

Why do some businesses perform better than others?

In business today, leaders are looking for the magic formula to drive the success of their businesses. They are looking for new ways to reimagine the workplace. They are searching for new tricks, programs or temporary fixes to drive employee happiness, engagement and performance. They are creating new incentive concepts to reward certain behaviors. The best leaders understand that their ultimate success is directly linked to the performance of their people. When their people are at their best and their safest, then the business is at its best and its safest.

So, why is it that so many businesses remain stuck in neutral with small gains and continuing challenges, while others thrive?

For the highest-performing businesses, the leaders understand the direct correlation between the employee and the purposeful culture of the organization. Too many companies have a culture that is an outcome of poorly executed mergers with the lowest common denominator becoming the adopted culture. Worse, there are many organizations that do not believe that culture can be understood, articulated or shaped. So, they implement “programs” and utilize communications as the way to drive culture. Unfortunately, these tactics are temporary and rarely yield outcomes that demonstrably impact culture; they are surface-level answers used to address deep, meaningful issues.

“We are asked all the time, ‘How do you take craftsmen from other companies with average performance and get them to achieve at levels they have never before demonstrated?’” recited Apache Industrial Services Chief Executive Officer Mike Knigin. “My response is the same: It’s the expectations we set for the culture and our craftsmen. We let them know about the Apache Way, and we let them know how important they are to our success. It

is never lost on us who drives our performance: the men and women on the front-line.”

When a culture is purposeful, it resonates from the leader across the organization. It takes into consideration the natural changes that take place in and outside the work environment and allows space for



evolution. The key is that the evolution is purposeful; in other words, there are specific decisions that are being made and defined levers that are being manipulated to drive an intentional outcome. That intentionality is what separates great companies from good companies.

Step outside the industrial services industry and look at businesses that operate in environments where the variables are consistent. Take the National Football League. There are a set number of teams, each with the same number of employees on the field, the same number of coaches and the same budgetary constraints. They play on the same fields with little variation. Why do some succeed year after year, while others languish in mediocrity? The answer is the same as in our industry: It is the culture that defines the outcomes. Think about teams that take washed up players, or even troublemakers, who become high performers in their new environment. They enter their new environment with clear expectations, and they want to live up to them. High performers routinely want to raise the bar that has been set rather than settle for the average.

Again and again, this is about people and the expectations that leaders create for success. Some may argue that high-performing teams or companies have the best work environment. While it is important, it is not the ultimate determinant of success. It is the expectation that is the key. When the expectation is clear, employees overwhelmingly want to embrace it. Some companies go to extraordinary lengths to define their culture and the behaviors that drive it.

“We cannot say it enough: Our people are our only constant. We know that they define us and, in turn, count on us to lead them and provide the safest environment for them to work, to learn, and to support customers and each other. When we can define what we expect from them, they go out of their way to achieve it,” said Knigin.

There are no accidents in a culture of purpose. Everything these companies do is intentional — from the way their values are defined to the behavioral expectations that are set, from the alignment of the incentives to the way employees are engaged and recognized for living up to the leaders’ expectations. The outcome is a happier, more



engaged, higher-performing workforce that is consistently producing at levels that exceed not only the competition but those expectations set by their own companies. It is, simply put, clarity: clarity of purpose, clarity of expectation and clarity of culture.



Most importantly, that clarity is demonstrated in not only the bottom-line performance but in the safety performance of the company. While some leaders point to other metrics to show strength of culture, such as employee satisfaction and retention, it is the record of safety that is often the great differentiator and definer of how strong an organization’s culture really is.

“To us, there is no more important indicator of a strong culture than a company’s record of safety,” said Apache Industrial Services Chief Safety Officer Tysen Lutz.

The best leaders understand that employees are becoming far more sophisticated. Employers know that it is not always about the extra dollar the craftsmen may earn down the street but the environment in which they work, the training they receive, the genuine concern about their wellbeing, and the opportunities they have to create a different future for themselves and their families. These underlie an organization’s culture and the company’s true commitment to the men and women who create its success. These cultural underpinnings are why some businesses continually outperform their peers over and over again.

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