

INSIDE PR

EXECUTIVE EDITION

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AGENCY PROFILE**At Creamer, Culture Change is Driving a Turnaround Effort**

As public relations agencies of every size and stripe confront the challenge of attracting the best and the brightest people, it is clear that smaller, more entrepreneurial firms believe they have the advantage. When it comes to cultural transformation — making an agency more democratic, more open, more collegial — it's easier to transform a culture of 50 people than a culture of 500.

The firms that appear to be setting the pace in creating the agency culture of the future are firms that started with a blank page, like ChandlerChicco, or firms where the founder could drive change quickly and decisively, such as Schenkein in Denver. (Both those agencies have been profiled in recent issues of Inside PR.)

An agency like Creamer Dickson Basford, with decades of tradition and a reputation as one of the least appealing work environments in the industry, faces a much tougher task. The agency's fee income has dipped below the \$10 million mark — after CDB was in the top 10 little more than a decade ago — but even so, few recent alumnae would describe the agency as nimble or quick to respond to change.

The challenge facing Darryl Salerno, when he took over as chairman and chief executive officer a little over a year ago, was considerable. Salerno says he experienced "good years and bad" while at Burson-Marsteller, and learned from his experience at both Edelman and Ruder-Finn, and was convinced that the key to turning the agency around was creating the right kind of agency culture.

"We have the vast resources of Havas behind us, and our objective is to build a world-class public relations operation," says Salerno. "The key to that strategy is being able to attract, develop, and retain the best people in the business. But becoming an employer of choice is not a strategy as much as it is an ideal. We didn't set out to create a great workplace because it's a great way to attract people; we did it because it is the right thing to do. Of course, it turned out to be a great strategy, but that's secondary."

The first obstacle to overcome was skepticism.

Says Chris Dobens, the firm's vice president and director of marketing, "My first reaction was that [Salerno] was full of it. Every agency says the same thing about employees. This agency said the same thing before he got here. The words are easy. Following through is difficult." Dobens has developed into the most vocal supporter of what Salerno is trying to do, as well as his toughest critic when the agency does not live up to its new aspirations.

Another skeptic was Nancy Maffucci, who has worked at major PR agencies including Cohn & Wolfe and Manning Selvage & Lee, and who spent several years at MasterCard International before joining CDB last year. At MasterCard, Maffucci had been part of a culture change initiative that began in 1994 and was still ongoing when she left.

"It all depends on the leadership of the organization, and the degree to which they are committed to change," says Maffucci. "The more time I spent with Darryl, the more apparent it was that he was totally committed to making things different, and when I met with other members of the leadership team it was clear they were in synch no matter how I asked the question."

To translate Salerno's vision into reality, Lloyd Kirban — a colleague of the new CEO at Burson-Marsteller, and one of his first hires at CDB — initiated a research program, talking with the agency's account directors to find out what they thought about the current culture, and what needed changing. As a result, the agency established committees focusing on professional development, rewards and recognition, and benefits programs.

One of the first concrete changes — it also had significant symbolic value — was a change in benefits. The agency increased its share of benefit costs by 10 percent, while reducing the contribution made by employees by 70 percent. Salerno also increased vacation time and introduced one of the industry's first sabbatical programs, which kicks in after five years and gives people "a chance to re-fresh and replenish."

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“These programs were important,” says Salerno, “but not as important as changing the way we treat our coworkers. There’s an atmosphere of mutual respect and collegiality.”

Salerno knew the changes were taking hold when an outside consultant visited the company to train people in the use of Lotus Notes. When the session was complete, he told the CEO, “This is the only company I ever visited where I couldn’t tell the mailroom guy from a senior vice president.” Says Salerno, “It’s not that we don’t have structure, but one of the great things about the culture here is that everyone treats everyone the same way, regardless of title.”

Says Adam Sohmer, who returned to the agency a year ago, after having worked at CDB briefly in the early 90s, “You’re not allowed to destroy people here. You’re not allowed to tear people down. It’s just not acceptable.”

Salerno believes that the turnaround at CDB was made both easier and more difficult by the agency’s past. It was easier to convince the agency’s existing employees that he was sincere about change, because they saw the improvements in both policy and culture immediately.

