

The Kettle Falls School District's Five Core Beliefs



Welcome Home!



Speak Courageously



Walk the Talk



Celebrate Solutions



Look Forward

Key Results: Student Achievement & Community Support

Your Team Culture Is In The Mirror

—By Tony J. Hughes

The culture of an organization is defined and imbued by the leader; plain and simple. To identify and understand the culture, simply get to know the values and operating style of the leader. If you are the leader and seek transformation in your people then you need a mirror, not a manual to begin the process of change management. Vision, mission and values statements are not enough – you must be the change you seek in your organization, especially when it comes to being [student]-centric and market driven.

Although the leader sets the tone and defines the organization's culture, people rather than vision and mission statements are the manifestation of culture and it is therefore essential to hire only those with the right attitudes and values. One of the leader's most important roles is hiring for cultural fit but the problem with most hiring processes and job descriptions is that the focus is on skills, experience and qualifications. These are important prerequisites for hiring but rarely the reasons for firing. Instead, the rationale for dismissing an employee is most often 'poor cultural fit' and this can be a point of contention when seeking to manage an employee out.

Latent brand risk resides in any employee who is a cultural misfit or emotionally disconnected from positive values. For this reason, one of the most expensive mistakes an organization can make is to

hire or retain misaligned staff. It is important to manage this commercial and brand risk by understanding that skills are easy to measure and evidenced but values often live behind a façade of salesmanship. Know what you are looking for beneath the surface of a resume and understand how to penetrate the persona being projected during an interview. Here are characteristics that the best leaders seek in a senior team member:

- **Guided by solid moral values.** They treat others as they wish to be treated and place the well-being of the [school], [teachers] and [students] above personal interests. They never bully or undermine others through gossip, negative politics or passive-aggressive behavior. They clearly understand what is right and wrong and have the courage to always act with integrity.
- **Committed to being part of the team.** They ensure everyone has a clear understanding of their role. They believe their personal value comes from the timely results they deliver and their positive influence; not from their position, knowledge or qualifications.
- **Cares about quality in everything they do.** They actively listen and ensure understanding before jumping to solutions. Proposals are well written and follow the brief or address the problems articulated. They proof-read everything, including e-mail, before sending.

• **Driven to achieve results.** They focus on what needs to happen daily to achieve the right outcomes. They have a bias toward action and focus on delighting [students]. They focus on [classroom]-case and managing risk.

• **Strategic thinker.** They gather intelligence to create insight before making decisions. They consider the politics within an organization and the various self-interests at play in complex decision-making.

• **Strong work ethic.** They work intelligently but also know there is no substitute for a strong work ethic.

All this begs the question: how do you hire for cultural fit and discover the truth about a person's character? The psychometric tools that measure intelligence and identify dominant personality traits do not address the issues of values and attitudes. To minimize hiring risks it is essential to understand all the relevant factors, including how candidates think and operate. The best [school districts] focus on the following elements:

• *Past performance is an indication of likely future performance. Reject any candidate with a resume that fails to document high performance against targets or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).*

• *Use candidate skills, experience and qualifications to screen individuals out of the process and then obsessively focus on cultural fit with the remaining applicants.*

• *Thoroughly research candidates and use social media tools such as LinkedIn to find connections within your network to further eliminate or validate someone in advance of an interview.*

• *Challenge claimed achievements and be weary of people who claim to have achieved great things with past [schools] yet regularly move on within eighteen months.*

• *Ensure the candidate evidences claimed traits with examples of difficult situations they faced and the challenges they overcame. Ask them about their most difficult situations and failures, then what they specifically learned.*

• *Use reference-checking early in the process, not as mere validation at the end. Most importantly, you select and request the references you want to talk to.*

Even with the right employees in place, the leader's actions set the tone and define the culture that cascades throughout the organization. Use a Mirror not a Manual to Create a Customer Centric Culture. Everyone within the organization represents the brand and the leader needs to enthusiastically embody and live the culture of the organization and make all values, vision and mission statements real and meaningful for everyone in the team.

Remember the key results for the Kettle Falls School District:

- Student Achievement
- Community Support

Remember the five cultural beliefs for the Kettle Falls School District:

- 1) Welcome Home!
- 2) Speak Courageously
- 3) Lead By Example
- 4) Celebrate Solutions
- 5) Look Forward

