

Additional Resources for *Church Culture* by Jim Ozier and Yvette Thibodeaux

Appendix 1

A Complete Congregational Culture Audit

To the culture transition team: Assessing a church's culture requires objectivity, observation, understanding, and analysis. All this must be explored considering the church's expressed desired results. Our purpose in ascertaining the following information is not to second-guess or be critical or even to offer suggestions; it is simply to acquire background and context for assessment. The following notes on culture assessment for your church will frame the conversation:

1. Culture creation is INTENTIONAL.

- When/where/how much is the church culture specifically and strategically talked about as a key priority?
- Do you have something like a culture ambassador team? Or other culture creation and maintenance groups? If not, how is culture strategically maintained?
- What is involved in on-boarding new hires?
- As new volunteer lay leadership members are equipped to fulfill their respective positions, how are they trained in the church's culture?

2. Culture travels on WORDS.

- We audit ongoing church publications, communications, and media for the type/style of words used.
- We examine spoken communications in worship, meetings, and hallway conversations as to their strategic messaging of the church's culture.
- How are respective campuses held together functionally? Culturally?
- See the Firm Foundation tool.

3. Culture is reinforced in ATTITUDES.

- We would want to observe interactions among and within staff and leadership in meetings and other settings throughout the church and campuses.
- We would conduct one-on-one interviews with staff and key leaders on attitudinal alignment to see the spirit of positivity and where there may be pockets of negativity, if any.
- See the Feel of our Church's Culture tool.

4. Culture comes to life in ACTIONS.

- We would look for consistency in what the church says and what it does.
- We will dig deep into the church's community life from a culture standpoint.
- Chart the consumer/producer gap—that is, what is involved in a first-time guest (consumer) becoming a disciple (producer).

From these key elements, we typically build an assessment process that:

(A) Starts with staff. As you well know, staff are the lynchpin of spreading and embedding the culture in a church. Therefore, we recommend:

- Ample time to interact with staff members in meeting sessions, plus one-on-one interviews with selected staff utilizing appropriate assessment tools aimed at learning how staff views the church's culture and how they think the church views its culture.
- We would also suggest staff-specific workshop(s) on culture and how it is impacted along various stages of the church's life, including—when appropriate to verbalize it—the consideration of a pastoral transition.
- We partner with the culture index analytics team for staff evaluations when requested.

(B) Similarly works with key leadership groups. Without key leadership groups reflecting and actively promoting the culture of the church, the tendency is to develop “culture clutter.” Culture clutter means there's a lot of awesome things going on but a lack of focus to both growing the church for the longer term and communicating a clear and compelling message to unchurched or first-time guests.

- We would expect at least three to four onsite visits spread over multiple months to interact with staff and leadership structure groups.
- During those same visits we want to experience all the various worship settings from a culture point of view and to meet with worship and hospitality teams.
- While culture travels on words, it breathes through the visual, tangible elements (what culture geeks call artifacts) throughout the hallways, entryways, and other parts of the property. No doubt the church's visuals are beautiful and memorable. We want to look at how they message the culture of the church.

(C) Needs time to do a thorough appraisal of church communications. Our aim is not to be judgmental but rather to lift up how culture is intentionally or unintentionally being spread (or ignored) throughout the organization.

- We have team members well trained in this process and would recommend a focused but appropriate time duration to observe church communications, including websites, Facebook, and other social media.

(D) Demonstrates timing is important. If a culture assessment is rushed or seems urgent, people can become defensive. Sometimes, even a sense of undue anxiety emerges. We don't want that. You have plenty of time, and we recommend that the timing and sequencing of a culture assessment allow for those involved to be energized and to have fun with it.

Appendix 2

The Eleven Laws of Church Culture

Churches that flounder, struggle, and spiral downward often exhibit an unhealthy culture that ranges from irrelevant to stagnant to toxic. Most of these churches fail to observe one or more of the following laws of church culture. The good news is that post-COVID-19 churches must be flexible and culture is fixable. Focusing on these laws and addressing each positively will help create an irresistible culture.

Back in 1993, Al Ries and Jack Trout published a best-selling book on marketing titled *The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing: Violate Them at Your Own Risk!* It was such an influence in my life and ministry that we followed their approach in titling this chapter.

Following is a list of what we consider to be the laws of church culture. These laws reiterate and expand on what we've shared in *Church Culture*, and provide a succinct summary of the key concepts we hope you'll take from this book. Feel free to use the diagram below as a tool for communicating these ideas to your team.

