

## **Chapter 12**

### **Multiplication Culture**

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*  
(Acts 2:42-47).

When our conviction so perfectly lines up with our practices (like what we read about in Acts chapter 2), God's response is growth. It becomes the inevitable outcome. As a result, we pass a tipping point where our core convictions, our stories, and our practices are so strongly aligned with who we are that we actually have to try *not* to grow.

Pause and reflect on the culture we read about in Acts 2:42-47. What were their core values and convictions that shaped their stories and practices? Now think about the stories they told one another. Imagine the power of the stories that started with, "I remember when Jesus ... ." The wonders and events this community of believers experienced in practice perfectly aligned with the teaching they received.

This combination resulted in two key outcomes that apply to most all strong cultures. First, "insiders," those who are part of the community or cause, become more fully devoted, raving fans of the cause. You might say they become owners in the crusade. The description in Acts uses the word "devoted." Devotion is the fuel of any movement. As people buy into the culture, devotion increases. Second, "outsiders," those not yet part of the community or cause, see what the insiders have and want it.

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A powerfully aligned culture increases the devotion of insiders and fuels the addition of outsiders to join the cause. From Apple to Starbucks to your favorite local restaurant, every organization has a culture. You can't stop it. It's what you become known for, and it powerfully shapes the way you see the world and the decisions you make.

As a Multiplier, your role in stewarding and cultivating culture may be the most important one you play. Value survival, and you'll establish a scarcity (subtraction) culture. Value addition growth, and you'll establish an accumulation culture. Value multiplication, and you'll establish a sending culture.

In a 2015 article for *Forbes* magazine, Southwest Airlines Founder Herb Kelleher says the unique core of any company's success is the most difficult thing for others to imitate—not their products, services or unique strategies, but rather the distinctive culture that penetrates and shapes everything they do.<sup>1</sup>

### **Defining and Building Culture**

While culture is notoriously difficult to define, leadership consultant Samuel Chand says the best way to understand it is through the statement: *This is how we do things here*.

“Culture is the prevalent attitude. It is the collage of spoken and unspoken messages,” he says.<sup>2</sup>

So how do we get to this tipping point where we begin to see our churches shift from working hard to multiply to a place where reproduction is just a natural part of their DNA? How do you as a leader aspiring to become a Multiplier start to make the shift to a powerfully aligned culture that embeds your vision for your new multiplication-based scorecards, both in you and in your church?

Throughout this chapter, we'll be answering those questions. Specifically, we'll focus on how we align our core convictions

with our practices in such ways that over time, we find ourselves sharing our own reproducing stories and reveling in the fruit of a culture of radical multiplication.

When our conviction to be leaders who multiply others so perfectly lines up with our practices like what we read about in Acts, God's response is multiplication. It becomes the inevitable outcome. As a result, we pass a tipping point where our core convictions, our story and our practices are so strongly aligned with who we are that, like Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird say in their book, *Viral Churches*, we actually have to try *not* to multiply.<sup>3</sup>

The two researchers pinpoint only one thing that needs to happen for church multiplication to become mainstream: "You need to do it!" they write.<sup>4</sup> In other words, multiplication must be both a core conviction and part of your practice (for example, planting a church before buying a building; sending staff to plant; or supporting a church rather than keeping staff, etc.). At this point in your journey, do your practices as a leader and a church reflect what you say are your core convictions? What are your practices saying about your scorecards and how you're defining success both personally and in your church?

### **The Foundations of a Powerfully Aligned Culture**

Every culture regardless of its context shares these common elements:

- a unique and distinctive set of core values;
- a unique language and narrative that continually celebrates and communicates those values;
- clear expectations, practices and behaviors that bring those values to life in tangible ways for people. People need to hear you say it in a way that makes sense and inspires action, and then see you doing what you say.

When we have strong alignment and synergy between these three elements, we start to create a specific culture. Missing just one of

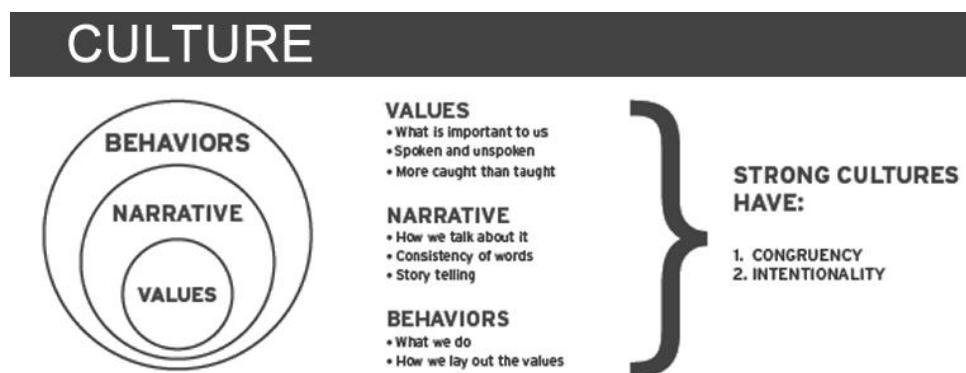
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the three elements will sabotage your multiplication vision. These three elements of culture function like the tiny wheel weights that keep your car tires balanced. If any of the three get even slightly out of alignment, you'll feel the negative impact to multiplication.