Says one account director, “There was obviously a morale problem. There was very high turnover. We were getting a reputation as a sweatshop. There was a feeling that management was always trying to get as much as it could out of people, but was not giving as much in return. When Darryl took over, his first address to the company focused on culture. He made it clear that he believed people could work hard and have fun at the same time. He sent a very positive signal.”

Like several others, the account director mentions Salerno’s dog, a Maltese terrier called Merlin, as one of the early signals that things were going to be different. Merlin spends most of the day in Salerno’s office, but occasionally joins other members of staff for lunch. He has been adopted as the company mascot, and as a symbol of a more relaxed work environment. He even has a title: director of stress management.

It was more difficult to convince outsiders of the change, because the agency’s reputation did not change nearly as fast as its culture. That’s why many of Salerno’s early hires have been people with whom he worked at other agencies, people already familiar with his management philosophy.

“Image always trails after change,” says Kirban, one of the pioneers of reputation research. “It may be a while before perceptions catch up with reality.”

Sohmer says he has spoken to several former CDB colleagues who were incredulous when they learned of his decision to return. For that reason, he says, he has become something of “de facto evangelist” for the new CDB. “There were a lot of talented people here when I worked here the first time. It would be great to get some of them back together,” he says.

All prospective employees are rigorously screened, even though the agency is once again in growth mode, and is constantly looking to hire.

“When we interview candidates, we spend a lot of time talking about our philosophy,” Salerno says. “If they don’t have a commitment to this as a way of doing business, they probably don’t belong at this agency.”

Havas, meanwhile, seems impressed — at least enough to support Salerno’s approach.

“I am a human being first,” says Salerno. “I just happen to be a human being who is also the leader of a company. But as a human being I will measure my success on the basis of whether people regard this agency as the best place to work in this industry. I don’t care if we are the biggest agency in the world, or the most profitable, except in that those things would create job and career opportunities for our people.”

Havas, he says, wants CDB to become one of the five best public relations firms in the country over the next three years, but it is prepared to let Salerno decide how that goal will be realized. Salerno is confident that the right things to do will also turn out to be the best thing to do as far as three years will tell.

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ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Creamer Sabbatical Program Aims to Improve Workplace

When Darryl Salerno took over as chairman and chief executive at Creamer Dickson Basford a little over a year ago, his was clear about his first objective. He wanted to turn CDB – decried by critics for its overly political culture and inability to hold on to senior staff – into one of the industry's employers of choice. That, he said, was the only way to attract the kind of people needed to halt the agency's alarming financial decline.

Over the past 18 months, CDB has begun to rebound, particularly in the technology arena, and one of the keys has been its ability to attract bright, young people. This week, in a move clearly designed to help the agency hold on to those people, Salerno announced one of the most progressive employee sabbatical programs in the PR industry. This program, combined with the agency's expanded vacation policy and additional holidays, is designed to reward CDB's employees for their hard work, Salerno says.

"Working for a public relations agency is very demanding and can occasionally become very stressful," he says. "Our paid sabbatical program and expanded vacation and holiday policies will ensure that our staff have the time to enjoy life outside the office. This will also benefit our clients because it will reduce employee turnover and ensure that our staff has balance in their lives."

Many agencies have resisted or restricted sabbatical programs because of the concern that key account staff might take extended leaves, causing client concerns. Salerno believes that problem can be addressed through smart management, ensuring that clients are served by integrated teams. Clients need to recognize that their relationship is with the agency, not an individual account leader.

Says Salerno, "The temporary departure of a single individual will not have a significant impact on the level of counsel and service clients receive."

Employees receive a four-week paid sabbatical after their fifth year, six weeks after their 10th, eight weeks after their 15th, 10 weeks after their 20th, and 12 weeks every five years thereafter. The program gives employees complete freedom as to what they can do with their paid sabbatical time.

In addition, the program honors any time an employee has spent working at the company. CDB believes that it is the only national PR firm that doesn't require continuous service as part of the criteria for its sabbatical program. The agency has also made the program retroactive, recognizing long-time employees for their past contributions.

"This is the kind of program that keeps you loyal and committed," said Rosemary Karl, an administrative assistant, who will be eligible for a 12-week sabbatical when she celebrates her 25th anniversary in two years. "I can't retire now!"

