

High-Performance Culture

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

In the words of legendary American businessman Harold Geneen,

"It is an immutable law in business that words are words, explanations are explanations, promises are promises-but only performance is reality."

One of the biggest challenges for leaders is creating an environment that inspires consistent, reliable effectiveness. If you don't nurture a culture that encourages your employees to continually push themselves to improve, even the most talented employees might not meet their full potential. Their motivation could wane if they're not committed to your organisation's goals and don't feel a solid sense of purpose. How your company operates day-to-day can provide a snapshot of how staff feel and indicate their dedication levels. Perhaps there's a sense of lethargy, unhappiness or restlessness. Maybe an office, once characterised by progress, creativity, and dynamism, has transformed into something slightly disappointing.

Today, we'll cover what high-performance culture is, what drives it, and how you can sustain it in your workplace.

A high-performance culture is one in which your employees are truly driven to deliver the best possible results by feeling engaged and appreciated. Peter Done [1], the founder of business services specialist Peninsula Group, said, "In a nutshell, it's a culture that empowers employees to work toward your company's success." Rather than just showing up for a paycheck and doing the bare minimum, employees are motivated by a desire to succeed and a dedication to their organisation's aims and ethos. In the simplest possible terms, everyone in your business constantly strives to improve.

According to Business Leadership Today [2], "A high-performance culture is a culture in which employees perform well because they are engaged, valued, and continually learning. This gives their work a greater purpose, instilling in them a continuous improvement mindset and a dedication to the organisation's mission that drives performance."

It's a reality here that you get back what you put in. If you invest in individuals, they are prepared to invest in your company and its mission.

The research and advisory firm Gartner [3] defines a high-performance workplace as “a physical or virtual environment designed to make workers as effective as possible in supporting business goals and providing value...[It] results from continually balancing investment in people, processes, physical environment, and technology to measurably enhance the ability of workers to learn, discover, innovate, team, and lead, and to achieve efficiency and financial benefit.”

Developing a culture is an active pursuit that takes time to perfect. There's no magic formula. It's a case of tuning into your team and being clear about what you hope to achieve as an organisation. Just as crucially, it's about being prepared to change, grow, and communicate well whilst enabling your colleagues to do this, too.

It's hard to overstate the importance of creating an environment where your employees are actively engaged with their work. A study found that corporations with motivated workers outperform those with low employee engagement by 202% [4]. So, by doing things differently, you're not just changing the culture in order to benefit your employees but transforming your organisation's outcomes more generally.

Let's look at exactly how you can do this.

First, what is your mission? Without a tangible goal to work towards, it's incredibly easy for people to lose direction and work aimlessly. Think about the organisation's core values. What are your goals? Are those goals clear to your employees? Are they able to recognise the ways that their work contributes to those goals?

While it's true that you can't just fill your business with talented employees and assume that this will take care of all your issues, the right people will always be at the core of any successful business. The key is understanding that finding “the right people” goes beyond securing the most qualified candidates. Look at your organisation's mission and values. The people you need are the ones who can facilitate the vision you have for your business and believe in what you hope to achieve.

But it's not just a matter of *discovering* the most appropriate people; it's helping to develop them. As Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic and Jonathan Kirschner write in the Harvard Business Review [5]: “No matter how skilled your employees may be, you still need to help them grow in new ways. No matter how much an employee is struggling, you are responsible for attempting to help them find their footing.”

Shane Green, thought leader and author of Culture Hacker [6], a guide to understanding your employees' mindset, offers this advice to leaders: “I have to ask myself, ‘What is my number one role?’ If I look at any manager's role, it's to make sure that the people can perform every day, so the first thing is to enable them. My job is to make sure they have the right training, skills, tools, information, and support to do their job.” Do your staff have what they need to thrive? Do your expectations for your team match what they are capable of delivering? Have you equipped them with all the necessary resources for success?

