Ritual cards

Rituals are recurring acts that shape and reinforce new behaviors—thus, the right ritual can be quite powerful in transforming a culture.

This deck represents a variety of rituals that we at SYPartners have heard about, read about, or even practiced ourselves. They're meant as inspiration in thinking about how to build the attributes of a culture that can constantly transform in today's fast-paced digital economy: collective speed, restless ingenuity, deep agency, radical collaboration.

What rituals resonate most for what you want to achieve, and how might you adapt them?

Reverse mentorship

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A health care group started a practice of pairing up executives with interns so that senior leadership could gain deeper insight from their millennial counterparts about the changing healthcare needs of the next generation.

How might you design an exchange of talents and skills?

Five-minute sketching

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To fuel generative thinking, teams at SYPartners often begin meetings with five minutes of individual sketching. New sketches are mounted on the walls each day for inspiration.

How might you use sketching or other methods of visualization to quickly generate ideas?

Get close to the customer

To build customer intimacy, every employee at an e-commerce company goes through an orientation program where they take calls from customers for three weeks—fueling the service mindset of the entire organization.

How might you facilitate more direct contact between your employees and your customers?

Walk in someone else's shoes

A large financial services organization instills a sense of passion and empathy in employees by helping them understand the emotional needs of their customers (primarily soldiers and their families). As an onboarding ritual, they review deployment letters, eat MREs (Meals, Ready-to-Eat), and walk with 65-pound backpacks.

What kind of simple rituals might help employees build empathy for those they serve?

Seeing tours

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SYPartners uses "seeing tours" to get client teams out of the office and inspired. Teams visit a variety of places and experiences to help them think creatively about their own business (e.g. *What might a hospitality company learn from a cult-fitness brand*?). Leaders reconvene after a few hours or even a full day of seeing to crystallize their most relevant insights.

What locations and experiences would deliver the kind of inspiration and learning you need most?

Company-wide hackathon

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Every couple of months, a global media and social networking company holds a "Hackathon"—an all-night coding session where employees come together around a shared challenge and experiment in new ways.

How might you use the principles of a hackathon (gamified, time-bound, a clear challenge) to stimulate creativity?

Write your future

The founder of an athletic apparel company often writes fake business articles for *Fortune* and *The Wall Street Journal,* five years out, to imagine and realize his most aspirational business goals.

What are other ways you might cast your imagination into the future to consider what is possible?

Bring inspiration in

A Silicon Valley-based tech company maintains one of the most innovative corporate artist-in-residency programs in the nation. By bringing outside creativity into the office, the company constantly surrounds employees with new ideas and perspectives.

How might you fill your environment with outside inspiration in a low-cost, scrappy way?

"I agree" or "I align"

While working with SYPartners, a large retail organization adopted this ritual to improve decision making. At the end of each meeting, everyone declares if they agree with the decisions. If they don't, they have to state what they need to see or believe to at least align moving forward.

How might you ensure everything that needs to be said is said in the meeting, not afterwards?

Make meetings matter

A well-known marketing group focused on a series of rituals to make meetings more efficient. They removed chairs from meeting rooms for morning meetings to foster urgency, and encouraged employees to decline one meeting each week if they felt they were not truly needed and had a better use for the time.

What are other rituals you might use to maximize productivity in meetings?

Reimagine emails

In many organizations, there's a movement to make emails more effective. For example, limiting emails to no more than three lines—to force brevity, increase face-to-face interaction, and reduce email-based misunderstandings.

What other communications protocols might help cut down the signal to noise ratio?

"Fix it" sprints

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A large internet and technology company uses 24-hour "Fix it" sprints for employees to drop everything and focus 100 percent on solving one specific problem.

How might you gather the collective intelligence of your organization to tackle issues that matter?

The Five Whys

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A Japanese automaker developed an iterative questioning technique that's core to its manufacturing process known as "The Five Whys." When something goes wrong, managers are trained to ask "Why?" five times in order to unearth and solve the root cause of the problem—rather than being thrown off by the surface-level symptom.

In what moments might you use the power of questioning to surface what matters, faster? What question would you ask?

Bite-sized training content

Quarterly, a large internet and technology company releases 6 hours' worth of training material packaged into 7-minute modules that are mobile and gamified—so they can be consumed quickly and easily.

How might you reimagine key learning moments or materials to be more easily consumable?

Embed the user

At a hospitality company, each team has a product manager who is assigned the role of user. It's their responsibility to intimately know and advocate for the user's perspective throughout the project—enabling iteration in the right direction.

How might you ensure that your customer always has an advocate within the business?

