

PUBLIC RELATIONS

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Testing Your Corporate Culture

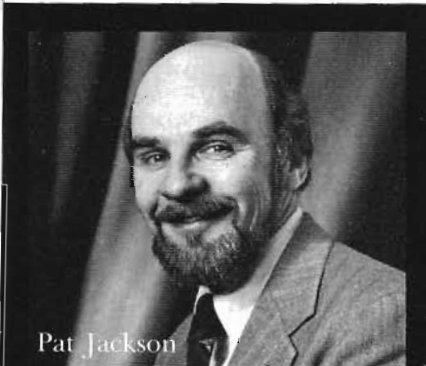
Schools deal in two kinds of cultures . . . but we rarely talk about one of them. Our emphasis is on the *societal culture* we're passing along to the next generation. Therefore, we focus on subject matter. On teaching. On the classroom. Yet the other culture is key to carrying out this education mission. It is *corporate culture*—what we do and share together as a group.

Every organization develops a culture. People working or living in the same place create certain ways of doing things and of thinking which become indigenous to them and to the place.

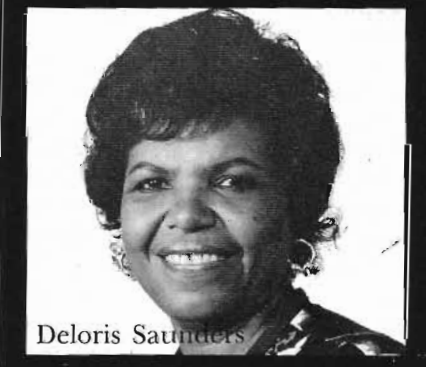
Much of corporate culture grows unconsciously; other portions are planned. Regardless, this culture often goes unnoticed despite its affect on—and even control over—the school family. Most of us just haven't spent a lot of time thinking about our corporate culture, *per se*. We do think about its results, in terms like teamwork, morale, productivity. The school's publics think of it in terms like inviting, friendly, happy—or forbidding, hassling, unhelpful.

Whether we like it or not, the conglomerate actions of each school's body corporate send a message about the place and the people. Sometimes this message, like body language, contradicts the verbal messages we're trying to communicate. While spokespersons, newsletters, and annual reports are saying what a lovely place Jones Elementary is, the palpable corporate culture there may say something else. That relationships among staff are politi-

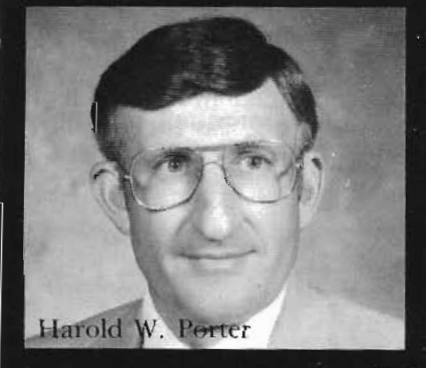
FOCUS



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cal and uncooperative, for example, generating an inward-looking attitude that results in impatience with parents who ask questions. Or maybe tight budgets have driven people apart, so overt criticism of colleagues is heard.

I use these negative illustrations to point out the damage that lack of awareness about corporate culture can do.

Blessedly, it is easier to have a positive culture—because that's more fun, more apt to draw support and energy, and more natural to educators, who by nature have to be optimists, believers, uplifters. Positive corporate culture invites good things to happen. It sets the environment for acceptance of new methods, for willingness to try new ideas, for morale and teamwork, for effective teaching and learning, for caring relations with students and one another, for risk-taking and learning from our inevitable mistakes, for cooperation between schools and central administration.

Some suggestions to help build such a culture in your school:

- *Step 1 is awareness.* Get everyone thinking about the concept of corporate culture. Discuss and agree on what yours is . . . and what you'd like it to be. Sounds obvious—but this groupwork is powerful.

- *Step 2 involves STS philosophy.* STS stands for Socio-Technical System—recognizing that every workplace (schools are no exception) has a natural, unavoidable social side as well as its task or technical side. Accepting this practical view lets administrators work *with* human nature, instead of fighting it.

You know the old joke about "what a great place this school would be if only it weren't for the people." STS is basic to a good corporate culture because administration by definition is "getting things done with people."

