Our topic today revolves around Company Culture and I will plan to discuss ways that you can work to develop your culture as a strategic asset. No matter what your location is, the industry you are in, or company size, I plan to give you quick – relevant- tips for improving your culture with the end goal of creating highly engaged and productive team members.
Session Goals

- Culture: why it’s important to business success
- Weak versus strong cultures
- Common mistakes that ruin culture
- Eight ways to improve culture
- Bonus: Panel guests
Meet Your Panel

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I found a great statistic from the Social Science Research Institute at Duke University that reports on average, Americans spend 57% of our waking time at work during a working life of 46 years. WOW. That’s a lot of time to spend somewhere – and shoot - even longer if you don’t enjoy being there. This point really serves as the foundation for what I will be challenging you all with today. And that is to empower you to create a work environment that your employees want to be a part of and look forward to getting up for in the morning.
So what is company culture? How do we work to define it? There are a few very vague and unhelpful definitions floating around out there that list a number of factors contributing to company culture, such as a vision, values, systems, language, and even assumptions. These things may be true but fail to really capture what Culture is. One of my favorite definitions that I came across was published by Investopedia and is listed on the screen. Culture is the beliefs and behaviors that determine how a company’s employees interact and handle outside business transactions. Culture is something that is implied and develops over time from the traits of the people hired. When I read this definition – the last part really stuck out to me and I got to thinking about how culture – to put it simply - really is the personality of a company. Just like how your personality is unique to you and my personality is unique to me – culture is unique to your company. It’s can be the unifying element that holds everyone in an organization together.
So what makes culture important to your business success? There was a recent study published by SHRM reporting that “Employees who identify with and feel a sense of belonging to a company are more productive, happier and want to work for the company longer.”

With most of us in the room being HR professionals, I am sure you have run the numbers and know that retaining employees who are happy & productive is not only good for company morale, but also good for your bottom line. Turnover can be extremely expensive when lost productivity and replacement costs are added up. In the same study, SHRM reported that is costs, on average, 6 to 9 months’ salary to replace a salaried employee. This figure can be even higher for management and high-level executives.

Additionally, high turnover can also harm your company’s culture and cause remaining workers to become disengaged and unproductive.
So I know you all are probably wondering where your company stands with all of this? Well let’s look at what defines a weak culture and what defines a strong one:

For weak cultures, employees typically accept duties and responsibilities out of fear; they do things out of obligation rather than having an intrinsic desire to do well for the company.

Whereas, employees who are part of a strong organizational culture will respect and adhere to company guidelines because they genuinely enjoy working and want to learn as much as possible.

So there are a set of questions that you can ask yourself to help determine if your company’s culture is strong and effective, or weak and in need of change.

*Reference Handout*

Use this tool to help point out areas of your culture that may be in need of change.
Let’s move on to the meat & potatoes of what I want to discuss today. And that is pointing out areas that can hinder culture:

Promoting Hyper-competition: A dose of healthy competition can sometimes be a good thing. However, if everything you do turns into a competition, this can lead to a hostile environment where employees begin to segregate themselves and lose the teamwork approach.

Ignoring ideas: This one is simple and even bends backwards to parenting. If you fail to listen to your child – or employee – it shows them that you don’t care what they have to say and could end up creating animosity between coworkers.

Only giving positive feedback: recognizing good work is great – don’t get me wrong. But, only focusing on the good can be detrimental to your employee’s development as a professional. It can also lend its way to over-confident team members who think too highly of themselves.

Ignoring the need for a work/life balance: Expecting employees to be plugged into work all day everyday will quickly lead to burn-out. As you recall, we are already spending 57% of our time at work so it’s important that employees are encouraged to power down and unplug so they have time to recharge their batteries.

Failing to be inclusive: This is not grade school so we don’t need cliques or sororities to make employees feel left out.

Communicating too little, too late: Failing to communicate important news to your employees in a clear, concise manner can lead to distrust within the organization.
Failing to uphold your company mission: If an employee realizes they’ve been sold on a company inaccurately, they will probably leave shortly after being hired. Not setting a good top-down example: Employees look up to their leaders and aspire to be in their shoes one day. An authentic leader is one that will gain respect and admiration from their team.

7. Remind your team the relevance they have. If they know how they fit into the mission and purpose of the company they will love where they are going. If they love where they are going, they will show you how to get there. Quick tip: Instead of demanding your team to action, take the time to remind them how their work directly impacts the company mission. They’ll be more likely to take their own action. This is why hiring a mission driven team is also critical!
Okay, I am done being a Debbie-downer. A great company culture attracts the best workers, increases retention and improves employee performance. These eight suggestions can positively impact your existing or new company culture.
Number one is to trust your people and encourage autonomy. By a show of hands, has anyone in here read this book, “Work Rules” by Lazlo Bock? This is an outstanding book that provides insights from Google’s culture. One of my favorite quotes in the book is this: “Encourage people to think and act like owners. You’ll be surprised what people can do when you simply trust them to do the right thing.” I don’t know if you know this, but Google receives over 1.5 million applications every year. Employees are dying to work there and it’s because the company operates on the belief that people are fundamentally “good.” What that means is they trust their employees to do the right thing and basically throw tedious rules and policies out the window.
Number 2 is to Recognize and Reward Valuable Contributions. So this is the opposite end of the spectrum from when I mentioned earlier the importance of not ignoring good ideas. Actually, Fifty percent of workers surveyed by CareerBuilder believe that recognition is a factor that drives retention. To effectively implement a rewards-rich work environment, consider the following:

- Identify specific behaviors and/or results aligned with your company’s values. Recognize those behaviors.
- Make it easy for everyone at your company to recognize and reward co-workers’ behaviors.

