



True Experts

BUILDING A STRONG WORKPLACE CULTURE

BY HEATHER HARBACK



HEATHER HARBACK

VP OF PEOPLE AND CULTURE

TRUE Community Credit Union presents Heather Harback as one of our TRUE Experts. Harback is the Vice President of People & Culture and has been with the organization for over nine years. Harback serves our 200 employees by leading the culture, engagement, and employee development strategies of the organization.



Our purpose at TRUECCU is to inspire the pursuit of a life well-lived – and that extends to our members, community, and our employees. Developing and maintaining a healthy workplace culture is one way we support our employees in living the well-lived life.

An organization's culture exists whether by choice or by chance, but every workplace has one. Culture represents the various beliefs, behaviors, values, and attitudes that become shared across the workplace. Consider it the playbook by which the organization operates. The plays can be written and well-executed much like those of a sports team, or they can be unwritten reflex responses learned over time and through experience. Examples might include how and which people are promoted, what kind of dress code is accepted, how accessible senior leaders are, how birthdays are celebrated, how employees are recognized, and how accountability is handled.

As much as organizations might prefer, culture isn't something that can be directly controlled. It's an evolving aspect of the organization that is shaped by its employees and shifts in response to changing conditions. The company can control the strategies put in place to create an environment where a strong culture can flourish.

Culture, for us, is primarily about doing what is good for and right by our employees – and it has to be genuine. Being intentional about guiding a workplace culture seeks to prevent areas where a disconnect exists between what an organization says their culture is and what leaders and employees are actually doing in practice day-to-day that demonstrates what the culture *really* is.

An environment that affords employees the space to be and bring their very best is also correlated to several business outcomes, including:

- Increased employee retention
- Ease of recruitment of new talent
- Higher employee engagement

- Increased productivity
- Stronger organizational performance
- Better service delivery
- Increased innovation

Here are some important factors in cultivating a strong workplace culture:

Ensure your values align with and drive your culture. We have eight core values – each correlated in one way or another to the culture we continue to build. For example, our value of focusing on people over profit, process, and product challenges us to ask ourselves tough questions before moving forward in a specific direction.

Ask for, analyze and act on employee feedback. Another core value of TRUECCU is two-way feedback, graciously welcomed and respectfully given. This commitment means we have to get comfortable in the uncomfortable – by asking for feedback (some of which might be tough to hear); spending time analyzing the themes, trends, and subcultures that are identified; and then shifting to the most important aspect of acting on what we've learned. This is something our organization continues to grow in and work through, and it's work worth doing.

Hire and promote employees who have culture alignment. Culture fit is not the same as culture alignment. Identifying someone as a good “fit” may contribute to a lack of diversity in the backgrounds, beliefs, thinking, and experiences that contribute considerably to any culture. Culture alignment focuses on a shared set of values that guide us while ensuring we're still curating a space where innovating, rethinking perspectives, and having productive conflict keep us humble and make us better.

Nobody sits the bench. Everyone in the organization either contributes to or detracts from the workplace culture, and nobody sits this one out. It's important that each employee is empowered to impact and influence the shared experience at work for the better.

Let's be honest, a commitment to treating people right is the right business strategy. Much like Dorothy realized in *The Wizard of Oz* that she wasn't in Kansas anymore, people recognize the difference. They can see it, and they can feel it. And maintaining that culture difference requires constant care and attention.

Our work in this space is far from done. There are many things we still stumble through. And, there will certainly be a “cultural misfire” here and there along the way. What remains clear is our intention to lead with our hearts and hands and our commitment to partnership along the way to a life well-lived.