purpose and priorities, and employees receive consistent feedback.

4. Accelerate execution: Culture is not separate from execution. Your strategy does not carry itself out on its own. That is the job and sole responsibility of the culture you build and manage. Strategy is critical to winning, but don't overlook culture's role. They collaborate concurrently to speed up execution and enhance impact.

5. Talent attraction and development: When you create a great culture that brings out the best in everyone, challenges others positively, and consistently drives winning behaviors in the marketplace, word spreads quickly.

Be ruthlessly clear about who you are as an organization, where you want to go, and the action plan for achieving those goals.

Everyone wants to work for a company that makes them feel like they are a part of something special and that they can contribute to the overall mission. There is a reason why the best football teams and world-class enterprises not only attract the best talent, but also mold and develop the talent they already have, which adds to the bottom line exponentially.

How to Avoid the Culture Dilemma Trap

There are many shiny objects that present themselves in every organization, and leaders are quick to believe that attacking or embracing the next shiny object with decisive action is the surest path to growth. They often overlook the very simple things that can propel them to success. This is the culture dilemma trap that sabotages most culture-building efforts.

Shiny objects consist of more than just action items and operating procedures. Certain mindsets and beliefs can also take the form of shiny objects. Examples include new and exhilarating technology tools, a running list of initiatives generated from employee survey results, an offsite leadership retreat, or thinking everything is fine as long as the company is profitable.

The number of decisions a leader must make every minute of the day can be overwhelming at times, particularly for those who are new to management. The first step in overcoming the “shiny object syndrome” is realizing that it attacks from all directions. However, awareness is only half the battle. Let’s look at some ways we can take it a step further so that culture-building efforts don’t get sabotaged and lose their intended impact.

1. Don’t underestimate culture. This may appear too simple and obvious, but most attempts to build, change, or improve culture fall short because leaders underestimate culture from the start. Your culture will suffer as a result if you believe that culture is just a word or that there are twenty other more important imperatives.

2. For everything you add, be willing to subtract something. The “shiny object syndrome” constantly

throws grand ideas in front of you, so you are quick to jump to the next cool project and completely lose focus on culture. Leadership teams become overburdened and performance suffers as a result. For each addition you make, whether it is a new meeting on the calendar, a new policy, or an initiative, consider what you can eliminate.

3. Be ruthlessly clear about your priorities. Leaders can be exceptionally intelligent individuals, but below-average decision-makers due to a lack of organizational clarity regarding their priorities. Be ruthlessly clear about who you are as an organization, where you want to go, and the action plan for achieving those goals.

The Five Roadblocks to Cultural Excellence

People are resistant to change. Even if it’s as simple as switching to a new refrigerator that will end up saving them money on their energy bills while also providing sleek and convenient features, they still find it difficult.

Consider this in terms of business. Simply because a certain structure and method of doing things have worked in your organization for years does not guarantee that those same strategies will continue to work in 2023 and beyond. Why? Because we live in a continuously evolving and progressing world.

Netflix approached Blockbuster in 2000 and asked if they wanted to purchase Netflix for \$50 million. Blockbuster passed, believing their business model was superior to that of the budding Netflix company, who fulfilled video rentals through the mail at the time. Instead of purchasing Netflix or changing their business models and developing new programs to include streaming and sending videos through the postal system, Blockbuster continued to do what they had always done. They filed for bankruptcy in 2010 and Netflix had built a \$25 billion annual revenue stream from its subscribers in just 12 years.

When you hear the Netflix-Blockbuster example, you might think it was more of an innovation or complacent issue with Blockbuster than a culture failure. Not so. Culture serves

as the internal compass for an organization's fundamental beliefs, how the organization behaves daily, and its level of market performance. A lack of innovation and ineffective leadership were unintended consequences of their existing organizational culture.

Depending on the current state or size of your organization, as well as the industry it operates in, the challenges it will face will vary from company to company. However, there are a handful of persistent roadblocks that prevent organizations from achieving cultural excellence.

Roadblock #1: Lukewarm Leadership Buy-In

Lukewarm leadership buy-in is without a doubt the greatest roadblock of them all, especially in the beginning stages of building culture when driving excitement and momentum is an absolute imperative.

Most senior leadership teams consist of accomplished leaders with a wealth of experience, and the last thing they want to do is shift their leadership style or change how they have done things for the past ten or twenty years. This mentality is a huge barrier in the initial stages of building culture, but also in the execution of all other organizational change efforts.

The message that is sent to the entire organization comes directly from the leadership. Many leaders have great intentions, but wildly underestimate their level of influence and how often others look to them on how to think and behave in a given situation.

The best and most effective leaders fully understand that it is their duty and responsibility not only to lead the way, but also to serve as a role model for the desired behaviors that they want to instill throughout an organization.

