



High Performing Cultures

What every organization can learn from Ferrari, Bentley and Lamborghini

Hugh Blane, President of Claris Consulting

It was one of the most thrilling moments in my life. I was doing 187 miles per hour at the Porsche racing school in what is best described as a rocket ship built on four wheels. The engine, only a few inches from my head, pounded in my chest as if I was receiving CPR, and the trees flew by so fast that they were no longer trees, but more a blurry green swatch of color out of the corner of my right eye.

I came to learn how to drive fast. Not to race you from one traffic light to the next down main street, but to become a more educated and safer driver in all types of circumstances. Learning the subtle nuances of when and how to shift gears, when to accelerate and when to brake, I left with a vastly improved lap time as well as greatly enhanced mindset behind the wheel.

High performance cars are very similar to high performance cultures. You have a choice as to whether to drive one or not. You can choose to drive a car that is purely functional transportation. Or, you can choose to drive a car that is one part engineering masterpiece, one part handcrafted artwork, and one part a catalyst for supreme exhilaration.

Here is good news. Whether you are a law firm, university, healthcare institution, a financial services organization or a technology department, you have a Ferrari sitting in your driveway and the keys are in your hand. Unfortunately, for the vast majority of people who own a Ferrari, the level of intimidation about the power, torque and performance of the Ferrari has the car parked in the driveway looking good but not being driven. Their owners are not experiencing the acceleration, the cornering and the ability for the car to transport you to an unparalleled more compelling driving experience.

In my consulting work I've found that driving a culture that is the equivalent of a finely tuned sports car requires embracing five high performance cultural mindset shifts.



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Not unlike a manual transmission in a car, making these mindset shifts allows you to trade in your functional transportation for a finely tuned, hand-built work of art that accelerates you to the finish line before your competition. I call these ***Hugh Blane's Cultural Accelerators***. They are:

1. **Cultures are hand built.** Not unlike Ferraris, Bentleys and Lamborghinis, cultures are made with painstaking attention to detail by master craftspeople. Automobile engineers pour over specifications in the hopes of eliminating tiny imperfections, and marketing and customer care representatives create experiences that are exhilarating and rewarding.

The same holds true for your organizational culture. It is handcrafted and not an off the shelf idea culled from the most touted leadership book of the quarter. It is crafted with an uncompromising and meticulous passion for a compelling future. A future that outperforms your competition, builds customer loyalty and commitment, and leaves you in a category of one. In all races between you and your competitors, the race to customer loyalty and commitment will always be won by the most committed and passionate culture.

2. **Cultures are customer centric.** All of the car manufacturers I've mentioned know their customers inside and out. They have painstakingly thought through every aspect of the purchase process and engineered it to adhere to the automotive admonition "the thrill of the wheel seals the deal." Once a prospective car-buyer has been thrilled by an automobile, the likelihood of them being converted from a prospective customer to a loyal customer increases exponentially.

Cultures that strive to thrill their customers, as well as to thrill the employees who work directly with them, will have customers'



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speed toward them. If you are not thrilling the customers that matter most to you they will jump in their car and drive toward your competitors.

- 3. Cultures need to perform at higher speeds.** Regardless of whether you agree that a Bentley Continental GT needs to hit top speeds of 197 mph is irrelevant. What is important is that the automobile has been designed to achieve these speeds with an amazing amount of composure and safety.

Cultures are the same. Your culture can be designed to travel from a complete standstill to sixty miles per hour faster than your competitors and it can be designed to achieve a higher top speed with composure and safety. But the important question all leaders need to ask is, are we traveling on the Autobahn in Germany at top speed? Or, are we on a two-lane highway in Shreveport Mississippi with a governor holding us to fifty-five miles per hour?

In today's world of work where hyper connectivity and access to information is expected in seconds, traveling fifty-five miles an hour will leave you obsolete and surpassed by newer and faster competitors. It's time to speed up.

- 4. Cultures require better car handling skills.** Creating a handcrafted culture that thrills customers and accelerates performance requires better car handling skills by drivers at every level of an organization. Specifically, every leader in the organization must embrace the admonition from racecar driver Mario Andretti who said, "If everything feels like it's under control you're simply not going fast enough."

Gone are the days of having everything under control. The race for accelerated performance requires you to build a culture that is capable of balancing itself on the safe edge of the known and predictable along with the unknown and uncharted. This will leave some leaders on the edge of their seats proclaiming they're going



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too fast. If you're not hearing this, you're not going fast enough.

- 5. Cultures cannot be purchased on the cheap.** High-performance sports cars as well as high-performance cultures require you pay a premium. You cannot take a Chrysler minivan to the racetrack and expect to be competitive. You have to invest a premium either in purchasing a car designed for the racetrack, or to convert your current car into a competitor. If you're not willing to make the investment into creating a high-performance culture then you will be resigned to being at the back of the pack and not being competitive.

Creating a high performance culture does not require you buy a Bentley. It does require that you buy-in to the five mindset shifts above and to move toward the same belief that W.O. Bentley had when he started Bentley automobiles. He said: *"we will build a fast car, a good car, the best in its class."* Here's to fast, good and best in class cars and cultures.

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Hugh Blane is President of Claris Consulting. He is a nationally recognized business strategist hired to help organizations solve challenging business issues, strengthen personal and professional relationships, and execute on strategic initiatives with greater effectiveness. A subject-matter expert in leadership, team performance, and influence, Hugh Blane is a senior-level consultant who has worked with thousands of people in a wide variety of organizations including Pepperdine and Stanford University, the University of Washington, Microsoft, Starbucks, Spacelabs Medical, KPMG and Costco.