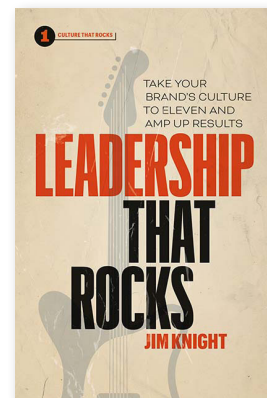


Leadership That Rocks:

Take Your Brand's Culture to Eleven
and Amp Up Results

by **Jim Knight**



Contents

Setting the Stage

Page 2

Culture-Driven Leaders

Page 2

Start with You

Page 3

Mentorship is Instrumental

Page 4

Conclusion

Page 4

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Up and coming leaders face a unique challenge. How can you enhance your company's culture when you play a relatively small role within your organization? How can you establish yourself as a true leader that's capable of turning your organization into something greater than the sum of its parts?

Even if you're not an executive or high-level leader, you still have the power to have an outsized influence on your organization's culture from the inside out— helping raise your profile and career fulfillment along the way.

Author, speaker, and trainer Jim Knight's *Leadership That Rocks* is a powerful, music-inspired guide to becoming a culture-driven and versatile manager that's a true catalyst for change within your organization. If you want to turn your cultural impact up to eleven, this rock-and-roll guide to leadership is written unlike anything else and will provide insights you won't find in other, similarly focused books.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to impact your company culture for the better, regardless of your role.
- Why culture-driven leaders are more effective, and how to become one yourself.
- How to be a catalyst for change within your organization in your attitudes, the people you hire and manage, and the projects you choose to pursue.
- How to make mentorship a powerful part of your organizational culture, and why being a mentor can be a transformative force in any organization.

Setting the Stage

How can you enhance your company's culture when you have no direct reports and you're not an executive?

Of course, every person in a company contributes to its culture, but sometimes it takes a little extra explanation to persuade junior leaders that they do indeed have the ability to amp up their environment. In fact, this question is one of the main reasons for this book summary. It's an opportunity for leaders at any level, in any industry, to have the strategies that create a culture professionals dream about every day.

As environmental activist Greta Thunberg says: "You're never too small to make a difference."

To be fair, she was talking about everyone's personal responsibility for saving the planet. But her sentiment works perfectly for any level of leadership affecting a company's culture. You absolutely can make a difference.

The real impact will come when you put in the work of studying and implementing the suggestions you'll find here. Consider the main lyrics of the overall tune, so you don't get lost in the melody or the beat. Invest in your future—the future of your career, the future of your business, and the future of an integral piece of your company's identity, it's culture. Through thick and thin, good times and bad, a business thrives and flourishes based on the strength and authenticity of its culture. Companies with strong, anchored cultures will grow and prosper, while those with weak, frail cultures will wilt and eventually die.

But the greatest accelerant to a cultural flame is leadership.

Culture-Driven Leaders

Many companies ignore organizational culture. It's not important to them. For decades, business leaders have been conditioned to focus exclusively on strategy and operations, with the hope that a strong culture will eventually be developed once they attain some success. It's totally understandable—and completely wrong.

As serial entrepreneur, bestselling author and media mogul Gary Vaynerchuk (or "Gary V" to his fans) famously said: "Company culture is the backbone of any successful organization."

The reason leaders of great brands focus on organizational culture first and foremost is to drive a business' ultimate success. Focusing exclusively on tactical nuts and bolts will

keep a company from becoming legendary -and companies that succumb to this small-time thinking will wallow in a malaise, constantly pushing the strategy-of-the-day to attain financial success.

Rock star leaders understand the difference between the two approaches and seek a higher purpose. They opt for the long-term sustainability of culture versus the limited focus of an annual strategy.

Tony Hsieh, the late, iconic founder of Zappos, put it this way: "If you get the culture right, most of the other stuff will just take care of itself."

Hsieh was so right. Unlike processes, tools, products and strategies, all of which can be easily copied, culture is unique. So unique, in some cases, that replicating it is too hard for competitors to even attempt. And that's the advantage. A great organizational culture provides differentiation for consumers and employees alike. It should be hard to copy. But it shouldn't be hard to understand.

Rock Bands & Business Brands

A company's culture is the brand's personality. It's a living organism—like a culture in a petri dish, where people are the microorganisms. The brand's personality changes as different 'microorganisms' affect it. Each person comes to the table with their own culture shifts and their own learned behaviors, and the culture of any organization can only exist because of the people embodying it.

Famous author, brand executive and chair of the board of AARP Libby Sartain put it this way: "If a brand doesn't live on the inside, it can't thrive on the outside."

As a company both succeeds and struggles through the years, its culture becomes more profound, wielding greater influence on all the stakeholders within to conform to its organizational norms. In this perpetual cycle, employees strengthen the brand's culture, and so define the brand's personality.

Take note: This doesn't just apply to positive organizational cultures; it is simply how a company establishes its 'personality.' An organization's founders and leadership may hope that their culture is positive and that it won't change over time, but it will. People come and go all the time. Just like a rock band, a culture is only as strong as the people currently employed and collectively making up the heart and soul of the organization. That's why it's up to you as a leader to choose your people wisely and foster the kinds of behaviors you want your customers to experience.

Combine passion, commitment, and a hard work ethic with thinking fast, creating alternatives and marshaling resources to achieve results; develop your ‘hustle muscle.’

