

The 6 Requirements of Designing & Scaling a Powerhouse Culture.

9 Years of creating an award-winning, rapid-growth culture in 3 pages.

1

Make your Values Visible.

Decades of literature and research proves your values will guide your business success. They must be seen, heard, or better yet *felt* every single day. Hip, open-flow workspaces aren't enough. In fact, too many offices favor form over function. Whether your team works solo from home, or is gathered in offices of hundreds or thousands— leaders and talent teams must keep the company values top of mind.

Have you identified the core principles, values, or virtues you aspire to as an organization? This is the obvious, (*crucial*) first step. They can be proposed by a founder or leader, but must be vetted through the team for resonance, and congruence. A bottom-up approach is ideal.

Once your values are etched in stone, get creative with making, and keeping them visible to **all** teammates. Picture your team cranking like a spin class at SoulCycle. Team Values can't be vague, generic platitudes that are mentioned once in orientation and then immediately forgotten. Make it fun or cheeky, but above all make it consistent, and unapologetically authentic.

Give your people the option to repeatedly buy-in to your shared mission. I love [this example](#) from InfusionSoft. Notice their language isn't about "what we believe" but rather "what we DO based on what we believe"

2

Choose Meaning over Happiness.

Happiness matters. People need to feel like we're given every opportunity to make ourselves happy. The challenge with happiness is that it can be fleeting. As soon as we trip over it, we're looking for our next fix. Employers need to accept there are many factors to happiness in our lives, but work is only one. Conventional logic is that we spend so much time at work, we should ratchet ourselves into a Pollyanna, or Uni-Kitty "Happy at any cost!" mindset.

Companies who only pursue happiness can struggle with authenticity and accountability. Redirect your efforts to discovering, and promoting a sense of meaning in your work. Viktor Frankl, in *Man's Search for Meaning* captures the essence of effective organizational design. "...Success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself."

The writing is on the wall with emerging Gen Y and Millennial leadership: inauthenticity makes their Spidey senses tingle, and they have no patience for transactional work without greater context. Especially if it comes packaged in: "but look how happy our culture is!"

Gen Y & Millennials need to be continually reminded how their work matters to the goals and values of the organization. This can only be accomplished by pursuing meaning, which is a precursor to happiness. Skipping over meaning and promoting only happiness creates a shaky foundation at best, and a fake, perma-grin culture at worst.

3

Educate your Team on How to Communicate.

Implementing this one simple step can dramatically upgrade your culture. *“Blasphemer! What? Tell my people how to communicate? That’s not our culture!”* If 80-95% of your communication happens digitally, then HOW your people communicate (not only with clients and vendors, **but with one another**) matters more than you think. Creating a simple policy to keep digital communication friendly and conversational is the quickest win in improving the work environment.

Tip: Never call it a policy. Call it *“How <insert your company> Communicates.”* Align your requirements with the company values.

Difficult, or direct communication still needs to happen digitally in many cases. Requiring all senders to include a proper greeting with the recipient’s name, and a respectful closing reminds us there are human beings on the other end of the thread. No one likes to receive curt “e-Blurts” that feel like you’re being yelled at or spoken down to. It only creates hurt, and resentment.

People will naturally email, text, or chat how they did in their past companies. Leaders need to set the tone for what is, or what isn’t tolerated. It goes without saying that your standards for open, direct, and respectful communication must carry over to all in-person interactions.

4

Create (or Revamp) a World-Class On-boarding Experience.

Attracting and retaining top talent is your single largest investment. Connecting the dots for candidates who accept your offer letter, all the way through ramping them in their new role is crucial. Letting them know exactly what to expect (and when) is the least you can do before putting your goals and expectations into writing. Aside from decreasing the natural anxiety in joining a new team, it’s just the cool thing to do!

An on-boarding sequence doesn’t have to be complex to let your new hires know you support their success. Timely access to resources—from the mundane (where’s the coffee)—to the exciting (bonuses and their role in hitting them, access to company perks, etc) should all be in the on-boarding cue, and updated religiously.

On-boarding doesn’t have to include an exhaustive Learning Management System, or bulky binders no one wants anyway. Creative checklists work wonders. I love this [simple, low-cost but high-value example](#) from Typeform. They used their own technology to create a fun, step-by-step guide to getting started in their company. Brilliant!

Find a balance between an in-person guided experience, with some digital processes to inventory their path toward success. People like completing checklists, even if they’re simple. Think through the most remarkable experience you’ve had as a guest, either in a hotel or AirBnb. Glassdoor.com is just another way to rate user-experiences. What can you implement today to create a thread of continuity from offer acceptance, through days 1/30/90/365?

Get creative on simple, cost-effective ways to blow their minds.

5

Facilitate Knowledge & Story Sharing.

Edgar Schein (b. 1928) is the Original Gangster of Organizational Culture. A former MIT professor in the Sloan School of Management, Schein famously documented three levels of culture. From the base level to the highest these are: 1. Shared Assumptions and Beliefs, 2. Espoused Values (See #1 above) and 3. Artifacts.

Artifacts are defined as everything observable, from business processes or “how we do things”, to organizational structures such as “how we’re organized.”

The most effective way to scale a culture you’re happy with is through facilitation. You can’t “teach” it through PowerPoint, or some other hellish, uni-directional broadcast. Leaders and the Talent team need to approach the transfer of cultural knowledge and stories with a meta lens. Because your managers are no doubt busy with the demands of the business, you need to arm them with simple ways to facilitate team meetings. Instead of defaulting to status updates or slide content, they need thoughtful prompts to share their knowledge and experience. All are teachers, all are learners.

Remember: Sustaining your culture into the future depends on this. Never assume your stories of *how, or why the company was built* will survive. You must facilitate their survival, and evolution through daily sharing and reflection.

6

Up-Level your Well-Being Benefits.

Right now, in a row of cubicles somewhere, there’s a mid-level manager getting a company-sponsored pedicure. Maybe she brought her cat to work. Perks have come such a long way in a short time! Your team works hard, and they deserve it. But companies can over-shoot the mark with fringe benefits. You don’t want your gracious perk to be perceived as bribery to stay in the grind. (Unless it is, then you have other problems.)

Benefits that promote well-being, and amplify connectedness and purpose are the exception. *IBISWorld* recently reported in their research that yoga & meditation have each exceeded a \$1 Billion dollar annual investment by companies globally. It can’t just be because these are “soft skills”. Reflective practices are essential in our complex digital age: their practice enables workers to release control in the face of relentless change. They cultivate what Dr. Carol Dweck calls a *growth mindset* and create a much more adaptable organization.

It’s well worth the investment. A 2015 study by Harvard-affiliated Mass General Hospital found that practicing relaxation-response techniques such as meditation and yoga could *reduce the need for healthcare services by as much as 43 percent*.

ROI aside, what will your team remember and tell their kids about working for you? Will it be the fringe benefits, or that you helped create a life-long practice of well-being? If you want your people to thrive, they need education and encouragement to establish their own practice.



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