

ALONGSIDER BRIEFINGS

Building disciplemaking cultures by Bill Mowry

Volume 1

Start with Culture

“Do you know what’s the most important part of my job?” asked a ministry leader. I gave various answers but not the one he was fishing for. “Managing the culture in our ministry is the most important thing I do. If I don’t lead and manage the culture, our focus and values will slowly disappear.”

Leaders must be committed to creating and sustaining cultures of life-to-life disciplemaking. What we emphasize, model, and talk about sets the culture for our congregations and ministries. Leaders do not take existing cultures for granted but intentionally shape new cultures. Life-to-life disciplemaking is an intentional culture that must be created and sustained by alongsiders.

Defining culture is like taking a drink from a fire hose, its overpowering and overwhelming. There are numerous definitions and descriptions of culture available. I try to keep things simple, like taking a drink from a faucet. Here’s a basic definition of culture; culture describes the shared language, values, story, and practices of a given people.

I think culture exists at both a macro and a micro level. A macro level is the culture of a country, such as the American culture. A micro culture can be the culture of a workplace, church, or a family. We swim daily in these cultures and they become second-nature to us. This familiarity makes it difficult to identify a culture’s component parts. Without a description of a culture’s components, its hard to lead and influence. Let’s explore four components of culture.

First, cultures have a **shared language**. The obvious examples are found in national cultures; Americans speak English and people in France speak French. Second, cultures have **shared values**. Values describe what is important to us. In the U.S., we have adopted social values in such diverse areas as how we dress, eat, date, or think about money.

Culture speaks to a **shared story** or vision. School children are taught the American story -- a country formed by a band of revolutionaries who broke from England. We have an “American Dream,” the ability of anyone to achieve a degree of wealth and success. Our social structures re-enforce and teach our shared story or vision.

The fourth component are **shared practices**. People of a common culture do things in a certain way; this is often found in procedures and practices. For example, American businesses have a shared way of marketing, branding, and customer service.

SUGGESTED READING

Crockpot Disciplemaking
by Bill Mowry

Leading Change
by John Kotter

Switch: How to change things when change is hard
by Chip and Dan Heath

To Change the World
by James Davison Hunter

Culture Making
by Andy Crouch

Cultures are created and sustained over time by leaders. As leaders, we must practice what Andy Crouch calls the “disciplines,” or the “long apprenticeships in the small things done over and over again . . .” Building an alongsider culture is more like a crockpot than an instant pot. Cultures are build by starting small, going slow and growing deep.

Here is a simple assessment for building a disciplemaking culture.

Language. Cultures share a common language.

- What words do we want to use and repeat regarding disciplemaking?
- Do we have a language that describes a disciple?
- What words speak to the stages of spiritual growth that people pass through?

Values. Values describe what is most important to us.

- How do we celebrate the ministry of disciplemaking?
- How much money is set aside in our budget for discipleship?
- What “wins” do we talk about at leadership meetings regarding discipleship?

Story. Story speaks to our common vision or hope for the future.

- How is the story of disciplemaking presented in our church?
- What is our vision for disciplemaking?
- How often do we communicate this vision?

Shared way of doing things. We have agreed upon approaches, skills, and activities for disciplemaking.

- Do we have an agreed upon pathway of discipleship?
- Do we have a core set of skills and practices that people use in discipling others?
- What are we doing to train people in this core set of skills?

Life-to-life disciplemaking, when practiced by alongsiders, is more than a program to institute but a culture to create and sustain. This takes intentional leaders who . . .

- create a shared language.
- model, teach, and reward disciplemaking values.
- practice the shared ways of the alongsider.
- create a shared story, hope, or vision for a congregation or ministry.

You can order *The Ways of the Alongsider* at navpress.com.

You can contact Bill Mowry at www.alongsider.com. Check out other disciplemaking resources and alongsider training on his website.

The Navigators Church Discipleship Ministry has a proven process for creating intentional disciplemaking cultures. You can find out more by visiting navigatorchurchministries.org.

