Cracking Your Church's Culture Code

Title: Cracking Your Church's Culture Code

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Book Summary:

Why is it that the best strategic plans and good leadership often are not able to move churches in the desired direction? Sam Chand contends that toxic culture is to blame. Quite often, leaders don't sense the toxicity, but it poisons their relationships and derails their vision. This work describes five easily identifiable categories of church culture (inspiring-accepting-stagnant-discouraging-toxic), with diagnostic descriptions in the book and a separate online assessment tool. The reader will be able to identify strengths and needs of their church's culture, and then apply practical strategies (communication, control and authority, selection and placement of personnel, etc.) to make their church's culture more positive.

Book Notes:

Self-reflection is both planned and spontaneous. A question that I teach people to ask about themselves at regular intervals is, "What is it about me that keeps me from becoming the best me that God intended me to be?" This question invites us to take full responsibility for our growth and direction, and it rivets our purpose to God's plan for our lives. Location 1665

To galvanize people's resolve to kill the old and raise up a new culture, every growing organization has to make friends with an odd ally: chaos. Location 1885

The way a leader navigates change may do more to define the organization's culture than any purpose statement. The path charted through threats and opportunities demonstrates the actual values of the leader, the team, and the organization. The response to chaos, then, is both a reflection of the existing culture and an open door to cultural change. Location 1913

I've seen leaders experience chaos in countless ways, but three of those ways stand out as unique challenges: redefining failure, creating a sense of urgency to take advantage of opportunities, and managing conflict. Location 1918

Failure can be the platform to learn life's greatest lessons so that we can continue to think the unimaginable, dream the impossible, and attempt incredible things for God. Location 1984

Great leaders, though, are often misunderstood, especially when they create chaos when everyone expects a

time of tranquility. Location 2007

Organizations naturally drift toward complacency instead of urgency, fear rather than optimism, and blaming others instead of taking responsibility. To overcome this drift, leaders can invite fresh, challenging ideas to stimulate creative thinking, tell stories to capture people's hearts, and be models of urgency for their team members. Location 2062

When I consult with church leaders about hiring or promoting staff, I suggest they ask four questions:

1. **Competence:** Can you do the job?
2. **Character:** Can I trust you?
3. **Chemistry:** Can you fit in our culture?
4. **Capacity:** Can you grow with us? Location 2137

The Diffusion of Innovations model (popularized by Everett Rogers) helps us understand the terrain of our teams and our churches as we propose change. According to this theory, people adopt one of five roles in their response to change. In my book *What's Shakin' Your Ladder?* I identify these as excited embracers, early embracers, middlers, late embracers, and never embracers. The distribution of these roles in a group forms a bell curve.

- **Excited embracers** make up 2 percent of a population. They are the dreamers and visionaries who are usually recognized as leaders or policymakers.
- **Early embracers** are 18 percent of a group. They are respected and influential, and they eagerly get on board when the concept is explained. Leaders treasure these people on their teams.
- **Middlers** are the largest part of the population, about 60 percent of people in the group. They feel more comfortable with the status quo, and they listen very carefully to anyone who resists change. They are willing to get on board only when they are convinced that everybody else will, too.
- **Late embracers** make up 18 percent of the people in a large group. They resist change as long as possible, offering objections all along the way. Eventually, they will go along with the majority, but with a large measure of skepticism and without any enthusiasm at all.
- **Never embracers** are 2 percent of the group. They are steadfastly committed to the past, and they continue to resist change long after the rest of the team is working hard to achieve success. Location 2160

Reinvent yourself every three years…so that you can remain relevant and able to make new contributions in a world of constant change. …Reinvention is the key to longevity. —Stephen R. Covey Location 2235

When I meet with pastors and discuss the principle of creating an organizational vehicle to fulfill their vision, I want to find out if their vision is clear and strong, and I want to help them see if their organizational structure and people can take them to reach that vision. Dr. Gerald Brooks (www.growingothers.com) has helped me think through this issue by using a series of test questions.

1. **The heart test:** Is the vision burning brightly in the heart of the leader, both in public descriptions of

where God is leading him and passionately in his heart?

2. **The leadership test:** Do the top leaders in the church share this vision, or are they apathetic or resistant? Are these the people who can take the church to the vision's destination?

