A Guide to Company Culture

The Ultimate Guide to Building a Great Workplace Culture

The subject of business culture can ignite a truly rousing discussion: there are companies with great cultures, companies with toxic cultures, and companies with every kind of culture in between.

The truth is that culture has perhaps as much of an impact on employee attitudes than do job responsibilities, paychecks, and benefits. If people truly spend about [one-third of their lives at work](#), then it is essential that they not only love what they do but also the people they do it with and the company they do it for. Bryan Clayton of lawn-care company [GreenPal](#) explains: "Culture can be a competitive advantage; you can't deliver good service from unhappy employees." If you have a great company culture, kudos to you and the company you work for. If your company culture leaves something to be desired, however, have no fear. Here is the ultimate guide to building a great company culture.

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Getting Started

Whether you're a startup moving out of the garage or the CEO of a *Fortune* 500 company, it's vital to get the basics right, or you may fall victim to [cultural debt](). Creating a great company culture shares a lot of the same steps you followed in building your company. The first step should be doing your market research so that you can find out what is working and what isn't. A great culture doesn't mean reinventing the wheel, but instead taking a page out of the [SEO playbook]() and doing what is known as the skyscraper technique. This starts with finding currently popular topics online and making your own, better versions of them. After researching other companies, according to Premier Rapport culture curator [Shelley D. Smith](), you should "Write your culture playbook. Update it every year. Include and ensure your

mission, vision, values, and culture statements are aligned. Spell out your philosophies on training, culture, collaboration, etc."

Finding the Perfect Space

You've got your culture planned out, and now it's time to start implementing! You're now at an exciting and pivotal point for your business because it's time to find the perfect space. New businesses have a bit of an advantage here if they are moving into their first building. This provides the opportunity to shop for precisely what you want, just like when you were buying your home. Whether you decided to move into a small office or a [five-story building](#), this is where your business lives now, and you have to make that space your own.

The importance of finding the perfect space for your business cannot be overstated. Your building is the first thing that people in your community will see, and it's where employees walk in every day, so they should feel proud of that space. One of the easiest ways to make the space your own is to incorporate your brand, mission, and core values all over the office. It can be as simple as displaying your company colors, placing mission posters on the walls, or, if you want to get extreme, putting your core values on the entire wall for everyone to see.

You Have the Building – Now Fill It

If you're going to be more than a sole proprietor, now is the time to start hiring or, more importantly, interviewing. I discussed cultural debt earlier, and it can rear its ugly head again during this part of building a business or a culture. It is paramount to get the right people in the organization the first time so that you're not wasting time, money, or other resources putting together a team. It's also essential at this stage to implement a process around hiring because it should be aligned with the organization, not necessarily the hiring manager or someone else in human resources.

According to Gabriel Richards, founder and CEO of Los Angeles-based web- and software-development agency Endertech, "Building our culture begins with the thoughtfulness and consistency of our hiring practices. At Endertech, I want to be careful to hire people who share similar values." It all starts with making sure the company hires people that fit the mission and core values set in place. Unfortunately, a company isn't always going to get this right. If left unaddressed, a toxic employee can end up contaminating the rest of your talent pool, no matter who they are or what their position is in the organization. The way that Coliant Corporation CEO John A. Swiatek deals with personnel problems in regard to company culture is to "Make the tough decision and eliminate the toxic workers even if

they are high performers. Remove anyone who does not mesh with the company's values. To do this, first, formalize your company's cultural values in writing. Next, place these written values in your human resource reviews and performance metrics."

Search for the Best Talent

When hiring new employees, make sure you always start with the company's culture in mind. However, that cannot be where the decision ends. The company also wants to acquire its industry's brightest minds. One of the best ways to attract top talent is to ask current employees for referrals. Existing employees are far more likely than some job board to know the type of person that can fit in with the culture that you've created.

Needless to say, one of the best ways to attract top talent is to advertise for it, and clearly. People looking for new jobs want to find employers with explicit missions, expectations, and coherent ideas of what career paths look like. Today, many companies offer more flexible work-life balances than ever before. Financial-consulting firm [Actualize Consulting](#) can proudly boast to have been named a [Top Company Culture by *Entrepreneur* Magazine](#) and a [Top Workplace for 2019 by the *Washington Post*](#). According to COO Kerry Wekelo, Actualize Consulting has built this type of culture by utilizing a work-life balance as one of its nine principles in its

culture-infusion program.

Another recruitment tool, albeit an underutilized one, is social media. Companies can gain audiences unlike any other through the influence of social media. Just as a company is researching a prospective candidate, that candidate is researching the company. People are going to be looking at salary, benefits, and how current employees feel about the company. If you want to attract top talent, make your social media accounts provide useful information to customers and employees.

