

# Iowa's Distinct Leadership Culture: Our Leadership We Prize and Our Community We Will Maintain

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Since 2016, dynamic leaders of businesses and organizations from all over Iowa have used the Business Record's 90 Ideas in 90 Minutes forum to present their 10 best ideas for leadership, professional success, and personal fulfillment. Each leader condenses their vast wisdom and experience into 10 minutes that is packed with insight and practical advice.

As international business scholars, we are part of an academic community that investigates leadership and organizational differences across cultures. For example, one study in our field has profiled leadership across 150 countries for over 25 years. So, naturally we were excited to apply some of these same research best-practices to understand our own distinct leadership culture a little closer to home. We embarked on a three-year study to gather all 540 ideas from the past six years to perform a thematic qualitative data analysis. Based on the major themes that surfaced from the data, we developed a set of recommendations and grouped them into five categories:

1. People & Culture,
2. Personal Development,
3. Strategy,
4. Innovation, and
5. Community.

As we emerge from a pandemic period that has invited significant personal and professional reflection, we are very pleased to share the following analysis with the readers of Drake Management Review in this celebratory 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. Drake University has influenced the leadership culture of Iowa for over 140 years... and we believe the insights presented below represent a distinct Iowa leadership culture that will sustain our community for many more years to come.



*Provide the right resources and training. Get people in the right roles. Then step back. Hold people accountable and reward success.”*

- 2. Be intentional about building a strong workplace culture.** Culture is established by leaders and then communicated and reinforced throughout the organization through various methods, ultimately shaping employee perceptions, behaviors, and understanding. Past 90 Ideas leaders have noted the importance of being very intentional about building, communicating, and maintaining a culture in which trust and pride exist among teams, and growth and development are encouraged at every level.

*“Leadership is ownership - The words people use to describe an organizational culture or the managers within the organization are the words that describe the leader. For leaders, there’s no hiding behind a bad hire or unfortunate event. A culture is a collection of ideas, practices, situations, expectations and shared experiences; it’s a mirror of what the leader shapes, allows and promotes.” - Beth Shelton, CEO, Girl Scouts of Greater Iowa, 2019*

- 3. Integrate diversity and inclusion into your talent and business.** Diversity and inclusion are instrumental in driving business performance. Embracing, integrating, and engaging with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, who may think differently and offer unique perspectives, results in better discussions, better insights, and more innovation. Mary Coffin, Executive VP & Head of Customer Excellence at Wells Fargo Home Lending gave the following advice in 2017:

*“Diversity and inclusion cannot just be a company theme. They must be institutionalized into your daily business practices. Take a look at company practices where you give the team the freedom to collaborate, socialize and come together to create truly inclusive outcomes. This helps team members engage, learn to listen to diverse perspectives and work with others from different backgrounds. Strive for your team to mirror those customers you serve and operationalize multilingual programs and services. Ensure your company is choosing vendors and suppliers who are diverse and build metrics directly into hiring and recruitment requirements. Finally, make sure the team understands this goes well beyond a ‘nice to have and, in fact, is a “business-essential need.”*

## Personal Development

Good leaders develop through constant learning about their personalities, relationships, careers, and the kind of leader they want to become. Knowing your circle of competence by asking and relying on others in the organization will make you a more effective leader while enabling your workforce to take additional responsibilities. Personal development was the second most mentioned topic at 27%.



Figure 2. Personal Development Word Cloud

## Recommendations

1. **Never stop learning.** In our constantly shifting environment, leaders need to prioritize self-development and take time to renew their skills and capabilities. Our 90 ideas leaders note that part of that learning process involves understanding your own limitations, admitting gaps in knowledge, asking for help, and being open to learning from others. Scott Jean, Chairman, President & CEO at EMC Insurance, said it best with this quote (2021):

*“I believe in continuously improving as a leader. This requires humility to recognize that I don’t have all the answers simply because I’m a CEO. I acknowledge I have a lot to learn, so I continually ask for feedback in order to create a culture of openness and coaching. Valuable feedback and coaching can come from every single person in your organization, regardless of title and rank. In addition, if I show I’m open to feedback, it might inspire others to do the same.”*



