

HOW AN ENGAGING COMPANY CULTURE LEADS TO SYSTEM-WIDE SUCCESS



Every organization has a distinct culture which relates to the values and attitudes of employees.

A healthy corporate culture values each employee in the organization regardless of job duties, which results in employees working as a team to meet the company's needs. Research has found that companies with high employee engagement levels were up to 10 times more likely to see an

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increase in sales and profit than those with lower engagement. A 2012 Deloitte LLP report titled “Culture in the Workplace” shows that exceptional organizations think about their business as a two-sided ledger: strategy and culture. From the study, 94 percent of executives and 88 percent of employees believe a distinct workplace culture is important to business success.

For example, Wild Birds Unlimited, the leader in backyard bird feeding and nature specialty stores with more than 275 locations nationwide, encourages all employees to connect with nature in the office and at home. Jim Carpenter, Founder and CEO of Wild Birds Unlimited, has turned his lifelong passion into a profit-making venture by sharing his love for bird feeding and watching with others. Carpenter doesn't believe in a corporate-owned store, which includes his own store that is considered a franchise. His philosophy stems from his attitude that if you own your own store, you take more pride in ownership, have more fun

doing something you're passionate about, and, therefore, work harder to ensure its success. The company has grown on a culture where employees are encouraged to work together to improve the system. Franchisees are trained with the best practices and ongoing training is available.

“Our best accomplishment as a franchisor is knowing our franchisees are happy with the level of support they receive,” said Carpenter

Encouraging employees to connect with nature provides fun opportunities. Unique bird sightings are announced over the intercom, and everyone races to the window to get a closer look. Company outings include bird watching, nature hikes, and participating in the Audubon Birdathon to raise money for the local Audubon Association. Sponsoring employee events and activities encourages team building, friendships, and allows team members to share their passion for nature with each other. An interest in the

avian world is essential for potential Wild Birds Unlimited franchisees.

The franchise is committed to educating the public about the importance of the environment and preserving wildlife. Franchise owners volunteer at local environmental and wildlife organization and also hold in-store events focusing on conservation and giving back to nature. By hosting events like nature days, families can participate in activities that help them bond with nature and teach children how to respect their environment. Wild Birds Unlimited has built a company culture that enables them to bring together a community of franchise owners and employees who share the same excitement about the hobby.

Another company with a unique culture is BlueGrace Logistics, the nation's most progressive logistics, transportation and technology provider. With 30 franchise locations established across the country, BlueGrace offers customized transportation management solutions to customers throughout the United States. Company executives believe that the level of employee and franchisee happiness is a true measure of company success.

Bobby Harris, CEO of BlueGrace Logistics, worked in the transportation and logistics industry for 20 years before starting his own franchise. He has spent the last five years making his company a great place to work by creating an environment employees enjoy. He even hired a full-time culture coordinator to plan company events, community service activities and other initiatives.

"A strong culture is the selling point of a great brand," Harris said. "Decide what your culture will be and make it the best possible. When people hear how you treat your employees and your franchisees, they'll want to become part of your company."

Successful strategies and tactics implemented at BlueGrace Logistics

include a peer-to-peer bonus program, which fosters employees to nominate each other for exceptional performance. The company also takes the hiring process seriously and aims to hire sensitive and empathetic employees to maintain their motto of "We don't care how much you know until we know how much you care." To help support the training process, the corporate team has established a mentoring program. Employees can also enjoy 'Free Beer Fridays,' as well as inter-office competitions and incentives. Harris also launched a 'cubicle swap' where executives moved their offices to cubicles and allowed employees to move into their offices for several weeks in an effort to bring management closer to employees. Not only did this allow executives to see and hear what was going on, but it allowed employees to interact more with executives and increased the overall productivity level. BlueGrace grants paid time off for volunteer hours at the charity of their choice, allowing them to support causes they support.

