



## The Culture Audit: Building the Successful Company Culture

A company's culture can help ensure the success of its business objectives. However, company culture is about more than having free Coca Cola in the fridge and allowing employees to take their dogs to the office. Culture is how employees describe where they work, understand the business, and see themselves as part of the organization. Building a strong company culture will not itself guarantee business success, but culture is a key determinant in attracting talent and it is that talent that carry a company forward.

A "culture audit" can help assess the culture that currently exists in a company. It also offers insights into the means to strengthen it. This process is more commonly referred to as an "employee survey," - it helps companies learn what *raison d'être* keeps employees at the company.

An effective corporate culture audit describes the overall working environment, identifies the unwritten "norms" and rules governing employee interactions and workplace practices, determines possible barriers to effective work practices and communication, and makes recommendations for addressing identified problems. Not only will it help retain top performers, it provides a blueprint of what attributes to look for in applicants.

Sample questions might be:

- 1) Are you being compensated fairly?
- 2) Are your benefits comparable to those of the company's competitors?
- 3) Does the company value your work?
- 4) Are you getting the training you need?
- 5) Does open communication exist in the company?
- 6) Do you feel challenged?
- 7) Do your values match those of the company?

You might notice that a culture audit asks questions typically asked during an exit interview! Why wait to ask these important questions after the company has already lost its investment in an employee. Audits uncover potential friction points as well as sources of synergy, and generate possibilities for internal process improvements within the organization. [Trinet.com](http://Trinet.com)

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## Personal development: Why work?

How many people do you know who are happy with their jobs? Perhaps you are one who is working just to survive and make ends meet, deriving little satisfaction from your employment. Those who find fulfillment, joy and contentment in their work do exist, but they are not the majority. One thing is sure: to be fulfilling and ultimately satisfying, work needs a long-range goal and an overall opportunity for personal development.

The many books, articles and reports that address the state of various national workforces testify to the fact that something is fundamentally wrong with the modern approach to working life. Note this comment from an anonymous essay on the Internet: "Work" as we know it tends to make us unhappy because we do so much of it, because it is so repetitive, because we don't get to choose what we do, and because what we are doing is often not in the best interest of our fellow human beings." Many of us could echo that observation.

Of course, a number of factors contribute to the sense of well-being we can draw from our employment. Similarly there are specific causes for the dissatisfaction that workers experience. Identifying them may provide some helpful insight.

### HARD QUESTIONS

Do we have the courage to ask ourselves whether it's possible that people weren't intended to live and work as we do today? Of course, there are implications behind such a bold question; namely, that we did not evolve from a primeval life form but were created by a divine Being. Could it be possible that work has become such a burden today because we are not "working" in the way the One who created us intended?

Let's take a moment to put aside any preconceived notions we might have and explore this line of thinking to see whether there is a relationship between the purpose of human existence and where we are today in terms of work. The Bible simply says that man was created in the image and likeness of God. Religion and the Bible describes the human form but also addresses the purpose of life.

In the first chapters of the Bible God reveals Himself not as a singular entity but in a family relationship-Elohim in Hebrew. In the first chapter of John's Gospel we learn that Jesus Christ was known as "the Word" before He came in human form. As the Word He was with God and He was God. So, long before the earth and human life existed, there were two Beings who have always existed.

Humankind was created to have a physical relationship with God that would develop into an eternal, spiritual family relationship-to become "sons of God," as the New Testament expresses it: "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19). Whereas animals were made after their own kind, man was made after the God kind, a unique creation with a unique purpose.

Having created the physical human form complete with a conscious mind, God gave humans stewardship over the earth. The Garden of Eden was a perfect environment and provided the

training ground for what man was to do as the human population increased and more of the earth's surface was inhabited. Adam and his descendants were given dominion over the various animal life forms. Regarding the environment, he was told to "tend and keep it," or nurture and preserve it.

Humanity was set to work, living as a physical entity. But unlike animals, during their lifetime humans were to take on the mind and character of the One who had created them, to develop in His likeness. To facilitate this development of character, God gave humans work to do and guidelines for how that work was to be performed.

