

## **How they got so good...Culture Lessons from the field**

*Culture Survey Feedback presentations took place in each market that participated in the survey. While presenting in markets that had scored much better on the culture survey than others, their Operations Team was asked the same question, "You are under the same resource and market constraints as every other market, and yet your results were clearly stronger. How did you get so good?" Pages and pages of notes were compiled from these discussions and from them common actions, ideas and themes in the language emerged. As it becomes more critical to drive a highly functioning culture that has a positive effect on all aspects of the bottom line, these actions, ideas and themes could be used as a 'how to' for those markets that are struggling with developing their own culture. Below is a small sample of the feedback.*

### **Theme: Relationship with Contractors and Suppliers**

- We formed a 'Partnership council' that consists of 10 different contractors and suppliers who meet monthly to work out issues that arise. The council does research and comes up with policies and guidelines to address issues. They also make recommendations on training, how to improve relations, how to increase quality, etc. Once they have come up with these recommendations, they publish the results and communicate it to the whole market.
- We include the contractors and suppliers in all of our training free of charge. It boosts their knowledge of our product as well as their relationships with our field employees.
- We share our goals and vision with the contractors and they sign up if they want to be a part of it. We hold meetings to discuss goals, share thoughts, get ideas on how to fine tune processes and WE NEVER SKIP THESE MEETINGS.
- We all walk new products together. We also make sure that representatives from the different contractors are there to see what the other contractors are doing and to get buy in on what is getting built.
- If we could be doing something better or different and one of our contractors knows it, we not only appreciate it when they speak up – we EXPECT them to speak up. We are a team of people building houses; anyone can and should stop the assembly line at any time.

### **Theme: Continuous Teambuilding**

- We start team building from the moment someone joins our team. It all begins with Orientation – every new employee spends time with all key players on the team and then they spend 3 days to a week just getting around to meet everyone. Before going into the field new employees are already developing friendships and joining in on group events. It is good, because this way they know whom they work for and with from the minute they join the team.
- We celebrate life events. We send birthday cards to everyone in the field that is signed by the entire operating committee. (Our City President) writes thank you notes every Monday morning and tracks that he sends them out to so we can track people and their achievements.
- All people get invited to outings – all outings are for everyone not just sales or just construction...everyone.
- We care about the "whole" person on every level and we team up to make sure that we all know each other on every level. It is important that this isn't just where you work, but where you like to work.

### **Theme: Develop your people**

- We develop our people to go to war with us. We like each other as friends and the levels are not "hard". There is a chain of command but it isn't flaunted and there is a definite lack of hierarchy. What is most important is that we all feel comfortable to learn from each other and develop.

- We develop people to be ‘cultural ambassadors’. They are trained and developed to set examples and lead. They do the assimilation and training of new people into our culture.
- We look for people who are interested in their own development. I don’t care if someone wants to learn Japanese! I figure, somewhere down the road they will need to use that Japanese to build, market or sell a house and then they will be ready.

### **Theme: Reward and Recognition**

- We use the 4 to 1 rule – for every criticism you give someone, make sure you give them 4 positive reinforcements.
- Employees recognize each other when someone goes above and beyond – they don’t wait for a special occasion they just do it when the time is right.
- I write thank you notes to my team all of the time, and you know what? They keep them! I was amazed the other day when someone pulled out a 3-year-old thank you note and quoted me!
- We believe in Servant Leadership. We appreciate and serve the people that work for us. We appreciate and thank all laborers and we try to raise up the people in the trenches.

### **Theme: Cultural Fit**

- People have to ‘fit’ in the organization. If there is no fit they will be a sore spot within the organization. We interview people under several different settings by several different functions. We always look for interacting in a group setting.
- We acclimate people day one through all departments but then the real organization kicks in with co-workers teaching culture to each other. We have quarterly meetings where we actually ‘haze’ our new people in a nice and fun way. New people get ‘sponsors’ that emerge on their own to help them acclimate and prosper within our culture.
- During the interview process people are told about the keys to success within our culture and then we don’t try to rule out, we try to rule in. We hire for cultural fit.
- We are continuously interviewing people and if there is a fit we hire them regardless – that is how important fitting into our culture is. If we don’t have a job for them right then, we interview them over time and develop a relationship. Over time there is no selling that needs to be done because they are so sure about us and we are about them too.
- We purposely introduced ‘culture’ into our interview process. We now have a longer interview process to be sure of proper fit.

### **Theme: Continuous Improvement**

- We continually ask the question “What can we do to get better?” We always ask the question and act upon it or explain why we can’t do other things.
- If we don’t know the answer to a question or an issue we conduct focus groups to ensure we improve our processes. We pay attention to employees as people and ask them their opinions for how we can get better. This shows a commitment on management’s behalf that they want to make things better and you get buy in this way as well.
- Our employees want to learn and grow and develop. That is the great thing about improvement; it creates a sense of urgency. It is our job to ensure they have an environment of continuous improvement.

### **Theme: Accountability**

- The idea is to practice what you preach, always.

- We have consistency of purpose, no one blames anyone else but we are all responsible for looking for the answer.
- Everyone sees the bigger picture, so there is no talk like “This isn’t my job” – everyone has accountability for every job. If you are finished and your co-worker isn’t, then you chip in and you both get the job done. That’s what makes us strong.

**Theme: Empowerment and Autonomy**

- Our people are empowered to make a decision even if it is not the right decision – people learn from screw-ups more than they learn from easy successes. People are encouraged at every level to take responsibility and ownership.
- I believe and encourage decisions to be made at the lowest possible level. I figure at the lowest level a decision may cost me a few dollars, but by the time that decision reaches my level the cost is 100 fold. It is all about the bottom line, having my people make decisions saves me money.
- We look for perfect 5’s, the bar has been raised that much. Everyone is competitive and looking for ways to make CSMS scores equal 100%. We play off of the competitiveness but not at the expense of our peers, but more so to empower teams to do their best.