



CREATING A CULTURE TALENT CAN'T REFUSE

Lessons from Chick-fil-A's former VP of talent



I speak to organizations and leadership teams across the nation, and there's one thing that's become increasingly clear in the conversations I've had with leaders in the past few years. No matter who I've talked to or what industry they're in, whether they're just starting their own small business or serving as the COO of a Fortune 500 company, leaders across the board are facing a crisis: attracting and keeping talent. ▶

Talent is the great differentiator in an organization. Talent can make or break your business or ministry. But there's not enough of it, and if you're blessed enough to find new talent and get them on board, how do you keep them? Because it's one thing to hire talent, but it's another thing entirely, especially in the world of camps and conference centers, to keep that person returning year after year.

Most leaders are so focused on what they're looking for in a candidate that they neglect to ask one of the most important questions when it comes to finding and keeping talent. It's not, "What is my organization looking for in new talent?" It's, "What is talent looking for in my organization?"

So, what is talent looking for in a job or a ministry today? And how do we grow and keep our talent? I've spoken about these very topics for years, and here's what I've come to understand: Most organizations are running in circles trying to do 50 different things to attract and keep extraordinary talent, but it causes them to lose focus and momentum. I believe you don't need to do 50 things.

You need to do three things — cultivate three distinct attributes — that will attract extraordinary talent. If you do these things, it will make finding and keeping talent easier. Let me lay out for you the three attributes you need to develop at your camp or conference center to attract talent who will want to stick around. ▶

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Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon



Carrying On a Culture of Care

A story of succession at a CCCA camp

■ by Cierra Winkler

Having served as directors for Camp Ida-Haven (McCall, Idaho) for 30 years, Douglas and Darla Roe announced their retirement in 2022. But they didn't have to look far for successors who they could trust to uphold the camp culture and legacy they had created.

Bruce Pratt started as a rafting instructor for the camp in 1993, and he met his soon-to-be bride, Bethany, at camp the following summer. They quickly realized that the camp culture the Roes were fashioning was something special.

"Their apartment was in the basement of our main building, and their door was always open," Bethany says. "They made it a point to make time for us as staff members. They would ask about our day and get feedback from us. They didn't make it complicated for staff to bring ideas to the table."

It was this emphasis on open communication and making staff feel like family that kept the Pratts coming back to Ida-Haven as staff, even after they were married and had children.

When they heard of the Roes' retirement plans, Bruce and Bethany knew they wanted to continue the legacy of leadership that had made such an impact on them for the past three decades.

"They had been speaking into us that we should consider taking over the camp," says Bruce. "It was a mentorship. We feel so blessed because we know that when Douglas and Darla took over as directors in 1992, they didn't have the support that we've had."

Part of that support, which will be essential to their first summer as directors, is the built-in retention of staff. "The commitment that I see in alumni staff and their continued involvement is because of how Douglas and Darla treated us," Bethany shares. "Every time I would come back to camp, Douglas would say, 'Welcome home, kid,' and that's what he says to every staff member."

Bruce and Bethany expressed their goals for continuing Camp Ida-Haven's culture of care for summer 2023. "This is where staff feel like they're at home, and home is that place where you can weather any storm," the Pratts shared. "Things can be challenging, but we want it to be a place of safety and refuge. It's a place where you know people will listen, encourage or just let you be and love on you."

The new directors are looking forward to maintaining that culture of care for their staff and campers this summer, and say their goal for Camp Ida-Haven is summed up in a simple but profound line from their camp song, "Camp Ida-Haven — where you're sure to belong."



Cierra Winkler has volunteered at LaVerne Griffin Youth Camp (Wasilla, Alaska) for the past 17 summers. During the rest of the year, she lives in Franklin, Tennessee, where she writes for Ramsey Solutions. She enjoys hiking with Rosie, her Shiba Inu, reading literature and British history and spending time with family.



Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon

A Remarkable Caring Culture

Let me tell you a story. Lindsey was a troubled teen on her way to getting into a lot of trouble. Family life was tough, and she had found herself making unhealthy decisions to escape the pain. She attended church with her family but wasn't really involved in youth activities.

Carrie was a year older, and after having watched Lindsey struggling to find her way, she invited the ninth-grader to camp. Lindsey had no idea what she was saying yes to, but she accepted the invitation and soon found herself at church camp with a couple of hundred other high schoolers.

This camp was a turning point in Lindsey's life. The counselors recognized her troubles and made deliberate efforts to show Lindsey that she was accepted and loved. They went above and beyond to be sure that she was included in whatever activities the day had in store.

As the week went by, Lindsey, a baptized believer since she was seven years old, began to find the answers to her struggles and her suffering in the daily Bible lessons, evening services and, just as importantly, her friends, fellow campers, counselors and the staff. She was encouraged and made to feel welcome by every person who served at the camp, and when that week of camp was over, she couldn't wait until next summer, when she could return to camp again.

The leaders of that camp had created a remarkable culture of care. And Lindsey thrived because of it.

