

# 3 Ways to Keep You [and your culture] Strong

*Define, Decide, Act*

By Denise Gaskin, Ph.D., M.S.

First, it is important to define culture. Culture is how things **ARE** *around here*. The phrase “around here” looks quite different today than it did prior to social distancing and shelter in place orders. If I were to give you advice about how to help yourself feel more connected BEFORE physical distancing, that advice would be different than what I offer today. Old advice would include things like noticing where you and others take a break, where you hang out, who you socialize with, how you work, where you work (office, cubicle), and how the environment supports [or hinders] your overall well-being. In other words, we would be having a conversation about space, and interactions among people who are working in an office together. We would look at a lot of physical things: furniture, furnishings, meeting space, equipment, décor, and “water cooler” types of interactions.

Overnight, nearly every aspect of our lives changed. We went from moving freely about our offices, our communities, and our country (as well as out of country), to being told to stay home and basically figure it out. Each of us was left to transition to a new normal without an end in sight. ***Just do it*** was a reborn slogan that may have inspired us at first. Now, we are wondering how long we have to keep this up, and is there an end in sight? No one knows when the end of physical distancing will come. And when we have permission to wander out again, what will that look like? Likely we will not be rushing back to business as usual.

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*So, what can you do to help yourself and other members of your firm feel **more connected** while practicing physical distancing?*

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What can you do to help yourself not only survive, but to thrive, during this time? And what impact do your actions have on the culture of your firm? Have you thought about your culture, and how you can help preserve it, or even strengthen it while you are working from home?

Since most people are working from home these days, they have had to create their own physical environments. This includes how they communicate with others on their team, or in the firm.

Your tools may be different, and you are likely spending a lot more time in “meetings” than if you were in the physical work office. The distractions you feel are also different from the regular work environment especially if you live with other people who are also working from home and if you have children, extended family members, and pets in your work space.

### 3 Ways to Keep You Strong and Support the Culture You Love

Here are three ways to manage your days (and weeks), so that you and your work continues to support the kind of culture that makes work life so enjoyable and makes your firm a great place to work.

1. **WHAT IS YOUR CULTURE?** Take a few minutes to think about your **law firm culture** BEFORE you started working from home. Write down the 3 things that you **MOST ENJOYED** about your firm’s culture. Here are a few cultural categories to get your thoughts going.

<b>CULTURAL ASPECTS:</b>	<b>WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?</b>
Communication with my team	The frequency, type, agenda/no agenda meetings, leadership, participation requirements (everyone talk, only certain people contribute, etc., length of communication, response required, etc.)
Celebrations & Social Events	What kinds of celebrations, when, who organizes them, who participates?

	List the top 5 ways your firm chooses to acknowledge or celebrate wins, accomplishments, milestones (anniversaries, birthdays, trial wins, new client work, great client feedback, etc.)
Client Interaction and Support	How do you typically interact with your clients? Do members of your team (legal secretary, paralegal, associates, other partners) regularly interact? What kinds of interaction: mostly email, text or phone or in person meetings?
Accountability	How are you holding yourself accountable for work product both quantity and quality? How about others? Are you making attendance at some meetings mandatory, if so, which ones? Should you evaluate this, and either ADD more accountability or decrease expectations?
Learning & Professional Development	Some firms have strong learning and development cultures. Are you continuing to learn and develop right now? If so, who is keeping track of learning, and supporting everyone? If you have reduced expectations in this area, why? Should you consider offering more, or encouraging more opportunities to develop new skills?
Strategy	What are the goals your firm set for itself? What are your individual goals? How are you meeting those goals? You may think this is the worst time to think about your personal goals (client work, number of clients, amount of work, revenue, etc.) but this could be the best time to think about what you want to accomplish, by when, and how you will achieve it. AND, this could give you a boost in that you will be taking CONTROL of something that you have some control over. And that leads to a great sense of satisfaction, especially during a pandemic when there is so much you may not feel you have control over.

2. **WHAT CULTURAL ASPECTS SHOULD YOU SUPPORT?** Pick three cultural aspects to continue to SUPPORT and even BUILD while working remotely. Write them down. Be specific.

CULTURAL ASPECT	THE FOCUS I CHOOSE
<i>e.g. Learning &amp; Development</i>	<i>I will learn how to deliver better presentations to my clients, especially when pitching new work.</i>

3. **BUILD ACTION PLAN FOR CULTURAL KEEPERS.** Now, develop action items around these three cultural “keepers” from your list. In other words, you have looked at what makes your culture special, why you enjoy working at your firm vs. another firm. There are no wrong answers here. Every firm has a unique culture, and you work at your firm because of certain elements that fit your personality, style of working, way of relating to others, and your values. So, what are the three things you need to keep doing, or start doing again, in order to continue to help you, and your firm, continue to be unique and valuable?

CULTURAL ASPECT	ACTION PLAN (what, who, when, where, how)
<i>e.g. Learning &amp; Development</i>	<i>What: Deliver better client presentations to win new work. I want to have a NEW client pitch DRAFT done by May 30.            Who: I will call our marketing director (or a person at my firm who does this well), and schedule time to talk with them about how to get started.            When: I will talk with them by May 10, 2020.            Where: It will need to be a Zoom meeting, or phone call.            How: I will send an email to them, explain what I am trying to do, and ask for help.</i>

Culture goes beyond the walls of your office. It is about how you **ARE** within your firm. It includes how you interact with others, how you choose to spend your time, what you choose to focus on, and the values and beliefs that drive and guide you. Now is a GREAT time to think about how you are showing up and interacting with others. This period of distance working is an

opportunity to focus on an aspect of your personal “cultural” belonging. Even small changes in how you are BEING and what you are doing could help you be more connected to your firm, to those you work with, and to your clients. Think of small shifts in your way of working. Small changes have a big impact.

Since culture is how things ARE around here, all the ways you are being, not just doing, help to sustain you right now. How does this translate to helping others? If you are doing well, and surviving, hopefully even thriving, then others around you benefit. The healthier you are, the more others will flourish as they interact with you. It is a well-worn phrase, but appropriate, “put your own oxygen mask on first” so that you can help others. Building a personal action plan around a cultural element is a way to put on your own oxygen mask. And, it is something you can control. Which will lead to feeling connected and grounded.

*Be Well. Stay Connected.*

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