

CULTURAL GOLD

A WHITE PAPER



CULTURAL GOLD

Good company culture is as essential to the performance of the individuals as it is to an organisation's success; and it has to come from the top. IoH investigates:

Culture is the lived experience of all in an organisation; it represents shared values and the behaviour and attitudes that reflect that, ensuring there is a happy and productive environment. But good culture is not a woolly 'nice to have,' it is defined by people, who bring it to life.

One thing is essential: it must come from the top. If the CEO and those at board level do not lead on values and how they are expressed, there is no reason for anyone else to subscribe. But if leadership is communicative, supportive and affirmative, that will trickle like lava into every corner of the business and onwards to customers.

However, new leaders often sail into a company and try to make their mark by changing the culture. Not only is this disruptive, it also misses the point. If they talk to and listen to people throughout the organisation, those individuals will feel valued and recognised, confirming a decisive culture and resulting in positive performance.

Policies, handbooks and rules play an important part in corporate structure but they do not define culture. They can help distil it and make it easier to understand, and that may lead to change and improvement, but get the right people in the right places and a positive culture will emerge. Culture is always a human endeavour.

Conversely, with the wrong people, the culture will be negative. If the working environment is not what you want it to be, pinpoint where the problem is and deal with it directly and without delay. Otherwise, the situation deteriorates, potentially leading to a tribunal claim.

If someone does not fit the culture, leaders have to do what is right commercially; that may mean making a difficult decision but that will be better for the organisation and the employee. If they remain in place, good people may leave.





GROWING A CULTURE

Culture will emerge organically but it should also be nurtured; it is an active, not a passive thing. If members feel their employer's values reflect their own, a positive environment will flourish. Belonging is a key ingredient and inspires productive behaviour, a united front that makes things work in a vibrant, successful way. This is a compelling reason for organisations to cultivate a persuasive culture.

Team spirit and a strong culture make hospitality – and a big heart is what makes it great. We may have had a tough few years but the industry is still here, and resilient to the core. Hospitality epitomises learning, growth and career advancement; we do that brilliantly. No number of academic qualifications will live up to the skills and qualities people learn in this industry; we are a poster child for other sectors.

Self-awareness is key to success – are we good or bad, where can we improve? And however much we love hospitality and what we do, it is a business that needs to turn a profit. To do that, a company needs to shape a brand and to create customer loyalty, and that is done through your people. A strong culture builds trust and resilience, so that teams stick with you through good and ill. And without that, when times are tough, you find you have nothing.



THE HUMAN FACTOR

Despite best intentions, it is inevitable that occasionally things will go wrong. The people, the legal structure and the working environment have to be aligned with what the organisation stands for. It is crucial employees know the values so that they can convey the message and sell the service or product. If not, they will not be able to do the job effectively, if at all.

A good example of this is the necessary handbook; it is not enough to give it to employees in the hope it will be implemented. It needs to be part of the induction process, embedded in the culture, so that people understand it; and that takes time and effort. The handbook is what everyone goes to when things go right but also when things go wrong – it should not be a let-out for employers, who can say they gave it to employees who signed it. The handbook is part of an individual's development; their ammunition to fulfil the role.

A career plan should be top priority as part of company culture but it is easily overlooked, particularly when times are hard and budgets straitened, but it remains important to support those climbing up the ladder.

COMMUNICATE

Lead by example. Talk about your values constantly, so that everyone around you sees you know and understand them, and they will follow suit. This level of open conversation should take place face to face, in internal forums and on social media. It sets boundaries and creates a strong definition. Interaction makes people feel they are respected, that they have a professional and safe environment.

In hospitality, it is inevitable that not all members of a team can attend regular meetings, so it is important to have a portal for communications, where people can post comments, generate conversations and ask questions. The more tools you have to facilitate communication, the greater people's engagement across the business. If communication from the top is regular, clear and supportive, whether addressing an error or delivering praise, that reflects a positive culture and creates an environment of trust.

In hospitality, the right people, with good progression, encouragement and management will have the tools to create strong relationships with customers and clients. This removes the need for a pantechnicon of policies. Confident, supported individuals are flexible, creative and adaptable.

During lockdowns, Dorchester Collection stated it would continue to support every employee, it would make no redundancies and would pay everyone in full for as long as it took. This harnessed creative energy and ideas as restrictions started to be lifted in varying degrees worldwide. Doing the right thing for teams allowed the group to do the right thing for guests.

And guests were concerned that employees had been looked after, and that created a strong foundation for the future. If you know what your enterprise stands for, you will make the right decisions for your people, and therefore protect your business.

The amount of money available to spend on cultivating culture will vary but making people feel rewarded and appreciated requires greater investment of time and effort than money, from celebrating milestones, through an open-door policy, to having lunch with the team, all this helps promote the culture in a business – a little goes a long way.



FINALLY

On the surface, hospitality is one of the most inclusive industries, embracing cuisine from every corner of the world and the culture and diversity that comes with that; that should be something to celebrate. However, there is a risk of apparent cultural diversity, where people who look different on the outside turn out to be much the same on the inside.

Ensure individuals bring diversity of thought as well as appearance, creating a vibrant culture that leads to greater understanding of customers and makes a business better prepared for future challenges, leading to a profitable enterprise. A cultural triumph.

CREDITS

This White Paper has been produced following a panel discussion at Above & Beyond - Honourable Artillery Company, London.

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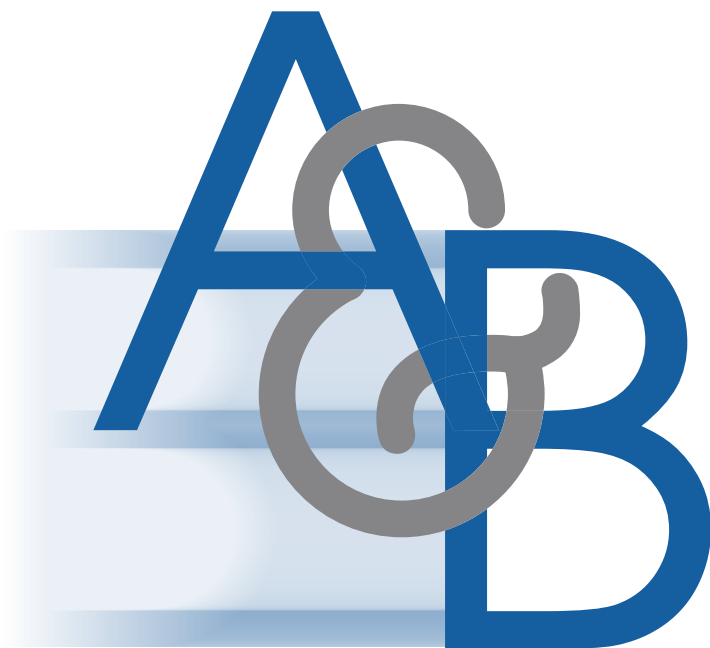


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