# 1

# FOR THOSE ABOUT TO ROCK

*"Music is always a reflection of what's going on in the hearts and minds of the culture."*

**- Tori Amos**

**M**ost companies ignore organizational culture. It's not important to them. Business leaders have been conditioned to focus exclusively on strategy and operations, with the hope that a strong culture will eventually be developed once they attain some success. It's totally understandable… and completely wrong.

The reason great brands focus on organizational culture first and foremost is so it will drive the ultimate business success. Focusing exclusively on tactical nuts and bolts will forever keep the company from cultural nirvana— and companies that succumb to this small-time thinking will continue to wallow around in a malaise, constantly pushing the program or strategy-of-the-day to attain any financial success.

Rock star brands understand the difference between the two approaches and seek a higher purpose. They constantly opt for the long-term sustainability of culture versus the limited focus of an annual strategy. As iconic management consultant and writer Peter Drucker once famously put it:

### *"Culture eats strategy for breakfast."*

Drucker was so right. Unlike processes, tool, products and strategies, all of which can be easily copied, culture is unique. So unique, in some cases, that replicating it is too hard for a competitor to even attempt. And that's the advantage. A great organizational culture provides differentiation for consumers and employees alike. And it *should* be hard to copy. But it shouldn't be hard to understand. Therein lies the reason so many businesses ignore culture—they don't understand it.

So, that's where we need to start…understanding what culture is.

I define an organization's culture as simply "a collection of individual behaviors." That's the purest and easiest definition I can think of to really communicate how a brand's culture can be affected.

Some will say that culture is *everything*, while others will insist it is only the outwardly-visible characteristics that truly define the company culture. Claiming that organizational culture is too broad to narrowly define, many won't even try, but then they wonder why their ability to explain it to others—

and it's very existence—tends to be fuzzy. Although I'm in the "culture is everything" camp and do indeed see proof of its existence in every facet of a brand, I have come to believe that all roads lead back to human behavior. Essentially, culture is inherent in the behaviors of a company's employees. Some would like to believe that the culture is defined by a set of behaviors that remain unchanged over time, but they do change because individuals change—they come and go in a brand all the time. Culture change is inevitable. What we want is the *right* culture change.

Surround yourself with the right people, and you'll have the right culture.

I'll share a lot of different elements when it comes to creating a "culture that rocks," many of which may be low-level programs or best practice-driven initiatives that can easily be implemented. But all organizational practices—positive *and* negative—only exist because individuals *make* them happen. Therefore employee behavior will always be home base for us as we journey together toward creating, maintaining, enhancing or even revolutionizing your company's culture.

Remember: culture is only as strong or weak as the employees that collectively make up the heart and soul of the organization.

# 9

# ROCK STARS VS. LIP-SYNCHERS

*"There's a difference between being a poseur and being someone who's so emotionally challenged they're just doing their best to show you what they've got."*

**- Billy Corgan, Smashing Pumpkins**

Whether you're seeking a culture based on great service, a strong team spirit or high-level performance, you're going to have some challenges when you start to implement changes—mainly because culture, as I stated earlier, is a collection of *individual* human behaviors. Regardless of the results hope to achieve, the people you hire and cultivate will determine your ultimate business outcomes. So your obstacles to change can be overcome—just surround yourself with loyal brand ambassadors who have the skills to produce the desired results. If we want great guest service, then we have to find great service-oriented people to deliver it. If we want a high performance culture, then we have to hire high performers who can make it happen.

In Chapters 5-7, I focused quite a bit on the importance of the service deliverer—because I believe that is the secret ingredient to a service-oriented brand's success. When you onboard team members who organically become part of the tribe, who are willing to regularly go above and beyond to strengthen the brand, they take on "rock star" status. They bring the "spectacular" on a daily basis and perform as if they are playing for a packed house. Not because they *have* to, because they *want* to. Hiring and cultivating rock star talent should be the quest of all organizations in search of differentiation.