Each culture is unique and emerges from the burdens, passions and experiences that God places in your heart. The most effective cultures powerfully align their core values, language and expected behaviors, or practices in a manner that builds trust and devoted followers, and makes it simple for people to participate personally. When people easily get it and want to be part of it, you embed your vision and move your scorecards forward. Alignment of the pieces helps people know what you're about and that you are serious enough about it that your words translate to action and impact.

The model we're using for the basic elements of a powerfully aligned culture comes from leadership and culture strategist Brian Zehr. Brian loves the church, works with numerous organizations and has experience working on staff helping lead a national church-planting network.

In the diagram below, Zehr illustrates the importance of culture and how values, narrative and behaviors must align to form a powerful culture. Let's take a deeper look into each of these elements.



### **Culture Element 1: Values and Core Convictions**

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Zehr says that we can discern our true values by asking the question: What is the most important thing we need to be doing or that we are about right now? What is important enough to us that it transcends all we do and shapes how we do what we do?

“I always say that if I go visit a church three or four weeks in a row, I can tell what's actually most important [to them],” Zehr says. “I can tell by how they interact with each other, by what things are and aren’t prioritized in their ministries. I can tell whether or not living on mission is important. I can tell if they care about the community. So, more is caught from them than is actually taught.”

Values are deeply embedded and shape how a local church does everything they do. You see it, you hear it, and you feel it. Values are like a magnetic force field surrounding the people and operations of the church, proactively shaping the things to come and correcting the things that go off track. In the diagram above, the center circle represents values because they bring life, meaning and context to the other elements of narrative and behavior. The clarity of your narrative/language and your behavior/practices is an overflow of the clarity and conviction of your values.

As I mentioned earlier, prior to entering full-time ministry I spent many years as an engineer at the U.S. Division of Naval Reactors. We were responsible for all aspects of nuclear propulsion in navy ships, including reactor and system design, operation, maintenance, repair and dismantling of reactor systems. The standards were stringent and the safety record unblemished. On the occasion of our 50th anniversary and in achieving over 100 million miles powered in nuclear ships, dignitaries from around the world sent their congratulations.

The vice president of the United States asked, “What is the secret of excellence in the Naval Reactors organization?” Without hesitation, our director said, “Excellence is a concept [value] so deeply engrained in whom we are that the word never needs to be used.” I remember hearing that and thinking, *Wow, I don’t*

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*remember ever hearing the word. I need to think about what it even means.*

Our record to outsiders shouted “excellence!” It’s what we became known for based on the results we achieved. But we never sat around talking about excellence. Instead, we demonstrated it in everything we did—from the small things to the huge decisions. Excellence didn’t happen overnight or through one act or decision, but emerged through the disciplined, consistent application of language and behaviors that were perfectly aligned to our core values.

Currently, the average person would not look at churches on *Outreach* magazine’s latest Top 100 Largest and Fastest-Growing lists and ask the leaders of those churches, “What is the secret to your multiplication?” Instead they would ask questions like, “What is the secret to your growth?” or “What is the secret to your innovation?” or “How did you break the 500-growth barrier?”

Multipliers value multiplication, trusting numerical growth will happen as a byproduct.

The questions outsiders ask based on what they see, hear, and experience give us the best insights into what our actual values are. Not what we want them to be, but what they actually are. Pause and reflect on the questions that outsiders would most likely ask about your church. Be honest. What core values are bleeding through to the language and practices or behaviors that people see, feel and hear? Would they ask, “What is the secret to your multiplication?”

If not, go ahead and ask yourself another honest question: “How strong is my conviction to be a multiplying church?” Do you want it, or is it just a nice concept? Are you willing to put to death the deeply embedded addition-growth scorecards that shape the prevailing definition of success in the U.S. Church and its leaders? If so, that story must start with multiplication becoming one of your most important core values.

## **Culture Element 2: Narratives**

Let's revisit Southwest Airlines. To effectively reinforce their values, the company uses storytelling. Says Southwest CEO Gary Kelly: "Storytelling is the single most effective way to remind employees of the company's purpose and to reinforce the purpose in their day-to-day interactions with customers."<sup>5</sup> To tell their story, every week Kelly gives a "shout out"—public praise—to employees who have gone above and beyond to show great customer service. And each month Southwest's *Spirit* magazine features the story of a deserving employee.

