

LEADER CONVERSATION GUIDE

How Large Churches Are Shaping a Strong Culture - Episode 284

What's Working in Large Churches Now (Pt. 4)

Healthy churches are clear on the type of culture they want to create in their ministry. Their leadership intentionally hires, evaluates, and celebrates based on this culture.

As we wrap up our series focused on learnings from [Christ Fellowship](#) in Miami, [Transformation Church](#) near Charlotte, [Sun Valley Community Church](#) in Phoenix, and [North Point Community Church](#) in Atlanta, we'll take a look at the final common theme of shaping a strong culture:

1. They are intentional about widening the front door and inviting people to follow Jesus.
2. They are encouraging people to engage next steps and connect with other people beyond Sunday morning.
3. They are leveraging multisite strategy as a reaction to growth that enables more growth.
4. **They are focused on shaping a strong culture on their team that leads to a healthy culture in their church.**

There's no doubt about it: a strong, healthy culture has a way of making up for many other gaps in the church's mission, vision, and ministry strategy. In this episode, Tony and Amy end our series with a conversation on how these churches are shaping a strong culture on their team—and how that culture is impacting their overall health as a church.

How Christ Fellowship Shapes a Strong Culture

A strong culture has proven to be one of the key ingredients for a successful transition in Christ Fellowship's leadership in recent years. Pastor Omar Giritli became the lead pastor right at the beginning of the pandemic (after their previous pastor had served for more than 20 years) and Carlos Cardenas became the executive pastor. In other words, the church now has two millennials in key pastoral leadership roles.

When asked what has made the transition so healthy, Omar and Carlos pointed to their culture. Carlos explained that the culture has been strong for many years and one of the reasons they moved into these leadership roles is because they've proven over time that they carry the culture and the DNA of Christ Fellowship. These next generation leaders have built strong credibility and

influence with the rest of the staff team and the congregation over time, and that makes it easy for people to follow their leadership today.

Typical employers look for skillset, experience, leadership capacity, education/certifications, etc. When CF was entering a leadership transition, they started with **culture**. That's another theme in large, healthy churches: they're looking for culture fit first, then leadership, skillset, and so on.

Takeaway: Leadership transitions are more likely to succeed if there is a strong culture in place and the new leaders have demonstrated over time that they embrace and carry that culture.

How Transformation Church Shapes a Strong Culture

Leaders have to model the culture that they're hoping to establish, but the staff needs to embrace that culture as well. Transformation Church is a good example of why it's important to make sure your culture is strong throughout the entire staff team: Not unlike a lot of employers including other churches, TC experienced a lot of staff turnover during the pandemic. According to Pastor Derwin Gray, one of the factors in that turnover was lack of culture fit on the team.

As a result, TC leadership spent time intentionally re-articulating their staff culture and values and clarified everyone's ministry roles so that the entire staff understood the wins for their positions. All of that has paid dividends, because the overall health of the staff has improved and that is leading to real momentum for the church as a whole. Pastors Derwin and Vicki Gray have expressed to us that they think this is the healthiest their staff team has ever been.

Takeaway: Team health begins with clarifying our culture and making sure every member of our staff team is aligned with that culture.

How Sun Valley Community Church Shapes a Strong Culture

[Earlier in this series](#), we shared data from SVCC about the number of new people they're reaching and the number of people who are saying "yes" to following Jesus/getting baptized. When we asked XP Paul Alexander what's driving this, he didn't mention a specific ministry strategy—instead, he said that it has more to do with the culture of the church. Helping people meet and follow Jesus is the focused mission of the ministry and what their church values most.

Senior Pastor Chad Moore shared that they are routinely sharing stories and using language in their communications that shapes the culture of SVCC. For example, Pastor Chad and his team have said for years: "The Church is not a building you come to, it's a movement you choose to be

part of to help people meet, know and follow Jesus. We don't just come to church, we are the church." If you repeat that consistently and your church sees leaders modeling that over time, it becomes a part of your culture.

SVCC didn't drift into this culture—they are intentional about modeling it as leaders and shaping this culture across their entire staff team. Paul mentioned that at a recent all-staff gathering with all six of their locations, Chad and Paul taught through their "new staff orientation" content to make sure *everyone* at SVCC understands what it means to be a part of the staff team—including how each staff person ultimately helps to shape the culture of the church. They're not assuming that just because someone has been on the staff team for many years, they are recalling and living out the culture that they're trying to shape.

Takeaway: Even a church that's been established for many years needs to be intentional about making sure there's a strong culture on the team so that there can be a healthy, strong culture in the church as well.

How to Shape a Strong Team Culture

Hiring: Shaping culture begins with the recruiting and hiring process. We always encourage leaders: Don't just look for competence or character, make sure you have a culture fit.

Onboarding: There are parts of culture that you just can't intuit from the outside looking in. It's vital that our onboarding processes not only speak to what the role is, but to the culture that we're intentionally trying to create.

Coaching & Development: Culture needs to be a part of the regular coaching and the development we're doing with our staff. That means that just like we do staff reviews and performance plans, we should also be developing culture plans for the people on our team.

Developing Culture-Shaping Behaviors: [Rather than developing a list of core values for your church](#), we recommend creating a list of no more than five specific "culture-shaping behaviors" that will help you model the culture you want reflected throughout your team and your congregation. Make them action-oriented and describe what it looks like when teammates live out those behaviors as they engage with other people. Identifying a specific behavior alongside a clarifying statement of what that behavior looks like on your team creates an effective framework for modeling, coaching and accountability. As this culture is embraced across your staff, it will start to shape the culture of your church.

Listen to the full episode on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or at theunstuckgroup.com/episode284.

Free Webinar: What's Working in Large Churches Now

At this free webinar on February 23, Tony Morgan and Amy Anderson are sitting down with senior leaders Chris Hodges (Church of the Highlands), Omar Giritli (Christ Fellowship Church in Miami), and Miles McPherson (Rock Church) to discuss what's actually working in their large churches now to reach new people and engage people in the life of the church a few years post-pandemic.

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