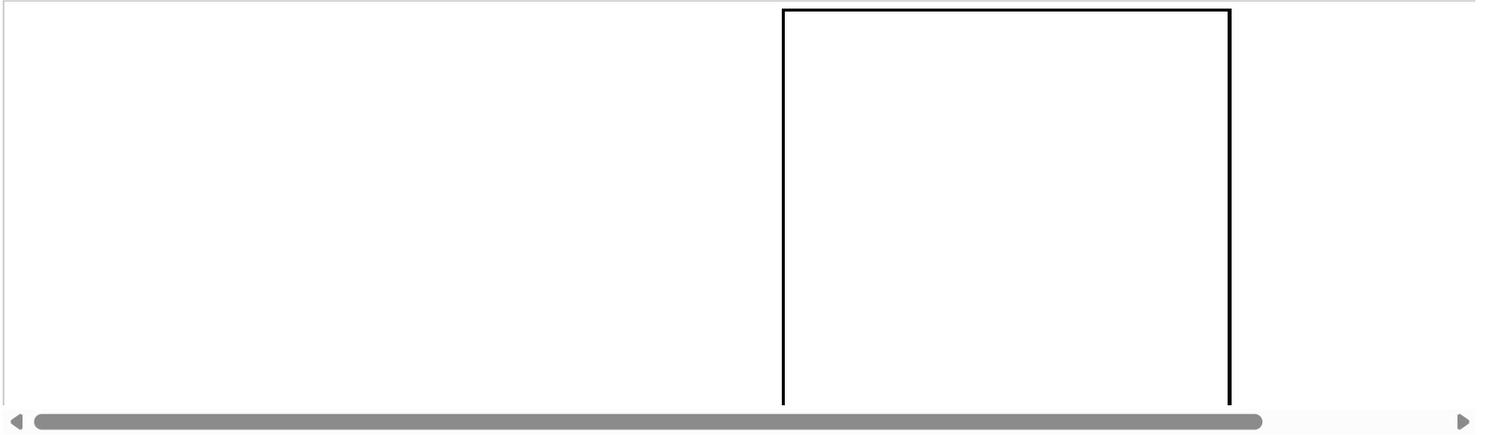


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SMALL BUSINESS

Cultures That Keep: How To Build Work Environments People Don't Want To Leave

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for **Forbes Business Council**, **COUNCIL POST** | Membership (fee-based)

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Attracting talent is just the beginning in today's dynamic work environment. The true measure of success is creating a workplace culture that makes people want to stay.

When we talk about "culture," it's easy to think of buzzwords or superficial perks. But the truth is, a culture that keeps people is deeper than that. It's about creating an environment where employees feel seen, valued and connected to a purpose bigger than their daily tasks.

As leaders, it's our responsibility to nurture such cultures—the kind of workplaces where people don't just come for a paycheck but also to grow, contribute and belong. Let's explore what it genuinely takes to build environments that engage and inspire our most valuable people.

Why Retention Is More Than Just Numbers

Employee turnover isn't just a statistic; it's a wake-up call. Every time a valued team member leaves, it disrupts workflows, drains morale and adds hidden costs that go far beyond recruitment fees. One often-cited statistic from the Society for Human Resource Management says that replacing an employee can cost a company **six to nine months** of that person's salary.

But the impact isn't just financial. Turnover affects the culture itself, along with the trust, collaboration and shared momentum that make an organization thrive.

I believe retention starts with recognizing people as whole individuals, not just resources. When people feel that their growth, well-being and voice matter, they're more likely to stay, not out of

obligation, but out of genuine commitment.

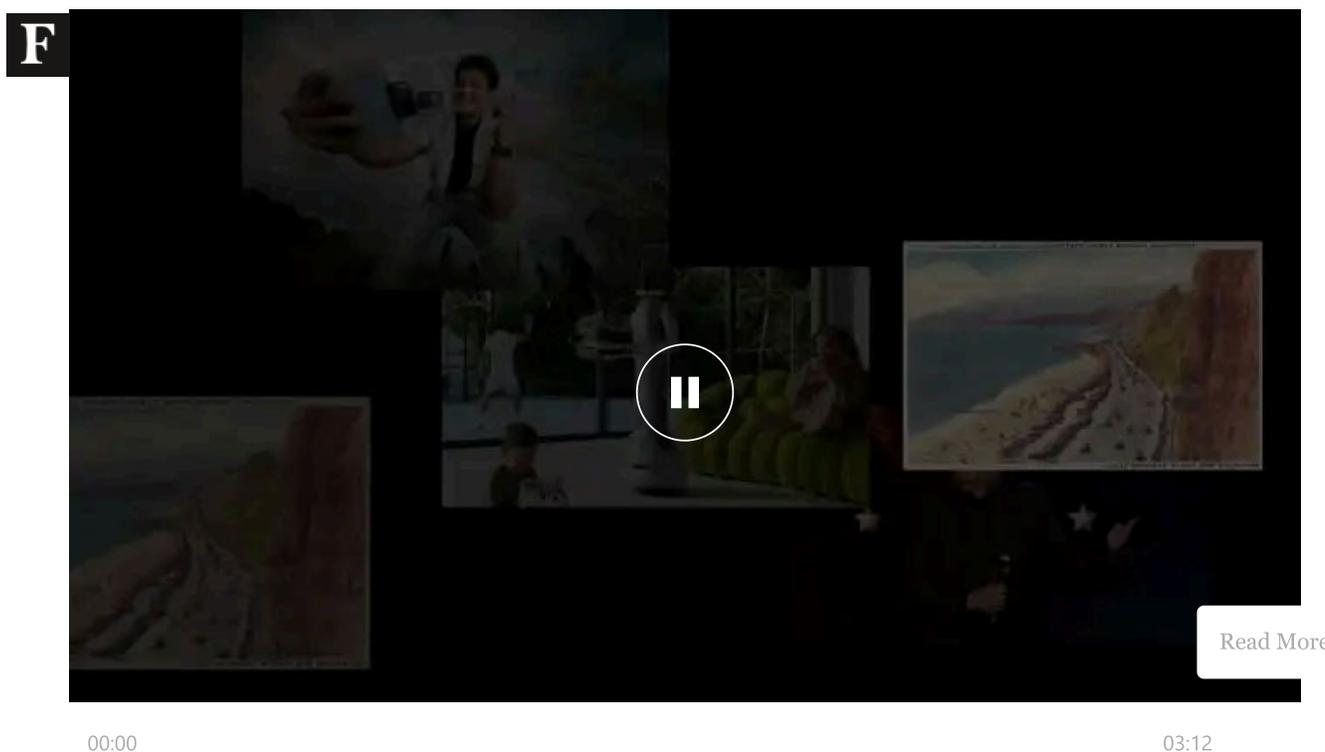
The Building Blocks Of A Culture That Keeps

