MBA Dinner Series

Topic: The Importance of Culture

Key Knowledge Points Developed

- No one person dictates good culture. It does not come solely from the top down or from the bottom up – it is an element that needs to be embraced and contributed to by people at all levels of an organization.

- Leadership most directly influences culture, but it is lived through the work of employees, evidenced through their testimony, actions, and the ability to repeat the mission/core values over time.

- Culture beats strategy always. You cannot exist without both and culture needs to be a primary focus for a strategy to be successful.

- Culture is intentional; everybody should feel ownership of the culture. Leaders must define culture early by establishing norms and then continually define it going forward through leading by example.

- If you want to shift the culture of a company, you must start with the leaders.

- Culture is impacted by individuals feeling fulfilled in their jobs, and fulfillment can be increased by ensuring people feel connected to their customers.

- Building a great culture is difficult because it deals with people, and people are extremely complex. People have a major lack of understanding of one another.

- To build engagement and interactions among staff - have one person from different departments be a part of a team that plans company events. This allows employees to learn to work with one another and learn about what they do for the organization and how they do it. Ensure the teams change for every event.

- As concerned as we are with measurable outcomes in terms of productivity/impact, there are tools (i.e. TINYpulse) to measure internal engagement, solicit feedback, and potentially support culture change. Anonymity, irrelevance, and mismeasurement can result in a bad culture.

- In thinking about corporate culture, strategy is the what, mission is the why, and measuring is the how.

- A culture is highly dependent on the adopted corporate culture, strategy is the what, mission is the why, and measuring is the how.

- Identifying and working with allies to build support for change adoption is critical. Even without positional power, one can influence the culture through personal actions and strategically identifying and working with allies to build support for change adoption.

- A critical component of how an organization is structured is whether employees know what impact they have on success. Supplemening that component ensures you are reinforcing people practices that support the culture.

- Communication is key, as is recognition of behavior that demonstrates core values. It is easier to keep everyone moving in the same direction if everyone knows what is going on. Recognition/celebration of actions that demonstrate core values is a means of letting everyone lead by example.

- Encourage team outings, and encourage employees to eat lunch together and form personal relationships. The closer the people who make up an organization are, the more their shared goals and aspirations will align.

- Caring about employee satisfaction must start at the top and be integrated into the corporate culture. If care for employee satisfaction does not genuinely exist within the corporate culture, an employee cannot change that. It is better for them to find a company that is a better culture fit.

- Employees who feel valued will work harder to make business successful.

- A few bad apples can drive poor company culture. It is helpful to have checks in place to balance out individuals who undermine culture. Human resources oversight is a primary tool for tackling this issue.

- Identify individuals that exhibit the culture you want. When you are making a new hire or course correcting another employee, assign an internal mentor as an indirect approach to assimilating individuals into the current culture.

- A culture is highly dependent on the adopted people. Skills are teachable, but if attitude does not mesh with the workplace culture, friction may result. Diversity/inclusion is important, but the core values of the individual need to match those of the organization.

- Once you have achieved a positive culture in the workplace, it is important to protect it. Be selective with who you hire. For hiring decisions, leaders must ask themselves, “Will this person set the example we are looking for?”

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