

# Walking the Talk: Leading to Align Your Organization's Culture—Inside and Out

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Monday, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm

## **Purpose/Description**

You are building an organization because of your passion for a cause or a purpose. But how can you make sure your organization's culture—both as experienced by those who work there and those who engage with your work—expresses the values and purpose that animate your organization? This session will unpack organizational culture—what it is, how it forms and changes, and what you can do as a leader to bring (or keep) your organization's "walk" in alignment with its "talk."

## **Desired Outcomes**

By the end of the session participants will:

1. Define organizational culture as a system of meaning, commonly understood as "how we do things around here," that manifests in artifacts, norms, values, and assumptions;
2. Recognize how their organization's espoused values are (or are not) expressed to employees, participants, and partners through policies, behaviors/practices, and decisions; and
3. Identify actions they can take to bring the culture that their employees, participants, and partners experience into greater alignment with the values they espouse.

## **Materials, Equipment, Set-up**

- Chairs in circle (possible to get tables in a U shape?)
- 2 Flipcharts with pads
- Markers (Rob to bring)
- Fidget materials e.g. pipe cleaners, play doh, etc.
- Chocolate kisses—dark and milk chocolate
- Handouts—see outline

## Process

<b>Timing/Materials</b>	<b>Process/Activity</b>
10:50 – 11:00  FLIPCHART: Welcome  HANDOUT: Session outline card  Fidget materials  Chocolate kisses (dark and milk)	<b>Before the session:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place card with session outline/agenda on each chair.</li> <li>• Place fidget materials (pipe cleaners etc) around the room, on chairs.</li> <li>• Place a chocolate kiss on each chair.</li> </ul> <b>As people enter:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greet them individually and shake hands, make sure to learn their names, and say something like “I’m glad you’re here and eager to hear your voice and learn with you today”</li> <li>• Post “Welcome!” in big letters on flipchart</li> <li>• Offer them a chair in circle of chairs set up ahead of time</li> <li>• What else?</li> </ul>
11:00	<b>Welcome and Connection</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with a niggun?</li> <li>• Share name, org, role, one thing you noticed as you entered and what it told you about the session you were about to experience.</li> <li>• Unpack how they were welcomed into the room as they arrived.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— What artifacts were visible?</li> <li>— What messages did they convey?</li> <li>— What norms were evident?</li> <li>— What values do those norms express?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
11:20 – 11:45  HANDOUT:  First Timer’s Worksheet	<b>Guided imagery exercise: First timers</b>  Choose whether you want to focus on your organization’s work culture (internal) or its outward-facing culture as experienced by those you engage.  Relax, get comfortable, place your feet flat on the floor, close your eyes if you wish.  If you want to focus internally, imagine you’re a new employee. If you want to focus externally, imagine you’re a first time program participant.

Timing/Materials	Process/Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do you go?</li> <li>• How easy is it to figure out where to go?</li> <li>• What do you see when you first arrive?</li> <li>• Are you greeted? By whom?</li> <li>• With whom do you come in contact or spend time?</li> <li>• How do you learn what you should do in this setting or situation?</li> <li>• What do you do or experience?</li> <li>• How do your interactions with others feel?</li> <li>• What do you learn? From whom? About what?</li> </ul> <p>On your way out at the end of the day or program, say your goodbyes, if any, and close the door behind you.</p> <p>Take a moment to reflect on what you’ve just experienced.</p> <p>When you are ready, open your eyes, but stay in the perspective you’ve adopted as a “first-timer.”</p> <p><b>Handout First Timer’s Worksheet:</b></p> <p>Take a few minutes (5) to reflect and write down your quick impressions in response to the prompts on your worksheet:</p> <p>On your way home, what are you thinking you know about this organization?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do people there think is important (or not)? What matters most in this organization?</li> <li>2. What does this organization stand for?</li> <li>3. Are you looking forward to going back there? Why or why not?</li> <li>4. Is this going to be a good organization to be part of or involved with? How do you know? What would it say about you if you become part of this organization?</li> </ol>

<b>Timing/Materials</b>	<b>Process/Activity</b>
	<p>5. What do you think it will take to be successful there?</p> <p>6. How do you expect you'll be treated? How will you be expected to treat others?</p> <p>7. Now, as yourself in the present, what are the core values that you want your organization's culture to embody and demonstrate?</p> <p><b>Debrief in pairs (7 min):</b></p> <p>What did approaching your organization as a newcomer reveal to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What cues did you use to detect and decode the culture (internal or external) of the organization? Artifacts?</li> <li>• When you viewed your organization through the eyes of a newcomer, how well aligned was what you "saw" with the values you espouse?</li> <li>• To what extent do employees and participants experience the culture you intend?</li> <li>• What unintended signals might your organization be sending? How?</li> </ul> <p>—Example: generous work-life benefits but message was "keep working"</p> <p>—Example: unlimited vacation policy; result is people don't take vacation.</p> <p>Debrief in full group (3 min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you learn?</li> <li>• What surprised you?</li> </ul> <p>This exercise was designed to position you on the boundary of your organization because culture is hard to see from the inside.</p>
11:45 – 12:00	<b>Defining and Understanding Organizational Culture</b>

