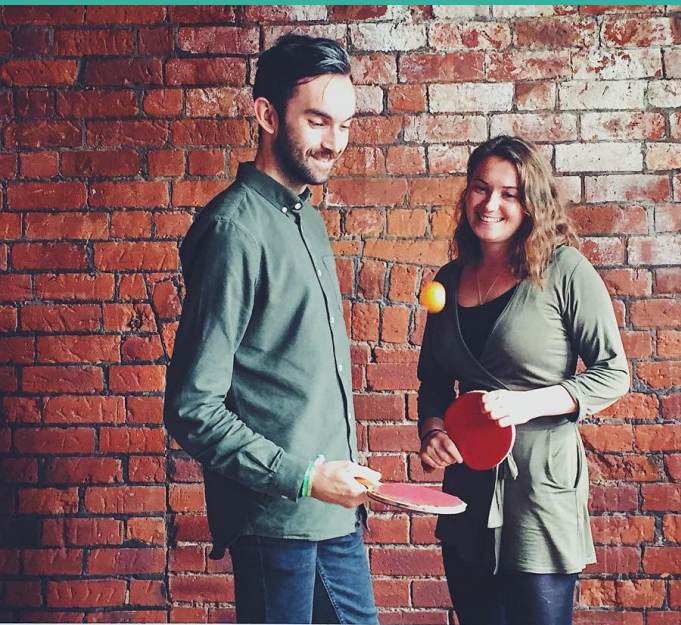




How we made our company culture not shit

Zac Williams



Introduction



If you've seen any of my LinkedIn posts recently (one of them got 60,000 likes, I'm just saying) you've seen me going on about company culture.

Why? Because your company is nothing without the people who make it up. Culture has a huge impact on attraction, retention, productivity and, ultimately, the success or failure of an organisation.

I'm going to take you through how we at GradTouch went about completely transforming our company culture between 2016 and today.

I'll show you WHAT we changed, WHY we changed, HOW we changed, and the kind of results you could be looking at if you do the same.

Change is painful. But it's worth it. Because shit culture is bad for business. And, if you get your culture right, the possibilities are endless.

- Zac Williams



**The workplace is
changing**

What a way to make a livin'

I don't know who wrote the book saying office hours must be 9am-5pm. But I'd like to speak to them.

They were wrong.

Thankfully, the workplace is changing, for the better.

The idea has always been: work exists between the hours of 9am and 5pm. Life begins after, when you clock out and leave your work behind at the office.

The idea of having a good work-life balance is great. Taking time to properly switch off helps you avoid burnout and maintain your physical and mental health.

But it's not realistic to think someone can just totally separate the two and completely forget work when they go home.

We should be embracing work and life as being wound together, not separating them.

And I don't mean answering your boss' emails at 10pm every single night. I mean giving people the freedom to keep things more fluid, so your job and life outside of it can be worked around each other.

I think we're finally starting to wake up to the fact that it doesn't matter when you work. How long you work. Where you work. All that matters are the results.

2016

Happy happy, clappy clappy, not get very much doney doney

That heading above is what our culture was like at the beginning of 2016.

We had the biggest group of people we'd ever had, working 8:45am-6pm (I know, wtf), Mon-Fri. We spent loads of time together outside of work. Free drinks every Friday. We were like a family. Sounds great, right?

But nothing was getting done at the pace we wanted. People were in the office for hours working on lots of different things, but the results didn't match up.

The turning point came when an employee at the time asked me:

"If you're not tracking my overtime, why are you tracking the times I'm not in the office?"

Me and Joe (business partner) started to question how we were doing everything, and stop doing things just because we'd always done them that way.

There were bits of our culture we wanted to keep the same, like having an office environment where people felt comfortable and able to be themselves.

But we wanted to be less of a family, and more of a team.

It's not enough to just show up. We wanted to stop micromanaging our people and just make them really care about scoring goals. We decided to start building a culture that empowered them to do that.

Just call me Gareth Southgate.

Change is hard...

So, we decided to change.

And it was painful. For about a year and a half.

Here's what we did:

- Got rid of set working days, and set working hours
- Told people they could work from wherever they wanted
- Gave everyone unlimited holidays

Contracts were edited to say:

"Your hours of work are those necessary for the proper performance of your duties."

We stopped tracking time spent on work and just focused on KPIs.

It made sense on paper - people could work however suited them best and be completely in control of their time. We didn't judge people on the number of hours they spent at their computers, we judged them on what they achieved in whatever that number of hours was.

We just looked at results.

...even harder than we thought

We fell at the first hurdle.

Neither myself, Joe, or our team were prepared or in the right mindset for the changes we were trying to make.

Some people took the piss with unlimited holidays. Some just didn't know how to be responsible for their own time.

We started to think we'd made a mistake. Maybe we really did need to see people in the office every day.

In theory, it's a great approach. But if you don't have the right people or the right attitude to it, it's going to be massively painful to implement.

What followed was the long and difficult process of refining our values and making sure we had the right team of people to move forward with.

