The 3 Steps to Building a Culture of Transparency

Craig Cincotta

I am a big fan of workplace transparency.

As a senior leader at my company, I really want people to understand the direction of the business and how their day-to-day work helps us achieve our goals. At the same time I want people to speak freely. I want them to collaborate and remove silos.

For this to happen a business needs to develop a culture of transparency. But what does than mean exactly?

To me, a transparent culture is one where employees are given meaningful insights that build trust with senior leadership and an environment exists where people can give honest and direct feedback, knowing it will be heard and shared with the right people.

So how do you do it?

Here are three ways any company, no matter the size, can work to build a culture of transparency.

1. Hold a weekly all-hands meeting.

 At Porch.com, a home-improvement network, we hold a 30 minute all-hands meeting every Friday that we refer to as "Around the Porch.". During this time we share a very consistent and transparent view of the business. It doesn't matter if you are attending your first Around the Porch or if you have been there since the start, you walk away with the same outcomes: an understanding of our business priorities, progress against metrics and a real-time view into product development efforts that took place during the week. We also use this time to make general announcements and share shout outs to fellow colleagues.

How this helps establish a culture of transparency:

By having weekly meetings centered on transparency, you are setting the tone for your company. And by sharing important information to the company in such a candid way, you will promote individuals to do the same. If you have questions, ask them. If you are not clear about how your goals align to the priorities, ask your manager. Are you contributing to our metrics in a meaningful way or do you have other ideas?

2. Give your employees an anonymous suggestion box.

Every employee shares feedback in different ways. Some people like to give feedback in a direct and verbal manner. Others prefer to express their thoughts through written word with the option to be anonymous. As a leader you need to get as much feedback as possible whether it come in directly or indirectly. At Porch we use a service called TinyPulse. Every week we pose a question that allows us to get a sense for how the company feels. For example, on a scale of one to 10 how happy are you at your job? The results give us a quick pulse on company sentiment. We also use a feature that allows employees to give virtual suggestions and feedback on any topic. During our Around the Porch on Friday we share the results and deep dive some of the suggestions.

It is one thing to ask for feedback, it is another to act on it. By utilizing feedback tools like TinyPulse a

company can discuss and address as many of the virtual suggestions as possible. Keep in mind, if you are going to encourage and implement a mechanism that asks for feedback, you need to be equally enthusiastic when it comes to embrace that feedback and put a plan in place to act on common themes and trends that emerge.

3. Give your employees a voice and help them stay connected.

While a weekly all-hands meeting is a great start, it doesn't go all the way. How do you give your company the ability to share and stay connected 24/7? To build a responsive organization you need to implement an office-networking tool like Yammer, which is what we use at Porch. This gives everyone a platform for sharing across groups and helps people learn from each other. It also provides remote employees a chance to stay in touch with their colleagues back at headquarters. In addition to helping create a culture of transparency, it also helps to increase the adaptability that your company will function more like a network and less like an organization of silos.

How this helps establish a culture of transparency:

When you get people talking and sharing you open up a network for new ideas and better ways to run the business. While a business shouldn't be expected to act on every suggestion, there is tremendous value in having a sense of scale when it comes to seeing how people operation and interact with each other. Are the right groups talking to each other? Are they sharing the right way? By promoting ways for employees to have a voice and for staying connected with each other, you are able to create not only a culture of transparency, but a responsive organization as well.