<b>Timing/Materials</b>	<b>Process/Activity</b>
<p>FLIPCHARTS:</p> <p>Definitions of org culture</p> <p>Concentric Circles of artifacts, norms, values, assumptions</p> <p>Culture Formation: Orgs Solve Problems</p> <p>How Culture Emerges</p> <p>HANDOUT:</p> <p>Org Work Culture— Questions to Consider</p>	<p>Rob teaches:</p> <p><b>Define</b> organizational culture as “a system of shared meaning”, commonly understood as “How we do things around here.” You can think of it as the “operating system” of the organization. It informs the default behaviors that people tend to prefer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elements/layers are Artifacts, Norms, Values, Beliefs and Assumptions</li> <li>• Culture’s relationship to an organization and those in it is analogous to the relationship of the media to society. That is, culture both <i>reflects</i> the organization’s values and behaviors and <i>influences</i> them.</li> </ul> <p><b>How culture forms and changes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture forms over time as an organization <b>solves basic problems:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— What is our reason/purpose for existing?</li> <li>— Who has power/authority over what?</li> <li>— What roles will people play and how will they interrelate?</li> <li>— How and from where will we get the resources we need?</li> <li>— How will we balance a need for stability with a need to adapt to change?</li> <li>— How will we survive and grow in our environment?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Culture emerges</b> almost imperceptibly as:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— “The way we did it” becomes</li> <li>— “The way we do it” which becomes</li> <li>— “The way we’ve always done it” and, ultimately,</li> <li>— “The right and proper way to do it.”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Once formed, culture becomes remarkably robust and stable (hard to change).</li> </ul>

<b>Timing/Materials</b>	<b>Process/Activity</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many factors contribute to and influence culture:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— History and “Ownership” (what happens when organizations merge?)</li> <li>— Leadership</li> <li>— Size</li> <li>— Budget and sources of funds/resources</li> <li>— Program/Service</li> <li>— Technology</li> <li>— Environment</li> <li>— People</li> <li>— Goals and Objectives</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Deciphering Organizational Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example core assumptions of daily practice:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Are relationships governed by rules or adaptive to the needs of those we serve/engage?</li> <li>— Do people here show initiative or depend on direction?</li> <li>— Which is more important: attention to detail or prompt action?</li> <li>— Who makes decisions: those who are closest to the issue and/or know the most or those in a position of authority?</li> <li>— Which is more important: getting the job done (right) or personal development?</li> <li>— Do Jewish values inform how we treat one another or are they only applied in our outward-facing work?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Other Work Culture questions</b> to consider (see handout)</li> </ul>
12:00 – 12:20	<b>Walking the Talk: Influencing and Aligning Your Organization’s Culture</b>

Timing/Materials	Process/Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As leader, you cannot <i>control</i> or <i>determine</i> culture. At best, you can influence it, and heavily at organization’s founding. As many of the organizations here are relatively young as organizations, you may have more opportunity than a legacy organization to influence the culture as it forms.</li> <li>• Other people influence it too; a good reason not to put up with “toxic” people or people who simply don’t exemplify or behave within the bounds of the desired culture. There’s a line between embracing diversity and sabotaging your organization’s values.</li> <li>• Aside from when an organization is new, another time when leaders can influence or even redirect culture is when an organization faces a crisis or palpable external challenge/threat that is vivid enough to convince people that old solutions will no longer solve the same old problems or that new problems have arisen for which the old culture provided no solution. These are moments when you have people’s attention and they will read a lot of meaning into decisions made and actions taken.</li> </ul> <p>Cultures also change more easily when the original culture holds a meta-cultural value for responsiveness and adaptability.</p> <p>A lot is being written these days about Jewish organizations and how they treat their people (not so well). Focusing largely on so-called legacy organizations, the implication is that we don’t treat our people the way we’d like them to treat our clients, participants, members, donors (or as we’d like to be treated). This suggests a disconnect or misalignment between what I’ll call internal and external culture.</p> <p><b>Internal and External Culture</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASK: How does the internal culture among employees affect (and reflect?) the external culture with participants?</li> </ul> <p>— Employees will treat participants as they are treated. Examples? Customer service, ECE use of 6-part</p>

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<p>HANDOUT: Walking the Talk Worksheet</p>	<p>meeting structure, organizations announcing early closing and time off for Thanksgiving the day before.</p> <p>Why is that important? Because one bleeds into the other. A mark of a healthy organization is a common culture through and through with consistent values, enacted in a consistent fashion—even when the going gets tough.</p> <p>Use the worksheet to consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Where is your organization’s internal culture well aligned with its external culture?</li> <li>2. Where are they out of alignment?</li> <li>3. What is within your power to influence to bring the cultures into greater alignment?</li> </ol> <p>Give time (10 min?) to work on the worksheet.</p> <p>Then debrief in pair (if time allows) and then</p> <p>Take a few responses in full group.</p>
<p>12:20 – 12:30  FLIPCHART</p>	<p><b>Reflection</b></p> <p>What’s one thing you are taking away or plan to do differently?</p>