

7 Ways to Protect Your Company Culture Through Change and Growth

Overview Terminology

Definition

“Why is culture so important to a business? Here is a simple way to frame it. The stronger the culture, the less corporate process a company needs. When the culture is strong, you can trust everyone to do the right thing.” - [Brian Chesky](#), Co-founder and CEO of Airbnb

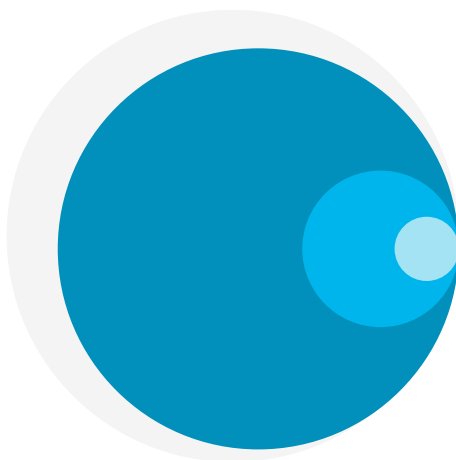
From renting out an air mattress to make ends meet in 2007 to welcoming 10 million guests and a valuation of [\\$10 billion](#) in 2014, we trust one of the founders of Airbnb to know a thing or two about the importance of building a great company culture and protecting it through all forms of growth and change.

A strong core culture is not a cleverly-worded mission statement, a freshly-remodeled conference room, or a savvy marketing campaign.

It's an environment where leadership means support and trust. Where workers feel empowered to carry their culture and their company through change and growth. It attracts and onboards new hires who quickly align to further an organization's mission. It reduces turnover and increases productivity.

Ultimately, culture helps employees succeed so they can help the business succeed.

What do executives think about corporate culture?



- 86% of respondents viewed corporate culture as vital to business success
- 28% report they understand their organization's culture
- 12% believe their companies are driving the “right culture”

In a [year-long study](#) of CEOs and CFOs in the U.S., over half said corporate culture influenced productivity, creativity, profitability, value, and growth. Nearly all believed improving their corporate culture would improve their company's value.

Deloitte's [2016 Global Human Capital Trends](#) found that 86% of respondents viewed corporate culture as vital to business success.

Different personalities and positions will come and go. An influx of employees means you might not be able to have impromptu all-hands meetings as easily as you used to. Perhaps you'll even need to change locations.

The flux and change and growth is not bad. It's quite the opposite, really.

However, if you're not prepared to protect your company's core culture and infrastructure, you could risk running out of "[secret sauce](#)" and driving away the loyal personnel who got you where you are today.

Whether it's a shake up in management, a major change in business direction, or even going public—strong, smart, and proactive company leaders from every department should take these 7 steps to define, exemplify, and protect their company's core culture through change and growth.

7 Ways to Keep Your Core Culture Strong

1. Be Precise

Let's just put it this way, if you don't make the concerted effort to define your company culture—someone else, or something else, will.

Do you want to risk walking into the office one day wondering what happened to the culture that attracted you and your colleagues to your company in the first place?

If not, then it's time to precisely outline your core company culture.

The foundation of your culture is built on your [mission, vision, and values](#). Let's revisit them now to make sure they're easy to understand, easy to access, and aligned with where you want your culture to be.

- **Values** guide what everyone at your company agrees to believe and defines how they'll act, feel, and work. They're a major building block of your core culture and should help guide daily actions and decisions. When clarifying values, consider what you're passionate about—is it collaboration, innovation, the environment?
- Your **vision** describes what kind of organization your company aspires to be throughout all changes and growth. It should serve as motivation and guidance for employees.
- Your **mission statement** briefly tells the world, and your internal team, the reason your company exists. When defining it, ask yourself: "What is this company here to do?"

Where some companies go wrong is committing to these values on paper without ever really believing

or practicing them. Therefore all they are is fluffy words instead of guiding principles of core company culture.

This lack of authenticity can be felt by employees, applicants, and customers. And if your culture isn't realigned or you don't start trying to live up to your values, there won't be anything to keep your company on track when hard decisions or changes inevitably arise.

Just look at [Enron's](#) Code of Ethics, which outlined their "commitment" to respect, integrity, communication, and excellence. Funny, "fraud" doesn't seem to be one of their core cultural tenants, but it's definitely what they'll always be remembered for.

Do you think it was part of [Volkswagen's](#) mission to cheat on emissions tests? Did [Wells Fargo](#) aspire to a culture of such intense sales pressure that their staff was caught creating millions of fraudulent bank accounts?

