



**GURU
GUIDE**
with
Vidusha and Anton

in conversation with
Steve Simpson

28

UNWRITTEN GROUND RULES

A QUICK INTRODUCTION TO THE GURU GUIDE

The 'Guru Guide' is an attempt to refine decades of hard-earned expertise into succinct, simple and practical advice.

It is NOT meant to be an exhaustive exploration of a topic: rather, pointed areas of focus which can only be discerned by a practitioner. It is not meant to be a generic set of advice: it is advice from battle-hardened professionals who have had a lifetime of experience and proven track records.

The Guru Guide has a pre determined format:

- ✓ It aims to understand a topic/ area of focus
- ✓ It aims to give tools to help you navigate the area
- ✓ It also gives contexts and examples: so that you can customize it to suit YOU

Exploratory, intimate and insightful, the Guru Guide aims to bring to you a wealth of expertise which can only be possible through veterans whose varied and in-depth experiences offer unparalleled insights.

The brevity and simplicity is by choice, and design. Focused on Executives and Managers who want to get quick tips and techniques, who are eager to improve their craft

and trade : the Guru Guide aims to offer 'little nuggets' of advice and importantly, simple tools, which will enable practitioners to up their game and benefit from expertise which may be hard to find in a hurry.

INTRODUCING



**VIDUSHA
NATHAVITHARANA**

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Luminary Learning and the organization's founder. His areas of expertise are with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



**ANTON
THAYALAN**

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands-on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management, and currently works as the Chief Evangelist of Luminary Learning and the Transformation Therapist of High5 Consultancy. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional clients.

INTRODUCING STEVE SIMPSON

We 'met' Steve through our 'In Conversation' segment : and we were instantly 'hooked.' Culture was one of those 'areas' we were all focused on : and have worked on with our Clients : and Steve brought clarity to what is generally a rather 'fuzzy' area (though many actually 'talk' about it).

With absolute precision of thorough and conceptual framing, Steve was able to not only 'explain' the phenomena : but more importantly : was able to masterfully navigate in 'simple' terms, how to actually go about changing a culture as well. The novelty of the approach is in being absolutely practical about it : and it was decisively clear that he was a master in his domain. Having worked with powerhouses

ranging from McLarens (yep - THE McLarens - the very same synonymous with F1 !) and Barclays Bank, Steve has enabled organisations to truly 'differentiate' themselves through a unique corporate culture that drives performance and also, definitive lived values.

For over 3 decades Steve has deep dived into an area many merely skim over. Backed by research and also, by constant perfecting of the tools, Steve's approach to culture is unique as it is effective...



UGRS?



'Unwritten Ground Rules' are what organisations are REALLY run on.

For all the policies and the procedures and values that are 'written', it is the UGR that drives 'behaviour': and behaviour is what creates culture ultimately. You want to change culture: well then, you need to be cognisant of UGRs first!

'Defining' culture as a set of UGRs help us understand culture better: and get a handle on it. Saying it is 'the way we do things around here' is definitely correct: but it doesn't necessarily enable us to understand it 'practically.' The moment you say culture is the 'unwritten ground rules' of the organisation/group, then you almost automatically know what 'we are talking about' and can put a 'finger on it'

So, UGRs are the foundational building block of the culture of an organisation/group

SO, IF CULTURE IS SO IMPORTANT, WHY AREN'T PEOPLE FOCUSING ON IT



Lots of 'good' reasons : but mostly it is the inability to actually understand WHAT culture is, HOW it actually comes into being and importantly, HOW it can be actually changed.

Culture cannot be changed through a series of 'interventions' or 'activities' or 'initiatives' which is what culture change generally looks like. Culture is fundamentally about behaviours : and addressing the UGRs are critical. Without doing that, what you are doing are mere superficial changes : which actually isn't about the fundamental culture in the first place.

Not being able to have a handle on what culture change actually is : and what it entails is the main reason why leaders don't get culture change 'right.' Most leaders understand the need for a strong and vibrant culture : and many will honestly say it is one of the most critical elements of performance : but being able to 'get to' the right culture is a journey that many don't undertake with clarity.

This is changing thankfully : and many many organisations DO acknowledge the importance of culture : and the role leaders (and the entire organisation in fact) need to play in building a culture that fosters performance and wellbeing.

LEADERS ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES RESPONSIBLE FOR CULTURE ISN'T IT ?



Absolutely...

See : lots of employees 'cop out' of their responsibility of building the 'right' culture by simply 'pushing problems up' and not being responsible for the UGRs THEY create. The issue is that we do these unconsciously - and often with plausibly good intentions. However, whenever a UGR is created and sustained, it becomes part and parcel of the culture : and there it remains.

