



EAGL Delta Track 2025:

Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast (Al Curnow, CultureWise) - Nov 19

(all links go directly to Audio/Video recording)

[VIEW RECORDING - 75 mins \(No highlights\)](#)

Meeting Purpose

[To present a systematic framework for intentionally designing and sustaining organizational culture.](#)

Key Takeaways

- [**Culture is a leadership system, not a democratic outcome.** Leaders must intentionally design culture to move the "potential" middle of the team toward "superstar" performance.](#)
- [**Actionable behaviors \("fundamentals"\) are the curriculum.** These specific, observable actions provide the clarity needed for coaching and evaluation, unlike vague values.](#)
- [**Rituals are the engine for change.** Simple, low-effort practices \(e.g., a "Fundamental of the Week"\) create the repetition necessary to embed new behaviors as habits.](#)
- [**Tolerating poor behavior from high performers undermines the entire system.** The culture is defined by the worst behavior a leader accepts, not the values they state.](#)

Topics

The Problem: Unintentional Culture

- [Unintentional culture is shaped by:](#)
 - [Leadership behavior \(spoken and unspoken\)](#)
 - [Influential team members](#)
 - [Physical environment \(e.g., working conditions\)](#)
- [Most teams follow a bell curve:](#)
 - [**Superstars \(right\):** Self-starters who own their work.](#)
 - [**Underperformers \(left\):** Not a fit for the team.](#)
 - [**Potential \(middle\):** Good people lacking clarity on what "good work" looks like.](#)
- [**Goal** → Shift the "potential" group to the "superstar" side.](#)

The Solution: An Intentional Culture Framework

- A 7-step system for leaders to design and sustain culture.
- **1. Define Behaviors:**
 - Translate broad values into specific, observable actions called "fundamentals."
 - **Example:** Value ("Integrity") → Behavior ("Honor commitments").
 - Each fundamental needs a name and a descriptor for clarity.
- **2. Create Rituals:**
 - Implement simple, low-effort practices to make behaviors stick.
 - **Example:** Ritz-Carlton's "Daily Basic" ritual discusses one guest-centric idea per shift.
 - **Client Example (Paul):** A "Fundamental of the Week" cycle (28 behaviors) is on its 7th round, proving its sustainability.
- **3. Select People:**
 - Hire for cultural fit, not just skills.
 - Use the defined behaviors as a benchmark during interviews.
- **4. Integrate New Hires:**
 - Onboarding must include cultural expectations and demonstrate that stated values are real.
- **5. Communicate the Language:**
 - Use the language of the fundamentals daily to frame all discussions.
- **6. Coach & Teach:**
 - Use daily interactions as proactive coaching moments.
 - **Heliotropic Effect:** People are attracted to positive energy; proactive coaching is more effective than reactive correction.
- **7. Lead by Example:**
 - Leader actions must align with stated values.
 - Vulnerability (e.g., admitting a personal struggle with details) can build credibility.
- **8. Ensure Accountability:**
 - Hold yourself and the team accountable to the process.
 - Integrate behaviors into performance reviews and recognition.

Discussion: Challenges & Examples

- **Gallup CliftonStrengths:** A complementary tool to help individuals focus on their strengths.
 - **Client Example:** Aggressively focusing on one Gallup Q12 survey question for a year improved its score from 3.8 to 4.4.
- **Negative Legacy Employees:**
 - This is a defining moment for a leader.
 - **Principle:** Culture = Values x Behaviors. Tolerating poor behavior from high performers undermines the entire system and signals that values are not serious.
- **Ritual Implementation:**
 - **Problem:** A leader struggled with a one-way communication loop for rituals.

- **Solution:** Involve the entire team in creating and sharing content (e.g., weekly blurbs) to build ownership.

Next Steps

- **Leaders:**
 - Define specific, observable "fundamentals" (behaviors) for your team.
 - Design simple, low-effort rituals to reinforce one fundamental per week.
 - Integrate cultural fit as a key criterion in your hiring process.
 - Use the language of your fundamentals in daily coaching and communication.
 - Integrate cultural behaviors into performance reviews and recognition.