

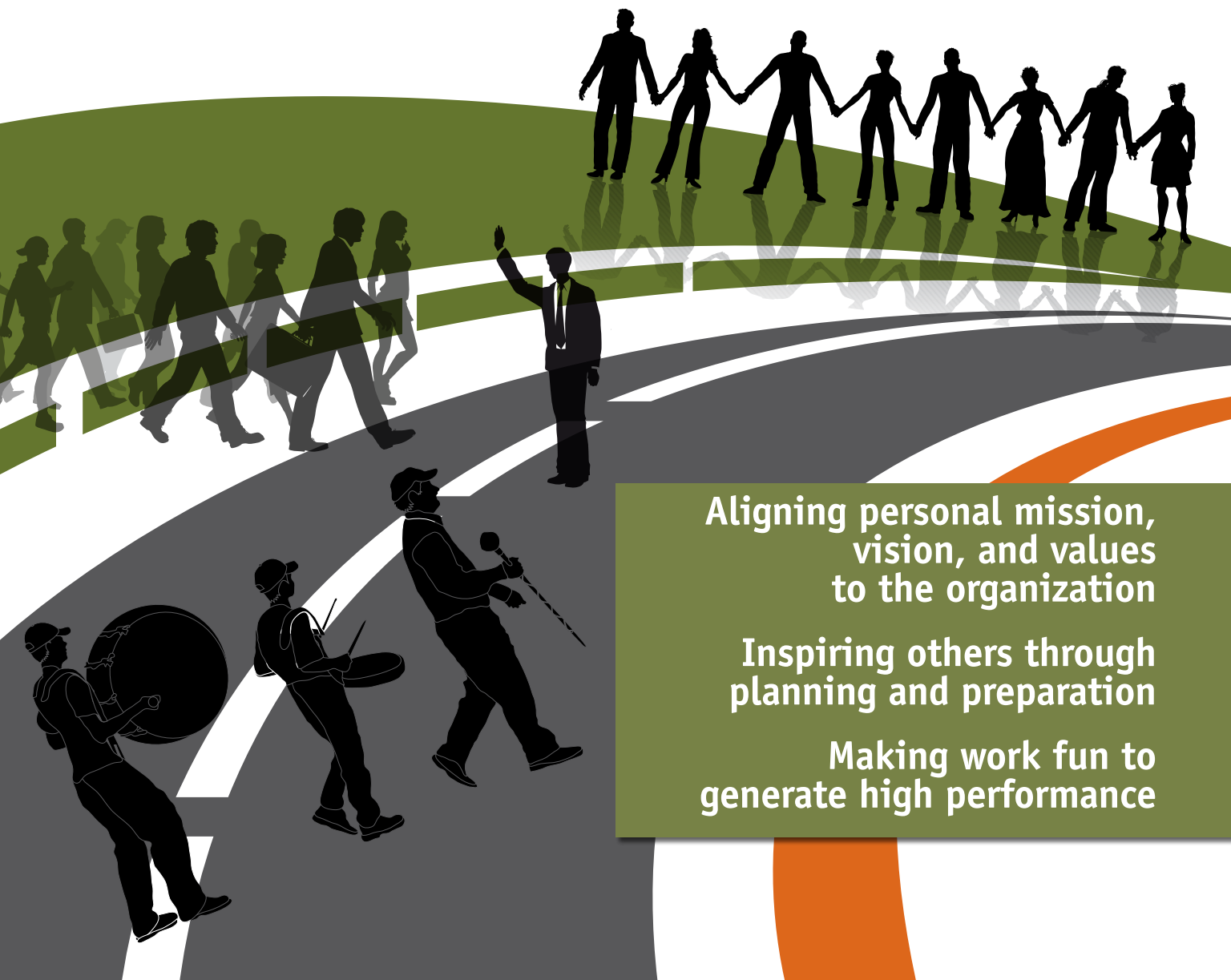
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Discovering Your LEADERSHIP STYLE



Aligning personal mission,
vision, and values
to the organization

Inspiring others through
planning and preparation

Making work fun to
generate high performance

A positive company culture is good for business, and seven tips to create one can increase employees' satisfaction and organizational performance simultaneously.