## Recommendations

1. **Plan and work strategically.** The key to growth and achieving organizational goals is to have a plan and work strategically. Through our analysis, we see that leaders are thinking about how the world is changing and the subsequent implications for their organization. They are deliberately setting goals and implementing systems for measuring, managing, and evaluating business activities, while at the same time, keeping customers top of mind. Below, Dana Wingert, Des Moines Police Chief, describes how best to plan for the future (2017):

*“Stop and think where you're at as an organization. Develop a strategic plan for the organization that looks at short- and long-term goals, challenges and successes. Make sure those around you are involved in the process, and ensure they receive the credit along the way. You won't be there forever, and when you're gone, they will understand how this process works and continue on in the same spirit.”*

2. **Remember your mission, vision, and values.** Mission, vision, and values provide organizations with meaningful guidance, especially in times of rapid change. Our 90 Ideas leaders understand the importance of defining these aspirations in their organizations, making sure that everyone in their organization is working towards them, and using them to guide their decisions.

*“Mission, vision and values need to be actionable and operational in what you do. The intentionality, of enhancing culture through assessment, data-driven planning and professional development for self and others is critical to the success of any organization.”- Scott Raecker, Executive Director of Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, 2017*

## Innovation

Innovation is an important driver of growth, allowing new ideas to emerge and thrive. It is the job of a leader to establish a culture of innovation throughout an organization, enabling the workforce to think outside the box, challenge old perspectives, and take risks to bring about real change. Almost 9% of ideas fell under the category of innovation.



“Change and adaption to market variables are essential for organizations to grow and thrive. Strong, nimble leaders maintain open minds versus squashing ideas as potential threats. I've never know what the source might be for the next breakthrough, cost-saving innovation or operational opportunity. Change can certainly be intimidating, but acting on change can be everything.”

## Community

Your organization not only affects the lives of its employees and those you serve – but also the surrounding community in which it resides. COVID-19 has shown us strength in numbers in working together for a greater good. Demonstrate a commitment to a larger purpose beyond your own business success. By aligning company values and goals with community efforts, you’ll be able to build new relationships, boost camaraderie between employees, and, of course, make a meaningful impact. About 8% of all ideas related to the notion of community.



Figure 5. Community Word Cloud

## Recommendations

1. **Build positive and sustainable relationships and partnerships within your community.** Develop relationships and partnerships with those in the community who make your organization successful - business leaders, government officials, strategic partners, customers, and even competition. Past 90 Ideas leaders have



mentioned that getting to know key stakeholders establishes trust and can deepen economic and social impact.

*“Look beyond your business and identify the impact it makes on the community around it. A thriving ecosystem is good for all, even if there may be moments where it’s irritating to see some of the spoils go to your competition. Squash that scarcity complex and ask yourself what will make the community better off in a year or three years. That could be creating an educational series, pursuing grants or fostering new talent. Your competition moving forward with you (but slightly behind, of course) is actually better for your business.” – Sid Juwarker, Principal, Terracon, & Owner, Teehee’s Comedy Club, 2021*

2. **Give back to your community.** Investing in your community is a great way to give back to those who have helped support your business. Design and implement community programs (philanthropy, volunteerism, partnerships, in-kind donations) that improve the quality of community life and promote the company's long-term business strategies and goals. In 2016, Bob Riley, CEO, Riley Insurance Group, talked about the importance of encouraging social giving of time, talents, and treasures:

*“Because we believe so much in building social capital, we encourage our employees to give their time, talents, and treasures to their choice of nonprofit organizations. We support them by matching their financial contributions and offering volunteer time off. As a leadership development opportunity, we also seek to place select team members on boards of organizations that we especially care about or have an interest in helping. It creates another win-win for the employee's development and for the organization in need of quality leadership and insight.”*

## Conclusion

The Business Record has invited Iowa’s top thinkers and most successful organizational leaders to share their most important personal and professional advice. Though these leaders represent a mix of industries, career paths, and personalities, we noticed strong themes in many areas such as people & culture, personal development, strategy, innovation, and community. The collective wisdom and analysis presented above reflects a distinctly lowan leadership culture – and we sincerely hope it can help leaders in all stages of their careers achieve their own personal, professional, and organizational aspirations.