

CREATING A COMPANY CULTURE THAT DRAWS INTEREST FROM PROMISING CANDIDATES

No matter what business you're in, workplace culture matters. But a great company culture is vital in industries like construction, bedeviled by ever-increasing competition and a labor market where workers are aging out and retiring at a faster rate than younger generations are entering.

To make matters worse, the construction labor shortage is projected to continue for years. According to Data USA (with national statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics by Industry in 2018), the 10-year job growth rate in the construction industry is projected at a mere 1.1%, while the national 10-year workforce growth projection is 6.9%. The best, most talented workers in any industry will gravitate to "Best Place to Work" companies. Is your company a great place to work, or is it just another high-churn job mill where unmotivated clock-watchers do the minimum to get by?

Construction firms that exude a "wow factor" will naturally attract and retain the most engaged workers, who thrive on building and perfecting their skills, give their best effort, consistently meet goals and delight customers. Does your company radiate a wow factor? If the answer is no, then it's time to do a "checkup from the neck up," as they say in health care—at least if you want to stay in business for the long haul.

The good news is that when leaders motivate and inspire employees, play to their passions, fill them with purpose and ensure each individual's goals are aligned with the firm's vision and objectives, the wow factor will spread like wildfire and eventually permeate an organization's entire culture. But how do managers create that kind of magic?

As the chief executive officer of Stay Metrics, Tim Hinds, said, "You lead with your soul." When Hinds transitioned to management early in his trucking career, he created a culture that put the wants and needs of employees at the forefront from the very beginning.

"When somebody comes to work for us for a period of time, and if someone asks them, 'How do you like working for Tim?,' if the answer isn't 'This is absolutely the best place I've ever worked in my life ... they treat me so much better here than I've ever been treated in my

life,' we fail," Hinds said. "We want to do things for our employees nobody else does." This is the essence of a workplace that exudes a wow factor.

To assess the wow factor in your business, check out the cultural checklist below. It's sure to help you get started on a more productive path toward achieving a real wow factor in your business.

□ HELP EMPLOYEES UNDERSTAND YOUR COMPANY'S GOALS & VISION

The people who work for you want to be inspired, no matter the nature of their job. They need to see an outcome that will help them achieve their own goals. When employees fully understand what you are trying to accomplish—your higher purpose—and how that works in line with what they are trying to accomplish, it will be far easier to get them to work diligently toward achieving the company's goals. Make it a priority to ensure the natural talents and personal objectives of each member on your team are aligned with the mission, vision, values and goals of your organization.

□ SERVE AS A ROLE MODEL

When you do all you can to wow customers, your employees will, too. They are watching and take cues from your behavior. If you openly commit to giving the best possible service to every customer, your employees will do the same.

Basketball coach John Wooden is a prime example. He said, "I'm convinced that regardless of the task, leaders must be enthusiastic and really enjoy what they are doing if they expect those under their supervision to work near their respective levels of competency. With few exceptions, an unenthusiastic leader will keep those under their charge from achieving their collective best."

□ HIRE FOR ATTITUDE, WORK ETHIC & A YEARNING TO LEARN THE BUSINESS

Earning the top spot in the list of America's 50 Best Steakhouses, Bern's Steak House in Tampa, Florida, prefers to hire and train



inexperienced employees so they don't have to break bad habits. Everyone starts "in the back of the house," to help each team member understand the basics of what everyone else does. The restaurant claims this approach creates better teamwork.

Southwest Airlines President Emeritus Colleen Barrett said, "We are a very forgiving company if you make a mistake, as long as safety is not involved. We're a very forgiving company if somebody takes a little longer to learn. It's not just words when we say, 'We hire for attitude and we train for skills.' We turn down highly skilled and talented people every day if something about their attitude turns us off. This tells us they won't fit within our culture."

□ DEFINE EXPECTATIONS UP FRONT

People need to know what "right" looks like. Workplaces with a wow factor have clearly defined behavioral standards and performance expectations. They have agreements between managers and employees about what each expects from the other. If you don't have such agreements, schedule a planning session and work with the supervisors in your company to create them.

WD-40 Company CEO Garry Ridge, who, together with Ken Blanchard, wrote the book, *Helping People Win and Work*, said, "We want to help our people get an A. It's about enabling them, taking away fear, encouragement, justice and fairness." Ridge continues, "I think the primary reason people get out of step with each other is that, in the beginning, they haven't confirmed what an A looks like. What do you expect from me, and what do I expect from you? We come to agreement."

□ MENTOR IN THE MOMENT

Mentoring should happen every single day, not just a few times a year during performance reviews. Executive Chairman of Patriot Defense Group Todd Wilcox recommends leaders should have no more than

five to six direct reports so that managers have time to mentor their team members every day. "If you're not talking to people every single day, I would argue you're not effectively communicating, managing, mentoring and developing them," Wilcox said.

□ HOLD PEOPLE TO HIGH EXPECTATIONS

As Sam Walton, founder of Walmart and Sam's Club, said, "High expectations are the key to everything." When people aren't meeting expectations, leaders of wow factor workplaces jump right on it to collaborate with any underperformer. Together, they will jointly develop a S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable and time-bound) performance improvement plan that clearly spells out objectives to be achieved, along with an exit plan that will be executed if the underperformer fails to meet the mutually agreed-upon objectives.

"There are serious downsides to not firing people fast enough," said Wilcox. "But when you finally get the underperformers out, the mood and productivity of the rest of the organization validates that we should've done it sooner. Afterward, everybody heaves a deep sigh of relief."

Rest assured, you can improve your company culture if it isn't what you want it to be. Commit today to start moving in a better direction. By taking the steps highlighted in this checklist, you can create the kind of company where those who work with you will tell their friends, "Wow. I'm so lucky to work here!" And when that happens, the kind of talent you want to attract will line up for the job. **CBO**

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