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Welcome to Bridge the Gap Contributor Wednesday. I'm Chris Watson, and today I'm gonna talk about how do we use storytelling to help us build culture? This idea of building culture is nothing new, but we saw a shift in how do we develop and build culture when really the pandemic hit. The pandemic exposed subpar cultures, and maybe more importantly, it exposed subpar managers and leadership. Because leaders could rely upon the culture, the coworkers, the four walls of an organization to help motivate people and excite people to work there. Now, when we saw a hybrid model or in some cases, a fully remote model of work, managers were exposed because now they had to have meaningful conversations, massive intentionality through other means of communication. They couldn't rely upon coworkers, peers, the environment, the four walls, whatever that has to offer, others to build that culture for them.

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What we know is, culture is not only something that you are reminded of daily, but it's also something that you feel, it's something that you decide to contribute to, or it's something you complain about. It's the environment, the ecosystem, the vibe of where you work. We've seen changes in that just based on situations that we've encountered in the last, I would say 18 to 24 months. We have seen a lot more workers either leaving or new workers being hired on, which affects or culture. We've seen different leaders deciding that they are gonna go out on their own and be an entrepreneur, as we see entrepreneurship increasing drastically. Then lastly, I would say that we are seeing, because of COVID, shifts and changes in how we're utilizing technology and a lot of different industries, which then affects the culture.

03:07

Number one, we have to understand that people recast the past to then build a narrative for the future. That means in every situation that I have with a leader of mine, or a coworker of mine, or the organization as a whole, whatever consequences of a conversation, a memo, an email, a decision made, a work function, whatever occurs in that and whatever narrative pulls out of that, that is then I'm going to expect for the future. It's very difficult because, in the moment, I'm using the past experiences to build a narrative that I'm gonna cling to for the future.

Quite honestly, because in drastically in America, we're so overworked, working so many hours, pouring so much time in, that were a bit lazy in that. It's just easier to think, well, what happened in the past, they made me happy. Or what happened in the past, work functions weren't very good. Or what happened in the past, I don't think leaders care about me, they only care about money. And they build that narrative. So as a leader, if you are looking to build culture, you have to understand that you are fighting against context, and narrative of the past, to create the future. What that really means is, there has to be an almost overdone of engagement. There has to be a massive amount of intentionality because it might take five touches, five conversations, five experiences to overcome what the narrative was that came from the past. That means that we have to, in all of our functions, all of our emails, all of our one-on-ones, all of our development calls, all of our whether we're getting a raise or not, the end of year conversations, KPI conversations.

We have to ask ourselves, are we actually engaging our people? Are we looking for engagement, or are we just looking for participation? I think it's a really important conversation for you to think about with

your other leaders, with yourself. Do I want to create opportunities for people to actually engage, or do I want just participation?

Now, what does that actually look like? Well, I think what that looks like, number one is, am I actually asking questions to hear what my people want, what they think, what they feel? Now, that doesn't always mean we're gonna act on all of those feelings, because sometimes we have what we would call a squeaky wheel. Somebody that always has an opinion, that's never going to be happy, that always is critical. We're not always gonna act upon that, but I wanna know where they stand. I want to seek out how do they feel. I also have to make sure to realize that I'm probably going to get the answer that they think I want. If we can create almost a culture of engagement over and over, and not just participation, we then have created a communication line that we may hear more truth.

Now remember, the goal of this is to create the culture that we want. If we are helping to shape a better narrative for the future, if we are considering an engagement before participation, then now because of that time invested, our people get to see a couple things. Our intentions and our motivations. That's really what I guess miscommunication or conflict normally comes down to. They misread my intention, they couldn't see that or they thought they knew my motivation, but they didn't.

07:01

The last thing is that we have to understand that people want, really, just three things. One, they want to feel safe. They wanna feel safe in their organization, and that comes from culture itself.

Number two, they want to be able to see that there's a future for them here in the organization. That that future is in alignment with what they want. I don't care if we're talking about a minimum wage worker or we're talking about a vice president C-suite executive role. They want to know that this organization supports the future that I want. Or is casting a future for me to consider, and I get to choose if that's the path I want to take.