These are examples of what happens when culture is no more than a PR play, your mission statement is left to languish in some dusty document, and your values aren't used to guide changes when growth occurs.

2. Prioritize Culture From the Beginning With Onboarding

[Culture](#) is "... easily felt, but sometimes difficult to describe."

Nowhere is that statement felt more deeply than in the HR department where new hires are just getting onboarded and learning more about their chosen place of work.

Think of onboarding a new hire like raising a child: At first, they're going to be a little discombobulated and seeking out someone to show them the ropes.

The early days when new hires are still orienting themselves has proven to be a time of [increased adaptation of new roles, goals, and values](#). This is when cultural training will make the most lasting impact.

If new hires experience a well-planned onboarding experience where knowledge is shared effectively and each team member they're handed off to is prepared and cares about their success—they'll innately absorb your core cultural tenets of communication, teamwork, and employee success.

And if they feel like a spinning top through an inefficient process racked with poor communication? Well, you get the picture.

Across jobs, the cost of replacing an employee is clustered between 10 and 30 percent of an employee's annual salary.

Range of estimates of the cost of turnover from 30 case studies spanning 1992 to 2007



source: <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/CostofTurnover.pdf>

[Effective onboarding programs](#) that put an emphasis on instilling company culture increase retention rates by as much as 25 percent. [When replacing an employee](#) can cost anywhere from 5.8 to 213 percent of their salary, it literally pays to pay attention to strong onboarding techniques.

Graph showing how the cost of replacing an employee is between 10 and 30 percent of an employee's annual salary

Need more tips on making sure new hires become productive quickly, feel aligned with your team and your culture, and how the heck your HR teams is supposed to pull off all this strategic onboarding while still performing vital daily tasks?

We've got you covered. Check out our [6 steps to instilling company culture in your new hire onboarding process](#).

3. Set Benchmarks, Make Measurements, Take Action

Who better to help you understand how your company culture is doing than those who live and work within it every day?

Former product manager at HubSpot [Karen Rubin](#) acknowledges that measuring culture is a tough task—but one that's totally worth it in order to identify employee satisfaction levels and establish a baseline to help keep your core culture on track.

HubSpot uses surveys and interviews to find out what people love and don't love quite so much about their company culture.

They even implemented internal [Net Promoter Score \(NPS\)](#) questionnaires to ask employees, instead of the customary customers, whether they'd recommend working at their company to a friend—and why or why not.

The 1 to 10 rating system that's used to calculate NPS helps quantify employee loyalty.

After your first round of collecting feedback, you'll know which items employees care about so you can set benchmarks against which to test future surveys.

Keep questions that are most relevant to these benchmarks as similar as possible to ensure consistency and accuracy over time.

Here are some questions the [HR pros at Insperity](#) recommend for a culture questionnaire:

- How likely would you be to recommend working at [your company] to a friend? Why or why not? Is your opinion valued?
- How many times in the past three months has your supervisor recognized you for something done well?
- Do you have the resources and tools you need to do your job?
- Do you feel like your manager listens to you?
- Do you feel like your benefits are fair and marketable?
- Are you satisfied in your job?

If you find employees are worried about experiencing repercussions for their honest feedback, be sure to note that concern and offer a way to communicate anonymously. If employees aren't interested in participating in feedback at all—that sounds like a red flag of mistrust or apathy that you should address immediately.

A commitment to setting benchmarks about your company's feelings on your core culture doesn't just stop there. Now you've got to do something with all those results.

By falling short here, you could cause your team to doubt your values or underscore any negative feelings they may have already been dealing with.

4. Exemplify Adoption From The Top Down

No matter how much you rely on your team for feedback, it will still be the leadership team that needs to, well, lead your company and your culture to grow with grace.

Those in managerial positions must be committed—and empowered!—to live by your company's values to set a positive example for both incumbent employees and new hires.

[Now is the time to ask yourself](#) if your leadership team is a good model of your values, if they're able to inspire action from their subordinates, if they are attracting like-minded job applicants, and if they're

always motivating themselves and others to do better.

Once you're confident in the ability of your leadership team to exemplify great core culture, try these five steps the [engagement and culture experts at 6Q](#) took at their own company to get that core culture adopted from the top down:

Go (Very) Public

Shout about your culture. Outline it in the employee handbook. Publish it on your company website. Print it on posters for your walls. Print it on posters for your client's walls.

This is not only great for accountability but it sends the message that you believe in your core culture and you won't be giving up on it anytime soon.

Discuss Culture Weekly

Weekly all-team meetings are a great way to make sure a growing organization still feels like a cohesive unit. But instead of dismissing right after all the usual business has been handled, take a few minutes to recognize an employee for living the culture or asking someone to give an example of a way they or a colleague aligned with your mission that week.

