



# Cultures increase or diminish profitability

Great cultures grow businesses, while poor cultures diminish them. It is experiences and influential voices that shape the perception of people, businesses and cultures. In marketing, there is a principle called “reinforcing the buying decision” where a person or organization tries to make you feel good about your purchasing decision during and after you have made

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it. My wife and I recently returned from a stay at Lake Austin Spa Resort. In the main restaurant, there are a few large round tables called Friendship Tables. This is an opportunity to sit with either strangers or people you have shared recent resort activities with. My wife and I were there for our own getaway, and dining with strangers wasn't

in the plan.

The only open table was next to one of these Friendship Tables. There, it was clear the eight individuals were becoming fast friends and the drinks they were enjoying were performing their role as a social lubricant. The conversation was loud. Our two servers even commented, apologizing it was the loudest they had ever experienced in the room. Meals, which were healthy and delicious, were all-inclusive; wine was not. Corey from guest services comped our wine to apologize for the situation. We were more than pleased with this. Upon returning to our guest room, we found another apology note and gift from Corey: chocolate-covered strawberries. At every turn, the friendly staff who clearly loved their jobs worked diligently to ensure guests felt they made the best decision to stay at this property. They were reinforcing their customers' decisions to stay there, and this results in me promoting this resort.

We are all customers of products and services. Employees within a company are customers of their own safety efforts and a part of the safety culture. The decisions

they make are either reinforced positively or negatively, which of course affects their future decisions. When these decisions and experiences become public, they can either positively or negatively affect the business and its external customers' purchasing decisions.

I recently read of Korean Airlines' decision to defend a pilot who, in December 2018, tried to drink champagne and wine before and during a flight from Incheon, South Korea, to Amsterdam. After an investigation, the airline verbally warned the pilot. However, the airline also demoted the cabin crew chief, who filed a formal complaint and then wrote about it on the company's anonymous online messaging board, first bringing this issue to light. It appears there was a verbal altercation between the cabin crew chief and co-pilot, and some insulting words were used. This could easily create the belief that, as part of the safety culture for employees, attempts to stop a pilot on this airline from drinking alcohol are taken more seriously than the pilot's behavior to request drinks. For external customers, this could diminish confidence in

the individuals piloting passengers to their destinations, and business may suffer. Poor safety cultures cost business.

If beliefs are to become shared values within a company or customer base, they must be consistently reinforced at or near the point of decision. What takes place to shape external customers' beliefs of your company? What takes place to shape employees' beliefs about the safety culture they are a part of? How might these overlap and impact the business if experiences become public? It is both the experiences and stories that shape perspectives. Either we are managing what we want, or we will be managed by what we don't.

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