Start with You

When it comes down to it, changing the culture of an organization you love will be among the most challenging responsibilities you’ll face. It takes time, patience, persistence, effort, know-how, and passion. But it’s not impossible—and it’s completely worthwhile.

Like most things in life that require an overhaul, culture change starts on the inside. That’s not referring to the ‘below the surface’ processes of the company. It’s referring to something even more internal. Culture shifts start with each one of us. They start with you.

Look at every experience as something that happens for you, not to you. Commit to growing with a company that has a value orientation aligned with yours. If you don’t love your brand, it will reflect in your lack of passion for your work.

This alignment between your individual values and the company’s identity is key to your personal fulfillment and your effective participation in the brand’s future. But, if you relish the leadership role you’re in, for a company that you truly love, all while acknowledging that it needs a bit of a cultural revolution, then a deep emotional connection with the brand will make you a catalyst for change.

Be the Catalyst for Change

We can all name people who are loyal to an organization for a long time, individuals who have watched their ideas come to life, take flight, and even grow into organizational norms. These brand ambassadors dig in to move mountains and shift cultural identities. They don’t just ride the back of the organization for their own interests; with the passion and commitment they put into the business’ success, they earn the right to represent the company culture. Partly because of tenure, but mostly because of dedication and fearlessness, they attain the status of ‘culture catalyst’ and the implied permission to influence the organization.

To shift the cultural pillars of a company, someone’s got to be the catalyst—the change agent.

Leaders at all levels need to understand that employees are the conduit for the changes that lead to any desired results. Surrounding yourself with different yet like-minded people with a passionate mission is one way to positively affect company culture. Inspiring the individuals you supervise is important, and focusing on who you bring on to the team may be just as critical for culture change.

This is where diversity can pay big dividends.

The value of a diverse workgroup has been long touted by human resources professionals and organizational psychologists alike. They maintain that a diverse workforce fosters better, more creative solutions to problems, thereby leading to sustainable growth. When that happens, the culture becomes even stronger.

Lay the Groundwork

Wanting change is one thing; making it happen isn’t so easy. Whether you have joined a company that just needs an adrenaline shot or you’ve been hanging out in an organization that requires major surgery for its failing heart, any company can be enhanced for the better. But this requires leadership. And to be an effective leader of others, you have to lay the groundwork in yourself first.

Be obsessed with results. Combine passion, commitment, and a hard work ethic with thinking fast, creating alternatives and marshaling resources to achieve results; develop your ‘hustle muscle.’

Instead of immediately revolutionizing the company, start small and crush a few things first; once you’ve earned trust, you will garner bigger responsibilities and influence.

Inevitable resistance can be mitigated if the change is carefully discussed, planned, embraced, communicated, and ultimately defended.

Never Stop Playing Your Part

Being a leader in a business culture that rocks is a massive undertaking, but it garners epic, long-term results. In fact, performance-oriented cultures possess statistically better

financial results. For culturally strong brands like Whole Foods, In-N-Out Burger, LEGO, or Walt Disney World, there is no doubt about the validity of their results in almost every area. Employee morale is higher and turnover is lower than their industry norms. People are passionately and actively engaged in the business. And because of these internal factors, organizational alignment filters through the entire brand, all focused on collectively achieving the company's goals, including the all-important financial ones. What starts out as an internal approach becomes external, profitable, and sustainable results.

Since we know that organizational cultures can only be affected by people and their behaviors, it should be clear that everything starts and ends with leadership. Regardless of position, any leader can enhance a company's environment, so never stop playing your part to advocate for and drive the culture.

Mentorship is Instrumental

One way to affect culture change is through personally developing others and being willing to be developed by others. So, humility is important here as well.

You are who you are today because of learned behavior, so humility may be one of those elusive leadership characteristics that takes a lifetime to embrace, especially if it is not part of your natural disposition. But if the selfless and humble side of you authentically exists, then you are ready for the next step. Mentorship is perhaps the greatest level of leadership maturity there is. And if mentorship is or becomes a widely celebrated part of your organization's learning environment, you can expect an army of culture catalysts to positively push the brand to new heights.

Light It Up

By definition, a person who starts an organization should be considered a catalyst. To create a culture so crystal clear that the company's 'personality' is apparent to all requires deliberate thought, strategy, and action. Such business leaders recognize the staying power of a strong brand personality; they aspire to positively ingrain the brand's culture into the end user's psyche— from genesis to nirvana.

Perhaps one day, you'll start your own business, but even if your current role is a new up-and-coming leader or middle manager, you should still think like a founder. We can learn a lot from their grit and innovative thinking.

Conclusion

Focusing on the company's culture may be new to you, but the benefits are Herculean. Building a strong culture creates an enjoyable, encouraging, and inspiring work environment that everybody wants to be part of. Your brand will see undeniable benefits when you do it right. But talk and thought are cheap.

You have to put in the work to truly start your cultural revolution. It is not enough to just fondly think of these proven best practices from time to time and expect better results—you have to act. Decisions are made by those who show up.

It's time to show up.



Jim Knight is an award-winning training and development veteran and culture catalyst who speaks on a variety of interactive topics, including programs on organizational culture, differentiated service and rock star leadership. During Jim's twenty-one-year career with Hard Rock International, his creativity and success garnered his team several industry awards for cutting-edge print, video, e-learning and instructor-led concepts. He was also recognized by Training magazine as representing one of the Training Top 125 companies in the world, across all industries, and has since been featured in Entrepreneur magazine, Inc. magazine, Forbes magazine and Fox Small Business News.

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