

## Creating a Phenomenal Startup Culture

**“I came to see, in my time at IBM, that culture isn't just one aspect of the game, it is the game. In the end, an organization is nothing more than the collective capacity of its people to create value.” Louis V. Gerstner, Jr., IBM Board Chairman 1993-2002**

It has been said eighty percent of a startup's culture comes from its founders. Putting a large emphasis on developing, understanding, utilizing and improving the culture of the startup right from the beginning is imperative.

All companies have a culture whether they are aware of it or not. Most Startup Executives agree culture is the most important element of a startup's success. We have seen, in time, no matter how much marketing and advertising you do, your culture becomes your brand.

The benefits of an effective startup culture include outstanding performance, amazing innovation, and unparalleled teamwork. The achievements of a successful culture lead to a positive spiral that makes the team's performance seem unattainable to people outside the group.

Brian Chesky, Co-founder, and CEO of Airbnb said “A company's culture is the foundation for future innovation. An entrepreneur's job is to build the foundation.”

Determinants of an exceptional startup culture are its core values, purpose, people and evolution.

### Core Values

The chosen values must embody the essence of the business. They should be action and results-oriented. Team members should be able to understand and use them as a guide for making daily business decisions.

Employees must know what the enterprise deems important, why it is valued and how their behavior will model those values. Examples of strong startup principles are authenticity, building trust, clear communication, transparency, alignment with company goals, team building, collaboration, commitment, conviction, inspiration, innovation, and competence. The earlier the Founders begin to define, shape and document the organization's guidelines the better.

### Purpose

We believe every startup founder is a sum of their decisions both positive and negative. They have a strong sense of purpose that allows them to inspire others to follow them. They deeply believe in their strategies, plans, and objectives. As strong leaders, they say what they do and do what they say consistently and with conviction.

Extraordinary founders are persistent and resilient. They are comfortable executing their plans. Being trailblazers, they are willing to take a stand for what they believe is the correct thing to do.

## **People**

The best employees to hire are those that are a good “cultural fit.” Diversity in skills, education, and perceptions are paramount.

Maintaining excellent relationships with your employees is essential. Employees work much harder when they feel they are a vital part of the culture. We have found that a healthy work ecosystem is no longer optional; it is mandatory in order to compete for exceptional talent.

Successful Founders always surround themselves with people that exhibit the culture’s characteristics and help to fulfill its business purpose. Outstanding leaders are quick to reward accomplishments and think carefully before admonishing for mistakes.

## **Evolution**

The Founders personalities, beliefs, strengths and weaknesses form the DNA of the organization. The company literally evolves in the image of their founders.

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, shared a vision with his employees so powerful it became the foundation for the company. The firm went from four-hundred to thousands of employees worldwide in only a few years. He accomplished this by teaching his employees how to tell the story of Facebook to others.

Startup Founders use more verbs than adjectives to describe the company’s story. The narrative is not only the backbone of their culture, it becomes a conversation people have about its success. Magnificent Founders talk about the organization’s beginnings constantly in every internal and external communication regarding the enterprise.

The goal of a startup culture is to move the team from thinking “I am great” to “we are great.” In this way, people learn to work for the benefit of the group as a whole. Founders create a place where their employees can build systems and processes for operations far into the future. They understand for each individual to be successful the organization must flourish.

One of the most salient trademarks of a tremendous startup culture is that it begins to focus on global opportunities rather than just group or industry challenges. This requires maintaining a certain mindset and consistently performing actions that create an environment where everyone feels empowered, inspired, productive and rewarded in fulfilling the most important and aligned objectives of the entity first and foremost.

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### **How We Can Help You**

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