Senior vice president and managing director, Katie McSorley, has been with the agency for 17 years. "I expect to come back after 10 weeks with a fresh perspective, looking and feeling 10 years younger. This will be a real benefit to our staff and clients, as well as to me."

The agency also announced that it has improved its vacation policy to offer employees three weeks after three years and four weeks after five years.

The agency has recently added several unconventional programs to benefit employees. Biweekly massages are among the most popular, followed closely by Wednesday staff lunches. And company events have included field trips to see "Star Wars: Episode One – The Phantom Menace" at the Ziegfeld Theater in May and June's Bring Our Parents to Work Day (see last week's newsletter).

"We feel that our combination of programs – such as our sabbatical, vacation, and training programs – along with our fun and rewarding work environment make CDB the best place to work in the PR industry," added Salerno.

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AGENCY MANAGEMENT

In a Twist, It's Not Children CDB Staff Bring to Work

By LaShieka Purvis

Workers at many companies have had the opportunity to take their children to work at least one day out of the year. But in the public relations business—so little understood by those who don't actually work in it—parents may be equally confused about what account executives or agency VPs do all day. That's why one major agency, Creamer Dickson Basford, took advantage of Father's Day recently to hold its first "Bring Our Parents to Work Day."

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AGENCY MANAGEMENT

CDB Employees Get Chance to Bring Parents to Work

Continued from page 1

"Because of its behind-the-scenes nature and relative youth, public relations is either unknown or often misunderstood by those outside the profession," says Darryl Salerno, chairman and CEO. "We took a poll among our staff and discovered that most parents have difficulty in understanding what we do for a living."

Twenty-one parents turned out to participate in the day-long event, which began promptly at 10 a.m. and ended at 4:30 p.m. with soda and cocktails. Activities commenced with a course called "PR 101," which provided parents with an overview of what the PR business is all about. Prior to that session many employees admitted that their parents didn't have a clue about their profession and needed to be "walked through" the fundamentals of industry.

"My parents assumed that my job was just related to advertising. They never grasped what I did for a living, until now," said Jamie DePasquale, account director, whose parents attended the event.

Account coordinator, Kimberly Schlofss said that she would explain her profession to her parents, who also came to the program, by using examples in the media, whether it would be through television or the newspapers. She would tell them that CDB was affiliated with that product or a certain event. "In the PR 101 workshop, our CEO led them through the ins and outs of the PR industry. My parents walked away with a better understanding. It was basically like they sat through a class."

Employees and their parents had a particularly good time during the brainstorming luncheon workshop. Having learned what the public relations business was all about in PR 101, parents then had a chance to apply their expertise. The parents were told to come up with ideas for a new business opportunity, Mott's mixer products. They got the chance to put themselves in their children's shoes and create ideas and suggestions for a possible account.

"The parents were fantastic," Salerno says. "They were very excited about it and they jumped right in! They were happy to be helping us and proved to be extremely helpful. "These parents came out of it with a very solid understanding of what their children do for a living. We were able to get very universal and positive feedback about their children's professions."

Schloff too was pretty impressed with her parents during the brainstorming activity. "They caught on really fast and I was very proud of them. A couple of their ideas were received very well. They were still talking about it the next day!"

DePasquale's mother not only came up with recipes for a product, but she also created an ingenious catch phrase and suggested different types of research CDB should consider looking into.

Salerno was definitely pleased about the brainstorming workshop. He felt as though the parents' clever ideas surely met the purpose behind the entire event.

Employees enjoyed the day just as much as their families did. Salerno said that CDB staffers appreciated the agency taking the time to do this for them and their families. At a time when PR firms are struggling to balance employees' busy work schedules with other commitments, it was an indication that CDB wants to become a more family-oriented environment.

