

Culture Club: Don't Underestimate the Power of a Law Firm's Culture

In marketing, we talk a lot about **branding** and the importance of differentiation. There is no greater differentiator than a firm's culture. Competitors can take your clients, staff and market share, but they can't take away the one unique thing all organizations have: culture.

Corporate culture is defined as the behavior of people within a company and the intent or meaning associated with those behaviors. Keeping in mind that, although behavior defines the culture, the culture in most cases influences behavior, which in turn influences the culture. Because of this, culture is one of the hardest corporate differentiators to change and, in most cases, trying to change it will most likely lead to failure.

Why Does Culture Matter So Much?

It is said that culture is the soul of an organization. Your firm's culture defines for all how a firm does business, solves client problems, interacts, attracts and retains. A strong law firm culture, in which partners, associates and stakeholders agree upon core values and are like-minded in their beliefs, will improve performance by motivating, inspiring and coordinating team behavior for success. Businesses with a well-defined and practicing culture tend to perform higher in hiring and retaining, and client growth and longevity.

What Makes a Good Law Firm Culture?

Each corporate culture is unique to itself. In most cases, unless you are creating a new company/firm/agency, culture is already in place. You cannot simply create a new culture for your law firm, but you can change it. However, that is not as easy as it sounds.

What makes a good corporate culture?

- **Mission statement and firm vision are stated.** This defines core values, principles and purpose.
- **Practice what you preach.** Culture and core values mean nothing if they are not enforced, reinforced and practiced every day in all aspects of operation.
- **Like-minded.** People are the key to cultural success. Culture thrives when everyone shares the same values and operates by those values.
- **Oriented to sharing.** Every firm, businesses and corporations has its own story to tell, along with history and examples of success to share. This is where firms and corporations need to tell, commit to and articulate their culture and values to better align with strategic partnerships and client targeting.



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The Not So Easy Culture Shift

Changing an organization's culture is not easy. The challenge is why a lot of folks talk about it, yet few actually do it. Knowing your law firm culture is key before trying to change it. Recognizing the positive and [negative attributes related to your firm's culture](#) allows you to build on what is successful, relevant and attractive to others. Culture is a living, breathing entity, so changing it has to be very strategic, well-communicated and consistent. Don't try to change an entire culture all at once, and be sure *everyone* is part of the process. Don't try to enforce it as a new management-issued mandate.

Corporate Culture Matters: It's Not Just a Trend

Culture is no longer that warm and fuzzy descriptor that hangs out in the background. Corporate culture is now part of marketing, business development, HR, management and client services. Culture is how people are sizing us up, aligning with us and measuring results. Everyone is part of and contributes to an organization's culture, whether we want them to or not. This is why identifying and living a culture is so important. Communicate your culture proudly and consistently; if not, others are left in control to make assumptions that might have a negative outcome.

Need help understanding your firm's culture? Contact me, [Terry M. Isner](#), at tisner@jaffepr.com.