Diversity in the Workplace

Teams composed of culturally diverse members will bring new ideas and different ways of thinking to the table. And when I talk about diversity, I am talking about it in its truest form. Companies should hire people not just from every race, but of any age, gender, and religion.

Organizations that prioritize diversity will reap the rewards of innovation by a group of people putting their heads together for the greater good of the organization. That diversity will ensure your company gets to hear opinions from every walk of life, from people who might propose a completely different solution from the one you propose. You want those differing opinions. It will help your company look inward, change itself, and grow.

Companies and teams that lack diversity tend to follow the status quo and have a hard time getting out of their own way. That's because, when they go to solve problems, they are recycling the same ideas and methods over and over. A positive take on diversity can show inclusiveness and foster a more collaborative in-house approach to the work.

Just be sure that, when you do become more culturally diverse, you are not doing it simply for show. Make it a point to become diverse,, and then use that diversity to the company's advantage. The results may just surprise you.

Women in the Workplace

In the twenty-first century, there has been an influx of

women not just in the workplace itself, but also in key executive roles. As with cultural diversity, it is important to have a blend of men and women in any organization. According to *Forbes*, there are numerous [hidden advantages to having women in leadership](#).

Soft skills are one of those. Of course, you want to hire any candidate based primarily on their hard, relevant skills, but never, ever ignore a candidate's soft skills. Personal qualities such as motivation, emotional intelligence, communication skills, social abilities, and critical thinking skills are all valuable assets that no company should be without. You need that in your employees, and women have been shown to possess these soft skills and others more so than men.

Other qualities women are known to bring to the workplace include the abilities to build trust and solve problems more efficiently than men. Hiring women to work alongside men in your office will only contribute to your company becoming more well-rounded and cohesive.

Find Your People Person

Whether you're a startup or an established business, you will inevitably need someone to head up the HR department. Traditionally, for that role, companies have looked for candidates with high operational skills and a knack for business partnerships. There is nothing wrong with being

traditional, but ask yourself this question first: how many companies have an HR problem? It's time to put the "human" back into human resources.

Many cutting-edge companies have added a new position to the org chart, the chief people officer. This person will typically have strong roots in HR, probably working in an HR capacity somewhere previously. The main difference between hiring a traditional CHRO (chief human resources officer) and a CPO is the skills you should be looking for in that individual. While there will be some nuances that fit the specific organization, these are prerequisite skills that should be non-negotiable:

1. **Business Acumen**: To have a seat at the executive table, the CPO must act as a strategic advisor to the CEO. The CPO should demonstrate his or her ability to lay out a business strategy based on operations, human capital, growth, and company vision. It's imperative that, through organization or reorganization, the CPO ensures that the company has the right people in the right roles for scaling, and all according to company values.
2. **Authenticity**: Employees should expect the CPO to be authentic, honest, and transparent. One of the CPO's superpowers should be gaining the trust of both employees and shareholders (if the business has them)

alike, while always operating with a sense of integrity. Benjamin K. Walker, founder and CEO of [Transcription Outsourcing LLC](#), said, "People can tell when their leaders aren't being authentic most of the time, and when they can't tell, they usually get found out eventually when something goes badly. Like when a company does all the kumbaya, rah, rah stuff and then lays off 25 percent of their people to meet their goals for the year." In other words, people should see this coming. Don't pretend everything is okay when it's not.

3. **Emotional Intelligence**: To be successful leaders of people, CPOs must manage interpersonal relationships with empathy. Key CPO traits to look for in this area include self-awareness, social awareness, self-management skills, and relationship management expertise.

4. **Innovation**: Innovation can't be just a word in the R&D department. If it isn't used by the CPO, you're never going to get the chance to hire the top talent a company needs to succeed. CPOs have to be innovative not only in how they recruit talent but also in how they engage with and groom that talent.

5. **Visionary Thinking**: As a member of the C-suite, the CPO must be a visionary thinker. He or she must be forward-thinking and inspire confidence in the rest of the team by having a big-picture mindset, positive energy, and a no-fear attitude.

The CPO role can be a bit more challenging for a smaller organization that hasn't yet built out an extensive executive team. Too many times, out of necessity, startups and small businesses have employees wear multiple hats. It's imperative that the CEO gets the CPO decision right because this role is about a lot more than ordering free lunch or scheduling an after-hours happy hour. Whoever the CEO chooses will often become the de facto face of the company. The decision has to be someone that the team respects and looks up to and who carries his or her own weight.

