

Five Signs Your Church Culture Needs to Change

Many churches that have a culture problem exhibit similar signs. Here are a few of the most common.

1. You judge the culture around you, rather than love the people in it

For some strange reason, most of us in the church today are known for our judgment more than our love. This is almost criminal, as Jesus said that the defining hallmark of his followers should be love.

It is impossible to judge someone and love someone at the same time. Certainly, you can *discern* that there are issues. But to judge is to put yourself above someone.

Somehow we've flipped it. We **let people on the inside off the hook** and judge people outside. And then we wonder why our church isn't growing and why our church is serially unhealthy.

Many churches aren't growing because people judge more than they love. It's human nature to gravitate to people who accept us (this explains everything from gangs to clubs to friendships). If you lead a Christian church, your mission is to serve people, not judge people.

2. You don't talk the way you talk *outside* church when you're *in* church

Even when they love people, some Christians have this weird habit of behaving in ways that are just...strange.

When there is a significant gap between how you talk to people in the grocery store and how you talk to people in church, it's a sign you might have a cultural barrier that new people will find hard to surmount.

I realize people have traditions, but sometimes these traditions get in the way of the mission. If nobody can understand what you're saying because you speak in Christianese or some kind of insider code, well, how do you expect people to feel a sense of belonging before they read your book of code (which by the way, nobody bothered to publish).

I don't want to have to convert people to my culture. I'd rather see them converted to Jesus.

When you need to convert people to your culture before they convert to Christianity, your mission is at risk.

3. What you think is contemporary, isn't

Of all the lies we tell, the lies we tell ourselves are the most subtle and deadly. Far too many churches make a lot of changes to how they behave and declare themselves ‘contemporary’, when the truth is they just sound traditional in a slightly different way to outsiders.

If you’re trying to be a contemporary church (and I realize not everyone is), get some outside feedback as to whether people who don’t go to church really connect with your culture and style. The fact that your ‘people’ like it simply creates a self-perpetuating community.

4. You handle conflict poorly and indirectly

Conflicted churches rarely grow. And, unresolved, sustained conflict will kill almost every organization’s mission in the long run.

Ironically, churches should be the best at resolving conflict. Often, we are the worst, despite some incredible biblical instruction on how to do it.

If your church has years (or decades) of continual infighting and never resolves conflict directly, just one question: why would anyone join you?

5. You have a justification for every bit of criticism you receive.

Sometimes people love their not-very-effective culture.

Churches that are great at never changing their defective culture often have a handy justification for every suggestion for improvement that comes their way.

In fact, often that justification comes with a bit of arrogance toward the dummies who ‘just don’t get us’.

Sadly, a closed and mildly arrogant attitude will often shrink a group until it becomes a closed minded ‘us against the world’ kind of attitude. That’s too bad. Because Jesus died for the world too many church leaders resist.

From a blog by Carey Nieuwhof