Unfortunately, the story we see in the first few chapters of Genesis is that almost from the very beginning people refused to work in compliance with the way of life God set before them, choosing instead to "do their own thing." Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden and allowed to decide for themselves the way of life they wanted to live. Mankind had refused the fruit of the tree of life, which would have provided a continuing close relationship with the Creator and the environment He had created.

The original concept of work was bound up in a family-oriented relationship with the environment such that we could realistically refer to it as a way of life. God intended work to be part of our way of life. Our efforts were to be directly tied to the support and development of His family through stewardship of land and animals.

In modern parlance we would say we are to take ownership, or responsibility, for the environment in which we live and for the positive development of home and family. This supplies purpose to human efforts and results in a great sense of fulfillment.

Ownership is a vital key to worker satisfaction. In the context of our personal labor; it means we will be doing things that we feel are productive and useful. This can be accomplished to some degree even in today's urban environment.

Obvious examples are starting our own business or working in a small partnership where the various tasks undertaken lead to the construction of the whole. If we look at the Garden of Eden model, the key to worker satisfaction would be ownership of land. Not just a suburban lot, but land enough to require the effort of all family members in providing for the family unit. In the original model there was no urbanization or specialization as we know it today.

Ownership of land creates a bonding by virtue of economic interest. It also ensures direct benefit for any work invested, as well as the emotional reward of seeing results for personal effort. It helps build loyalty as the

effort of each member of the family contributes to the greater whole rather than merely to self-fulfillment.

### PURPOSE-DRIVEN WORK

For physical and mental endeavors to be meaningful and rewarding, they must have purpose. A goal beyond sustaining physical life can inspire and motivate to great accomplishments. But when the horizon becomes blurred and the peaks of success appear an impossible dream, there is no reason to strive to do better.

We become bogged down in mediocrity and too easily satisfied. Temporary pleasures seem to be all that is left within reach, so we busy ourselves with comforts and enjoying life and leave altruistic pursuits to others.

Unfulfilling jobs sap our energy and imagination. But even the most menial of tasks, if performed for a purpose and with a worthwhile end in view, are rewarding.

Much of the satisfaction we can draw from work springs from our mental approach and our focus on the future. Most in the Western world are working toward the goal of a comfortable retirement. Sadly, by the time they get there they may find that their health has broken down and their families have disintegrated.

Is it a coincidence that as we grow older (and, we hope, wiser), our thoughts tend to turn to getting away from the rat race of suburban life? Our perspective shifts and our families become more important to us. The Harry Chapin song "Cat's in the Hat" comes to mind. There were planes to catch and bills to pay, and too late he discovered that his son had grown up to be just like him.

Our children will grow up and inherit the moral values we inadvertently or deliberately instill in them. They will either work hard with goals in mind for themselves and their families, or they will struggle aimlessly through life and wonder whether it's really worth the effort.

Teaching the importance of hard work and perseverance is valuable, but helping our children establish the goal of building character, helping others and working toward an eternal future is priceless.

Perhaps we should not wait until we are old to begin to address the fundamentals of making our working life happy, fulfilling and supportive of family-oriented values. It will require a reassessment of our attitude toward work and work-related values, placing work where it was intended to be in the first place, within the original value system and in a broad family context. -free-articles-zone.com

## Confidentiality and your employees

No company wants to lose its valuable sensitive information to a competitor, potentially creating negative client situations and compromising future growth. The vigilant protection of company information is an issue that needs to be discussed with employees during their employment and, more especially, as they are leaving your employ. What practical and legal steps can you take to guard your company's secrets?

### Start at the beginning

The best time to have an employee agree to confidentiality obligations is right at the time of hire. Managers (or HR professionals) should have employees sign a confidentiality agreement unless they have already signed a document with confidentiality provisions during the interview process.

