

Key Insights On How To Spot An Amazing Company Culture

When you recruit people to your company or startup, you need to be aware that they might have been in a culture that was not so great. For many people, believing a company can actually have a good culture is like believing in unicorns (that don't exist) or winning the lottery (it can happen, but the odds are way against you). Many employees are often frustrated by their previous culture, with some describing their workplace as being dominated by negative and/or toxic colleagues and supervisors who are back-biting and manipulative. These types of cultures are never high performing. There could be nothing worse than being obligated in some way to work as an employee in a toxic culture or organization that has a bad culture. Toxic cultures are detrimental to your overall health inside and outside of work. We all know people who work in these kinds of companies. They say this: "I hate my job."

By contrast, one of the biggest joys you can experience is working with a company that has a great culture. Great cultures are self-sustaining and the leadership is focused on making the culture even better than it currently is. How do you know when you are walking into a great culture? Visit or audit companies where you have heard they have a great culture and evaluate or measure these key areas:

Recruitment Seems Easy. The company has a waiting list of people they can hire when needed. The company doesn't pay way above the average wage for the geographic area. But those waiting in line know about the great culture and want to take any opportunity to be part of it.

Turnover is Low. Examine how long employees have been at the company. Not really at the leadership level but at the entry or mid-point levels. If you find people who have stayed two or three years or more, the company likely has a strong culture.

Leadership Supports. Support means the leadership looks at their job as maintaining the culture, growing employees, and helping others succeed. The success of others is never a threat and is considered evidence of the leadership's own success.

Direct Communication. A direct-communication culture requires people to speak directly with one another when issues arise. Gossip is simply not tolerated. When one employee speaks of another in a disparaging way without the disparaged employee being present, any member of the culture can encourage the gossiping employee to discuss the issue directly with the employee who was the subject of the gossip. Also, anyone can talk to anyone without going through management hierarchy channels.

Collaboration Matrix. The right culture allows room for any employee to influence or talk to any other employee, regardless of title, position, or department. Leading people who report to you is easy. It is when you don't have authority over others that leadership gets difficult. A great culture encourages collaboration, communication and influence through a matrix, regardless of the organizational hierarchy.

Mission is Clear. A great culture must include members who understand how they are a part of something larger than themselves. They find their work meaningful because they believe they are doing something that really impacts the end customer. They understand it's not about them but about the customer.

Genuine Relationships. Genuine relationships are also an essential component of a great culture. Members of great cultures take a real interest in what is going on in the professional and personal lives of others (i.e., milestones, important events, etc.). They actually care about each other.

People, Customers, Profits. Jim Sinegal, co-founder of Costco, once stated the order of priority (people, customers, profits) to an investment analyst on a quarterly conference call. No wonder Costco employees are so loyal. Employees must feel that they are an important component of the organization and its culture. They are not expendable. To encourage this, leadership must create and continuously cultivate a culture that reinforces their employees' needs to feel integral to the company's success.

Happiness is Real. If you walk around inside of a company and you see a workplace with real and evidently happy people who are smiling and genuinely happy to be at work, you can "feel" the great culture. You can't fake happiness at work.

Fear is Absent. Employees should not be afraid of speaking their mind about a policy or process or actually anything. They should feel confident about approaching decision makers to make suggestions as necessary. Leadership should not observe hushed conversations or conversations being clipped when leaders walk into the room.

Information Flows. Employees aren't surprised by leadership decisions if they are included in the process. Memos, emails, and letters should serve to document next steps for processes that have already been discussed in teams and shared across the organization as necessary. Keep information flowing to cultivate a great culture.

Change is Embraced. Remember, people don't fear change; they fear loss. Any issue that can be perceived as a loss for employees should be discussed and resolved so that the change can be embraced throughout the culture. Any opportunity to embrace a change that is great for employees should be treated the same way.

Innovation is Expected. New ideas are expected and not rejected out-of-hand. There is a sense of freedom and adventure that openly encourages employees to create "better, smarter" solutions on behalf of customers. The company has a goal of never being obsolesced so the culture celebrates changes. No Blockbuster mentality here, just Netflix on steroids. If it isn't broke, break it.

If you have worked in a company with great culture, awesome for you. If not, do your due diligence and learn about the core building blocks necessary to build a great culture. Doing culture audits with companies you respect is also a great way to learn exactly why certain company's cultures are great.

Credit: <https://www.forbes.com>