4 steps to creating the company culture your employees crave

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What do you want your employees feel and think about your company upon arrival at work each day? Maybe this is something you've never considered. However, how employees feel reflects the company culture you've established.

Can you breathe new life into a company culture that needs saving? It will take work. Start by asking:

- Do your employees enjoy doing their work? Work should not incite feelings of dread.
- Is there a level of accountability and responsibility? Employees feel connected when they have ownership of their duties.
- Is your staff engaged? A belief that their work matters to the company and its mission helps to build commitment.
- What about camaraderie and respect? Employees know that their word and work are trusted.
- Do you invest in your employees? Recognition and rewards illustrate that you value your employees' contributions.

With these questions answered, you can begin to create a company culture that will make competitors envious. Follow these four steps.

1. Set a foundation

Company culture doesn't grow and blossom overnight. It's a process that starts with finding your mission, vision and values. At its core, your company culture is about values – what you stand for.

You establish this foundation. Let's take a look at this three-pronged approach and what each entails:

- Mission statement: This explains to your employees, customers and vendors why you're in business. Keep this brief.
- Vision statement: Describe what your company aspires to be. Make this emotional and motivational.
- Values: What do you and your employees believe? How will you behave? This is the foundation of your company culture.

Many companies throw in the towel as they try to establish values. It may be difficult, but don't give up. Your values help to guide daily actions and decisions.

Begin by determining what values you share with your executives. What kinds of things are you all passionate and emotional about? These are your values. This is where company culture lives. For example, say your company focuses on innovation, the pursuit of excellence, integrity and community involvement. If this is the case, these values should be a part of who you are, who you hire and how you conduct business.

2. Measure the temperature

Culture can't be discussed without bringing up employee engagement. Employees who are disengaged are costly in terms of company money, productivity and morale. If you think you might be lagging in the company culture department, a climate survey for your employees is a great place to start.

Here are some questions you might ask in a culture survey:

- Is your opinion valued?
- How often does your supervisor recognize you for something done well?
- Do you have the tools you need to do your job?
- Does your manager listen to you?
- Are your benefits are fair and marketable?
- Do you feel satisfied with your job?

A survey with these type of questions will reveal how your employees think and how they feel about their job, the company, their peers and managers. Be sure to look at the survey participation rate. In organizations with distrust, the participation rate among employees will be low. Consider this a red flag.

Trust is key, so take this as a chance to start building some trust. Use a third party to conduct the survey and keep employee responses anonymous. Also, be sure to commit to taking action on the results. Your employees will need see an outcome. If they don't, it will only underscore their disengagement.

3.   Get employees involved

Before you finalizing anything, get input from your employees. After all, it's their workplace that's going to be affected. Focus group with employees from different departments, experience levels and job titles can helpful. No supervisors, manager or executives – just your employees. Have them review the mission, vision and values and give their input. Again, get the help of a third party.

The feedback you receive can be both eye-opening and affirming. For instance, what you thought would be a marginal issue may rank higher for your employees. Or, what employees find to be vital, may not have registered on your meter. Review the feedback with other executives, and make any adjustments as you see fit. Once you have the final version, your management team should commit to living these values every day. Walking the walk is critical.

Things to consider as you move forward:

- Does your leadership team model your values?
- Does your company attract like-minded candidates?
- Do your values challenge employees to do their best work?
- Are there more opportunities to be involved with your employees?
- Make sure your employees can't say: "Well, that's what they say. But they don't actually do it."

How you and other leaders act will be the litmus test for employees. And it starts with their supervisors. If your leadership team has done a good job hiring supervisors and employees, the culture should be transparent from the top down.

4.   Roll out your plan

How do you make culture an innate part of the company? It's more than a poster that hangs in the break room. Your company culture is living. It impacts the entire organization: From the performance reviews to the way you acknowledge people, it all ties into your HR infrastructure.

For example, it should impact how you hire, onboard and fire. Additionally, your rewards and compensation practices will reflect your values. Do you crave strategic, competitive edge for talent? This is how you do it. People will want to work for you and stay. It's not enough to get them, you have to keep them. And some companies fall short.

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