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What Every Business Can Learn From Apple: Establish A Winning Culture

There is something every company can learn from Apple—and it has nothing to do with product design. As a company, Apple has established a winning culture. It attracts the brightest employees, which in turn have helped the company attract a loyal following of millions of customers. (Remember the Service Profit Model? I wrote about it here).

Due to its ability to fully engage its core mandates of innovation and creativity, Apple's culture transcends the company's boundaries to create an enterprise value that is greater than most nations.

Apple is not alone. Famous entrepreneurs through the ages have built enduring companies based not just upon their fine inventions, but on the ability to build a culture that attracted and retained loyal employees and satisfied customers.

Wherever there are two or more people aligned together there is a culture. Families and neighborhoods have a known culture. Churches, schools, teams, charities, ethnic groups and nations have cultures. Every business has a culture. I define culture as the behavior or conduct between people. Culture, by nature, is closely linked to the collective character and shared values of individuals who make up a group.

In a business setting, culture defines the essence of the organization. It identifies the emotional temperament and physical interface between all employees. It also spans the interaction of employees with vendors,



Your company will be far more profitable with a winning culture.

customers, investors and media.

I recall with great displeasure and sadness the loss of a major [MarketStar](#) client some years ago due to the poor treatment its leaders received from some of my condescending employees. The client terminated our service contract. The economic loss was in the tens of millions of dollars. Nearly 150 employees lost jobs. Unfortunately, I was to blame even more than several misguided employees. Over time, I had taken for granted the long-standing business relationship and had not paid adequate attention to the client's views or needs.

Our culture, which had been established on the theme of taking care of loyal patrons, had somehow changed to, "It's not about customers; it's about us." In an indiscernible way, we had begun to view ourselves as more important than our clients. As I look back, I note there was also a significant shift in the way employees treated one another. Ill will, contempt, selfishness and greed had become our standard, replacing a more benevolent culture.

We had lost our way and had paid for it. In the midst of self-destruction, we looked at ourselves in horror at what we had become. Sorrowfully, we recognized the wayward drift. We noted, to our chagrin, that our collective personalities had morphed downward.

Prior to our undoing, we had hired leaders and managers who did not share our original culture of teamwork and a client focus. There were heated and frequent debates, confrontations, disagreements and menacing contentions among our employees. A foreign counterculture had slipped under the door and was spreading the seeds of destruction. Stress, sleepless nights and anger became our way of life.

Loyal and dedicated employees who loved our genesis complained, "Alan, we are miserable. We came here years ago to work for you, and have stayed because we loved that culture. Let's return to who we should be."

Over time, we began to correct our missteps and return to the culture that had made us a successful and happy company. The process to change was painful and complicated. It required courage, determination and an unbroken will to make things right. Many leaders and employees were asked to resign; others were terminated. Restoring employee morale and client trust took time. Over the course of several years, the original culture returned and the company has grown beyond our wildest dreams.

What have I learned from this experience? There are three tough lessons I am happy to share:

1. When hiring new employees, it is imperative to clearly describe the culture of the company to every candidate. Be sure every prospective employee understands the conduct and behavioral rules that all employees are expected to honor.
2. I recommend that when the company culture is firmly established it should become non-negotiable. There should be no room to alter or dramatically change a great cultural model. In fact, if an employee chooses not to follow it, I would invite them to find new employment.
3. Finally, if your organization has not established a cultural mandate on how employees behave, I would suggest creating one immediately. Communicate it

regularly and be sure it is closely observed.

Your company will be far more profitable with a winning culture. In fact, its very life may depend on that fact.

For more detailed information I have written an e-book on the *Characteristics of a Successful Entrepreneur* that is available from Amazon or from my personal website at www.AlanEHall.com.

This article is available online at:

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