

A winning work culture isn't hard to create

By Jack Daly

If you're the CEO of a company, the realization that much of what you do can be copied by your competitors may be distressing.

Sure your competition copy what they can, but there are two things they can't: your people and your culture.

I specialize in corporate coaching and sales, the latter of which really counts on the talent and sustained motivation of the sales force. Even your best salesperson needs that extra shot from time to time, and the best way to ensure a driven team is to create a culture that fosters the results you want.

Some companies are outpacing their competition because of their culture, including Southwest Airlines, Zappos and the Virgin Group.

Here are some tips:

- Start new hires on a Friday – and with a big welcome. Many managers think new employees should start on Monday – the day when their new co-workers are facing a long to-do list for the week. Consider starting them on Friday, when the office is a bit looser. Also – how about throwing the new hire a welcoming party? Many offices hold going away parties for departing employees, but it makes more sense to put this enthusiasm toward the person with whom you're making a commitment, rather than the person who's no longer working for you.
- Recognize accomplishments by putting it in writing – handwriting. Typing emails and instant messaging is clearly much more convenient, which is why an employee who deserves

special attention will recognize the extra effort behind a hand-written note. A letter has that personal touch; the receiver knows that the manager or CEO has taken some time and effort to create a special communication just for him or her.

- Provide lunch – for free. One of my clients started with just 10 employees, and each day one would bring in lunch for everyone. As the company grew to several hundred employees, the CEO found that free lunches were so beneficial, the company now hires a caterer to maintain the boost in culture it provides. While many may cringe at the expense, employee appreciation outweighs the cost. And it keeps people engaged within the office, rather than having employees leave for lunch.

- Flatten the privilege structure. It's not a good idea to create anything resembling a class system, including special parking for upper management. I was the No.1 salesman at one company, but I always preferred to park with the others. I'd come in at 5am and noticed that those with reserved parking arrived significantly later than those who parked in unreserved spots. Parking should be on a first-come, first-serve basis. Upper management shouldn't feel too entitled or privileged above other employees.

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