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WHAT IF EVERYONE
BROUGHT THEIR
SOUL TO WORK?

SCOTT MOOREHEAD & RYAN McCARTY

We've been taught that making a profit is somehow evil—that businesses are unethical and greedy and that it's only nonprofits that deliver any good in the world. It's like someone has asked us to check our soul at the door anytime we show up for work. Giving back and making a positive difference in the world is just something you do on your own time after you've collected your paycheck.

But what if we told you that profit can be the fuel that empowers you to do some serious good in the world? What would happen if we intentionally tore down those walls that separate us from going to work and giving back—if everyone was given permission to do good while they did their work? Think about how that would even affect your customers; how do you think they'd react if they were given the chance to see the kind of positive impact the dollars they spend can have on the world?

Or, to put that another way, what do you think might happen if you found a way to rally your employees and your customers to a common cause where everybody, including your bottom line, wins? We could change the world in a profound way, right? That's the promise of building what we call a Culture of Good inside your organization.

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Culture Is a Competitive Advantage

Consider conducting a little experiment inside your organization. What would happen if you asked every single person the following question: Why do you come to work every day?

What answers do you think you'd get? If you heard a lot of responses with keywords like "paycheck," or "Ping-Pong tables," or "casual dress code," you might be in some big trouble.

In case you haven't noticed, today's workers—especially millennials—seek out workplaces that embrace a cause that extends beyond the organization. They want to make a difference in what they do. That means if you want to attract, or even keep, your best employees, you might need to rethink the connections between doing work and doing good and how they can be directly related. As the famed business guru Peter Drucker said, your best workers have options, and you need to manage them as if they were volunteers. How then can your organization expect to attract—and then retain—great talent, which is really most organizations' true competitive advantage?

The short answer is via your culture, which is the real secret sauce to making your organization "sticky" at keeping its best people and inspiring them to deeply engage in their work. Ping-Pong tables aren't sticky (well, most aren't, and if they are, gross).

Let's first admit that culture has become one of those catchall phrases that everyone is talking about these days without perhaps knowing exactly what they are talking about, since it can mean different things to different people. For our purposes, let's define culture as what most of your people are doing most of the time inside your organization as it relates to your norms, beliefs, and values. What makes a culture truly sticky, therefore, comes down to a couple of things:

- **Knowing why you are in business (your norms, beliefs, and values)** and
- **Hiring talent that shares those same values.**

When you can connect those dots, you greatly increase your chances of keeping great people over the long haul. Case in point: 92 percent of our company's workforce (our company is a national telecommunications retailer) is made up of millennials between the ages of 25 and 35. Those younger workers expect a lot from their employer and, as a result, tend to move between jobs quite a bit. In our industry, turnover averages about 66 percent. But our people tell us that our Culture of Good, where we give our people permission to do good while they do their job, gives them a sense of fulfillment at work. That's a big reason why our turnover is down 25 percent—even though our workforce has more than doubled over the past five years. People want to work with us because they know they can make a difference in the world where they work thanks to our Culture of Good.

Put simply, recruiting and retaining your top people is good for business—no matter what business you are in. By building a culture that gives our people permission to care and to do good through their work:

- We have saved about \$3.7 million a year in reduced turnover costs
- Our people have driven our top line sales up 200 percent
- While operating income has soared 490 percent.

That's right: we're more profitable as a result of embracing the Culture of Good, which has allowed us to do more good as a result.

We now contribute thousands of dollars per employee each year to good causes—and that doesn't even count the thousands of hours of volunteer time and personal contributions our employees make every year. But don't mistake this as charity. We've proven that by doing good, you can help grow a profitable company, which then enables you to give back to the world in amazing ways on an ongoing basis. Is it really any surprise that people want to come work with us? It turns out that's why people want to buy from us as well. Our Culture of Good is both the product of and the fuel for our success.

It's More Than Just Another Program

There is a symbiotic relationship in every business, where what we take equals what we get. This relationship can tip out of balance in either direction at times—which can lead to a feeling that something is missing. And when it does, either by taking or giving too much, the organization becomes unsustainable.

We recognize that most companies give back in some way. Corporate social responsibility programs, or CSRs, as they're called these days, have become all the rage. If you own a business, perhaps you even cut a check at the end of the year to help out a few nonprofit organizations. Or, maybe, if you work for a progressive-minded boss, he or she gives you the chance to volunteer while you're still on the clock. You might even find ways to do all of the above away from the office on your own time, which is absolutely a noble thing to do.

“There is a symbiotic relationship in every business, where what we take equals what we get.”

The real power behind building a Culture of Good, though, is to think about doing good as more than just a series of “programs,” or corporate-sponsored initiatives, or even something that you do after work. We’re not here advocating for some newfangled philanthropy program either. The world already has enough nonprofits.