Larger organizations can attack the CPO position in an alternate way: by keeping the traditional HR team in place but creating a new role. The team at iHeartRaves decided to go in a different direction and create a position called director of happiness. According to marketer Brandon Chopp, "The main goal of this position is to increase engagement from employees and to enhance our company's culture. We focus on identifying the core values we want our company to align with. We also support transparency and display recognition for reaching goals on a large screen that is in the center of our office for everyone to see." There is no right or wrong way to add or identify your people person, except by not doing it.

Competitive Pay and Benefits

Attracting and keeping top talent means that you have to offer competitive benefits and compensation, but what exactly does that mean? In the case of benefits, if the company can afford to, they should at least offer health, vision, and dental insurance, with the company paying a portion. Matt Ross, co-founder and COO of [Slumber Yard](#), said, "Besides the obvious of paying employees well and providing clear advancement opportunities, there are a few other strategies we use to make employees happy. We offer medical, dental, and vision insurance, of which we pay over 50 percent for the employee. I believe that is more than what the average company covers."

Beyond that—and, once again, only if the company can afford it—short- and long-term disability and 401k plans are benefits that many employees want. A newer, progressive benefit that a lot of companies are starting to offer is unlimited PTO. That might sound counter-productive, but, actually, it fosters a culture of trust in the company. Workers will tend to reward the flexibility their employer gives them by being more productive at work.

Darlene Hollywood, principal of [Hollywood Agency,](#) uses a method called ROWE (Results-Only Work Environment) at her business. She told us: "Last year, I had some personal challenges that took me away from my desk, often in the middle of the day, sometimes more than a few times a week. Still, the business didn't fold, much thanks to my incredible team, but also because I continued to get the work done. Maybe not during the typical 9-5 shift, but it still got done.

"Upon reflection of this time, I realized that even due to the many sacrifices I made to slap the title of principal on my desk, I came to the conclusion that my employees could also benefit from a flexibility in not being judged as to why they may come in late, leave early, or step out during the day – we are all adults, after all!

"Welcome ROWE, the Results-Only Work Environment that I've piloted at Hollywood Agency. The agency world dictates that we be at the mercy of our clients, who for the most part

work 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. But we're taking it as far as possible. In a ROWE, employees are judged by the quality of the work and the results, not when or where the work gets done, or how well an employee plays the game. The work is about measurable results, not how long you sit at your desk. Gone are the Friday afternoons when you're shopping Amazon or scrolling Instagram awaiting the 'bell' to ring."

On-boarding New Employees into Your Culture

On-boarding new employees is one of those tasks that even great companies fail to do well a lot of times. Everyone who has started a new job knows that the first day or two is meeting your new boss or team, setting up your computer and email, and maybe meeting with an executive who gives you a flashy smile along with a handshake while they fumble through telling you the mission statement or core values of the company. What makes this time difficult is that the new employee doesn't have any "real work" to do yet, and existing employees don't have the time to take out of their busy schedules to show the new hire the ropes.

The entire period leading up to the new employee actually starting should be called "pre-boarding," and organizations can take a lot of the anxiety out of it with just a little effort. The first thing to change is how the "You're hired!" moment is handled. With all of the technology in the world today, the offer is often given by phone call, email, or even (gasp) text! This is the first chance for the company to showcase its culture and make the new employee feel welcome. Instead of sending out an email with an offer, companies should make it more personalized by creating an energized, enthusiastic video offer.

After the offer is accepted, but before the employee starts, there is often an elevated level of excitement and anxiety in

the new hire. Therefore, it is important to stay in communication with that person. One way to take advantage of this time is to send over a "care package" that welcomes the new employee to the team. The package should include some company swag such as a shirt, stickers, a card signed by their new team, or other tchotchke items, along with all of the new-hire paperwork that includes tax and direct-deposit forms.

Make the First Day Memorable

Employers should put a great deal of effort into planning out a new hire's first day so the employee does not have to feel so anxious and stressed. If the building the new hire has to report to is secured by security measures, then his or her direct supervisor should be waiting at the door to provide access. If the employer sent a keycard or pin to get the new hire into the building, or if the building is not secured, the new hire's direct supervisor should still be waiting at the door to greet the new team member with a smile.

Upon the new employee entering the workspace, there should be a stand-up meeting held so that the whole team can gather to greet their new compatriot. For bonus points, have some music playing and the team clapping as the new hire enters the space for the first time. Kristi Herold, founder and CEO of Sport & Social Club, goes the extra mile when they onboard a "rookie," as they call their new hires. "When

we welcome new employees, they enter the 'clap-in': a tunnel of current employees decked-out in SSC hoodies and jerseys, high-five-ing their rookies down the line to their welcome package, which includes their hat, hoodie, crew-neck, and a few sponsored gifts and coupons. When employees reach one year with the team, they get 'drafted' by receiving a custom SSC hockey jersey with their name on the back and the number indicating which year they started."

