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Culture Is Not Built. It Is Breathed.

A thought. And a penny.

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Stop trying to build **culture**.

The question I have lived with my whole career is not what makes a great event.

It is what makes a room of strangers feel, for two hours, like they belong to each other.

That question turns out to be the same one that makes a great company.

Culture is not manufactured. It is breathed. Design it badly and they survive the job. Design it well



Your values are your brief. Know them in the dark.

Most companies mistake decorative values and vision/mission boards for direction.

A value you have to look up will not help you when the room gets difficult.

The real test is not whether your team can recite your values. It is whether they make decisions you would be proud of, without you in the room.

That is the brief. Write it so people carry it in their chest, not in a folder.



Your vision should make people feel something before it exists.

Nobody follows a destination. They follow a feeling about what that destination means.

The companies whose people go beyond what is asked are not the ones with the clearest strategy.

They are the ones where every person understands, in their gut, why the work matters.

Re-write your vision until it does that. Say it out loud until everyone can feel it the way you do.



Three goals. No more.

Clarity is not a gift you give your team. It is a responsibility you carry as a leader.

When everything is a priority, nothing is. People do not fail because they are lazy. They fail because they are moving in six directions at once and calling it dedication.

Create Three goals per year. Define Measurable outcomes. Broken into quarters so the wins feel real. Focus is not a constraint. It is the point.



Trust them before they prove they deserve it.

Trust given after proof is not trust. It is approval.

Real autonomy means handing someone the what and the why, then stepping back. Not hovering. Not asking for updates that are really just reassurance for yourself.

People who feel genuinely trusted do not just do the job. They protect it. They own it. They defend it like it belongs to them.

Because it does.



Your managers are the culture, made of flesh.

Everything you believe about how people should be treated, how hard work should be recognised, how difficulty should be handled.

None of it reaches your team through you. It reaches them through their direct manager. Every single day.

A leader who invests in their vision but neglects their managers is building the organisation on sand.

Develop them deliberately. Continuously. The team succeeds or fails at that level. Not at yours.



Most leaders only speak loudly when something breaks.

Their silence when things go right is deafening.

Recognition is not a ceremony. It is a frequency. A signal your team receives constantly that tells them what this company truly values.

Praise publicly. Fix privately. Celebrate together.

Recognition does not just reward people. It tells them what kind of company they are inside.



Burnout is not dedication. It is a design failure.

The culture you create after hours is just as real as the one you curate in meetings.

When a leader sends messages late at night, the message is never just the message. It carries a subtext: this is what commitment looks like here.

Your team watches how you treat your own time before they decide how to treat theirs.

Protect your hours. Mean it visibly. The people around you are taking notes.



The best ideas came from the person who felt safest to disagree.

Not the loudest. Not the most senior. The one who felt the room would hear them without punishing them for it.

Diversity without inclusion is a headcount exercise.

Hire people who think in ways you cannot. Then actually listen when they speak.

A room full of people who think like you will only ever tell you what you already know.



People do not burn out from hard work.

They burn out from work that feels meaningless.

A salary answers whether someone can afford to stay. Purpose answers whether they want to.

These are not the same question.

Connect every role to the real human consequence of what your company does. Not through a mission statement read once a year. Through real stories. Specific moments. The face of the person whose life changed.

Purpose is not a perk. It is the point.



If people are building something, they should own a piece of it.

Variable pay tied to results creates hunger. Profit sharing creates loyalty. Equity creates co-authors.

The difference between an employee and a co-author/owner is not talent. It is whether they feel the gain when the work succeeds.

When the upside is shared, the thinking gets longer. Braver. More honest.

Share the **win** deliberately. Or watch your best people go somewhere that will honor them more for it.



People make companies.
But it is what they breathe into them
that makes companies live.

Culture is the atmosphere you design. Consciously or not, you are already designing it.

Design it with intention.

A wide-angle photograph of a grand, ornate theater interior. The theater features multiple tiers of seating, with the front rows being dark red and the upper tiers being dark wood. The architecture is highly detailed, with arched ceilings, ornate moldings, and several chandeliers. The stage is visible on the right side, with a large red curtain and various stage equipment. The overall atmosphere is one of elegance and grandeur.

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