



# Company Culture

## AND ITS INFLUENCE ON YOUR BRAND

by Rachel Downey

This article includes two exercises that can help you identify your culture and its alignment with your Brand.

### CULTURE

*noun: the customs, arts, social institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group; with adj: attitudes and behavior characteristic of a particular social group.*

Many people think of brand in terms of tangibles—logos, websites, brochures, products and other semi-concrete objects. The whole brand picture requires thinking about experiences people have with your brand and those experiences are often with People.

Many companies neglect to address their company culture when moving through a brand process—either celebrating the strengths of their people or identifying and rectifying issues. Small businesses are often remiss to introduce new employees into the fold with an in-depth orientation *see Where Do I Work? Orientation for the New Guy*. Periodic meetings with employees to bring them up to speed with company goals, benchmarks, successes and messaging are also frequently forgotten.

What is it about your company's collective personality that your clients/customers love? What is it about your process or approach or service delivery that keeps them coming back? What, maybe, is turning them off?

The two exercises below can help you pinpoint what it is about YOUR business that makes it unique, from a People point of view.

### EXERCISE ONE: VALUES

A company is a living, breathing, evolving organism. It has a collective conscience. It has values.

Ask employees to list 10 or so values of the company (anonymous is fine). Consolidate and tally which ones have multiple votes. With leadership influence, refine the list down into 6-10 core values that represent how your business operates. Which values are imperative for success? Share them. Today's clients/customers make buying decisions based on aligned value systems and want to know what you stand for. And new employees, especially Generation Yers, want to know what kind of company they might work for. Put your values on your website and incorporate into your orientation.

How does our culture align with our brand and if there are any misalignments, how will we fix them?

### EXERCISE TWO: CULTURE

Those values translate into the way people treat each other within your company and how they treat those who interact with it. How you answer the phone, settle disagreements, give back to your community and move your business forward. Acknowledging your culture is scary because you might have to face some ugly things about your culture that need to be fixed. Fix them. Now.

**When thinking about your culture, some questions to ask might include:**

- How do we work together? Are we collaborative, competitive, siloed? Does that serve us?

*continued*

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- How are people's differences acknowledged?
- How do we talk about each other and talk about our customers?
- How are ideas expressed?
- How is conflict resolved?
- What is the nature of the work ethic? Fast-paced, dynamic, fun and creative, lazy?
- How do our values fit into our culture?
- How does our culture align with our brand and if there are any misalignments, how will we fix them?

Incorporate your Culture Norms into interview questions and your orientation process and update it as it evolves. Maintain it and nurture it. Give it opportunities to grow within each person through training courses and performance review feedback. Appreciate its value.

Employees appreciate feeling included and knowing what is expected of them, not just in terms of tasks, but in terms of attitude and interactions. This doesn't mean they are all Clone Troopers of your business, but that they can further deliver on your Brand Promise within their own personalities. They can honestly determine if they fit into your culture or if they need to look elsewhere. And if they fit, they can be the champions your business because they Believe. They get it. And so will your customers. ■

#### About the Author



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As principal and founder of Studio Graphique, a Branding Consultancy and Environmental Graphic Design firm, Rachel is the resident visionary for the organization and its staff. She has established the philosophy, direction and culture of the firm which is a highly collaborative and creative environment focused on improving life experiences and opportunities for the immediate community and beyond. Rachel holds a BFA in Visual Communication Design from Kent State University and is a graduate of the Cleveland Bridge Builders, a year-long program for aspiring leaders. She has studied at the Gestalt Institute of Cleveland and is certified in Reiki I. Rachel resides in South Euclid, Ohio with her son Simon, 5, and husband Jason, an architect.