



How a Culture of Enablement Attracts and Keeps Young Talent

By Sade Akindele, MBA

It's that intangible thing, the one you can't quite put your finger on. It's that illusive necessity that either drives people to your firm and keeps them there, or has them leaving you high and dry. The closest word we have for describing this intrinsic, inescapable, and all-encompassing thing is culture. With or without intent, every company has one, and, as marketing professionals, we can have a significant hand in shaping and leveraging it to our firm's advantage.

In today's workforce, millennials and Gen Zers frequently prioritize working for a company that not only does more for their communities and the environment, but also allows them to be more too. Employees are no longer satisfied with the traditional 9–5 job, where they chip away at a checklist. Instead, today's young people want more. They want to feel connected—like they have a purpose, like they belong.

It's at this deep level—culture—that employees learn there are no limits to what they can be. Once they realize that the sky is the limit and are given a springboard, they can stretch to reach even greater heights. Firms can help employees achieve this by creating a culture of enablement.

Once given a platform to be heard and create the change they want to see, talent stays more engaged and creates broader networks across the company. Importantly, new talent is attracted to join in too.

One such a platform is an empowerment group, like Stantec's global Developing Professionals Group (DPG). This group is a clear example of how a company made a deliberate step to help extend these boundaries. This internal program allows employees to harness their entrepreneurial spirit and make a difference for themselves and their peers. This is accomplished through in-person and digital interactions and activities in the workplace.



The group organizes itself around four pillars: Connect to Peers, Connect to Leadership, Connect to Professional Development Opportunities, and Connect to Community. Each pillar provides an avenue for members of the network to get involved and discover ways to grow. The DPG gives employees an opportunity to step outside of their normal roles and think differently. As a result, employees are more involved in the company, stick around longer than their peers, and oftentimes, recommend others join the company.

While Stantec has long prided itself on traditions that led it to become a top 10 global design and engineering firm, the organization now embraces change at all levels, namely the top, with CEO Gord Johnston acting as the primary sponsor of the group. Johnston works in close concert with its global network lead to keep a beat on what's happening across the network. He also makes it a priority to meet with the DPG chapter leads at each office he visits. He's taken his involvement a step further by inviting the global network lead to executive-level strategy meetings to ensure that the fresh perspectives of this group are being heard. Actions like these engage the workforce, show employees that they are being heard, and answer their questions about whether what they're doing has purpose. The group has created a safe place for them to feel at home—and to stay at Stantec.

Sounds Great! What's Next?

A culture of enablement is a way to give trust to employees and empower them to be bigger, brighter, and better. So how can you establish an empowerment group at your company?

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While the bones of these groups are their mission and vision—such as the DPG's mantra of “find your people,” along with its four pillars previously mentioned—what gives them life are their passion, personal touches, and their people.

This is where marketing professionals can really make an impact. You can help design a cool brand for the group or create graphics that can be used to promote it.

But where the biggest difference can be made lies in the fact that empowerment groups are largely about their networks and, therefore, bigger is better. To fuel growth, more people need to be made aware of the opportunities. By leveraging your understanding and access to internal communications platforms, you can introduce more people to the network and help them get tied in. You'll also need to continue leveraging these platforms to maintain visibility and keep members engaged and connected. From here, it will be a snowball effect of growth, adding on layers of enthusiasm and participation.



After establishing a healthy network, and employees feel like they belong at the company, you can then turn attention externally to help with employee acquisition. For this to be as strategic as possible, you'll need to combine your knowledge of where the business need is for new hires with the correlating platforms these people are exposed to (social media, industry publications, professional associations).



Enticing language will tempt potential new hires to join a company where they have an opportunity to be a part of something important.

Here are some best practices for how you can pull out your marketing toolkit and help create empowerment groups at your company, based on Stantec's proven success:

1. Provide platforms for open and regular communication within the group and its chapters at different offices.

Encourage each chapter to share event updates. This can be done on internal social platforms (for example, Yammer) or through newsletters, so others can be inspired with event ideas or make connections with colleagues.

2. Ensure a dedicated, reasonable budget.

Request and dedicate a committed sum of money for the group to organize events. While many of these can be free (for example, Lunch and Learns), setting aside money for after-hours activities or to organize a skills-development training is important. Monetary support for marketing materials such as posters or ad campaigns, can go a long way as well.

3. Lower barriers to entry. Get senior support so everyone feels they're welcome to participate and then make this known via your regular communications.

4. Establish regular check-ins. Organize regular meetings (in person or digitally) so that attention remains on the group. This also connects multiple chapters in different geographies, which can enhance participants' personal networks. During this time, you can also check in to see if there are any good stories to share with your external networks.

So much of why we come to work is because we want to believe that what we're doing has a purpose. Creating a culture that's aligned



Business Furniture Corp showroom, Dayton, OH. Business Furniture. ©Michael Firsich Photography, LLC, michaelfirsichphotography.com.

with employees' purposes, passions, and interests is arguably the best way to keep them engaged and at your company. While leaders can talk about culture until they're blue in the face, it's the day-to-day actions that make the difference. That's why groups that connect colleagues have such great potential to mold a company culture into the purpose-driven mission that employees crave. By leveraging your marketing skills and experience to help create and maintain such a group, you can play an instrumental role in crafting an empowering company culture that will help to keep employees with you, get the best out of them, and attract others to join as well. ■



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