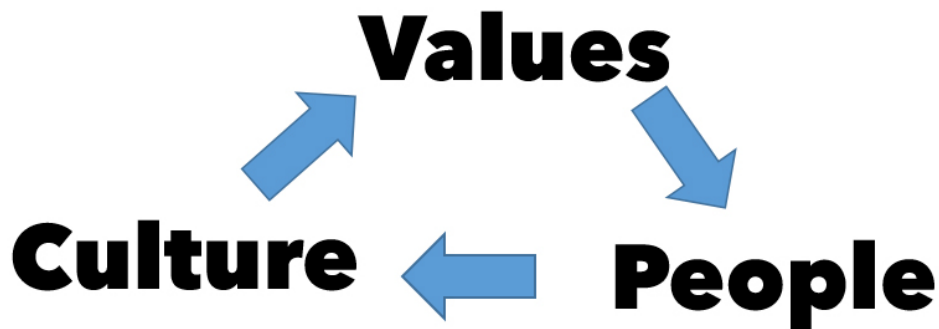
We kept the people who could adapt and really benefit from the new culture, and those who couldn't, left.

There's no one-size-fits-all solution to company culture, which is part of what makes it so difficult to find what works for you. That's why it took us so long (until around January 2018) to figure it out.

2018

Here's the theory

Before I get back to how we transformed our company culture, it's time for a shit chart. FUN.



It's all about finding the culture that's right for YOUR business, not just trying to copy another company's culture that you think sounds good.

To do that, you need to look at the three things in my shit chart.

Shared values bring people together

Define them. Ask your employees to help you define them. You don't need to be on a mission to change the world, you just need to be clear about what you're working towards.

People drive business growth

Hire people who are better than you. People who will bring ideas, and add value and diversity of thought to your team.

Culture facilitates growth

Culture is about every member of the business embodying the values that have been defined, and it impacts how well people are able to drive business growth. If you get your people and your culture right, everything else looks after itself.

No dickheads

Our culture at GradTouch today is built on three basic values:

No dickheads

Be yourself

Add value

We hire people who can work autonomously and don't need to be micromanaged.

People who are willing to figure shit out for themselves, who can accept that everything isn't always going to be crystal clear for them.

People who have a sense of pride in what they're doing.

Self-aware people, who are able to reflect on the work they do objectively. Who can take feedback, think about it, and say: *"yeah, I can see why people think my idea was shit. It WAS shit. But that's ok, it doesn't mean I am."*

The main thing is: we hire individuals. People who aren't just going to be another number on the team. People who are actually going to add value, bring their own ideas to the table and contribute to the culture - not just fit into it.

We encourage everyone to be completely, unashamedly themselves.

Good vibes

As you can tell, we expect a lot from people. And we give them a lot back.

Free breakfast every day. Free lunch on Fridays. Regular socials. A ridiculous summer party. We wear whatever we want to work. There's always a Spotify playlist on and people having a laugh, enjoying each other's company.

Most importantly, we trust our employees.

Tired today and want to come in at 12pm and leave 4 hours later? No worries. Want to book half of next week off to go to a festival? Go for it. Worried you're getting burnt out and need a few weeks away? Get on a plane right now.

We only employ fully-formed adults, who we trust to manage their time, their work, and their lives for themselves.

We've even stopped writing job descriptions. Because we don't hire people to do a role, we hire people to improve the role and add value. We hire people because of who they are as individuals. Everyone is given a rough remit, and the freedom to run with it.

We let people have an opinion, and encourage them to push back when they disagree with something. If they think we're going about something the wrong way and they've identified a problem, we are always interested in their solutions.

Our employees are empowered to make an impact.

2016-2017 was tough, but now I think our culture is THE most powerful thing we have going for us as a company.

**We're not done
yet**

The results are in

Was making all these changes worth it?

100%. Yes.

There are at least 4 key areas where moving towards this culture, based on individuality, autonomy and results, has benefited the business. They are: attraction, retention, brand awareness, and business growth.

Attraction and retention

We have been able to hire some amazing people recently, including several more experienced hires who have brought a lot to the team. They've wanted to work with us because of who we are and what we're about. They're inspired by how we work, not just the work we do.

We've talked a lot about our unique approach to company culture on LinkedIn, and now I get at least 10-20 people reaching out and applying to work with us each week. Even when we're not actively hiring.

We're also retaining significantly more people. In 2017, we had 7 people leave. In 2018, we've had 1.

People are clearly benefiting from the culture change. Since September 2017, we've taken an average of 36 days' holiday each. This will probably go up to around 38-40 days by September 2018.

The results are in (2)

Brand awareness and business growth

All those holidays aren't stopping people getting the job done.

Since 2016, revenue has grown by 180%. And since we started the culture change, we've raised £2.2 million in investment.

Our culture and the way we communicate about it has also improved how our brand is seen externally. We've transformed from an 100% outbound company, to 80% inbound - largely because of the social reach and press that's come from us being ourselves online.



