Solving Talent Attraction &
Retention Challenges with

COMMITMENT TO A PEOPLE-CENTRIC CULTURE

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 If you're reading this, you already understand that a healthy workplace culture and effective leadership are more than just corporate jargon; they're the pillars of a successful, sustainable business. But how do you move from understanding to action? How do you navigate the complexities of human behavior, organizational growth, and the ever-changing business landscape to build a culture that not only attracts top talent but also brings out the best in them? This guide will answer these questions and more, offering you a comprehensive roadmap for building a culture of excellence and developing courageous leaders who inspire.

INTO THE STORM MENTALITY

Why the Buffalo?

In a world that often encourages us to take the path of least resistance, the buffalo symbolizes a transformative mentality. It's about creating a culture where challenges are not avoided but embraced, where problems are not deferred but solved and where the status quo is not accepted but questioned. This mindset can serve as the cornerstone of your organizational culture, setting the tone for how challenges, both big and small, are met. It's about fostering an environment where courage, quick decision-making, and direct engagement with challenges are the norm, not the exception.

What Do We Mean by "Storms"?

- **Addressing Misaligned Behavior:** Taking the uncomfortable step to address behaviors that don't align with core values, even when it feels like it's not your place to do so.

- **Letting Go of a Toxic Top Performer:** Making the tough decision to part ways with a high-performing but toxic employee, even when you fear that results may initially suffer.

- **Admitting & Owning Mistakes:** Taking ownership of mistakes not only builds trust but opens the door for others to be honest about their own.

Self-Reflection: Recognizing Your Storms

- **The "If Only" Moments:** Have you ever caught yourself thinking, "If only I'd dealt with that sooner, it wouldn't have escalated into such a big issue"? These are the storms you knew existed but chose to avoid, letting them grow into hurricanes.

- **Fear-Induced Procrastination:** Are there challenges you've put off tackling because the fear seemed overwhelming, only to later realize that the situation wasn't nearly as bad as you'd built it up to be in your mind?

Take the Next Step

Let this guide serve as a catalyst for courage. Use it to inspire you to charge into your storms, to face challenges head-on, and to transform them into opportunities for growth and improvement. Remember, unlike other animals, the buffalo doesn't avoid the storm; it charges into it, knowing that facing challenges head-on is the quickest path to blue skies.

THE DELEGATION DILEMMA & OTHER CHALLENGES: WORKING 'ON' THE BUSINESS, NOT JUST 'IN' IT

One of the most common challenges tree care owners face is the struggle with delegation. It's not that they don't understand its importance; it's that they often fail to implement it effectively or simply don't believe it to be possible. This results in owners working 'in' the business—caught up in the day-to-day operations—rather than working 'on' the business to drive growth and innovation.

We operate on and implement something called The Entrepreneurial Operating System® , which provides a framework and tools to make effective delegation possible. But let's be clear: the tools are only as good as the hands that wield them. It's ultimately up to the leader to take this necessary risk. If you believe people will rise to the challenge and give them the opportunity to do so, they often will. The reverse is also true.

Recommendation:

- Read "Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business" by Gino Wickman, which outlines the EOS® system.
- Do the Elevate & Delegate exercise to get better clarity on where you should be investing time.

> "The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."
> - Theodore Roosevelt

Simplify. Delegate. Predict. Systemize. Structure.

Cross-company and internal development programs are a great way to demonstrate your commitment to the long-term growth of team members, especially if they have the desire but lack the experience or skills.
Pro Tip: there are usually state funded grants available for this type of thing.

Primary Channels for Culture to Thrive

- *Onboarding & Training*
- *Internal Communication Platforms*
- *Recognition & Rewards*
- *Team Building Experiences*
- *Leadership Development*

Concerns About Succession Planning

Succession planning is often a topic that leaders avoid, either because it forces them to confront their own replaceability or because it seems like a distant issue that can be deferred. However, the reality is that succession planning is a critical aspect of long-term business sustainability. It's not just about identifying who will take the reins when you step down; it's about developing a deep bench of talented individuals who can step up to various leadership roles within the organization.

Dealing with Long-term Yet Underperforming Employees

Long-term employees can be a valuable asset, bringing institutional knowledge and experience to the table. However, longevity doesn't always equate to high performance. Addressing underperformance in long-term employees can be a sensitive issue, fraught with emotional and even legal complexities. Yet, avoiding the issue can send the wrong message to other employees and create a culture of complacency.

Action Point: Address underperformance head-on, even if it's uncomfortable, to maintain a culture of accountability and excellence. Avoiding this is a disservice not only to your other team members, but to the under-performing employee as well.

BUILDING A PEOPLE-CENTRIC CULTURE: THE PATH TO ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS IN THE TREE CARE INDUSTRY

Indicators of a Strong Company Culture

- **Alignment with Values:** When employees can see how their work aligns with the company's values, they are more engaged and motivated.
- **Employee Engagement:** High levels of engagement often translate into increased productivity and lower turnover rates.

A strong company culture manifests in various ways, but perhaps the most telling is how employees behave when no one is watching. Do they go the extra mile? Do they treat each other with respect and kindness? These are the indicators of a culture that not only attracts top talent but also brings out the best in them.

Key Pillars of Company Culture

1. **Purpose and Values:** A strong culture is built on a clear sense of purpose and values. These aren't just words on a wall; they should guide every decision and action within the organization.
2. **Communication and Transparency:** Open communication is the lifeblood of a healthy culture. It's not just about sharing good news or financial reports but also about being honest when facing challenges.
3. **Leadership and Empowerment:** Leaders set the tone for the culture. Their behavior, decisions, and interactions with the team serve as a model for what is acceptable within the organization.
4. **Employee Well-being:** A people-centric culture prioritizes the well-being of its employees, offering not just good compensation and benefits but also opportunities for growth and development.

