Cracking the Comm Center Culture Code

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Kentucky Client Services Director

Your Mission Matters

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Bud's Background

- Started dispatching at the ripe age of 18

- Years of Experience in the PSAP: 25

- Worked in 5 different PSAPs

- Positions Held:
  - TC, CTO, Radio Technician, Supervisor, Assistant Director, Executive Director

- Special Positions Held:
  - LEADS Gremlin, Refrigerator Referee, Chair Wrangler, Chuck Master, Guy Who Could Break into the Thermostat (GWCBT)

- Toxic-Employee-Purges (TEPs): 3

- Started the Illinois APCO Leadership Symposium in 2018

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Fully Staffed?

Good Hiring Process?

Solid Training Program?

Up to date policies?

Competitive pay/benefits?

Good labor/management relationship?

Robust Retention Strategy?

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Is turnover expensive?

- Overtime
- Testing (CritiCall, physical fitness, psychological, polygraph, drug, hearing, etc.)
- Orientation and onboarding
- Training
- Vacation and other pay-outs
- Advertising
- CTO Burnout
- TC Burnout with OT

- Reference checks
- Background checks
- Work disruptions
- Service reductions
- Interviews
- Recruiting events
- CTO Payouts
- Many more…

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What causes poor culture?

"The fear of losing your job will only make you work just hard enough to not get fired."

Office Space, 1999

Organizational Culture:

How do all of your staff (including you!) feel about coming to work everyday. Are they excited to get there, or do they dread coming in?

- Whose responsibility is it to improve culture?
- What are you **doing** to improve culture?
- What are you ignoring that you should not be?
- What kind of an examples are being set internally?
- Will you ever "arrive"?
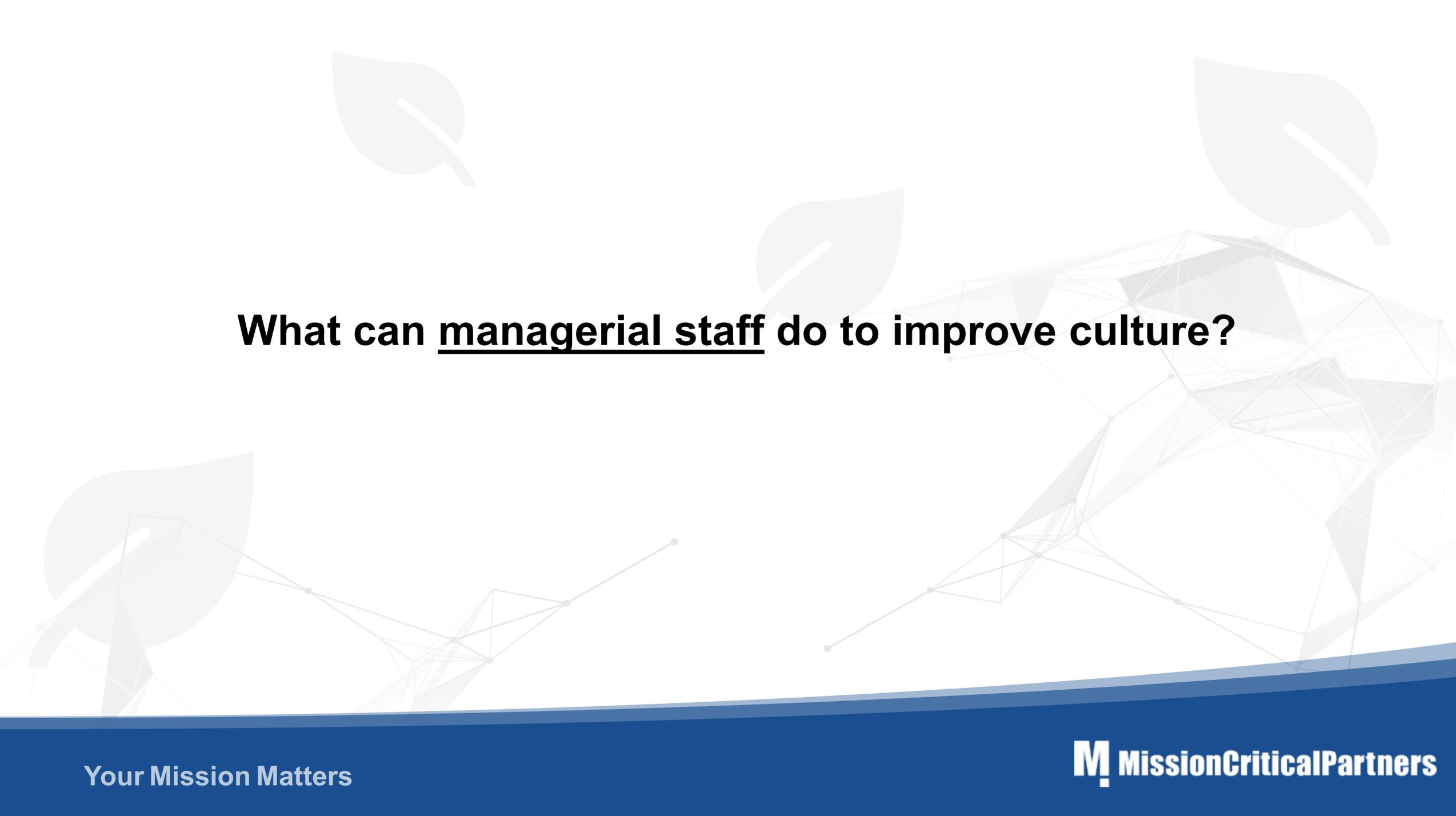
What can <u>managerial staff</u> do to improve culture?

