

Culture change: the holy grail of staff engagement?

Culture change: it is one of those trendy phrases that has been flying around boardrooms for a while. But what does it actually mean? What is involved in changing a business's culture? And frankly, is it worth the effort?

For us at Stephens Scown culture change really has made a difference. Going back a few years we were at a cross roads. We could have stayed a small high street solicitor, but now, we are one of the largest in Devon and Cornwall, with over 290 staff and some of the best legal talent and clients to match.

A few years ago staff often felt underappreciated and did not feel part of the “big picture” or understand how they fitted into the overall success of the firm. So what has changed?

First of all we listened. Then we took action. We set up focus groups in each office to hear what staff had to tell us, warts and all. We involved all of our staff in establishing new behaviours to support our firm values by running a series of workshops which were facilitated by a well known business psychologist who has worked with big brands.

Our managing partner went on the road, sharing his vision for the firm and the part everyone could play in it. Again he listened, giving staff the chance to ask questions and give feedback. We introduced more informal chances for staff to get to know each other, including office choirs and lunchtime art classes.

Some of the steps were simple: we introduced “positive postcards” – thank you cards that we could all share with colleagues who help us out. We also involved staff in our rebrand and their photos and tips were the main focus of our [Love Where You Live campaign](#), which showcases our support for the region.

Other initiatives were much more complex. The latest is the introduction of an employee ownership trust, which will oversee an equal distribution of our profits among all staff – along the lines of the famous John Lewis scheme. We are among the first in the legal sector to take this step.

So what are the results? This year we were 12th in the medium sized business category of the Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work For. This is based entirely on staff feedback, so is a great barometer of where we are going.

It has had an impact on our bottom line too: revenue has risen by 18% to £17.85m for the year ended April 2016. This follows revenue increases of 12% and 13% in the two preceding years.