

# MY CAREER AS A **Culture Sleuth**

LESSONS YOU CAN  
APPLY IN YOUR OWN LIFE



*By Terri Kruzan*

**Culture Matters.** What I learned in my 20 years of helping organizations change is that culture matters.

If you expect to be a 21st century leader – taking charge of culture is your job, within organizations and working across national boundaries. It will be your personal source of competitive advantage.

## Culture Is Bigger Than an Individual.

Leaders – most of whom inherited their organizational cultures – do not understand its magnitude, what needs to be done to shape it and how to model new behaviors. The next generation of leaders is quicker to understand this. Cultural barriers can hinder your ability to change behaviors needed to achieve goals – and move forward. Thus, understanding the role of culture is critical for those who want to spur progress.

**Why Blog About Culture?** I began blogging to help people adapt to change more easily and become better leaders – I wanted to share my skills on culture sleuthing.

As a medium, blogging is the best way to reach an international, diverse audience with immediacy. By sharing examples of those who are shaping governments, companies, countries, communities and families – we can demystify culture.

I've grouped the most compelling posts to tell a story – to help readers start their journey of taking charge of culture as 21st century leaders – and compiled them into this e-book.

**The (Cultural) Bottom Line.** Culture is all around us. Its impact is enduring and profound – endlessly fascinating and there to be shaped.

Through blogging, I've engaged with people in the U.S., Asia, Australia, the Middle East and Europe – especially young people, students and leaders responsible for change within their organizations.

I hope you'll join our online community; [Leading-Workplace-Change](#) and continue on your 21st century leader journey

Terri Kruzan

*Founder, Culture Consulting... turned Culture Sleuth*

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After being introduced to  
the idea that culture  
matters for 21st century  
leaders, your next thought  
is how do I know  
***where to look  
for culture...***

# How To Be A Culture Sleuth

LESSON LEARNED:

**By digging below the surface, skillful cultural sleuths can solve problems.**

The job of an armchair culture sleuth is to find the underlying reasons for people's actions. Those actions may have been formed during another time and place. By looking for clues, the savvy sleuth can uncover a set of shared values or a belief system that can help resolve a problem.

So why should you be an armchair culture sleuth? To become more successful at recognizing and solving problems in the workplace, in community organizations or in your own family.

The best culture sleuths are curious. They keep their antennae tuned, continuously digging deeper for data that can be linked together to detect the underlying causes for a problem. By uncovering clues and developing leads, they learn why issues are not always easily solved.

Imagine yourself as an investigative reporter – such on as the TV show CSI or a writer for *The Smoking Gun* website. And, here are four steps to get you started in how to be a culture sleuth.

- **Observe** what is put up on the wall (pictures, plaques, web-pages)
- **Investigate** what an organization or community measures (annual reports)
- **Dig deeper** into stories about founders, leaders – their response to crisis and success (news articles & history timelines)
- **Link** the clues together (create a shared culture map)

For example, let's look into the 'lack of confidence problem' facing many banks today. The culture sleuth observes the pictures and captions on a local bank's website. They project images of reliability and saving for the future.

Investigating further, she reads the bank's recent annual report and notes a recurring strategic focus on higher margin, higher risk products.

The culture sleuth digs deeper and reads about increasing annual bonuses paid to the bank's executives in recent years – while reviewing the bank's history timeline, she finds the past focus was on stable and conservative dividends paid to stockholders.

After linking the clues, the culture map is revealing. It appears to chart a shift in the bank's underlying values from stability and reliability to high-risk and high gain.

This culture sleuthing work reveals a possible underlying reason for the 'confidence problem' facing banks today. And most likely guides the sleuth as to where to put her next IRA savings deposit!

In your journey of becoming a culture sleuth, it is important to realize how much national background influences beliefs – the source of culture. In this short e-book, the focus is on how ***‘being American’ influences culture.***

# Harnessing the Hustler

LESSON LEARNED:

**“Winning at all costs” requires ground rules to play by.**

It is always fun to write about how the American persona manifests itself in the corporate cultures of many companies.

One of the clear themes in historian Walter A. McDougall’s book *Freedom Just Around the Corner – A New American History, 1585-1828* is that “we are a country and a people with a ‘penchant for hustling’ – in both the positive and negative senses.” He talks about:

**...how hustlers are folks who are known for getting things done, but also cut corners and cheat and above all are always in a hurry... fleeing into the future.**

You can sense that hustler persona emerge in companies today, especially those with win-at-all-costs cultures. When asked what it takes to be successful in these companies, the following behaviors are often noted by employees:

- **Must create opportunities and exploit them**
- **Must be aggressive, compete and take calculated risks**
- **Must do whatever it takes to get the deal done**

Harnessing the hustler instincts of the American persona is what good leaders should be about – providing ground rules, incentives and consequences to structure the competition.

This is not an easy job and usually very much a juggling act on the part of leadership. Their work is to set and maintain the organizational mission front and center at all times – without sacrificing the willingness of individuals to take personal risks and create opportunities for the future.