

## Company Culture: Weaving Your Thread



It's your biotech company. It's your brand. It's your global reputation. How do you want your employees to create, feel, and interact as members of your organization? Sounds esoteric. Hard to quantify, grasp, measure...?

There is no shortage of social media posts with photos of famous leaders that say things like 'There's no magic formula for great company culture. Just treat your employees how you would like to be treated.' This may be a popular sentiment, and it is partly true; there *is* no magic formula and, of course, treating your employees with respect is key. However, realistically, these memes are lacking substance.

Good news. Achieving this is not as mysterious as it may seem, and it need not be overwhelming. Start with small intentional actions that build over time to create a positive ripple effect. Think about immunotherapy, beginning with William Coley in 1891. His actions began a positive ripple effect that progressed over the next 100+ years to come to what we now know as our modern-day immunotherapy. It certainly won't take a century to create your culture, though, intentional actions over time will continually grow and enhance it.

Here outlines a simple guide on how to begin weaving this seemingly intangible fabric that you desire to be your Company's culture:

1. Create written Company Core Values. Three to five Core Values are best. Core Values are a way of crystallizing what a company stands for and believes in, and how it chooses to achieve its goals. Team. They define the standards by which its practices can be judged. For illustrative purposes, let's use: Driven to Discover; Acting with Integrity; and Commitment to the Success of Each Other. Determine a brief definition to ensure the intended meaning is clear.
2. Make these Core Values a visible thread throughout employment, with accountability for alignment.
  - Hire, promote, and performance manage team members to these Core Values.
  - Communicate to internal and external stakeholders, such as incorporating them into your Employee Essential Handbook, as well as, marketing materials.
  - Your company's talent management strategic plan should include strategies for folding in the Core Values into employee engagement initiatives, such as training, onboarding, team building, career ladders programs.
  - Ensure your team members are held to these Core Value by adding to every Job description as an essential duty: 'Adhere to Company Core Values.'

- Add this as a criterion in performance evaluations so that every employee has a performance measure based on their adherence to the Company Values. Then, if you have a pay for performance model, aligning with Company Values will also be a criterion that impacts compensation.
  - Add this to your coaching and discipline process by specifying that a lack of adherence to these values is grounds for performance improvement action planning.
3. Empower your employees for maximum autonomy and innovation.
- From early start up days, take the time to ensure that basic HR foundational processes are in place which are as efficient as possible with the least amount of people involvement as possible.
  - Communicate what the processes are and who owns it so roles are clear.
  - Include your team in the collaboration process of building out Core Values and culture initiatives, but know when to take those ideas and make your Core Values decisions. Too much crowdsourcing of team ideas leads to no one being able to make a decision.
4. Creating, building, and growing Company culture isn't a once and done thing.

Some core values “misses” we’ve observed over the years:

- ✚ Simply “cut and pasting” another company’s Values for its own
- ✚ Forcing disjointed words into a catchy acronym
- ✚ Choosing bland values, without color, flavor or originality, such as “Service, Quality, Integrity” – there is nothing #differentiating about that
- ✚ Posting generic values on the wall that everyone ignores
- ✚ Lack of communication or thoughtful weaving of the Core Values into Company communications — “I didn’t even know we had core values!”

In reviewing the above steps, Number One is often overlooked. The gap typically occurs in weaving that thread throughout company growth and ensuring accountability, as outlined in Number Two. Even where there may be vast cultural differences across a global organization, being intentional about the cultural footprint you are building so that making the consistent thread throughout is something you can control. Core Values function as a unifying force. If employees do not share values, this can (and often does) damage not only productivity but also working relationships. Successful companies make sure their employees share the core values of the organization. Ensuring your Core Values are front and center, this can also be achieved, in part, by using your Employee Essential Handbook as a vehicle to connect these ‘value’ dots across your global footprint. Every communication you have with candidates and team members, from offer letters and beyond, is creating that cultural footprint of your life science company.

Company values may find their values change over time as they grow. Pivoting scientific strategy, changing work locations, company acquisition may contribute to the need for review and refreshing of your Core Values. And, that’s a good thing, as long as there is a thoughtful and transparent process to the communications surrounding change.

Number Three above may also look like common sense. However, the most fundamental administrative areas are often disregarded as minutiae that is not given attention for the sake of focusing on the big picture. When, to the contrary, rudimentary items can and will inhibit your big picture growth if your employees are caught in a state of inertia trying to figure out key processes such as how the company runs its recruiting processes. Spending some time up front to be intentional about the basics will keep the minutiae limited and smooth – as it *should* be. Now, your scientists can focus on their genius zone for maximum autonomy and innovation toward developing that scientific gamechanger for universal quality of life.

You have now made this seemingly intangible concept of your Company's culture into something very tangible and very real for every individual in your entire workforce, as well as the global community that you serve. Now, don't stop navigating forward with that intention every single day or that thread will unravel much more quickly than you weaved it...wake, weave, sleep, repeat. Wake, weave, sleep, repeat....

Have a question, just ask us anytime!

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