How to Foster a Strong Culture With a Remote or International Workforce

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Organizations continue to struggle with employee retention and engagement, which play a big role in productivity and revenue growth. That’s why company culture is more than a buzz phrase — it can make or break a business.

One of the biggest barriers to a strong culture is navigating a remote environment. Today’s leaders need to learn how to establish strong remote workforces quickly.

In an office, you can manage people by sight and create community by osmosis. With a remote workforce, you must be intentional. Learning how to manage and train by objective is key. You can no longer rely on someone learning the job by shadowing a coworker. You need to train and onboard people so they feel connected to the rest of the organization and can grow as professionals and as people.

Another challenge is aligning remote teams with a central purpose. United, they stand; divided, they fall.

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Consequences of a poor remote

culture

The two biggest consequences of these roadblocks are effectiveness and turnover:

- **Effectiveness:** Team members aren't as effective when they're unable to collaborate with each other. And an individual's lower performance impacts the motivation of others. The high-performers have to contend with additional burdens, which creates negative tension.
- **Turnover:** The cost of turnover is high – one-half to two times the employee's annual salary. And replacing someone is usually more expensive than initially hiring them. In the offshore industry, where turnover rates can be higher, costs soar.

Change your processes, or repeat these costly mistakes.

Being deliberate with your process

Address these challenges and consequences with deliberate processes. Start with the desired outcome – for example, what is your organization's acceptable turnover goal? Discuss which inputs are thriving, too.

Retention comes from finding people who match the role, properly preparing them and setting clear expectations. Train people carefully on your processes and systems, making sure they feel integrated with the team, connected to the client and connected to leadership.

People also need to see their career path; otherwise, they won't remain in the organization. Show them that their short- and long-term goals matter to you, even if they'll eventually leave. The goal is to retain them for as long as possible while preparing them for their next role.

When someone leaves, find out why. Collect feedback and have honest conversations. Track these reasons, learn from the feedback, and keep improving.

Ensuring cultural integration

The aim of hiring people who fit the culture is to make them feel a sense of connection. This is especially important for today's remote workers. Here's how:

- **Focus on values:** Ask candidates what their values are in interviews. How do they inform their decision-making? Tell them about your company's values, and ask how they interpret them.
- **Improve onboarding:** Onboarding must be intentional with a dedicated process that maps out milestones and goals, emphasizing opportunities for collaboration. Categorize urgent tasks (like signing HR paperwork and reading the employee handbook) versus important tasks (like meeting with every leader in the first two weeks).
- **Set a process beyond day one:** Set up objectives for week one, month one and more. This helps break down what's most important and what success looks like beyond someone's initial days with the organization. What does the company need to provide to ensure new-hire success?
- **Maintain engagement:** Plan beyond the first 90 days. Start by defining your culture. People need to feel connected to the greater purpose, make connections with teammates, clients, leadership and their career growth. Holding regular one-on-one meetings is also crucial for maintaining engagement. Think of ways to promote team-building remotely, like virtual games and extra video meetings.

Time and resources can be major setbacks, especially without

an HR department or sufficient hours available to create and track all these processes. Be prescriptive on role expectations. Provide visibility into the training along with the resources each remote team member needs to be effective. Start small, and continue to gather feedback to keep improving.

Related: **How to Build Team Culture in a Remote-Work World**

Overcoming the hybrid work trap

Hybrid environments are becoming increasingly common as companies try to accommodate employees. These arrangements aren’t always optimal because remote workers may feel disjointed from their teams. It’s easy for them to be forgotten or overlooked, breaking communications down.

If a bifurcated workforce develops, then neither in-person nor remote employees will become best-in-class. This arrangement also ends up costing more. Committing to a fully remote team ensures everyone’s on the same page, further empowering a team that works in harmony.

Decide: Is the future the same as it’s always been, or is the future borderless?

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