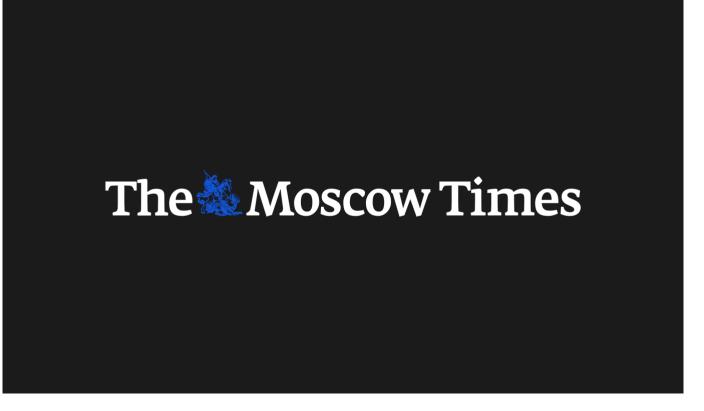# Corporate Armory: How to Keep and Fortify Your Defense in Talent Wars

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A certain sense of spirit exists whenever there is a group of people doing something together. Although the people in the group tend to pay more attention to individual differences, an outsider will most immediately sense the common denominator; put simply, the outsider will sense the working culture of the group. The company culture, therefore, is a natural aspect of work. While intangible, it can make a great difference in attracting and retaining human capital.

When a small enterprise starts out, its culture is generally not looked into specifically: The associates often bring in the people they trust. Round-tabled, these people initiate the emergence of the core culture for their company. The associates' values become company values and, if the business is going successfully, the company starts to become known for the special working atmosphere and attracts those who look for this kind of atmosphere. Enthusiasm is all over, those who fit in are magnetized and those who do not are expelled naturally.

The "golden age" when companies could enjoy the pleasure of being the choosers by picking out the best-fitting ones from the outside often ends when exponential growth comes in: The in-flow from the outside becomes so massive that the initial unity faces the risk — the risk of culture dilution. Those companies that have successfully overcome this "developmental disease" were wise enough to develop open-mindedness while remaining apologists of the initial values that made the company happen. Even more importantly, they were indeed wise enough to do that, meaning this was what they lived, not only what they declared.

When referring to company culture in everyday life, non-specialists often mean staff events and meetings, company hymns and codes, etc. — the "exterior" side. But what actually matters lies deep beneath all of the above: it is the true operating nature of the company — the nature and direction of reporting lines, regulations of the business processes, rewards

and recognition practices, etc. From my professional experience, the following three vital pillars uphold the best working company cultures:

Smart in-flow

Recruitment is generally about getting the right people "on the bus," and it is certainly an art to get those people in. However, there is another art behind it: How do you define the right people and how do you define the okay degree of deviation from the "right" for those you recruit? In other words, the company comes up with a set of competencies for their staff to perform in their jobs and keep up with the pace of the company. On the other hand, the company must come up with an approach to those who don't quite fit: If you don't let them in, you might miss out on today's diversity-demanding atmosphere, if you do let them in — you have to make sure they don't twist it the wrong way. That's where all sorts of induction programs come in: Formal induction alone doesn't make it, you have to implement informal integration techniques like buddies and mentors who will help instill the company culture into the individual. When the newcomers feel the welcoming environment they are more likely to become a part of it than consciously oppose.

Leadership

What you perceive as the culture of your organization may appear very different to what people underneath would say if you asked them to describe it. The reason for this is that the culture is to a great extent perceived through the words and actions of those who regularly deal with employees on the company's behalf — management at all levels. The declared mission and vision are useless if they are not extrapolated into the values that managers exercise in everyday working life. It is therefore vital to, firstly, pay close attention to personal profiles and leadership styles of managers-to-be, putting them through evaluation and assessment procedures and, secondly, invest in development of the missing competencies where there is a lag.

Feedback free flow

To enable the first two — and actually a lot more than that — you have to make sure the work-satisfaction related information flows freely throughout the company. Most employees will naturally keep their feelings to themselves, perceiving them as something too personal to share unless they are asked (the Russian mentality adds to this). At the same time, for some the sole fact of being asked how they feel may be a good motivator. It is therefore the employer's obligation to combine the two by introducing tools for feedback gathering: satisfaction and engagement surveys, 360 degrees feedback gathering, ad hoc "pulse checks." As "step two," employee focus groups are an excellent means for interpretation of such survey results and brainstorming for action plans.

The tools described above work wonders when wisely incorporated into a company's life and genuinely supported by passionate leaders. A tool for the sake of a tool does nothing but irritate both employees and managers and any pressure put on top will most often guarantee complete rejection. But actions being taken speak louder than words and create a true matching point in the company's history with employees' most authentic buy-in.

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