Culture is the soul of your organization. If the soul is healthy, the organization will follow. You'll see growth cultivated and lives changed. But if the soul is unhealthy you end up with a toxic culture — a culture that teaches people to follow the rules and keep their heads down or risk getting fired. That's the kind of culture that repels talent. And that's not the kind of culture we want to create.

So how do you build a remarkable culture of care? The first element is having a meaningful purpose. Someone once asked me in an interview, "What's the most important thing in culture?" and the answer is this: you must have a meaningful purpose.

Purpose answers the questions, "Why are we here?" "Why do we exist?" and "Why do we even do this?" By answering your *why*, you start building a culture that attracts talent.

The second element is setting a challenging mission. If purpose answers *why* your mission answers *what*. What are we here to do? What is the big goal that we're chasing? What is the mission that we want to motivate our talent to accomplish?

With every remarkable culture I've seen, no matter how big or small the organization, leaders have identified a challenging mission for their talent and they're crystal clear about what they want to achieve. They write down their goals and repeat them time and again, so no one loses focus or gets sidetracked when it comes to their goals.

After determining your *why* and *what*, you need to answer *how*. How are we going to accomplish our mission to fulfill our purpose? That's where core values come into play. Core values are critically important to the soul of your organization. Core values answer the *how*.

If you haven't taken the time to sit down with your leadership team and put your core values to pen and paper, you're missing an amazing opportunity to explore your organization's identity with the people who help steer the direction of your organization's culture. Only when everyone's on the same page about your core values can you start demonstrating them to and through your talent. ▶

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If you want to attract talent, create a culture that cares.

Photo courtesy of Grace Adventures



Something Bigger Than Themselves

Creating a remarkable caring culture isn't the only thing talent is searching for in a job or ministry. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves. They want to make an impact.

Remember Lindsey? What Lindsey found at camp is what I like to call "Jesus with skin." But this didn't happen by accident. From the camp director to the cabin counselors to the dining hall staff, everyone who served at this camp was intentional about creating a culture of care. They determined for their camp a meaningful purpose, a reason they existed at all. They chose a challenging mission with goals to accomplish together as a team, and they demonstrated their core values. And in the process, lives were transformed.

On the last day of camp, Lindsey came forward and rededicated her life to Christ. The camp staff's remarkable culture of care had gently encouraged her to stop seeking answers or temporary solutions in empty relationships but through the grace and mercy of the Almighty God.

It's not just campers who will want to return year after year when you create a culture of care, it's the staff, too. It's the talent. Because true talent wants to make an impact. They find joy and motivation from seeing their organization's mission being fulfilled, and what better mission can there be than seeing lives transformed?

Caring Leaders

The final thing that talent is looking for is a leader who cares about them deeply, and who's interested in working with them to develop their skills and talents. I truly believe that more than anything, it's an organization's leadership that attracts and keeps talent — or doesn't. Because it's leadership that establishes a meaningful purpose, sets a challenging mission and demonstrates core values.

For Lindsey, the ninth grader who was lost in a sea of struggles, it all came down to camp leadership. Her life was so transformed by the camp leaders' culture of care that she returned every year. And when she was old enough, she became a camp counselor, serving at that very camp where others had poured into her, chasing a purpose of transforming lives for eternity.

The camp was well known for its results, year after year. Thousands of young people passed through there, giving their lives to Christ, rededicating their lives or committing their lives to Christian service. They became church leaders and raised their families in the local church, and, yes, sent them to camp, too. You see, the influence of this one camp is found in Bible colleges, seminaries, businesses and mission fields.

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You may have already guessed it, but Lindsey wasn't Lindsey. I was Lindsay. And without that one summer when Carrie invited me to Christian camp, I would not have gone to Bible college. I would not have married a pastor. I probably wouldn't have worked at Chick-fil-A. I wouldn't have led mission teams in Kenya. I wouldn't have written the books I've been blessed to publish, and I wouldn't be writing to you today. But I am. And all because one summer I went to camp.

If you want to attract talent, create a culture that cares. Know your purpose. Create a challenging mission. Demonstrate your core values. Let their talent be part of something bigger than themselves. Give them leadership that cares and wants to see them grow. Do these simple things, and, like the camp that changed the trajectory of my life, you'll create a culture talent can't refuse. ■



Dee Ann Turner is a 33-year veteran of Chick-fil-A, Inc. Prior to retirement, she was talent vice president and sustainability vice president for Chick-fil-A, Inc. Selected as the company's first female officer in 2001, she was instrumental in building and growing Chick-fil-A's well-known culture and talent systems. Prior to her retirement, she launched and led Chick-fil-A's Sustainability and Social Responsibility function. Today, she leads her own organization, Dee Ann Turner & Associates, LLC, writing books, speaking to over 50 audiences per year and consulting and coaching leaders globally. Dee Ann has been married to her husband, Ashley, for 38 years and they are the parents of three grown sons.