One thing that many companies do on a new hire's first day that should actually be skipped is putting out doughnuts and coffee in the morning. The last thing that someone wants to do is be forced into eating around a bunch of strangers. Instead, after the initial surge of energy fades, there should be some self-introductions by the team and the new hire.

Now that introductions are finished, the department head should meet one-on-one with the new employee to review the following: organizational chart, individual KPIs, company KPIs, career path, and how high-level decisions and strategy are handled. It's important to establish transparency and establish trust right from the start. Instead of doing breakfast, the team should do lunch instead. By this point in the day, the new hire has probably worked a bit, and lunch is a good way to break the ice.

Lunch can be either on or off campus, but it needs to be with the whole team and used as an hour of bonding. Chanty

founder Dmytro Okunyev's team has a simple saying: "A team that eats together stays together. There is no easier way to build culture than by bringing people together for a meal." At Chanty, they go above and beyond by putting Dmytro's core value into motion. "We tend to have lunch together every day at the office, either by ordering something together or visiting a nearby restaurant. Every Friday after work, we go to dinner together to a place that one of us picks."

Life after Onboarding

In the first six weeks, an organization should be pressing the new team member for ideas on how to make the organization better from an onboarding standpoint or in production. New employees have a fresh set of eyes that haven't yet been tainted by years of working for the organization. It's important to ask for these opinions because, many times, a new employee may not be comfortable volunteering this type of feedback. Another avenue an organization may use to ensure life after onboarding goes smoothly is to institute a mentor program where veterans mentor new hires. According to Marc Prosser, co-founder of [Choosing Therapy](): "Oftentimes, an employee who is mentored becomes a mentor to others, thus creating a much larger impact." Having a mentor system also allows the mentor to be groomed into becoming a

leader in the organization.

Leading by Example

One of the easiest and most effective ways to improve the culture of any organization is to make sure you have leaders that aren't just giving orders through email all day long. Leadership doesn't have to mean an employee has a particular title or status in the organization; there are plenty of leaders at every rung of the corporate ladder. Employees need to know they can talk to their leaders and that their leaders care about them as both employees and people. Here are # ways for leaders to lead through example.

1. Say Good Morning

One way for leaders to ensure that they regularly interact with their staff is by taking the time to say hello to everyone. The easiest way to accomplish this is to walk through the office every morning and greet people by name. Dale Carnegie said, "A person's name is to that person, the sweetest, most important sound in any language." Greeting someone doesn't have to be overdone. Instead, you can say, "Hey (fill in the person's name), good morning!" This exchange sets the tone for the rest of the day by letting the employee know that the leader is approachable.

2. Empower Employees

Leadership can often be a lonely responsibility. With the amount of work that has to get done, oftentimes long hours are required, so the last thing a leader wants is a set of mundane tasks that get piled upon an already full plate. One way to free up some of a leader's time is to empower employees to make decisions and know that not every little detail needs to run past a supervisor.

Empowering employees not only allows the business to be more efficient due to streamlined processes, but it also lets employees feel stronger and more confident in decision-making. A good leader must understand, though, that an empowered employee will still make mistakes. The leader should remember to treat those mistakes as teaching moments. Failures are going to happen along the way; it's part of life and certainly a part of business, but failures should be treated as opportunities to grow. Success and failure go hand-in-hand because most success is built on learning from previous failures. So, when success is achieved, it's important to call it out, as well, and make it known to the rest of the team. If an employee is willing to take a risk, isn't afraid to get in trouble, and gets celebrated when it goes right, then you've just created a culture of trust and accountability, two of the strongest words in business.

3. Remember to Say "Thank You"

Saying "thank you" or expressing gratitude in another way

seems like something that shouldn't have to be written about. We are all taught as children to thank people. This should be second nature, like breathing. However, this is an area that many organizations need serious help with. The problem is not that they're not showing gratitude, but instead that the gratitude comes off as forced instead of authentic.

A culture of gratitude starts at the top, with the leaders. If the leadership team takes the time to acknowledge what can seem like menial tasks, that encourages others around them that have either heard the gratitude or received it to be willing to give gratitude to others. When giving that gratitude, make sure it is for a particular task that assists the organization in moving towards its goals.

Leaders should also remember that behaviors in organizations are contagious, so it's more helpful if you're spreading positive energy that can increase productivity. According to Monica Eaton-Cardone, co-founder and COO of [Chargebacks911](), "Employees are an organization's most valuable asset. Many of those who feel appreciated and valued will go the extra mile to get the job done efficiently. This will lead to an increase in sales and better customer satisfaction."