- *Step 3 is OCV.* Speaking with One

Clear Voice to all your publics, internal and external. Fully thought through this requires that actions and attitudes (your "culture") complement written and spoken communications. Therefore . . .

● *Participation and sharing are step 4.* If all stakeholders in the corporate body have some voice in decisions and information is fully shared with them, they feel ownership in the culture. They become, by definition, a team . . . a group committed to similar goals.

These ideas are supported by three principles of behavioral science: (1) From psychology, the fact that people will only get behind those policies and organizations they have a voice in shaping; (2) From sociology, that bad relationships between two groups are the result of an abuse, real or perceived, on the part of one; (3) From anthropology, that no successful society or organization exists without some cheerleading.

When you first enter a school, you can feel what it must be like to be a teacher or an administrator there. This is corporate culture manifesting itself. If I visit your school, what will it say to me? □

MINORITY AFFAIRS

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The Black College: Verification of Democracy

The black college in the United States has been more important to democratic principles than any other institution in America. Founded in the late nineteenth century, it offered post secondary education and credentials to a segment of the society for which college education was virtually nonexistent. The first among traditionally black institutions was founded in 1854. Abolitionists against slavery and missionaries founded Ashum Institute, which later became Lincoln University. They organized the University because of their belief that Afro-Americans had the right to profes-

sional education and the ability to master academic studies. The school was deliberately located on property near a terminal of the Underground Railroad. Its specific goal was to prepare and produce leaders for the nearly 4,000,000 Afro-Americans, 3,500,000 of whom were enslaved. Enslavement carried with it denial of any opportunities for education, so that only 500,000 Afro-Americans were "entitled" to an education.

Establishment of Lincoln University served as an impetus for the proliferation of traditionally black schools. Between 1854 and 1965, 105 schools were established which awarded degrees to more than 96 percent of all Afro-Americans enrolled in post secondary institutions through 1960. Opportunities that provide for adequate preparation to participate fully in a society are essential for all members of that society if, in fact, that society proclaims democracy as its fundamental value. The traditionally black institution provided that otherwise unavailable opportunity to Afro-Americans and, in so doing, guaranteed democracy and redeemed America from a serious "short-fall."

During the civil rights era, traditionally white institutions began admitting Afro-American students to their campuses. While there was an increase in Afro-American enrollment in black institutions in the 1970s, there was a decrease in percentages of Afro-Americans attending these schools when compared with enrollment figures in the 1950s and 1960s. Afro-American enrollment, for example, in traditional black schools was 96 percent in 1965. In 1982, the percentage of Afro-Americans enrolled in these schools had decreased to 50 percent. Clearly a shift in enrollment patterns for Afro-Americans has occurred.

Options to participate in all American institutions, organizations, and enterprises must be available to all citizens. Thus, Afro-American institutions, organizations, and enterprises must be available to all citizens, and Afro-Americans have no choice but to pursue attendance in traditionally white institutions. Pursuit of those options, however, must not result in massive abandonment of institutions that will continue to offer unlimited professional prepa-

ration opportunities to a populous which will otherwise have few options.

Implications

● Two million Afro-Americans are enrolled in American colleges and universities. Nearly half of that enrollment matriculates in traditional white institutions; this enrollment shift is adding to the economic crises traditional black institutions are experiencing.

● Traditionally, black institutions afford an opportunity for young Afro-Americans to see models of leadership demonstrated by professionally credentialed members of the same race. Modeling is essential to self-esteem and career aspiration.

● Leadership opportunities and options to participate in school activities in traditional black institutions (academic, political, social, cultural, dramatical, musical, etc.) are based almost solely on ability. Leadership and participation options are critical to young men and women confirming their worth and ability prior to full participation in a competitive society.

The traditional black institution must become a priority concern for all Americans, for it has been an undeniable source of verification of democracy. There is no doubt that these schools are experiencing a severe crisis which impacts maintenance. To allow these institutions in America to close is to reverse America's proudest achievement: Her most unfortunate had opportunities to achieve professionally and contribute to the professional development of other Afro-Americans.

The following recommendations seem appropriate for traditional black institutions:

● Recruitment programs which will attract academically and financially able, as well as needy students, are a highly prioritized reality.

● All black colleges should develop solid public relations and institutional development programs to attract needed resources and support from the public and private sectors.

● All concerned Americans, especially those educated in traditional black institutions, should adopt a black college and make annual donations to support the school.