



The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series

8 Ways to Build a Flourishing Culture

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Giselle Jenkins

Male: Welcome to the Flourishing Culture Podcast, where you'll learn how to build a flourishing workplace culture that drives the ministry impact of your organization, your church, or your company, brought to you by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. Now, here's your host, BCWI president, Al Lopus.

Al Lopus: Hello, and thanks for joining us on the Flourishing Culture Podcast. If you're in leadership of a church, a parachurch, organization, or a Christian-led business, you're in for a treat. Here's why. This is the first segment of a special new series called "Eight Ways to Build a Flourishing Culture." Whether you're joining us for the first time or you're a loyal listener, the "Eight Ways to Build a Flourishing Culture" reveals the eight proven drivers of a flourishing culture that can take your organization to the next level. Well, let's get started, and I want to welcome my colleague, BCWI director for consulting services, Giselle Jenkins. Giselle and I are going to unlock each of the eight best ways to build a flourishing workplace. Welcome, Giselle.

Giselle Jenkins: Thanks, Al. It's great to be with you.

Al: Giselle, you have 25 years of professional experience, and let's talk about some of the inside transformational stories about the steps that you have seen leaders take to help build a flourishing workplace culture. And I've got a few stories of my own.

Giselle: That sounds great, Al.

Al: As you and I have talked about, Giselle, these eight essential drivers of healthy workplaces have been confirmed through rigorous research that we've done through the hundreds of thousands of employee survey responses from over 1,000 Christian organizations in the U.S., Canada, and around the world, so let's get right to it. Giselle, give us the first driver of a healthy workplace, where more work gets done in less time and with greater results.

Giselle: Sure, Al. The first driver of a healthy workplace is fantastic teams. At BCWI, fantastic teams, their definition is that they exemplify a spirit of partnership and collaboration. A flourishing workplace is not about *me*, but rather it's all about *we*. So fantastic teams are all about achieving shared goals and objectives within a department, across departments, and across the organization.

Al: Well, give us a story where you've seen fantastic teams build the health of an organization's culture.

Giselle: Sure. I'd like to tell a story about a great ministry partner, which is Bible League Canada. And several years ago we began working with them, and they were struggling, basically across the board, with engagement, and teamwork was included in that. We suggested they do focus groups, and that's their ability to dive deeper and find out what employees really need. And they did that, and they got the organization together, and they came up with 21 things to work on. Well, frankly, that's a lot of things. And they decided to go for it, though, and so as it came, they took accountability for improvement for these 21. And they did that by creating a shared document, and it listed the common goals for the year, all 21 of them, and then assigned different teams work. And weekly they posted their progress, and each of the teams could see how they played a part in the improvement, and they also could see how they depended on each other. This very coordinated effort supercharged their cross-departmental teamwork, and the end result was it produced the single highest one-year improvement in engagement we've ever seen. I think the bottom line is, I believe that knowing the goals, depending on each other for excellence, and then keeping the goals in constant sight were keys for their success. It's really what makes fantastic teams.

Al: That's a great example, and I remember talking with them about that. When you define team goals, you assign responsibility, you keep them in focus, you accomplish those goals, you celebrate success—that really does supercharge a fantastic team.

Giselle: So, Al, why don't you tell us about the second driver of a healthy workplace, which is what we call life-giving work.

Al: Yeah, thanks. You know, life-giving work is work which is full of meaning and has significance or purpose that is life-giving. Work is inspirational when people are devoted to the role that they have, and they utilize their skills and their spiritual gifts, and as a result they love the work and they love working for the organization that they're in.

Giselle: Can you give us a favorite story where you've seen life-giving work improve the health of an organization's workplace?

Al: Well, you know, we work with an organization named Hope International, and they work with poor countries around the world, with micro lending. And what they do is, they have people tell stories of how the work that each of their staff have impacted and the way that they've impacted the people's lives, their personal lives, their families' lives, and how that's been improved. And that just gives each of the employees a sense that the work that they do is important.

