

## The Intersection of Company Performance and a People-Focused Culture

*By Jesse Kropelnicki, P.E., Chief Operating Officer, Verdantas*

As a former coach of high-level endurance athletes that were consistently under extreme pressure to perform, I have over the years developed a leadership approach for the engineering consulting space that is people-focused and supportive via my coaching experience. Applying my coaching experience to engineering consulting has been a great intersection for me—it's where business acumen, support coaching of people to excel, leadership, and my education as an engineer all converge. I believe this intersection is where for-profit engineering companies can also truly be people-focused by prioritizing longer term investment in the well-being and satisfaction of their employees, customers, and stakeholders. What it takes, not unlike sport, is patience, a focus on long-term performance, and relentless follow through to build trust. This can be achieved so many different ways—I have outlined my top approaches below.

### Employee Engagement and Development

One of the most crucial aspects of building a people-centered culture in for-profit companies is employee engagement, trust building, and development. This includes providing opportunities for employees to grow professionally, through training programs, mentorship, clarity of direction, and career advancement opportunities via organic growth. Additionally, fostering a positive work culture that values inclusivity, collaboration, creativity, and teamwork is essential. This is built through deconstructing the silos of otherwise siloed organizations, and through investment in programs and people as mentioned above. It is also done by coaching leaders to help create a culture where trust building becomes inevitable. However, I have always felt that the real authentic “magic,” if there is such a thing, comes from the thousands of small interactions we all have every week, the energy you bring to them as a leader, and the infectious impact this can have across the organization. If done well, this positive energy spreads through the organization with or without leadership present. The for-profit outcome manifests itself over time via best-in-class retention and loyalty, all creating a better service for our customers—not necessarily through best-in-class utilization given the time investment in training programs and other people first initiatives.



Small interactions over time create a positive work environment that spreads throughout the organization.

### **Customer Trust (Satisfaction)**

Customer trust building and satisfaction is also critical, and companies should ensure that customer needs and feedback are at the center of decision-making. Developing a customer-centric approach to product design and service delivery is necessary, and leaders should make sure that customer needs are resolved in a timely and satisfactory manner. This is where responsiveness and follow-through are important. These are not difficult tasks, but difficult for many to follow through with on a consistent basis—always lean in with proactive communication! Building close authentic relationships with important clients also supports the efforts that so many staff put into those clients. Employees and clients see and feel this level of interaction and support of clients from leadership, and it creates a positive impact internally, as well. If you as a leader are supportive and proactive in both internal and external engagements, it only aids in the overall culture transformation that adds value later.

### **Community Involvement**

Community involvement is another key area for companies to focus on. They can get involved in local community initiatives and causes that align with their values. Supporting local charities, promoting sustainability and environmental conservation, and volunteering all contribute to creating a positive impact that, in turn, creates more organic and tangential positive impacts.

### **Ethical Business Practices**

Finally, ethical business practices are essential to creating a consistent thread of values throughout the organization. Adhering to ethical business practices and ensuring that the company's values are reflected in its operations, marketing, and interactions with stakeholders will create a business practice that staff want to be a part of.

### **Conclusion**

By focusing on these key areas via empathetical, supportive and coaching based leadership, a successful for-profit engineering company can create a truly people-focused culture that prioritizes the well-being of all stakeholders. This in turn can lead to long-term business success and a positive reputation via employees that are engaged, stay at your company for long periods of time, and are willing to put in that 10% extra effort because they believe in what they are doing and contribute to a company and team they truly believe in. Many companies have the headline that they embrace this concept, but when not fully felt or perceived by staff, this disconnect can become a virus in the organization which is worse than not having a headline at all. Profits from those that do it well, however, help fuel further investment into creating a positive environment in a circular fashion. The trick in many situations is to get the positive spin started, and then finally let the momentum be a tailwind to future success. This does not happen overnight, but via those thousands of interactions every week, and with a little bit of patience, this can truly be a fulfilling journey for staff and leadership alike.