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**Creating a great place to work**

*Our people are our greatest asset. How many times do we hear this tarnished, worn out old cliché trotted out? But when organisations can say it and mean it, then they have a truly powerful message. That's what creating a great place to work is all about: attracting, keeping, encouraging and inspiring the best people to do the best possible work.*

**Put people at the centre of your operating model**

This is the cornerstone of making any organisation a great place to work, whatever business you are in. Success depends on the quality of the team, so if you have a consistent and uncompromising focus on getting the right people then you have the foundations for an attractive workplace.

**Encouraging ownership**

By giving people ownership of their own ideas and then recognising the contribution that they make, you build up strong bonds of loyalty and community within your organisation. What's more you encourage a wider pool of creative and innovative ideas.

**Make people feel part of the company**

Encouraging ownership is part of the wider picture of making people feel part of the company. It's all too easy to create divisions between old hands and fresh faces, and for other cliques to develop. The solution can range from regular company meetings in a central location to "I am a name, not a number" T-shirts. There are plenty of ways to make people feel as though they belong, they just need to be reiterated. Success is in small things carried out day after day after day.

**Build up trust**

Upside-down management is the buzzword here. It's about breaking down hierarchies and encouraging openness and honesty. If there is a lack of transparency in the company, if employees do not trust the management, or do not believe in what they are doing then it shows in the most crucial areas.

**Show appreciation**

Certainly everyone should earn what they deserve – and deserve what they earn. But that doesn't mean you should fall into the trap of relying solely on a high salary to motivate your staff: financial remuneration is only part of what gets people out of bed in the morning to do their best work. And if the relationship between you and your staff is based purely on money, then you lose the sense of community, loyalty and trust that you have built up. Everyone likes to be thanked. And in many cases it is no more complicated than that.

**Personalisation**

Company policy and guidelines are essential to help create a level playing field for all your staff, but individuals are individuals, so training, recruitment, gifts - everything needs to take that into account. Also bear in mind that career paths differ and progress at a different pace. Not everyone fits on the same escalator: some will go slower and actually want to progress slower because they have young children, an urge to go travelling, or a trans-continental relationship. An organisation that fits round people will be far more successful at keeping them than one that expects them to bend to its will.

**A sense of fun**

"Work hard, play hard." Another of the clichés that surrounds business life. But putting the fun into work is more than that. You need your people to have a sense of passion about what they do and who they work for – and that doesn't come solely from Friday night drinking sessions. They put a lot of themselves into the job to be successful, so you need to give people room to be more than just the professional face they put on for clients.

**Inclusivity**

The real challenge is how to maintain a strong culture while being open to all types of people. With growing companies there is a serious risk that the culture actually

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becomes a barrier, so you we need to work hard to ensure that the inclusive environment becomes a club that wants to have new people and that new people want to join.

### **Pride**

It's often hard to define what pride means within an organisation – but you know when you have it. It's about going to a dinner party and not mumbling the answer when people ask you what you do! If people have a sense of pride in what the company is going to achieve, they get pleasure from that. It's important because there's no point in coming to work if you don't enjoy what you do.

### **Integrity**

It's important to remember that the virtuous circle of trust, community, and loyalty takes effort to create, but no effort to lose. All you need to do is stop doing the right thing by your people and your clients. You know you're getting it right if you are happy to explain your decisions, face to face, to everyone that is affected by them. Most of all, ask yourself: would you bring in friends and family to work with you.

### **By Jim Hayward**

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*The Structure Group is a management consultancy specialising in the energy and finance sectors. In 2007 it was voted 13th in the Top 50 Best Workplaces in the UK by the Great Places to Work Institute.*

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