However, when we think about business leaders such as Warren Buffett, Bill Gates, and Mark Zuckerberg pledging their billions to help the world, shouldn’t it beg the question about what could have happened if they had been able to do as much good as they were building up their businesses? What could the impact have been if every one of their employees joined them on that ride all along? Imagine what we can do if we do good while we are doing our work in a way that benefits our fellow coworkers, our customers, and the causes we believe in.

That’s the promise of rewiring our thinking in a way that let’s us recognize that earning a profit and making the world better through our everyday work is a symbiotic relationship. If an organization isn’t financially sustainable, it’s out of balance, because it won’t have the resources to give back and to do good. But the better a company performs, the more it can give; and the more a company gives, the better it performs. And the way to kick off that virtuous cycle is to give everyone connected to your organization, which includes your employees and your customers, permission to care about a cause they believe in on a daily basis.

Rallying Around A Common Cause

Our business started in rural regions as a way to service local communities where we were the only phone store in town. Our mom-and-pop stores were important hubs in the communities we served. We lived our Midwestern values. We created jobs for people who liked to interact and help the people in their communities. Our customers loved us because the idea of doing good by people—our employees, our customers, and the members of the communities we live and work in—was woven into the very DNA of our company. That’s why people want to work for our company and why customers want to buy from us—because they know we are a part of the community.

That’s why our business has chosen to give back to the local communities where we operate in as our cause; the thing that we strive to impact in a positive way through our jobs on a daily basis. While your organization may have a different cause from ours, the key is that the people in your organization are truly passionate about it. That’s how you will win their hearts and minds.

The real beauty is that our cause isn’t something that’s enforced from the top-down like so many corporate giving and CSR programs. Our cause has inspired our people to give from the bottom up. Our associates all over the company have picked up the ball and begun doing good in their own special ways, by stepping up and finding their own way to contribute to our shared

cause that community matters. Nothing builds employee engagement like shared values and giving folks the autonomy to make their own decisions.

- More than 93 percent of our people feel that we share their values for social responsibility.
- We've had 58 percent of our folks hashtag at least one picture with #cultureofgood from one of our events.
- More than 83 percent have used some or all of their 16 hours of paid volunteer time we give them in their communities.

In other words, we gave our people the permission to care again as part of their jobs. The reason our Culture of Good works, and why a CSR program would fail, is because we found those core beliefs that had been the foundation of our business all along.

It's also worth noting that it pays to be creative when it comes to allocating resources toward supporting your company's cause. Perhaps you can use 10% of your current marketing spend and earmark that to impact your cause. Every company has redundancies and wasted spending that, if you can find it and eliminate it, can help provide the resources you need to kick off your Culture of Good, which will be an investment that will pay off in spades over the long run.

The question is, what is the cause your organization will rally around? When you think about it, most businesses start as a way to solve a problem or fill a need. You have a real sense of purpose—a why—when you pursue a goal like that. That’s why you see so many people drawn to work at start-ups: they are energized by the idea that they are making the world better for their customers and their cause even in some small way.

But what happens so often in business is that as the organization grows and adds more people and customers and moves into new towns and cities, it begins to forget about those core values that made the place so special when it started. The mission shifts from filling that need to fine-tuning a spreadsheet. You move from thinking three dimensionally to taking on a two-dimensional view of the world, where you’ve extracted emotion and purpose from the equation. It’s why people feel like robots or numbers when they work for big corporations. They wish they could get back to working at a place where they felt like they made a real difference in the world. Embracing the Culture of Good can fill that gap by tying your employees and your customers together in striving toward a common cause.

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Cementing Deeper Connections—Inside And Out

If there is one universal truth in business, it's this: you don't have a business until you have a customer. And every business has to make critical strategic choices about how they can connect with their potential customers: do they offer the lowest price, the best quality, or something else that differentiates them from their competitors? In short, offering exceptional customer service is not enough; that's just ante to get into the game. No one is going to shop somewhere where they don't feel valued or treated with respect.

What we have learned is that the Culture of Good is also an extremely powerful way to differentiate your business in the marketplace. You have the opportunity to create a conversation that goes far beyond the transaction itself, by explaining how customers' purchases are directly making the world a better place. If someone was on the fence before about doing business with you, learning that should make building a sustainable relationship with him or her a no-brainer.

Some surveys show that some 60% of customers buy certain brands because they support a certain cause. Imagine what might happen if you invited your customer to contribute their time, talent, and treasure to your organization's cause? Rather than sharing what you support as a brand, why not ask your customers to join you in your efforts? Stop saying to your customers, "This is the good we do" and start saying, "This is the good we can do together!"

But this also brings us to a word of caution: you can't approach the Culture of Good as some newfangled approach to branding or some kind of Band-Aid that you try to affix to mask something that's really broken inside your business. There are plenty of stories about how companies have decided to pledge a ton of money as a way to try and rebuild their image in their community or in the marketplace. Your customers, as well as your employees, will see right through that. If you want your company to embrace a cause that fuels the Culture of Good, it needs to be genuine and authentic.