They've also structured their workplace to have fun. They have fun together, they meet together outside of the office, they eat together outside of the office, they even have a Ping-Pong table or two

outside their door in their office where they can have a Ping-Pong competition, which builds camaraderie within the team. So that's an example of an organization that really has this sense of life-giving work.

Giselle: I think that really is a great example of life-giving work. We know that Christian-led organizations, life-giving work is one of the most important reasons that people actually choose to work there to begin with and they choose to stay there. You can look at it in the sense of Jim Collins' favorite example of the hedgehog. It's really a hedgehog for Christian organizations and a hedgehog for retention.

Al: I think that's the competitive advantage that Christian organizations have in the marketplace, in the labor market particularly, because what we're doing in Christian organizations has an eternal purpose. It's truly life-giving. Well, that's life-giving work. Now, let's talk about the third driver: outstanding talent.

Giselle: So, outstanding talent. We believe the organization's success is highly affected by the fit; the experience; the gifting of the people it attracts, people it retains, rewards, and ultimately and hopefully promotes into technical and leadership roles. So outstanding talent means having and keeping highly qualified people with the necessary calling, character, competence, chemistry, and contribution to achieve the organization's mission.

Al: Well, how about a story, Giselle, where you've seen outstanding talent increase the health of an organization's culture.

Giselle: Yeah, so, when we look at outstanding talent, it's got four facets to it. And one of the organizations we work with is a large, multisite church in an urban community, and they've got a wonderful reputation. So the first of the four areas that make up outstanding talent, which is attracting great talent, well, this church was knocking it out of the park. However, their people, or their talent, as we like to call them, let them know that for several years, through the survey, that they were less than satisfied with the three other areas of outstanding talent, which was rewarding, promoting, and retaining the talent. So as a result, they're actually losing some of their best people.

We worked with leaders to come up with a strategy to turn this thing around, and what we did was discovery groups. We asked the employees questions at the campus level in a two-way dialogue. And we said, you know, "What does the church need to do to retain you? What does that look like? When will you consider yourself to be rewarded?" And it was great. We got some great answers. Great, as I said, two-way dialogue.

Here's what they said: "I would like to work with my supervisor on a one-year development plan so I can grow and learn." Second thing they said is, "If I do a great job, I'd like specific recognition, like a small reward, tied to my progress." And then, third, they said, "I'd like to see that there's a career path here, and I'd like to be given the opportunity to get on that path if I'm willing to make the effort."

What's really neat about this story is that it was easy for leaders to say yes to the whole list, and because they got together, had these discovery groups, they could hear from their employees directly.

And this really engaged this group which was predominantly millennial, and they were just really a great group of talented people, and I know they'll be able to retain them.

Al: You know, it's really interesting. When we start with asking employees what the issues are, oftentimes you find that you're surprised on what you actually find, and what you find out is, in this case, is that it's often easier and cheaper to resolve than you might have imagined otherwise. So starting off with discovery groups to find out exactly what the issues are is a great start with this. Tell us about the fourth driver, Giselle.

Giselle: Well, we call the fourth driver uplifting growth, and uplifting growth improves the performance of individuals, of groups, and essentially the organization overall. And as you have uplifting growth, you can meet the challenges in a changing world. Most significantly, growth comes from related experience along with interactions with others—so your interaction with a manager, with a mentor, or with a coach—and then, it also does come from formal development events like training.

Al: I know you've got a good example of how uplifting growth has strengthened the health of an organization. Tell us about it, Giselle.

Giselle: Sure, Al. Let me just give you the background. We've learned from our ministry partners that rescue mission work is amazingly challenging. Everyone needs to be primed and ready to serve because they're serving some of the most hurting and struggling people in the nation. Well, we began working with a large rescue mission who is really making a terrific impact, but their employees were struggling at the front line. When we looked into it, we found out that, like many other organizations, their frontline supervisors had been placed in their positions without training or preparation, and they didn't really know how to grow and develop others. The BCWI engagement survey mines for this through our uplifting-growth questions. Well, in this case, the scores were very low in this particular area, and employees weren't getting the support they needed to do a good job, and the supervisors didn't have the basic skills to help them.