THE NUANCES OF EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING: ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

When we talk about employee well-being, it's not a one-size-fits-all scenario, especially in a multi-generational workforce. Different people have different motivations and priorities. For some, an owner's effort to offer work flexibility—enabling someone to occasionally pick up their kids from school or attend a sporting event—could mean much more than higher wages or additional mental health benefits.

We're quick to dismiss flexibility requests in this industry due to the nature of the job. But those who find creative solutions to these challenges differentiate themselves from the competition. The key is, you don't know unless you ask, and you shouldn't assume. Make intentional efforts to build authentic trust, show vulnerability, and get to know their aspirations. It's an understated yet paramount piece of the puzzle.

Actionable Insight: Conduct regular one-on-one meetings to understand individual needs and motivations. A study done by one of our partners, HR Signal, saw that the largest positive change in retention risk came from "stay interviews" or informal well-being and job satisfaction checks.

Book Recommendation: "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team" by Patrick Lencioni.

"Trust is knowing that when a team member does push you, they're doing it because they care about the team."
- Patrick Lencioni

THE CONSEQUENCES OF INACTION IN THE TREE CARE INDUSTRY

Stagnation and Lack of Innovation

When leaders are too involved in the day-to-day tasks, they often neglect the bigger picture, leading to stagnation and a lack of innovation. In today's fast-paced business environment, this can be fatal. Companies that don't innovate get left behind.
Action Point: Encourage networking events, offer incentives for those who take ownership to innovate, and other methods of continuous improvement.

Weak Organizational Culture

A weak organizational culture can lead to a myriad of problems, including low employee morale, high turnover rates, and even financial losses. It's like a ship with a hole; it might not sink immediately, but it's taking on water and will eventually go under if not repaired.
Action Point: Don't assume, ask. Validate your thoughts through frequent informal touch bases and employee feedback surveys.

High Turnover Rates

High turnover rates are a symptom of deeper issues within the organization, such as a toxic culture or lack of career development opportunities. The costs of high turnover are not just financial but also include the loss of institutional knowledge and the negative impact on team morale.
Action Point: Implement employee retention strategies that focus on career development and job satisfaction.

OPENNESS AND HONESTY: THE CORNERSTONES OF A HEALTHY CULTURE

Providing Clear, Kind, and Direct Feedback

Another way leaders factor into both retention and a healthy culture is their ability, or lack thereof, to promote an open and honest environment. This includes explicit permission for employees to offer upward criticism and candor, so long as it's done with emotional intelligence and delivered with a combination of respect and kindness.

Once that expectation is set, it's far easier, but still just as important, for leaders to communicate with extreme clarity, directness, and compassion. In the healthiest organizations, accountability is something that's recognized by all as a service to others. Nobody should ever have to guess where they stand or how they're doing. While feedback should happen in-the-moment whenever possible, that doesn't replace the need for quarterly conversations or annual reviews.

The best leaders master giving feedback in a way that combines compassion with directness, while many other well-intentioned leaders fall into 'Ruinous Empathy', where they hold back criticism or pull punches, failing to realize that rather than an act of kindness this is actually a disservice to your people. If you care about someone, it is your responsibility to challenge them directly.

Action Point: Read "Radical Candor" by Kim Scott

> **"If you don't genuinely care about the people you're leading, you will not be an effective leader. You might hit your numbers for a while, but over time, you will fail." - Kim Scott**

THE TANGIBLE BENEFITS IN THE TREE CARE INDUSTRY

Improved Employee Engagement

Engaged employees are the backbone of any successful organization. They are not just present but passionate about their work, leading to higher productivity and better customer service.

Increased Retention Rates

By focusing on culture and leadership development, you're not just making your employees happier; you're also making them more likely to stay. This is crucial for maintaining the long-term health of your organization.

Enhanced Productivity

A happy employee is a productive employee. By creating a work environment where people can thrive, you're setting your organization up for success.

Better Customer Service

Happy employees lead to happy customers. It's a simple equation but one that many organizations find hard to balance. Investing in your employees is indirectly investing in your customer service.

YOUR FIRST STEP INTO THE STORM

Creating a healthy workplace culture and effective leadership is not a one-time effort but a continuous process. The key to long-term success lies in your ability to identify and courageously charge into your "storms," transforming challenges into opportunities for growth and improvement.

At CultureShoc, we're committed to helping you adopt this "Into the Storm" mentality. Our real-world approach, follow-through accountability, and authenticity are designed to make a tangible difference in your organization. That's why we offer a "Results or Nothing" promise. We're not just here to guide you; we're here to journey with you, charging into those storms to reach clearer skies faster.

By embracing this guide's principles, you're taking the first step toward transforming your organization into a place where people are excited to come to work and are empowered to contribute their best every day.

To keep sharpening your leadership tools, check out the Into The Storm Leaders podcast on the CultureShoc YouTube channel or wherever you already listen to your favorite podcasts.

Differentiate Your Business
With Better Culture

So maybe I'm not technically in tree care, but this past year I fell in love with the industry. TCIA has been a client of ours for a few years now and earlier in 2023 I had the opportunity to present at their Winter Management Conference in Barbados. Since then, I've learned more about the industry from owners, joined a peer group with those in the industry, and recently participated in Saluting Branches and will be presenting at TCI Expo 2023. It's the authenticity of the people that make up this industry that keeps me coming back. I hope you found value in this article and that it serves as a catalyst for you to do something differently in pursuit of strengthening your workplace culture!

Joe Jurec

Discover, Engage, and Grow Leaders

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