Culture isn’t a thing – it’s everything

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There are many things that the likes of Reed Hastings of Netflix, Steve Jobs of Apple, Reid Hoffman of LinkedIn, and Howard Schultz of Starbucks have in common, aside from being titans of industry. They share a crucial realisation: the vital role of culture in business success. When asked their views, they all wish they had invested more time in shaping company culture from the very beginning. Because culture isn’t a thing – it’s everything.

In the whirlwind of managing performance and chasing numbers, it's easy to overlook the intangible: attracting, retaining, and developing the right talent. But, without a clear vision of your culture, your business may falter. It's not just about you, the founder, setting the tone. Culture must permeate every fibre of your organisation.



What is culture?

It’s a question which can illicit mixed or complicated answers, but it should be simple. Think of it as "the way we do things around here." It's the collective mindset, the shared values, the way everyone in the business thinks, feels, and behaves. Simple, yet crucial.

But here's the kicker: culture isn't static. It's a journey—a journey of who we are and who we aspire to be. It’s always evolving, as your business morphs and grows.

Why does culture matter?

Culture isn’t a nice-to-have or something that business leaders can ignore. Whether you directly attempt to shape it or not, your business has a culture. It’s important that it’s an accurate reflection of your business now and in the future to help you thrive.

A positive culture is a magnet for talent and a powerful retention tool. It ensures you are attracting the right people – those who share your values and priorities – and helps to keep them with you as you grow.

It also creates a competitive advantage. Think about your business as a machine, with your employees as parts. That machine works best when each part is working harmoniously towards shared goals. That’s how culture impacts your business.

Culture in action

The next step is to define your values and behaviours. Values must be more than words on a page or office wall; they're the soul of your organisation. But they need substance. Enter enabling and derailing behaviours – where you define the tangible expressions of your values in action.

So your team really understand what it means to live the company culture. Which behaviours will push your business towards success, and which will cause you to stagnate or even begin going backwards? Co-create them with your team and watch as your culture comes to life.

It’s vital that your values aren’t passive. They must be active and help to shape your organisation's daily life. It's about values in action, where every decision and every interaction reflects who you are and what you stand for.

Finally, the litmus test: ask your team how proud they are to work for your

business. Their answers will unveil the essence of your culture - the strengths to replicate and the areas to improve. Because, ultimately, a proud team is a powerful force for success.

Remember this: culture isn't a luxury; it's a necessity. It's the foundation upon which great businesses are built. So, embrace the journey, define your culture, and watch as your business thrives.

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