

5 ELEMENTS OF GOOD WORKPLACE CULTURE

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“Culture guides discretionary behaviour and it picks up where the employee handbook leaves off. Culture tells us how to respond to an unprecedented service request. It tells us whether to risk telling our bosses about our new ideas, and whether to surface or hide problems. Employees make hundreds of decisions on their own every day, and culture is our guide. Culture tells us what to do when the CEO isn’t in the room, which is of course most of the time.” – Frances Frei and Anne Morriss, Harvard Business Review.

When employees are happy, they are more productive and everyone knows that increased productivity means a better bottom line for your company. Companies with a good workplace culture do almost twice as well as the competition in the stock market. Whether you believe it or not, employees know their value in the job market and they have come to expect a good workplace culture alongside the traditional work benefits like vacation time and a good salary.

The office shouldn’t be a place where employees dread daily. In fact, they should look forward to going to work because they enjoy the work atmosphere. Even if the job is difficult, a good workplace culture will alleviate some of the stress workers experience. This is why a good workplace culture matters – it sustains employee enthusiasm. So it’s worth the investment for companies to build and nourish their culture. But how do you create a company culture that will not only attract the best employees but retain them as well?

1. Teamwork: When employees hoard information and are always in unhealthy competition with each other, it is a sign of poor culture where selfish behaviour is rewarded. A good company culture should create an atmosphere for collaboration where everyone has a common goal that will be of benefit to the organization.

A survey of 14 companies with good workplace culture showed that everyone saw the need for teamwork among employees, departments, suppliers, customers and stockholders. When a CEO lays people off to increase his stock’s price, he’s making opponents out of people who should be teammates. When a purchasing manager strong-arms suppliers into slashing parts prices, she improves the short-term bottom line but incurs long-term resentment. The days of making your top performers compete with one another are over. Nowadays, collaboration is the name of the game if you want to get the best out of your staff.

2. Everyone knows their part: Another important aspect of a good workplace culture is when no employee feels like they are performing a task with no meaning. Good workplace culture means that everyone understands the mission of the company and how they are helping in their own way to achieve it. This doesn’t necessarily mean knowing your company’s mission statement by heart, but that you know how the work you do daily affects the performance of your company.

3. Flexibility: Today’s workers are constantly proving the statement “change is the only constant” right. Employees are in search of not just flexible hours, but continuous training so they can improve their skill sets. Thus flexibility, like allowing employees to work from home and have varied work hours (instead of being forced to stick to the traditional 9-5), is rapidly becoming the norm, not just a perk. One in four employees report having big problems balancing their work and family life. Providing a flexible work culture is necessary for the recruiting and retaining of top employees.

4. Communication is key: Good leaders make the direction they are headed in very clear to their entire team and then continually support it. They know that involving people who are at lower levels than them in the process of making decisions will encourage them to own the results and thus seek to get better results.

5. Reward: Employees have a popular complaint that they never hear a word about their performance until they make a mistake. If you want to build a good workplace culture, make sure that you constantly recognize your employees for a job well done.

If you feel like your company culture could do with some changes, you can put them in place, but keep in mind that it will take time. None of the mentioned steps can be achieved with quick fixes or short cuts. If you want a good workplace culture, it usually entails letting some employees and managers go, hiring new ones that better fit the culture you want, examining existing company policies, taking great care to articulate your company mission and values, and improving communications around those goals. Once you achieve a good workplace culture, you can start recognition and reward systems for actions that are in line with the company's goals.