



## Episode 67 Show Notes: How to Build a Strong Culture

Scott Overcarsh returns to HR Studio Podcast to share more on the culture at Chick-fil-A, where he spent his entire career until his retirement earlier this year. Scott has just published *Is Everybody Happy!?!: Creating Culture Where Success & Happiness Thrive – The Chick-fil-A Way*. In this episode, he explains how the underlying philosophy of Chick-fil-A's founder shaped its culture. He offers advice to HR Leaders who are seeking evidence that employee-centric leadership, policies, and programs can yield improved results. Scott discusses leadership principles and attitudes that are foundational in his last company's success, as well as approaches to hiring, retaining, and engaging employees.

From age 16, Scott worked at Chick-fil-A and became an expert in its culture, spending years helping restaurant operators be more successful in their work. He mentored participants in the Leadership Development Program to help them understand Chick-fil-A's culture to become more successful as future Operators. Since his retirement, Scott consults, sharing his knowledge and experience about building an effective and successful culture.

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### Key Learnings From This Episode

- **S. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A, believed in the hospitality philosophy that 'people go where they are invited, they return where they are appreciated'.** When he opened his first restaurant in 1946, he believed that if customers felt appreciated, they were likely to return. Truett also believed that everyone should be treated that way, and so as a Chick-fil-A employee, you also feel appreciated, whether you work in one of the restaurants or in the Support Center. This creates a loyalty and camaraderie that allows the culture to thrive.
- **Leadership Principles.** It is important for leadership to own people first principles. Truett cared about employees as individuals. The home office is called the Support Center. The naming was intentional – its purpose is to provide support to restaurants in the field. It is a reminder to support other people and help them to be successful.



- **Leadership Examples.** There are many examples of leadership at Chick-fil-A. An email recognizing an employee’s work anniversary date, a birthday card, a cake to celebrate an upcoming wedding or the birth of a child are just a sampling of how leadership demonstrates that they care. It creates a family atmosphere. You don’t have to be a family-owned business to feel like a family-owned business.
- **An Attitude of Gratitude.** Truett was grateful that people would join him in his little-known venture. He had to convince people to put their careers at stake at a time when the brand was unknown. **Teddy Roosevelt once said, ‘people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care’.** Truett cared – the family was more important to him than any project on which you were working.
- **Generosity as a Competency.** The organization embraces generosity as if it were a ‘competency’. You build skill around ‘generosity’ by being generous. The company provides support for continuing education and has a reward and recognition program in place. It is one of the few private companies to provide a pension plan, in addition to a 401K plan. The company is generous in taking care of team members. The spirit of generosity is also demonstrated in the company’s scholarship program, helping employees to get started in their college education. You (the company) have to be a role model in gratitude and appreciation.
- **Chick-fil-A Hiring Approach.** You have to time hiring the right people. Some organizations rush into it. You need to know what you are looking for. Chick-fil-A is selective in its hiring. The company is known for certain traits. It’s important to be patient and deliberate in finding the right person. At Chick-fil-A, the motto is ‘you will probably stay until you die or



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retire'. Look for people who you believe will be successful long-term.

- **Attracting & Retaining Millennials.** How does Chick-fil-A attract and retain today's young workforce who are looking to 'rotate' through companies? The company focuses on setting up mentorships, partnering long-tenured employees with new hires. The company is also very deliberate in encouraging employees to apply for other positions across the organization.
- **How can HR leaders help make organizations less stressful and happier?** Understand how you are making employees feel appreciated. Before you ask employees, understand what you are currently doing. Then ask employees what the company is not doing that they would like for you to do. You want employees to feel like leaders are sensitive.

**HR should also talk to leadership to understand how they want the company to be known.** If they aren't leading and living in that way, it is hard to encourage people to follow. Leadership starts at the top. HR can be the bridge to build alignment.

- **Focus Groups.** Organizations can conduct focus groups. Ask employees, 'what are you struggling with?' and 'what do you need from us to do your job better?' If their job is not appreciated, challenging and rewarding, they are going to look elsewhere. If you are able to create an environment where work is challenging and rewarding and people are fired up about what they do, they will be more productive. They are going to grow within the organization, and they are going to breed an environment where you will have happiness and success across the company.

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## Recommended Reading and References From this Episode

- [Is Everybody Happy!?: Creating Culture Where Success & Happiness Thrive - The Chick-fil-A Way](#) by C. Scott Overcarsh

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