4. Promote Honesty and Trust

Just about every company will get together to celebrate successes. Signing a big client, saving a big client, or hitting any type of milestone is often cause for celebration. This is important because hard work *should* be celebrated and rewarded.

On the flip side, great leaders are just as honest about struggles as they are successes. The worst thing that can happen is to have employees blindsided because they didn't know there was a problem until it was too late. When leaders communicate the struggles of the company, oftentimes employees are willing to do what it takes to rectify the situation.

The benefits here are that the organization can stay ahead of problems and be more proactive than reactive. Employees will now trust leadership a bit more because they will feel more involved in the company, and you might get to celebrate another success after mitigating a problem.

Discover What Employees Want

Sometimes, the best solutions to complex problems are simple. Finding out what employees want from leadership can be a real challenge, especially in larger organizations.

However, know that the way to know what employees want is simple. Ask them. Leaders often don't know what they don't

know, but that is not an excuse because it's often as easy as asking. Town halls, standups, or anonymous surveys are all great ways to allow people to make their opinions known. Organizations may be surprised with the results, because most answers aren't based on compensation, but instead on areas such as flexibility and wellness.

Create a Culture Committee

Culture committees are being used more often by businesses today than ever before, but what exactly are they? A culture committee is a group of employees from different sectors of the company who come together to discuss, plan, and steer the culture of an organization. It's important to make sure that, if a company puts together a culture committee, a delegate from each sector is involved so that no part of the company has a larger voice than another.

It is especially important that someone from the leadership team be on the culture committee. The committee will feel more empowered to make recommendations if they have the buy-in from leadership. Leaders on culture committees are also important because proposed initiatives will need a budget. A culture committee should be the voice for both internal and external planning for the company, ranging from things like holiday parties to community outreach.

Ask Them What They Want – and Track It

One of the best ways to ask employees for feedback is by conducting confidential surveys. Imagine how nerve-wracking it can be for an employee to walk into any manager's office to ask for a change to benefits or a new perk to the job. The stress of that will deter a lot of people from voicing their opinion on how to make the organization a better place to work.

This is why I propose collecting ideas from employees via anonymous surveys. People have an additional layer of candor when replying to something when they feel there is no way to know it was them who said it. Once responses are collected, the next step is to assign the task of sorting and tracking the responses to the HR arm of the company. Responses should be triaged based on risk to the company and the percentage of responses.

Some more successful companies send out a simple, anonymous Net Promoter Score survey. NPS surveys ask audiences to rate something on a 0-10 scale. On top of that, companies may want to ask a simple question such as: "If you were CEO, what is one thing you would change?"

Continuous Learning and Development

Creating a culture around continuous learning and

development is vital when you want happy employees, top talent, and a company of innovators to take the business to the next level. That all starts with having employees that are continuously learning and developing new skills, while sharpening old ones. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." It is important to build a culture around learning, development, and improvement so it permeates through the staff. In turn, the staff will sharpen and hone one another's skills. A blunt knife is still a knife, and when you sharpen it, the tool will be able to do so many more things.

The financial-advice company The Motley Fool is widely recognized for its stellar company culture. The following

quote is from Jordan DiPietro, chief growth officer at The Blueprint and a senior Motley Fool executive of more than ten years:

"It's important to inspire and take care of your employees—mind, body, and spirit! So at [The Blueprint](#) (and The Motley Fool), we have a Bookie Monster program, where we pay for all books related to your job, to business, or to finance; we reimburse all employees for a meditation app of their choosing, and we have a Fitness Adventure Subsidy Program where we reimburse people for things like ski gear, park passes, swim lessons, even gardening tools."

Fortunately, many companies are taking a step in the right direction around personal and professional self-development. Laurie Fontenot, strategic communications director of digital marketing agency [BBR Creative](#), told us: "Mini and master classes are scheduled through the year where internal employees use their own knowledge to train the rest of the agency on their skill or expertise. These are all saved in our Know-It-All Database for future reference."

Speaking of training, every employee at LSEO recently went through a leadership training course with University of Florida professor and [leadership-development specialist Matt Sowcik](#). Through structured modules, Matt took us through a logical progression of what being a leader truly entails. We learned how to see our coworkers in different

lights, communicate effectively with people from different walks of life, and hold effective meetings. The exercises that went along with the modules taught us more about ourselves and our coworkers, as we took Myers-Briggs personality tests and figured out how to interact with people who are different from us. For instance, how should I, as a heavy extrovert, effectively communicate with any of the company's content writers, who are all textbook introverts? Matt's lessons taught me to engage with these people in ways that work for them, not just for me. That's empathy; it's understanding where someone else is coming from and using that to form stronger relationships.

