COMPANY CULTURE GARDENING

REAL EXAMPLE BEHAVIORIAL PRACTICES

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To make clear what behavioral practices look like, I'll share some of the best from actual team building sessions I conducted during my tenure at Xerox as manager of organization effectiveness in the Worldwide Engineering and Manufacturing Divisions.

Jerry Wagner, PhD. and CEO, Academy of Culture Ambassadors, supports what I'm going to say when he suggests:

"Believed and practiced behaviors are the nourishment that feeds and sustains employee desires for a healthy workplace. I propose the imagery of a garden, depicting a place where employees in teams select and grow their own behavioral practices which become their nourishment and feed their appetites; a "behaviors garden" if you will. When behaviors become firmly implanted and flourish, a culture is being solidified."

Team behavioral practices are a set of behaviors which state the team's view regarding how all members should operate as they interact with one another. These practices, *when both stated and practiced by all team members*, become the operational norms of the team and have a massive impact on determining its culture.

But behavioral practices cannot be dictated to a team by "the boss", lifted from someone's blog, or pulled from some other company's web page. Behavioral practices must be proposed, processed, debated, pulled apart, rearranged, and hammered out together before they can be truly accepted by the entire team (including the manager who operates as an equal with all other team members in creating the shared values practices).

Once completed and supported by all, this list of behavioral practices becomes a set of shared values guiding behavior within the team. If one or more team members—including the manager—are ignoring or violating one or more of the practices, other team members have every right to call out that individual or individuals and remind those concerned of the practice(s) being violated and chat about the team's expectations that these practices are to adhered to by all.

Developing a list of behavioral practices that become a team's shared values is not easy. I know, I have facilitated several hundred of these over the past many years. The process must be done off site, away from distractions, metaphorically speaking in a place called a cultural garden.

Basically, I gave the teams the five main categories at the beginning of the session and broke them into pairs to come up with their three best, most relevant behavioral practices under each category. Then I combined them into teams of four and asked them to take the six inputs for each category and discuss, combine, rearrange, add new thoughts, carve up, restate, challenge, until they had a revised list of three practices for each category they could all support. Finally, these revised practices from each team of four was written on flip charts.

Then, taking the categories one-by-one, all the information was hashed out as a whole team. The final goal was: consensus on a minimum of two, up to a maximum of three, behavioral practices as takeaways under each broad category. (Given five categories the minimum behavioral practices would be 10, the maximum of 15 which is plenty, but doable). This limitation stopped the all to familiar fault of teams

generating so many practices they are overwhelmed—with a "cast of thousands" of practices, with all soon forgotten and none practiced.

The listings here are examples of how to explicitly define—in behavioral terms—what *Communications, Mutual Respect, Collaboration and Trust, Decision Making, and Business Operations* means to a team. These broad categories were developed over time from my experience, research, team building exercises, and discussions with managers as to what over-arching categories tended to most impact interpersonal relations in teams.

The individual items under the broad categories are real examples—very good ones I believe—of what various teams developed. These are just a small compilation to give insight and are not in any particular order. So here they are.

BEHAVIORAL PRACTICES WE LIVE BY

COMMUNICATIONS

WE WILL:
- Encourage employees to bring bad news at the earliest possible opportunity since this maximizes our chance to deal with it in a timely fashion.
- Nurture open and honest discussions, share information that is important to others in a timely manner, and we *will not* carry "hidden agendas."
- Foster intra-team communications.
- Share both good and bad results.
- No fluff, no spin, no saying what the others want to hear, just forthright messages.

MUTUAL RESPECT

WE WILL:

- Treat each other with dignity and consideration by explaining the reasons behind statements, questions, and actions.
- Openly share information with no hidden agendas whenever soliciting team member inputs.
- Criticize constructively by sticking to the issue and not getting personal.
- Recognize "fruitful friction" as healthy and respect another's right to disagree.
- Resolve interpersonal issues privately.
- Acknowledge mistakes then move ahead.
- Be sensitive to other people's workload by prioritizing our requirements of them.
- Remain mindful that all team members add value to the program.

COLLABORATION AND TRUST

WE WILL:

- Form natural and informal collaborative teams whenever needed "to move the ball forward" and accomplish shared task objectives.
- Be responsive to each other's needs by offering, and accepting, help and assistance.
- Positively recognize—not shoot—messengers who bring bad news.

- Take pride in, and recognize, each other's accomplishments—including those people outside our team but who are working with us on a project.
- Bring problems to the table with root causes clearly stated and potential solutions defined.
- Remember that "gold nuggets of wisdom" are in no way bounded by rank, seniority, or function.
- Live by the principle that: When you make a promise, you create hope; when you keep a promise to create trust!
- Operate for the greater good of the whole.

DECISION MAKING

WE WILL:

- Get facts, use facts, and avoid "hip shooting"; however, we will not be afraid to use intuition with clearly thought out assumptions when appropriate.
- Seek definitions of the boundary conditions before making decisions.
- Involve all relevant team members in the decision-making process prior to action being taken.
- Use the consensus decision-making process at every appropriate opportunity—especially when acceptance and commitment are crucial.
- Never assume consensus! We will verbally poll each decision member (i.e. test for consensus) to confirm that everyone agrees with, or agrees to support, the final decision that has been decided upon.
- Document our decisions to make clear: who, is to do what, by when.
- Outlaw the right of infinite appeal. That means once a decision is made and supported, it stays made! On occasions where there is factual evidence or a major shift in circumstances that undermine the current decision, we of course must reopen, reexamine and alter the original decision.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

WE WILL:

- Act as a team of business partners, as a board of directors, not as isolated heads of independent, functional silos.
- Focus on achievement of our business goals.
- Share in team members' problems and help out when possible because we warrant our commitments and deliverables to our customers.
- Continually test customer requirements and modify direction(s) as necessary.
- Be relentless in tracking and sharing the significant few key metrics by which we measure and improve our business so all employees can see how we are performing.

- Inspect, revise, and update our work processes as required to meet our goals.
- Stick to our "core competencies knitting" while keeping that "knitting" state of the art."

This paper is one in a series from the Academy of Culture Ambassadors on Company Culture Gardening.