BLE BUSINESS LENDING EXCHANGE

Company Culture: What Does It All Mean?

Appeared April 10, 2015

CRACKING THE CODE OF

COMPANY
CULTURE

It's often referred to in a professional setting as organizational culture, but commonly spoken about as company culture. What actually IS company culture when you strip it down? How do you make sure that your businesses culture is on point with how you want it to be, and that it's right for your employees? We spoke to a few innovators, CEO's and influencers in efforts to put forth a definition of company culture and how to make sure your company gets the most out of the way it functions.

Dictionary.com defines 'organizational culture' as "the customs, rituals, and values shared by the members of an organization that have to be accepted by new members," but according to our research it means a whole lot more.

Tom Walter, Chief Culture Officer of _Tasty Catering_ in Chicago, IL
Some core values that Walter includes in his culture are: respect, quality and high customer service standards. A glaring stand out on his website is "freedom and responsibility within the culture of individual discipline," and this translates well with the central messages of his organization.

"Include employees in the development of company vision, mission and values and enable them to maintain the culture and implement programs that will ensure employee satisfaction and engagement," he said, "Tasty Catering's culture council meets monthly to do so.

Walter also states that adopting an 'open book' management style for an entire company of leaders by way of common values and goals, accountability and training/development, as well as playing the great game of business, can really help culture and performance.

Lou Solomon, Founder and CEO of Interact Charlotte, NC

Solomon is responsible for assisting Fortune 500 companies like Goodrich and Wells Fargo among others to enrich their company culture. She truly believes that it all starts with the hiring, "It's important to give heavy weight in the persons drive and willingness to learn rather than just skills when hiring," she says. It is these people that will enhance the company as a whole moving forward.

Another important aspect according to Solomon is mistakes. She says, "Be open in the company about sharing your own mistakes and it will encourage others to admitting mistakes, wanting to fix them and make themselves better at the task at hand." She says that it could make or break whether an employee is willing to contribute to company culture (if they choose, or do not choose to learn and grow from a mistake). The open flow of communication can help in a plethora of ways including effort that will "help foster trust, collaboration and innovation."

For the leaders, Solomon says an approachable personality is most important. Have an open door policy, ask employees questions, and respect their answers.

Ben Luftman Esq., Co-Founder, Managing Partner, Luftman, Heck & Associates Columbus, OH

Law firms can be a different shell to crack when it comes to company culture but Luftman has it covered in Columbus. He says that one of the reasons he started the firm with his partner Jeremy Heck right out of law school was so that he would be able to do things his way. This includes the offering of an enhanced and individualized legal service to clients, and their own rule for how they might see culture at their firm.

When it comes to work, what helps their attorneys get the job done is what they allow them to do. For instance, "While some firms might not allow headphones, one of our high-volume criminal defense attorneys thrives on fast-paced music to get energized and prepped for a big trial."

A huge bone of contention lately in the news has been that employees have barely taken any vacation time in 2014. This is not a problem with Luftman, Heck & Associates. "We also value health and vacations, many of the times combining the two," said Luftman, "Jeremy and I are also friends outside of the office and we have spent many hours training for marathons together as well as traveling to hike Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Rainier."

Scott Deming, Author Powered by Purpose: Identify Your Values, Discover Your Purpose, and Build Success for Life

Deming says that helping people realize the best in themselves assists in creating a great culture. He adapted a ten step model in which to follow for a great result in company culture. The steps include: creating stakeholders: it begins and ends with you, it's not enough to bring people on board, promoting accountability, creating dialogue by listening, confirming and correcting, situating the conversation, considering assumptions, giving other ideas a try, managing change, and managing values.

David Lewis, President/CEO Operations Inc. Norwalk, CT
Operations Inc. takes pride in their company as demonstrated in this video: OI CAREERS 2015

We asked Lewis a couple of questions:

The Blog: How do you make sure that your culture stays the way it is?
David Lewis: Actually I don't want it to stay as is. I want it to evolve and hopefully get better. New hires come in and see how things are done and then go to some extent with the flow. I also make it a point to tell new hires that we do things a certain way here, and that they are strongly encouraged to challenge the establishment to make it better.
The Blog: What is important to you about having a great company culture?
DL: I want my employees to think of our office as a great place to work and a place they like coming to each day. I want prospective employees to be wowed by what they see and here.

Jacob Engel, CEO and Author of The Prosperous Leader Tallman, NY
Engel says that trust, openness and honesty, empowerment, recognition and accountability are key for creating the best possible company culture. He says, "The way I change or create a positive culture and make sure it sticks, is by spending time defining what culture is all about and how it effects the business and people."

Weekly management meetings are a favorite of Engel's as he says leaders can emphasize changes and hold employees accountable with compensation, etc.

Ultimately Engel says, "Without those ingredients you usually will have a dysfunctional or dictatorial culture, which none really appreciates or will give their best and when you have a positive culture, people will take responsibility, be accountable and deliver great results."

Company culture and implementation of a strategy can be a rough nut to crack, but with these tips you can take it to the next level.