What Sports Can Teach Us About Company Culture in Business

5 min read

Key Takeaways

- Staff Vs. Team: The difference is in the culture – it's in the "how" of how work gets done. A team accomplishes work together, while a staff accomplishes work in any manner they see fit.
- Human Capital Strategy: Cultivating a positive workplace culture not only helps to keep individual employees engaged and happy at work, thereby improving employee retention, but it can actually have a direct impact on productivity and your bottom line.
- The Three Pillars: Leaders can build this type of culture by focusing on three pillars: a team's or, in your case- your company's values, attitudes, and goals.

Do You Have 'Staff' or a 'Team'?

Referring to your employees as a team has become common business terminology. Used interchangeably with terms like staff, crew, and workforce, the word choice is rarely given a

second thought- even though culturally speaking, teams are more strongly associated with sports than they are with business enterprises.

But let's stop and take a moment to consider why we use the word "team" when we talk about the people who make up our businesses, what the word can teach us about the importance of company culture, and what sports can teach us about business management.

Let's break it down...

> *"Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships." - Michael Jordan*

How Is a 'Team' Different From 'Staff'?

As defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "a team is a number of persons associated together in work or activity." When used as an adjective, the word refers to being "of or performed by a team" and emphasizes a group's effort rather than an individual's [1].

The dictionary defines staff as "the personnel who assist a director in carrying out an assigned task" [2].

So, what's the key difference?

The difference is in the culture – it's in the "how" of how work gets done. A team accomplishes work together, while a staff accomplishes work in any manner they see fit.

The difference between 'staff' and a team is that staff take on tasks individually while team members strategize together and make plays together. They pass the ball. They're rewarded for assists. Team members work together to win together.

On the other hand, staff members work alone toward individual goals. They're rewarded for meeting individual benchmarks. The tasks a staff member accomplishes aren't

necessarily tied to a greater purpose. These tasks don't necessarily provide any fulfillment beyond tackling a to-do list.

Why Does the Difference Even Matter? The Importance of Company Culture...

According to the renowned psychologist and sports author, producer, and columnist, Jim Taylor Ph.D., "A culture is the expression of a team's values, attitudes, and goals about sports, competition, and relationships...Team culture is so important because it directly influences many areas that affect team functioning and performance." [3]

Taylor explains that culture defines the norms of acceptable behavior, communication, conflict resolution, and cooperation, and he points out that, in turn, culture creates an atmosphere that permeates everything within a team's organization. That atmosphere can be positive, negative, supportive, or discouraging.

Culture can make or break a team in sports. In business, company culture can mean the difference between success and failure.

[What is the impact of working with a dedicated TEAM? This Nonprofit tells all 👉 Watch and read the full story here to find out.](#)

Cultivating a positive workplace culture not only helps to keep individual employees engaged and happy at work, thereby improving [employee retention](#), but it can actually have a direct impact on productivity and your bottom line.

"The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime."-Babe Ruth

How Do You Turn a Staff Member Into a Team Player? Build Company Culture Into Your Business Strategy

When cultivating culture, Taylor believes that coaches should actively create a culture that encourages growth on both the team and individual level, strives for success, and isn't afraid to have fun along the way.

He explains that leaders can build this type of culture by focusing on three pillars: a team's or, in your case-- your company's values, attitudes, and goals.

Values

He defines values as standards of behavior and principles. Values are the things that we choose to prioritize as important. Values should help guide your decisions and those of your team members each day.

In your business, do you prioritize recruiting the right person for a job or the one that looks best on paper? Do you value an individual's high performance over teamwork? Do you provide your employees with opportunities for professional and personal growth? How is your business connected to your community?

Attitude

Attitude is the way we think and feel within a company culture. A staff member, for example, might feel unmotivated, underappreciated, and either indifferent or negative about his or her job.

Whereas a team member will feel motivated, appreciated, and will care deeply about their work. Consider how these differences in attitude can adversely or favorably affect employee engagement, productivity, employee retention, and profits.

Goals

Goals are the target at which everyone in an organization should be aiming. They consist of big-picture, long-term goals like the company's mission statement and five-year plan, in addition to smaller goals like individual tasks and department benchmarks. For a cohesive culture, all of your business's goals should align and move the company as a whole in the same direction.

To ensure your workplace culture boosts productivity and your bottom line, it's important to create a marriage between your [human capital strategy and your overall business strategy](link). Define individual tasks in terms of the business's path toward big-picture goals.

"One man can be a crucial ingredient on a team, but one man cannot make a team." - Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

The Bottom Line (No Pun Intended): Cultivate and Protect Your Company's Culture

Culture is complex. Culture is delicate. It cannot be left to chance. If culture didn't require a leader to cultivate it, nurture it, and protect it, then sports teams wouldn't need coaches.

Likewise, if culture could successfully come together on its own, then staff members wouldn't need business leaders to turn them into teams and rally them around a brand, shared values, and common goals.

When you focus on your culture and people, the positive impact on your bottom line will speak for itself. More employee engagement means greater productivity and a maximized ROI- Organizations with positive company cultures enjoy 72% higher employee engagement than those with high-stress, cutthroat, or negative cultures. [4]

One of the most respected coaches and minds in Rugby, Phil 'Gus' Gould has famously said, *"It takes years to build a strong and lasting culture. It can take only a couple of months to destroy one."*

So, don't forget that focusing on your bottom line is just as much about focusing on dollars and cents as it is about focusing on your people and your culture. Every time you refer to your employees as a team, take a moment to pause and consider whether they are actually a team or a staff and think about what you can do to emphasize working together rather than simply working toward individual tasks.

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[1] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/team

[2] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/staff

[3]
https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-prime/201609/build-team-culture-athletic-success

[4]
https://www.denisonconsulting.com/sites/default/files/documents/resources/rn_engagement_0.pd