Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, discusses how a positive work environment and satisfied employees influence business efficiency.

The Importance of Company Culture

3 Tips

Family manager Kathy Peel
On managing stress and personal wellness at work and at home

Growing your own talent
Contributing to professional development

Changing the way the world ‘works’

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Would your company offer nap rooms to employees? How about 28 onsite weekly group dance classes, ranging from ballet to breakdancing? Would it ever give its employees one paid day off for every eight hours of time they volunteer for a charity of their choice?

As America continues on the road to economic recovery, the quality of the workplace and the talent that employers can access to improve competitiveness will be a key issue for all companies.

While the Census Bureau reports that more individuals are currently graduating from high school and college compared to a decade ago, a majority of business leaders say it is still challenging to find employees with the skills and education their companies need.

Given this reality, many successful companies are finding it necessary, and in fact profitable, to invest in training and developing the skills of their existing employees. Corporate Voices for Working Families, a national non-profit business membership organization, will soon publish research that finds that the return on investment from training lower-skilled, entry-level workers is positive and compelling.

Important strategies

In a forthcoming report, “Why Companies Invest in ‘Grow Your Own’ Development Models,” Corporate Voices will illustrate how companies like AKAMARK, CVS Caremark, John Hopkins Hospital and Pacific Gas and Electric have found that “growing their own” talent, often with the joint commitment of community partners, helps to increase employee retention, lower turnover and hiring costs and increases the diversity of the workforce. For these companies, introducing youth to career opportunities is an important strategy for identifying and retaining talent.

While there is a strong business case for “growing your own” talent, companies that do so are also fulfilling part of a corporate social responsibility agenda. By building the skills of young workers, businesses play an important role in connecting more than four million low-income youth with high school diplomas to career opportunities.

As a result, those organizations tend to thrive financially. Since 2000, independent analyst data have shown companies haveComparability 

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"Programs and policies are essential. They are the tools that leaders and managers use to systematically create a great workplace that’s aligned with the organization’s business.”

RICHARD LANGE, CEO, Great Place to Work Institute, Inc.

meaningful career pathways one company showing leadership in this area is H-E-B Grocery Company, which offers a variety of career ‘lattice’ programs to attract, retain and promote employee growth throughout the many stages of their lives—from elementary school to top-level management. H-E-B considers job shadowing, internships, tuition reimbursement, scholarships and leadership training as important aspects of talent development that contribute to its overall success. The vitality and strength of families and communities depends on employer initiatives like these to create meaningful career pathways to make our workforce more competitive.

Through its workforce development portfolio, Corporate Voices seeks to document and encourage employers’ best practices in investment in the skills and education of the workforce. To access research, best practice case studies, each of the one highlightering the H-E-B’s “engaging paths” model mentioned above, and tools for making the business case for investments in workforce training visit: www.corporatevoices.org.

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A quarter century since they began their immense influx into the workforce, they now represent nearly half of all workers in America.

Working women, especially mothers, have redesigned the modern workplace. In doing so, they started and have sustained a cultural shift in how and when work gets done, and in how employers recruit and retain their talent.

This shift has created challenges, however, and mothers are in this new reality even more apparent than with nursing mothers.

Mothers with infants are one of the largest and fastest growing segments in the workforce, particularly in retail, service and other lower-wage industries. Mothers often choose to be breastfeeding after giving birth, both for significant maternal and infant health benefits. But because continuing to breastfeed at work is so difficult—especially for those who don’t have access to a clean or private place to pump milk, scheduling flexibility to do so, or a supportive manager—most stop breastfeeding after going back to work.

Support for nursing mothers has been an issue for decades, but in recent years health care reform has addressed this problem last year—for the first time, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was amended to require employers to provide nonexempt nursing mothers with reasonable break time and a private, space, that is not a bathroom, to pump milk at work. While this new federal law is an important first step, it is by no means enough for anyone wanting to help shape a positive work environment and satisfied employees.

The United States Census Bureau reports that the average American police department spends a little over $2 million on employee travel. At the same time, distance, miles per gallon, and the current cost of gas, that amounts to an employee commuting per month on gasoline alone. Fortunately for many companies, there is a profit benefit available, called Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefits. This allows employers to give employees money specifically for commuting costs such as vans, pools, public transit, and parking.

The first advantage of commuting benefits is money saved. Next, with money saved, it is easier to provide incentives for employees to use forms of transportation other than their own personal vehicles. Finally, we have seen an influx into the workforce, especially mothers with infants, have redefined the modern workforce. Working women, especially mothers, have redefined the modern workforce.

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Spending differently

Health Savings Accounts

Transfer responsibility from HMOs to employee, provoking a vital element in the fight against ballooning health care costs. Insurance plans can be extremely complicated and poorly understood. Coupled with rising health care costs, some companies feel the need to find new ways of managing individual health spending among employees. Health savings accounts are the answer for many such companies. In 2010 the Health savings Act was put in place. The Act enabled employees and employers both to contribute money into an HSA savings account, a triple tax exempt long term funding vehicle designed to pay for health costs. IRA Bank, which focuses exclusively on health savings accounts, offers a 1.5 percent interest rate on balances of $1,000 or higher. People under 55 can use their savings on anything that is section 2120 of the tax code, according to Dr. Steve Neeleman, founder of HealthEquity. “When patients are spending their own money, they ask different questions,” says Neeleman. “People spending their own money are much more likely to use preventaive care, and are more careful with how they spend their money. With the tax advantage we have together saved over $1 billion as of January 2010 across America.”

