

## LEADERSHIP CULT OR CULTURE?

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It's time for a check up on your leadership. How well do you equip and empower other leaders? This is part one of a two-part series of articles to help you assess where you are, and to improve what you do. The title for this article may sound extreme. Is this our only choice? Either a cult or a culture of leadership? Not exactly. However, based on the kind of leader you are you will create an environment that leans toward one of these extremes.

**A Cult:** A rudimentary group of people devoted to a person, whose organization fades when that person departs.

**A Culture:** A community of people which share common language, values and behaviors, which set them apart from others, and which grows of itself.

None of us plan to create a personal cult. We despise stories of cult leaders like Jim Jones, Charles Manson and David Koresh who led hundreds of people astray. However, when we cause others to depend solely on our leadership, we share some of the same qualities of a cult. While our message is nothing like Charles Manson's, our methods are far too similar.

The paradox at the heart of organizational leadership is that the leader must add value to the organization but must not take it away when he or she leaves. An essential part of a leader's job is to become dispensable through creating a culture of leadership that extends throughout the campus or organization, and outlives the leader.

### CULT

1. Emerges quickly with a forceful leader
2. Based on the personality of the leader
3. Fragile and volatile due to the leader
4. Future lasts as long as the leader does
5. Survival rests on a personality
6. People are controlled from the top
7. Leader pushes values on others
8. Works through compliance
9. Centralization (positional power)
10. Can breed fear and insecurity
11. Low risk, low reward
12. The leader leads followers
13. Short-term success

### CULTURE

1. Emerges slowly in time with a leadership team
2. Based on the shared values and goals of people
3. Durable and robust due to the environment
4. Future lasts as all transmit to next generation
5. Survival rests on shared belief & experience
6. People are empowered from the top
7. Leaders model and teach competence, passion
8. Works through commitment
9. De-centralization (personal power)
10. Will breed love and respect
11. High risk, high reward
12. The leader creates leaders
13. Long-term success

A Leadership Culture Out Performs a Cult Authors Robert Dills, Anne Deering and Julian Russell note that there are three central leadership ingredients that "cultures" do better than "cults." I added a fourth one to the list, and offer them here.

1. **ANTICIPATE** This means getting ahead of the curve, and seeing changes that need to happen. It requires adaptability to respond to weak signals or trends and create fluid organizations. A culture does this better because it doesn't rely on one single personality, but on a community of people who have diverse gifts but shared values. A cult tends to be characterized by a lot of rhetoric. Leaders don't listen well and people are afraid to speak openly.
2. **ALIGN** This means achieving congruence in your values and behaviors. What you say you value and what you do are consistent. You move together toward goals with passion because energy is focused. Cultures do this because everyone owns the vision and values, and each makes a contribution toward their creation. Cults only do this when one personality is in control.
3. **ACT** This means establishing what is important to achieve the organization's goals and passionately pursuing these areas that make a difference. A culture does this better because momentum comes from the environment itself. It doesn't rely on one person doing it all. Many hands make light work. Synergy is at work. Having leaders at all levels accomplishes the goals more quickly and effectively.
4. **APPRENTICE** This means being a magnet to emerging leaders, and drawing them into the environment so that they can be equipped to participate in reaching the goals. Cultures attract leaders; cults attract followers. Cultures build more leaders through training and empowerment; there are leaders at every level. On the other hand, cults are only happy with one person leading from the top. The rest are followers.

Fostering a Leadership Culture As I work with organizations, churches and universities, my goal is to help them create a "leadership culture." Let me offer a simple definition for the term leadership culture. I believe:

A leadership culture is an environment that contagiously affects team members to think and act like servant leaders.

If you want to nurture a leadership culture, you must prepare yourself in following ways:

1. Get comfortable moving from leading followers to leading leaders.
2. Get ready to mentor and teach hungry, emerging leaders
3. Get the resources these emerging leaders will need to grow and succeed
4. Get used to an atmosphere of creativity, ideas and pushing the envelope
5. Get prepared to release control of methods, and simply embrace mission
6. Get familiar with the leadership style: management by objectives.
7. Get over trying to regulate everyone and enjoy the fruit of the culture.

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If you want to foster a leadership culture, you will need to take some steps. In this month's article, we will outline some simple, transferable steps, then furnish an evaluation for you to give yourself.

The Ingredients for Developing Leaders in Your Culture Over the last twenty-six years, I've noticed that when I take a group of potential leaders, and create a safe community in which they can grow, leaders always emerge from those communities. They are like little "cultures" or gardens, where you can grow plants only we are interested in growing leaders. You can accelerate the development of leaders by using the following template. Here are some simple ingredients these growth communities should possess:

1. Give them a vision to work toward. Use transferable concepts.
2. Give them a problem to work on. Provide laboratories.
3. Give them a team to work with. Offer learning communities.
4. Give them a mentor to work under. Commit to apprenticing in every area.
5. Give them a resource to work through. Furnish tools to equip them.

#### An Evaluation: Culture or Cult

To evaluate whether your campus or ministry is more of a culture or a cult, respond to these questions. This test was inspired by the Alpha Leadership Group. Rate yourself on each question, scale of 1 to 5:

5 = Almost always 4 = Mostly 3 = Sometimes 2 = Rarely 1 = Almost never

**Detecting Weak Signals** Staff at all levels are encouraged and supported to evaluate and speak openly about what they think. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

**Developing Mental Agility** Many people are encouraged to take the lead and express their ideas and visions, and leaders are responsive to these ideas. 1 2 3 4 5

**Freeing up Resources** Values, goals and actions are determined and shared by staff (team members) at all levels. 1 2 3 4 5

**Leading Through Example** The leader is a reflection and example of the vision and values that everyone shares. 1 2 3 4 5

**Demonstrating Teachability** The leader is genuinely committed to learning, and submits to the discipline of building his or her own expertise. 1 2 3 4 5

**Task Through Relationship** Staff at all levels are acknowledged and valued as individual contributors. 1 2 3 4 5

**Shared Vision** Staff plans/actions are motivated by their common values and shared vision. 1 2 3 4 5

**Creating Cultures That Can Act** The organization succeeds primarily because of the vision / empowerment of people at all levels. 1 2 3 4 5

**The 80/20 Principle** Students understand key responsibilities and prioritize them for best results. 1 2 3 4 5

**Ready, Fire, Aim** Within parameters, people are allowed to make mistakes if they are acting and improving themselves along the way. 1 2 3 4 5

Diligent Pursuit Staf are motivated by common values to tenacious pursuit of the goals. They have a 'whatever it takes' attitude. 1 2 3 4 5

Equipping Disposition Leaders understand that a chief part of their job is to equip others for leadership not simply lead themselves; the goal is developing people not just doing programs. 1 2 3 4 5

Multiplication Through Reproduction Leaders always have someone with them as an apprentice because their goal is to reproduce other leaders. 1 2 3 4 5

Assessment and Next Steps&

1. Where are you strong and weak on the evaluation above?
2. What single action would be most fruitful to move from "cult" to "culture"? Blessings& Tim