



Stanford eCorner

Culture as a Sustainable Advantage

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Method Products prides itself on maintaining a unique, open and collaborative culture, says Co-Founder Adam Lowry. Moreover, this commitment offers Method an advantage over larger competitors. Lowry describes how culture affects product prototyping and realization, hiring practices and the values empowering employees to live the mission.



Transcript

We think of culture as something that is our number one sustainable advantage. Because if we don't have a culture that can continually innovate and continually reinvent what we're doing than we can't stay ahead of our much larger and more well resourced competitors. We have an open space, as you might imagine. We have these things that we call wiki-walls, which is if you go to Method's offices in San Francisco, you will see everything is put up on the walls, which is actually a really intimidating thing if you're a product designer or a you're a graphic designer, putting unfinished work on the walls. And we have to train and hire the right types of designers that can deal with that. And then we also have to train our people to be able to work and collaborate and say 'yes and' rather than 'yes but' and build on work that's up on those walls. But it does foster an idea flow that's really exceptional. You know we curate a lot of things that we think are cool from all around the world. We have - this is Sarah. She's - if you e-mail or call Method you will get your e-mail or call answered by a real person, and Sarah is one of those people.

She often just sits in a beanbag chair next to our product development floor to be able to fire across questions that she may have about things. Every Monday morning we get together and we talk about the news of the business, we talk about everything from birthdays to strategy. We prototype everything. We have the ability to prototype photography, shelf sets. We have a lab, obviously, that we can do prototyping in. This is actually fairly unusual to have a lab in downtown San Francisco. We can, because the products that we make out of it are not going to explode. We do 3D printing, we can do rapid prototyping of mold so that we can do product realization. And all of these things reinforce our ability to move very quickly and design very quickly. We do things like - we very much design for ourselves.

So the first thing we do is design something, put it on the sink in the office and say 'hey tell Josh do you like it or not?' And this idea of prototyping is something that we even take all the way to our hiring practices. So, anybody who looks for a job at Method, if you get far enough in the process you'll be asked to do a homework assignment, and that assignment will always have three questions. There'll be a strategic question about the job that you're interviewing for. There'll be a tactical question. And the third question is always, simply, how would you keep Method weird? Keeping Method weird is one of our five values. I mentioned MacGyver, there are a few others. But what this does is it has an amazing effect to actually, to orient the people that we hire around the mission that we have and the methodology that we have to actually succeed as a business. And what keeping Method weird is about, is how would you participate in the culture of this place? And the homework assignment has an amazing effect of separating the window shoppers and the good interviewers from people who will really be additive and contribute to the culture of this place, which is ultimately the secret of how we try to succeed in the marketplace.