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Honest Tea Wants to Pull a Zappos

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— last July, when Amazon.com was on the verge of acquiring Zappos.com, I questioned if the move would lead to the demise of the unique – and uniquely powerful in terms of buzz and sales – productive workplace culture Tony Hsieh built within his retail business.

A year later, I'm happy to note that just the opposite seems to be true. Hsieh has remained in place as CEO and, more importantly from an employee engagement perspective, he's become even more visible as a "chief culture officer": I was one of many bloggers and reporters to pick up on his *New York Times* Q&A in January in which he shared the benefits of attracting and retaining offbeat workers. Last month, Hsieh went even further in sharing his workplace culture beliefs, practices, and successes with the release of his book *Delivering Happiness*.

Through it all, Zappos continues to wow customers with its incredible service, helping to maintain sales in a tough economy. What's more, the company serves as a beacon of hope to job seekers and a vital source of tax revenues in hard hit Las Vegas.

Honest Tea, a finalist for our 2010 Top Small Company Workplaces award, appears to be following in Zappos' footsteps.

After seeing this post last week on the Triple Pundit blog, which spells out the dilemma for the 12-year-old, Maryland-based organic tea bottler – staying true to its "no high-fructose corn syrup" label, and thus its customer base, with a Coca-Cola minority stake that's set to become more significant next year – I decided to dig into Honest Tea's application for our award for clues to their next moves.

Here's how they answered our question on their key long-term strategic goals for the organization and the workplace (my emphasis is in bold):

A critical strategic goal is to **maintain our mission-driven, entrepreneurial culture as we grow alongside the world's largest beverage company**, and to mentor other mission-driven companies. We will continue our tradition of including all employees on crew drives, a vital way of instilling the Honest Tea culture. Rapid expansion in 2010 will demand participation from everyone in the company. Crew drives enable employees from every department to experience selling and marketing our beverages and directly invests them in our business fundamentals. Another key goal is to **maintain and build our position as a leading, innovative organic beverage company**. In 2010 we introduce Honest Kombucha, a unique, sparkling tea beverage based on live, organic cultures. Even as we grow nationally, we are determined to sustain our role as a leader in the local community. Honest Tea is a founding sponsor of a local environmental non-profit, Bethesda Green, supporting a healthy economy and sustainable living. The company's visibility in the community is a source of pride for our employees and a key part of our identity. Finally, the company's **commitment to transparency, the accessibility of our President and TeaEO and the rest of the management team**, are important ways in which Honest Tea will continue to be steeped in its entrepreneurial, mission-driven culture.

Like Zappos, Honest Tea is placing a premium on maintaining its human capital strategies and core values that have contributed to its massive success while it negotiates with a much larger company that has a sizable interest in it.

Related: For more on how Honest Tea's employee development strategies led it to become an industry leader, read our award profile on the firm.

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