Roadblock #2: All Slogans and No Action

The second roadblock that can prevent the achievement of cultural excellence is when culture is viewed as nothing more than some meaningless slogans.

If you believe that building a great culture comes down to hanging posters with your mottos and core values on them or simply including more perks, you run the risk of promoting fluff that lacks real substance.

Words don't build culture or culture change by themselves. It takes action. True cultural change starts when behavioral change at scale begins to take root. And not just changing behaviors from time to time or for a few months at a time.

It must be a long-term process with repeated changes in behaviors that create a new cultural paradigm and become the new norm. Doing something *repeatedly*, to the point where it becomes ingrained into what an organization does daily and becomes common practice, is where cultural excellence lies.

Roadblock #3: Temptation of Instant Gratification

Nothing satisfies us as humans more than instant gratification. Before we do or commit to anything, we often ask ourselves or others how long it will take to reap the benefits or experience the results. When it comes to building a powerful and winning organizational culture, the temptation of instant gratification lurks around every corner, ready to derail you.

Building a great culture takes time and a tremendous amount of energy, which are often far more than leaders can imagine. Not only will it take longer and require more energy than expected, the results may not be immediate. \

This roadblock is what destroys morale and kills momentum gained up to that point. When time passes and the energy you expend outweighs what you receive in return, comfortable habits of the past take over. Building a great workplace culture requires a delicate balance of tenacity and extraordinary patience.

Roadblock #4: Distortion and Distraction

Once you decide, as a business leader, that you are going to heavily invest in building a better culture, a million ideas and initiatives download into your brain. And it doesn't stop there.

Leaders and managers of all levels will put together action plans to present to the rest of the organization. But once the plan is finished, leaders start to second guess themselves and doubt their ability to successfully execute everything on the list. Anxiety takes over and the warning bells start ringing!

Leaders begin to disconnect and distract themselves. Everything becomes so overwhelming that you procrastinate and put it off. Dysfunction creeps in. You must use caution when rushing to adopt and implement an idea that you read about, thinking that it will have the exact same effect on your organization. There is a never-ending stream of great ideas and advice in books and articles everywhere you turn. Thinking that you can achieve similar results by adopting a best practice another company had great success with is a very dangerous game to play.

It all comes down to how well leaders model the way forward, practice what they preach daily, set clear cultural expectations for everyone to abide by, and blaze the trail forward.

Roadblock #5: Lack of Cascading Change

The dictionary definition of *cascade* is “a process whereby something, typically information or knowledge, is successively passed on.” Depending on the size of the organization, the difficulty of cascading change will vary.

But there is no doubt about it. Building a great culture and changing old organizational habits that no longer serve a company’s best interests are extremely difficult work on their own. It is a monumental task to then cascade that change across an entire organization, hoping that everyone will not only buy into the change, but also be a voice of reason.

The real challenge in achieving cultural excellence and bringing an entire organization together to move in the same direction is undoing previously learned behaviors and ways of being. Not only that, but then developing and relentlessly implementing a strategic game plan for how communication will be shared, who will say what and when, and presenting a concise breakdown of how the culture will be integrated at scale. Consistent action must be taken. Building a world-class culture is a never-ending job.

The Five Steps to Building a World-Class Culture

The five steps for building and sustaining a world-class culture were formulated after years of experimenting, copious research, and merging of key learnings from the football field.

Step One: Define Your Culture

If you ask a group of people who work for the same company, “What is the culture of your company?,” most likely, each respondent will have a different answer. In thriving and world-class enterprises, everyone knows what the culture is, what it stands for, and what’s expected of them within that organization.

Step Two: Discovery Through Collaboration and Inspiration

The discovery phase focuses on a collaborative and inspirational approach that engages the entire organization in the culture building process. Senior leaders will collaborate and partner with all people managers in the organization, soliciting specific feedback along the way to encourage and highlight valuable employee input.

Step Three: Launch, Cascade, and Embed

It is detrimental to the organization as a whole if the culture does not trickle down from the top and permeate all departments. Leaders must make it a priority to disseminate it across the entire organization. This stage is all about strategically launching and relentlessly implementing it across the rest of the company, as well as embedding it across all functions.

Step Four: Drive Long-Term Impact

It is one thing to create a momentary buzz about your culture. It is quite another to create a culture that embodies the core DNA of your organization and has a lasting impact. This stage aids in reducing the likelihood that your culture will only have a short-term impact and helps you develop a strategy for creating a sustainable culture that consistently delivers for your organization.

