Leading Through a Startup

HotChalk

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Assignment 2

Leadership Strategy

Looking at the information provided about HotChalk: a small number of employees, a single customer, and a total lack of leadership; a few ideas come to mind for a leadership strategy as well as an organizational structure. Since the company currently lacks any leadership and vision, a strong leader would need to be found in order to drive the vision of the company. With a staff of 25 and an expectation to grow and serve more customers, more leaders would also be necessary within the organization to serve more of a coaching and management role as the company necessarily breaks up into smaller teams. As for an organizational structure, the size of the company is already at the breaking point of a flat structure, so it would be important to pivot to a more defined structure depending on how the growth of the company was planned.

For a medium sized startup like HotChalk, there needs to be more than one leader within the company. There are multiple major elements of a successful business that are missing, most notably vision and employee motivation. In order to combat these issues, there needs to be a strong, vision-oriented leader within the company that can serve to drive the startup towards some future goal by identifying plans for growth, expansion, and the acquiring of new customers. This vision-oriented leader would most likely would fall into the visionary, autocratic, or democratic leadership style, focusing more on the business and its goals than the day-to-day of the employees. Though the vision-oriented leader does need to worry about the wellbeing of their employees, a staff of 25 is too much for any one person to effectively nurture alone, and as such there would likely need to be two additional employees in leadership roles within the organization, bringing each leader's oversight of employees down closer to a limit of ten. These day-to-day leaders for the company could come from any leadership style, but most beneficial for the development of the company would be those with a coaching, servant, or transformational style. These day-to-day leaders would be responsible for ensuring that the vision of the

vision-oriented leader was properly communicated, but most importantly that the employees under their care are allowed to thrive and grow with the company.

The current flat structure of HotChalk can only be sustained in the short term. As the company grows and more universities become customers, there will need to be a shift to a more sustainable organizational structure. The two types of organizational structure that make the most sense for this company as it grows are either a hierarchical/functional structure or a team-based structure, depending on how the company expands. If the operations for the services provided by the company are fully distinct from one another then a hierarchical/functional structure makes the most sense, with each branch of the company providing its own specific services to the customer and having their own leadership structure based on the individual needs of the branch. If the services to universities make the most sense in small, contained units then a team-based structure makes the most sense, with each small team being comprised of specialists in each of the services offered to universities, and one team being created for and assigned specifically to one customer.

Issues and Remedies

Lack of Vision

Employees are more easily motivated when they know the "why" of the company, the vision and drive that pushes the company forward other than to make money. Two contributing factors to communicating vision are first having a clear communicable vision and second making sure that vision is hardwired into any decision the company makes. The first factor can be addressed by having strong, visionary leadership. Whether this leadership is the actual owner or leader of the company, or a panel of employees who feel strongly about the vision of the company, there needs to be someone to distill the vision of the company into clearly communicable terms, a short sentence or series of bullet points. The second factor of communicating vision, hardwiring it into the company, is a more day-to-day goal that

needs to be carried out at all levels of the company. Management needs to consider the vision of the company when making decisions about new customers and markets, leaders need to consider the vision of the company when making hiring decisions and how best to grow current employees, and employees need to consider the vision of the company as they go about acting on the company's behalf.

Poor Work Culture

A poor work culture can have many causes and many effects. Lack of business vision, communication, and rewards can all drive towards a poor work culture, as can toxic workplace behavior by management and fellow employees. A company with a poor work culture can expect less motivated employees, poorer performance, and higher turnover rates. In order to improve the work culture at HotChalk it would be important to seek the insight of the employees, as it's their work culture that is suffering these ill effects. Leadership should institute weekly one-on-ones between managers and their direct reports, with monthly skip-level one-on-ones between employees and upper management, as well as a fully anonymous method of feedback for employees to give their feedback about the work culture and any other problems that arise. This improved communication flow not only allows employees to feel and be heard, but also provides management and leadership invaluable insight into the inner workings of the company and its employees that is otherwise impossible to gain from the big-picture view. If a company makes open communication with employees the norm, and considers and acts on feedback it receives, employee morale and work culture will without a doubt improve.

No Employee Motivation

Motivated employees enjoy their jobs, know they're appreciated, and know the work they're doing has a purpose. Providing a clear vision and creating a good work culture through open communication will go a long way towards improving employee motivation, but there are many other aspects that can improve motivation as well. Providing clear expectations and goals for teams and

employees, and celebrating when those goals are met or exceeded, is a great way to improve

motivation. Clear goals also provide opportunities for growth, another key motivator for employees. A

goal that goes unmet is an opportunity not for punishing the team or employee, but for diagnosing the

problem or problems that lead to missing that goal and working to improve the team or goal-setting

process for the future.

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