

Workplace Culture Analysis: Chick-fil-A

Rachel Watts

One of the best-known fast-food franchises of the southern United States, Chick-fil-A is distinctive not only because of its all-chicken menu or its atypical work week, but because of its distinctive company culture. Noticeable from both the customer perspective and the employee perspective, Chick-fil-A is committed to hospitality focused, servant minded approach that sets it apart from competition. The company's religious roots continue to inform the workplace culture that the company cultivates, and the company's corporate purpose— "To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us and to have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A"—and mission statement—"To be the world's most caring company"—extend from the corporate organization all the way to the individual stores.¹

History

Chick-fil-A was founded by S. Truett Cathy as the Dwarf Grill in 1946. After work on the menu and developing the iconic Chicken Sandwich the brand is known for, Cathy opened individual Chick-fil-A locations, first in malls and eventually as free-standing stores, with the first free-standing location opening in 1986. From there the company continued to grow, with Cathy being involved until his death in 2014. Cathy's son Dan Cathy took over for him and continues to take an active role in leading the company, made possible by the company's decision to honor the wishes of its founder and refrain from going public.¹

Structure

Chick-fil-A as a company has two main components: corporate and in-store. Within the company, the corporate offices and organization is known as the "Support Center;" this is a reference to the company's commitment to servant leadership. The corporate entity is not more or less prestigious than the in-store component, and in fact exists to support the in-store operations.

The in-store component is, of course, the main public face of the company and is the avenue through which the company interacts most with its customer base, and it is through this interaction that the public grows to understand the company culture in a way that they do not with many other companies.

1. "History." Chick. Accessed February 8, 2021. <https://www.chick-fil-a.com/about/history>.

Culture

The company culture is, as has been previously stated, distinct. Formed from the principles of stewardship and servant leadership, the company culture is distinctly others focused. Internally, this means that upper-level leadership is committed to serving and supporting those around and below them, both in-store and at the corporate level. This results in a environment that is helpful and encouraging to work in, devoid of the stereotypical corporate backstabbing and politics that might characterize other businesses.

In-store the commitment is the same but is also results in a focus on hospitality and care for customers, both in a business and in a personal sense. Team Members are encouraged to make genuine connections with guests and to put effort into serving with care and hospitality.

The other noticeable factor of Chick-fil-A's company culture is their commitment to recognizing and nurturing talent in their employees. The corporate branch prefers to hire from within the business, beginning with the in-store employees, and if a Team Member or leader is talented, they are provided with both the resources and opportunity to grow their skills and take on new roles.

Personal Experience

I have been employed by Chick-fil-A since August 2017, beginning as a Team Member, moving to a Team Leader in mid-2018, then to Supervisor in 2019, and finally as an Assistant Manager since 2020. I have experienced first-hand the supportive, servant-led culture that Chick-fil-A claims to have and have been able to take part as a leader in serving and supporting my team. As I have pursued other opportunities within the company I have been informed and encouraged every step of the way. Even when my potential career paths lead away from Chick-fil-A, I felt encouraged and equipped. My General Manager made it clear that their goal was to support me and give me the skills to excel in whatever I chose to do, and that they valued me as a member of the team. I have been given opportunity to grow, just as I was told I would.

Not only are all of these things true, but the commitment to hospitality is genuine and comes from a genuinely caring spirit. I have been encouraged to care for and serve guests well not because it is "what is done" at Chick-fil-A, but because that is the ethic that the company is built on.

In discussions with store operator Keith Booth, the culture at the corporate office was described similarly, and CEO Dan Cathy was described as "the first person to offer to clear or clean the table. He will stop and ask after the wellbeing of anyone and everyone—from a visiting in-store Team Member who he has never met, to the corporate workers he sees every day."

Conclusion

Chick-fil-A is a relatively new company, but its company culture flows directly from the convictions it was founded upon, and though it seems too good to be true, it is a genuine culture of support, service, stewardship, and hospitality.

Bibliography

"History." Chick. Accessed February 8, 2021. <https://www.chick-fil-a.com/about/history>.