The solution was we worked with the leadership to develop basic supervisor training. These are skills around communication, delegation, giving and receiving feedback, giving employees clear directions through accurate job descriptions, how to conduct performance reviews, even the keys to effective one-on-one meetings. Well, the result was the turnaround for this factor, uplifting growth, was actually amazing. Employees showed their gratitude for their supervisors' new abilities by giving them very strong positive feedback on the next survey, and they said that their supervisors now were caring for them more as people, they were caring about their development, and they actually had much more role clarity. They knew what they were supposed to do.

Al: Well, that's a great example. The frontline supervisors and managers is a key level in an organization, and it's very interesting to me that when you invest in the growth of these managers, it really helps the organization prepare itself for growth, because oftentimes that's where we see stagnation is in that frontline management area.

Giselle: Yes, Al. That's actually a really common theme that we hear as we talk with our ministry partners that front-level supervisors haven't received that training and preparation.

Al: I trust you're enjoying our podcast. We'll be right back after this brief word about a valuable tool that can pinpoint the true, measurable health of your culture.

Male: What if you could get an upper hand on unwanted turnover, relationship conflicts, struggling morale, and unproductive staff, and, at the same time, increase the effectiveness and impact of your organization? You can with the Best Christian Workplaces Employee Engagement Survey. This popular, proven resource pinpoints the true health of your workplace culture and ways to improve it.

You'll get a detailed breakout summary of the eight essential ways your culture and your organization can flourish, all from a principled, practical, faith-based approach that works. Join the more than 800 satisfied organizations, churches, and Christian-owned businesses who have said, "Yes." Sign up online today at bcwinstitute.org. The Best Christian Workplaces Employee Engagement Survey. It's your first important step on the road to a flourishing culture.

Al: All right. Now, let's hear more from today's guest.

Giselle: Well, let's go on, Al, and talk about the fifth driver of a flourishing workplace, which is rewarding compensation.

Al: Well, rewarding-compensation programs provide tangible resources that include benefits such as a medical retirement and paid time off, in addition to the paycheck. And fair and equitable total compensation plans provide a sense of peace of mind and a satisfaction that an individual's personal and financial needs are being met. So rewarding-compensation practices remind employees that they are respected and valued, maybe even loved, in their organization.

Giselle: Al, what's a favorite story where you've seen rewarding compensation enhance the health of an organization?

Al: Well, we've worked with one organization, probably now for 12 years in a row. In the early years, what we found out was that they were not paying their staff competitively. They were in a very high paid area, and they were looking at data that did not reflect the local compensation level. So they did a study, and they built a competitive salary structure. They paid competitively. They took about a three-year period to get to competitive levels. And what they saw is that they began to see a reduced turnover of their really talented people, and they were able to retain their top talent, and as an organization, they began to see the growth that they had really hoped for in the beginning. Again, we've worked with this organization for over a dozen years, and they've continued to grow and thrive by paying competitively and being able to attract, retain, and motivate the best talent that they could get.

Giselle: Well, that's a great example, Al. We all know that employees want to give their best, and when their compensation and benefits are appropriate and rewarding, they're free to exercise their gifts and talents for the mission and also free from undue stress and worry or just making ends meet.

Al: Exactly. And that also builds integrity, where if there's competitive compensation levels, it really builds integrity with leaders and builds trust within the organization. So, Giselle, one of my favorite drivers is the sixth driver, and that's inspirational leadership. Tell us a little bit about that.

Giselle: Inspirational leadership as a factor is routinely at the top, if not actually the top, predictor of employee engagement across all the industries and organizations that we survey. And it's really the extent to which a leader exhibits good character and is also competent, and this is crucial for inspirational leadership.