Why was this training important to the culture of LSEO? Because it taught us all to be more mature about our roles here, not only in the work we do every day, but in how we treat one another, the human beings who power this digital marketing machine. We all came out of Matt's training prepared to be more organized, more responsible, and more accountable to one another.

Going one step further, organizations are also now starting to place more of an emphasis on wellness and mindfulness.

Jennifer Ciarimboli, founder and CEO of mental well-being company [studio BE](#), told us: "At studio BE, we're committed to employee wellness, not only at our own company but by bringing mindfulness training to corporations and

organizations. In our office, we've built an inclusive, supportive workplace. We begin staff meetings with a silent meditation to ground and center, bringing focus and presence to the team. We have zafu and zabuton meditation cushion sets available in our office for use anytime, as well as on-site yoga classes and log-ins to our guided meditation platforms for all of our staff. We're also looking forward to our annual day-long team-building wellness retreat. And I've hired carefully so that our entire team shares in our goals and is always ready to laugh and celebrate."

Create Teams, Not Individuals

Building a team culture is one of the most important concepts that an organization can instill in its employees. Aristotle said, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts," and that couldn't be truer when it comes to business. If one part of the organization is lacking, that has the ability to rock the foundation of the company and send it into a tailspin. Building a team culture promotes cross-departmental alignment and accountability rather than finger-pointing. Ben Horowitz, co-founder of the venture capitalist firm Andreessen, coined [The Freaky Friday Management Technique](#) where he had his head of sales engineering and head of customer support switch jobs. The two quickly found the core issues causing strife between the two subsets of the organization, and when they returned to

their original positions, the two teams worked in unison rather than opposition. While Horowitz's technique was somewhat extreme, promoting a culture of the team is one way to keep companies from coming to this problem.

Encourage Group Debates

Austrian-born management consultant Peter Drucker often gets credited with stating that "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." Scholars have debated that statement for a long time. Strategy can be looked at as a plan of action designed to reach a particular outcome that the organization is looking to achieve. Culture on the other hand, consists of the behaviors, ideologies, perceptions, and norms of an organization. The real question is: why aren't these two pieces aligned more often?

An effective method of aligning an organization from a strategy and culture perspective is to get people together in a room to talk it out. A great debate can often ensure that each member feels like they have a voice in the organization and that proper alignment between everyone in the company can truly be achieved. By nature, debates can get heated, and there is often a lot of personal pride involved with the topics being discussed, where one person might feel married to his or her own idea. It is important, therefore, to follow the following principles for a good debate:

1. Create a culture where everyone has a voice: If you don't do this, then debates will never happen. You will simply be checking a box to say you foster open

communication. Employees voicing their opinions should feel more like obligations than rights.

2. Have a clear objective before going into the room: People often hate meetings because they are seen as just going through the motions of talking while not really getting anything done. A great way to make sure that there is a clear objective and that everyone can be heard is to assign a moderator. This person will be in charge of sending out the objective before the meeting, opening and closing the meeting, asking the questions in the meeting, and soliciting answers or feedback toward the end of the meeting.

3. Don't make it personal: no name-calling, personal attacks, or idea shaming. Remember that, within a debate, there may be a lot of egos and a few that need to be checked. Attacking someone or an idea personally doesn't help the debate and will cheapen the argument of the party performing the negative action. It's important to remember that everyone in the room is striving for the greater good and is on the same squad. It shouldn't be viewed as someone having a hidden agenda, so it's important to remember that while the ideas and beliefs may differ, everyone has good intentions.

4. Stay humble: humility is one of the most important traits of any leader, or person, for that matter. Humility can mean several things, but, in this case, it is important to

keep in mind that, when debating with a group, the needs of the company should always come before the individual. Another part of humility that is important to remember is that it's okay to be wrong, and that it's not possible to always be right, but when you are, admit it, learn from it, and move on. Lastly, don't take things personally. It's a team effort, so who was right or wrong doesn't matter. All that matters is that, when you leave the room, everyone knows the expectations.

Innovation

Innovation has always been at the core of great organizations and leaders dating back thousands of years. Where would the world be without the printing press, the compass, or the domestication of animals? These are things that for centuries have been taken for granted but, at the time of their inception, were cutting edge and revolutionary.

Innovation in the workplace should be no different. At its core, innovation is the method of coming up with a new idea, method, or product that should make a company more efficient, which allows the company to make more money. At the very least, every company should have a culture of innovation to improve the bottom line, but that's not where innovation should start and stop. Part of being innovative is setting aside the time to be daring in your daily schedule.