Our real core values shape and define our language and our narratives—*how* we talk about what matters most to us. This is why "outsiders" or visitors can discern so much about our true values in one visit to our churches.

If your church says one of your core values is caring about the surrounding community, then the language you're using to naturally describe that care should indicate your convictions. Do the people in your church talk about inclusiveness and building relationships in the community? Or is the conversation more about simply giving money to various community efforts? Do you integrate regular stories of community engagement and impact in your sermons, newsletters, and printed materials, etc.?

In life, we tend to talk about and get most excited about the things we care most about. It's the "twinkle in the eye" and "pep in the step" effect. These things shape our language and our practices. They most naturally reflect our passions or burdens. Our passion and burdens provide a direct lens into our values.

I've already talked about Bob Buford as a hero maker. I have the privilege of working alongside Bob, founder of Leadership Network ([leadnet.org](http://leadnet.org)) and Halftime ([halftimeinstitute.org](http://halftimeinstitute.org)). For more than twenty-five years, Bob was mentored by modern management pioneer Peter Drucker. Inevitably, in virtually every

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conversation Bob and I have, Peter Drucker's name comes up. Bob will lean forward with a twinkle in his eye, and newfound vibrancy in his voice and say, "I remember when Peter said ... ." Bob can't help it. His core values and convictions naturally overflow to shape and define his language and narrative.

Pause and reflect on your church's language and narrative. Are there specific themes or patterns? What core values do the stories reflect? Are there core values you publicly state, but if you're honest you don't have the stories to bring them to life?

Brian Zehr offers this caution: "I remember when a church I was working with told me their key value was life-changing relationships with God. But when I asked to hear a recent story about someone whose life was changed, leaders could only recall stories from decades ago. This church was either suffering from wishful values, or not living out their values."

There is also real danger in forcing language and storytelling that doesn't line up with your real core values. In our zeal to be or project something that we're not, we risk being perceived as disingenuous or shallow. People will see through and pick up on our integrity by looking at our words and actions. Does what we say (or don't say) line up with what we do (or don't do)? Your language and narrative are key components in helping move people from *knowing* your core values (the first element) to actively *participating* in what you do (the third element discussed below).

Once our core values and language are aligned, then we have to ensure our practices, behaviors, and decisions also line up.

### **Culture Element 3: Behaviors, Practices and Decisions**

The third element of culture is where you might say, "the rubber meets the road." You can have perfect values and a great narrative, but if your behaviors and practices are inconsistent with the story



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you tell, you'll struggle. Your behaviors and practices will always be self-correcting and align to your *real* values and story.

Our words can say that we are a lean, fit and healthy athlete. But the food we eat, our weight, and our blood pressure reading tell the real story. The results and outcomes, and the behaviors that produce them, are the proof of our real values. They tell the real story.

At my friend Dan Smith's Momentum Christian Church, people continually hear about the scorecard of sending and naturally begin to ask themselves what it will look like for them to be sent. The language and practices naturally help people to transition from "if" to "when" as they take ownership for the cause.

We must seek to powerfully and simply link the language and narrative we use with the behaviors and actions we want people to take. And that process must be simple. From our initial review of multiplication-growth cultures, it appears they tend to be far more simple and reproducible than the addition-growth strategies that are always reliant on the next leading-edge idea or innovation.

Deliberately and frequently pause to assess whether or not the things you're doing are congruent with the values you espouse and the narrative you tell. Then proactively look for and find stories, metaphors and language that reinforce whom you want to be.

For example, if you value personal evangelism, be careful about how you celebrate the results of direct mail marketing campaigns. Rather than celebrating the impersonal activity or action of direct mail and the resulting new people showing up at church, find and celebrate stories of church members who used the direct mail card to invite their neighbor to church. Same action, but different narrative. Consider creating a similar matrix/schedule of powerful stories that bring to life how your core values are translating into action.

Language and narratives help the “outsider” who experiences your church become an “insider,” easily taking ownership of the process and then bringing along other outsiders on the journey. The cycle easily repeats when the language and the practices are tightly integrated.

### **Culture-Defining Questions and Decisions**

Most of our tensions and the resulting practices we put in place in response to them find their roots in a handful of key questions that play a vital role in shaping the culture you create in your church.

Brett Andrews, leader of New Life Christian Church in Chantilly, Virginia, faced many of these tensions. Brett was called to plant a church and like many planters, he started with just his wife and practically no money or expertise. He had more questions than answers, but he also had a conviction to lead a church-planting church that would be faithful with the few resources under its care—trusting that God would bless with even more.