Culture is not created overnight. It demands intentionality, reflection and consistent action from leadership. As a starting point, you can use surveys and candid conversations to understand your team's authentic needs and concerns. Culture is lived experience, and hearing real voices is essential.

When you act on that input, you can begin building a culture that blends trust, purpose, recognition, growth, inclusivity and well-being. When these elements come together, I've found something powerful happens: Employees become not only productive but also passionate advocates of the organization.

Trust And Psychological Safety

Trust isn't optional; it's foundational. A key part of this is fostering "team psychological safety," a term [coined by Amy Edmondson](#), a professor at Harvard Business School. This refers to "work environments where candor is expected and where employees can speak up without fear of retribution."



I see psychological safety as a cornerstone of high-performing teams. As leaders, we must cultivate openness and vulnerability, show our teams that we value honesty and allow employees to learn from setbacks rather than punishing them. This trust breeds creativity and commitment.

I like to foster openness through one-on-one discussions where I seek my team's feedback and ideas, not just give mine. I've also found it helpful to share my own challenges and mistakes openly because when leaders are vulnerable, it creates space for others to be honest, too.

Purpose That Resonates

In my experience, employees want to know their work matters. Purpose is not a tagline; it's a leadership operating system. When people see how their efforts contribute to a greater mission, it can fuel motivation and pride.

Deloitte's research shows that mission-driven companies have [higher levels of innovation and retention](#) and tend to be market leaders compared to competitors that lack a strong sense of purpose. This means leaders need to consistently communicate the connection between individuals' roles and the organization's impact. This makes purpose tangible and personal.

It's also important that you exemplify the values you champion. Purpose, trust and respect should guide your everyday decisions and behaviors.

Genuine Recognition

Everyone wants to feel appreciated. Recognition is a simple yet profound tool to reinforce engagement. Gallup reported that employees who receive regular appreciation are [more likely to stay](#).

Recognition doesn't need to be reserved only for big achievements; it's about celebrating daily efforts with sincerity. At my company, for instance, we've introduced monthly recognition awards, like Employee of the Month, to boost confidence and celebrate contributions. I believe when we recognize, we nurture a culture of positivity and encouragement that keeps people energized.

My advice to leaders is simple: Practice what you preach. Recognition feels genuine when it's rooted in honesty and shared experiences.

Growth And Development

Growth opportunities are a silent promise that an organization believes in its people. According to LinkedIn, [94% of employees](#) would stay longer if their company invested in their growth and development. Providing pathways for learning, mentorship and advancement shows that we don't see our people as static, but as evolving talents. This investment is one of the most powerful retention strategies. Help your employees develop personalized growth plans, and remove barriers to learning and advancement.

Inclusion And Belonging

True belonging comes when diversity is embraced, not just in numbers but in mindset. McKinsey's data confirms that inclusive companies are [more profitable](#). More importantly, an inclusive culture tells every employee, "You matter here." Building this means addressing biases, encouraging diverse voices and fostering environments where everyone can thrive authentically.

I make it a point to invite diverse voices into decision-making, whether it's asking my team what we should do differently or seeking their input on social media creatives. I value perspectives across age groups and roles because inclusion isn't about hierarchy; it's about collective insight. When leaders truly listen, people feel they can contribute authentically, and that's when everyone thrives.

Well-Being As A Priority

We can't expect people to give their best if their well-being suffers. Workplace stress can lead to absenteeism and turnover. Flexible policies, mental health support and genuine empathy from leadership create resilience and loyalty. When employees know their holistic health is valued, I've found they bring their whole selves to work.

Building a culture that retains talent is a critical leadership responsibility today. Doing so requires leaders to go beyond surface-level perks and foster environments where trust, purpose, recognition, growth, inclusion and well-being are prioritized. When these elements are in place, organizations create spaces where employees feel valued and motivated, leading to genuine commitment rather than mere retention.

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