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# The most effective way to tackle a toxic workplace

There's no quick fix for workplace toxicity. Leaders must take their time to survey the landscape before attempting to change it.



Whether you've just become aware of a problem with your culture, or you're new to a leadership role, it's important to understand what the culture has been previously.

If you are going to try to change it, you need to do it incrementally, with a lot of engagement and buy-in. Under no circumstances should you go into an organization that has a toxic culture and attempt to stamp your authority on it. As a new leader, you need to spend the first three months just getting to know your people and the problems they are having in the business before you start discussing any type of change program.


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Being a compassionate leader is the awareness that your role is not just about how you manage a person and their work deliverables. It's about understanding who they are as a person, and understanding that they bring all the challenges in their life, their reality, their external world and their home life to their work environment.

When they show up in your workplace, a compassionate leader actually takes into account what is going on for that person each day of their life, and is flexible enough to make adjustments as needed. Truly compassionate leaders encourage their people to want to show up and focus for the time that they have available, because they feel valued.



(<https://www.theceomagazine.com/howard/>)

**By Kerry Howard**  
FULL BIO 

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# Communication is key

Toxic workplace cultures (<https://www.theceomagazine.com/opinion/toxic-work-culture/>) thrive on miscommunication, so a compassionate leader needs to take the helm by communicating consistently with all staff and not allowing any other leaders in the business to control the narrative. Problems arise when there is a misconception around what the leader is trying to achieve. A regular, single point of communication is the best approach to maintain stability.

Toxicity in large organizations is perpetuated by silos, enabling different areas of the business to be closed off to other sections, which can change the messaging significantly. The larger an organization grows, the more challenging it is to ensure that there is a consistency of approach, especially in communication.

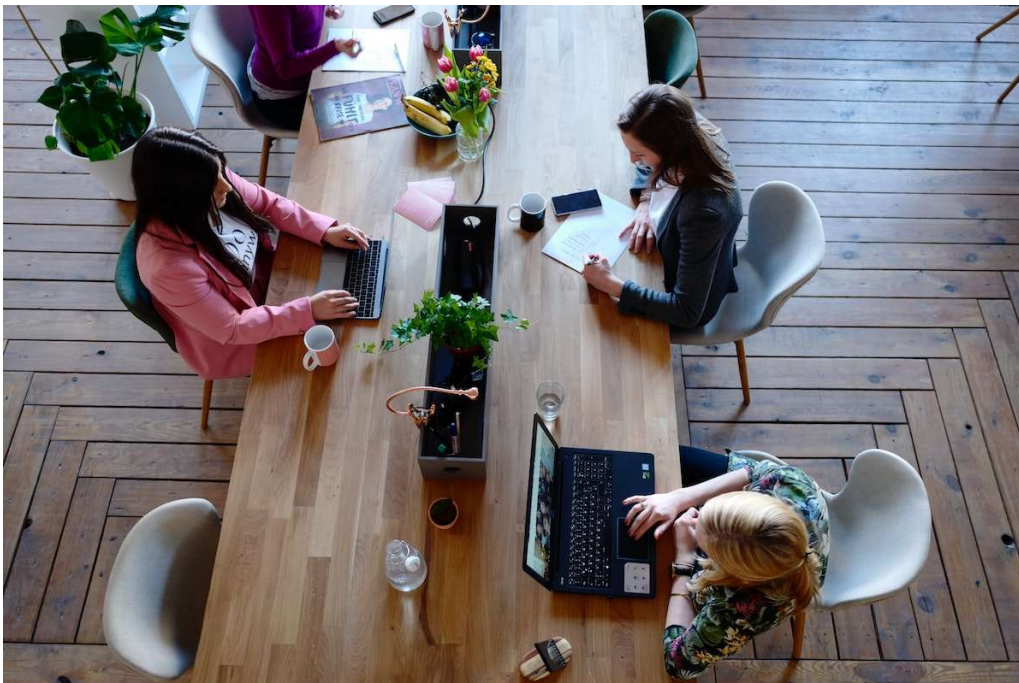
## ***Toxicity in large organizations is perpetuated by silos.***

The culture of an organization is always led from the top. If there is a perception that you are not being inclusive (<https://www.theceomagazine.com/business/management-leadership/inclusive-workplace/>) or not providing opportunities to engage (<https://www.theceomagazine.com/business/management-leadership/remote-working-motivation/>) with people and ask for feedback and input, then it will just create more toxicity down the line. The leader sets the culture.

A closed leader operates in a 'command and control' way, which only works in military environments. It doesn't work effectively in corporate environments, where people expect openness and collaboration, and want to be engaged in supporting the business to succeed.

A good leader, an inclusive leader, will approach challenges in the workplace by bringing their team into their inner circle and utilize the challenges to engender trust. Many leaders, however, believe that they have the skill set to sort out the business problem and they already know the solution; that's why they are the leader.

Although it may be true that leaders have the necessary skills and experience to sort out problems for themselves – and they could dictate the solution and the team will do as they are told – this approach is guaranteed to elongate the process and create a lot of staffing problems along the way. This approach to change tends to result in high levels of staff turnover and a significant drop in productivity.



# Changing culture

When a leader is new, or they are trying to fix culture, they will start asking questions to ascertain the challenges. Depending on your people, this can result in them closing ranks, and the leader can find themselves extremely frustrated that they are not able to access the information they need to make decisions.

Taking the time to meet with the team, asking them about their perception of the business and their role in it, is essential for building rapport and trust. When proposing change, the leader needs to meet with all staff in an organization-wide meeting to communicate the problem and seek input to resolve the challenge before planning change.

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In this way, you establish the groundwork for what the future will look like. Follow this up by meeting with every staff member individually. You want to hear three things from them: the thing they love about working there, their biggest frustration in working there, and the one thing they would like you to change in the business.

Such an approach engenders a sense of clarity about who you are as a leader and what you are there to do. It affords your people an opportunity to understand your values and your vision for their future. By demonstrating a sense of inclusivity and asking for their feedback, you provide all employees with a feeling that they have a voice. When you follow this up with a personal interaction – no matter how brief – they feel that they are important to you.

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