In order to use the word 'culture' you need to be referring to something that is present everywhere, that permeates throughout whatever you're talking about.

Something like organizational culture, work culture, program culture, and in this case team culture.

We're not talking about one-off incidents, even if they're really big one-off incidents. We're talking about what is always present. That includes from the beginning when you start having conversations about what your team culture is and what you'd like it to be all the way through your time together as a team.

When we use this word 'culture', we mean a shared set of assumptions, values, philosophies, operations, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and practices to name a few.

Some of these are going to be written down in the form of policies or handbooks but many times culture isn't written down. Or if there is some type of statement about what your team culture is, it might not be what actually shows up. Team culture isn't what you put down on paper. It's about what's actually happening.

It's an answer to questions like:

So what is it like to work there?

Or if we're referring to you as the team leader:

What's it like to work for them?

People's responses capture team culture. They might say things like:

It's really intense or *it's laid back.*

It's super fast-paced or *it's kind of slow- maybe even boring.*

It's very top down or *it's kind of flat.*

It's collaborative or *it's independent.*

It's really personal or *it's very professional.*

There's a focus on self-care or *self-sacrifice.*

There is a high level of accountability or *it's really easy to get away with stuff there.*

They really like people to take initiative or *they really like people to follow orders.*

You really follow your job description or *they like to use the other duties as assigned.*

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I chose some examples and I chose their opposites to prove a point, but of course in a lot of cases culture lies somewhere in the middle.It's not a hundred percent intense or a hundred percent laid back.

Think about the words you would use to describe your team culture.

What words would your team use?

How would you define your current culture?

How would you define the culture you want?

Those answers might be really close or you may have a long way to go.

In either case, what do you need to go from where you are now to where you want to go?

Because this concept comes up a lot- that the setting can be the easy part. The consistency and the follow through can be the challenging part.

You want to start your culture from the beginning through the end and this means starting with people before they even work for you.

Think about your hiring process. (We'll talk about that a lot more later.)

How and where are you recruiting?

Who are you recruiting?

How does that demonstrate your culture?

What does your hiring process look like?

I worked for an organization once where in the final round of hiring they had consensus decision- making across the entire organization. As a candidate, when you walked into that room for your final interview, there may have been 30 to 40 people sitting in a circle to have that final interview with you. That is a very demonstrative example of what this organization's culture was. They decided things on consensus.

How are you showing candidates what your culture is like?

I worked with a client once who had a lot of tattoos. This was a little bit before tattoos seemed to be everywhere and they were in charge of the organization and they were preparing for their first interview in the summertime. They had tattoos all up and down their arm.

We were talking about whether or not to show them during the interview and it was a

really interesting conversation. My question was, 'what is the value in showing it? What is the harm in showing it? Does it not matter either way?Are you concerned it's going to turn people away from your organization? And in that case, is that a good thing because this is somehow representative of your culture?'

I can't tell them what tattoos mean to their organization, their team culture, or their candidates, but these are questions to think about.

What message are you sending?

Are you sending the message you want to be sending?

Once you do hire someone, how are you welcoming them to the organization? Literally welcoming them.

Are you getting them a nice lunch on the first day or showing a lot of enthusiasm and have a good plan in place for them?

How are you welcoming them in terms of what you are focusing on for their orientation?

What message are you sending about what's really important for them to know from the first day they walk through that door?

What do you want to set up from the beginning and be consistent with throughout?

Things like feedback and coaching.

I talk to my managers all the time when you first hire someone I used to say 90 days- I've talked myself down a little bit to 30 days- but how can you for the first 30 days give some type of feedback opportunity to your new staff every single day?

I know that sounds challenging but part of why that sounds challenging is 1) most places don't have a strong feedback culture and 2) often when we think of feedback, we think of sitting across from someone for an hour and having a big long conversation.

That's not what I mean when you first hire someone but how can you everyday give an opportunity to say, 'hey, how did you think this went?

Here's what I thought' or 'hey, remember that you can't park in my parking spot' or whatever, right?

How are you setting up the expectation from the beginning?

This is how we do it here.

We give a lot of feedback here.

We do a lot of coaching here.

I'm going to be asking you to give me feedback too and I'm going to set up that expectation really early so that you get used to it.

What is your culture around timing and deadlines?

Are you a team where both of those are very strictly met?

Are you a team where it's a little bit more fluid?

And how are you sending that message from the very beginning with new staff?

How are you sending it verbally, but more importantly, how are you sending it through your actions?

What about team dynamics?

When you're sitting in a team meeting, are you as the team leader in charge of everything?

Are you the one who leads the meeting and talks the whole time?

Do staff have an opportunity to give their input?

Do they have the opportunity to disagree?

Are people open to disagreement and hearing feedback from their colleagues as well as from you as the team leader?

What about praise? Are you a team that praises a lot?

I hope so.

We're going to talk about that too because it's so important.

So how can you show from the very beginning that praise and recognition is a really important part of your team culture?

Who's part of decision making?

Is it all you?

Does your team have a say?

What about breaks?

Is everyone sitting at their desk for lunch?

I always have this image of shoving a salad in while you're trying to go through emails. You never see the light of day. You're constantly in front of your computer. planning things and on the phone and in meetings.

Is that the culture you're setting up for your team?

I hope not. It's a really dangerous culture.

Sometimes leaders will say to me, 'well, I tell them to go take lunch and tell them it's okay.'

But you're sort of showing them it's not because you're not taking lunch.

So what they mean to say is yes, I sort of have to allow you to take the lunch, but the culture here is that we sit and eat it quickly at our desks so that we can keep working.

Or that nobody ever uses their vacation time here or we never take a break throughout the day.

So, something for you to think about is what kind of culture do you want on your team?

And what do you need to do to get there?