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Employee Benefits:

Tangible rewards for doing their work. Pay, Insurance, Clothing Allowance, Vehicle, Forks, Plates, Ketchup, Therapy, Vacation, Holidays, etc.

- How do you know what is a fair raise?
- Be ready to think outside the box.
- The best agencies are being aggressive here.
- **You do compete with the private sector!**

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Professional Development:

Everything and anything that helps staff gain new skills and knowledge in order to advance their career and improve their performance.

- Continuing Education
- Career Planning
- College Education
- Ride-Alongs
- Certifications
- Conferences

- Mentoring
- Cross Training
- APCO/NENA Association Work
- Blue Shirt Meetings
- Public Education

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Be the manager/director you wanted to have 10 years ago:

- Be honest and objective
- Say "yes" when you can
- Say "no" when you have to
- Go to bat for your people
- Work the console occasionally
- Communicate your struggles
- Send staff to conferences
- Spend time in dispatch regularly
- Actually care about what people have going on at home
- Make **EVERYONE** happy!
- Cut off the cancer

Stop putting the wrong people in positions of authority.

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Should We Retain Everyone?

Negligent Retention: A legal concept in employment law that occurs when an employer fails to take action against an employee who is unfit for their job and poses a risk to others. This can include ignoring red flags like poor performance, misconduct, or complaints from coworkers.
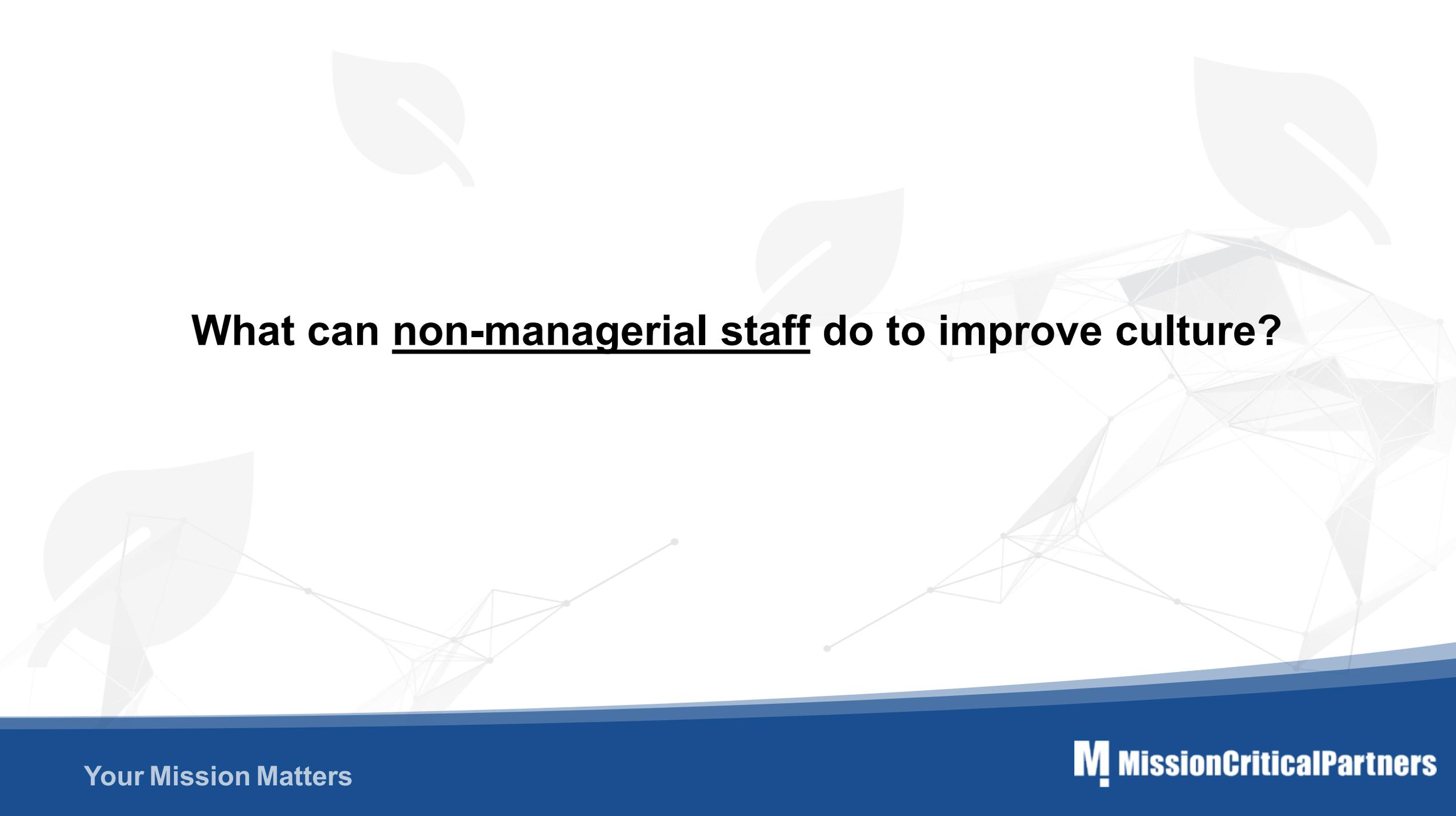
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What can <u>non-managerial staff</u> do to improve culture?

Be the coworker and employee you would want:

- Stop jumping to conclusions
- Give the benefit of the doubt
- When the boss says "no" assume they have a good reason or ask "why" privately.
- If you see something not working right, fix it, or report it
- READ your policies and contracts regularly
- Give the boss a heads up if you create an operational mess
- Practice the lost art of **peer-to-peer accountability** with management support
- High five your peers!

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What can <u>everyone</u> do to improve culture?

