Building a Strong & Positive Company Culture

A great company culture attracts the best workers, increases retention and improves employee performance. Culture can be influenced, and new norms can be introduced to employees, at any time. Even if a company is not suffering from a negative, unproductive culture, there are always steps to take to improve company culture for both the short and long term. These eight suggestions can positively impact your existing or new company culture:

1. **Recognize and reward valuable employee contributions.** According to Deloitte, the top 20 percent of companies with a recognition-based culture have a 31 percent lower turnover rate. Fifty percent of workers surveyed by CareerBuilder believe that recognition is a factor that drives retention. To effectively implement a rewards-rich work environment, be sure to do the following:

   - Identify specific behaviors and/or results aligned with your company’s values. Recognize those behaviors as frequently as possible.
   - Make it easy for everyone at your company to recognize and reward co-workers’ behaviors. Often, peer-to-peer recognition is the most effective way to infuse recognition into your culture.

2. **Encourage employee autonomy.** It’s no secret that micromanaging your employees rarely produces favorable outcomes. Trusting your employees to manage their responsibilities on their own is not as simple as it sounds, though. Some simple, yet effective ways to inspire employee autonomy include the following:

   - Establishing autonomous work groups
   - Reining in bosses or co-workers who tend to hover over others
   - Creating decision-making opportunities

3. **Incorporate flexibility into your organization.** Workplace flexibility can improve morale and reduce turnover. In fact, 51 percent of workers surveyed by CareerBuilder believe that a flexible schedule is a factor that significantly drives retention. Workplace flexibility programs are up to the organization’s discretion, but common ways flexibility is demonstrated include the following:

   - Flexible scheduling opportunities (to help workers with school drop-offs and other responsibilities.)
   - Paid time off (PTO) policies
   - Telecommuting (work from home) opportunities – this is mainly for management and marketing positions and may not work in all company layouts.

4. **Provide regular and timely feedback.** Once-a-year feedback is a thing of the past. Younger generations thrive in environments where they know exactly how they are doing. Continuous, meaningful feedback provides employees with the tools they need to improve and grow. Opportunities to provide feedback outside of performance reviews could include the following:

   - Monthly or semi-monthly check-ins between a supervisor and employee
   - Peer-to-peer weekly check-ins
   - Mentoring programs

5. **Embrace workplace transparency.** Trust is the foundation of a great company culture. Transparency can improve employees’ trust of upper management, give employees insight into a company’s operations and future, and improve cross-departmental collaboration. One way to improve your organization’s transparency is to share both the successes and challenges your organization and its employees face with everyone.

6. **Promote strong professional co-worker relationships.** According to the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, when individuals identify with and are invested in professional relationships with their colleagues, workplace productivity increases, employee morale increases and burnout levels decrease. However,
building strong relationships takes time and effort. To help your employees, consider the following suggestions:

- Encourage collaboration and peer-to-peer work.
- Create “collision points” in your office. Collision points include areas like a communal coffee station, break room, main office or cafeteria.
- Host events. No matter how small (think: team happy hour) or large (think: corporate outing), employer-sponsored events are a great way for employees to interact with peers that they normally would not on an average day.

7. **Create a mentoring program.** Providing employees with professional development opportunities is a low-cost retention tool and a simple way to improve employee engagement and your company culture. A mentor is an individual in the workplace who shares his or her knowledge and expertise to help another employee grow professionally. Some companies use group mentoring, third-party mentoring or reverse mentoring, while others use peer mentoring, flash mentoring or one-to-one pair mentoring.

Mentoring programs provide benefits to all parties involved. Benefits include the following:

- **Skill development.** Mentors teach mentees the skills and qualities necessary for success. Mentoring provides mentors with the opportunity to develop their communication and leadership skills.
- **Improved networking and teamwork.** Mentoring allows employees to build a professional relationship over a period of time and teaches them about the value of networking. This also instills a sense of cooperation and teamwork at your company.

8. **Improve your “soft” benefits offerings.** There are a variety of employer-sponsored programs that encourage employee engagement, increase employee morale and attract new talent. Workplace flexibility is a highly effective benefits offering. Other top benefits to offer are listed below.

- **Wellness incentives**
  - Subsidize gym memberships.
  - Provide healthier food and beverage choices.
  - Sponsor company sports teams.
- **Trendy, new voluntary benefits**
  - Identity theft protection
  - Student loan repayment programs
  - Financial counseling services
  - Pet insurance
  - Discount programs
- **Fringe benefits**
  - Company-provided beverages and food

**Common Mistakes that Ruin Company Culture**

1. **Promoting Hyper-competition** – Competition is not always a bad thing, however, too much competition between employees can create a hostile work environment.

2. **Ignoring ideas from your employees** – not listening to your employees gives the impression that you don’t care about them, which in turn will lead to resentment.

3. **Communicating too little, too late** – failing to communicate news to your employees can damage their level of trust in upper management.

4. **Failing to be inclusive** – creating an environment in which every single person feels welcome is very important in today’s society.

5. **Firing or retaining the wrong people** – firing talented staff while retaining poor performers can cause confusion, frustrating and poor work performance among your staff. Employees need to be held to the expectations that are set forth by the company, this will help staff understand how to behave to find success within the organization.

Today’s workplace is vastly different than it was in the past. Prospective and current employees care about your reputation as a company and are evaluating potential employers on their corporate culture. In fact, many millennials view cultural compatibility with a company as just as important as salary. Culture can set one company apart from others.

Moreover, a positive and strong company culture vastly improves retention rates as employees who identify with and feel a sense of belonging to a company culture are happier and are more likely to stay at an organization for longer.