THE LAW OF FIRST THINGS FIRST: Jesus said, “Seek ye first.” This is not to equate church culture with the kingdom of God, but Jesus knew about prioritizing and so should we as leaders. The constant demands on a pastor are neverending, and like the crowbird, the demands that are the loudest get the most attention. But beware of putting focus on your church's culture so far down on your priority list that it's unlikely to make a difference. Remember that anaconda in chapter 3—without prioritizing your church culture, it can squeeze the life right out of you and your ministry.

THE LAW OF LEAKAGE: Culture can be viewed like a bucket of life-giving water. But it can leak because (a) there was a hole in the bucket, (b) it rusted by poor maintenance or lack of use, or (c) it just got old. Holes can unwittingly be poked in your cultural bucket by every new staff member bringing his or her culture; every new member can do the same. Or it can happen with time and loss of focus. Culture leaks, so it must be continually and intentionally refilled; the wise leader works diligently to continuously pour the clearly stated culture back into the church's life by messaging it and emphasizing it repeatedly.

THE LAW OF EXTENSION: A vibrant culture starts somewhere. It is birthed from strategic decisions aimed to get the church to its desired results in ministry, and then extends sequentially outward to and through (a) staff, (b) leaders, (c) key influencers, and (d) the general congregation. Failing to gain traction through the threading, spreading, and embedding process is usually an indicator that shortcuts are being taken. This results in going on a “wishing trip”—“I wish we had more youth, or more young adults, or more money, or a different preacher, or whatever”—instead of going on a “fishing trip,” similar to which Jesus invited his disciples.

THE LAW OF ASSESSABILITY: Constantly and consistently assess your church’s culture using agreed-upon available tools. Leadership’s willingness and ability to assess the culture is a must, but it has to be approached in a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental way to minimize resistance and suspicion.

THE LAW OF REPLENISHING RETURNS: First-time guests get a gut-level feel of “how they fit” in making a church choice. Inwardly focused culture tends to attract prospects with a similar life approach who readily become “consumers” instead of “producers.” Outwardly focused culture is compelling to those who are drawn to starting new things, reaching new people, and being disciples and entrepreneurial difference-makers. Your culture tends to replenish itself. Who are you reaching?

THE LAW OF RANDOM ACTS OF CULTURE: Caution flag! Your church recently came up with a great program that gets lots of buzz and creates excitement—for a while. But little is maintained and built upon as it waits for the next random big thing. The pastor often gets promoted while the church struggles mightily because no lasting culture is being created. Sometimes these “culture burps” become entrenched in the larger macroculture of the denomination, which then unwittingly contributes to a culture of systemic “big-thing” thinking.

THE LAW OF LITTLE THINGS: Avoid the temptation of thinking that changing culture means implementing significant eye-catching, talked-about big changes. Or making a big splash or stirring things up in ways that can cause unintended upheaval. Remember Elisha’s story: real culture change results from doing little things repeatedly and well. It’s the fundamentals.

THE LAW OF THE UNDERTOW: The undertow lurks unseen and undetected beneath the surface, pulling counter to and against the desired waves slapping at the beach. The unsuspecting can be pulled below the surface and not even know it. When realization sinks in, frantic efforts to counter it cause fatigue and frustration that can end in drowning. Be alert! There is almost always an undertow current at work in even the best of cultures. Pay attention and look for warning flags. Remember the cowbird problem.

THE LAW OF CULTURAL CLUTTER: Stated simply, keep it simple. Does your church have too many different nonaligned or poorly aligned messages driven by competing staff members or programs? Even if each one is good, the result is clutter, which can be confusing and overwhelming and can interrupt your journey to great. Better to keep it simple so that a first-time guest as well as a long-time member “gets it.”

THE LAW OF LESSONS NOT LEARNED: A healthy culture accounts for mistakes being made by leaders and good ole church folk; the good news is that it makes the mistakes worth making. How? By learning from them and redeeming them. Warning signs of a distracted culture are finger-pointing, blaming, complaining, criticizing, and even demonizing being normalized. A church can be goal-oriented and still be grace-filled.

THE LAW OF THE FALL: “Pride goeth before it,” says Proverbs 16:18 NIV. “And misery follows behind it,” we might add. A person’s ego can turn culture into personal agenda, especially a leader’s

ego that falls into the trap of thinking church success is the result of “me” instead of “we.” The fall of the once-famous Mars Hill Church is a good bad example of a toxic culture erupting from an ego-driven leadership style. Ego squeezes the life out of even a healthy culture and harmfully manipulates the church during a period of weak culture. Leader: Be sure you are humbly asking about the “why” behind the “what”; it will help keep the focus on “we” rather than “me.”

