

Corporate Culture: The Success Factor Most Don't Get

By Bill Blades

Every employee at every level has the ability to act for the betterment of the employer and clients. Unfortunately, most people are content with stagnation. They put in just enough effort to *not* get fired as they quietly march along with the status quo. Much to many CEOs' dismay, such a corporate culture is more prevalent than a culture that calls for greatness from all.

For any company to succeed long-term, having the right corporate culture is key. Where does your organization's culture fall in the spectrum? Does the CEO expect greatness from everyone every day...or does the CEO allow mediocrity to creep in and fester? Make no mistake—culture is not just important; it's *crucial* to an organization's true potential.

Following are some key components for strengthening your culture to be in the "best of the best" category.

- **Get clear on the organization's mission.**

Most employees can't recite their company's mission statement. This means the leadership's process of developing the mission statement was a joke and a meaningless exercise. When the company's mission statement is an "out-of-site-out-of-mind" document, it's irrelevant...no matter how well written it may be.

A compelling mission statement only needs two and no more than three sentences with two primary commitments: 1) What we stand for to each other (internal clients) and 2) What we stand for to clients. You can choose to add various comments regarding vendors, stakeholders, and teamwork, but keep it short and simple. Longer mission statements are hard to remember.

Once you have your mission statement complete, you not only frame it and place it throughout your facility, but you also refer to it regularly for reminders, coaching, reprimanding, and even decision-making. Realize, too, that one person ignoring the statement can poison the environment. The only thing worse than having turnover is having none when there should be.

When asked if they have someone on staff who they knew was a bad choice by the second month of the new hire's employment, about 75% of CEOs and VPs say "yes." Usually, that particular employee has not attempted to meet or exceed the mission statement. When asked why that person has not been discharged, most CEOs and VPs reply, "Because I'm afraid s/he will go with our competitor." But that's exactly where you want the person to go. Set them free!

- **Commit to personal improvement.**

In order for every employee to commit to personal improvement, the company's President and VP of Sales must lead the way by example. Why? So go these two individuals, so go those they lead—and so go the company's revenues and profits. When all levels of employees see the President and VP of Sales committing to something, the rest follow suit. Additionally, it's rare to find a President or VP of Sales who can't improve by 25% in two to

three months and by 50% in six months. Many even get 100% better. Why? They've been so busy mentoring others that they haven't had the time to work on themselves.

Realize that mentoring isn't about motivational speeches. Many corporations make the mistake of bringing in a motivational speaker for an annual meeting and then believe that personal development training is over. Yes, motivational speeches are great to hear, but their effect is gone as soon as the speaker leaves the room.

When it comes to real personal improvement, it's about assigning each individual nine specific skills, habits, and traits to improve upon. And the starting date to act is that day or no later than the next day. See the culture change taking place?

Then, the person's chief or an outside consultant must follow-up to ensure implementation has begun, and to monitor the results. Later, another nine new skills, habits, and traits are assigned and monitored.

The best sales and management education sessions are those where the group selects the best ideas presented and holds everyone accountable (again) for implementation. You may pick six skills to assign to the group, but you pick an additional one each for both Joe and Mary based on their individual weaknesses. And then what? Then you monitor.

- **Create meaningful position descriptions and measurements.**

This is another area that is typically woefully weak. Most companies are using outdated position descriptions they created a decade ago. And measurements? They don't even exist. But how can you expect greatness from people if you have nothing by which to measure that greatness?

For each position in your company, you need current and realistic position descriptions, as well as measurements you use to determine if someone is successful in their position. You utilize these devices for informal reviews (can be done by telephone) and for formalized quarterly reviews. Naturally, these documents are crucial for year-end reviews, but if you currently only conduct year-end reviews, it's too late. People need feedback more than just once per year.

Preparing position descriptions and measurements carefully will keep everyone focused on the goal: higher sales and revenue for the company. You'll also discover that the goal of increasing sales and revenue is part of everyone's job to some degree. Ultimately, the more detailed you can be and the more you monitor, the more you encourage people to be great.

- **Take time for planning.**

Every department needs a plan. But the question often asked is, "What do I plan?" The answer: Everything.

Here's an example of some planning ideas using the sales department as the focus. The following list of planning objectives would be done for each salesperson on staff.

1. What is the 'no later than' date you want to land/increase business with ABC Corporation and 50 others?
2. What are you going to do quarterly and monthly to make the results happen?
3. What is the salesperson's VP of Sales (and Regional manager if it applies) going to do to ensure the results occur?

There are about 50 more items to planning for the year, so you would include everything that is to be done, by whom, and by when.

Planning requires a lot of thinking time without interruption. A good idea is for the people charged with planning to work off-site with a consultant to focus intently on both the big details and the little ones. Why off-site? Yogi Berra said it best, "How the hell are you going to think and hit at the same time?"

- **Have fun.**

Most organizations don't have enough fun, which is almost a corporate crime. But every company should have a goal of being the most fun place to work in town.

A few benefits of fun include:

- It prevents a succession of ordinary days.
- It promotes creativity.
- It elevates retention of your best employees.
- It improves recruitment efforts.
- It aids with teamwork.
- It increases risk-taking, aggressiveness, job satisfaction, and mental health.
- It boosts revenue as clients want more excitement also.

Perhaps most important: The best of the best always want to work at a fun company. So let the grumpy, negative, and whiny people work for your competitors. Instill fun in your culture and you'll have a workforce that's by far the cream of the crop.

Culture Success Starts Now

Of course, there's much more to corporate culture than these five points. However, this foundation will get your company started on the culture transformation.

The bottom line is that if you want stronger revenues, then you must develop a stronger culture. One of greatness trumps any other.

Bill Blades, CMC, CPS, specializes in growing people and revenue in sales and leadership areas. He can be contacted at (443) 477-0061 or wblades@aol.com. Visit www.williamblades.com.