Dan Kelsall

Hyping things at Twikel & GradTouch
1w

Janice, the crap manager.

Another rubbish poem by Dan Kelsall.

I'd really love my job if not for one tiny hitch,

Janice is my manager, and she's a proper little bitch.

Though I work extra hours, from 9am through to 8,

She'll say "nice of you to join us," when I'm 2 minutes late.

Yet she leaves bang on 5, I just don't get it

And when I close a big deal, she'll take all the bloody credit.

And she loves to micromanage, like I don't know my job,

Standing over me as I work, her breath like Satan's knob.

When the CEO's about, she always tries to put me down,

Her tongue is so far up his passage, it's a weird shade of brown.

And if something goes wrong, she'll lose her shit and start to panic,

She's hot and cold, she's up and down. I think she's schizophrenic.

Then when it comes to company drinks, she's as inappropriate as ever,

At the last Christmas do, she fondled an intern called Trevor.

I just don't know what to do, a new career would be my preference,

I'd find a new job, but Janice wouldn't give a reference.

Then yesterday she said she's leaving, I couldn't be much happier,

But then I met my new boss, Steve, and his attitude is even crappier.

#TrevorsPulled #EveryoneKnowsAJanice #SatanBreath

793 Likes · 135 Comments

One of the ways we embody our values is by being ourselves online. Controversial posts like this from Head of Hype etc., Dan, get some hate - but they generate a lot more inbound enquiries.



We've recently been featured in the Manchester Evening News, the Mirror, and spoken to hundreds of people about culture at events.

The future

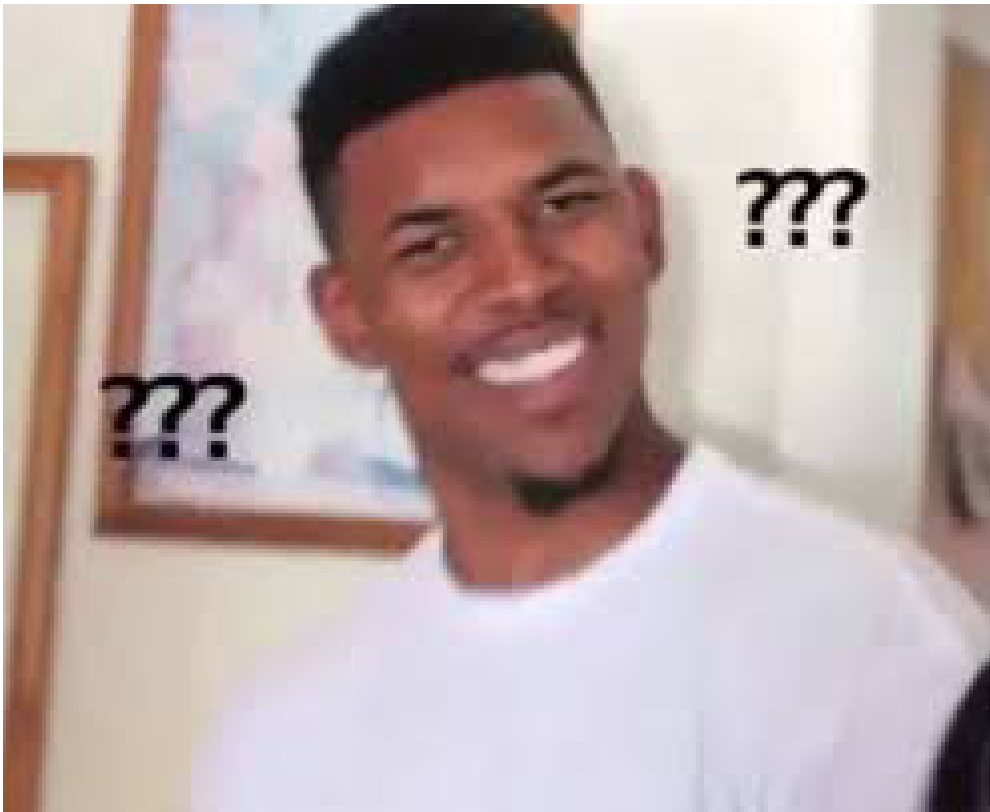
It's still weird being here at 12pm on a Wednesday, looking around, and seeing just 2 other people in the office. That will never not be weird.

But it doesn't worry me. Part of what makes our culture work is that we balance the autonomy we give people with regular catch ups, so we always know things are progressing.

One last point: you should never stop working on your company culture. Ours isn't done, and it never will be. New employees will change and develop it. Our values aren't set in stone, they will be regularly adapted as our team grows.

Our culture in 2018 is almost unrecognisable when we look back to 2016. We've done a lot of work to achieve that. But your culture is only ever right for that moment in time. It needs to always be evolving.

Any questions?



If you're as lost right now as we were in 2016, but you're interested in changing your company culture for the better, just get in touch with me.

My email is open for anyone who wants to have a chat about it.

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