

Newsday

[Small Business: Developing a strong office culture](#) September 7, 2014 3:55 PM
By JAMIE HERZLICH jherzlich@aol.com



Companies looking to improve corporate culture should engage in regular communication with employees, experts say. (Credit: iStock)

Jamie Herzlich



[Jamie Herzlich](#)

Herzlich writes the Small Business column in Newsday.
[bio](#)

Many companies take pride in their corporate culture. Others, well, not so much. A recent survey by Turnstone found that seven out of 10 entrepreneurs are not satisfied with their office culture, and experts say that's not so uncommon.

"Everybody has a culture," explains Jeff Levy, president of Plainview-based Janusian Insights Inc., a leadership and strategy consulting firm. "Sometimes it's just not very good."

Some cultures are carefully cultivated. For example, "Zappos is the poster child of corporate culture," Levy says. Its culture "developed around offering exceptional customer service."

The companies with the strongest cultures have "clarity about what's important in the strategy for growing the company" and the behaviors they want and expect from their people, he notes.

Culture checkup: Seven key areas to look at when assessing your culture are: teamwork, morale, information flow, employee involvement, supervision, meetings and customer service, according to Glaser & Associates Inc., a Eugene, Oregon, leadership development and organizational communication firm. Principals Peter A. Glaser and Susan R. Glaser, co-authors of "Be Quiet, Be Heard: The Paradox of Persuasion" (Communication Solutions; \$18.95), have developed a survey to measure and evaluate these seven aspects of corporate culture.

"Problems arise when people are unaware of the culture they have inadvertently or unintentionally created," says Susan Glaser. Three key questions to ask yourself:

What are the feedback practices within the organization?

What are the engagement practices?

What are the reinforcement practices?

Consider such factors as how people behave toward one another, particularly if they disagree; if there's a way to constructively confront problems; and if it's a closed company or one where information flows.

"A healthy corporate culture has to go beyond the need to know and really focus on the employees' desire to know," says Peter Glaser.

Communication is important, notes Ron Eagar, a partner and COO at Grassi & Co., a Jericho accounting and business advisory firm that was recently named one of the best companies to work for in New York State by the Best Companies Group. "Listen to your employees," Eagar says. "They have a lot of good things to say."

Among the firm's best practice protocols are regular communications with the staff. The firm uses an intranet system to post policy information and updates, and managing partner Lou Grassi holds firm-wide conference calls to discuss current initiatives.

He also takes groups of 10 staffers from different levels to breakfast two to three times a month to garner feedback and suggestions, says Eagar. The firm also has team-building drills and assigns each employee a peer partner and coach for regular mentoring. "It's like a buddy system," Eagar says.

Focus, focus: To hone your culture, develop a strategy or focus for your business, says Levy. One client that wanted to differentiate itself in the market as a product

leader brought employees together at each level to discuss what they had to do to emphasize that competitive edge.

That sort of collaboration and mission helps shape the culture, notes Levy. And it promotes employee buy-in and engagement.

Employee engagement is critical, says Susan Glaser, whose firm created an "Interpersonal Leadership Survey" that helps show how individual leaders and managers are affecting culture. The idea "is to become conscious and aware and to invest time in strengthening the key components of what strong cultures require," says Peter Glaser.

FAST FACT

Most preferred company culture attributes among job seekers:

- *Honesty/transparency
- *Casual/relaxed
- *Family-oriented
- *Friendly
- *Fun

Source: Software Advice Survey