Winning the 'War'
It's All About Company Culture

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What is organizational culture? Here are some simple, practical answers and solutions to the "culture" question.

Culture is each organization's unique personality. It is made up of its corporate philosophies, values and beliefs that govern how people behave in organizations. It has a strong influence on the people in the organization and dictates how they dress, act and perform in their jobs. In today's competitive world, organizations are working hard to attract and retain talent, which makes culture the competitive edge.

Setting the stage

Studies suggest people don't leave companies, they leave managers. If they're managed well, challenged and given appropriate support, people can overcome obstacles and achieve exciting and desirable results. If not, the talented people won't engage or stay.

Leaders at every level of the organization make this difference. The leaders, in turn, need support from a positive, people-focused culture, which organizations must establish.

Some of the main characteristics of a people-focused culture are:

- **Top-down approach:** It has to start at the top. Employees look up to their leaders and follow their lead. This is a great way to not only establish a desired culture but also sustain and nurture it.
- **Clarity across the organization:** Clarity of organizational and departmental mission, vision, values and goals; clarity of goals for each individual and how those goals tie in with organizational goals. This clarity provides employees with work satisfaction.
- **Promise of meaningful work:** The greatest motivating factor for people to do their best is meaningful work. It is their right as employees to be awarded an opportunity to connect with a greater purpose and know that the work they are doing is meaningful. There is no greater satisfaction than knowing you're making a positive difference.
- **Organizational transparency:** Most organizations promise transparency in words but lack it in practice. Just as employees want to feel like they are doing meaningful work contributing to the goals of the company, they also want to know they are part of the decision-making. The organizations must take steps to be open and transparent with employees.
- **Caring and empathetic support system:** Employees are real people with families, personal interests and hobbies. If they feel like the organization they work for truly cares about them and theirs, they will stop at nothing to serve the organization's goals.
- **Hiring the best fit:** We often hear organizations saying they want to hire the best. To be successful at finding and hiring the best talent, organizations must commit to their definition of best fit and incorporate a cultural-fit assessment as part of their hiring process.

Putting it into practice

To attract, hire, engage and retain the right talent, an organization needs a healthy, caring, innovative culture where leaders are strong and supportive and work together toward sustaining that culture. Here are a few ways an organization can create a desired culture and be able to attract the right fit:

- **Motivate and engage leaders:** First and foremost, leaders must not only be fully engaged, but also inspire desired behaviors by leading by example.
- **Create culture ambassadors:** Engaged and satisfied employees stop at nothing to advance the cause. Award them the opportunity to be culture ambassadors for the organization by engaging them in initiatives promoting the organizational culture to the outside world.
- **Revamp your hiring process:** An organization can find the best talent and maybe even have the best culture, but how would they ever know if the person they are hiring will be the right fit for their culture? The only way to know is to incorporate culture assessment as part of the hiring process. Train interviewers to ask the right questions.
- **Always hire for fit:** Organizations cannot compromise in this area. While skill is very important, it can be taught. The right fit is key to retaining talent.
- **Create and commit to an onboarding process.** Organizations must create a nurturing onboarding plan for the talent they're hiring. Without an onboarding plan and support — such as pairing them with a mentor/sponsor, introducing them to key personnel and showing them how things are done — even the most perfect cultural match will fall short.
- **Transparency in practice:** Just saying we're transparent isn't enough; organizations must commit to supporting employees with information in an effective and timely manner.
- **Reward the right behaviors:** With the right cultural support system, employees are self-motivated to do their best. Rewarding these behaviors could be the encouragement they need for long-term engagement.
- **Giving employees a voice without fear of negative consequence:** Inspiring thought leadership and collaboration in employees is a sure way for an organization to retain talent. People have great ideas and want to share them but sometimes don't for fear of negative repercussion. There are many ways to do this: Formally through focus groups, surveys and one-on-one conversations. Informally at company social events, team building events, etc.

There is a direct relationship between organizational culture and attracting the right talent. It used to be all about the skill and now it's all about the fit. Organizations that intentionally create and sustain a healthy, nurturing culture ultimately win the talent war.

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