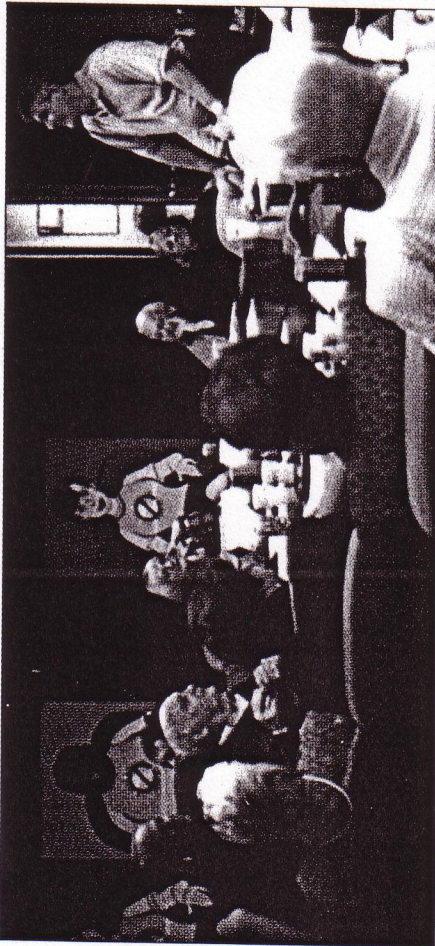
It seems to have worked. "I was happy to share a huge part of my life with my parents," says Schlofss. "A lot of my friends were surprised to hear that CDB was doing something like this."

Bring Your Parents to Work Day will become an annual event at CDB. It is already scheduled to take place next year, conveniently between Mother's Day and Father's Day.

DRAWBACK

July 5, 1999

DIARY



Open house... Creamer Dickson Basford employees recently brought their moms and dads to work

Can your parents define 'strategic media placement'?

Can your mom or dad define exactly what PR is?

The parents of employees at Creamer Dickson Basford couldn't either, apparently. To combat this problem, the agency recently held a "Bring Our Parents to Work" day at its New York headquarters.

The firm conducted an informal intra-agency poll and discovered that most employees' parents didn't understand PR. CDB promptly decided the best place to start informing outsiders about PR was with the families of its personnel.

"Because of its behind-the-scenes nature and relative youth, PR is either unknown or misunderstood by those outside the profession," said Darryl Salerno, CDB's chairman and CEO.

Twenty-one parents showed up for the day and took CDB's new PR 101 training class. Afterwards, the visitors attended a working lunch hour headed by Phillip Bloom, SVP and head of the agency's consumer practice, where they brainstormed ideas for bringing food products to the fore-

front of public awareness.

Christopher Dobens, VP and director of marketing at CDB, said the program opened more than a few eyes. "Here were people who didn't understand what their kids were doing for a living," he said. "Now they don't understand why companies aren't investing more money in PR."

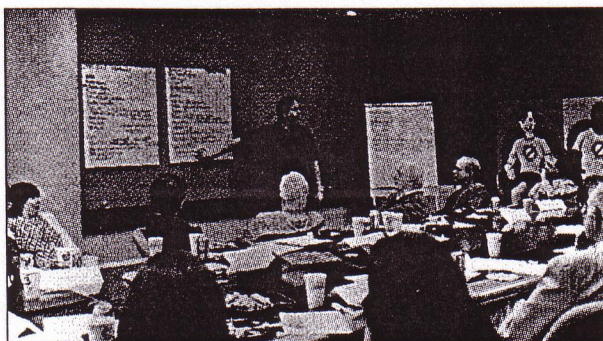
At the end of the day, parents received certificates saying they were versed in PR and enjoyed cocktails with CDB's staff. One even asked, "Are you accepting applications?"

← TRENDWATCH →

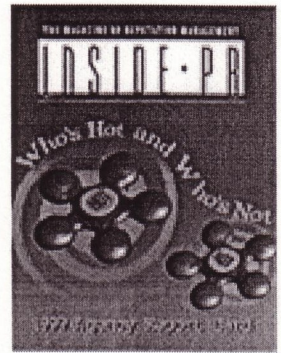
Compiled by John Elsasser

AGENCY CELEBRATES FATHER'S DAY BY BRINGING PARENTS TO WORK

To help foster a better understanding of public relations, Creamer Dickson Basford (CDB) employees conducted their first "Bring Our Parents to Work Day" last June 21.