Al: Well, give a story, Giselle. What comes to mind?

Giselle: Well, a very recent story comes to mind, actually. We have a nonprofit leader that we've worked with before over the years who took on a new role as president of a struggling organization. And this organization, unfortunately, had had back-to-back leadership failures. One of the results was that they were losing their clientele. They were losing their talent. They were losing their funding. They were having a shrinking footprint in the nation. And the new president knew about the survey and knew that it allowed staff to voice their concerns and their suggestions because this president had seen it work at other places. And so they took it. But the next step was key to what makes this an inspirational story.

The new president was very transparent about the survey results, gathered the staff together, solicited specific strategies for improvement from the staff, and also made some key leadership changes at the organization and placed in some new leaders who typified the organization's existing values and also just a biblical servanthood. In implementing the changes, the new president was really transparent and very honest, very open, listened well to people, and what proved to be trustworthy, because there was a lot of follow-through involved, and according to the staff, did it with humility and collaboration. The results were amazing. Staff this year are excited about the future, believe more in the mission and vision, are feeling more life from their work, and, also, they actually report having more fun. So I consider that a remarkable story of inspirational leadership at work.

Al: You know, and this story really shows how some of these factors are interrelated with each other. I mean, you've talked a lot about life-giving work and how inspirational leadership can provide an environment for life-giving work. That's great. I love the way this organization started off. They measured their culture, they understood where the gaps were, they communicated transparently, they acted on the results, they created this biblical servanthood model that really brought in a depth of spiritual character, and what happened? They had great outcomes. That's a great story, Giselle.

Giselle: So, Al, let's talk about the seventh driver of a flourishing workplace, which is sustainable strategy.

Al: Oh, sustainable strategy, yes. This is an organization's deliberate, effective approach to serve its constituents. Sustainable strategy entails the planned, determined to achieve the organization's vision, and to provide a solution to meet the need of the organization that it set out to remedy. Mission and vision are essential. There's no question, there's no debate about that, but without a strategy, they're

just ideas. Successful ministries that align Christ-centred mission also have an excellent operational strategy.

Giselle: Al, why don't you tell us where you've seen sustainable strategy drive the health of an organization's workplace.

Al: Well, I can think of a healthy organization where this was a weak area, and this was a pretty simple solution because the leaders amongst the leadership team, they had very clear goals, and they measured those goals, but quite frankly, they didn't communicate them broadly. And so what happened was the employees didn't really see how they were impacting the overall organization's goals. They didn't understand clearly what the goals were, so they couldn't really row being fully engaged in the same direction with all their teammates. Once they saw the goals and they were able to align more clearly with the goals, the organization became much more productive.

I also think of another organization, and we oftentimes have talked about Joni and Friends, and Doug Mazza has done an outstanding job with their sustainable strategy, and they've worked very closely with their board to identify what the key elements are that they're going to focus on. They focus on three or four over a five-year period, and they really attack it. And again, there's a lot of broad involvement in developing this strategy, people understand and are involved in developing the goals, and then once the goals are set, they know exactly what to do to go about accomplishing them. So strategy is a key element, and we're seeing it's becoming an even more important element as time goes by.

Giselle: Those are really two very good examples, and I know there's listeners out there, and they really appreciate the insights that you've learned through those two organizations. I've found that a sustainable strategy is really hard to develop, but when employees know about the strategy, they understand the goals, and they begin to believe in the strategy, well, they're engaged, and they'll get behind it. And that's really what you've just communicated to us.

Al: It's got to be clear. And it's great when everybody's behind it. Boy, there's nothing like having wind in your sails in that regard. So, we're coming down to the final driver for a flourishing workplace, Giselle. Tell us about the eighth and final driver.

Giselle: Well, we've actually been talking about it quite a bit, but let's talk about it now. It's healthy communication. When communication is healthy, it's the purposeful exchange of information. In organizations, communication is effective when leaders involve employees, they seek and act on their suggestions, they explain the reasons behind decisions, and they create an environment of open dialogue. Organizations with healthy-communication practices value diversity, they experience an environment of mutual accountability, innovation, and unity.