Brett had no idea what it meant or what it would take to be a church-planting church. But again, he had passion and conviction. After three years of struggle in the survival culture, New Life took a deep breath and celebrated being financially self-sufficient. The journey wasn’t easy. Brett tells of the seasons when he was unsure whether or not anyone would show up the next week, or if his family would have money for food. Like most planters, he lost some of his closest friends who left the launch team. So that deep breath of celebration came at a deep cost and with great struggle.

But also with that deep breath came a number of defining moments: “Would they buy land and build? Or plant their first church? Would they take care of their own internal family’s needs to care for the 99 safe sheep? Or would they risk everything and go after the one lost sheep? Would they let go and send their best staff? Or hold on to them tightly?”

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To plant their first church, New Life chose to release two of their three staff members and a significant portion of their budget, rather than follow the conventional path of building a facility. After all, facilities help legitimize your existence. In retrospect, that one decision set the course for the leader and church Brett and New Life would become. From that point on, the church has gone on to be involved in more than one hundred church plants, has founded several church-planting support ministries, and has even helped start Exponential.

There is a good chance you've never heard of Brett. The scorecards of Multipliers don't land you on the Top 100 lists. But pause and imagine the impact of New Life not making that one decision. Had they waited until the elusive day when the resources lined up correctly to plant churches, their impact would now be measured primarily by their addition rather than their multiplication. Momentum Church's Dan Smith is a church planter out of Brett's church. Dan started the church with a vision of sending out one hundred-plus leaders to plant or be part of planting teams. Where would those one hundred leaders be now if Brett had chosen to build a building rather than plant their first church? The chain reaction of multiplication is profound.

The bottom line is that we can't establish a multiplication growth culture without bucking conventional thinking and making some radical decisions. How prepared are you? Are you willing to:

- Plant your first church before building or buying your first building?
- Send your first church planter before accumulating your first two to three staff members?
- Commit the first fruits of your financial resources, tithing 10 percent or more to church multiplication, even before paying other essentials like salaries?
- Plant your first church before starting your first multisite?
- Come alongside and coach other planters in your area who can benefit from your encouragement and experience?

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- Start or join a church-planting network, locally or nationally, to collaborate with others, find accountability for multiplying and building a multiplication culture, and get involved in more than you otherwise could?

### **Moving Forward**

Knowing how culture is created and nurtured allows us to look ahead to the predictable tensions you'll inevitably face in putting a multiplication growth culture in place. For example, if your church commits to a \$6 million building campaign before it plants a church, what does that say about your priorities? Or if you call yourself a multiplying leader but continue adding more staff before you train and release a church planter, what are you modeling for your church?

Most of these key decisions draw defining boundaries around the specific culture you create: The beautiful new building you want will give you momentum and accelerate growth. The best staff members will help you break the next growth barrier. The new site will help you expand the number of services your church offers.

These decisions are the right ones for addition growth, but we simply need to understand that those decisions can also become the barriers that keep us from creating a multiplication culture and the right macro-level strategies. Remember, our actions define our real values. The best spin or marketing campaign in the world can't change that.

In the next chapter, we'll look at the three types of primary tensions you'll face in seeking to move beyond addition thinking to multiplication thinking. Be prepared. This is a dangerous journey and will require you to put to death some of the things you've grown to idolize. Overcoming these tensions as you create and implement a culture and new scorecards that value and champion multiplication will take courage, persistence and intentionality.

## **Putting It into Practice**

- *What culture are you creating in your church? Scarcity/survival, addition, multiplication? What culture have you become known for?*
- *Why is culture creation your most important role as a Multiplier?*
- *To create a multiplication culture, what are the specific behaviors deeply engrained in your culture that you'll need to overcome and change?*
- *In 20 years, what specific behaviors (that you're not currently practicing today) would you like to see embedded into your church's DNA?*
- *Pause and reflect on your church's language and narrative. Are there specific themes or patterns? What core values do the stories reflect? Are there core values you publicly state, but if you're honest don't have the stories to bring them to life?*

## **Tools for Becoming Multipliers**

***Spark: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication in Your Church*** by Todd Wilson. The first in Exponential's series of multiplication-focused eBooks, *Spark* thoroughly explores what culture is and why it's important to embedding your multiplication vision; the cultures that prominent church cultures leaders most naturally create; and how culture is created.

***Give God Some Credit: Risk Taking for Future Impact*** by Brett Andrews. Brett candidly shares the story of New Life Christian Church's unimaginable impact, including the struggles and worries. Brett's story of how he became a church Multiplier offers poignant reminders that even though we can't see God working in or lives and ministry, He is indeed, as Brett says, "working upstream."