

Qualityinfo

Volume 25, Issue 20*Fortnightly, Free soft copy***15th January 2024**

Five Levers for Building Your Desired Culture

Lofty platitudes need not apply

In more than 130 interviews with high-performing CEOs, across a wide variety of industries, culture was almost universally cited as the single most important factor contributing to company success.

Why is culture so important? Because culture drives how employees feel about working at your company. And this drives productivity, discretionary effort, and customer experience.

A recent Aon Hewitt study shows that engagement does drive financial performance. According to the study, “a five-point increase in employee engagement is linked to a three-point increase in revenue growth in the subsequent year.”

Here are five approaches to bringing your desired culture to life in your business. It’s a lot more than putting platitudes on the wall in your break room. It takes strength, honesty, and an intentional strategy.

Model the behavior

It’s simple and effective (and cheap!). Culture is very much a conversation. It’s very much monkey see, monkey do. For example, Baptist Hospital in Bengaluru is committed to removing the “us vs. them” from their culture. Their CEO explained his approach to establishing this as a cultural norm. “One of the ideas is a program we instituted a while ago called Walk a Mile in My Shoes,” says the CEO. “What we do is: Everybody in leadership takes time every month to go upstairs, what we call upstairs, and work with a department.”

For the CEO, it’s a chance to demonstrate what he wants from others by using herself as an example. “We go to the pharmacy, we go to accounting. We just find out what everybody does,” says the CEO. And with that, comes a level of input that staying secluded in your office can’t provide.

Throw money at the problem

Keeping a healthy culture is worth the investment. This includes compensation, benefits, programs, and incentives. For Kapil Dave, CEO of a well-known

company, it meant hiring an executive specifically equipped to focus on core values.

If health is a core value, you should invest in making that a reality. Put in a gym, or give away gym memberships. Have programs and incentives that encourage people to quit smoking or lose weight. If adventure is a core value of your company, plan and fund team getaways to fly hot air balloons or kite surf. Be creative. Have fun.

Train your team

In my experience, it is more common for large, enterprise-sized companies to put the time and energy (and money) into training their team in core values, but it's worth keeping on your tools list. This is especially the case if your company has gone through a lot of fast growth, or when you find that the reality of your company is far from the mark set by your core values. Training can help your team get aligned on what your values mean for your company, and can incorporate discussions on the best ways to continue to implement the values.

That said, this is one of my least favorite ways to implement culture. It's expensive and is only successful about half the time, according to [Harvard Business Review](#). If you do go this route, make sure you use it as part of a strategy for change, not the whole "pizza with toppings"

Utilize internal communication

In large corporations there are whole departments committed to dealing with internal culture and communications. You might not have a whole team, but make it someone's job to create and implement a strategy for internal communications. It might start with a newsletter, social media sites, telling the story each month of an employee and how they exhibit company values, or just holding weekly meetings. The idea is to broadcast your values in a variety of formats, and reward employees who are operating inside them. Broadcast the culture conversation.

You can also combine this with the "throw money at the problem" step and bring in outside experts who call themselves a "cultural design firm" and focus on creating internal marketing campaigns and internal communications plans that support cultural development.

Immerse your team in the desired culture

Just like immersing yourself in a language you are trying to learn, immersing your team in your intended culture can fast-track the development of that culture in your company. This can help the company go far beyond talking about the values, and create an immersive environment that creates an emotional reaction in your team.

It may incorporate displays, presentations, videos, stories—as well as the other four methodologies mentioned. It means having a multifaceted plan, and it's about having the value—integrity, trust, empathy—show up almost as a physical presence in your work space. Human beings are experiential creatures, so having the experience of empathy is much more powerful than just hearing about it.

Discussions about culture can devolve into spewing lofty platitudes. We've all seen cases where a company espouses one set of values on their break room wall and another set of values in executive behavior. We are not advocating this kind of sickening hypocrisy. Instead, what we recommend is undertaking an authentic effort to have your values reflected in your culture and your culture then becomes a reliable experience for everyone who interacts with your company. And, because this experience improves productivity, engagement, and customer satisfaction, these efforts do pay off in real financial results.

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