Step Five: Leaders Must Blaze the Trail

This final stage of the process is a deciding factor in whether an organization succeeds or fails in its pursuit of creating a world-class culture. It all comes down to how well leaders model the way forward, practice what they preach daily, set clear cultural expectations for everyone to abide by, and blaze the trail forward. What leaders do on a regular basis, and how they behave, send a strong message to the organization. Employees are watching and are acutely aware of what is being communicated through leaders’ actions.

Culture Implementation Playbook

You will need a well-prepared playbook to effectively introduce the culture change in your organization during the implementation phase of the journey. This playbook ensures a successful culture launch.

1. Ensure management team alignment: First focus on ensuring management team alignment. Senior leaders and all people managers who will play a major role in launching and implementing the culture must be completely on board. Make sure everyone understands the end goal and who will be doing what and when.

2. Determine your official launch date: Next, decide on your official launch date. If at all possible, the date should be one that everyone in the organization can attend, in person or via livestream. If operations are going to be put on hold for a while, it is almost certain that every division and function in the company will need to help with this.

3. Craft your communication strategy: Create your communication strategy and the overarching message you want to send to your organization and announce it in the kickoff meeting. Do not overlook this part. It's critical that this message be genuine and authentic rather than heavily scripted. Infuse as much energy as possible into explaining the deeper meaning of your culture and how you arrived at this point. Welcome feedback and ask for suggestions.

4. Plan how you will embed and cascade the launch: Depending on the size of the organization, this could take weeks or even months. Every company leader and manager should not only have team meetings to spread the message, but they should revisit it during one-on-one meetings and performance reviews shortly after the launch.

5. Create your Behavioral Manifesto: This is a concise document that converts your core values into clear daily behaviors. Make sure it's intended for the entire company and that it can be applied and translated to any role or responsibility. Managers can then relay it to the various divisions within the company.

6. Take inventory on a regular basis: Keep track of what's working well and what might need to be tweaked, and then actively listen and adjust as needed. There will be a few action items that have had an exponentially greater impact than everything else. Find out what these actions are and continue to perform them. Ask for feedback and begin every team meeting with a pulse check.

7. Share the plan: Share the playbook so everyone knows exactly what to expect in the future. There will be more commitment from employees and a true sense that this is a team effort if every step in the journey forward is fully transparent.

8. A word to the wise for frontline managers: Don't underestimate your ability to influence change as a frontline manager. The ability to create and build a better culture is decided just as much by how well you model the culture as it is by senior leaders.

Be Fanatical About Sustained Impact

Fanatical is defined in this book in a way that may be similar to other definitions you'll find: as having and being driven by an extreme and often unquestioning enthusiasm, devotion, obsession, or zeal for something. And for you, as a leader, that something needs to be culture. Being fanatical is an absolute must if you want to create a high-performing and thriving culture that will last.

The Five-Step Fanatical Framework can help you get started on being fanatical about driving sustainability and embedding your culture as the heart of the business. When these five steps are used regularly by everyone in

1. Fanatical continuous attention, development, nurturing: Building culture isn't something you do periodically. It's a continuous pursuit to achieve a winning culture that supports and enhances business performance.

2. Fanatical consistency and alignment: There must be a consistent message and this consistency is not only what is communicated but is also demonstrated in the organization's decision-making and daily actions.

3. Fanatical focus on the vital few: Attempting to do everything at once while constantly adding more to the plate is not a sustainable action plan. Identify the vital few areas for improvement that will strengthen your culture while also improving organizational performance.

4. Fanatical follow-through: Starting a tactic or tweaking an existing process or structure is a good place to start, but it is ultimately meaningless unless it is followed through on relentlessly. The risk of becoming a "start and stop" fad as opposed to a way of being is high without tenacious and fanatical commitment.

5. Fanatical about making the business case: Leaders must present a convincing argument for how developing a

sustainable culture will enhance business performance and how it is necessary for a long-term impact. If the correlation between how the culture will benefit the business and the customer you serve is not made, the sustainability and long-term impact of cultural success will be jeopardized.

Building an extraordinary, sustainable culture takes time, effort, and energy. It doesn't happen overnight, and it may not happen in six months or a year. The more challenging the journey, the more special and fulfilling it will be when you reach your destination. *Do more. Become more. Set the standard. Make a difference.* Culture is the way.



Matt Mayberry is an internationally acclaimed keynote speaker and one of the world's foremost thought leaders on leadership development and culture. His insights on leadership, culture, and business performance have appeared in publications such as Forbes, Fortune, Business Insider, Entrepreneur, NBC, ABC, Fox Business, and ESPN, to name but a few. Before becoming a sought-after keynote speaker and management consultant, Matt was a linebacker for his hometown team, the Chicago Bears. Due to an injury, Matt's career was cut short, but he learned invaluable lessons on leadership, culture, teamwork, and peak performance.

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