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Culture...what is it and how do you build it?

Culture is the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.

Very interesting when formally defined, but what does all of that mean? Let's take a look at your office and further define the culture you have created and operate in on a daily basis.

Is your office filled with the spirit of abundance or do you see glimpses of scarcity? Do you lead by personality or by principle? Is your office a convenience or community? Do your agents complain or come forward with solutions to problems as they arise? Is there a sense of volunteerism in your environment or are the agents expecting the company to "do it all"? The most important question; do you keep your commitments? We will visit that question later, as it is one of the smallest and least pondered topics.

Culture is not something that just happens and unfortunately, not something that can be changed overnight. Stop for a moment and reflect on your culture. What are your challenges and how will you change what is currently taking place in your office. These are three critical areas to focus on in creating a thriving, productive and inspiring culture.

1. The Interview: Do you realize that your office is in its current condition because of the way you interviewed your agents when hiring them? That's right, you did it to yourself. Don't get too concerned, there is a solution. During the interview, did you tell the agent that you are always available? Did you tell them that you will help them with any challenges they have with their transactions? Did you ask them what their expectations are of you while failing to mention the expectations you have of them? Did you sell them on your company or ask them questions about why they would want to join your company? If so, you may have "oversold" yourself and your company in the interview.

The strategy of "selling" in the interview process is antiquated and just doesn't work! Well, let me rephrase that. It works if you want to get yourself in a situation of the "overselling" trap and then having to deliver on what is not realistic. Many brokers/managers make huge promises that are impossible or unreasonable to deliver on, and they get burnt out trying to fulfill these undertakings. Instead, why not set

expectations for the prospect and challenge them to deliver?

Let's look at some more viable assertions you could make during the interview. First of all, you are not always available; that is an unrealistic promise and is an irresponsible communication to make to a potential agent. Instead, this dialogue will help to re-create a culture that will inspire you and your agents in the interview process. "We are here to serve and support you as a team. Our environment is founded on and supports action through abundance vs. scarcity. What do I mean by this? Our agents know that their success is predicated on the success of others around them. It's not uncommon to see our experienced agents helping other experienced agents and new agents with transactional or day-to-day real estate challenges. Our experienced agents were new at one time and realized the benefit of agent support when they were just getting started. It's a natural for them to give back now that they have the opportunity. I want you to know that I am here to support you, but realize that this entire team is here to support you, too."

Let's explore the transactional drama that we get wrapped up in. Are agents lined up outside your door because you have trained them to believe that you are not only their leader, but also their problem solver? Scary, isn't it? How much growth will a human being experience if they are constantly provided with the answer? NOT MUCH! The learning process is about self-discovery. How are you facilitating self-discovery with your agents? Many times brokers/managers provide all the answers because it's a means to validating themselves in their job. Validation doesn't come from being a "Deal Doctor"; it comes from facilitating your agents' growth and creating a condition in which they choose to be productive. You may find short-term productivity with the "helper" leadership style, but long term productivity comes from empowering agents and leading with vision. Stop being a helper and start being a leader. Allow your agents to self-discover in the learning process. You will see a great shift in your agent productivity and start to enjoy your job a lot more.

2. Training and Coaching: First, are you aware that training is just that without accountability? You will not see sustainable productivity from training unless you have an accountability matrix in place

behind every training session that you do. Let's move away from that concept for a moment and talk about how training can contribute to a thriving, productive, and inspiring culture. Are you excited about the training and coaching that you are doing? If you're not, your agents likely aren't that excited either. If you can't get excited about the training/coaching you are doing, you should hire someone who will motivate the agents. In addition, you need to focus on your experienced agent/top-producer training in order to keep them. Some feel that top-producers don't want training or coaching, but that notion couldn't be further from the truth. For instance, why are top-producers hiring coaches? Because they aren't getting this training from their broker! Start giving value to your top-producers beyond just rewarding them with plaques for being agent of the week, month, quarter or year. Top-Producers want a Top Coach. Be their Top Coach!

Who does the training in your office? Do the agents do any training for you? If not, why don't they? Many brokers feel that top-producers don't have time to do training. This is a bad excuse! Training provides a great opportunity for agents to practice their skill-sets in their area of expertise. "Not in my office, Jon," is what I hear a lot of the time. This unwillingness shows the manager supports an environment poisoned with scarcity. Ask your top listing agent to conduct a listing presentation class, and watch the outcome. One caution—before having an agent do training, you want to make sure that they are someone aligned with your vision and model of how to do business. If they aren't on board with this, it is a fundamental problem you will need to address.

Let's now revisit the concept outlined at the beginning of this section, that of training/coaching with accountability. I find that many brokers/managers aren't holding their agent accountable, they're just training them. Why don't we hold people accountable? The reason is we don't like to be held accountable ourselves. That's something you will have to reflect on and discover how to resolve that fear. If I had to choose between the importance of accountability or training, I would choose accountability. Accountability provides a positive tension that causes people to take action and become creative, when necessary, to uphold their commitments. Once agents become accountable for their own progress, they will experience growth in the environment you have created.

3. The Sales Meeting: The context of your sales meetings is one of the most important components driving the culture in your office. Do your sales meetings start and end on time? Meetings that start or end late shows that the agents' time is not valuable and the meeting is not important. A simple thing such as starting and ending meetings on time shows discipline on the manager's part and respect for the agents. In measuring the quality of a meeting, a great gauge is

whether a recruit would want to join your office after attending. If the recruit is bored to death, wondering where the rest of the agents are or has to listen to the "Negative Ned" whom hijacks the meeting with his newest lists of office complaints, the meeting is a failure. If you can't invite a potential recruit to your sales meeting with confidence and pride in the experience, you need to gain control over the meeting format and fast!

Your sales meeting is the one opportunity you have to bring your entire group together, demonstrate your leadership and synergize them through your purpose, vision and value. The sales meeting is where you instill culture. Reinforce your values and expectations at every meeting on a weekly basis. Acknowledge the agents' behaviors and or activities that meet expectations and ignore or redirect those that are maligned. This is your meeting and your office; show your leadership.

Acknowledge volunteerism observed at your office during weekly sales meetings, and you will support a healthy culture and get excited about your job again. Don't overlook people stepping forward in the spirit of volunteerism for the benefit of the office and the agents, no matter in what way or how small. Acknowledge the actions they have taken at every meeting.

What else do you communicate during the sales meeting? Continually repeat your vision like a broken record. Restate your principles and guiding values and recognize all activities that mirror your beliefs and vision. People want to be acknowledged. Show them how they can gain acknowledgment.

What should you avoid at your sales meetings? Gripe sessions, starting late and finishing late, acknowledging anyone who is absent (it trains the present that it's not important to attend the meeting), housecleaning, policies and anything else that may take away from an inspiring meeting.

Have your interviews, training/coaching and sales meetings contributed to behavior patterns, beliefs, and human work and thought that is counter-productive to what you are trying to accomplish? Are you open and willing to look at how you are contributing to your current culture? More important, will you make the changes so that your office can experience the potential of a thriving, productive and inspiring culture?

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