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Inside Practice: Building Retention Through Corporate Culture

SPEAKERS

Allison Perlman

In this episode of *Inside Practice*, [Allison Perlman](#) speaks with Jillian Lapedus, founder of The Guru Experience and former Senior Director of Global Events and Philanthropy at Equinox, about corporate culture and retention, the difference between stated company values and lived corporate culture, the role of peer-to-peer leadership, and why dissatisfaction can be an important indicator of where a culture needs to change.

Transcript

Series: *Inside Practice*

Episode: Building Retention Through Corporate Culture

Host: Allison Perlman

Guest: Jillian Lapedus

Allison Perlman (00:04):

Hi, Jillian!

Jillian Lapedus (00:05):

Hi, Allison. I'm so happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

Allison Perlman (00:08):

Thanks for being with me. Today, we have a very interesting topic we want to talk about, and this touches on your experience and what you've been doing over the past 15 years, and it's how to create retention through strong corporate culture.

So let's start off with a kickoff question. When people talk about strong corporate culture, it can be quite abstract, and in your mind, what do you think a strong corporate culture actually looks like in practice?

Jillian Lapedus (00:38):

I think lots of big brands and big companies get it wrong. I think that there's a difference between having company values and having a corporate point of view, and getting that into the hands, and the eyes, and the ears of your employees.

So I think the most important thing is connecting with your people, is listening to them, seeing what they need,

seeing what they want, making them feel valued, trying to find their strongest characteristics, and really getting that to go to work for you. And I think that builds a really solid corporate culture, a corporate community, when you're rooting for one another, having people's career paths in the right way, and really building the community from the ground up, almost in a grassroots kind of perspective, really being there for each other instead of just sort of putting the corporate values and the corporate culture, I think a lot of companies would say, into their employees. The easiest way is really listening to them and listening to their values, seeing what's important, and seeing how to get the best parts out of them.

Allison Perlman (01:53):

And so you say here, you say a lot of it is listening to your employees, listening as a grassroots culture. In a large organization, for example, Equinox, where there's thousands of employees across different states, different countries, how do you listen? How do you get that information, and how do you filter it up?

Jillian Lapedus (02:14):

Yeah. I mean, that's a great question. I think a lot of times in situations like that, especially with Equinox, when we had so many different locations across 13 markets in three countries in all these different cities, the most important part was being really attuned to the values of the local communities and what was important to their network and their teams.

Teams across a big national company like that and all these different markets respond differently to company values or to the way they view it, and their relationship with their community. So with their members and their employees, city to city was very different. So really getting a handle of what's happening in that community and catering to them. Hosting events for them that made sense for their networks and their communities. One city to the next is so different.

Allison Perlman (03:14):

So I guess different markets probably have different needs, and it's adopting a personalized approach to your different markets based on what their needs are or their wants.

Jillian Lapedus (03:24):

Exactly.

Allison Perlman (03:25):

And what do you think makes great people stay, particularly when they have other options?

Jillian Lapedus (03:33):

I think leadership, and I think that doesn't necessarily mean your manager or your director or who you're reporting to. Leadership could be your colleague, someone you work closely with every day. Keeping a positive perspective, supporting one another, and again, really listening to the needs of each other. I think that leadership can — from an Equinox perspective, a really strong front desk person could carry a whole other team just by perspective and attitude and point of view.

Allison Perlman (04:05):

So corporate culture's not just built from top-down approach, it's built across the entire team depending on your

level, age stage, and position, and it's fostering a culture where you support each other regardless of what your position or stage is at, within the company.

Jillian Lapedus (04:22):

Exactly, and I think things like lunches and happy hours and outings are really important, but it's really the day-to-day that matters. Coming in with a positive attitude, knowing that you're supported, knowing that your team is there to win every day, and that you have the right people to count on to really push those goals across, and I think that's when people stay.

Allison Perlman (04:44):

I'm hearing teamwork is a big one. Instead of individual silos, teamwork is a really big part of it.

And where do you think companies get retention wrong? Are there things that leaders think employees value but actually matter less than they assume?

Jillian Lapedus (05:01):

Yeah, I mean, always I would say micromanagement and not listening to teams and not understanding them. I think that lots of people have really great ideas no matter what your level is. So hearing people out, whether it's the right idea or the wrong idea, but getting those people the right support that they need to push their ideas through. And again, communication is really important, so being able to have good communication from the top down to the bottom up, and really, again, it comes back to listening to one another and working with the team.

