

The Year that Changed the World

How an effective culture sustains your agency through a crisis

By Frank King

What will history say about 2020? Thus far, this has been a year like no other, a year of a pandemic and maybe more. The question is, will it change the way we do business forever? Or, will we look back and remember that, while it was turbulent, we were able to rebound and return to business as usual? One thing is certain: Your agency's culture and how you lead are crucial, especially during times of crisis.



We are accustomed to change in insurance. The market hardens and softens, regulations shift, technology advances to make our customers' lives easier, and, of course, the laws that impact what we offer to our clients keep evolving. This is a regular change. However, no one anticipates a global disease. There weren't many reference materials, articles or webinars on "how to lead your agency during a global pandemic." At least not until now. Is this the year that changes the world or, at least, your agency?

For now, your leadership during the crisis is sustained by the culture you create. Culture is the quality and character of an organization or team. It is the personality that exists within your agency. No matter your strategy, your culture will enable and determine whether the goals you set for your team will fail or succeed.

Things such as how you care for your customers, empower your staff and celebrate your wins make a world of difference in regular times but especially during crisis moments.

Theodore Roosevelt coined the phrase, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Of course, knowing your business is essential, but the quote invites us to think further and be intentional about caring for your clients' business just as much.

Recently, an agent in a small town in South Dakota received a call from his client. The client said to the agent, "I'm building a new shed on my property in the spring and I would like to have it insured." Spring was just a month away. In April, he begins building the large shed and was 90% completed when a tornado struck the area and completely demolished it.

The client called his carrier to claim damages, but they advised that the shed was not covered because no policy had been written. The client called the agent and inquired, "Why didn't you place the coverage for my shed?" The agent responded, "You never

called me back to let me know that you were building the shed.”

The client made an errors & omissions claim against the agent. In his interview for why he believes the agent made an error, he stated, “He didn’t care to follow up with me about my project, and that’s how we always do business in this town.”

Whether the agent committed an error is not the primary issue here. The fact that the client expected his agent to care about his needs was paramount. A culture of caring for the customer’s needs, both current and future, helps eliminate added stress during crisis and brings calm during times of uncertainty.

Creating trust within your insurance agency among your staff will sustain you during challenging times. There are many ways to empower your team. Here are a few:

1. Encourage open and honest communication
2. Provide adequate training and development
3. Create opportunities for them to take the lead during a crucial part of the acquisition or renewal of a policy
4. Require accountability after setting clear expectations.

When this is a part of your culture, you can overcome many obstacles during uncertain times.

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