More than just physical health

Physical health is only one aspect of well-being. John Litts of Healthways categorizes six domains of wellbeing that they use in the Gal- lup Healthways Wellbeing Index: emotional, physical, health, healthy behavior, work environment, and life evaluation. “People who have one or more chronic disease and are in a poor work environment will miss on average six more days of work than a similar person in a good work environment,” says Litts. Healthways takes the survey data in the index and modifies it into the Wellbeing Assessment, which matches biometric screening, medical claims data, and pharmacy data into an algorithm to find what program would be right for each individual. The programs themselves include a suite of online tools, incentive programs, and a national network of support.

The pay-off

Harriss says that for every point you drive up on your overall assessment of wellbeing, an employer sees a one percent reduction in medical costs for every 10 points that number increases, it will show a $409 reduc- tion per person per year, and an 11 percent reduction in unabsorbed absences. Abshire adds, “Rising health costs is a huge cut out of profit, a number of different clients have done the health economics, for every dollar invested yields a five dollar return in savings.”

Rising health care costs are eating away at the bottom line of businesses across the country, and altering the ways that companies hire and manage their people. The best way to deal with this prob- lem is to tackle it head on, healthier employees cost their companies less. Employers can motivate their staff to improve their overall health and therefore lower costs, by imple- menting rewards programs based on their involvement in healthy behaviors.

The key to motivation

Virgin Health Miles is one organi- zation that has developed a way to motivate businesses to practice healthy behaviors. The company works with employers to help businesses motivate their staff to improve their overall health and manage their people.

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WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Today’s workforce is comprised of a significantly different demographic than that of a decade or more ago. It is also comprised of more mothers, students, and with the average age of retirement increasing, older workers as well. With the recent recession and plummeting employment rates, the group has faced financial instabili- ty and cutbacks.

Because of these factors, many people rely on flexible policies in order to just make ends meet. They take on a second or even third job, or continue with their education, from entry-level through retire- ment, work-life balance is an important issue at any stage of an employee’s career.

Taking a life-style approach to work-life balance is essential in recognizing that practices such as flexible work arrangements and personal time-off programs like paternity leave can benefit employees and those abroad. Not only do work-life policies help enable workers who are juggling a variety of commitments to fulfill them, but they also benefit the com- pany itself. Flexible work arrange- ments serve as powerful tools both in recruiting and retaining talent.

Managing home stress and personal wellness starts with business management solutions

Stress at the workplace can be overwhelming, but when combined with the stress of an already overburdened household, it can be paralyzing.

Kathy Peel, founder and CEO of Family Manager Coaching, admits that the information can be overwhel- mingly overwhelming. “I had a business background and I’m a recovering type A,” she said. “I started studying and researching organization and business strategies to better manage my family. It really did reduce stress at home,” she explained.

Peel, determined to share her message with women facing similar strug- gles, has since been a regular speaker on countless television and radio programs, from Oprah’s “Super-Busy” to “Today,” and written 21 books on the topic. “People want to be able to help some other mums with this,” she said. “They are smart women, they have been out in the business world, and they came home and they fell apart. They weren’t taking the things they already knew about managing work and applying it to their home.”

The power of compartmentalizing

Peel’s strategy is simple. One thing by department. She created seven distinct departments: home and family; food and meals; fam- ily and friends; finances; special events; time and scheduling; and self-management—a category that is frequently overlooked. Often peo- ple forget to take care of themselves and don’t get the essential nutrients they need to stay healthy. For example, Peel takes a daily eye vitamin from FloraGLO to make sure she’s doing everything she can to keep her eyes healthy and function- ing at their best.

“As the Family Manager, you’re juggling a lot of different balls all the time. I know I don’t always have the time to eat a balanced diet. Taking a supplement gives me peace of mind knowing I’m bridging the nutri- tional gap to protect my vision,” Peel said.

Kathy Peel
Founder, Family Manager Coaching

*Often people forget to take care of themselves and don’t get the essential nutrients they need to stay healthy.*

Planning for retirement is a difficult concept to grasp, especially for young workers.

That stage of life can seem so far away that the benefit of consistent saving is nearly impossible to instill, even as the current social security system runs out of money. Unfortunately, most people do not start seriously saving for retire- ment until they are in their late 40s. This leaves people unprepared to bridge the inevitable child-rearing years in fact, according to the Employee Benefits Research Institute, 7 per- cent of workers and they had less than $1,000 in retirement savings in 2010, up seven percent from 2009.

The value of automatic enrollment

To combat this worrying trend, experts such as David John of both the Heritage Foundation and the Brookings Institution have conducted extensive research on how people save for retirement. Their findings were clear: “An employer does not get involved, essentially it doesn’t happen. It doesn’t get covered if you don’t take the time to put it in the company, the firm, the bank, or even the 401K, whatever it is.”

John, having spent more than 30 years working in Washington, DC, has created a program called Retirement Made Simpler “aimed at employers of all sizes to explain to them the value of automatic enrollment.” Automatic enroll- ment for retirement savings gives a gigantic boost to the amount of people who save, and how much they save. “Under an automatic program,” John explains, “the worker is part of a 401K, a set amount of sal- ary (usually starting at three per- cent), and invested in a diversified portfolio that changes as the worker ages.” He adds, “there is a second feature called automatic escalation; when a worker goes up a pay- grade, the rate goes into their 401K, while the rest of the raise goes into their paycheck.”

The biggest advantage to auto- enrollment programs is that it makes the decision process much easier for the employee. Most companies function today with opt-out programs, which are extremely complicated and require a lot of planning on the part of the employee. As the state allows, this does not happen. John argues, “The automatic enrollment program changes the default from doing nothing to doing something.”

ANTHONY HYMES
Managing editor

FLEXIBLE WORK

RECRUITING

FLEXIBILITY

RECRUITING

Simplifying retirement planning

SARA QUIGLEY
Managing editor

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For a fresh view on eye health and vision wellness, visit USA Today.EyeSiteOnWellness.com.

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