

WHY SETTING UP YOUR COMPANY CULTURE EARLY IS IMPORTANT

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Hi, this is Rhys Jones, welcome to my latest podcast.

Today I want to talk about why it's so important to set the culture of your business from day one within your recruitment business.

Start as you wish to go on

It's massively important to get that culture out as early as possible, because when your business grows, if you feel as though it's not going the right direction, it's very difficult to reverse culture. To give you an example: if you worked in a decent sized office, you may have noticed some people come in and they will have a certain style, but they'll fit in very quickly with the office environment. So, say for example, everybody turns up bang on nine o'clock and leaves at 5:30, they're more likely to do that. Maybe when they start, they'll come in early and finish later but that'll adapt to the way the rest of the office works. But if the people within the office all start early and finish late, you'll tend to find the people that join the organisation are more likely to do that.

It's not just about the number of hours; it could be how much they're on the phone. So, if you are in an office that is very phone-based, you'll tend to find that people that join the business are more likely to use the phone. But if you have a business that isn't too phone-based, you might see people that come and use the phone a lot, but they'll start to use it less, depending on the environment. That's what you call reflective behaviour.

Reflective behaviour

If you're working in a pack environment, which an office is, the people that join that pack will start to reflect the rest of the people within the office, the rest of the pack. It's human nature. So, for that reason, it's critical that you try and set the tone within your office as soon as humanly possible. It's very easy as a new business owner, when your first one, two, three people start, that you want it to be all nice and laid back and you can all be friends and people come and go as they like.

Maybe you just hired some people that you've worked with in the past that are super billers and get away with having a very relaxed style. That's fine, but you've got to bear in mind that you're not always going to get these super billers that can behave in that way. And especially if you're going to take on trainees or rookies. They need to adopt that environment, which is, let's say, a phone-busy environment or a 'working particular hard' environment, or a very proactive environment or an environment that's

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really good using the database. But you've got to think one or two, three years ahead as to how you want that environment to be how would you want these people to behave.

Personal development

And consider things like personal development and being the best you can be, because the most successful businesses I've seen in recruitment are the ones that have a great attitude at the top and that cascades down within the office. A lot of the time, when you have a new business start-up, you'll have a very driven individual, so it comes a little bit naturally. I found that with my business, because I was always mega enthusiastic, mega driven, it came naturally to me. But there were things that I did notice. If you had a couple of people that came in and their attitude wasn't what you wanted; if you didn't do something about it quickly, that could then infect the rest of the office.

So, if you had somebody that was very negative or the sort of person that played politics - as you know one bad apple spoils the bunch - you've got to bear in mind the greater good of your office. I did have an individual that worked in one of my businesses and he was a very good biller, but he was terrible for office politics. He was the one that would create descent or create negativity around the environment.

I had to decide one day that, regardless of how much he billed, I couldn't have him in the office because he was reducing the billings of the people around him. That's going on further down the line in two or three, four years into your business.

Lead from the front

But going back to how to set the culture within your business early on, you've got to think, 'How do I want people to behave.' Try and drill down to certain key behavioural characteristics that you want to engender in people so you can start to engender that in your own behaviour. That's one thing that's critical when you set up a new business: leading from the front.

As you grow your business and move away from running a desk, you should have leads underneath you, but initially when you're a billing business owner, it's important that you understand the way you behave, your characteristics, your style, your skills, your attitudes. The people around you will adopt that, so you're on show a little bit and you're going to dictate that going forward.

And as I touched on earlier, with a critical mass, if you've got two, three, four people in your business and they're all on board, they're all team players, they're all really dedicated to the job; they're enthusiastic, they're positive. The more that grows, if you then get somebody into the environment that isn't naturally like that, they're more likely to reflect that positive behaviour. So, every single person that you add to your business that has the right behaviours and characteristics and attitudes that you want, is money in the bank for the growth of the office.

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So, if you want to drill down to those characteristics, for example, if you want people to be prepared to work long hours when it's necessary, then you need to be prepared to come in early and leave late and show them that's how you're prepared to do it. If you want people to be a lot more, say phone-active than they are necessarily using LinkedIn or emails, you've got to be hungry on the phone. You need to be the first person on the phone. If you want people to be prepared to be flexible at lunch time, that if the need arises, they know they're going to cut it short. You need to do that. If you want that high work ethic, if you want people to use the database; all these things that will contribute towards a good working environment, you've got to demonstrate.

One of the things that I unconsciously engendered within my business is the desire for self-improvement and personal development. You can coach and train people, but a lot of it must come from them, and if you could have an attitude within your business of people wanting to be the very best they can be, being that kind of person is seen as a positive in that environment. Somebody wants to be the best they can be then you've got to engineer that as well. You've got to strive to be the best you can be.

Encourage team players

And again, team players - if you want team players, involve the business in the decision making. Not necessarily everything, because you can't run a business by debate, but certainly communicate what you're doing and ask for their insights and their thoughts. Because that's one thing I learnt from growing my businesses; everybody in the business will have something they contribute. Certainly, don't do it on a hierarchical basis because I had some great ideas and suggestions from, for example administrators and resourcers, because they have a different way of looking at things.

So be prepared to listen to people and if you listen to your staff and you recognise their ideas, then those suggestions will come more often, and they'll feel more part of the business and you're more likely to create that team environment. Because when you're looking to attract staff and especially if you're looking to attract experienced staff, we all know that if you're looking to attract a big biller, those big billers will be able to choose where they want to go.

Any recruiting company worth its salt, if you've got somebody who's guaranteed to come in and do £200k a year, you're going to want to take them, aren't you? These people need to be convinced it's the right working environment. So, if you've got that culture where people are happy and positive, there's that personal development.

