

Hi, this is Wayne Rivers at FBI where *We Build Better Contractors*.

This week I want to talk about culture. What the heck is it? I can tell you that 10 years ago, as recently as maybe five years ago, in the construction industry, I never heard the word culture. I really don't think I did. Maybe it was there, and I was just missing it, but today, the term culture is on every contractor's mind. How can I improve my culture? How can I build a great culture? How can I use my culture to attract and retain people in this tough environment?

There's an article from Chief Executive Newsletter. I've told you about this before. It's a good newsletter. It's a daily thing. Written by Michael Sullivan, and he has some very specific thoughts on what culture is and what it isn't. It does sound kind of nebulous, right? When you talk about culture, I suppose that if you talk to 10 different contractors, you might get 10 different definitions.

Sullivan talks about these companies, and they have foosball tables and ping pong tables and a fully stocked kitchen, and they do social gatherings and all that stuff. He says, "None of that is culture. That's an illusion." I don't know, those things sound kind of cool to me, but he says they're an illusion. He goes on to describe six components of culture that are much, much more important than that superficial, the things around the culture.

Now, what about this is important to you? Clearly, we're all working on ourselves, our teams, our cultures all the time. I thought this was a very prescient article for on this topic. First, let's define culture, okay? And this definition comes from Steve Anderson, who's in my peer group, great writer, great businessman, and he simply described it this way: culture is how we treat each other on our shared journey, how we treat each other on our shared journey.

Beautiful, concise, one-line definition, I think it has it all. That's going to be our working definition for culture. Now, what does Sullivan have to say? First thing is part of your culture, you have to have safety. Now, every contractor thinks about safety all the time, but he's talking about not just physical safety; he's talking about mental and emotional safety in the workplace too. He says, "You've got to lead with love and demonstrate, signal to everyone that we're all in this together."

I agree, to have a safe place is where people are not afraid to take a little risk, to maybe say something that could be controversial, to push back a little bit on the conventional wisdom. If you have those things, you have a safe culture in your company. The second thing he talks about is having a mission. Mission is not top-down. Mission isn't the three or five or 10 leaders of the company going to a retreat, writing a mission statement and coming back to work and cramming it down the rest of the organization.

I think the best missions bubble up in the organization. I think they're organic. For us, it's *We Build Better Contractors*. Everybody grabs a hold of it. It's so simple, and it resonates with our group. It's something that everyone can see, think about, and orient to as the North Star, their North Star, the company's North Star. Your mission should ideally drive decision making and your behavior.

If your mission is a great one, see number one, it's a safe place to work and a place driven by mission. That's two really super important components of culture. The third thing, vulnerability. The Gary Cooper, High Noon style is out, that John Wayne, those old westerns that we grew up on. Those are out. Leaders and everyone on the team, we all make mistakes. We all screw things up and do silly things from time to time.

We've got to accept accountability for them. We've got to own up to our mistakes, and especially leaders, I think can send a beautiful signal. When I screw up, everybody on the team knows it because I want everybody to know that we can all screw up. We have the freedom to do that. We don't want it to happen all the time obviously, but everybody does it. There's no perfect human being. If you know one, let me know. We'd like to hire him. Trust. Vulnerability leads to trust, and trust leads to increased cooperation in your organization.

The fourth thing, belonging and connection, obviously a critical component. Belonging isn't optional according to Sullivan. Everybody has to be welcomed and accepted as a part of the team. The organization has to be transparent, and ideally, belonging means that people who work in the organization are part of something bigger than themselves. It's a mission that they can all embrace and drive forward together, and it's bigger than any one individual in the company.

The fifth thing is constant and never-ending improvement, or I think Tony Robbins wrote it, "CANI." Constant and never-ending improvement. Why can't we do this better? Why can't we build this differently? Why can't we do this faster? Why can't we do this more efficiently? Why can't we reduce our price? Whatever it happens to be, tinkering with the organization. The worst business advice in the history of mankind is if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Tinkering works. You don't want to break down operations that work supremely well, but you should always have the freedom to question, "Can we improve this process, this deliverable," whatever it happens to be. Then the last thing is congruent leadership. Leaders need to be learning, reading, studying. They need to be improving themselves, not just focusing on improving the other people in the organization. Leaders need to undertake self-improvement as well.

Then providing vision, direction and guidance leads to team improvement, so self-improvement is a piece of it, but also team improvement is another piece of it. I'd like to hear what you have to say. How do you define culture? What do you think are the big, interesting, important components? Is it ping pong tables? Maybe we're missing something here at FBI. Let us know. Don't forget about boot camp. The dates are below. Sign your folks up there. This is Wayne Rivers at FBI where *We Build Better Contractors*.