Organizational Culture

4 Ways Every Employee Can Contribute to Company Culture

by Scott Behson

February 02, 2022

PDFmyURL

HBR Staff/Getty Images/MicrovOne

Summary. A great company culture is built and reinforced by its people — meaning you, your peers, and your teammates. Individual contributors without supervisory power can have a huge impact within their own spheres of influence. In fact, there are several things you can... **more**

Tweet

Post

Share

Save

Print

Ascend

Where your work meets your life. See more from Ascend here.

Most of us would love to work in a vibrant, diverse, and caring environment in which we are valued as whole people — meaning our priorities in life are as supported as our work priorities. We often leave it to the "powers that be" to turn this dream into a reality, believing that company culture is something set by leadership, and implemented by managers and human resource teams. We assume that their values,

along with the policies and decisions they make, determine the behaviors and priorities we employees must follow.

While there is some truth to these assumptions, it is equally true that a great company culture is built and reinforced by its people — meaning you, your peers, and your teammates. Individual contributors without supervisory power can have a huge impact within their own spheres of influence. In fact, there are several things you can do, even early in your career, to incorporate whole-person workplace values into your organization.

Get to know people on a personal level.

The first and most foundational thing you can do is to get to know your colleagues as people — not just coworkers — and support them. Be the person who goes out of their way to befriend new team members, many of whom may feel out of place joining your organization remotely or adjusting to a hybrid environment. Invite them to lunch or to chat over a virtual coffee. Suggest other people that would be good for them to connect with, or if you are in the office, take the initiative to introduce them yourself.

The same goes for those colleagues who you may have fallen out of touch with over the past couple of years. Reach out over email or Slack with a message like, “Hi [name]! I was wondering if you might like to grab a coffee and catch up? I really admire the work you’ve been doing but feel we haven’t really had a chance to connect.”

These small gestures can make all the difference. Your colleagues will begin to see you as a positive ally, resource, or better yet, friend — all of which can increase your influence and potential for growth. Moreover, the more friends you make, the happier you will be showing up at your

job. Remember that “having a best friend at work” is perhaps the single best indicator of long-term satisfaction and engagement.

After all, if you and your coworkers are going to spend 40 to 50 hours a week together, you may as well enjoy the company.

Celebrate others (and be creative).

Recognizing and celebrating team members for their work is a great way to set an example and develop a positive culture, even if it’s only within your department. Your actions will signal that you’re paying attention, that you notice other people’s contributions, and that you’re an advocate of their work.

There are also several small (but powerful) things you can do to show your colleagues that you perceive and value them as whole people. You can remind your team of each other’s birthdays and work anniversaries, or you can encourage people to come together to show support when a colleague experiences a big life event. These gestures, while simple, can create a genuine culture of care. Think of it this way: If no one keeps track of dates, collects the money to buy a cake, and asks people to sign a thoughtful card, there’s no party!

Workplaces can host baby showers, happy hours, team-building lunches, and even support groups for those who are going through difficult times. Managers don’t always have to lead the charge. Often, it’s more powerful if culture-building activities grow organically from individual employees.

Subscribe to our Weekly Newsletter
Ascend
Sign Up

Career and life advice for young professionals. Sign Up

Show up for people without resentment.

When your manager offers extra accommodations to one of your colleagues (for whatever reason), it's human nature to become resentful or jealous. For instance, a young, healthy, single person without kids may occasionally find themselves working late or taking on odd hours to compensate for the needs of their senior colleagues. If you find yourself in this kind of situation, you can consider yourself a victim of this story — or you can rewrite the script and see yourself as stepping up to support someone in need.

After all, we are all human. We all experience roadblocks and are able to apply ourselves better at certain times than others. If you zoom out and look at the situation through an empathetic lens, you will realize that you can never really know what someone else is going through — whether you work with them every day or pass them on the sidewalk.

This isn't to say that you should be a doormat. You deserve to have your needs attended to as much as anyone else. Rather, the goal is to set healthy boundaries, but to lead with empathy. Find a balance between saying "no" and "yes," and when you say "yes," do so with care and not resentment. Consider how much you may be helping a colleague out by cheerfully supporting them during a difficult time. At some point, you'll need others to pitch in for you. Why not contribute to a whole-person workplace culture that makes mutual support more likely?