"Because of its behind-the-scenes nature and relative youth, public relations is either unknown or often misunderstood by those outside the profession," says Darryl Salerno, chairman and CEO of the New York-based agency. "We want to change that, and it seems only logical to start with those closest to us." Salerno says that they took a poll among the staff and discovered that most parents have difficulty in understanding what their children do for a living. "It's time that changed, and not just for us at CDB, but for everyone in this business," he says. CDB's New York office had parents coming from as far away as Charlotte, N.C. to participate in the event. (CDB also has offices in Pittsburgh and Irvine, Calif.) The day began with an office tour followed by a seminar that explained the fundamentals of public relations. The parents then had a working lunch in which they participated in an actual brainstorming session to develop new ideas for a beverage company. The afternoon was filled with staff presentations that showcased CDB's best work. Lastly, a cocktail reception that evening gave parents an opportunity to informally interact with the staff. CDB's event drew kudos from others in the PR profession. Says Jack Bergen, president of the Council of Public Relations Firms: "Few professions are as little understood as public relations, and there can be no better place to begin building that understanding than with one's own parents."



CREAMER DICKSON BASFORD

1999 Agency Report Card

The bad news is that Creamer Dickson Basford, a decade ago one of the top 12 public relations firms in the U.S., would barely make the top 40 today. The good news is that Darryl Salerno, named CEO a little more than a year ago, has a clear vision of how to reverse the trend. The agency's decline began as CDB earned a reputation as a difficult place to work, and so Salerno's priority is to create a healthier work environment, one that treats employees as adults, that recognizes and encourages differences in personal style. A series of initiatives-enhanced benefits, a sabbatical program, onsite massages, even an innovative Take Your Parents to Work Day-have set the agency on the right track, and turnover was far lower this year than it was 12 months ago.

Salerno believes that everything else – good people, good work, good clients, and ultimately growth and profitability-will flow from this beginning. He has already brought in a couple of key executives, both former Burson-Marsteller colleagues. Lloyd Kirban will head the research group and Nancy Maffucci (ex-Manning, ex-Cohn & Wolfe, ex-Mastercard) is heading the rejuvenated consumer group. Rich Layne, who formerly managed the New York office for technology specialist Neale-May & Partners, heads the tech group but is expected to move into a consulting role once a permanent practice leader is found.

Meanwhile, the agency's greatest strength is in the business-to-business group, where practice leader Katie McSorley (nee Esser) has provided the kind of stability missing in other units. Accounts include Bayer's polymers division, Carrier Corporation, and Bowne Publishing. In the tech group, meanwhile, the firm represents clients such as Tornado and Hurricane. Fees are rising again, and Salerno hopes to record a 75 percent increase in business over the first two years of his tenure – enough to show that CDB is back on track.

Growth could be even more impressive if parent Havas Advertising opens its pockets. The French communications conglomerate recently acquired Grayling, one of the U.K.'s leading public relations firms, and is clearly interested – after lengthy neglect – in expanding its PR holdings. With a couple of good acquisitions, CDB could be back at the \$25 million level again, and a real player.

PRWEEK

December 6, 1999

NEWS

CDB grows in California with \$1.6m CSP acquisition

By Aimee Grove

CORONA, CA: Creamer Dickson Basford (CDB) bolstered its Southern California operations late last month with the acquisition of CSP Communications, a 15-person, \$1.6 million firm.

CDB, a New York-based agency owned by Havas Advertising, has had an office in

nearby Irvine, CA since 1996. Together, the CDB and CSP operations will have about 22 employees and more than \$2.5 million in combined annual billings.

CSP co-owners Christopher Perez and Scott Smith will head the newly merged agency, which will assume the CDB moniker. Financial details of

the deal were not disclosed.

The merger adds a range of clients to the CDB roster, including Toyota Motorsports, Price Pfister and Pioneer New Media. The firm will also handle regional work for the Coors Brewing Company and Sprint PCS.

CSP is just the first of several acquisitions CDB has in the

works, according to chairman and CEO Darryl Salerno. A full-service agency with more than 70 employees nationwide, CDB has reportedly been seeking to add a hi-tech agency to its stable.

"Our goal is to expand our geographical coverage and product offerings across the US," Salerno said.

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AGENCY NEWS

CDB Buys California Firm, More Acquisitions Expected

NEW YORK—Creamer Dickson Basford has acquired CSP Communications Inc., a southern California public relations agency, headquartered in Corona and serving national and regional consumer, technology, and business-to-business clients.

“This acquisition will strengthen our Southern California presence, which we established in 1996, by adding a very talented team that understands regional issues and already has an impressive client base,” said Darryl Salerno, CDB’s chairman and CEO. “It reflects our strong commitment to growing and developing our West Coast operations.”