Can Fun Translate to Funds?

Michael Houlihan and Bonnie Harvey

Every week, it seems, there's a new report issued detailing how millennials' attitudes, habits, and expectations differ from those of their parents and grandparents. A recent study from Accenture says that 60 percent of 2015 graduates revealed that they would take a pay cut to work for a company with a positive social atmosphere.¹ In other words, the newest crop of workers will be looking to join organizations with casual, flexible, but connected, cultures where they'll be encouraged to innovate and where they can have fun as they work!

If your first inclination is to start grumbling, "It's called work for a reason; it isn't supposed to be fun," pause a moment to consider what you already know about positive company cultures. You've probably witnessed the truth that when employees enjoy being at work and are fulfilled by their jobs, they're more engaged and more productive. They work together more smoothly, and they also tend to be more entrepreneurial—as opposed to doing the bare minimum until it's time to punch out for the day. These things hold true regardless of a worker's birthdate.

The fact is, making an effort to meet and even exceed millennials' expectations by creating a positive social atmosphere will impact internal performance, the

quality of your product or service, and the satisfaction of your customers favorably. Because millennials now account for the largest share of the U.S. workforce, taking this approach will put you in a good position to attract the best and brightest new employees.

How can you start shifting your company's culture toward fun and fulfillment? Don't worry; you won't have to put in a basketball court or offer bi-weekly yoga classes in the break room—although employees wouldn't complain! As Barefoot Wine was built from the ground up, several methods and tactics were determined to help create a positive atmosphere. You can use them to make your company an enjoyable place to work and to boost the bottom line, no matter your industry.

Here are seven ways to create a positive company culture that were used successfully at Barefoot Wine and why millennials in particular found them attractive:

- *Inject some fun into daily operations.* You might not be able to find an employee who will admit that being at work is better than a day at the beach, but you still can make your workers' hours on the clock enjoyable. When possible, allow your employees to work in highly collaborative teams and make group work areas available. Give these teams clear goals and be



sure to celebrate when they're accomplished—even if it's only with a toast at the water cooler. You might want to introduce a little friendly competition. Believe it or not, Barefoot made a game out of adding up how many “nos” salespeople heard before a prospective customer finally said “yes!”

- *Strive to create a fun environment.* Barefoot was designed with colorful work spaces with natural light and playful graphics. Employees choose their titles and were encouraged to select wine-related names. For instance, Michael was “Head Stomper,” and Bonnie was “Original Foot” because Barefoot’s now-iconic label was based on her footprint. Other practices included plenty of time off, birthday celebrations, and encouraging a bit of silliness as long as the work got done. All of this helped people to stay fresh and involved and kept morale high.
- *Make sure all employees are treated with respect.* Your new millennial hires will be the low men and women on your company’s totem pole—at least until the next crop of graduates hits the job market. That doesn’t mean they can be treated dismissively or viewed as a cost, however. No one, regardless of age or experience, enjoys coming to work if they aren’t treated with respect and viewed as an important part of the organization.

A good way to show employees respect is to create a know-the-need culture instead of sticking to a need-to-know policy. Practice transparency and share company challenges. At Barefoot, the entire office staff was invited to brainstorming sessions, and discussions were open to everyone. Ideas and solutions often came from completely unexpected sources. The point is that your people are full of intelligence, ideas, and passion, and you may be surprised by the ideas they contribute. Be sure to recognize them for outstanding performance and acknowledge their accomplishments publicly—no matter how long they’ve been on the payroll.

- *Weave philanthropy into your mission.* A 2014 report by consulting firm Achieve revealed that not only do millennials think it’s important to give back to their communities, but 57 percent also would actually like to see their employers offer more company-wide volunteer opportunities.²

It’s a good idea for your company to stand for more than just the mercantile value of its goods and services. All of your employees, regardless of

age, will be proud to work for a company that’s committed to a better world, not just a better product. If some of them share your company’s good deeds on social media, the organization benefits even more.