Many people know about the [20 percent rule at Google](#), which in a nutshell states that Google employees should take 20 percent of their day to work on projects that they thought were important. This concept has led to some of the largest advancements in tools such as Gmail, Maps, and News. However, not all those projects will work out. Remember [Google Wave](#)? It's vital to remember that failures are to be expected and tolerated when the company is pushing to innovate every step of the way.

Innovation requires companies to make sure they set the employees up for success by giving them the best tools to do their jobs. It's critical that the tools an employee uses are promoting collaboration, automation, and efficiency.

The first office tool that a company should think about is email. The two most popular options are [Office 365 Business](#) or [G Suite](#) because not only are they email platforms made by two of the most trusted names in technology, but they also offer tools for shareable document creation, spreadsheets, and presentations.

Along with email, most companies are going to need some sort of project management tool for accountability and task management. [Asana](#) and [Basecamp](#) are both intuitive project-management tools that allow a company to create projects, assign tasks, and get notifications as they are finished. There are hundreds of project-management

systems on the web, so choose the one that meets your organization's needs, and your employees will thank you.

Next, a business is going to have to decide on collaboration tools for the company to use. This is especially true if you have remote workers. Getting an internal messaging service is a great way to start. [Slack](#) is one such program that allows users to have private chats along with group chats called channels. You can use channels for projects or initiatives that a group is working on. Slack also integrates document sharing and various project-management tools.

Remember to Have Fun

The business world is becoming more competitive with each passing day, so that means, to get ahead, a company should hire the top talent in their field, push them to work hard, and make them want to stay. An easy way to get employees to work hard is by allowing them to play hard, too. Letting employees have fun goes a long way, especially when asking them to put in the long hours to meet a deadline or kick off a new project.

Some company fun doesn't even have to cost money. In a lot of offices around the country, there is music playing at all times, so a fun thing to do is create an office playlist by asking everyone to put ten to twenty songs on it.

At [LSEO](), every other Friday there is show and tell, just like when we were in grade school. It's a fun exercise that allows the staff to see a bit deeper into each other from a personal standpoint. Show and tell examples ranged from collections people have gathered over the years to the food they prepared. Our show and tells were regarded as one of the most successful activities the team has done. Other fun activities might be things like potlucks or bringing your pet to work. Laurel Mintz, founder and CEO of digital marketing firm [Elevate My Brand](), couldn't agree more, saying, "We like to have our office pooches around because they bring us so much joy. Sometimes we'll even play some games in the office to get the energy and creative flow back. Part of our value proposition here at Elevate My Brand is about play and creativity, which is why bringing that back to the team when we're having a little bit of a stale moment is so critical and important."

When activities do cost money, they don't have to break the bank to be effective. Some tried-and-true activities that still work today include things like pizza Friday, lunch and learn, or, to get out of the office, hit up an after-work happy hour.

Michael Stahl, EVP/CMO of [HealthMarkets](), says, "We have fun! I have an incredibly hard-working team made of smart, talented, creative, and dedicated people. Year after year, they do incredible work for our company that ultimately benefits the millions of customers we serve, and an important part of our culture is to celebrate those wins and all that hard work throughout the year. We have a very fun (and competitive!) Halloween costume contest annually."

Sports are another way that companies can have fun with their employees. The NFL can offer office fantasy football, a survivor pool, or Super Bowl blocks. College basketball offers March Madness brackets that are interactive. And what feels better than picking the upset your boss didn't

pick and getting to rub it in at the water cooler? The great thing about this is that even people on the team who aren't sports fans can still participate and have fun with these programs.

Employee Pride

Building a culture based on pride is a bit unique because it's the one area that the organization isn't directly responsible for. Instead, it's the employees who manage their own pride. Although, there are certain actions an organization can take to make someone proud to work there. Employee pride is going to create an organic buzz throughout the industry and community the organization belongs to. Subconsciously, people are going to want to be part of an organization that is getting all the buzz when it is positive, even if they don't know what the company does.

Wear Your Brand

Corporate gear that displays the company logo helps create a brand identity for those who see the apparel and those who are wearing it. Think about getting gear that your team can wear both to work and naturally in their everyday lives. If you decide to go the clothing route, decide on multi-purpose pieces of apparel like polo shirts or jackets that can be worn in the office, on the golf course, or out on the town.

