

Under the Hood
Fire Up and Fine-Tune Your Employee Culture
Stan Slap

SYNOPSIS

Under the Hood claims to be a book that will help you scale a wonderful employee culture, fix a troubled culture, ease a culture under pressure, and shape a new culture, and it does a good job of this.

Culture is defined as your employees' shared beliefs about the rules of survival and emotional prosperity. "How do I survive—in this company, working on this team, working for you—and once I know I'm going to be okay, how do I get rewarded emotionally and avoid punishment?"

Slap also notes that as a manager, you are not part of your employee culture. You are a key influencer of its survival and emotional prosperity who is standing outside the culture trying to sell something to it.

Most of the book is spent on Slap's Seven Deadly Sins of Cultural Commitment. They are:

1. Failure to respect the power of an employee culture – Your culture will give you what you want if you give it what it wants first.
2. Presumption of rapid behavioral change – An employee culture doesn't hate change. It hates the loss of the known rules of survival and emotional prosperity, so it will move to stop or slow change.
3. Plenty of management where leadership is needed – Employee cultures don't trust strategies. They trust the leaders who bring strategies.
4. Say what? – The purpose of communication is to persuade, not inform. Keep it heartfelt, empathetic, and free of management speak.
5. Pay what? – What the culture cares most about is what money can't buy.
6. Asking for too much trust – Make small short-term promises that you can deliver on and momentum will build as the culture collects proof points.
7. Big kickoff. Little payoff. – If you do a good job of introducing a goal and the end result, you can't blame the culture for expecting everything in between to be figured out.

The book goes on to give tactics to address each of these sins. It's a great primer for professionals who are charged with "changing our culture."

Review by Chris Gay, Bridge Consulting

KEY LEARNINGS

Some highly relevant tactics include:

- Explain what isn't changing. Focus on the security of the known.
- Sell it like a consumer product with early adopters first.
- Pick your top three values—they won't remember more.
- Do something significant to prove that you mean it.
- Match what you want with what you give.
- Ask for trust a little bit at a time.
- Forecast the choice points and choke points for your culture. Where will the culture hit a crossroads between old and new and where will they no longer have a choice?
- Be creative. The effort you spend will mean as much as the reward. Don't buy a cake; bake it.

There are many more tips in *Under the Hood*, but these will help you get started!

BOOK REVIEW