It's not enough to just have a vision for the future of your business. You have to be able to communicate that effectively to your employees. If you want to make changes, what exactly will they be, and what do you need from the people you work with? Clear expectations are essential. Worryingly, according to Gallup research, the majority of employees don't think that their leaders communicate effectively [7]. Make a concerted effort to prioritise clarity. You must ensure you effectively convey the ideas and messages of the company, as not doing so risks fuelling speculation and rumours. If individuals are confused or faced with gaps in information, they are likely to attempt to fill these themselves. Cultivate an environment where people feel comfortable and confident to ask questions, too. Make yourself available to deal with any unanswered queries.

Seek to provide training to your employees so that they can always keep up with how your industry is evolving. Likewise, create opportunities for them to provide feedback and influence the direction of your business. You can't simply expect your employees to trust in the vision of your business. You need to give them agency over it as well.

If you have concerns about performance and don't feel like your team is working to your company values, it may be worth checking if they're actually aware of what they are. Maybe you mentioned them when onboarding, but they haven't been spoken about since. Now could be the perfect time for a refresher.

Relatedly, high-performance culture is linked to your own experiences. Are you committed to progress and professional growth? Do you feel comfortable leading by example? Rather than simply telling your team what you expect from them, *demonstrate* what you hope to see. As the job listing site Indeed [8] advocates,

To lead by example, you must nurture social skills like active listening, empathy and emotional intelligence. When experienced leaders take the lead in these areas with others, these behaviours become contagious. The leader's growth only becomes more effective for everyone involved.

If you're implementing changes, tracking the tangible results is important. Perhaps use regular staff surveys to evaluate effectiveness. Share achievements in internal newsletters to keep colleagues motivated and in the loop. Clarify and communicate key performance indicators and highlight them regularly. Make sure team meetings have a clear purpose and that any developments are shared with the team. Essentially, keep checking you're on course to meet your broader aims. You might have felt a shift in attitudes and performance, so it's great to have evidence to support your feelings.

Today we've seen how important vision and values are to fostering a high-performance culture. Remember, too, that a workplace's culture is always evolving. If you want to get the most out of your employees and see the business succeed, you've got to be open to continual change.

This week, take a moment to reflect on your organisation's mission. How do your responsibilities directly contribute to the longer-term aims of the company? Once you've considered this, you're in a powerful position to ensure your team approaches work with tenacity, energy, and diligence.

[1] *Developing A High-Performance Culture Without Risking Staff Burnout*, Peter Done (2022)

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/03/16/developing-a-high-performance-culture-without-risking-staff-burnout/?sh=22b42cf1461f>

[2] *What Is a High-Performance Culture?*, Matt Tenney (2022)

<https://businessleadershiptoday.com/what-is-a-high-performance-culture/#:~:text=A%20high-performance%20culture%20is%20a%20culture%20in%20which,dedication%20to%20the%20organization%E2%80%99s%20mission%20that%20drives%20performance.>

[3] *High Performance Workplace*, Gartner Glossary

<https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/high-performance-workplace#:~:text=Gartner%20defines%20a%20high%20performance,business%20goals%20and%20providing%20value.>

[4] *Company Culture Statistics: Leadership and Engagement in 2023*, Team Stage (2023)

<https://teamstage.io/company-culture-statistics/>

[5] *How the Best Managers Identify and Develop Talent*, Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic and Jonathan Kirschner (2020)

<https://hbr.org/2020/01/how-the-best-managers-identify-and-develop-talent>

[6] *Culture Hacker*, Shane Green (2017)

<https://www.amazon.com/Culture-Hacker-Reprogramming-Experience-Performance/dp/1119405726>

[7] *Cultivate 5 Drivers for a High-Performance Culture*, Shannon Mullen O'Keefe And Vibhas Ratanjee (2020)

<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/320960/cultivate-drivers-high-performance-culture.aspx>

[8] *8 Strategies To Help You Lead by Example in the Workplace*, Indeed Editorial Team (2023)

<https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/lead-by-example>