Number three is, are the stories that I'm hearing, do they create a level of honesty and empathy and vulnerability for me to be able to be honest? For me to be able to communicate what I want to accomplish.

08:15

See, I believe that the reason why a lot of organizations aren't creating the culture that they want is because there's a massive lack of intentionality to create that culture. Number two, because the workplace has changed due to technology. That leaders are catching up to say I still need to create culture, even though we're utilizing technology, events, gifts, different pieces like that, motivational things, we're utilizing those. We thought we were gonna utilize those, and they almost shifted into a little bit of complacency to utilize those things as culture. We're recognizing, oh no, I need to be more intentional, but how? Because of this idea of I always wanna look credible, I always want to be perfect, I always want to show that I'm steering the ship the way it needs to go, then I don't lean in and ask other leaders, peers, people that are at a conference, how they are creating culture in this modern world, in this new world that we're in.

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It's no secret that we are seeing because of social media. We are seeing organizations talk about and communicate what their culture is about. What I find humorous is there are times where an organization might say, 'Hey, this is what our culture's about,' but there are very few employees that were retweeting, liking, agreeing, sharing, yes, that's so true. And that makes me wonder, are we perpetuating an image of our culture that isn't reality? If you're sitting there and you're thinking, 'man, I wonder if people love the culture that we're creating,' or you're considering yourself to say, 'yeah, when I evaluate the culture, like

it's not one that I would create for myself.' Then what I would tell you is, you need to consider these stories.

Number one, what is the story that you tell yourself every single day that you show up to work? Do you tell yourself I'm excited to be here. Whether I have success or failure, this is the right place for me. I feel like people care about me. I'm safe here. I have a future here, and I can be vulnerable and honest about what I'm going through and how I'm feeling. That's number one.

Number two, the stories that you're hearing from others. I want you to consider, there's always gonna be people that are gonna be extremely negative and they're just looking for an outlet to be negative. So think about those that, you know have good character, you know will be honest and true, there's some genuineness from them. Ask them, Hey, what do you think about the culture here? What do you think about the culture that we're creating? Is it shifting? Is it changing? And lean into that.

Number three is, what are the stories you're hearing from your leaders? Because what we communicate is what we value. The stories that we're telling are what our goals are. It's what the future that we're trying to cast. So think about the email. Think about the work functions. Think about the vision, the objectives, the KPIs. And then think about when they talk about these objectives and these KPIs and the vision and our goals for this year, are the people included in how to get there? Or is it just primarily execution and has really nothing to do with individual contribution? Because what we should see is culture is taking each of your people and building a mosaic to create the outcome, to create the picture that you want.

The last story is, what is the story that your customers, that your prospects, that your patients are sharing? When you start hearing them and what they're sharing about your organization, it'll give you a very clear insight into, do we have a culture that is motivating others in a positive direction?

12:57

Once again, if you're trying to create culture. Number one, remember all people, everyone, we recast the past in our brain to build a narrative for the future.

Number two, we should be creating opportunities for engagement, not just participation. Not just to say people showed up to a function. Not just to say that people showed up to a happy hour. Not just to say, yeah, people put their goals down and they have their dreams. Not just to say, yeah, I held this meeting and people showed up and they talked.

Then number three, are we telling stories so that people know that they're safe, that they have a future here, and they can see that, build a vision from that.

Then lastly can they be vulnerable and honest about how they feel and what they're going through? Once we begin to tell stories around those three things, we will see a shift into building the culture that we want and individuals that don't need to be on the bus, don't need to be in that culture. Will self-identify that and will say, this isn't the place for me.

I hope that as you've listened to this, you've thought about man, what is our culture? And I'm evaluating that. Also, how will I shift some of the stories I'm telling, and stories I'm hearing, to be able to align with audience, my people, my leaders, and all the other audiences that an organization has. Thanks for listening to this week's BTG Contributor Wednesday. Please connect with me at [BTGvoice.com](http://BTGvoice.com).

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