

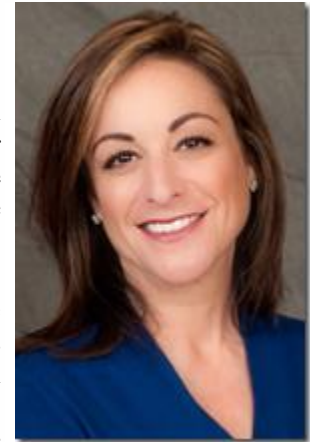
Business Veteran Advice

Back to Basics: Strategic Plan Must Drive Organizational Culture

By Megan J. Davis
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What makes an organization a great place to work, motivates employees and decreases turnover? The best run organizations are inevitably those with a clear sense of mission and goals that are shared by everyone from the C-Suite to the mailroom. There's never any guesswork because those shared values permeate every corner of the office and inform the activities of every employee every day.

The unfortunate reality, however, is that in most companies, employees aren't able to easily articulate the big-picture vision and its goals, simply because this information was never shared with them in a meaningful way. Often, these vital drivers are hoarded in a bookcase in the C-Suite, in a binder marked Strategic Plan. We need to remind ourselves constantly that vision and mission and goals are meant to be shared, discussed often and used as a measurement of individual and organizational success. Absent that sharing, they lose their power to transform the organization's culture and keep it on track.



How will you get your company off the dime and transition to a more dynamic and unified effort? Dust off that Strategic Plan and help your employees understand how what they do directly impacts the organization's ability to achieve its vision. If they understand how their own role is important and what they do, individually and collectively, really matters, they will be motivated to go the extra mile because they now share ownership of the vision.

If this sounds like a relatively easy fix, it is – but it's a fix that requires real clarity on the part of management and the willingness to spend quality time with staff members at every level. And it doesn't stop with the "telling." Leadership must also demonstrate their own commitment to the goals by regularly modeling the kinds of behaviors that add value to the work and advance the organizational agenda. It's important to ensure that the values-based approach is tied closely to the hiring process and regularly reinforced through the performance review and merit increase/bonus system.

Yes, there are costs in time and effort attached to doing business this way, but the payout is priceless. Once vision-sharing is underway, you should begin to see signs that the organization's values are alive and well, and that morale and productivity are starting to build a new momentum.

Now, ask yourself, "Where is the love?" If employees are fairly compensated for their work, it's a given that long-term engagement and recognition for good work trumps pay hikes every time. Appreciation lasts longer than the temporary boost a raise provides because most people really want to do a good job, be a part of a winning team and work in an environment that fosters professional growth and intellectual challenge. If the CEO encourages staff to learn new skills that move them closer to excellence in their careers and in their lives and can genuinely recognize individuals for the specific value they contribute, this reinforces the reality that everyone wins if the organization succeeds. As a result, respect, trust, loyalty and employee retention will remain at all time highs.

As the CEO of an Arizona-based consulting business, I'll summarize these thoughts in a way I hope is clear and memorable as you begin to tackle your own organizational challenges: To bring the herd in, all the cowboys need to drive the stock in the same direction. Each can have his own swagger and style, but ultimately they've got to work together. Even one lone ranger can significantly hamper the group's ability to

achieve its vision and goals, and it's the trail boss' job to see that everyone has bought into the end goal and the way in which the goal can best be achieved. That's what cultural alignment is all about.

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