3. **The organization test:** How well does the current organizational structure work to achieve the vision? What are the bottlenecks? Which aspects are cars that can't take you there? Which ones are planes or ships?

4. **The recruiting test:** Are new hires and volunteers on board with the vision, or are they still a work in progress?

5. **The message test:** Is the vocabulary of the vision consistent and strong in every part of the church? Is the message of the vision reflected in sermons, written materials, the budget, signs, and conversations about the priorities of the church?

6. **The planning test:** Is the church's vision your staff's benchmark for strategic planning in every area?

7. **The facility test:** Do facilities, including their layout, design, and decor, reflect the vision?

8. **The money test:** Does the budget demonstrate the vision's priorities?

9. **The pragmatism test:** Does the vision make sense? Is it both God-sized and workable? Can you see it happening? Is it so global that it doesn't capture anyone's heart, or is it appropriately targeted?

10. **The capacity test:** How well does the capacity of the current organizational structure and personnel match the vision?

11. **The clarity test:** Can people throughout the organization articulate the vision clearly and with passion? If you ask people who come out the door after the service on Sunday morning to articulate the vision of the church, could they share it clearly and with enthusiasm?

12. **The counsel test:** Who are the outside voices that are helping to shape the vision and the vehicle to fulfill it?

13. **The growth test:** How do the ministries of the church need to be organized to capitalize on the next two stages of growth? Location 2265

As I've worked with church leaders, I've observed them moving through the following phases as they've implemented new strategies, especially in changing their cultures:

1. **Entrepreneurial**, or the discovery phase, when the strategy is seen as viable: it can be done!

2. **Emerging**, or the growth phase, when credibility is crucial: the leader can be trusted.

3. **Established**, or the maintenance phase, when stability is achieved: the systems are in place and functioning well.

4. **Eroding**, or the survival phase, when the church is vulnerable: signs of decline are obvious.

5. **Enterprising**, or the reinvention phase, when leaders adapt to a fresh vision and new strategies: they

adjust so they can grow again. Location 2357

Your future can be bright if

- You have a compelling vision.
- You have aligned the resources and ministries of the church to the vision.
- You understand the process of change and transition.
- You have the blessing of the Lord. Location 2384

Developing a healthy culture is the "soft side" of leadership, but strategic planning, the "hard side" of leadership, is also essential. The two complement each other. Location 2401

To change things in an organization, it's far more important to make adjustments to the informal connections, not the formal structure. Location 2486

William Bridges, a noted expert on change and transition, explains in his most recent book, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change,* that the reason change agents fail is that they focus on the solution instead of the problem. This may seem counterintuitive to forward-thinking, visionary leaders, but Bridges teaches that people need to be gripped by the need before they will embrace the solution. In fact, he believes that 90 percent of a leader's efforts should be spent on selling the problem and helping people understand what is not working. He rightly claims that people don't perceive the need for a solution if they don't fully grasp the problem. Location 2549

Changing an unhealthy culture to a strong, vibrant one requires both a sledgehammer and a potter's wheel. We have to be ruthless to attack systems (not people) that block us from achieving our new objectives, but we also need to carefully mold a new culture with gentleness, wisdom, and strength—like a skilled potter making a beautiful vase. Location 2619

Is it possible to transform a culture? Some of us think that it seems almost too good to be true. But yes, it's not only possible but also the most productive work we can do because it has a dramatic, multiplied impact—on the team, in the church, and throughout the community. Location 2678

Gifted teachers know that asking a great question is often more valuable than an hour of brilliant lecture. Location 2781

Questions for personal reflection:

- Who am I? Where does my identity come from?
- What matters most to me?
- How well does my daily schedule relate to what matters most to me?
- Beyond roles and paychecks, what is my deepest, most compelling motivation? Really?
- How do I define success?
- Where am I in the process of learning, growing, and changing as a person and as a leader? Location

2787

The conundrum of leadership is this: people want improvement, but they resist change. Location 2860

All change is a critique of the past. If we're not careful, we can step on the toes of those we're trying to lead as we destroy the old vehicle and create a new one. Leaders need to understand what's at stake in the hearts of those who treasure the past. They may not be thrilled to change vehicles! We can't improve anything without changing it. The conundrum of leadership is this: people want improvement, but they resist change. Our task is helping them learn to embrace change. Location 2862

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle "location" is provided after each entry.