Giving Back to the Community

Richard Branson famously said, "Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients." While that is certainly true, it is also important to create a culture around giving back to the community within the company. [Community service offers unexpected benefits](#), from team-building to mental health. Kevin Tucker, founder of [SOLitude Lake Management](#), said, "SOLitude Lake Management supports a positive company culture through an internal program called The SOLution. This program encourages colleagues to attend charitable events during work hours and rewards them for volunteering during their personal time. Through food bank drives, environmental clean-ups, animal adoption events and more, we believe that we can help to make a positive and measurable difference in the world."

Display Your Culture On Social Media

Hopefully, your organization is doing a lot of the things discussed above, but many companies overlook a really easy part of company culture: sharing it! Social media is an easy way to show the public that your company is creating something special from a cultural standpoint and that you have the best people working there. Imagine hitting this trifecta: having a team of employees doing community service while wearing company-branded swag that you post

on social media.

When you do get into promoting yourself and your employees through social media, keep a few ground rules in mind. First, remember to be consistent across all your social media platforms. Use the same logo, colors, and taglines. Post the same kinds of posts every day of the week. Throwbacks should be saved for one or two days of the week. Inspirational quotes should be on another day. Second, set your tone right from the start. If your language is fun from the start, keep it fun. If you are more serious, don't deviate. Last, don't neglect interacting with people through your various social media platforms. When users comment on your posts, respond!

All of this together will really project the image that your company has its brand together. The photos themselves show you are proud of your employees, and the great brand personality will go a long way toward advertising that you are a great employer to work for.

Celebrate Departures

When creating the best company you can possibly make, turnover is still going to be inevitable, but it doesn't have to be looked at as a negative. Some employees are going to be looking for new positions, titles, or roles that aren't available at the moment in the organization. Those people may end up

in other places.

When this happens, the departing employee should be celebrated for all of the hard work they put in to grow the organization before leaving. Holding a farewell party or happy hour is a fun way to send the employee off, and it gives their superiors a chance to say something in front of the group and recognize all the contributions that person made. This also gives a more relaxed setting for the employee to say goodbye. It offers closure.

One of the benefits of hiring the best talent is that when an employee does leave, a new employee is always waiting in the wings to take the person's place. Before current employees leave, they should work with their new successor on the roles and responsibilities that come with the job. The transition should also be communicated with the internal team before being made public to the rest of the organization. Promotion within the company allows everyone to move up one rung when deserving and allows for a consistent flow of entry-level workers and recent graduates to come aboard.

Building out the Bench

Interns can provide a youthful jolt to any business and provide some help with tasks, allowing the team to accomplish more. Interns, paid or otherwise, should not be

looked upon as free or cheap labor, but instead as members of the team. Interns who performed well may go on to be hired into the division that they interned with, which cuts down on the learning curve and onboarding process. Another advantage is that interns will already be assimilated into the culture. Companies should therefore always pay attention to interns' personalities to see if these people would be good cultural fits for the organization.

Always Take Interviews

Building out the bench means hiring new people into roles, but even if the company is not in the position to create a role, it should still interview qualified candidates. Recruiting is one of the most important pieces of building a great company, and it should be happening all the time. If the company isn't able to hire at that time, the applicant's information should be stored for when a position becomes available and an existing employee isn't the answer.

Building out the bench keeps the company safe from reactive hiring. All decisions made by an organization should be methodical, well thought out, and proactive, with hiring being no different. If catastrophe hits the company, it's important to have people on deck instead of scrambling to check a box and fill a need. Taking interviews allows the company to be selective in who they hire and who they don't. If a great interview does come in and the company

doesn't have a position open just then, it may be smart to hire the applicant anyway and train them to do things the way the company does.

Lastly, always interviewing allows the team to get better at talking to applicants. The traditional hiring process is dead, and new techniques have to be used to recruit top talent. Frequent interviews give the company a chance to streamline new processes that can improve results. If the hire isn't made, the company can still build out its network and makes the organization seem selective in who it hires so only highly skilled applicants will apply.

Tying It All Together

[Simon Sinek](), author of Start with Why, hit the nail on the head when he said, "Customers will never love a company until the employees love it first." That quote sums up company culture in a nutshell: if you want the public to love your company and what it stands for, then your company must first get the employees to love who they are, what they do, and why they do it.

Company culture can no longer be put on the back burner if an organization is going to try to scale and compete in an ever-changing landscape. Culture brings in talent, talent brings in customers, and customers scale businesses. Of course, the important takeaway from this post should be

that, no matter what suggestions I have made here, your company culture ultimately comes down to you and your business. What works for you? What would your employees like to see when they come in to work every day? Most importantly, what cultural institutions will make your employees happy and proud to call themselves members of your organization? It is well worth the time it will take to figure all of this out. It will increase employee retention, attract new employees, and help your business grow larger than you ever thought possible.