Be a good human:

- Observe the platinum rule

- Extend grace to everyone

- Find something positive about everyone

- Work on yourself professionally

- Offer to help someone at least once a week

- Embrace change

- Put others before yourself

- Don't be a keyboard warrior

- Set a good example

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How do you get started?

Good culture is not accidental!

- **Culture Research:** The intentional effort to uncover factors that are driving poor culture in your agency.

- **Culture Strategy:** A plan organizations create and use to reduce employee turnover, prevent attrition, increase retention, and foster employee engagement.

- **Culture Commitment:** An agreed upon obligation that restricts freedom of action or in-action in the future.

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Good culture is not accidental!

- **Culture Research:** Employees are very frustrated with inconsistent and outdated policies and procedures.

- **Culture Strategy:** Develop a Policy Review Committee (PRC) from the employee pool and engage trainers to watch for inconsistencies.

- **Culture Commitment:** Management and the PRC agree to address policy issues within 2 weeks of identification.

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Good culture is not accidental!

- **Culture Research:** Employees would like to trade shifts to increase schedule flexibility.

- **Culture Strategy:** Employees and Management agree to collaborate on the development of a shift trading program pilot.

- **Culture Commitment:** Management agrees to allow a 1-year trial of shift trading to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Good culture is not accidental!

- **Culture Research:** Exit interviews show that exiting employees feel that shifts are not in alignment with each other, which causes problems among line level staff.

- **Culture Strategy:** Have regular staff meetings with the whole agency present to keep members aligned. These meetings should be open and honest, and everyone should be free to respectfully speak their mind.

- **Culture Commitment:** Staff commit to engaging in these meetings in good faith and cooperate with management to keep practices in alignment.

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Questions?

THANK YOU!

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