Salerno said he was confident that after several years of decline, CDB was set to begin growing again. The agency, which spent several years on the verge of the top 10, saw fees decline dramatically during the 90s. But parent Havas has been buying public relations firms, most recently the U.K.’s Grayling Group, and Salerno says he believes the French advertising giant will invest in building a comprehensive presence in the U.S.

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CDB Acquires West Coast Firm

Continued from page 1

“This acquisition is the first of several we are exploring,” said Salerno. “Our goal is to strategically expand our geographic coverage and product offering across the U.S. while helping Havas Advertising achieve its stated objective of 60 percent growth in the Diversified Agencies Division over the next three years.”

CSP co-owners Christopher Perez and Scott Smith will assume management responsibilities for all Southern California operations, including CDB’s existing Irvine office. CSP has \$1.6 million in fees in 1999 and employs 15 people.

“We’re very excited about joining the CDB team,” said Perez. “There are a lot of similarities between our organizations—the range of services, types of clients, and philosophical approach to the business.”

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ACCOUNTS

CDB Builds B-to-B Practice

NEW YORK—Creamer Dickson Basford has added more than \$1 million in revenues through its business-to-business practice in the first three quarters of 1999.

“The fact that our growth comes from existing clients as well as new ones reaffirms the approach we have taken— attracting high-caliber professionals who consistently deliver valuable counsel and results,” said Katie McSorley, a 17 year veteran of the agency recently promoted to executive vice president and head of the practice.

New clients include Amorim Industrial Solutions, for corporate and product publicity; Bowne & Company, for corporate and product publicity; Haverfield Corporation; Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation, for positioning and promotion; Sithe Energies, for brand building; and Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux, for corporate communications, employee and investor relations counsel.

In addition, the agency has earned expanded commitments from existing clients, including Bayer and Carrier.

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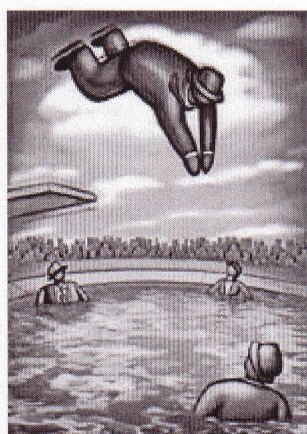
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Managing your business

strategies and tactics for managing your business

Create a Winning Corporate Culture

by R. Daniel Foster



Thinking that it's time for "cultural change" in your organization? Perhaps managers have begun tossing around that ubiquitous term "corporate culture." Whether you're on top of the dot-com mountain and went public last week, or just posted your first dollar bill behind a Formica counter, realize that your organization's culture is a profit-producing variable that shouldn't be overlooked.

"If you haven't been paying attention to your organizational culture, that doesn't mean you don't have one," says P.J. Bouchard, co-author of "Getting Your Shift Together, Making Sense of Organizational Culture and Change" (CCI Press). "It just means you may have one you don't want."

Hence the first step in creating a winning corporate culture: Identify the culture that now surrounds you. And exactly what is culture? Some call it an organization's oxygen, the nearly intangible feel to the workplace that either empowers employees to tackle tasks, or has got them swapping recipes via email with their cousin Helen in Houston. Bottom line, culture defines employee morale, encompassing your company's mission, values, future outlook, and most importantly, the manner in which employees are treated.

"A preeminent example of a successful corporate culture is found at Southwest airlines," says Bouchard. "Not long ago Southwest was going broke. It had one plane left, which it had to sell. But they reorganized the company with employees as owners/shareholders. In effect, they created a workplace that's fun and invigorating. A place where you can make mistakes, and then learn from them. You see the culture reflected in employees' eyes, and you hear it in their voices. For them, it's not just about showing up for work."

The lesson? Employees want to be respected and valued. Bouchard uses the acronym ACT: Authenticity + congruency = trust. "Trust is earned," says Bouchard. "When employees don't trust managers it's because managers have not acted authentically and congruently. They've talked out of both sides of their mouths. Employees don't know what to believe."