Set the example.

Readers Also Viewed These Items

Many companies need employees to join employee resource groups, short-term projects, or long-term committees focused on building a better workplace. By participating in these efforts, you also help yourself by building your internal network, developing communication skills, demonstrating your willingness to take on more responsibility, and, of course, improving your workplace. Further, you establish yourself as a reliable and caring role model, especially for those new to the company.

If you are someone with job security and a good reputation, you can take this a step further by openly practicing self-empowerment at work, and therefore, encouraging others to do the same. Examples of this could include taking a real lunch break, using your vacation time, being the first to accept extended parental leave (or another perk people may be hesitant to use), or even respectfully giving your boss feedback that her 11 pm emails are causing stress for the team. Be the team leader who unapologetically shows others that prioritizing your own health and wellness is okay, and often necessary.

There is plenty of advice out there pushing managers to take charge when it comes to developing positive team cultures. You, however, can do it too. Change doesn't happen unless someone steps up, and that person doesn't have to be the boss. That person needs to be a leader, and with a little initiative, creativity, and empathy, that leader can be you.

Scott Behson is a professor of management and Silberman Global Faculty Fellow at Fairleigh Dickinson University, and the author of the new book, *The Whole-Person Workplace: Building Better Workplaces Through Work-Life, Wellness and Employee Support*.

Tweet Post Share Save Print

5 ITEM COLLECTION

Financial Intelligence Set: What You Need to Know to Succeed (2nd Edition)

Special Offer

Buy Now

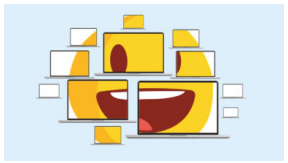
HBR's 10 Must Reads on Building a Great Culture (with bonus article "How to Build a Culture of Originality" by Adam Grant)

Book

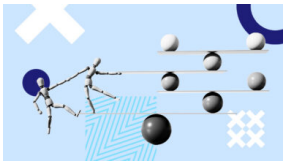
Buy Now

Read more on **Organizational culture** or related topics **Managing yourself**, **Emotional intelligence** and **Interpersonal communication**

Recommended For You

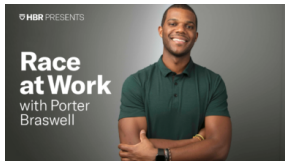


Company Culture Is Everyone's Responsibility



How to Build a Great Work Culture: Our Favorite Reads

How to Become More Comfortable with Change



AUDIO
Mastercard's Former Chief Diversity Officer Donna Johnson: Advancing Company Culture

Partner Center

Harvard Business Review

Start my subscription!

Explore HBR

The Latest
Most Popular
All Topics
Magazine Archive
The Big Idea

HBR Store

Article Reprints
Books
Cases
Collections
Magazine Issues

About HBR

Contact Us
Advertise with Us
Information for Booksellers/Retailers
Masthead

Manage My Account

My Library
Topic Feeds
Orders
Account Settings
Email Preferences

Follow HBR

Facebook
Twitter
LinkedIn
Instagram
Your Newsreader

Reading Lists
Case Selections
Video
Podcasts
Webinars
Data & Visuals
My Library
Newsletters
HBR Press
HBR Ascend

HBR Guide Series
HBR 20-Minute Managers
HBR Emotional Intelligence Series
HBR Must Reads
Tools

Global Editions
Media Inquiries
Guidelines for Authors
HBR Analytic Services
Copyright Permissions

Account FAQ
Help Center
Contact Customer Service

Harvard Business Publishing

About Us | Careers | Privacy Policy | Cookie Policy | Copyright Information | Trademark Policy

Harvard Business Publishing: Higher Education | Corporate Learning | Harvard Business Review | Harvard Business School

Copyright ©2023 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved. Harvard Business Publishing is an affiliate of Harvard Business School.

PDFmyURL.com - convert URLs, web pages or even full websites to PDF online. Easy API for developers!