Al: So, what does healthy communication look like when it's driving a flourishing culture?

Giselle: Well, recently I had the privilege of working with a Christian K-12 school, and they have a great turnaround story. Their practices were so good they could be in a textbook. Excuse the pun. The initial problem they were facing was that they needed, really a big turnaround. Things were not good.

They were losing students. They were losing teachers. The previous leadership was making decisions in a vacuum. And one of the reasons this can happen at a school is that the teachers are in the classrooms, students everywhere, it's really hard to meet together. And so the way the leaders were adjusting to that was they were making decisions all by themselves. They appeared to the faculty and staff as being very authoritarian.

So what happened was that the school partners with another ministry, and that ministry sent in one of their leaders to really drill in and find out what the faculty staff and students needed. And this gentleman did a listening tour, and in a listening tour, you ask questions and you listen. And he formed action groups, after the listening tours, to act on the suggestions. He gave the action groups authority to make decisions. He shared reasons for decisions he needed to make when we had to make them personally and was very transparent and open about how the school was doing.

Another thing he did is he invited innovative thinking into decisions, and what does that look like? Well, rather than pushing conflict out of situations, he actually welcomed challenges, and he welcomed the pushbacks, and he coached existing leaders on how to be inclusive and also how to be servant leaders. One of the things that happened was he had to make a difficult decision, but it was important. He had to change out one of the leaders who couldn't adjust to this new style.

So at the end of the day, they had an amazing result. Their engagement scores on communications skyrocketed. The employees also gave additional feedback that they now had inspirational leaders, which they did, indeed. And this year, student retention is up, faculty and staff are highly engaged, based on their survey. And the story reminds me of a recent quote I saw from a gentleman who's a communication guru. He's also the pastor of North Point Ministries. His name is Jeff Henderson. The quote is, "The better you communicate, the better you lead."

AI: Yeah, that's really common sense in a lot of ways. "The better you communicate, the better you lead." That's true. You know, as I've mentioned before, these eight drivers, they're not only unique in themselves, but they also overlap with each other. You know, it leads me to ask the question to each one of our listeners today: what is the health of each of these drivers in your organization? Are they healthy? And then, in a combined basis, is your overall culture healthy?

But I think about communication, that reminds me, Miles McPherson, senior pastor at the Rock Church, said something that's very straightforward but true: what people are saying is real. And what we're talking a lot about here with healthy communication is just listening to what people are saying. And as he says, it means something. So, really identifying what it is, listening to it, and understanding what the meaning behind it is, that's a great step for healthy communication.

Before you go, I want to send you a summary of today's podcasts so you can share it with your colleagues, your teams, and the people that you work with or might find it helpful. Just go onto our website, bcwinstitute.org, and simply click "free podcast summary" on our homepage.

Coming up next week on the "Eight Ways to Build a Flourishing Workplace" is Jim Tomberlin, the MultiSite guy, who will describe how to use the flourish model to predict and equip your organization to grow. I'm looking forward to seeing you next week.

Al: I want to thank you for joining us on the Flourishing Culture Podcast and for investing this time in your workplace culture today. If there's a specific insight, story, or action step that you've enjoyed in these past few minutes, please share it with others so that they can benefit as well, and please, review the show wherever you listen to podcasts.

This program is copyrighted by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. All rights reserved. Our writer is Mark Cutshall, our social media assistant is Solape Osoba, and this is Al Lopus, reminding you that a healthy culture drives greater impact and growth for your organization. And I'll see you again soon on the Flourishing Culture Podcast.

Male: For a free transcript of today's podcast, visit blog.bcwinstitute.org. Join us next week for another one-to-one interview with a respected Christian leader. The Flourishing Culture Podcast with Al Lopus is a presentation of the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, helping Christian organizations set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world.