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Build a positive environment

If you've been into other recruiting businesses for interviews, you can tell quite quickly from walking into that environment, 'Is it an environment that I want to work in?' You need to think about that because with some of the businesses that I've supported, I always encourage going for quick wins. If there's people that you've worked with in the past that you know fit that culture and they bill well, get them in. But at some point, you must start hiring people that you don't know.

You can go the rookie route, you can go the resourcer route, which is always a great route because you can build your own. Or you can go for experienced people within your sector. But if you're going to go that route, you've got to make it appealing to join your company.

It's about more than commission

One of the mistakes business owners make, is that it's all about the commission; offer a generous commission structure. But generally, it's not the commission that makes the difference. It's the feeling that people have about your business, your attitude, your persona, and your enthusiasm for its growth. And thinking about what motivates them, introducing them to key people within your business who will sell your business on your behalf, because people love working in your business. One of the best things you can do is to introduce potential employees to those staff members. It's something I used to do, and it used to close it every time, because I was fortunate enough to have had a very positive environment.

We had a representative from Investors in People; that was a long time ago, but the lady that came here from Investors in People, interviewed all the staff and she took me to the room afterwards and said, 'I've never met a group of people that are so proud to work for a business. These people love working here. They feel as though they are working for the best company in the industry and any other business within that industry is a step down.' She said, 'I've never seen that before'. So quite frankly, you're wasting your time spending money on getting this Investors in People qualification because you've nailed it.

It was all unconscious that day because I'd almost done it by accident. I had been conscious with the ground rules that I wanted to have within the business, where the flexibility was and where it wasn't. I was quite keen on that, but it was my natural unconscious competence on creating an environment of team play, recognition, fairness, good communication; the personal development to me was key in the business and it sort of naturally flowed.

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For me, to be the best mentor and coach I can be, I needed to unpick how I did it. And that's where you become consciously competent of how I did it and that's how I mentor and coach the business owners I work with. To upskill them on how to influence the environment within their business. And being able to do things that you don't think are necessarily the most popular to get the right environment.

Keep it professional

What you can't do is be everybody's friend all the time and let people do as they please because you think that's going to make everybody happy. Yes, they probably will be happy, but they'll bill less, and the environment will reduce to a point where, if you get people that aren't good, they won't survive in that environment. You've got to get the balance right between listening to what people want in the organisation and making it an environment they want to work in.

But you'll find that the vast majority of recruiters want to work in a high profit, successful office. They want to be in the business of making good money. And to make good money, there's certain things within the business that they wouldn't do if they're left their own devices, like using a database or getting on the phone at 9am rather than half past ten.

Do the hard things

There are certain parts of creating a high profit organisation which people will happily follow if that's the culture, but if it's not the culture, they won't do it. And it is examples like say, getting on the phone, it's that proactive nature. If everybody in the office is asking the same additional questions, like which other businesses have you been to recently where you've been interviewed, covering the counteroffer properly. If everybody's using the right set of skills, that inheritance of intellect is another thing that's key in your business.

You don't just have to train people how to do the job or train people how to be good at what they are; if they're exposed to people around them that are good, they'll learn from the people around them. So that's why it's key to engender the people that you work with to do the job properly and to keep on top of training and coaching and improving them. Because even if the billings are good, they could always be better. You don't hammer people that are billing well by trying to force them into doing a lot of the skills that they don't want to, but you still must bear in mind that you've got to register your candidates properly. You've got to take your vacancies properly; you've got to ask for the right regulations properly, you've got to make the approach calls properly.

You've got to do the job as if you're on show. If you're on stage and you must perform the job to the best of your abilities and not get away with it because you're naturally good. People will notice that, and they'll copy your behaviour because it's very easy to underestimate, especially if you're humble within

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an office environment, that people will look up to you and reflect your behaviour and your skills and the way you do the job.

Set a good example

There was a period in time with Elliot Marsh where I went through the construction crash, went through an economic crash, and I went back on the phone just to lead by example. It was enjoyable because I could tell people were listening to me because they'd not seen me on the phones before, did not see me recruit before and I was dusting off all the old skills. I was doing the job at damn sight better than I used to do when I was a recruiter, and I was a high profit desk recruiter.

But because people were listening to it, I was making sure that I covered all the counteroffers properly. I made sure I was doing the registrations properly. I made sure that I took the vacancies down, I was closing for commitment. I was doing all the things that I trained people to do, and I'd never really done them all because when you become successful, it's very easy to become too relaxed on the use of your skills because you'll be able to get away with it because clients know you, your candidates know you.

You get a bit sloppy but when I realised that people were watching me, it was a lot more fun doing the job to the best of my skills, in addition to my natural ability. So, people would notice that, and I could see the sort of ripple effect in the way I was doing it was going throughout the office. It was improving the whole office.

So, the point of this podcast was really to try and reinforce that it's never too early to try and set the tone and the culture of business within your start-up or within your SME. Further down the line it's very difficult to change, so think hard about how you behave. Think hard about your early recruits and think hard about how you police and coach and reinforce what is a desired culture and environment for you and have the courage to stand up to people that aren't necessarily working, living, and behaving the way you want the office to be built.

Have a think where you want it to be because, when you first set up your company, it's very easy just to wing it. People are making money, you're making money and just roll with it, but you do have to put your head up and think about six, twelve months, two years' time, how would you want that environment to be.

I hope you found this podcast helpful. If you've listened to this and you think you can set up on your own and you want to grow a successful business, not a lifestyle, that's not really me. I don't want to be a lifestyle recruiter, but if you want to build a high profit, successful recruitment business, then feel free to contact me on LinkedIn. You can also subscribe to these blogs on all the various platforms, but also if you go on to our website, we have a mailing list for all the brand-new blogs all the brand-new podcasts.

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Hope you enjoyed it.