Building a Killer Culture

To create a culture that values employees, begin by garnering input from all levels of your organization. "There's nothing worse than a business saying, 'We are this or that,' and only the top three executives really believe it," says Christopher Dobens, Chief Cultural Officer of the New York City-based public relations firm Creamer Dickson Basford. Dobens shares that his firm was once a "sweat shop" where employees would constantly "bitch and complain" about management whose style was "we yell and they move." Dobens was hired to change that atmosphere, and he began the Herculean task by soliciting employee input.

"It was a grueling process," says Dobens, whose firm has 82 employees across the nation. "Everybody in your organization will have a slightly different sense of how the company should be re-tooled and what it should stand for. Accounting may view it from the material perspective. Sales will focus on serving the client. How do you find common ground?"

Dig deep, says Dobens. Don't go for the quick and easy mission statement. After months of work, Dobens and his team boiled a mission and values statement down to several points, which included making a difference in the world, enriching the lives of others, appreciating humor, maintaining a healthy balance between one's personal and professional life, and striving for excellence, among others. The idea of digging deep, he adds, will prevent another CEO from coming in and changing the culture, no doubt causing employees to roll their eyes as they endure yet another reorientation.

Creamer Dickson Basford, along with an increasing number of firms, do pro bono work, and consider it a cultural keystone. Case in point: Seattle-based Gary Manuel Salon which has hosted a farcical speed croquet fundraising tournament for several years running. Players arrive in costume and bribe judges to cheat. Over the past 13 years, the salon, teaming with others in the area, has raised \$400,000 for various causes. The result? Increased self-esteem and camaraderie among employees. In short, good people like to work for companies that do good things for other good people.

Whatever culture you decide on, make sure it sticks. "The strongest point we make about our culture is that it will not change," says Dobens. "Twenty years from now we may be in a different business because of new technology. But our core values will remain, we feel that strongly about them." While the company's unflinching approach to culture may

seem rigid to some, Dobens says that arriving at a strong, deep culture means "there will be no need to change it," he says. "Build it to last, not just get you by."

As with most organizations, perks and rewards are part of Creamer Dickson Basford's culture. Staff are often taken on outings, such as to a new Star Wars movie. Neck and shoulder masseurs come every other week to give 15 minute rub-downs. And there's a semi-regular pub crawl which is "a good way for employees to blow off steam," says Dobens. "Company's like IBM used to coerce employees to associate with each other, but that's hard to mandate. But giving staff a couple hundred dollars to sit in a bar eating chicken wings, drinking beer and saying whatever they please is invaluable."

Bouchard cautions, however, against creating outings that may be perceived as placating, or "downright painful for employees." Today's workplace is diverse. Know that not everyone will jump at the chance to watch an employee talent show, or, after a nine hour workday, spend another three at a bad karaoke bar.

"I've seen employees get very agitated with this kind of thing," says Bouchard. "They know they'll have to work twice as hard the next day because everyone went to Disneyland. Don't assume what your employees will like. Ask them."

On the other hand, Bouchard realizes that businesses need to stake out what is and what is not important to their culture. "For example, people who work at Nordstrom's are all called 'Nordies,'" says Bouchard. "If you don't like being called a Nordie, well, you shouldn't apply for a job there."

What's it Worth to You

Once you've identified a workable culture, just how much money should you sink into this all-too intangible essential? That depends, say experts, on how valuable you perceive culture to be. The idea, however, is not to park a personal espresso cart next to each employees' desk. But to lay out cash in measure to how much you value employees as human beings, and not just as cogs in your profit machine.

"In this competitive environment, just throwing more money at employees is a fool's bet," says Dobens. "There's always going to be someone out there willing to pay your employee more. So culture is the answer."

In fact, a lousy culture quickly drains cash from a business, say Dobens, Bouchard and others. Bouchard figures about two hours of productivity a day is lost should an organization lose employees' trust, and hence their drive for excellence. "Say you have 50 employees that are paid an average of \$20 an hour," says Bouchard. "That's \$2,000 a day lost in productivity, or \$40,000 a month." If employees are instead amped up about arriving at their desks each morning, she adds, getting a lot done in far fewer hours is the outcome.

"Whatever sort of culture you now find yourself in," says Bouchard, "Know that the initial steps you take to improve it will undoubtedly be welcomed by your staff. And that's an excellent beginning."
