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EIGHT TIPS ON HOW TO IMPROVE COMPANY CULTURE IN BUILDER WORKPLACES

Executives from two leading home builders offer advice on how to design the best place to work.

By Symone Strong



From the executive team to the unpaid interns, everyone knows the value of a strong company culture that appreciates all of its members, especially in today's modern work environments that embrace diversity and inclusion. In order to create a workplace where all employees feel valued, the leadership team must put in continuous effort to ensure the company is retaining and attracting top talent. BUILDER compiled a list of workplace tips from executives at two leading residential building companies: Leonard Miller, president and CEO at The New Home Co., and Robert Hefner, vice president of human resources at David Weekley Homes.

Miller recently offered his advice on this topic in a session at the Builder 100 virtual conference called "Design a Fortune 100 Best Place to Work," and Hefner, who works for a builder that was recognized on Fortune's "Best Workplaces for Women" and "Best Workplaces for Millennials" lists in 2020, echoes similar guidance that could help other builders create workplace cultures that no one could turn down.

1. Be people-centric first: Both Miller and Hefner heavily emphasized this point when speaking about the workplace. Hefner, in particular, states that "some companies like to lead from a profit prospective, then product, then people." At David Weekley, it's a conscious decision to reverse that order, and all employees are referred to as "team members." "We think of our people, which creates a great product and then eventually the profit comes," says Hefner. "It's almost like the profit is a happenstance."

2. Be transparent and honest: It is also imperative to make sure employees understand the company's vision and purpose, while keeping them up to date with current plans and how the company is doing against those plans. At The New Home Co., Miller writes leaderships letters to convey principles and beliefs, conducts monthly town halls with open Q&A sessions, and sends weekly update emails.

3. Be flexible: Leadership should keep in mind that all team members also have personal lives. Before the pandemic, it involved showing understanding for unexpected schedule changes or life-altering events. Since COVID-19 emerged, it has included allowing employees to work from home for their health and safety and pivoting the business to virtual meetings and distanced communication.

4. Be consistent: People are observant and they will catch inconsistencies in the company and in the company's leadership. "It's not what you say, it's through your actions and how they see you act in the toughest of times," Miller says. "I think people are smart. They are very perceptive, and that's ultimately how they are going to measure you."

5. Be approachable: Employees should feel comfortable approaching leaders to discuss new ideas or for help to solve an issue. Hefner says, "From a leadership perspective, we've pushed to get to know your team pretty much like family," and Miller emphasizes the importance of "showing you genuinely care, having an open office, and listening."

6. Be inclusive: Beyond the pandemic, the country experienced a lot of social unrest last year. To address diversity, Miller says The New Home Co. established an employee task force that will spearhead new ideas; formalized diversity training; and instituted the use of blind resumes, where recruiters see only a candidate's background and no names. The company also plans to implement a diversity calendar to highlight people of all backgrounds during different times of the year.

7. Be thoughtful: Companies also have the choice to offer more tangible appreciation options in their benefits packages. Whether it be a high percentage match on a 401(k) or receiving ownership shares of the company after so many years—David Weekley offers both options—Hefner advises, "Anything that they can put in place that makes the team feel like they are part of the organization will also help build that culture."

8. Be curious: All of the above traits and tips are great to practice, but it also helps to periodically ask team members if they are seeing the efforts put into action. Both The New Home Co. and David Weekley Homes use annual

employee engagement surveys to learn about how employees feel about the workplace and to uncover any areas that might need improvement.

