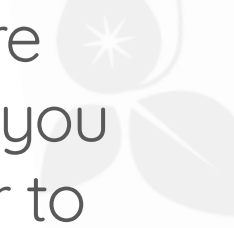




5

Ways Leaders Can Improve Work Culture **TODAY!**

New Approaches supports values-driven leaders with tangible solutions to create positive change in the here-and-now, while also planning proactively for the future.



Simply being aware and open to what you can do as a leader to improve work culture is an important step. Being a boss, you have a greater impact on your direct reports than their own doctor or therapist!

It can be overwhelming to take on the responsibility, but with increased awareness and skill, you can continue to become a compassionate and effective leader.

Check out these 5 shifts you can make today, with actionable steps, and start making a difference in the work culture right now!

Step 1



Cultivate a burnout prevention lens

Through increased awareness, you can start to be more attuned to how your decisions impact morale, workload, and overall work demands.

Commit to asking yourself this one question every time you make a decision for your team: “How will this impact morale?”

Remember, every change adds stress, even if it’s likely to be a positive change. Every additional task adds work. That doesn’t mean you choose not to make changes or add work, it means you consider the impact on morale.

Consider the invisible workload of planning, organizing, managing relationships, and the emotional load of listening, empathizing, and supporting. Recognize the full amount of energy that goes into these aspects of work and respect that this is real. Asking for more energy, emotion, or cognitive processing is asking for more work!

A burnout prevention lens means that when you add stress, you add support. If you add to the workload, you take something off. You take responsibility for recognizing what can look “invisible” but takes up real energy and involves a high level of skill.

Honoring that people need time and support to process changes, and that they cannot accept an increasingly large list of tasks, and respecting the invisible labor and skills that are part of the workload, are key ways to improve work culture.

TIME TO TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Write a “note to self” and put it somewhere you will see it every time you make a decision: How will this impact morale?
- ▶ Brainstorm: What work has been added to my team? What changes are we going through right now? This will help you better understand the load your team is carrying. Consider “invisible” labor and appreciate its emotional load.
- ▶ Consider: What is the invisible load my team is carrying? What emotional labor (listening, empathizing, showing concern) are they doing that is not obvious? What is the cognitive load (planning, organizing, anticipating) that requires them to be successful? This is the first step in making this work visible and acknowledged.

Step 2



Take time to connect with no other agenda

Talk to people. Work to listen to them and better understand their perspective. Taking the time to do this work will help you better understand what people need of you as their leader. You will see how different people communicate and what motivates them. You will learn what invisible skills and labor they are contributing that you need to highlight and appreciate. You will build trust because you are doing the real work of leadership: gaining an appreciation for the people who are on your team, respecting them as full humans, and learning how to become more responsive to their needs.

Remember, you are the leader. You are connecting in order to lead better, not for your team to do more emotional work to support you. It's important to be real and for people to get to know your personality, but you need to be aware of the impact you are having. Leaders must find deep support with peers, mentors, and friends outside of work, not with the teams they are leading.

TIME TO TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Make time in your daily calendar to talk to people (and schedule it in)
- ▶ Consider regular one-on-ones where you are just checking in with no other agenda
- ▶ Give yourself time and space to reflect on what you are hearing and observing from your team

Step 3



Positive reinforcement

Making the effort to notice and acknowledge the positive contributions, attitudes, efforts, thought-processes, intelligence, and uniqueness of people on your team is essential. Positive reinforcement is a supertool. It helps motivate people to do more of the things that you want to see and it feels great to them. It's easy, highly effective, free and it greatly improves morale.

You can acknowledge what you see and how it's helpful, special, or valuable. People will know you see them and what they are doing truly matters to you.

Build in reminders to yourself and take regular opportunities to thoughtfully tell people about what you see from them. Observant leaders show they are appreciative through sincere and meaningful words of positive reinforcement.

TIME TO TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Create a routine where you think about and acknowledge specific things you see from team members each day
- ▶ Consider how to recognize team members as part of your regular meetings and correspondence
- ▶ Ensure that you are not causing people to feel overly embarrassed. Consider how they most like to receive your acknowledgment (written or verbal, public or private).

Step 4



Consider the 4 C's of effective communication

Putting in some effort and intention to your communication can greatly improve morale.

Here are 4 C's that can improve your communication: Clear, concise, calm and compassionate

Clear: be straightforward and let people know the purpose of the conversation and what you are looking to accomplish.

Concise: clarity can help you keep your communications short. Be thoughtful about what you want to communicate and say it in a way that is relatively short and simple.

Calm: before you enter a potentially tense situation, ground yourself and work to be calm. Leaders try to put forth a sensible response, not react with their emotional "first draft." Get calm (and clear) first, communicate after.

Compassionate: remember that you are speaking to another human and be sure to treat them in a caring way, even if you have something difficult to say.

TIME TO TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Reflect on your recent communications. Can you think of how the 4 C's could help you improve?
- ▶ Consider the conversations you are going to be having today. Can you be more intentional?
- ▶ What feedback have you received about your communication? Can you think of ways that you will be more effective and reduce stress and confusion?

Step 5



Validate, validate, validate

Validation is another interpersonal supertool that I believe all leaders should master.

My definition of validation is acknowledging the other person's feelings as understandable and that you can recognize/see/sense these feelings.

Validation is a way of really listening and connecting with anyone, in any situation. It is a tool of communication that allows people to feel a sense of safety and belonging, even when we disagree.

Validation is not agreeing. It is not conceding. It is not giving in.

It is a way to establish trust, which improves your relationships and your reputation with your team.

An example might be, "I see that you are upset about what happened, and I can understand that response." or "I can recognize how difficult this situation is for you."

You have to be sincere in your validation. People can always spot it when we are being inauthentic. Validate generously and really mean it.

TIME TO TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Reflect: Where can you add validation to your communications and conversations? Are you quick to jump to "fixing"? What would it be like to slow down and make sure people feel heard by offering some validation?
- ▶ Script some potential responses if validation is not something that comes natural to you.
- ▶ Practice. Challenge yourself to use a validation statement daily.

As you start to build your intentional practices for improving work culture, notice how those around you respond. You now have a plan and a toolbox that allows you to be part of the solution to a problem that most people feel powerless to change. This will set you apart as a leader and help boost your confidence that what you do makes a difference.

Ready to **uplevel** your leadership?



Check out our **Compassionate Leaders** program (new cohort starts soon!).

Have questions? Feel free to reach out to me, Hannah Curtis, LCSW hannah@NewApproachesME.com

Follow me on **Instagram** and **LinkedIn**



About Hannah:

Hannah Curtis, LCSW owns New Approaches, an emotional health and work wellness company based in Maine. Hannah, a social worker by training, has created innovative programming and coaching based on her deep and extensive experience with helping professionals, leaders, and business owners. Her goal is to provide the tools needed to create happier, healthier and more functional workplaces and communities, by effectively supporting her clients with burnout prevention, communication, and leadership strategies.

Hannah graduated from Bowdoin College with a degree in Sociology and earned a Masters in Social Work from the University of Michigan. She is the creator of programs such as ***Sustaining Work Wellness, Compassionate Leaders, The Self-Worth Club, and Boundaries for a Thriving Business.***