Allison Perlman (05:35):

Because it's hard, especially with large companies, you want to have systematic directives, but sometimes that just doesn't work for the needs of the specific people that are working for you and where they live and their specific life circumstances.

And one thing you mentioned, too, was support. You said support to get to hear people and give them the support they need so that their needs get communicated. What would that support look like?

Jillian Lapedus (06:01):

Well, I would actually say that would come from leadership, so from managers and from directors, supporting your team, hearing them out, making time for everyone outside of your regular one-on-ones. Check-ins. At Equinox, a very specific example would just be walking around a club and really making that communication with everyone.

Allison Perlman (06:24):

And I think what I'm hearing is spending time and giving people the time of day. I think a part of it, too, is just having people know that they've been heard, and that there's someone to talk to and there's someone there to support you as opposed to them having these needs that they have no one to communicate them to, or they know that it's going to go into a vast silo.

Jillian Lapedus (06:47):

Definitely

Allison Perlman (06:48):

So that you were saying, face-to-face connection is really important.

Jillian Lapedus (06:51):

Yeah, and as simple as even eye contact and a smile and a check-in and just being really present. I think that goes a long way, and I think those are the types of things that really get people to stay at a company because that comes from the top down, from the bottom up, from side to side. I think once you have the right leaders doing those things, it goes through the company quickly.

Allison Perlman (07:15):

It really humanizes your experience as well as opposed to saying that, "I'm just an employee." It humanizes your experience and really makes you feel as part of a team. And in my experience when I've had that contact and that support, it goes a really long way.

And I guess the one final question is if you're a leader who realizes your culture isn't where you want it to be, what can you actually do to change it?

Jillian Lapedus (07:43):

That's a really good question. I think that in a situation like that, what I would do is sort of poll a few people, see who the natural leaders are in each team, and listen to them and hear their needs. I would create an event first around that, and see how they can be better supported, the leaders amongst the groups, and cater to what they need. I typically found actually with Equinox, a lot of the times, from the member perspective, not the team perspective, I would find the most unhappy people and find out what they needed, and then create events based on that, and that would bring together a whole new world of exciting events that were very successful.

Allison Perlman (08:32):

There are two things that you mentioned there that I like. One is finding the most unhappy people and two, the events. So let's touch on both of those. So finding the most unhappy people... I've never heard anyone say that before. And usually what you hear is the people that are unhappy, it's their fault that they're not fitting in, or they're maybe the ones causing the trouble.

But flipping it on its head and working with them and finding solutions through them, because probably why they might be unhappy is because their needs are not being met or they're not being heard. And in your experience, does that make a big difference?

Jillian Lapedus (09:08):

That's made a world of difference, and that was actually my approach for many years, and I found that to be the most successful. Those were the people that weren't heard. Or sometimes they're just people who have things going on in their personal lives we don't know about. But it's the communicating with them, listening to them. And then from an events perspective, I always like to say things that would really blow their mind experientially, would come out in all the other ways and bring all these other different people together that I wasn't really considering in the first go-around. But the people who need it the most are likely the ones who seem like the biggest distractors.

Allison Perlman (09:47):

That's so interesting. And on any parting notes, we're running out of time, but do you have any parting notes on corporate culture? Anything else you'd like to share with us?

Jillian Lapedus (09:56):

I think that, and this might sound a little bit cheesy, and I don't want it to, but I really think that it's your perspective every day, your point of view every day, the little things like eye contact and communication and going in with a good mood.

I used to tell my team if they weren't having it and they weren't having a good day and they weren't in a good mood, "Go home, take a break, fix yourself. Work on yourself. Maybe you need 10 minutes break to come back and really get your head straight." Because I think a lot of things is your personal attitude and the energy you exude, and it bounces off other people.

So I think number one is working on yourself and making sure you're in the right frame of mind, and then your communication, your eye contact, and your daily touchpoints really go a long way.

Allison Perlman (10:43):

Okay. And mood is contagious. Especially if you're the leader or if you're an employee, the way you're coming into work and the way that you present yourself definitely has an effect on other people around you. So I love that. Coming into work with a positive attitude, listening to people, and really humanizing the corporate work experience. I love all of it.

So thank you so much, Jillian. Thank you for talking to us.

Jillian Lapedus (11:11):

Thank you for having me.

Allison Perlman (11:12):

Bye.

Jillian Lapedus (11:15):

Bye.

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