Tight feedback loops

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At a multi-national consumer tech company, the new head of retail launched an internal app called "Share Your Ideas," to enable retail employees to propose improvements or lodge complaints. She committed that someone from her team would respond within 48 hours.

Are there other ways (from sophisticated to scrappy) that you might collect ideas for improvements?

Musical chairs

—

At a digital payments company, each functional and project team relocates within the office every 3-6 months so they're always adjacent to different teams—opening up new conversations and connections.

In what simple ways might you shake up your environment to promote new interactions among employees?

3-minute knowledge share

To build a culture of constant growth, where employees are always learning something new from one another, SYPartners introduced mini mastery classes—where one person offers to teach others a new skill in three minutes.

How might you facilitate more learning and development across different functions?

Weekly demos

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Every Friday afternoon, employees at an editorial tech company hold a demo hour called "Mock O'Clock." Employees gather around a large table and anyone can share their latest work—giving people a chance to contribute and convene outside their functional teams.

How might you create a simple forum for sharing work more broadly?

Cross-functional partner-ships

Members of the data and analytics team at an e-commerce company are assigned as liaisons to specific products, to help transfer insights throughout the company.

What kinds of cross-functional partnerships are most needed in your organization? How might they work?

Tea Time

On Wednesdays, employees at a global design company partake in a ten-minute ritual called "Tea Time." A cow bell rings, everyone drops what they're doing and gathers for tea. People working on different projects cross paths and share what's inspiring them. It's been so successful that it's spread to all locations.

How might you orchestrate casual collisions among employees so that ideas and inspiration are regularly exchanged?

Build a brain trust

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To promote candor and channel the collective creativity of the organization, a major animation studio uses a mechanism called the Braintrust—a group of directors, writers, and heads of story who share ideas and criticisms for each film. This forum helps the director get outside his/her own head and get unstuck throughout the development process.

How might you build a brain trust of diverse individuals who can help shape and move work forward?

Swarms

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At SYPartners, when a team or individual needs to supercharge their thinking, we rely on a trusty ritual called a "swarm"—emailing a question to the entire office encouraging all employees to contribute ideas. Swarms are archived so anyone can access them for future use.

How might you develop a simple, low-stress way of seeking input?

Internal documentary

A hospitality company has a ritual of filming important internal meetings, debates, and announcements, and then editing them into digestible content—enabling employees to get up to speed quickly and learn why important decisions were made, in context.

How might you expose people more directly to conversations happening throughout the organization, in a fun, engaging way?

Daily Line-Up

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All over the world, employees at a luxury hotel brand gather each morning for a 15-minute standup—to plan for the day, and stay connected to their values and each other. They commonly cover three areas: educating the group on an important topic, revisiting one of the key "customer-service basics," and running through operational issues.

What might a standup look like in your culture?
What topics would you cover?

Stop, start, continue

At a large media and entertainment company, performance management is built on the idea of "context, not control." The company shifted from doing annual reviews with managers to more informal 360s in which colleagues tell one another what they should stop, start, and continue.

How might you promote more frequent feedback to help employees be better equipped to lead their daily work?

The Two-Pizza Rule

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One CEO's solution for hesitation and groupthink is the "Two-Pizza Rule": All meetings and teams should be small enough to eat no more than two pizzas. The idea is that a small team allows room for everyone to voice their ideas and make quick decisions—while avoiding bureaucracy.

How might you ensure that all voices are heard in meetings?

Simple guidelines

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At a multinational consumer tech company, five key behaviors for customer interactions are ritualized into an easy-to-remember acronym (that spells out the company's name) to help employees show up at their best.

What are the core behaviors employees must know in your organization? How might you make them simple and accessible?

Public goals

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Employee goals at a large internet company are made public internally to promote accountability and transparency.

How might you create a sense of shared accountability for employees?

Prototyp-ing kit

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A software company created an all-in-one package designed to enable anyone at the company to prototype, test, and iterate a concept with as little corporate overhead as possible. It includes: a pen, post-its, a timer, a mini notebook for "Bad Ideas," a bar of chocolate, and a $1,000 prepaid Citi card.

How might you inspire new behaviors through the tools you provide?

Make a statement

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To give employees a voice and an outlet for making, a Silicon Valley-based tech company created an internal workshop where employees can create posters on any topic they care about, and put them up anywhere.

How might you inspire guerrilla-style making that encourages employees to share their passions and ideas?

Failure of the Week

To empower its employees to take risks and "fail safely," a news media organization carries on a weekly ritual called "Failure of the Week." Employees who have tried something new that didn't work out are recognized for taking the risk.

How might you make it safe for people to push themselves and try new things?