4 Culture Pitfalls to Avoid After Big Success

Success always brings new problems.

January 22, 2019 5 min read

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In the early days, maintaining a startup culture is easy. Small groups of people who all know one another don’t need processes in place to keep working in harmony. They do it instinctively because they want their colleagues and their company to succeed. The culture pitfalls you need to avoid come after big success.

After success arrives, though, rapid growth disrupts the status quo. Day-one employees quickly find themselves surrounded by new faces, some of whom work in executive roles, and the influx of new people changes the culture. An office that housed eight people now holds 50. Every new person comes with a unique background, and all the while, the company is under pressure to deliver on loftier goals than ever.

Plenty of companies have achieved early success only to fold shortly thereafter. Entrepreneurs looking to avoid that fate should consider these tips to maintain their positive cultures in the face of big changes:

1. Establishing values and a mission statement will avoid

culture pitfalls.

Young startups have great cultures because everyone believes in the same vision. As startups grow into full-fledged businesses, that vision sometimes takes a backseat to everyday processes. Eventually, that lack of vision creates a disconnect between the founding team and everyone else, sowing discord in the ranks and leaving founders wondering what went wrong.

Avoid the hassle by establishing a concrete set of values and a mission statement early in the company's life. Set expectations for where the company should excel and how employees should treat their work. Whether that's customer service or sustainable business practices, put in the work early. Then when growth arrives, the established value and mission is already set and running. The new influx of differences won't kill the company's spirit in the bargain.

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2. Hire for attitude, not skills, to avoid the culture pitfalls.

Anyone versed in management knows by now that leaders should hire for fit and teach the skills later.

However, when it comes time to hire, many managers balk at that knowledge and go with the person with the most experience. Most lean on the original team to teach new members about the ins and outs of what the company needs. It is difficult to be in the original team and have the skills and be overlooked continually — but this is what happens a lot.

Marketers, salespeople, developers and customer service workers all come with a basic kit of tools. As long as they

meet the minimum requirements, prioritize their attitude over their background and let the company work out the rest. Not only does this lead to more productive employees, but it also helps the company develop employee skill sets and working styles that fit the culture.

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3. Give employees a say.

The bigger the company grows, the easier it becomes for executives to ignore employees in favor of client meetings.

Investor relationships and high-level projects have to become a higher priority for a company to achieve maximum growth efforts. Startups rely heavily on the “all for one and one for all” ethos but isolationism is a cultural death sentence for a growing company.

Keep executives available to employees to receive feedback and form bonds. New hires need to know not to bother the top people with ordinary questions. All employees need to feel that can approach their leaders with suggestions, criticisms and questions about things like vision – especially when they don’t see that vision reflected in the company’s operations.

Whe employees voice concerns listen to what they say and be prepared to act on the information when they have good points. Employees are more likely to feel like part of the team when they believe their input matters.

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4. Understand what culture really

means.

Arcade machines, free beer, ping pong tables, season tickets to local sports teams and other perks are nice, but they don’t define culture

Startup culture is not about what employees do when they aren’t working. Your company culture is about how people treat one another in and out of the office. Culture is about what motivates an employee to pick up the slack when their coworkers need help. Those are the employees you want to keep around.

Consider how the company operates and look for places where employees have opportunities to help each other. Where do marketing teams step in to help sales teams close deals? Where do customer service teams and developers get together to solve client problems and come up with new solutions? Publicly recognize people who work together across departments and create opportunities for cross-functional teams to collaborate. Keep teams close to break down silos before these barriers are created and become an impediment to your company and or between employees.

As every owner of a growing business knows, no culture stays the same forever. Rather than hold on to the culture of the past, lean on these tips to set the stage for the positive culture yet to come.

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