Additionally, BlueGrace has found social media to be an important tool for collaboration and engagement. Having an open social media policy connects the entire franchise system and corporate employees, enabling each person to learn about colleagues' lives outside of work. This has created positive employee morale and greater retention, resulting in reduced training expenses and a strong bond between employees.

Sometimes franchisors think large corporate headquarters would impress franchisees. But, for 85-plus-unit retail franchise Flip Flop Shops, the opposite is the case. For them, the term "home office" for supporting franchisees takes on a literal meaning.

The CEO, COO, President and entire support staff of North America's first retail chain exclusive to the latest styles of flip flops and sandals work from their homes, globally. They stay connected via

phone, email, and FaceTime, as well as with periodic face-to-face meetings, and believe that not having a "corporate office" provides benefits the franchisees. Why? Flip Flop Shops' culture – which starts at the top and spreads throughout the entire franchise system in shops throughout the United States, Canada, Guam, and the Caribbean – is rooted in the idea of a flexible, care-free lifestyle.

"Our culture has a mellow and free-spirited nature – it's about enjoying life and freeing your toes.," said Brian Curin, President and Co-founder. "Our mission is to give anyone, anywhere the opportunity to 'Live...Work...Play With Their Toes Exposed®' and enjoy the same lifestyle the brand exudes. How can we expect our franchise owners to believe in this lifestyle if their franchisor is operating in a stuffy corporate office with closed doors and tiny cubicles?"

Both Curin, company's CEO Darin Kraetsch and COO Alan Woods, spent years building the Cold Stone Creamery franchise, spending day-in and day-out dressed in suits. The group of outdoor enthusiasts let their lifestyle considerations guide them when moving onto their next professional venture, creating a culture that allows them to work flexible hours, enjoy their passions and live their lives while still completing work and staying connected with the team.

"We had already built the Taj Mahal of offices and it didn't make us any more effective at our jobs or our companies any better," Kraetsch said. "So, when we sought out to build Flip Flop Shops, there was no way we were going the typical corporate route. Our focus was going to be on lifestyle and quality of life. When the management team and employees are happy with their lifestyles, it benefits the entire company, and trickles down to the franchisees."

The executive team meets monthly at an industry event or Shop Day, a 'discovery day' showing prospective franchisees

Jim Carpenter, Founder and CEO of Wild Birds Unlimited

a Flip Flop Shops location, teaching them about the brand and its culture, and enjoying each other's company over Mexican food and margaritas. The franchise also uses a Facebook group to keep all shop owners engaged. This platform serves as an easy way for everyone to keep in touch and share practices.

“We're looking to grow with shop owners that embody the Free Your Toes® lifestyle and share the same flip flop passion and attitude we do,” Curin added. “Potential franchisees must also have a good sense of humor and solid business acumen. They appreciate our living the culture and not having to dress ‘business casual’ to visit their franchisor. All they have to do is throw on flip flops and shorts and hang out with us.”

In conclusion, having a unique company culture provides a foundation for shaping an organization's culture and enhancing the overall success of the business. Wild Birds Unlimited, BlueGrace Logistics and Flip Flop Shops have established distinct company cultures that are driven by employee engagement along with the growth and success of each franchise system. When a company truly cares about its people, nurtures the culture, creates an environment and offers challenging work, great things happen.

In 1981, Jim Carpenter combined his retail experience with his enjoyment of nature to open the first Wild Birds Unlimited location in Indianapolis. Carpenter franchise the concept in 1983 to more than 280 locations throughout North America. Today Wild Birds Unlimited continues to evolve as the original and largest franchise system of backyard bird feeding and nature stores.

For more information:

- www.wbu.com/
- www.mybluegrace.com/
- www.inc.com/profile/flip-flop-shops



CEO Bobby Harris with Executive Team



Hurley Creative Director Ryan Hurley, Flip Flop Shops Co-founder and CEO Darin Kraetsch, Hurley Founder and CEO Bob Hurley, and Flip Flop Shops Co-founder and President Brian Curin



Corporate team on company outing