From the very beginning Barefoot was aligned with several social causes, including local parks, civil rights, and environmentalism. Even when the company was extremely strapped for cash (which was more or less a permanent state of affairs during its first years), bottles of wine were donated, and employees were encouraged to volunteer for partner organizations on company time. Knowing that their work was governed by a higher set of principles gave employees an elevated sense of purpose and increased their engagement, morale, and loyalty. They were truly proud to say that they worked for Barefoot Wine.

- *Offer flex-hours whenever possible.* If your company has a rigid attendance policy, ask yourself why this is the case. Thanks to technology, many of today’s jobs don’t require employees to be in the office, at their desks from nine to five. Believe it or not, almost half of millennials say they’d choose flexibility over pay.³

Employees value the ability to work for companies that give them time to live their lives outside of work when possible. You can earn their loyalty and goodwill by setting up deadline-based timetables rather than strict work schedules and allowing for home office work as much as possible. This also will help your people save gas and commute hours. Think of this shift in terms of paying for performance, not attendance. Barefoot found that when it trusted people to do what had been asked of them and left the *when* and *where* up to them, they were more focused and productive. They thought like entrepreneurs, not clock punchers.

- *Extend appreciation generously and often.* Your employees work hard on your company’s behalf, and they deserve your thanks and appreciation in addition to their paychecks. For example, don’t take it for granted when your employees put in extra hours, land a coveted client, or generate an incredibly well-thought-out proposal. Make sure they know that you have noticed their efforts. For that matter, don’t even take it for granted that they show up every day; bear in mind that as the economy continues to improve, they’ll have more and more opportunities to continue their careers with the competition!

A great way to build team spirit and nurture a positive culture is to send written acknowledgments or make an announcement when a person does something that affects business positively. Barefoot spotlighted each employee's achievements on his/her anniversary with the company. At a staff meeting, an announcement might have been made such as, "Here's what Sandy did to save money for us this year, thereby increasing your bonus. That's why she's such a valuable teammate and why we're thrilled she has celebrated another year with us."

Not only does saying thank you as publicly as possible give individual employees the warm fuzzies, but it also causes the whole team to gain more respect for its co-workers.

- *Create a workplace "family."* Accenture's report also revealed that only 15 percent of 2015 grads prefer to work for a large corporation.¹ Today's employees want to be known and treated as individuals, not merely as human capital or cogs in the proverbial machine. They value kinship, shared values, and being part of a supportive group that has one another's best interests at heart. They want to feel proud of their tribe and look forward to the company of the group with whom they spend the majority of their waking hours.

All of the advice shared in this article will help you to create a workplace family. In addition, setting up a mentorship program is recommended. When a new employee comes on board, try to match him/her up with a more experienced worker who can advise, teach, challenge, and encourage. Mentoring relationships are a win-win. When respected veterans take rookies under their wings, the rookies learn more quickly, make fewer mistakes, and have tangible evidence that their employer cares about their success on a personal level. On the flip side, asking experienced employees to guide new hires shows these veterans that you notice and value their expertise. Overall, mentoring relationships guarantee that valuable institutional knowledge is passed on while knitting your team more closely together.

If you read through the entire Accenture report,¹ you'll notice that 70 percent of the graduates surveyed are still being subsidized by mom and dad, but don't assume that they'll be willing to settle for

less in the workplace for the sake of a few more bucks once they've left the nest. By that time, your competition probably will be in a position to woo them with higher salaries and a positive company culture. Now is the time to get in front of the curve and attract the folks you need to build your company.

Shouldn't work be fun anyway? Isn't that when everyone does the best work? Isn't that the fertile ground that allows the best solutions and out-of-the-box ideas to grow? Isn't that the basis of company loyalty? With the right people in the right environment, your company will be more likely to hit its numbers and be able to provide those increased salaries when mom and dad pull the plug.

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