Unfortunately, the talent pool for almost any position, regardless of the industry, isn't quite what it used to be. Not only are the great ones harder to find, but the labor force is made up of an entirely different kind of animal. Compared to past generations, today's potential employees have different needs, different beliefs and different perceptions about work. Even the coveted top talent that everyone desires—individuals with both high competence and strong character—is often clouded with excess and unwanted traits.

Yes, top talent is out there, but like rock stars, they come with baggage. It could be the way they act, the way they look or the way they were brought up. However, today's potential workforce *is* ripe with talent just waiting to be discovered—perceived "flaws" and all.

# IN SEARCH OF...3C EMPLOYEES

*"It comes down to building your own world out here on the road. It's who you surround yourself with."*
**- Brad Paisley**

Every day, companies are becoming more cognizant of the fact that sustaining an organization's culture is primarily dependent on hiring people who can live and exude it. This drive to hire culturally-sound employees wasn't always a popular approach. In the past, most organizations focused more on a person's ability to do the job, the amount of work experience he or she has accumulated and, as much as it's possible to tell from an interview, the person's general trustworthiness. Culture most likely wasn't a huge factor in the hiring process.

Times have changed. While that criteria is still, as it should be, front and center during the hiring process, there is now a broader acceptance of the importance of "right fit" employees. As I mentioned earlier, there are still many company leaders who do not see or understand the value of culture and will shrug it off as a nice-to-have by-product of the brand, versus a sought-after characteristic, but many others are starting to come around. And if those naysayer leaders were to do a little self-study about the successful companies that are constantly in the news for their brand health—The Container Store, Five Guys Burgers, Whole Foods, etc.—they would notice that their strength isn't solely rooted in their employees' base skill-sets or job experience, but rather in the way those associates have magnificently represented the organizations' values and overall culture.

In a July, 2012 *CNN Money* article, Fortune Management reported on this heightened awareness in corporate boardrooms across the U.S. The article specifically pointed to the rise in Chief Culture Officer appointments. This executive level position is tasked with keeping an eye on the overall culture, especially for those brands that believe culture drives everything the business does. An organization's hiring approach would obviously fall into this position's sphere of influence.

An applicant's ability to perpetuate the company culture is now as critical as any other hiring factor—perhaps even more so in some brands. Apple Computer's co-founder put it this way:

*"Find people who are competent and really bright, but more importantly, people who care exactly about the same things you care about."*

**-** Steve Jobs

Jobs was not discounting the benefits of diversity in an organization's workforce, rather he was singling out the importance of an overall values-match between a company and its employees. He also clearly believed that intelligence and work experience were not enough in his world. This supports the thoughts I shared in Chapter 1 about surrounding yourself with different yet like-minded people in order to positively affect company culture.

Brands today are only as good as the care and attention they put into ensuring that every employee has all three "C"s:

- Competence
- Character
- Culture

It used to be that the first two "C"s were enough, but now you need all three: solid Competence, strong Character and a Cultural fit. All of these are unseen qualities that will not necessarily show up on an application or a resume. Instead, these have to be discovered during the interview and onboarding processes.

# PURPOSE IS INSTRUMENTAL

*"You don't have to be singing about love all the time in order to give love to the people."*

**- Jimi Hendrix**

Loyalty to any single company seems to be a rarity these days. People "job hop" like Cher changes outfits during a show. Internally, employees of today constantly ask, "How does this work in this job specifically benefit me?" If things don't gel with their idea of good quality-of-life—because of the pay, benefits, hours, environment or even the leadership—then they have no problem moving on to greener pastures—because they can.

In the previous four chapters, we focused on how employers can create a culture that rocks for their specific business by understanding what resonates with the new generation of employees. Now we'll take this guitar riff even further and discuss the pivotal role "purpose" plays in an employee's overall attitude toward an organization.

