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How Tradition Shapes the Workplace Culture for Four of Our 2010 Top Small Company Workplaces

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Tanveer Naseer has a thought-provoking post on his blog this week in which he emphasizes the importance of celebrating the traditions that define your firm's workplace culture. He says company traditions are worthwhile because they:

- Make your organization stand out from the crowd,
- Foster a sense of shared identity, and
- Remind us of past challenges and of how far we've come.

In businesses, tradition is commonly thought of as parts, or the whole, of special events that bring employees together and help [Provigil pharmacy](#) with building trust in the workplace. One example is this practice at Rackspace Hosting, a 2006 winner of Winning Workplaces' annual workplace award.

But it can also serve as a benchmark for how you want your firm to be unique, or at least different than your competition, in your processes and people practices. This is apparent in the feedback shared by the following four winners of our 2010 Top Small Company Workplaces award:

Award application question: How do you work with employees to help them grow in their jobs?

Response: *In 2008, ALL4 made a significant change to our performance review system by eliminating the existing system and replacing it with what we call our Continuous Improvement Program (CIP). Our old process was a **traditional** annual performance review and we made salary adjustments based on the results of the review. We felt that this system was not consistent with our company culture, or our matrix-type organizational structure, and it relied on feedback that was not always current or geared to affecting positive personal growth. We migrated to the CIP system which we created. The system involves soliciting more consistent and current feedback from everyone involved with project execution. At the beginning of each year, all staff take part in a "Create the Year" exercise where each person develops their own annual goals and objectives (aligned with company goals and initiatives, where applicable). Each employee also identifies their personal "breakthrough" objectives. Additionally, employees are able to give and receive performance feedback using a web based system. Staff meet with their group coordinator on a regular basis (at least 1/quarter) to discuss feedback and their progress to date on their goals and objectives that were developed in their "Create the Year" form. All group coordinators act as "career coaches" and maintain an "open door" policy at all times.*

Award application question: Describe the culture of your organization and the key people practices that support that culture.

Response: *I can best describe Biomark as a group of individuals that use an organic approach to management. While there's reference to a **traditional** organizational chart which outlines Biomark and its hierarchy, Biomark practices the idea of individual contributions and self management. It is this that defines our culture. We've found that by empowering and EXPECTING personal input at all levels people become vested. It IS their ideas and actions that are moving our business decisions forward and albeit they may not always be the right ones, they're input directly affects the health of the business. We've been fortunate over the last (2) years to become 100% employee owned (ESOP) and this move has solidified the belief in every one of us that it is "our" company and what we do wholly affects it. We have been and continue to be the best at what we do and our execution both physically as well as financially has proven it. There are examples of this practice and their positive outcomes that occur frequently. Production staff have recently taken steps that have both improved quality and output (productivity improvements) of a product we make. This is not done at the urging of*

management or supervisors. This is done because these people care about what we do and want to see their team and the company succeed. Trust can cost an organization but we believe that oversight can be even more costly. We prefer to work in an atmosphere of trust.

Award application question: How does the organization encourage employees to participate in important business decisions?

Response: Dealer.com has a flat organizational and management structure, rather than a **traditional** hierarchical structure. This format was adopted to facilitate communication among all employees, regardless of title, department or tenure. All senior executives have an open door policy that encourages any employee to ask questions and share thoughts. Team leaders also sit with their groups in "pods," instead of being located in separate offices. This allows for immediate and continuous communication between team members and leadership. When employees have suggestions, criticisms or new ideas there are numerous communication options. They can schedule a meeting with a team leader or departmental manager, email their thoughts, or talk to them via the internal chat tool. Open discussion about the majority of important business decisions is encouraged and taken seriously by management. Senior management also regularly communicates information, both good and bad, via the company wide "earthlings" (Dealer.com's nickname for all employees) meetings. The weekly meetings also showcase the company's successes, news and development stages of various projects so that all employees can see how their job responsibilities fit into and contribute to the overall organization. Even more frequently, executives write and send informal emails to all employees to keep everyone up to date regarding new business and company developments. In addition, president and CEO Mark Bonfigli sent out a company-wide email stating that he wants to get to know all employees better, as Dealer.com has been growing so rapidly. He offered to take all new employees out to lunch on an individual basis. The feedback from employees is that it has been wonderful to get to know the president and CEO on a personal level. Mark encourages everyone to express their opinions and share new ideas about how Dealer.com could be an even better company and workplace.

Award application question: How does your organization develop employees for leadership roles?

Response: We think that Open Book Management challenges employees to be responsible for the outcomes that they control in our organization. Those that are in leadership positions at Ginger Bay Salon are asked to consider all the sources of information they have (appointment books, vacation schedules, previous results) to predict future revenues. These are tasks that are **traditionally** executed by very few people in small business, let alone front-line leaders. Because the information is shared across the entire team, all of our employees are in a better position to lead should the opportunity arise. While we use this system to help run our business, we can't help but believe that Open Book Management also helps build our employees' resumes. Ginger Bay may not be the last stop in some of our employees' careers, so helping our team understand our business puts them in a better position for the future. Our sincere hope is that none of our employees are ever in a situation where they are at the mercy of a small business owner and unaware of what they need to do to help build value in a business.

Does your small business do things that buck tradition when it comes to your staff engagement activities? If so you may be a contender for our 2011 Top Small Company Workplaces award. Learn more here.

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