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## Happy people

### HOW TO CREATE A VALUES-DRIVEN CULTURE

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One of the most important positions at The Beryl Cos. is the “Queen of Fun and Laughter,” but that wasn’t something CEO Paul Spiegelman anticipated when he and his brothers founded the company more than 20 years ago.

“At some point along the road, we realized that the kind of environment that we created for our people made a huge difference in terms of the productivity and success of the business,” he says.

The culture he has created has garnered the \$30 million company – which provides outsourced telephone and Web-based communications – recognition as one of the best places to work last year by the Society for Human Resource Management.

*Smart Business* spoke with Spiegelman about how to create a strong culture to make your company a top place to work.

#### **Q. How do you create a strong culture?**

It starts at the top. You have to have leadership that

believes in improving or changing their culture. It’s not like you can just create a great culture overnight.

It takes years to do, but if you don’t have a management team that believes there’s a connection between a positive culture and business success, it’s going to be difficult to get there.

My suggestion for other leaders, whether you’re the leader of a company or a department within a company, is to start small and make sure you have the basics in place. Things like salaries, benefits and 401(k) – those are the basics of employment. If you don’t have that, and you say, “Let’s go out and have some fun events,” it can look to be disingenuous.

The other is, don’t push down the culture. Create the culture from within. Get people involved in creating the ideas and programs. We have a committee. They meet every month. Their job is to not only plan events, but they deal with on-boarding issues and orientation, and they’re the ear to the company morale.

They alert us in senior management as to what people are thinking or feeling so we can react to that. You want the ideas to come from within and not from you.

Empower other people to own it. They know that it starts with me, and I need to set a good example, but peer recognition is very powerful. Our recognition program is called PRIDE, which is Peers Recognizing Individual Deeds of Excellence. While they would certainly like to get a note from me, we concentrate on people recognizing each other for a job well done, so that’s where the ownership comes from.

#### **Q. How do you keep the culture intact as the company grows?**

Naturally, as a company grows, you build more structure and process. We tell them that while anything can change in the company – our products, our customer base, how we



**“Get people involved in creating the ideas and programs.”**

do business – one thing that won’t is our culture and the core values that we live by.

Having a set of core values that become institutionalized is one way to make sure that the culture remains intact. It’s very easy that something that’s taken years to build up could be gone overnight

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if, based on an event or some situation, people feel like, “Wow, this just isn’t the place it used to be.” Once you commit to a culture like this, you have to keep it going, and that’s where you get loyalty from your people because they know you’re being genuine about it.

**Q. How do you create values to stand by?**

I used to be very cynical about mission statements and all that stuff. We never really had any of that, but it was probably seven or eight years ago that we sat down with a much larger group of people – probably 30 people- and we did this together.

Don’t come up with them and say, “This is what our values are going to be.” Ask your team, “What are the code of ethics that we’ll live by?”

It’s never too late to start to make it inclusive of the group. And make sure that once you commit, that those are repeated often, and that people could recite them at any point.

**Q. How do you make sure people know the values?**

The easiest thing is simply in the repeated communication and the examples of adherence to those values. For example, if I want to recognize someone in another department, my job is to write down what they did to support one or more of the core values [passion for customer service, always doing the right thing, never sacrificing quality and spirit of camaraderie].

Then we have four parking spaces, and each one is one of the core values. If someone did something

in a particular month to exemplify that core value, they get to park in that space that month. These aren’t on a plaque- they’re painted on the wall for everyone to see.

Lastly, incorporate them into your meetings. We don’t start any meeting – small or large- without talking about the values. When I have a town hall, the first thing I do is test the employees. I say, “Let’s recite the four core values” so they know how much it means to me.

People will follow if they know how important it is. It’s just repeated exposure.