## PURPOSE-DRIVEN & SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS

Purpose, in a business context, can manifest itself in a couple of ways. It might deal with an employee's "big picture" understanding of the company's overall mission, beyond his or her singular role. It might also be philanthropic in nature—maybe the brand goes above and beyond its day-to-day responsibilities to help those less fortunate. Both of these manifestations are important to and widely expected by today's youth.

People are purpose-driven. They naturally want to do meaningful work and grow both personally and professionally. It doesn't matter what type of work they do; people need to know that their work matters.

> **KEY CULTURAL DRIVERS OF TODAYS WORKFORCE:**
>
> **1. Experience-Obsessed**
>
> **2. Identity-Oriented**
>
> **3. Visual Learners with Short Attention Spans**
>
> **4. Technology-Dependent**
>
> **5. Purpose-Driven/ Socially Conscious**

I believe that most people want to contribute to a meaningful cause. They need to clearly understand their roles—how their pieces of the puzzle fit into the grand scheme of the organization. Communicating this cause is a responsibility many employers struggle with. Perhaps the leadership doesn't have

time to talk about it or they don't know how, but my experience in these environments has been that the employers simply see their employees as conduits for getting the work done. After all, the employees are getting paid. Isn't that enough?

It's not. People need more.

If your company's ultimate mission is not communicated up front and discussed on a regular basis, your employees will fill in the blanks and come to their own conclusions, which may or may not align with your own. And sometimes those conclusions can be perceived negatively. Without direction, even really competent and caring employees will do the best they can, yet still not deliver the exact experience you want or your consumers need. The employees aren't to blame. If team members are never taught or motived to aspire for more within the organization, they will surely continue to just "punch the time clock" for you…no more, no less.

Employees need purpose. It is a key cultural driver for today's workforce.

As leaders, this little bit of commitment on our part will help solidify an employee's commitment to the brand. As much as any of the other factors we've discussed so far, purpose is a major part of the driving force behind today's employees…and, eventually, your organization's culture.

# COMMUNICATE LIKE CRAZY

*"I wanted to be in a band that shared ideas and were in it together."*

**- Roger Daltrey, The Who**

The most successful organizations in the world have a shared mindset.

By following the successes of some Fortune 500 companies, I have discovered that, aside from the fact they make more money and command more market share than their competitors, they communicate like crazy to their internal masses…maintaining a strong sense of transparency and ultimately loyalty. In these high-performing organizations, everyone knows the mission. The lowest line-level employee in any of these companies shares the same view on the purpose of the business as the President or Chief Executive Officer does. Additionally, each person knows how he or she fits into that mission.

Communication is key to ensuring that everyone is on the same song sheet. If it's done well and often, your company's internal messaging will create a collective mindset among the team. And *that* is powerful.

## BE LIKE U2

Considered one of the biggest bands on the planet, U2 consists of four members, yet many people do not know the names of the bass guitarist or the drummer. Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr.—the lesser-known musicians in the band—make up the group's critical rhythm section. They certainly don't get the notoriety of the band's other two members, but they are perfectly cool with their roles.

Additionally, Adam and Larry have claimed in interviews that each time they play to a packed arena on tour, they are trying to duplicate *exactly* what they did the night before. The same show, night after night…driven by consistency. They're the steady engines driving the band. Yet, if you listen to discussions with Bono or The Edge—the more well-known, public faces of U2—these two rock stars admit they are trying to do something completely *different* from the night before. They're trying to soar the band to new heights and create something uniquely spectacular with each performance.

With the combination of these two different approaches to performing, all four members of U2 understand both their individual roles and the collective mindset that makes this band one of history's rock treasures. Group members are all on the same page and understand their independent responsibilities while also supporting the ultimate goal of the band: to make some

of the greatest music of all time.

It doesn't matter if you're the brand-new technician at the auto repair shop, the dishwasher at the restaurant, the administrative assistant at a technology giant or the toll attendant on a major highway…everybody has a part to play in the band.