THE FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF BEING HUMAN - #1

A human culture is a win-win for all. It is a place where people can be themselves, an environment where they can create their best work and share new ideas. The competitive advantage this type of environment creates has contributed to market disruption appreciated by us, the consumer, and is demonstrated in the growth of the economy. We all want to work in an environment where we are empowered to be our best, and as employers we want to attract and retain talent to drive our company's ambition, however big or small.

I believe that there are five key characteristics of a 'Being Human' Culture. They are:

1. A clear purpose that everyone understands.

2. Authenticity and trust in communications.

3. Varied, yet complementary, communications.

4. Diversity of people and ideas.

5. An environment that allows everyone to be their best self.

I want to delve further into the first, and examine what it means to have a clear purpose.

A clear purpose is beyond words, beyond a mission or vision statement, a clear purpose is all about, 'Why are we here?' Each employee should understand how they are contributing to a company's purpose and how their role supports it. I believe companies realise their purpose in different ways, depending on their tenure, size and inception.

The Start-Up Company. Over the years we have seen an increase in 'start-up' companies. These Founder-led businesses that have seen a gap in the market, clearly articulated the market opportunity to gain funding, but the vast majority of businesses, as many as 8 in 10, according to one study, fail. Why is that? As a recent report from the ScaleUp Institute illustrates, there are many reasons companies aren't successful. What sets companies that are successful apart from the rest? It probably isn't as simple as just having a clearly articulated purpose, but truly believing in what they are doing undoubtedly helps entrepreneurs and their teams achieve success and get through the knock backs.

There is no one answer, as there are many factors but at its core it's likely that businesses that fail don't have a purpose that translates, is accessible, and scales. In short, people can't align with the purpose. Companies with a clear, articulated, relevant purpose attract employees who are inspired and want to be part of bringing that purpose to life The challenge for start-ups is how to scale and grow and keep their purpose alive and intact. As more people join a company, the personal approach of introducing, explaining, and reinforcing the purpose from the Founder and those who joined at the beginning becomes

impossible to maintain. Reminding people regularly, through written and verbal communications how their work relates to the company's overall purpose is important. It's also important to reiterate to employees, what their purpose is. A well-thought out and thorough onboarding process is essential, because everyone needs to be familiar with both the company's history, their future plans and how these will drive the company's purpose. This needs to go beyond relying on individual conversations (although those are still important), but that doesn't mean that the message isn't personal. Creative films, podcasts, handbooks, leaders and even notices shared in common spaces can all play a role in sharing and supporting purpose.

The Mature Company. As companies age, their purpose may have to evolve in order to stay relevant. It's important for companies to keep up with the times and to ensure that their purpose remains relevant. Evolving a business and its purpose is hard, especially when there are people there who have difficulty connecting to a new purpose. So how do these companies do it?

They involve their employees, get their views, and set up a framework to openly listen. As they make changes, they check that the new purpose makes sense. These companies also accept that there may be employees who can't stand behind the new purpose and openly ask them, 'Can you continue to work here, be happy, and do your best work? Or has the time come to move on?' Change can be hard, but open and honest conversations create better opportunities all round. Individuals who move on have talents other companies or the economy needs, and evolving companies need employees who support their transformation.

Respecting the past is critical for these transformations to be successful and companies shouldn't disregard how they worked in the past. It's about creating a blend of collective company memory, and new ideas and thoughts. Two-way mentoring, pairing a new employee with a long serving employee, being open to new ideas, as well as a facilitated framework to discuss and critique them, and importantly, leadership paving the way, are all critical ingredients in perfecting this blend of old and new.

In summary, we are all human and we want our ideas to be heard. We also all want the security of knowing where we stand. Being open and honest so people can decide if they want to evolve or whether it is time for them to move on to a new venture, whatever that might be is the foundation that an evolving purpose needs to be successful in the long run.

Sustaining Purpose. Whatever the size or age of a company, it's essential that they never lose sight of their purpose. That means it's essential to consistently go back to it so it's not getting lost in the detail.

Every strategic decision should begin with a question, 'How is what we are doing supporting our purpose?' Every project should be evaluated with the questions, 'Are we seeing our purpose in action? Have we spoken to consumers? Do they understand our purpose?' Every people intervention must also put purpose at the centre. It is important to point out that having and sustaining a clear purpose does not automatically translate to a successful culture that delivers on the purpose. The company culture or the way things are 'done' is more than purpose, it's about interactions, communications, decisions making etc. As we all may have experienced, you can have a company with a clear purpose but a culture that does

not encourage development, enthusiasm, or motivation to be your best. Human companies need both to thrive.