

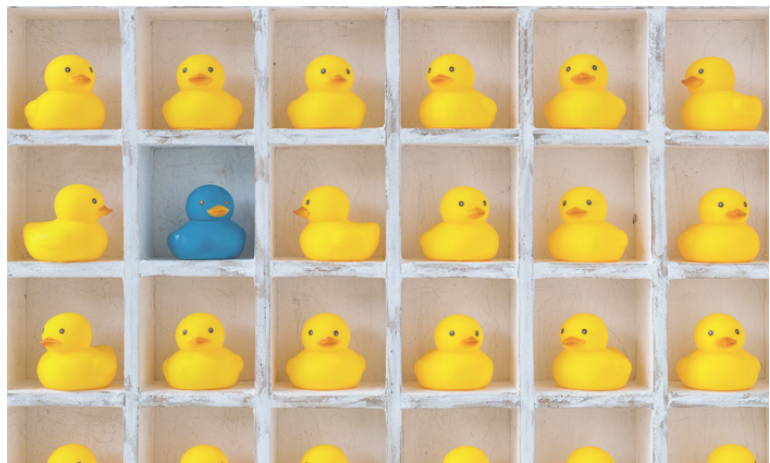
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HR &

From baby steps to big wins: How 8 SME Culture Leaders built best practice into their business

Making small changes in your business can have a ripple effect that goes on to create big changes. Here, eight businesses demonstrate just that



Sometimes, a small change can make a big difference

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Striving to make life better for your staff can have a domino effect – and the return on investment can really pay off. For example, research from the University of Warwick found that happy workers are 12% more productive than the average worker, while unhappy workers are 10% less productive.

Productivity will impact your bottom line, which means there is a real business case to creating a positive culture in your workplace.

Recently, Real Business teamed up with breatheHR to seek out the UK's top 25 SME Culture Leaders, and we were impressed to see how these small businesses took baby steps and ended up making big wins.

Here, we show you some of the small changes that can go on to make a big impact for your business.

1. Believe in your people



The 10 most common reasons why British workers have been fired in 2018 so far

It might sound obvious, but showing your staff that you believe in them can work wonders. **FieldHouse Associates**, a PR firm nominated for the Culture Leaders list by employee Seun Alabi, has a flexible organisation structure and gives younger employees opportunities to take the reins.

“FieldHouse encourages junior employees to pursue new business opportunities, from drafting the proposal to presenting it, while providing ample support along the way.

“A great example is when one of our account executives took full advantage of this to build her own network, ultimately leading her to secure a high-fee retained contract with a new client.”

2. Make employee retention a priority

SARH is a non-profit, dedicated to being an employer of choice. Karen Armitage, CEO, explained: “SARH employees understand the importance of a great culture in generating great leadership, wellbeing, personal growth, fair pay and benefits.”

As a result, in 2018 96% of staff said SARH was a great place to work.

This is something **Zool Digital** a PR company, has also worked to achieve.

Louise Kilburn, an employee at Zool, said: “The family ethos is reflected in every part of the business. Staff happiness and work/life balance is valued over anything else, and there is an open and honest culture where problems are shared and everyone supports each other.”

Businesses should always strive to be a good place to work – if your staff are happy, they are more likely to stay with you. Not only is this good for consistency, it saves you time and money on recruitment.

Not only that, if you work hard enough to show your loyalty to them, they are more likely to be loyal to you, and go above and beyond in fulfilling their role.

3. Work hard, play hard

Astro, a software company, was nominated by managing director Steve Hodges who describes the culture as “nothing short of awesome”. Organising team bonding events doesn’t have to be expensive, and can really pay off.

For example, Astro organises a lot of social events, including both “micro events” like clay pigeon shooting or going to gigs, and larger trips such as getaways to places like Dublin and Amsterdam. There is even a fund for those attending the bigger trips to have a small amount of their salaries set aside over six months to make the costs more manageable.

Hodges said: “A positive mind-set, a happy place to work and culture like ours centring on professional standards, high quality and fun becomes infection and seeps into our customers through their interaction with us and creates a very positive cycle.”

4. Stress management

It’s a fact of life that some people will get stressed out at work, especially in faster paced, results driven industries. **GingerMay PR** has been “determined to smash traditional perceptions of consultancies as stressful work environments with high employee turnover”, according to its nomination.

To achieve this, the business has capped its annual client roster and the subsequent number of accounts on which employees work, to prevent “staff from buckling under the pressure of too many client accounts”.

Now, late nights are a rarity at the business, yet it has seen big wins – while consultancy growth reached just 7% in 2017, the business expanded by 45%.

5. Thinking outside the box

Phoenix Community Care, a non-profit that looks after unaccompanied minors, owns the properties it uses to accommodate these young people – whereas others in this industry tend to rent spaces.

“This means that we seek a high standard of accommodation, and as our key workers will when placing young people in supported housing we seek a ‘wow factor;” said Adrian Hawkes, who sent in the nomination.

Not being afraid to think outside the box can built a culture of innovation – and can help your business make a name for itself.

“Evidence of our success in some of our initiatives and growth is that our senior manager was awarded an MBE this year for services to adoption. He is now in demand to lecture in various places and represents children on a key government committee.”

Freedom also plays “a huge role” in software company **Freespee’s** office culture, according to its nomination.

“From group breakfasts on Fridays to pet-friendly office spaces, the company promotes a way of working that brings together employees and encourages collaborative thinking,” it said.

“In order for businesses to be able to challenge established brands, creativity is key. Thinking of the next idea that will disrupt an entire sector, or result in a hotly-demanded new product for businesses or consumers, is no mean feat – and a relaxed working style can help achieve a higher level of creativity, which in turn helps drive innovation.”

6. Prioritise health and wellbeing

The Specialist Works is a media company that “wholeheartedly believes that employees should get the right support – both personally and professionally,” according to employee Hannah McCready who sent in the nomination.

There are small steps businesses can take, regardless of their size or budget to really prioritise health and wellbeing – whether that’s offering flexible working, or just simply keeping an eye out for your employees and fostering a culture where they feel comfortable reaching out to management.

“[The Specialist Works] also works with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which is an independent assistance program intended to help employees deal with personal problems that might adversely impact their work performance, health and wellbeing,” said McCready.

This point is also crucial – employees struggling with their health and wellbeing won’t be at their most productive, but by making small changes to look out for them, you could secure big wins in terms of productivity.

Overall – these businesses have proven their commitment to building positive company cultures, yet it is perhaps surprising how much can be achieved with lower budget measures.

It doesn’t have to cost the earth to create a positive environment in the workplace – a little goes a long way, and before you know it, you could be seeing the same kinds of big wins.