So, we ALL must take onus of changing the unproductive and inhibitive and counterproductive UGRs and make them productive, uplifting and supportive UGRs. Towards this, EVERYONE must get involved.

If you do : before you know it : culture DOES change : and performance improves near automatically.

STEVE SIMPSON & STEF DU PLESSIS

A CULTURE TURNED

USING UGRS
TO BOOST
PERFORMANCE
& CULTURE

CONCEPT 1: FACING UP TO REALITIES OF UGRS



The first step towards anything is acceptance of things as they are.

So, the first step to any shift in a culture is to accept that UGRs EXIST : and that they drive behaviour (and therefor performance) far more than the policies, procedure and processes that are 'formal.' You cannot afford to write policies, procedures and also processes around absolutely everything anyway : so, UGRs actually DO run the organisation.

Facing up to this : and understand what the UGRs are for YOUR organisation is a critical first step in being able to address them. Most of the time we never talk about the UGRs : and we accept them as they are. Bringing it to a level of consciousness and being able to work on them systematically is critical in building a conducive culture.

So, as the initial step - make sure you 'bubble up' the UGRs to a level of consciousness : and there will be no going back - because EVERY TIME you see one - you will be CONSCIOUS about it : and this makes a world of a difference !

TOOL ONE - 'LEAD IN' SENTENCES



One of the most effective tools we use to get to the UGRs is something we call 'Lead In SENTENCES.' It's rather simple : and actually will give you amazing insights about the REAL culture within the organisation.

Most organisations have a written set of Values. So, start there (because values are what is EXPECTED to drive culture - though the written values and the 'practiced' values are quite different often times)

So, imagine Innovation was a key Value...

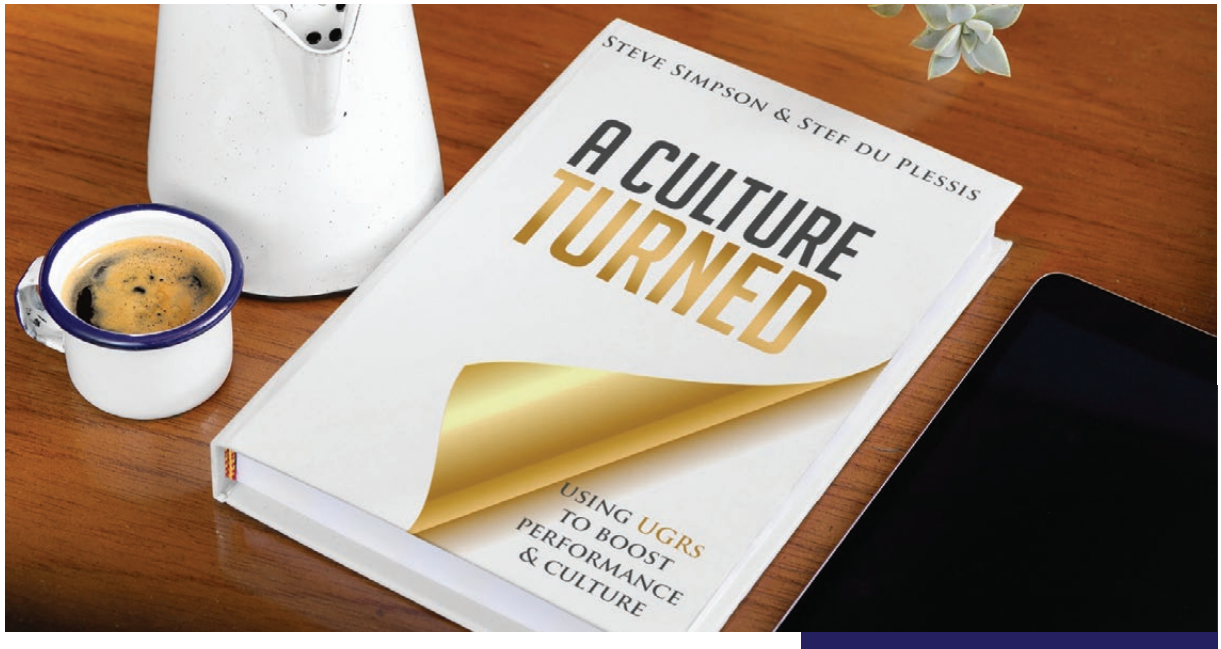
Now, coin a sentence like this : and allow the chosen employees to anonymously fill in the sentences and give it back.