Of course, drawing attention to yourself and the supposed good deeds that you do can feel disingenuous. It almost defeats the purpose of doing good in the first place if everyone else thinks you're doing it only to get extra credit. But here's another thought to chew on: what happens if nobody shares the good things that people are doing? What if that kind of vacuum leads us to believe all of the horribly negative stories that we are blasted with so often? Is it possible that we could all stand to share more of the good stories as a way to inspire others to do similar things—to embrace the idea of doing good better? Would that be a threat to our authenticity and turn people off?

Maybe. But in a time when it seems we only tune into bad news on a daily basis, maybe the real opportunity is to think bigger—to believe that we can truly inspire people by sharing the good we do through our work.

Let's Change The World!

It's important for us to acknowledge that we didn't always know how to reach the goals we set for ourselves. In truth, we started this journey simply because our hearts told us it was the right thing to do. We've had to learn a lot of hard lessons along the way.

We're also continuing to experiment and to push forward as a way to keep our momentum rolling and to avoid what happens to so many cultural initiatives like this in other companies: apathy. You know, the point where the excitement of something new wears off and everyone just drifts back to doing their work the way they used to.

That's a real danger, especially if you fail to keep stoking the fires of passion in your people. If done correctly, the power of the Culture of Good is that you achieve long-term sustainability rather than just quick jabs of excitement to the organization. The Culture of Good will keep everyone fired up to come to work and be a part of something bigger than themselves—which includes making their own organization financially sustainable. It becomes a normal daily effort that keeps an elevated sense of worth inside of every one of the company stakeholders.

“ Rather than sharing what you support as a brand, why not ask your customers to join you in your efforts? ”

Our challenge to you is to think about how to tie doing good into the daily routine of how you go about your business. If we can inspire employees to ignite positive change, while impacting your business, great things will result. If we can all do that, wow, we can truly make the world a better place, don't you think?

Building Your Culture Of Good

If we've inspired you at all by sharing our manifesto, we hope you will consider building a Culture of Good of your own, starting with embracing the principle of giving employees the permission to care. From that sense of care will emerge a commitment and a passion to contribute to a greater good.

So where should you begin?

① Identify Your Cause

Ask yourself what you are passionate about. Consider what you could do to make a positive difference in the world. Our company's cause is community. Yours may be the same or something different. The challenge for you is to select a cause that you know would involve your people.

Now ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does your cause align with your company's strategic vision?
2. How is it authentic?
3. Why does it matter to your employees?
4. Why does it matter to your customers?

② Connect It to Your Employees

Your cause will be sustainable only if it involves the hearts and minds of your people. First, look for ways to explain what you want to accomplish. Attack the mind. Build a plan for reaching out to your people. This means you must communicate, communicate, communicate. Engage their hearts by giving them something to experience. Keep in mind that communications and experiences must be ongoing. Once is not enough. Determine a cadence of communications and experiential events that suits your organization best.

Now consider the following questions:

1. How will you build your plan for how your employees can connect to your cause?
2. How will you weave your cause into how you interview, hire, onboard, train, retain, inspire, and compensate?
3. What will you do to continue to communicate the cause to your employees?
4. What will you do to ensure that employees have permission to care so they can discover their calling?

③ Connect Your Cause to Your Customers

Customers can play an essential role in your cause. Research shows that consumers patronize businesses that share their same values. In this regard, they are similar to employees who choose to work at companies with values that mirror their own. Encourage customers to become involved by making it comfortable for them to participate. Let them know what your cause is and why it is important to your organization and its employees. We let our customers know that a percentage of every sale goes to support a community event. This communication is the first step in engaging the customer in your cause. It can lead the way to building a stronger

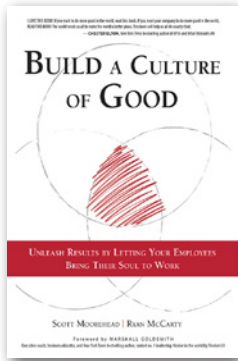
relationship between your organization and your customers that improves customer retention and creates greater awareness for your cause.

Now consider the following questions:

1. How can you use your culture and your cause to gain and retain customers?
2. How can you encourage your employees to take pride in telling your customers about your cause?
3. What can you communicate to your customers to let them know they have a role to play in fulfilling your cause?

Employees and customers don't want to, and shouldn't have to, check their souls at the door to your business. In fact, your business will be better off if they don't, and it all starts with building a Culture of Good. 📖

Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [Build a Culture of Good](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS | **Scott Moorehead** has been a lifelong resident of Indiana. After falling for his future wife in high school, they set up on a lifelong journey of live music, travel, adventure and raising their two kids. When Scott graduated from Purdue University, he vowed to never be typical in any business venture or challenge. **Ryan McCarty** has always had a passion for making the world a better place. Ryan's wife and two daughters teamed up with the culture zealot to start a church, build a school in Africa and launch an after-school network that exists across states and even countries. Although Ryan would like to be an old school hip hop star, he spends his spare time listening to NPR and watching *Antiques Roadshow* while smoking a pipe.

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