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5 Truths About a Brokerage's Company Culture

Run the show from the top without forgetting about your employees

Key Takeaways

- Even if you don't directly hear about it from your employees, the tone of your core values as a leader will not go unnoticed.
- Encourage agents to not only participate but to oversee brainstorming sessions and contribute ideas.
- Office gossip can unfairly taint an employee's opportunities at a brokerage. Talk to the person in question before making any sudden moves.

NEW YORK — The concept of company culture is oftentimes elusive and slippery. Or, as moderator Katie Maxwell of Intero Real Estate Services put it — culture sounds like total BS, until you've experienced the effects of a negative one firsthand.

"I came from a brokerage, and I was indebted to them," Maxwell said. "But there was no culture — the marketing wasn't uniform."

Shaun Osher, founder of CORE; Amy Bayer, co-founder of Porchlight Group; and Dottie Herman, CEO of Douglas Elliman took the stage at Inman Connect New York to reveal how they build a reputation of amazing culture around their brand. Here are five takeaways from their discussion.

1. Your actions as a leader trickle down

Every company does have a culture, and it all starts at the top. The tone of your core values will not go unnoticed. They will affect every employee from your high-level producers to the assistant who answers the phone. Whatever "vibe" is created internally also infiltrates the treatment of your customers. "How people feel is really the most important thing," Osher said. "As an agent, the people you work with, the way you interact and spend your days — it's all important to feeling like you're part of something. They embrace it."

When you build up large opaque walls (both physically and figuratively) and hit people over the head with hierarchy, don't expect people to be inspired. Rarely is the best work drawn out through fear.

2. Large companies may fare better when split into smaller teams

Keeping 150 people on the same page is like trying to steady a plane, Bayer said. To handle this problem, she splits her agents into groups of 20 who work well together. "Not everybody is going to get along," she said. You can make things fun with creative team names and friendly competitions.

3. Collaboration should be contagious

Go beyond inclusion and making everyone feel like they matter. Empower your employees from the bottom. Osher said that he encourages agents lead brainstorming sessions and contribute ideas.

Adding to that, Herman said, "We have an open door policy and our people know that."

4. Squash gossip and listen to marginalized employees

What's the best strategy: putting the kibosh on toxic employees, or working with them toward improvement?

It depends, the panelists said, especially on the size of the company (one difficult employee makes a bigger difference if there are only 10 of you).

But Herman (who works with 6,000 agents) made an interesting point about office talk. "Before I would throw somebody out, I wouldn't just listen to everyone telling me what was going on. I would try to determine it myself ... and talk to that person."

5. The golden rule applies to professionals, too

We're not on the playground anymore, but we're still human. "Not just being a number at someone's company I think makes a big difference," Herman said.