

Building Your Business' Culture



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For many of us, buying a franchise can fulfill the dream of becoming our own boss. Franchises provide new business owners with an established system, eliminating guesswork and many of the errors start up businesses often face. While franchises come with an established brand, marketing strategies, technology tools, training and support; there are still opportunities for the new business owner to make his mark in the corporate culture he or she creates.

After buying a franchise, the new owner will be immersed in rules and 'how to' manuals for running the business. But a business culture is less about the rules and more about how the owners think, feel and act while implementing those rules. These attitudes are expressed in the written policies and procedures implemented at the unit level, but also by the unwritten, often unspoken, actions of the

management and employees. Things like hiring practices, employee relations and everyday communication are all part of the company's culture.

The business culture an owner establishes can be positive or negative; intentional or unintentional but ultimately plays a significant role in the success of the business. These are some of the ways a business culture can affect performance:

Successful Staffing

When you understand your own culture, you can be very intentional about hiring people that align with your needs. Along with assessing a candidate's knowledge, skill and abilities, you'll want to look for characteristics that demonstrate that their values are in alignment with the culture you want to create. If you're team oriented in your approach, you'll look for people with a collaborative nature. If you prefer self-reliant individuals, hire employees that have experience working independently. Hiring personnel that are well suited to your company culture means increased job satisfaction, lower turnover rates and a stronger chance for success.

Policies and Procedures

Franchises come with policies, procedures and best practice recommendations. That's good news for a start up business owner, but the way you execute and enforce those policies is a key part of your culture. For example: many franchise systems provide guidelines for the work attire of employees that have direct contact with customers. In these situations, the franchisee's implementation, encouragement and follow up on dress code procedures impacts the success of the program overall. This applies to your attitude on all the systems and procedures recommended by your franchisor. If you value them and see how they affect your



product, profitability and success of stakeholders, your employees will follow suit.

Communication

The way organizations share information varies enormously and can dramatically impact employee morale. As a new business owner you have the opportunity to decide what level of communication you want to implement. Do you want to create an environment where people feel well informed and an integral part of the team? Or would you prefer to keep people focused on the task at hand while you keep the information to yourself? Do



your employees know enough of what's happening and what's coming, so they can work effectively with the customers? Or are they just as surprised as the customers when changes are made or policies aren't implemented? Whatever communication style you choose; understand it has a direct impact on the success and potential failure of your business.

Emotional Climate

As a leader, do you rant, rave and shout insults when mistakes are made? Or do you keep calm and collected: able to assess the situation and people involved?

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When the culture dictates calm, cool and collected, employees are safe to admit mistakes and seek direction, leaving managers to see where retraining or new procedures are needed. Feeling secure in the workplace has a profound effect

on employee morale and directly affects interactions with customers.

Employee Relations

Along with creating a safe environment, corporate culture is also reflected by the

way you regard employees. All too often people live in corporate America feeling disposable, undervalued and even invisible. As a leader you have a choice about how the people in your organization feel. You can choose to reward employees for excellence or even valiant attempts. You can share the wins, announce victories and celebrate successes. When positive behaviors and outcomes are celebrated, it results in increased solidarity and a willingness to pull together in the good times and bad.

Is The Customer Always Right?

Sadly we have all experienced that unreasonable, inconsolable customer. But what's important is how we respond to challenging situations and how we equip our employees to respond. Thorough training in business operations prepares staff in best practices and procedures, but how will they respond in unusual circumstances, the situations not covered in a training manual? Your company culture sets the tone for the employee - customer relationship. How will your employees know when to seek input from management? How will they know when things have crossed the line? Is it safe for them to seek input from management? Will you use them as a scapegoat or will you have their back in extreme circumstances?

Share the Vision

It's important to tell people where you're going as an organization. Paint the big picture. Share your vision for the business. Be as transparent as you can as a business owner. Do you want to be the top producer in the region? Do you want the highest score in customer satisfaction? The more your team understands your goals and objectives, the more successful they can be in helping you achieve them. Your level of sharing and communicating the company's vision can mean the difference between a scattered group, pulling in different directions; or, a team focused on success, all rowing towards the same goal.

As a franchise owner, you have the opportunity to create your own company culture. When you purchase a franchise you are choosing to start a business, ripe with experience, proven business systems, marketing, training and support. But as the business owner, your personal-



ity and influence are an integral part of the equation. As you work to establish the culture of your organization, you can recreate a great experience you had in previous work experiences; or you can correct a bad experience, by making yours the kind of place you always wanted to work. Either way, you have the opportunity to make your business a place people want to be – where employees matter, where their voice is heard, where they can contribute, where they know their success is your success.

Whether we realize it or not, corporate culture exists in every organization. Think about what you want to create, understand the affect it will have on business outcomes and be intentional about crafting a culture that sets you on the path to success for yourself and the people on your team.

BETTE FETTER, Founder and CEO of Young Rembrandts, Inc. and Author of *Being Visual*, began her career as a professional artist with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Northern Illinois University. Through her education, participation in various forms of the arts and

experience with Montessori education, Bette gained first-hand understanding of the value of the arts on developing young minds. Her passion for the arts and early childhood education led Bette to develop Young Rembrandts, a unique teaching methodology focused on developing foundational art and drawing skills in young children. Bette franchised her business in 2001 and what began 24 years ago with eight kids at her kitchen table now reaches tens of thousands of children nationally and internationally. Young Rembrandts Inc. has a presence in the US, Canada and international countries; Germany, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. After 24 years of teaching and developing art curriculum for kids, Bette shares what her experience, clinical research and educational experts have to say about the value of arts on early learning development for children. In her recently published book, *Being Visual*, Bette illustrates the value of right-brain, visual-spatial thinking and its relation to much needed innovative thinking.

For More Information:
www.youngrembrandts.com