

# BUILDING POSITIVE COMPANY CULTURE

**Y**OU'VE SEEN THEM. THEY DO EXIST. They are industry professionals who genuinely enjoy going to work every day, contributing to their organizations' greater good. The genesis of their enjoyment is revealed, and it is the result of a positive company culture. And watch out! It's been known to create strong desires to work in partnership with such positive organizations.

## Just What is a Positive Company Culture?

According to leadership gurus, it is essentially a reflection of personalities, beginning with the company's leader. It is the core values this leader establishes as important. It's defining consensus and boundaries of what's acceptable within the organization, and finally, it is constant reinforcing of that culture on all fronts.

"Every company has a culture, whether it's good or bad, it exists," says Dennis Tallon, principal of Quantum Consultants, a firm that specializes in executive coaching, leadership development, and team building.

So we are all a part of a company culture. But is it a positive one?

Building a positive company culture is of utmost importance in today's marketplace, where home building professionals are seeking ways to overcome the challenging effects of the fluctuating housing market, where

companies are even battling layoffs and slower absorption rates. How do you create, let alone maintain positive company culture, and why is it so important?

## Professionals Speak About their Culture

"It starts within the organization with your people as the core, establishing that the attitude of the individuals truly make the difference," says Lita Dirks, principal of Lita Dirks & Co., a nationally recognized interior merchandising firm based in Denver, Colorado. "Eventually, the attitude within extends way beyond our team, and has positive effects, ultimately benefiting our clients and partners."

Lita Dirks & Co.'s core beliefs are that the company's attitude truly does make a difference, and that a mutually respectful team approach creates a seamless experience with their clients. "The main idea is to help bridge gaps and create understandings



Lita Dirks & Co. celebrates a successful model installation with DR Horton-NJ/PA division president, Al Garfall.

Photo courtesy of Lita Dirks & Co.

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**WCI Associates are all smiles as they welcome residents to the Grand Opening of their new Meeting House and amenities at Four Corners in Fishkill, New York.**

*Photo courtesy of Lita Dirks & Co.*

to truly help our clients with their challenges," continues Dirks. "It's with a firm belief that this can really be accomplished."

A team approach is only one part of the equation to create and maintain such a culture at Lita Dirks & Co. Their mix also includes camaraderie to celebrate individual's accomplishments, both professional and personal, and a common desire to help one another with a real sense of selflessness.

Another key ingredient to creating and maintaining a positive company culture is setting the tone and expectations and creating

rituals that the team understands, believes in, and values.

"There are so many ways to build positive company culture, but one of the ways we do at WCI is focusing on the experience we create for our customer," says Gabe Pasquale, vice president and chief marketing officer for WCI Northeast U.S. Region. "The key is to follow professional guidelines, embrace a genuine respect for one another, and most importantly, keep a continual communication going regarding the company's goals and vision, and provide and accept daily feedback amongst associates."

Communication becomes even more valuable during times of uncertainty. To build and maintain a positive company culture in a tough market, it is invaluable to provide clear, and sometimes candid, communication. Stay true to your core values and reinforce what is important to the company.

"Often, people get disconnected and lose the understanding of the company vision and values, mostly because of the lack communication. They don't know where

they stand, they wonder if they are performing and meeting expectations, and eventually begin to drift from the common core values," adds Gabe.

Shaping and influencing your culture through effective communication begins to create value. It starts to reinforce not only how people are managed, but how they are valued. This is where you start seeing the success of a more collaborative environment.

"At Kephart, we periodically go through exercises with the team to ask them what they think the culture currently is, and what it ideally should be. We then make sure that everyone buys into that ideal and follow that by making decisions and planning activities to shape the culture into what we want it to be," says Paul Campbell, president of Kephart Community-Planning-Architecture. "When it comes to culture, it is important to



**A group of KEPHART employees at their annual softball game benefiting Easter Seals.**

*Photo courtesy of KEPHART Community::Planning::Architecture*

always know what you are working toward, to solicit feedback, and to stay on track of your goal."

Kephart adheres to the rule of consistency when it comes to maintaining positive company culture. From its quarterly staff development event known as the "Burnsley Bash," aptly named after the hotel at which the event started over 10 years ago, to regular coaching and team building efforts, all are part of Kephart's company culture design.

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The KEPHART team gathered around the center table for their quarterly KEPHART University (KU) session. This one was about Green design and planning techniques.

Photo courtesy of KEPHART Community::Planning::Architecture

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## Is it Important to Work with Companies with Similar Cultures?

It's second-hand nature for people to want to be around other people that make them feel valued, and have successful results to match. People want to work with organizations with strong core values and a positive company culture. A positive company culture can help to build your perceived value as "a hard-working, fun, and vibrant company where the people love what they do, and includes proven successful results for their clients,"... all the more reason to work with them!

Positive company culture does extend beyond the walls of an office. It also affects your perceived value with your trade partners, consultants and ultimately, the buying public. One way to measure the value of positive company culture is examining your repeat and referral base. Again, people will gravitate to you time and time again if they enjoyed working with you the first time around.

Consider that a positive company culture impacts not only who would like to work with your company, but also, who you "choose" to partner with as well.

While it may not happen in a deliberate way, companies with a defined culture seek out partnering clients or companies that share the same ideals and core values of positive company culture.

"Working with clients that have a culture similar to ours is a definite plus. Over the years, where we have found it is essential is with our consultants. Having similar cultures makes working together much easier because we are able to see things eye to eye," adds Campbell.

As we have shared, building positive company culture doesn't just happen miraculously overnight. It takes on many shapes and forms, and grows over the course of time.

While this may be the case, there is one thing that holds evident, that the building of a positive company culture creates rewarding team results internally, and extends to positive experiences and results for clients and trade partners. **SMI**



Runners and walkers who volunteered to be part of Team Lita Dirks & Co., helped to raise money for Brent's Place at the Kids Cure 2007 race.

Photo courtesy of Lita Dirks & Co.