AYP Associates

Winning the hearts and minds of employees

The right hiring strategies, effective training as well as open and inclusive communication are the cornerstones of a great corporate culture, says Annie Yap, *Group Managing Director, AYP Associates*

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I have been through four economic up and downswings over the last twenty years and have picked up a few things along the way on how companies can be built to last.

Each time there is an economic downturn or contraction, companies talk about the value they place on their people and how important these people are to the ability of the company to weather difficult times. They talk about the importance of developing and sustaining positive culture, critical thinking and ingrained belief systems that allow companies and their people to be successful year after year. Yet all these great concepts seem to be forgotten once sales and profits return.

Positive corporate culture is a commitment to a way of doing business and a set of beliefs that is not a by-product of economic cycles. Not what we sell but why we are in business; what is our USP; why we care about the success of our people; why satisfying the needs of our clients is important? If you can't answer these questions, I guarantee you that your employees can't either.

How do we create great corporate culture? The keys are: right hiring, effective training, open and inclusive communication. We all know that people will do what we ask more quickly and positively when we explain to them why. Creating positive corporate culture is the development of a clear vision that defines us and that is ingrained throughout the entire organisation. That's exactly the same for effective corporate culture. Winning the hearts and minds of employees are keys to ingraining the beliefs and achieving the goals that are the basis for corporate culture. It will positively impact people, clients/customers and bottom-line.

Culture is both visible and invisible; some cues and concepts can be readily seen, while others are more elusive. Attire, for instance, is a visual aspect that can set the tone of the office. Casual clothing might convey a comfortable, laid back environment while formal wear might indicate expected attitudes about behavior. Similarly, even office layout and environment transmit company values. A highly modern office with glass walls and plenty of white boards presents an open environment that may be more conducive to collaboration than say, a warehouse that is sparsely decorated. One is not necessarily better than the other, but they certainly embody different values. Mostly, company culture is intangible, though its visible components can't be overlooked.

We can always tell instantly those who are committed to corporate culture and the ones who aren't. Some just want information presented but some ask the important question: What can we do to actually create these positive changes? These are the ones who will win the hearts and minds of their people. They will take the time to develop their cultural identity and give their people the training they need to achieve their goals. Whether it's speeding a product through to development, clearly defining roles and responsibilities, creating expectations and accountability for management and staff, implementing a community service programme, creating a social calendar of events with fellow employees or developing a reward system for helping co-workers, the organisations that invest in creating a positive and powerful corporate culture will always reap rewards that far exceed their investment

Something I noticed about these core values is that they all require willingness and action from the top level. The willingness of management to encourage and support these values and to take the action necessary to make sure they are fully integrated into the way in which business is conducted each and every day. Great corporate culture maybe created at the top but it's not a top down or a bottom up process, it is both. This is very similar to when management finally understands that quality isn't a department but rather an organisational mindset. Management has to allow their people the control to try new ideas and new ways to handle existing situations and their people have to believe that if they reach out and try something new, right or wrong, the company will support them.

When the people within an organisation feel that their best interest is at heart, they work harder, stay longer and are absent less often: the result is higher productivity and profitability. When people are challenged with positive ideals, great corporate culture becomes possible.