Every organization has a unique culture of shared values, beliefs, and assumptions that creates a psychological environment that is unique to the organization. Culture determines how employees behave in the organization—how they dress, act, and complete their work. The culture usually dictates how decisions are made and how communication occurs, and it spawns internal politics and informal processes.

Culture can have a very positive effect. When culture and strategic priorities are aligned, a kind of energy is created that can propel the organization forward to gain a competitive advantage. Leaders often speak of “changing” the culture in an organization, and what they mean is to change it so that it is more aligned with the strategic imperative. This is often what is meant by “leading the culture.” It does not necessarily mean to lead the culture as it is today but to “question the value of the organization’s current culture and identify beliefs that are counterproductive or inaccurate.”

How do you do that? Well it’s not easy. Entire books have been written about the topic and a multitude of consulting firms would like to assist with the change. Organizations change behaviors (which eventually leads to changing mindsets); link behaviors to business objectives; use cross-organizational methods; align program efforts with behaviors; and work through the organization’s authentic informal leaders. These are the leaders who are seen as “leading the culture” as ambassadors for the organization. They are often the results-producing leaders as described by Kevin Cashman.

Cashman, author of *Leadership from the Inside Out*, studied the most effective clients he had coached over 30 years to identify the most effective results-producing leaders. He learned that leaders who inspire others embody three principles:

- **Authenticity**: self-awareness that openly faces strengths, vulnerabilities, and development challenges.

- **Influence**: communication that inspires people by reminding them and others what is genuinely important.

- **Value creation**: passion and aspiration to serve multiple constituencies—self, team, organization, family, community—to sustain performance.

These three principles describe the skills required to lead a culture as well. Do you see yourself as someone who defines the culture needed; creates a vision for how to work together; aligns the team around the vision, strategy, and culture; and sets a positive personal example for the organization? Identify your next steps based on this description.
What do you do now that depicts someone who leads your organization’s culture?

Are you satisfied that the culture is what your organization needs to reach its strategy?

Which skills from the Cashman study resonate with you?

What could you do better or differently?

What will you do to become a culture leader?

Who can help you achieve your goals?