How to Create a Winning Company Culture

“Culture” is the soul of your business. Neglect it at your peril.

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The job market has certainly improved in the past decade. Competition heated up after the financial crash of 2008 but, today, all that’s changed: A record number of people are employed, and staff turnover rates have gotten much higher.

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In short, companies need to do more to retain their top talent. While optimal office environments like those at many of the big tech companies (Google comes to mind) are well known, smaller businesses cannot compete with such lavish expenditures.

So, what can a startup — your startup — do to make itself attractive to its employees and job candideates and benefit overall from a winning culture?

Seven things:

Hire for your culture.

Whatever stage your company is at, it will already have some semblance of a culture. Of the employees you already have, some will have traits that you want in new employees.

You need to hire people who fit this dynamic, which could mean searching for people with similar backgrounds. Or perhaps you'll want to search for people for a more creative environment full of free thinkers who are open to new opportunities.

Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, includes the question "How lucky do you think you are?" in all his employees' interviews. Hsieh believes that the luckier a person believes he or she is, the more attentive and open to opportunities he or she is.

Whatever candidates you yourself are aiming for, make sure you design your recruitment process around those desired core traits.The result will be a more homogenous environment.

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Determine your core values.

A company must have core values that dictate how it will interact with the world, and how it will be viewed by its customers and society. It is important to also set *employee* values. These values will dictate how employees should conduct themselves, and how they should approach their daily work.

At FE International, we have a core value called "Find a Way." What this value promotes is an entrepreneurial mindset for every employee, no matter what the position or department.

By letting employees know what we value, we make clear that moving beyond the reaches of a job's parameters and thinking creatively are important goals for success. You can see a list of some famous companies' core values here.

Focus on family.

The company Sweetgreen, a healthy-salad restaurant chain, has invested heavily in its company culture by aiding the families of its employees. Through voluntary paycheck deductions from corporate employees, Sweetgreen created its “Family Fund.”

This fund offers assistance to employees who require temporary housing, crucial travel arrangements or medical assistance. The company also created a policy of allowing new parents to take up to five months of leave. It is worth considering the average age of your mployees and whether family-based benefits would make their lives easier.

Watch your competitors.

In a world where employees change jobs more frequently, there’s nothing wrong with eavesdropping on the competition. Finding out what other companies do to retain employees can give you ideas for a more productive and stress-free environment at your company.

Also, you need to pay attention to how your competitors advertise their perks and benefits. PayScale, a Seattle-based compensation data company, makes its benefits extremely clear on its careers page. Have you done the same?

Call in the professionals.

If you believe your company culture is taking a hit, there are now companies you can call to help you reorganize your efforts. These companies, like Santa Monica’s NOBL Collective, will reassess your company’s core values that are driving culture and productivity.

By working on a company’s communications and helping to improve its work culture, consultants can teach a company how

to thrive. Because of their heavy emphasis on culture, these advisors are driving a wedge between themselves and more traditional management consultants.

Create unique perks.

Making your company stand out via the popular and unique perks it ofers can be extremely valuable. For example, SC Johnson & Son, makers of Glade, Pledge, Windex and other household brands, offers its employees a special concierge service.

If people need their personal packages dropped off, their cars serviced or their groceries picked up, the company has someone on hand to help. Not only does this make employees' lives easier, but it helps them focus on their jobs.

Another example is Timberland, the footwear company. It offers employees up to 40 hours of paid volunteer work each year. Timberland also offers annual bonuses and a generous discount on its products.

Give the work meaning.

One of the key things you can do to make your working environment more amenable and more productive is to give employees the reasoning behind their efforts.

Simon Sinek is a thought leader who spends a lot of time convincing companies of the value of "why." He says that limiting an employee's motivation to simply making a higher salary doesn't inspire dedication. A real "mission" needs to be created to motivate an employee to want to get out of bed in the morning.

To cite an example, Airbnb doesn't focus on just earning money, it encourages people to travel farther and wider and have new experiences. If you can work out how your own employees might find some sense of mission in their work, you

will cultivate a stronger company culture.

Conclusion

Ensure that you create company values from the get-go, and build unique perks for your employees. Company culture is an important part of any business’s DNA, and having a bad culture can mean the difference between a successful venture and an unsuccessful one.

Of course you don’t just achieve a good culture, then sit back: Maintaining this positive new environment will be an ongoing task that requires a lot of one-on-one time with your employees, funded by a generous budget.

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But that budget is worth it because the long-term benefits will outweigh the short-term costs; so look for inspiration from other companies and don’t be afraid to experiment.

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