Often, peer-to-peer recognition is the most effective way to saturate your culture with recognition.
Number 3 is to hire people that are better than you. To find the best people you have to be willing to wait. Jumping the gun and making a bad hiring decision can be toxic to your culture.
Set the bar high
Never compromise on quality
And find someone better than you in some meaningful way (such as creativity or mathematical aptitude)
Doing this will help ensure you create a much stronger team.
Number 4 is one of my favorites, mainly because I am a manager, and I am passionate about the role I have assumed. Managers are crucial to company success because they are your front-line people assessing performance, directing projects, and typically leading the team. Their focus should always be on clearing roadblocks and inspiring their team members to be the best versions of themselves.

As a manager, coming into work with a servant attitude and truly believing that no task is beneath you is a way to quickly earn respect from those taking your direction.

Additionally, managers need to be willing to share in the company vision and to be your company cheerleaders. They also need to be okay with your desire to have them share timely feedback with their team members.
5. Provide Regular and Timely Feedback

Opportunities to provide feedback outside of performance reviews could include the following:
- Monthly or semi-monthly check-ins between a supervisor and employee
- Peer-to-peer weekly check-ins
- Mentoring programs

I’ve mentioned the importance of timely feedback a few times already, but want to reiterate that Once-a-year feedback is a thing of the past. Younger generations thrive in environments where they know exactly how they are doing. Continuous, meaningful feedback provides employees with the tools they need to improve and grow.
According to the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, when individuals identify with and are invested in professional relationships with their colleagues, workplace productivity increases, employee morale increases and burnout levels decrease. However, building strong relationships takes time and effort. To help your employees, consider the following suggestions:

- Encourage collaboration and peer-to-peer work.
- Host events. No matter how small (think: team happy hour) or large (think: corporate outing), employer-sponsored events are a great way for employees to interact with peers that they normally would not on an average day.
- OR, you can do what The Bailey Group does and organize a wellness walk for office people get out and take a lap or two around the building to stretch their legs and catch up on weekend plans.
Our number 7 is to create a mentoring program. A mentor is an individual in the workplace who shares his or her knowledge and expertise to help another employee grow professionally.

As a mentor myself, I can tell you that mentoring programs end up providing benefits to all parties involved so try not to think of it as one more thing added to your plate.
There are a variety of employer-sponsored programs that encourage employee engagement, increase employee morale and attract new talent. Some of the top “soft” benefits to offer are:

Wellness Programs: I work with a lot of awesome companies that aim to support their employees with a healthier environment. They provide healthier food and beverage choices, subsidize gym memberships, sponsor company sports teams, and even offer onsite financial management courses.

If you are looking for some Trendy New Voluntary Benefits, you could consider Identity Theft Protection, Student Loan Repayment Programs, Pet Insurance, and Discounts, such as on cell phones and car insurance.

With more talented females in the workplace, it’s imperative that employers pay attention to Maternity and Mommy Support. Some companies go as far as offering Onsite Child Care, lactation rooms, and supplemental support for new moms.

Fringe benefits: Company-sponsored lunch

Chat and Collaboration: Internal Messaging Software, such as SLACK

Incorporate Flexibility: Workplace flexibility is a highly effective benefits offering that employees are actively looking for when they are searching for new opportunities. Consider being open to Work from Home Opportunities and Flexible scheduling opportunities that allow employees to facilitate the work-life balance.
Today’s workplace is vastly different than it was in the past. Prospective and current employees care about your reputation as a company and are evaluating potential employers on their corporate culture. In fact, many millennials view cultural compatibility with a company as just as important as salary. Culture can set one company apart from others.
So now, moving into the best part of the day, I want to welcome our panel guests to come up.
Ann Sabbag is the CEO and Founder of Health Designs, a gold-standard biometric screening and wellness company, that was started 21 years ago on Ann’s dining room table. Ann has steadily grown her company and dedicated employee-base over the past several years and has many secrets to share with you all about the culture she has developed.
Jen Korsen, joined by her HR Coordinator Rachel Palompo, is the Director of People Operations at iVenture Solutions – the leading IT Service Company in Jacksonville, Orlando and Tampa. As you would expect from a tech company, iVenture has a unique culture that sets them apart from their competitors. Their employees currently rate them a 9.2, out of 10, on how happy they are while at work.

**BOTH:**
Tell us one thing that you think sets your culture apart from your competitors?
Is there anything that I mentioned today that you have implemented already within your culture?
Is there anything that I did NOT mention today, that you think is important to building a healthy culture?

**Ann:**
Health Designs has a unique employee base with some associates in the office, but most are out in the field serving their customers. How have you been able to translate your culture from office to field in a positive way?

Jenn:
In our discussions regarding iVenture’s culture, you mentioned that your company has a unique way of giving employees a voice. Can you expand upon this?