

Expedia's 6 Tips for a Winning Company Culture

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Scoring a place on Glassdoor's Best Places to Work list is no accident; it requires an unshakeable commitment to excellence that few companies are willing to make. But, for those that accept the challenge, the rewards are manifold. In fact, the data is crystal clear: Best Places to Work winners boast more satisfied workers, and financial results that significantly outpace their competitors.

One business that has clearly figured out the secret of success is the winner of our Employees' Choice award (for the second year running), Expedia. Every day, senior leaders at Expedia demonstrate their commitment to fostering a culture of transparency, honesty and accountability by placing these values at the core of every business decision. So, if you want to get your company on next year's list, here are 6 actionable tips from Expedia that will help you on your way.

Embrace Difference

A well-known fruit-based technology company once exhorted us to 'Think Different'. Expedia takes a similar view, building upon the strength that comes from seeing old problems in new ways. This means encouraging new ideas, diverse backgrounds and unique approaches—because averages can lie and sameness is dangerous. At your own company, remember that rules may not be one-size-fits-all and will naturally evolve over time. When it comes to recruiting, understand that diversity, far from being a source of tension, can bring a welcome, fresh perspective to your company and a diverse set of voices that can lead to a more creative workplace.

Lead Humbly

During victory parades in Ancient Rome, servants would be stationed behind the returning general to repeat, 'Memento mori' ('Remember that you have to die') as a means of keeping him humble. While we're not suggesting that your senior leaders adopt such a drastic approach, it does help to remember that a successful business is built from the ground up. Great leaders serve their teams, not the other way round, and while leaders should take their responsibilities to their teams and the company seriously, they should never take themselves too seriously.

A winning company continually makes hypotheses, rigorously tests them and then learns from the results, understanding that no one person has all the answers. This scientific approach is the great leveller—ideas can come from any level within the organisation—and empowers all team members to put forward new ideas; this, in turn, fosters creativity and innovation which leads to better results. Remember that even the most junior employee can have valuable insights into your business.

Be Transparent

The value of transparency in business cannot be overstated; in fact, it is one of the key determining factors behind employee satisfaction. Every employee, from the mail room to the boardroom, wants to know that they are valued as a member of the organisation and that their voice is being heard. Expedia encourages open and transparent dialogue on a regular basis, through its 'Passport to Performance' scheme, which ensures that conversations around development, feedback and coaching do not just happen at annual review but are ingrained in the day-to-day life of the company. Make sure that everyone in your organisation is equipped with the tools and authority to communicate openly and honestly, at all levels: upwards, sideways and downwards. That way, any difficult issues are surfaced quickly, allowing you to act upon them and learn from them.

Organise for Speed

A winning company is always ready to adjust to changing conditions. They gather data as fast as possible, and move as soon as necessary. This focus on speed allows them to make mistakes (which we all do, right?), but to learn from these mistakes and constantly improve. Focusing on speed applies to every aspect of the business, including product development, marketing strategy, web UI and design, app development, platform work, big data/analytics, machine learning, web e-commerce, backend services, etc.

Believe in the Scientific Method

Everyone's ideas are equal in the face of hard data. In other words, data should be used to guide—but not define—your company's actions.

At Expedia, they embrace a 'Test & Learn' philosophy. That is, the company focuses on data-driven, rather than opinion-led, decisions. This actively encourages people to fail (as long as they move fast and learn!), accepting that failure is a natural (and welcome) part of growth, and is an essential requirement for improvement. Give your employees as much input as possible into what the company builds, and how, while placing the emphasis on dispassionate analysis. In this way, employees can claim ownership of the end result, while an analytical environment creates a less political culture.

Act as One Team

At the end of the day, a winning company culture is one in which all employees are striving towards a common goal; and in order for that to happen, everyone must know what the goal is! Open and honest communication throughout the organisation is essential to ensuring that everyone is on the same page.

Expedia's overarching goal is to optimise for the greater good—not just their own, or even their own teams' interests—and they are actively interested in the success of others. Although the company manages various brands and business lines around the world, including Retail, Marketing, Product and Engineering, they are united in their desire to create engaging experiences for their customers. This type of structure allows for employees to collaborate and get exposure to multiple parts of the business and fosters inter-company moves as well. In this way, they are empowered to engineer their own career path.

To learn more secrets of the winners, and put yourself in the running for next year's list, check out our eBook, "The DNA of a Best Place to Work".