Your culture team will keep these laws in the front of the minds of all the church leaders. The purpose of the laws is not to be punitive or judgmental. The purpose is to keep the church on track to get to the desired results. It doesn't help to understand organizational culture if it doesn't make a difference in your church. It doesn't help to know the laws of church culture if you don't work within them or learn the consequences of ignoring them. It doesn't help to learn the lessons of changing church culture if you don't implement them!

THE ELEVEN LASTING LAWS OF CHURCH *Culture*

Churches that flounder, struggle, and spiral downward usually suffer from an unhealthy culture. Most of these churches fail to observe one or more of the following laws of church culture. The good news is its fixable! Focusing on these laws and addressing each positively will create an irresistible culture!

THE LAW OF FIRST THINGS FIRST

Jesus said, "seek ye first." This is not to equate church culture with the Kingdom of God, but Jesus knew about prioritizing - and so should we as leaders! Beware of putting focus on your church's culture too far down your priority list to make a difference.

THE LAW OF ASSESSABILITY

Constantly and consistently assess your church's culture using agreed upon available tools. Leadership's willingness and ability to assess the culture is a must, but must be done in a non-threatening, non-judgmental way to minimize resistance and suspicion.

THE LAW OF REPLENISHING RETURNS

First time guests get a gut-level feel of "how they fit" in making a church choice. Inwardly focused culture tends to attract prospects with a similar life approach who become "consumers" instead of "producers." Outwardly focused culture is compelling to those who are drawn to starting new things, reaching new people, being disciples and entrepreneurial difference makers. Your culture tends to replenish itself. Who are you reaching?

THE LAW OF RANDOM ACTS OF CULTURE

Caution flag! Your church recently came up with a great program that gets lots of buzz and creates excitement...for a while. But little is maintained and built upon as it waits for the next random big thing. The pastor often gets promoted while the church struggles mightily because no lasting culture is being created.

THE LAW OF LITTLE THINGS

Avoid the temptation of thinking that changing culture means implementing significant eye-catching, talked about changes! Or making a big splash, or stirring things up in ways that can cause unintended upheaval. Real culture change results from doing little things repeatedly and well. It's the fundamentals!

THE LAW OF LEAKAGE

Holes can unwittingly be poked in your cultural bucket by every new staff member bringing his/her culture; every new member doing the same. Or just with time and loss of focus. Culture leaks so it must be continually and intentionally refilled; the wise leader works diligently to continuously pour the clearly stated culture back into the church's life by messaging it and emphasizing it repeatedly.

THE ELEVEN LASTING LAWS OF CHURCH *Culture*

THE LAW OF EXTENSION

A vibrant culture starts somewhere. It is birthed from intentional decisions aimed to get the church to its desired results in ministry, and extends outward to and through staff, leaders, key influencers, and into the general congregation. Failing to gain traction through the threading, spreading, and embedding process is usually an indicator that short-cuts are being taken.

THE LAW OF THE UNDERTOW

The undertow lurks unseen and undetected beneath the surface, pulling counter to and against the desired waves slapping at the beach. The unsuspecting can be pulled into its deceitful ways and not even know it; and when realization sinks in, frantic efforts to counter it causes fatigue and frustration that can end in drowning. Be alert! There is almost always an undertow current at work in even the best of cultures. Pay attention and look for warning flags.

THE LAW OF CULTURAL CLUTTER

Stated simply, keep it simple. Does your church have too many different non-aligned messages driven by competing staff members or program or ministry emphasis? Even if each one is good, the result is clutter which can be confusing and overwhelming. Better to keep it simple so that a first-time guest as well as a long-time member "gets it."

THE LAW OF LESSONS NOT LEARNED

A healthy culture accounts for mistakes being made by leaders and good ole church folk; the good news is that it makes the mistakes worth making by learning from them and redeeming them! Warning signs of a distracted culture are finger-pointing, blaming, complaining, criticizing, and even demonizing being normalized.

THE LAW OF THE FALL

"Pride goeth before it," says the Bible. "And misery follows behind it," we might add. A person's ego can turn culture into personal agenda, especially a leader's ego that falls into the trap of thinking church success is the result of "me" instead of "we." Ego squeezes the life out of even a healthy culture and harmfully manipulates the church during a period of weak culture. Leader: Be sure you are humbly asking about the 'why' behind the 'what.'