

Do you know what's happening at your company when you're not looking?

Company culture is typically driven by the founders and executives within startups or scale-ups. Larger than life personalities and founders who are custodians of their babies (the companies) are the ones who typically lead by example and set the tones from the top: setting the culture and showing their employees how to act and behave.

However, founders and leaders are often being pulled in all directions – their time is monopolised in the high growth start-up or scale-up phase and decisions are needed to be made not only on people and culture, but also on products, customers, budgets and a whole host of other things on the business agenda.

So, the question is, how do you manage culture and know what is happening at your company when you are not looking and checking upon it constantly? The good news is that there are a few hacks to keep your company culture going in the right direction when you are not around or able to dedicate as much time to it.

They are:

Implementing continuous recognition programmes,

Ensuring people are clear on how they contribute, and,

Inspiring the team with a clear purpose.

Firstly, what gets recognised gets repeated. Research has proven time and time again that recognition of good behaviours and practices leads to higher levels of engagement, which in turn helps with a company's innovation efforts. Working in a company where your effort is recognised is important, as it makes people feel valued and their efforts seen. Importantly, this recognition doesn't need to come solely from a founder or leader within an organisation. It is often best when it comes from peers, so implementing a continuous recognition programme where employees can send a "thank-you" or "kudos" between one another is a great way to start the flywheel of culture spinning. Once a few recognition messages are sent, people will feel the rush and enjoy the acknowledgement, with the rest of the team putting in the extra effort to gain recognition for themselves. A simple mobile app, or Slack based programme, can be built in hours and launched successfully with a strategic communication to accompany it.

Linked to how we recognise people for their contributions is making sure people know what they should be doing and how they contribute. The most successful companies are fully committed to having people understand their business strategy and direction, and the company structure and organisation. Once people understand those aspects, they can link their individual goals, which are typically in the form of objectives and key results (OKRs), to their wider team and the company. When people can see what success looks like, and know what part they play in it, people go the extra mile. In addition to this, you should be asking your people to set high, hard goals – as research from Latham and Locke has proven that those teams who set challenging and aspirational objectives aligned to their company strategy typically boost their performance and productivity anywhere from 11% to 25%.

And finally, once you have created the flywheel of positive behaviours, and people are contributing to the business success there is one extra action you can take to keep your culture front of mind. And that is having a clear and inspiring purpose. People want to work for companies who have a strong purpose, as evidenced by studies showing Gen-Z employees that are prioritising purpose over salary for the first time in workforce history ever. Take a look at these companies, and see if you find any purpose you are inspired by:

Nike: "To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world. If

you have a body, you are an athlete.”

Patagonia: “Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis.”

LinkedIn: “To connect the world’s professionals to make them more productive and successful.”

It is clear to see that a company’s culture can be very tangible given the purpose. And when you have people pushing each other to live the culture through recognition, a clear alignment of goals with strategy, and an inspiring purpose you can, for a while, leave your culture bubbling away before you turn your attention back to it once again.

Daniel Strobe is Global Director of Culture and Strategy at Santander and the author of *The Culture Advantage* (Kogan Page, £19.99).

Buy The Culture Advantage

Article by DANIEL STRODE