

STACKING THE CULTURE DECK

A culture deck is a series of slides created to describe a company's culture and behaviour in order to sell itself to potential and current employees.

Brett Putter explores how to make your culture deck more appealing

When Reed Hastings, Netflix's CEO, published the company's culture deck online in 2009, the game changed for Silicon Valley and the tech industry as a whole. Hastings wanted current employees and potential job candidates to understand what Netflix was about on a fundamental level so he could attract and retain the right kind of talent.

Netflix's online culture deck covers everything a potential employee could want to know about the business - from how people are rewarded, to how "adequate performance gets a generous severance package"; from clarifying that the company works like a pro sports team (not like a family), to explaining that the company doesn't tolerate brilliant idiots; and why there is no holiday policy.

There is no doubt that culture is critical to the success of companies. According to 2012 research by Deloitte, 94% of executives and 88% of employees agreed that culture was important to business success. Yet, according to a survey of 40 CEOs from high-growth companies by CultureGene, nine out of 10 CEOs do not leverage it as a competitive advantage, despite having complete control over it. If they don't know how, they might start with a culture deck.

Done well, a culture deck identifies and conveys your ethos to those inside as well as outside your company. It will help attract like-minded candidates, reinforce the behaviours you expect from your team, and broadcast your unique culture to a global audience. As you get started with your own culture deck, consider these tips.

Your culture defines your company, so be clear about what culture means to you, as well as its importance and how the company perceives it

01

USE THE CULTURE DECK AS A WINDOW TO YOUR COMPANY

A culture deck should clearly identify the character, personality, behaviours, practices and norms of your company. It should articulate the company's mission, vision, values, history, purpose and the "way we work around here". It doesn't have to be 125 pages long like Netflix's, but should be straightforward, well thought-out and reflect the unique ethos of your company.

02

DON'T DANCE AROUND THE TOPIC

Your culture defines your company, so be specific about what it means to you, as well as its importance and how the company perceives it. In its deck, Hubspot states that culture is "a shared set of beliefs and practices" and that "it doesn't just help attract amazing people, it amplifies their abilities and helps them do their best work".

03

STATE WHAT YOUR CULTURE ISN'T TO MAKE CLEAR WHAT IT IS

On a slide in its culture deck, Soundstripe noted that a company's ethos is not just game rooms, or other things such as day care, health benefits and sushi lunches. "Yes, we do have a ping-pong table (typical)," Soundstripe adds with self-deprecating humour. But then it gets serious: "Things do not define our culture. Our people do." This slide stresses the true focus of culture: people, rather than perks and other gimmicks.

04

USE LANGUAGE THAT FITS YOUR COMPANY - NOT SOMEONE ELSE'S

"We are here to help our customers kick ass," is how GoDaddy's mission statement begins. From the first line to the last - "stare down the impossible until the impossible blinks" - you get a real sense of passion. The language of a culture deck should reflect the essence of the company - playful or dignified, intense or laidback, casual or formal.

05

ARTICULATE YOUR VISION

A company's vision encapsulates its medium- to long-term goals and aspirations. LinkedIn's culture deck includes a slide that simply states: "create opportunity for every member of the global workforce". It says that this is a company that helps improve the lives of others; that people who want to make a difference in the world should consider working at LinkedIn.

06

GET INTO THE DETAILS

Describing "how we work around here" covers the nature of working for your company. Answer questions that prospective as well as current employees would ask - such as about the hiring process, onboarding, diversity and inclusion, feedback, performance reviews, employee benefits and making a difference in the world.

Everyone at work management company Asana has clearly defined areas of responsibility. This is a new approach to workplace empowerment and why it scores in the 99th percentile of employee engagement and is consistently rated five out of five on Glassdoor.

07

REMEMBER YOUR AUDIENCE

A vital function of a culture deck is to attract the right talent. Netflix makes it clear that it pays top dollar for employees who thrive on "excellence, candour and change". It also encourages employees to understand their market value: "It's a healthy idea, not a traitorous one, to understand what other firms would pay you, by interviewing and talking to peers at other companies." This not only pushes the concept of transparency, but it also transmits Netflix's tremendous confidence. Only a company that knows the magnetic pull and staying power of its culture would encourage employees to do this.

08

ENGAGE YOUR TEAM

The creation of a culture deck is an opportunity to engage your team in defining the company's environment. When Hastings was asked about the creation of the culture deck he explained: "One of the great things about putting things in writing is that it makes it more debatable, so it's not just hearing a sermon [...] you can comment and say that this part here doesn't seem appropriate or this part doesn't seem like what we do."

09

EVOLVE YOUR CULTURE DECK WITH THE BUSINESS

Culture is described as "the way we work around here" and the way a company works changes regularly as the business grows. The best culture decks reflect this and are reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

10

ENSURE THE LEADERSHIP TEAM LIVES AND BREATHES IT

Your team is watching how you and the rest of the leadership team behaves. If the leaders do not refer to the culture deck and live up to the values, mission, vision and other principles defined in it, then your team won't either.

A company's *raison d'être* is often the primary reason a candidate joins it - more than salary, stock options, or any inherent risk. And the biggest driver of successful hiring is how well the company defines and understands its culture. Crafting an effective culture deck turns it into a visible, tangible and conscious asset. It enables talent to connect with what your company is really about and get excited about the prospect of working there. A well-crafted culture deck is a strategic advantage. ●



Brett Putter, founder and CEO, CultureGene. His new book *Culture Decks Decoded* is out now. Learn more at brettonputter.com