Revisit Values in Two-Way Performance Reviews

Performance reviews should be two sided: Your employees should be invited to grade your performance and give feed on how you have aligned with company culture.

Use Values as a Recruitment Tool

Your culture should be featured front and center in any ads your running for new employees.

When you get a potential hire in the office, your HR team should be sure to explain your values and ask them how they've exemplified these values in their own lives.

Careful consideration must go into whether a candidate aligns with your core culture before they can go any further in the hiring process.

Include Cultural Learning in Onboarding

You never get a second chance to make a great impression of your core culture on a fresh new hire.

Your HR team should specifically focus on core culture in their standard onboarding procedure. Even the newest employees should understand what you value, know what isn't acceptable, and have examples for putting your culture in action.

[Click here for more tips](#) on juggling culture-centric onboarding with the growing lists of tasks for which HR teams are responsible.

5. Clear the Path for Communication and Feedback

Even in a large, highly-structured, and widely-dispersed company in which strategy directives are handed down from executives—there should always be room for [communication and feedback](#).

Every employee should feel comfortable raising issues, making suggestions, and sharing feedback on how they think the company culture is working.

Pay special attention to remote workers, new hires, and loud dissenters. These are groups who are at the highest risk of feeling isolated and may feel the most negative impact from change.

And if one of your managers gets wind of unhappy rumblings in any part of the company, **do not** let it go unchecked. If you sit back and hope negative feelings will correct themselves, assumptions will fill the void your poor management created.

Establish full-team [“town hall” meetings](#) where any negative feelings can be brought to light without fear of consequences.

Even if you aren’t able to deliver on every single term from an unhappy employee, just providing opportunities for communication and feedback will show that yours is a culture that doesn’t leave a single employee out in the cold.

6. Don’t Underestimate “Silly” Traditions

From that ugly, feather-covered ornament your family lovingly regifts in the holiday gift exchange to Friday lunch and learns at work—[people love a good tradition](#).

Animation showing Will Farrell and Carell in the show The Office

When you can feel things changing as your company grows, holding on to a few of your most important traditions is a simple way to establish a semblance of stability for those employees who have stood by you for the longest.

And it’s not just old traditions that matter. Over time, new traditions (that align with your culture, of course!) give teams the opportunity to create shared experiences that are important to them—and that bond goes deeper than the values in your employee handbook or any impressive growth metrics ever will.

7. Reinforce Through Recognition

No matter how modest, everyone appreciates recognition from time to time. And the best part is, managers who are good at recognizing that will have a much easier time reinforcing their company’s valuable culture in the midst of change.

An employee engagement survey by the Aberdeen Group [reports](#) that 95 percent of organizations feel employee recognition improves engagement.

[IBM Analytics found](#) that employees who participate in recognition programs, especially ones that provide rewards for demonstrating core values, report having a better employee experience than those who don’t.

And the well-respected Robert Half International staffing firm [found](#) that **limited recognition the number one reason employees leave their jobs**.

Recognition doesn't just reinforce engagement, it removes ambiguity and provides employees with examples of how they can exemplify the tenants of your core culture in real life.

This chart will help you identify which actions to recognize to reinforce key cultural elements:

If you want...	Then recognize...	Not...
profits	Profitable sales	any sales revenue
teamwork	collaboration	internal competition
quality	process improvement	inspection
effective training	skills used on the job	training time
high performance	results achieved	seniority
problem solving	problems found and solved	problem hiding
knowledge sharing	organizational expertise	individual expertise
leadership	quality of leadership behaviors and decision	a manager's title or position alone
creativity	creative ideas	conformity
aiming high	meeting stretch goals	over-performance
safety	safe behavior	meeting stretch goals
cost containment	reduced spending	keeping within budget
customer service	customer loyalty	lack of companies

source: <https://www.dummies.com/business/human-resources/employee-relations/how-recognition-drives-engagement/>

Your company culture is alive. It's the lifeblood of your organization that runs all the way from how the top brass behaves to how HR onboards a new hire on day one.

Maintaining a strong core culture in the face of growth, change, and digital transformation is not easy. But if you commit to clear goals, regular measurement and reinforcement, trickle-down adoption, open feedback, and everything else we've talked about here today—we believe you'll be able to do just that.

With a determined approach and a purposeful intent to maintain your culture even as business scales, you will enjoy the benefits of an engaged and productive team that will put you ahead of your competition.

It was [Teddy Roosevelt](#) who said "Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

Does your core culture make your work worth doing?