At times, it may also be desirable for a company to require stronger post-employment restrictions, such as non-compete obligations, on a key hire. In most states, non-compete agreements are fairly routine. For example, in California, the conventional wisdom is that enforceability is limited, which is generally true. There is, however, some belief for enforcing agreements that do not actually prevent that restricted employee from earning a living within his or her field.

### What are trade secrets, really?

The core of confidentiality obligations is the protection of trade secrets. While many states have statutes to help protect trade secrets, specific confidentiality provisions in the terms and conditions of employment re-enforce those protections, calls them to the employee's attention, and binds the employee to them using the employee's signature.

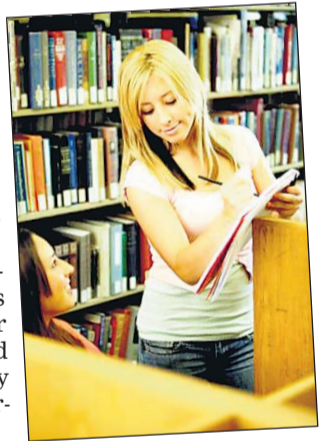
A trade secret may consist of any formula, pattern, device, or compilation of information which is used in one's business and which gives the employer an opportunity to obtain an advantage over its competition. Generally, a trade secret is a process, device, or information intended for continuous use in the operations of the business.

Trade secrets can include customer lists, pricing structures, business strategy, marketing plans, financial information, product development strategy, intellectual property, current and anticipated research and development, and inventions. Following are some questions that should clarify if you're not sure if some information, a device, or a formula constitutes a trade secret:

- ▶ Is the information known outside of the employer's business?
- ▶ Is the information known by employees and others involved in the business?
- ▶ What measures does the employer take to guard the secrecy of the information?
- ▶ What is the value of the information to the employer and to the competitors?
- ▶ What is the amount of effort or money expended by the company in developing the information?
- ▶ How easily or readily could the information be obtained by a competitor through an independent source?

Note that trade secrets need not be technical in their nature. Market-related information and documents may be deemed to be trade secrets, and thus confidential.

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## The Importance of outplacement services

Trimming a workforce is difficult. Both managers and employees are bound to experience emotional turbulence as they prepare to go their separate ways. To make this painful process easier, your company may want to look into hiring an outplacement service. Providing this thoughtful benefit to terminated employees can help them transition into the next phase of their careers.

### What should you look for?

A good outplacement service will visit your company and provide on-site workshops and individual consultations. It should also provide specific functions to participants for an extended length of time, to include:

- Customized assessments
- Job search planning
- Professional help with resumes and cover letters
- Coaching on particular professional topics of interest
- Administrative support
- Help with research materials
- Financial consulting
- Entrepreneurial consulting
- Videotaping and mock interviews

Information on online services, recruiting firms, and job fairs  
Helping terminated employees get the



most from outplacement

The outplacement process does not produce automatic results. Employees will get out of it what they put into it. For some workers, outplacement is a futile exercise that only prolongs their transition from one employer to another. However, many individuals benefit from outplacement as a means to redefine career goals and find other employment.

Encouraging a positive relationship between employees and the outplacement service

Advise employees to trust the process. Outplacement might be a completely new experience for them and it can help them find the work they really want.

Encourage them to participate in the process. Employees shouldn't expect an outplacement consultant to do all the work; it's up to them to find the right job.

Help them articulate their thoughts, feelings, and ideas to their outplacement counselor. Employees need to be assertive so the counselor will understand how best to help them.

Ask them to network with other employees using the outplacement service. Encourage them to form a community.

Remind them to make and keep appointments with their counselor and any job contacts that they find.

Suggest that they map out what they want to accomplish with their counselor, and bring a list of specific questions to each meeting.

Recommend that they set a rigorous schedule for themselves and follow it. It's important for job seekers to keep a full calendar.

Most importantly, remind them to take action. They shouldn't wait for others to take the first step.

Companies can assist the process by working in tandem with the outplacement service. Install a company bulletin board with advertisements for job openings at other companies. Designate some office space for terminated employees, giving them free use of personal computers, Internet connections, telephones, fax machines, and photocopiers.

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