



## The Business of Culture and Engagement (Part 2): Four Simple Principles

*Posted by Joe Fournier*

What specific words come to mind when you describe a healthy workplace? What's the "smell" of your department? What's the "smell" of your company? Answering these questions is the starting point for a meaningful discussion about the plan for shaping culture and employee engagement in your organization.

Inspired by the late [Professor Sumantra Ghoshal's](#) discussion about "The Smell of the Place" to the [World Economic Forum](#) (see my [blog post](#) last week), I have been reflecting on senses and scents. In 2014, researchers from Rockefeller University and Howard Hughes Medical Institute made a noteworthy discovery about the sense of smell. They estimated that the average human can distinguish between 1 *trillion* different odors, if not more. The study underscores the amazing power of the sense of smell.

Fostering an environment where people thrive and are highly engaged is challenging. After all, culture and employee engagement are about people and their beliefs, behaviors, and feelings. Leaders must use all their senses, including this powerful sense, to evaluate their organizations.

### Calling All Leaders

The challenge (and opportunity!) is to make culture and engagement the business of every leader in your organization. Forget the plaques and the movie tickets. Inspire your people through action. Whether you are a board member, the CEO, or any leader, talent and people strategy should be on every meeting agenda.

Speaking about people issues at meetings can be uncomfortable. It requires pivoting from reviewing spreadsheets and PowerPoints to an authentic discussion about how your organization will thrive through people. It is easier to fixate on diagnostic and planning tools and to focus on beating benchmarks than to remember that your people simply want you to inspire them to be their very best every day.

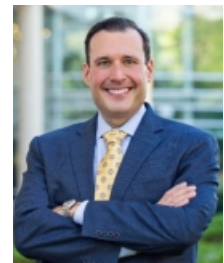
The conversation with your board and leaders is easier when you have a talent blueprint. The blueprint process helps leaders adapt to talking about beliefs, behaviors and feelings. It will be uncomfortable at first, but I promise that it will re-orient your organization and its people in a positive direction. Remember, culture and engagement are a journey of continuous improvement. Get started, find a toehold and climb up from there.

### Four Steps Forward

The road map to a healthy and engaged workplace is straightforward. While every group and individual needs something different, they all are bound by a desire for identity, community and a feeling of purpose.

Under these four major themes, your human resources partners can recommend effective tools and techniques to accelerate culture development. Areas such as compensation, benefits, recognition, learning, wellness, inclusion, and career pathing can focus and inspire people to be the best they can be in service to their patients, customers, co-workers, families and communities. At each employee interaction, keep in mind these themes:

1. **Talk with Me** - Staff want clear, open, honest and consistently frequent communication from their leaders about their performance, future career opportunities, value of the department and the mission of the organization. Authentic



communication builds trust and confidence in the organization and its leaders. Trust and respect are the primary building blocks of confidence in leadership, which leads to engagement.

2. **Listen to Me** - We all want to be heard. Listen carefully because people want to tell you their joys, ambitions, and successes. They also want to share stress and vent frustrations. As a leader, these situations present valuable opportunities to build strong, credible relationships. The words of Toyota Chairman Fujio Cho to "Go see, ask why, show respect" are well known and basic continuous improvement principles. To discover "the smell", go to where people work, show respect for them and their work, and ask meaningful questions. You'll learn a lot - I promise!
3. **Care About Me** - People want to know that their leaders and co-workers care about them and their well-being. Gary Chapman, author of a New York Times #1 bestseller, outlines five ways to express and experience love in relationships - receiving gifts, quality time, words of affirmation, acts of service and touch. Think about how these "languages" translate into how people express and experience relationships with others in the workplace. A sense of purpose is a unifying theme that captures care for others, community and colleagues.
4. **Develop Me** - We all want to know someone who is invested in us and our future. It gives us a sense of purpose in our work. Now more than ever, employees, especially younger generations, want to learn and develop themselves along a career path that has meaning beyond simply advancement and compensation. They want to know that you are interested in their social conscience and will support their continued learning. They are eager to pursue professional development and advancement along a career path that is aligned with doing something to contribute to the greater good.

As you work to build a positive, mission-driven culture, think about the power of communication, inclusion and camaraderie. As you reflect on employee engagement, commit to action and be deliberate about the time you spend with people. Finally, as you complete your talent blueprint, take time to stop and smell the roses. You'll be able to envision its short and long-term impact on your people, patients and customers.

As always, feel free to email me with questions or ideas at [fournierj@inveniaspartners.com](mailto:fournierj@inveniaspartners.com).