A. Whenever someone comes up with a new idea,

B. When it comes to dealing with other work areas

What do you think you teams will write in the blanks ?

CONCEPT 2 : YOU NEED TO MAKE CULTURE A PRIORITY FOR LEADERS



Everyone SAYS culture is important : but ask yourself IS IT ?

UNLESS we make culture the top priority, it never really takes off : and it never really becomes something that concerted effort is put on.

Ultimately, culture NEEDS to be driven from the top - and especially if you are looking at radically overhauling a culture, then, Senior Leader involvement and support is critical. There is no real traction on the culture agenda unless there is unequivocal support and buy in from the senior team.

The issue is that we think 'performance' is something to drive : without understanding performance is an outcome of many things. Amongst the many things that drive performance Culture arguably is at the top. So, creating the right culture is going to impact performance - DIRECTLY. Many leaders miss this : and think that driving performance without setting the culture in place is going to work. It does : but it doesn't last too long : whereas, once the culture is set right, performance takes care of itself most of the time.

TOOL 2 : HOW TO MAKE A BUSINESS CASE FOR CULTURE

Ask your Senior team to write the answers to these questions : and summarise the results...

1. Is culture important to performance ? Yes/No
2. Do we have the optimum culture we need to truly perform at our optimum ?
Yes/No
3. IF we have a culture that supports performance, how much of an improvement in current performance will we see ? (Rate 0 to 100%)

HERE IS WHAT WE GENERALLY FIND

Most leaders accept that culture is important for performance (generally over 90% of leaders say yes)

The majority of leaders accept that the current culture is not at its optimum to support performance (over 75% of leaders say no)

Most leaders see a significant improvement in performance if culture is optimised. (Generally the average is 40% +)

Now : ask yourself : what other initiative can drive your business performance over 20% (let's just halve the 40% mark) ?

Isn't this enough of a business case to make culture the top priority ?

CONCEPT 3 : UNDERSTANDING THAT CULTURE CAN'T BE CHANGED INSTANTLY



Culture cannot be changed in a hurry : chances are if you try : you will probably get it horribly wrong. Culture needs time : but also, proper thought and focus. It shouldn't be regarded as a 'project' because it is more than that!

The key is to ensure that it becomes an evolutionary journey : based on conscious thought, action and also, involvement of the organisation overall. It is something that should not be 'rushed' simply because you have pegged a milestone and the timelines. Changing behaviours doesn't happen simply because you demand it or will it : but, when it does take place it takes a lifeform of its own.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



1: CULTURE SHOULD BE THE WAY WE WORK - Culture is less about projects and more about 'HOW WE DO THINGS HABITUALLY'. It is the way we work. A collection of initiatives does not amount to culture. Whether you are dealing with you family or school or work, how we habitually do things, without being prompted and reminded of, becomes the way we work or the way we do things...that's your UGR!

2: CULTURE MUST BE IN YOUR TOP 3 PRIORITIES - The question is, do we want 'culture' to be amongst the top three priorities? Clearly there are no penalties if it is not. You need to be very serious about culture as a top-three priority for your business. Otherwise you cannot expect the desired results and you can be rest assured that people are quick to identify that it is not a top priority either. Their behaviors will reflect this.

3: CULTURE IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY - It is most certainly not the responsibility of just the leader or a group of individuals. It is of the entire organization. If we are able to successfully mobilize the staff to achieve a better culture, that is the moment significant progress happens. Everyone must know their role and responsibility, and everyone must contribute. This is how culture will become a shared responsibility.

SOME FINAL TIPS



Tip 1: Get agreement from the top on the culture that's needed for the company to be truly successful while making it a great place to work. This should number no more than 6 and can be called 'Values'. We can call this the 'Aspirational Culture'

Tip 2: Find out what the current UGRs are in relation to the Aspirational Culture. For example, if you have 'Respect' as a Value, how would your people complete the sentence 'Around here, people are treated...'. Once you've unearthed the prevailing UGRs, put in place strategies to address any areas of concern

Tip 3: Continue to focus on culture as a top 3 priority. Be relentless: talk about culture all the time. Your people MUST come to a view that everyone in the company is serious about fighting for the Aspirational Culture, and people are supported and challenged to get there

GET STEVE TO HELP YOU BUILD THE CULTURE YOU DESIRE



Here is Steve's and Stef's video that is used an inspirational way to look at workplace culture

You can **click here** to find out what the senior people at McLaren Automotive thought about UGRs!

You can **click here** to find out more about identifying the current UGRs!

McLaren

STEVE SIMPSON



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